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WHAT IS A DIALOGUE GOSPEL?

Defining a Genre

Dialogue gospels comprise a great variety of portrayals of Jesus and his disciples, as well as his cosmological, eschatological and soteriological teachings. Yet at the heart of each dialogue gospel stands Jesus as revealer and Saviour. All gospels are inspired by this figure, whether they narrate his life, death and resurrection, recount his sayings, or describe him answering his disciples' questions. Our purpose here is to construct a genre, or literary group, of dialogue gospels as a starting point to find connections that will point to other texts within the genre itself as well as to those outside of it. The term 'genre' here needs some qualification. Collins writes: 'By "literary genre" we mean a group of written texts marked by distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing.'¹ For our purposes, thirteen texts have been focused on under the premise that to be a dialogue gospel, a text must contain two things: (1) Jesus, the central character, on the verge of departure, and (2) dialogue with one or more of his disciples.

'Dialogue gospels' is a constructed or invented genre: the genre has various names, and each name is indicative of the texts that scholars wish to include within it. Sometimes they are called 'resurrection dialogues', which confines the genre to dialogues with the risen Lord. These might include the Apocryphon of John, the Sophia of Jesus Christ and the Epistula Apostolorum, among others. Sometimes the group's title is prefixed with the label 'gnostic', and so will exclude the Epistula Apostolorum and the Apocalypse of Peter (and arguably the Apocryphon of James). A more inclusive group of texts might be called 'dialogue gospels', expanding the

¹ John J. Collins, 'Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre', *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1. However, as we shall see, some or many of these 'recurring characteristics' may not be 'distinctive' at all but shared with texts in a quite different generic category. In other words, genres are 'open' to one another and overlap; conversely, a single text may inhabit multiple genres.

group to include farewell discourses, such as the Dialogue of the Saviour, the Johannine Farewell Discourse and the Gospel of Judas, alongside resurrection dialogues of any theological persuasion. This chapter will discuss how previous scholarship has construed the genre and ask what work the construction of a genre can do for us.² I will propose that for this study, genre is a useful tool for comparison of texts.

The thirteen texts that form our genre of dialogue gospels comprise:

- i. *Johannine Farewell Discourse*
- ii. *Apocalypse of Peter* (Greek and Ethiopic)
- iii. *Apocryphon of James*
- iv. *Apocryphon of John*
- v. *Book of Thomas*
- vi. *Dialogue of the Saviour*
- vii. *Epistle of Peter to Philip*
- viii. *Epistula Apostolorum*
- ix. *First Apocalypse of James*
- x. *Gospel of Judas*
- xi. *Gospel of Mary*
- xii. *Pistis Sophia*
- xiii. *Sophia of Jesus Christ*

Following an overview of these thirteen texts, I will analyse how the concepts of the Saviour and eschatology are broadly conceived throughout the genre. The cursory overview will demonstrate the unity and diversity within the genre and exemplify why a rhizomatic lens is a useful way to think about these texts, rather than any binary or structured model.

² See the table below. The differences in the collections have been noted by e.g. Petersen: 'Diese Zusammenstellung macht deutlich, daß die Zuordnung einer Schrift zur Gattung des gnostischen Dialogs keineswegs eindeutig ist', Silke Petersen, *Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit! Maria Magdalena, Salome und andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-agnostischen Schriften*, NHMS 48 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 37. Dettwiler also notes: 'Die Texte, die von der Forschung zur Gattung des gnostischen Dialogs des Erlösers resp. des gnostischen Offenbarungsdialogs gerechnet werden, sind weder formal noch inhaltlich streng einheitlich. So werden bspw. je nachdem, ob die Dialogstruktur als konstitutiv für eine Schrift angesehen wird oder nur eine spätere literarische Einkleidung einer ursprünglich nichtdialogischen Schrift darstellt, unterschiedlich viele Texte dieser Gattung zugerechnet', Andreas Dettwiler, *Die Gegenwart des Erhöhten: Eine exegetische Studie zu den johanneischen Abschiedsreden (Joh 13,31–16,33) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihres Relecture-Charakters* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 22.

1.1 ‘Gnostic Dialogues’ and ‘Dialogue Gospels’

The Literature

Few scholars have looked at dialogue gospels in their entirety, and those that have reached no consensus regarding what they are (i.e. what genre) or which texts should be included. The two main studies on these dialogues as a ‘genre’ are Perkins’ *The Gnostic Dialogue* and Hartenstein’s *Die zweite Lehre*.³ Perkins includes only those that she considers ‘gnostic’, and Hartenstein includes only those that contain a narrative frame. Although different interests predominate, both studies build their categories and analysis from earlier scholarship that tended to hold an exacting view of both genre and ‘gnosticism’. Recent trends in literary studies tend to advocate a looser and more flexible explanation of how genre is constructed, and for this study, a porous and malleable understanding of genre facilitates a deeper appreciation of the place of dialogue gospels within the rhizome of early Christian literature, as well as the interconnections within the group itself. Furthermore, to my knowledge, since ‘gnosticism’ as a category has been dismantled or nuanced, no major study on ‘dialogue gospels’ has been published.⁴ The critical evaluation of ‘gnosticism’ as a failed category also yields to a new way of looking at dialogue gospels, allowing us to see the genre as made up of individual texts that represent divergent theologies, christologies, eschatologies, and so forth.

Two decades after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945, scholars were constructing a group of ‘dialogue gospels’ that included several texts found at Nag Hammadi alongside works from previously known related codices. Much of the scholarship from the late 1960s to the 1980s stressed identifying literary genres, proposing structural similarities between texts, and then deciding on the antecedent genre. In 1968, Rudolph raised the question of

³ PHEME PERKINS, *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); JUDITH HARTENSTEIN, *Die zweite Lehre: Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmenerzählungen frühchristlicher Dialoge*, TU 146 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000).

⁴ Much of the scholarship before Williams’ and King’s works understands dialogue gospels in terms of non-Christian traditions woven into a Christian narrative framework. For example, Meyer states that the Epistle of Peter to Philip has ‘baptized these [non-Christian] traditions as revelatory utterances of the risen Christ’, MARVIN W. MEYER, *The Letter of Peter to Philip*, SBLDS 53 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 122. In the last twenty years, most scholars working on texts that were once classified as ‘gnostic’ have become more nuanced and qualify their use of these categories.

the ‘gnostic dialogue’ as a literary genre, understanding these texts as an independent literary form developed out of older styles such as *erotapokriseis* and Platonic dialogues.⁵ The texts he considers are the Apocryphon of John, the Gospel of Mary, the Apocalypse of Paul, the First Apocalypse of James, the Sophia of Jesus Christ, the Pistis Sophia, the Second Book of Jeu and the Manichaean *Kephalaia*. He constructs the genre by identifying features typical to the texts, including the following: the teacher-revealer is the exalted Christ; the students are the apostles; the teacher-student relationship is frozen in a ‘Question-Answer Schema’; there is no discussion with opponents; the aim is not primarily polemical but to serve its own ‘*Sitz im Leben*’; the content is often concerned with exegetical questions; and the characters are fictional ‘without flesh and blood’.⁶ Mary Magdalene is by far the most popular disciple, appearing sixty-nine times (followed by Peter appearing seven times as a not-so-close second). Within the dialogues, Rudolph sees the characteristics as:

repeated call for attention,
self-predication given at the beginning,

⁵ Kurt Rudolph, ‘Der gnostische “Dialog” als Literarisches Genus’, in *Probleme der koptischen Literatur*, ed. Peter Nagel (Halle: Wissenschaftliche Beiträge der Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1968), esp. 89. Revelation dialogues have continued to be associated with *erotapokriseis* literature, and the question has recently been addressed in a collection of essays from a 2013 volume. Kaler argues against the tendency to link revelatory dialogues too closely to *erotapokriseis* literature as it will overemphasize only one aspect of the revelation dialogue, Michael Kaler, ‘Just How Close Are the Gnostic Revelation Dialogues to Erotapokriseis Literature, Anyway?’, in *La littérature des Questions et Réponses dans l’Antiquité profane et chrétienne: De l’enseignement à l’exégèse*, ed. Marie-Pierre Bussièrès, *Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia* 64 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 37–49. Piovannelli shows that these are traditions that are in transition and are not static, Pierluigi Piovannelli, ‘Entre oralité et (ré)écriture: Le modèle des erotapokriseis dans les dialogues Apocryphes de Nag Hammadi’, in *Questions et Réponses*, 93–103. In the same volume, Edwards argues that the First Apocalypse of James ‘is not representative of our concept of *erotapokriseis*’, as the dialogue is not intended to be didactic or exegetical and is not a one-sided conversation between teacher and student, Robert Michael Edwards, ‘The Rhetoric of Authority: The Nature of Revelation in the First Apocalypse of James’, in *Questions et Réponses*, 77. I would say that the conversation between James and Jesus in the First Apocalypse of James is both didactic and exegetical and should be no more or less associated with *erotapokriseis* than other dialogue gospels. Zamagni shows that the question-and-answer pattern in early Christianity serves a number of aims and purposes and is far from clearly defined itself, Claudio Zamagni, ‘Is the Question-and-Answer Literary Genre in Early Christian Literature a Homogeneous Group?’, in *Questions et Réponses*, 241–68.

⁶ Rudolph, ‘Der gnostische “Dialog”’, 89–90.

consolation of the disciples frightened by his [Jesus'] appearance, praise of particularly well-asked questions or answers, speech without parables that is clear and undisguised.⁷

He argues that the dialogues are written to develop doctrine and convey salvation, and that it is 'through this form of literature that Gnosis seeks to enlighten itself'.⁸

Outlines to this effect are relatively popular in discussions about genre. Puech defines 'gnostic gospels' as having the following features: located on a mountain and set after the resurrection, contains the appearance of the Saviour in supernatural light form, depicts astonishment and fear from the recipients, and begins the dialogue almost immediately. In the dialogues, the resurrected and glorified Christ bestows the highest revelation, revealing mysteries and solving problems about which the disciples are concerned.⁹ Krause suggested a simpler outline of the 'revelation dialogue' genre: (1) setting: post-resurrection, (2) question/dialogue, (3) action, (4) conclusion.¹⁰ A different approach was taken by Koester who, instead of listing internal-textual features that define a genre, inserted dialogues into the context of sayings traditions, arguing that the dialogues are a continuation of older sayings collections and offer an interpretation of them. In doing so, he changed the scholarly conversation around these texts; instead of isolating the dialogue gospels from other gospels, he brought them into conversation.¹¹

In 1979, Fallon proposed a genre of 'gnostic apocalypses'. The new focus on 'apocalypse', rather than 'dialogue' or 'gospel' pushed him in the direction of categorizing the texts in terms of their eschatology.¹² He created a scheme of those without (Type I) and those

⁷ Rudolph, 'Der gnostische "Dialog"', 92–3.

⁸ Rudolph, 'Der gnostische "Dialog"', 103.

⁹ This is in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, ed., *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung: Evangelien*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1959), 1:170–71. The 1991 sixth edition advises that several Nag Hammadi texts had not been available to Puech, and so we should be cautious in using his work to define this genre. W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, Vol. 1, trans. ed. R. McL. Wilson (Louisville: WJK, 1991), 354–5.

¹⁰ Martin Krause, 'Die literarischen Gattungen der Apokalypsen von Nag Hammadi', in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism*, Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 621–37.

¹¹ Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).

¹² It should be noted here that ancient authors were perhaps oblivious to the distinctions between genres, say prophecy and apocalyptic, that modern authors

with (Type II) an otherworldly journey and sub-types (i) those with cosmic eschatology and (ii) those with only personal eschatology. The apocalypses divide as:

Otherworldly revelations but no otherworldly journey (Type I)

Cosmic eschatology included (I.i): Melchizedek, Second Apocalypse of James, Gospel of Mary, Hypostasis of the Archons, Pistis Sophia 1–3

Personal eschatology only (I.ii): Apocalypse of Adam, Allogenes, Sophia of Jesus Christ, Apocryphon of John, First Apocalypse of James (Apocryphon of James),¹³ Apocalypse of Peter (Coptic), Epistle of Peter to Philip, Pistis Sophia 4, Hypsiphron

Otherworldly journey (Type II)

Cosmic eschatology included (II.i): Paraphrase of Shem

Personal eschatology only (II.ii): Zostrianos, Apocalypse of Paul

Fallon's classification of these texts as apocalypses encourages a stronger emphasis on their eschatological aspects – a facet which is often overlooked. Although his overview is introductory, for his selected texts the analysis is spot on: he argues that the emphasis is on present salvation through knowledge and eschatological salvation conceived through the ascent of the soul/divine element to the divine realm.¹⁴ However, he continues:

Occasionally, this interest is accompanied by an interest in the consummation, i.e., the dissolution of the cosmos and the return of all divine elements to the divine realm (e.g. NatArch, PS I-III, ParaShem). Obviously, there is no interest in these gnostic apocalypses in cosmic transformation at the end of time, since the cosmos is in principle evil.¹⁵

are keen to establish. See e.g. John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986), 198–202.

¹³ In the introduction to the *Semeia* volume on apocalypticism, Collins writes that: 'The Christian Apocryphon of James from Nag Hammadi, which is not clearly Gnostic, also conforms to this type [Apocalypses with only Personal Eschatology (and no otherworldly journey)]', Collins, 'Introduction', 14. But Fallon places it under 'Christian apocalypse' rather than 'gnostic apocalypse', and so it is not placed alongside the First Apocalypse of James, the Epistle of Peter to Philip, and so forth, Francis T. Fallon, 'Gnostic Apocalypses', *Semeia* 14 (1979): 145.

¹⁴ Fallon, 'Gnostic Apocalypses', 125.

¹⁵ Fallon, 'Gnostic Apocalypses', 125. Another defining characteristic is the dualism between the evil heavens and/or their rulers (which are more developed in later works, such as the Pistis Sophia) and the divine realm above them (126).

In actuality, this is not 'obvious' and dissolution of the cosmos does not have to equate to an evil nature, as we will see in the case of the Gospel of Mary in Chapter 4.

Fallon differentiates these apocalypses from 'gnostic revelatory dialogues' on the basis that in the dialogues '[t]here is no account of the appearance or departure of the revealer and thus no clear presentation of Jesus as a transcendent mediator as in the gnostic apocalypses'.¹⁶ The 'revelatory dialogues' are the Gospel of Thomas, the Book of Thomas, the Dialogue of the Saviour, the First and Second Books of Jeu. This division could benefit from being blurred: 'no clear presentation' does not preclude something from being implied or presumed and the Jesus of the First Apocalypse of James and the Dialogue of the Saviour, as examples, may not be so different. The separation of these two genres is arbitrary: as Collins writes in the introduction to the same *Semeia* volume, '[a]n "apocalypse" is simply that which scholars call an apocalypse'.¹⁷ Saying that, he later offers a definition:

'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹⁸

From this definition, many texts could be categorized as a dialogue gospel and as an apocalypse.¹⁹

The monograph-length studies of Perkins and Hartenstein have been influenced by the discussions of Rudolph, Krause and Koester, especially their outlines of generic characteristics. Perkins sees common features throughout the 'gnostic dialogues'. Common features of the narrative frame are: (1) the risen Saviour, (2) the revealer's appearance as angelic, announcing himself with an 'I am' or rebuking the disciples, (3) reference to opponents, (4) the disciples are to preach gnosis and possibly to face persecution, (5) the revelation has been

¹⁶ Fallon, 'Gnostic Apocalypses', 139.

¹⁷ Collins, 'Towards the Morphology of a Genre', 2.

¹⁸ Collins, 'Towards the Morphology of a Genre', 9.

¹⁹ Many aspects of 'apocalyptic' discourse are related to dialogue gospels. Ashton examines themes of apocalyptic discourse in his analysis of John: these are revelation, mystery and two ages, visions and dreams and two stages, riddles, insiders and outsiders, and correspondence between above and below, Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 305–30. Many of these issues will be explored in relation to dialogue gospels later in this chapter and Chapter 2.

hidden, (6) a post-resurrection commission and (7) questions listed or an *erotapokriseis* style. Frequently occurring content includes: (1) the Sophia myth, (2) the necessity of gnosis, (3) asceticism, (4) the ascent of the soul, (5) New Testament interpretation and (6) baptism. Other, less common, topics include Genesis interpretation, the nature of God, the crucifixion and cosmic eschatology.²⁰ The Sophia myth occurs frequently, but the revelation dialogues 'seem content to paraphrase the myth in order to provide a basis for the redemptive activity of the Gnostic revealer'.²¹ This may be why, as Perkins concludes, '[t]he predominant emphasis of the revelation dialogue is on soteriology, not on speculation about the cosmos or doctrine'.²²

With these characteristics, her 'gnostic dialogue' genre includes thirteen works: the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, the Apocryphon of James, the Apocryphon of John, the First Apocalypse of James, the Apocalypse of Peter (Coptic), the Book of Thomas, the Dialogue of the Saviour, the Epistle of Peter to Philip, the Gospel of Mary, the Hypostasis of the Archons, the Pistis Sophia and the Sophia of Jesus Christ. The dialogues themselves draw on a variety of models, including philosophical dialogues, Jewish apocalypses, Hermetic teacher/pupil dialogues and *erotapokriseis*.²³ Perkins sees the revelation dialogue as a 'powerful weapon' in the debate between different Christian groups. She argues that this may be inferred from the Gospel of Mary, with Peter representing orthodox Christians acting against Mary who represents gnostic Christians,²⁴ and the *Epistula Apostolorum*, 'which seems to be an orthodox attempt to use the genre against Gnostic opponents by presenting the content of post-resurrection revelation as identical with the teaching of the canonical gospels'.²⁵ But the 'gnostic' dialogues are written for insiders: 'They are not rhetorically designed to persuade the unconverted.'²⁶

²⁰ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 68. The forms of speech used are commonly the 'Sophia myth, apocalyptic vision, hymnic or prayer language, sayings of Jesus, exegetical questions – usually about the New Testament – and doctrinal questions' (60).

²¹ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 66, also 63–5.

²² Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 73.

²³ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 19–20. On philosophical dialogues, she writes that the gnostic dialogue is not an exchange of ideas, but a way to 'provide the revealer with an opportunity to discharge his mission', and on *erotapokriseis*, she writes that the gnostic dialogues have a 'polemical edge which sets them apart from the more irenic instructional dialogues'. The instructional dialogues are *Zostrianos*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, 80–98.

²⁴ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 133–7.

²⁵ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 26 n. 2. The *Epistula Apostolorum*, however, does not present revelation identical with the canonical gospels, as will be discussed later.

²⁶ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 68.

Within the ‘gnostic dialogue’ genre, Perkins notes the various interests of the texts and divides them into four categories:

- (1) ‘Gnostic revealer’ texts, comprising the Apocryphon of John, the Sophia of Jesus Christ, the Hypostasis of the Archons and Zostrianos. These texts claim esoteric truth and show little evidence of polemical aims.
- (2) Thomasine texts, which are ascetic in character and include the Book of Thomas and the Dialogue of the Saviour.²⁷
- (3) Petrine texts, which are interested in ‘Christian problems’, such as the passion, christology and apostolic authority (as opposed to cosmology, eschatology and asceticism).²⁸ These texts claim Peter as their favoured disciple and include the Apocalypse of Peter (Coptic), the Epistle of Peter to Philip and the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles. They do not report new post-resurrection revelation and instead emphasize that true instruction was given to Peter and/or the apostles before Jesus’ death.²⁹
- (4) Non-apostolic texts, which favour either Mary or James rather than Peter or the Twelve. These include the Gospel of Mary, the Pistis Sophia, the First Apocalypse of James and the Apocryphon of James. The James texts ‘explicitly acknowledge that gnosis was not preached by the apostolic generation’, and the Gospel of Mary and the Pistis Sophia claim that Mary or James respectively was someone ‘whom Jesus loves’.³⁰

Perkins’ constructs these four groups first through the disciple(s) that Jesus privileges for his revelation but then finds thematic connections within the revelations themselves. As well as identifying key points of commonality within the groups, she also helpfully detects connections outside of a text’s primary classification: for example, she finds common ground between a Thomasine text and a non-apostolic text in the way that the Book of Thomas and the First Apocalypse of James present Jesus’ familial relation to a ‘twin’ or ‘brother’ as more important than the Twelve.³¹

²⁷ These two texts Perkins regards as atypical within the genre: ‘Though both make it clear that the revealer is the Risen Lord prior to the ascension, they lack the opening epiphany in response to the disciples’ perplexity, which is so typical of revelation dialogues,’ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 100. Parenthetical references omitted.

²⁸ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 114.

²⁹ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 116.

³⁰ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 132. Perkins does not deal with the fact that James is the brother of the Lord in the First Apocalypse of James (NHC 24,12–14) but appears to be one of the Twelve in the Apocryphon of James (1,22–25).

³¹ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 101.

While these four groups are useful for answering certain questions, the connections between dialogue gospels and related literature can be expanded significantly. For our purposes, to create preliminary subgroups within the dialogue gospel genre undermines the (non-)structural rhizomatic model of all dialogue gospels beginning on an equal footing, and that connections can be made at any place and any point, without hierarchy.

Hartenstein offers a different approach to the genre, seeing the teachings of the ‘dialogue gospels’ as divergent in content, but their narrative frames as arranged in parallel. Her scope moves away from ‘gnostic dialogues’ to ‘dialogue gospels’, which include the *Epistula Apostolorum* alongside the Apocryphon of John, the Gospel of Mary, the Epistle of Peter to Philip, the First Apocalypse of James, the Apocryphon of James and the Sophia of Jesus Christ. (The Sophia of Jesus Christ, she argues, is the oldest dialogue and perhaps the form that the others were based on.³²) To refer to dialogue *gospels* is to understand these texts as not only revelatory dialogues but as *gospels*: Jesus is the central figure, these texts claim to reproduce his words, and their message is largely salvific.³³ Hartenstein’s dialogue gospel genre or *Gattung* is clearly defined. As well as the need for a narrative frame, another criterion that she imposes is that the narrative frame must establish a post-resurrection setting.

Hartenstein’s focus on the narrative frame draws perceptive connections with the resurrection scenes of the canonical gospels, and she argues that the dialogue gospels presuppose the canonical gospels – they do not intend to replace them, nor could they exist independently of them.³⁴ Instead, they propound a second, higher teaching (*‘die zweite Lehre’*) to the well-known, recognized and canonical one(s). Post-Easter was an appropriate setting to impart a higher teaching as Jesus acquired a greater status after his resurrection, although she notes that some dialogue gospels assert continuity

³² On the Sophia of Jesus Christ as the earliest dialogue gospel, see Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 313–14. *Contra* van Os who writes that ‘Sophia cannot have been the model for the other early resurrection dialogues, as the other early works are often shorter, less coherent, and less structured,’ Bas van Os, ‘John’s Last Supper and the Resurrection Dialogues’, in *John, Jesus, and History: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*, Vol. 2, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 274.

³³ Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 27–8.

³⁴ But: ‘Diese Bezüge lassen sich allerdings nicht durch ein Konzept von literarischer Abhängigkeit, wie es zur Bestimmung des Verhältnisses der Synoptiker entwickelt wurde, erfassen’, Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 20.

between the message of the earthly and risen Jesus. To bring the *Epistula Apostolorum* into the conversation allows Hartenstein to argue that, although the texts may be seen as ‘gnostic’ in their content, they are not ‘gnostic’ on the basis of their genre.³⁵

Much like Perkins, Hartenstein sees the dialogue gospels as addressed to their own ‘*Trägergruppe*’, and on the whole, they are neither suitable nor intended for missionary purposes.³⁶ These groups had a clear self-conscious understanding of their identity, believing themselves to be the recipients of an in-depth understanding of Jesus’ teachings. However, she argues that the group(s) behind the dialogue gospels saw themselves as part of mainstream Christianity, and (with the exception of the Apocryphon of James) they were not esoteric writings.

Her seven texts, she argues, have more in common with each other than with other texts, such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Hypostasis of the Archons or the Dialogue of the Saviour. The commonalities are found within the narrative frame and include an appearance of Jesus and the ratio of questions and answers.³⁷ Perkins noted the atypicality of the Book of Thomas and the Dialogue of the Saviour within her genre as they lack the appearance of the Saviour, and it is on this basis that Hartenstein excludes them altogether as she sees the absence of a narrative frame to represent a different historical perspective. She writes: ‘In my opinion, DialSav, like GThom, avoids temporally embedding the revelations – a situation after the resurrection is not clearly recognizable – and therefore it has a different relationship between text and reality than the dialogue gospels.’³⁸

If, however, we want to analyse the *content* of the revelation, rather than the structure of the texts or their generic ancestors, then it is helpful to take a more open view of the genre. There are

³⁵ Martina Janssen also disagrees with linking gnostic theology or christology to the dialogue genre. She uses a wide range of dialogues, including ‘gnostic’, ‘non-gnostic’, Manichaean and Hermetic, and demonstrates that there is a lack of common features (including disunity in the narrative frames) to link all dialogue texts, Martina Janssen, ‘Mystagogus Gnosticus? Zur Gattung der “gnostischen Gespräche des Auferstandenen”’, in *Studien zur Gnosis*, ed. Gerd Lüdemann, *Studies in the Religion and History of Early Christianity* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 21–260.

³⁶ ‘Aus der Analyse der Schriften ergibt sich aber als Gemeinsamkeit, daß alle in erster Linie der Erbauung, Stützung und Festigung ihrer Trägergruppe beabsichtigen’, Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 251.

³⁷ Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, esp. 255–9.

³⁸ Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 256. In a later article, Hartenstein gives up the title ‘Dialogevangelien’ and replaces it with the more specific ‘Erscheinungsevangelien’, Judith Hartenstein, ‘Erscheinungsevangelien (Gespräche mit dem Auferstandenen)

as many similarities and differences within Hartenstein's seven-text group as there are with related texts outside of it. The cosmologies of the Apocryphon of John and the Pistis Sophia share much in common, both having a repentant Sophia; the Gospel of Mary and the Dialogue of the Saviour have a similar realized/future eschatological tension; the Apocryphon of James and the First Apocalypse of James do not have a high regard for the Twelve – but neither does the Gospel of Judas; and the Epistula Apostolorum and the Ascension of Isaiah share an angelomorphic christology.

Petersen builds on Hartenstein's work, identifying a group of texts that have an appearance of the resurrected Jesus as a focal point.³⁹ She names the Sophia of Jesus Christ, the First Apocalypse of James, the Gospel of Mary, the Epistula Apostolorum and the Pistis Sophia as 'appearance gospels'. (Her main focus is on women in these texts.⁴⁰) Yet it is not only the appearance that serves a purpose in these texts: Petersen hypothesizes that their use of dialogue incites dialogue among readers and hearers. She writes:

Dialogues (as well as other ancient texts) were predominately not privately received, but read aloud, heard and possibly even discussed, whereby the dialogic situation was doubled.⁴¹

Therefore, the dialogue within the text is important for the transmission of the text's contents within the community of its readers. The fact that these texts were *designed* to be read aloud showed that the intention was to expand the audience for Jesus' revelatory speech. Furthermore, Petersen posits that appearance dialogues summarize their revelation at the end, and this revelation is intended to

im Kontext frühchristlicher Theologie: Anknüpfungspunkte und Besonderheiten der christologischen Vorstellungen', in *The Apocryphal Gospels within the Context of Early Christian Theology*, ed. Jens Schröter (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 305–32.

³⁹ Petersen maintains Hartenstein's view on Christianity and 'gnosticism', writing: 'Die Texte dokumentieren eine Vermischung und Durchdringung von Christlichem und Gnostischem, und klare Unterscheidungen zwischen beidem sind in vielen Fällen kaum zu treffen', Petersen, *Zerstört die Werke*, 42.

⁴⁰ Petersen, *Zerstört die Werke*, 38. In all of Petersen's selected texts but the First Apocalypse of James, Jesus appears to female disciples either first (as in the Epistula Apostolorum, the Gospel of Mary) or within the group (the Sophia of Jesus Christ, the Pistis Sophia). Although the First Apocalypse of James does not have an appearance to a female disciple, the text identifies a group of women as honoured disciples.

⁴¹ Petersen, *Zerstört die Werke*, 43.

be repeated and learned by its readers.⁴² Thus, she links the salvific message contained within the text with the form of the text itself.

There are several points at which my analysis of dialogue gospels diverges from the studies of Perkins and Hartenstein. Principally, the deconstruction of the category of 'gnosticism' allows us to see the variety of theological ideas within the group of texts under discussion without presuppositions. Perkins' view of revelatory dialogues ('gnostic dialogues') may be summed up by her statement that '[t]he revelation dialogue seems to have been as characteristic of Christian Gnostics as the Gospel was of orthodox Christians'.⁴³ The parallel between genre and 'gnosticism' breaks down at the basic level of the inclusion of the *Epistula Apostolorum* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, but also when we see the variety of theological perspectives within the once so-called 'gnostic' texts. Hartenstein also constructs her analysis through this gnostic/Christian dichotomy, but without linking genre and christology. She sees dialogue gospels as comprising a Christian narrative frame that has been imposed on a gnostic dialogue, and only because she focuses on the Christian narrative frame can she make connections to the canonical gospels: 'At the same time, for some writings the narrative frame is the only part that reveals relationships with other Christian traditions, especially the appearance stories in the final chapters of the canonical gospels.'⁴⁴ Although some of what we find in our dialogue gospels may have once circulated as independent sources,⁴⁵ someone has put them together to create the text that we have today, and this is how they were read and used. Going forward, I propose to read the texts as coherent and complete works and to destabilize outdated boundaries of 'orthodox' and 'gnostic' in order to recognize dialogue gospels within a rhizomatic network of early Christian literature.

⁴² Petersen, *Zerstört die Werke*, 43.

⁴³ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 26. For criticism of this, see Janssen, 'Mystagogus Gnosticus?'. Also, King's extensive footnote: Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003), 192–3 n. 8.

⁴⁴ Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 3. Despite the overall rhetoric of the Christian narrative frame and the 'gnostic' teaching being largely incompatible, Hartenstein does attempt to appreciate each text on its own basis without instantly ascribing to it a gnostic worldview. Thus, she notes that '[b]ei den von mir untersuchten Schriften ist allerdings nicht immer eindeutig, ob es sich um gnostische Schriften handelt, da der Weltentstehungsmythos nicht in allen vorkommt' (31).

⁴⁵ For example, *Eugnostos* as an independent source text for the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and the dialogue with the archons that we find in Irenaeus' *Adv. Haer.* 1.21 and the *First Apocalypse of James*.

The Taxonomies

In the scholarship that has investigated this group of texts (in varying forms), there has been no consensus regarding the name or form of the genre or which texts should belong within it. Rudolph, Koester, Perkins and Hartenstein, among others, are interested in different things and so choose to discuss different texts. Hartenstein is interested in the narrative frame and so excludes the Dialogue of the Saviour and the Book of Thomas from her work, and Perkins is interested in gnosticism and so excludes the *Epistula Apostolorum*. When these scholars define a genre, they are not coming up with the same title or collection because they are not starting with the same set of questions. The table below shows the differences in the titles and texts of these comparable literary genres.

Hennecke-Schneemelcher, 3rd ed. (1959) ⁴⁶	Rudolph (1968) ⁴⁷	Perkins (1980) ⁴⁸	Schneemelcher, 6th ed. (1990) ⁴⁹	Hartenstein (2000) ⁵⁰	Tuckett (2005) ⁵¹	Markschies-Schröter (2012) ⁵²	Bockmuehl (2017) ⁵³
<i>'Dialogues of Jesus with his disciples after his resurrection'</i>	<i>'Gnostic "dialogue"'</i>	<i>'Gnostic dialogues'</i>	<i>'Dialogues of the Saviour'</i>	<i>'Dialogue gospels'</i>	<i>'Resurrection discourses/dialogues'</i>	<i>'Dialogue gospels' (Allogenes)</i>	<i>'Post-resurrection discourse gospels'</i>
EpAp	1Apoclas	ActPet12	AplAs	AplAs	AplAs	AplAs	AplAs
Freer Logion	ApJohn	ApJohn	2Apoclas	1Apoclas	ApJohn	1Apoclas	1Apoclas
Gospel-fragment of Strassburg Coptic papyrus	ApocPaul	1Apoclas	BookThom	ApJohn	BookThom	2Apoclas	2Apoclas
<i>'Other gnostic gospels and related literature'</i> ⁵⁴	2Ieu	ApocPetCOP	DialSav	EpAp	(DialSav)	DialSav	EpAp
	GMary	BookThom	EpPetPhil	GMary	EpAp	EpAp	EpPetPhil
	PistSoph	DialSav	Freer Logion	SophlesChr	GMary	EpPetPhil	GMary
	The <i>Kephalaia</i>	EpPetPhil	<i>'Other gnostic gospels and related literature'</i>		(GThom)	GMary	GPhil
		GMary	AplAs		SophlesChr	Freer Logion	GThom
		HypArch	ApJohn			Fragment of dialogue between John and Jesus	SophlesChr
		PistSoph	BookThom			GJudas	
		SophlesChr	DialSav			GMary	
			Ieu			SophlesChr	
			GJudas				
			GMary				
			PistSoph				
			SophlesChr				

⁴⁶ Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung: Evangelien*, Vol. 1.

⁴⁷ Rudolph, 'Der gnostische "Dialog"'.
⁴⁸ Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*.

⁴⁹ W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*.

⁵⁰ Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*.

⁵¹ Christopher Tuckett, 'Forty Other Gospels', in *The Written Gospel*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald A. Hagner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 238–53.

⁵² Christoph Markschies and Jens Schröter, ed., *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung: Evangelien und Verwandtes*, Vol. 1, pt. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

⁵³ Markus Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017).

⁵⁴ This is split into several sections and includes many more texts. I only include here those that are relevant to us. This is also the case with the *New Testament Apocrypha* 1990 edition in the fourth column above. (GJudas there refers to the Gospel of Judas as mentioned by Irenaeus, as Codex Bezae was only made available in 2006.)

The nature of making a 'collection' of New Testament Apocrypha leaves editors with little choice but to create generic categories, and so in the 1959 and 1990 Hennecke-Schneemelcher editions, 'dialogues' were differentiated from 'gospels'. The difficulties in placing these texts into a single category are apparent in the 1990 edition, in which three texts (the Apocryphon of James, the Dialogue of the Saviour and the Book of Thomas) appear in two lists: 'dialogues with the Saviour' and 'gnostic gospels and related literature'. Marksches-Schröter's 2012 collection takes a different approach, combining the two categories into one ('dialogue gospels') and creating a more substantive list.

In the table above, the scholars are largely dealing with the same body of literature, but the lists are not as uniform as we might expect. The Gospel of Mary and the Sophia of Jesus Christ are the only texts that appear in each column. As we have discussed, Hartenstein omits the Dialogue of the Saviour and the Book of Thomas because they lack the narrative frame, as well as the Gospel of Judas because it does not have a post-resurrection setting. Perkins' focus on gnosticism leads her to include the Hypostasis of the Archons and Zostrianos. It is unclear why Marksches-Schröter and Bockmuehl left out the Apocryphon of John.⁵⁵ The genre titles and lists make it quite apparent that they reflect the interests of the modern authors rather than anything about the ancient world. The scholarly endeavour to define and delimit a genre necessitates contrast with contemporaries who are interested in the same texts but place them in different generic categories and alongside different ancient writings on the basis of their own differing interests.

Recently, Tuckett and Bockmuehl have created new taxonomies that are less interested in strict genre definitions than the works discussed previously. Tuckett writes about 'resurrection dialogues' that include the Gospel of Mary, the Apocryphon of James, the Sophia of Jesus Christ, the Apocryphon of John, the Dialogue of the Saviour, the Book of Thomas, the *Epistula Apostolorum* and the Gospel of Thomas.⁵⁶ He notes that the Dialogue of the Saviour and the Book of Thomas do not explicitly have a post-resurrection setting but that it might be implied nonetheless, especially in view of the fragmentary nature of the Dialogue of the Saviour.⁵⁷ The Gospel of Thomas is less clear,

⁵⁵ Neither appears to offer an explanation for this.

⁵⁶ Tuckett, 'Forty Other Gospels'.

⁵⁷ Tuckett, 'Forty Other Gospels', 247.

but Tuckett wonders whether the present tense of λέγει in the Greek fragments (as opposed to the atemporal tense of πειξε in the Coptic) suggests a speaker in the present – the risen Jesus.⁵⁸ He continues:

Further, dialogue elements are also present: on occasion followers of Jesus, individually or collectively, pose questions to which Jesus responds (sayings 6, 12, 13, 20, 21 etc.). It may be, then, that the *Gospel of Thomas* is rather more like a ‘resurrection dialogue’ than might appear at first sight, and that in generic terms, not too large a wedge should be driven between *Thomas* (as an alleged ‘sayings gospel’) and other resurrection dialogues.⁵⁹

Bockmuehl creates a category named ‘post-resurrection discourse gospels’, a category in which ‘many of the lines of textual, ideological, and genre identification are patently blurred’.⁶⁰ In it he includes those texts that are ‘unambiguous examples of a post-resurrection setting’, including the *Epistula Apostolorum*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, the *Apocryphon of James*, the *First Apocalypse of James* and the *Epistle of Peter to Philip*, as well as those that ‘strongly presuppose or imply such a narrative setting’, such as the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Second Apocalypse of James*.⁶¹ He also wants to impose ‘extremely fluid’ boundaries, expanding the genre to include the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Philip* – the latter described as ‘a timeless mode of instruction that may only be tenuously identified as the teaching of Jesus’.⁶² On the *Gospel of Thomas*, Bockmuehl sees Christ’s title $\overline{\tau\epsilon} \epsilon\tau\omicron\nu\alpha\zeta // \overline{\iota\eta\varsigma} \delta \zeta\omega\nu$ (POxy 654) in the prologue as a ‘reference to the

⁵⁸ But note that Logion 1 on POxy.654 has εἶπεν.

⁵⁹ Tuckett, ‘Forty Other Gospels’, 248. *Contra*, Klauck insists that nothing in the *Gospel of Thomas* points to a resurrection dialogue. Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 146.

⁶⁰ Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 161.

⁶¹ Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 162. Yet the Freer Logion ‘cannot be regarded as a dialogue gospel’ as it never existed independently of Mark (162–3). Presumably then, neither can the Johannine Farewell Discourse. Bockmuehl argues for the fluid boundaries of his genre, but unfortunately never explains what the boundary limits might be.

⁶² Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 163. The *Gospel of Philip* is not a dialogue, nor a narrative, but a theological reflection on Christ, and it is unclear why it would be placed alongside dialogue gospels. Bockmuehl writes that: ‘In substance and genre, however, *Philip* seems remote from most of the other texts discussed in this [book]’ (183–4). He appears to include it because it stands alongside the *Gospel of Thomas* in NHC 2: ‘[I]t must be significant that two such noncanonical gospels are here bound together in the same volume, and indeed that the text of *Philip* begins without any intervening new title’ (184). But Coptic titles come at the end of texts (sometimes at the beginning too), and the *Gospel of Thomas* does conclude with a title that separates the two gospels.

heavenly, eternal as opposed to the earthly Christ'.⁶³ On the matter of 'timelessness', Bockmuehl also points to the Johannine Jesus:

One may also usefully compare and contrast the apparent timelessness of John's loquaciously self-referential, supratemporal, descended, and perhaps already ascended Son who seems – particularly in the Farewell Discourses of chapters 14–17 – to speak almost from a viewpoint outside history.⁶⁴

Bringing the Johannine Farewell Discourse into the equation is effective. Not only do these chapters present a picture of a self-referential and supratemporal Jesus comparable to dialogue gospels, but they are also structurally comparable in that Jesus answers the questions of individuals (13.36–14.14) and a larger group (16.17) about his departure and the role of the disciples in his absence. Dettwiler and van Os have also noted the similarities between this text and dialogue gospels,⁶⁵ but the latter is generally considered without reference to the former and vice versa. With an 'open' view of genre, in which generic categories are fluid rather than fixed entities, they can be brought into much closer contact, and this will be put into practice in the following work.

This overview serves to demonstrate that, despite repeated attempts at meticulous pigeonholing, texts do not fit into neat genre boxes. The term 'dialogue gospel' in itself may point to flexibility as these texts are both gospel and dialogue. But, as we shall see, they can also be revelations, acts and epistles. They might include visions, farewell discourses or *erotapokriseis*.⁶⁶ The title 'apocalypse', 'epistle' or 'evangelion' might appear on the manuscript, or no title at all.

⁶³ Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 164.

⁶⁴ Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 174–5.

⁶⁵ Dettwiler, *Die Gegenwart des Erhöhten*, 21–6; van Os, 'John's Last Supper'. These will be discussed in further detail later.

⁶⁶ The concept of discourse mode could be used as an alternative way of constructing a view of these texts; for example, we could say that Mark is a gospel in the apocalyptic mode. However, this would damage the open view of genre as it would reinforce imposing a primary genre onto a text rather than acknowledging that a text can participate in than one genre, and so could be both a gospel and an apocalypse. As Chandler notes, 'One theorist's *genre* may be another's *sub-genre* or even *super-genre* (and indeed what is *technique*, *style*, *mode*, *formula* or *thematic grouping* to one may be treated as a *genre* by another),' Daniel Chandler, 'An Introduction to Genre Theory', 2000 [1997], 1. Available from http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/intgenre/chandler_genre_theory.pdf. In another context, it might be useful to discuss modes employed by dialogue gospels, but for the purpose of comparative analysis, it is better to discuss genres.

1.2 The Genre Question

Genre for Interpretation and Comparison

It has been shown that a definition or agreement on the dialogue gospel genre does not exist, and it has been suggested that it is unhelpful to be prescriptive about the texts included in any certain genre. The question now is how and to what purpose might we create a category of texts. Study of ancient Christian literature should be informed by the way that literary theorists now conceive of genre, which has changed dramatically in the recent past. Genre is increasingly regarded as fluid and dynamic rather than static, rigid and constraining. Derrida's statement has become widely cited: 'Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging.'⁶⁷ Derrida articulates the difficulty and necessity of genre. A text can participate in more than one genre and does not have to be hermeneutically confined by its primary genre. The genres themselves are invented rhetorical categories; they do not exist independently of the scholars who create them.⁶⁸ Instead of becoming entangled in the 'theoretical minefield' of genre theory, as Chandler describes it,⁶⁹ our discussion of genre in early Christian literature will be seen as a microcosm of the larger field of literary studies.⁷⁰

Some scholars of early Christian literature argue that the genre of a text affects the way we interpret it. For example, BurrIDGE writes that genre is vital as 'the set of conventions and expectations mediating between authors and audiences, guiding both the production and the interpretation of texts',⁷¹ and Stanton warns his readers that 'gospels are not letters' and therefore should not be read as such.⁷² He writes:

The very first step in the interpretation of any writing, whether ancient or modern, is to establish its literary genre.

⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', *Glyph* 7 (1980): 212.

⁶⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Origin of Genres', in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. David Duff (New York: Longman, 2000), 193–209.

⁶⁹ Chandler, 'An Introduction to Genre Theory', 2.

⁷⁰ The change in the way genre is perceived is reflected also in classics, e.g. John Marincola, 'Genre, Convention, and Innovation in Greco-Roman Historiography', in *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative in Ancient Historical Texts*, ed. C. S. Kraus, Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava: Supplementum 191 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 281–324.

⁷¹ Richard A. BurrIDGE, 'Who Writes, Why, and for Whom?', in *The Written Gospel*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and D. A. Hagner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 112.

⁷² Graham N. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 193. Perkins also: 'Our perception of the genre of any writing is an important help in interpreting it. The implication of particular details may change radically if we change our view of a writing's genre', Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 26–7.

If we make a mistake about the literary genre of the gospels, interpretation will be skewed or even misguided. A decision about the genre of a work and the discovery of its meaning are inextricably inter-related; different types of text require different types of interpretation.⁷³

It seems to me that modern genre theory would contest this stance, and instead express the view that generic expectations are formed and can be overturned through the reading process.⁷⁴ To determine the genre of a text at the outset goes hand in hand with the ‘taxonomic’ view of genre as static, formal and inflexible. Texts do not belong to genres but participate in them. Texts are shaped by genres, but they also shape genres.⁷⁵

Rather than seeing genre as a method for interpretation, for our purposes it is more helpful to see it as a heuristic tool for comparison. To create a genre entails identifying texts that have certain similarities and therefore can comfortably be placed in a comparative framework. The genre, then, invites various and, at points, disparate texts to be brought together for analysis. Defining a genre for the purpose of comparison allows the analysis to draw out both similarities and differences within the group, as well as holding the potential for gaining new insights into the unique qualities of the individual texts. However, since genres overlap, equally effective comparisons may also be made across their now-fluid boundaries.

Assigning Genres

For a large proportion of early Christian literature, and particularly that deemed ‘apocryphal’, the way we assign genre is often both arbitrary and rigid. But in light of developments in literary theory,

⁷³ Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel*, 192.

⁷⁴ One of Chandler’s great concerns is to ask: ‘[I]f we are studying the way in which genre frames the reader’s interpretation of a text then we would do well to focus on how readers identify genres rather than on theoretical distinctions,’ Chandler, ‘An Introduction to Genre Theory’, 3. I would argue that, to interpret a text, a reader does not need to identify its literary genre – the act of interpretation is not affected by this identification. Reading a text as a work of fiction or a work of history might produce different results, but that necessitates that there are right and wrong answers in interpretation. Identifying a text as one genre or another simply has the potential to produce different results.

⁷⁵ See John Frow, *Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), esp. 28.

opposition towards pigeonholing texts is increasing. Recently, Smith and Kostopoulos have applied an open view of genre to New Testament writings, arguing that ‘ancient texts do not bear the imprints of a rigid system of generic classification’, and that the ‘restrictive system of generic categorisation’ needs to be challenged.⁷⁶ Luke-Acts is a particularly striking example and the subject of Smith and Kostopoulos’ study. Some scholars have tried to place Luke and Acts in the same genre, but Smith and Kostopoulos argue that ‘their efforts to force the two volumes into one generic classification often result in awkward pairing – one volume fits well enough, but the other resembles a round peg wedged into a square hole’.⁷⁷ Luke is generally considered to be a *bios* gospel, but Acts has been labelled an apology, an epic, a biography, a history and a novel/romance.⁷⁸ Smith and Kostopoulos argue:

We are not seeking to cast Luke-Acts as the ‘*texte sans genre*’, but as a text that indeed participates in (and whose author emulates) multiple literary traditions of the ancient Mediterranean world. The emphasis on ‘participation’ frees us from the problem of choosing a rigid generic category for Luke-Acts.⁷⁹

Acts is not an apology *or* an epic *or* a biography, but participates in all of the above. In fact, to claim a single genre and to read it solely through that lens might lead to ‘misguided’ interpretation, in the words of Stanton, whereas to read it as participating in multiple genres may well lead to a more thorough understanding of the text.

A genre does not have to apply to a whole text. A single text can include different sections that participate in different genres. John, for example, is a gospel comprised of narratives, dialogues and monologues, as Dodd argued.⁸⁰ Attridge sees these different sections within John as purposefully bending a traditional view of genre: for example, ‘John 3 is a paradigmatic reveler discourse, yet no sooner does it make a dramatic revelation than it points to ambiguities and tensions within the terms of that revelation. A revelatory genre is

⁷⁶ See Daniel Lynwood Smith and Zachary Lundin Kostopoulos, ‘Biography, History and the Genre of Luke-Acts’, *NTS* 63.3 (2017): 405.

⁷⁷ Smith and Kostopoulos, ‘Biography, History and the Genre of Luke-Acts’, 391.

⁷⁸ See Sean A. Adams, *The Genre of Acts and Collected Biography*, *SNTSMS* 156 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5–22.

⁷⁹ Smith and Kostopoulos, ‘Biography, History and the Genre of Luke-Acts’, 406–7.

⁸⁰ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), esp. 133–4.

bent'.⁸¹ The way that the larger 'gospel' genre uses and bends different genres is 'playful',⁸² and Attridge suggests that 'in the imagination of the fourth evangelist, genres are bent because words themselves are bent'.⁸³ Genre, then, is not a fixed entity.

Coming back to the dialogue gospels – the name 'dialogue gospel' already suggests that these texts participate in both dialogue and gospel genres.⁸⁴ But they can also be letters. And letters can be basically anything.⁸⁵ The Book of Revelation and the *Epistula Apostolorum* are both letters, but could belong to several genres as their comparable openings suggest:

Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν. Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς. Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἐπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ ... (Rev 1.1–4)

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near. John to the seven churches that are in Asia ...

⁸¹ Harold W. Attridge, 'Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel', *JBL* 121.1 (2002): 12–13.

⁸² Attridge, 'Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel', 19.

⁸³ Attridge, 'Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel', 21: 'If something quite spectacular happens to flesh when the Word hits it, something equally wondrous happens to ordinary words when they try to convey the Word itself. Revealing words reveal riddles; realistic similitudes become surreal; words of testimony undercut the validity of any ordinary act of testifying; words of farewell become words of powerful presence; words of prayer negate the distance between worshiper and God; words that signify shame, death on a cross, become words that enshrine value, allure disciples, give a command, and glorify God.'

⁸⁴ As Smith and Kostopoulos write, '[t]he notion of "mixed genre" may sound like scholarly capitulation ... [but it] reflects the reality of ancient literary activity', Smith and Kostopoulos, 'Biography, History and the Genre of Luke-Acts', 394.

⁸⁵ For definitions of the literary form of an ancient letter, see Andrew Gregory, 'Non-Canonical Epistles and Related Literature', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Christopher Tuckett and Andrew Gregory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 90–114.

The book of what Jesus Christ revealed to his disciples ... John, Thomas, Peter, Andrew, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Nathanael, Judas the Zealot and Cephas, we have written to the churches of the east and the west, the north and the south. In proclaiming and declaring to you our Lord Jesus Christ, we write about how we both heard him and touched him after he was raised from the dead, and how he revealed to us what is great and wonderful and true. (EpAp 1.1–2.3)⁸⁶

(Near the beginning of the Coptic manuscript:) εΤΒΕ ΠΕΙ
 ΝΠΝΑΝΟ ΕΑΝΣΕΕΙ ΝΗΤΝΕ ΕΤΒΕ Τ[Μ]ΑΡΤΥΡ[ΙΑ] ΝΠΝΑΩΡ ΠΧ
 ΝΕΤΑΦΕΟΥΕ ΕΝCΑΝΤ ΝCΩQ Δ[ΟΥ Ε]ΤΙ ΔΝ ΖΝ ΝΗΕΟΥΕ ΜΝ ΝΑΒΗΥΕ
 (EpAp 7.1)

For this reason we have not hesitated to write to you about the [t]estimo[ny] of our Saviour Christ, the things he did as we watched him, a[nd t]hat are still in (our) thoughts and works.

The opening of Revelation shows that it could be judged to be a revelation or apocalypse (1.1–2), a prophecy (1.3) or a letter (1.4f.), or all of the above.⁸⁷ The opening of the *Epistula Apostolorum* suggests a book, a gospel and a letter, but there is no epistolary ending, and the majority of the text has no trace of the letter-form of its opening. This is comparable to other dialogue gospels: the Apocryphon of James begins with an epistolary greeting, with the recipient asking James for a ‘secret book’ (ἀποκρύφον [1,10]), but the bulk of the text is a dialogue with an epistolary conclusion.⁸⁸ The Epistle of Peter to Philip too begins as a letter but then changes to narrative, reminiscent of Acts literature,⁸⁹ and dialogues between Jesus and the apostles.

⁸⁶ Translation (adapted) of the Ethiopic *Epistula Apostolorum* provided by Francis Watson, forthcoming.

⁸⁷ See Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–17. Bauckham argues that Revelation belongs in three categories: apocalypse, prophecy and letter.

⁸⁸ The term ‘book’ (βιβλίον) is used in reference to books that the apostles were writing (2,14–16). Scopello calls its genre ‘heterogeneous’, and Williams suggests that the letter may be a frame added later to the original content, Marvin Meyer and Madeleine Scopello, ‘The Secret Book of James’, in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition*, ed. Marvin Meyer (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 20; Francis E. Williams, ‘The Apocryphon of James – 1.2: 1.1–16:30’, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex)*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, NHMS 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 17–18. But it is incorrect to assume that anything that looks anomalous from the perspective of genre must be a later addition.

⁸⁹ F. Lapham, *Peter: The Myth, the Man and the Writings: A Study of the Early Petrine Text and Tradition* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 172.

Early Christians used the letter form openly, which meant that a letter could be a gospel too.⁹⁰ The *Epistula Apostolorum*, the Apocryphon of James and the Epistle of Peter to Philip are all examples of this.⁹¹

Many scholars who work on ‘non-canonical gospel-like texts’ endorse an inclusive definition of gospel, seeing a ‘gospel’ as a text that purports to give information about the life and/or teaching of Jesus.⁹² The table above shows that some scholars have been using this title with reference to the Apocryphon of John and the Dialogue of the Saviour, among many other texts. Of our dialogue gospels, only the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Judas are self-titled ‘gospel’ in the extant manuscripts. The Coptic BG and Greek PRyl manuscripts of the Gospel of Mary contain the subscript ‘gospel’, which has left scholars perplexed regarding its genre. The missing beginning causes further ambiguity. Bass asks, ‘Is it a Gnostic revelation dialogue, apocalypse, gospel or post-resurrection dialogue?’⁹³ Following Perkins’ characteristics of a ‘gnostic revelation dialogue’, King and Tuckett write that it fits the characteristics of a post-resurrection revelation dialogue.⁹⁴ Tuckett thinks it best not to ‘specify the genre of a text like the *Gospel of Mary* too narrowly’, as it may foreclose or predetermine interpretative possibilities,⁹⁵ and while the Gospel of Mary has its closest parallels with revelation discourses/dialogue gospels,⁹⁶ it can be called a gospel ‘if one is willing to accept the text’s own self-description as a “gospel”’.⁹⁷ King, on the other hand, prefers ‘post-resurrection dialogue’ to ‘gospel’, as the latter indicates ‘the message and promise of the Savior, not the genre of the work’.⁹⁸ King sees post-resurrection dialogues as mutually exclusive to

⁹⁰ Timo Glaser, ‘Liaisons Dangereuses: Epistolary Novels in Antiquity’, in *A Companion to the Ancient Novel*, ed. Edmund P. Cueva and Shannon N. Byrne, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Chichester and Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 252–3; Richard Bauckham, ‘Pseudo-Apostolic Letters’, *JBL* 107.3 (1988), esp. 474.

⁹¹ Bauckham refers to the Apocryphon of James and the *Epistula Apostolorum* as ‘[l]etters with mainly Gospel content’, Bauckham, ‘Pseudo-Apostolic Letters’, 483.

⁹² In the wider field, scholars vary in their willingness to apply the term ‘gospel’ to non-canonical gospels. For the division in scholarship, see Judith A. Diehl, ‘What Is a ‘Gospel’? Recent Studies in the Gospel Genre’, *Currents in Biblical Research* 9.2 (2011): 171–99.

⁹³ Ardyth L. Bass, ‘Composition and Redaction in the Coptic Gospel of Mary’ (Milwaukee, WI: PhD Thesis, Marquette University, 2007), 2.

⁹⁴ Christopher M. Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37–8; King, *Mary*, 30.

⁹⁵ Tuckett, *Mary*, 31.

⁹⁶ Tuckett, *Mary*, 41.

⁹⁷ Tuckett, *Mary*, 38.

⁹⁸ King, *Mary*, 30.

gospel, whereas Tuckett does not. Luttikhuisen does not agree that the Gospel of Mary is a revelation dialogue at all: 'At first sight, one is tempted to put the first part of the Gospel of Mary on a level with other revelation dialogues ... But upon closer examination, this equation seems to be quite problematic'.⁹⁹ He argues that *only* Jesus' communication with Mary, rather than his dialogue with Peter and others, can be paralleled to revelation dialogues. This seems counter-intuitive as the dialogue with Mary is a vision whereas the dialogue with Peter (from the little we have of it) appears to be much closer to other dialogue gospels; but Luttikhuisen proposes that because Peter's dialogue with the Saviour leaves the disciples in a state of fear, unable to preach and with unanswered questions, it is not comparable to revelation dialogues.¹⁰⁰ Fallon raises another possibility; namely, that the Gospel of Mary is an apocalypse presented through a dialogue, due to its soteriological concerns and personal eschatology.¹⁰¹ Denzey Lewis follows this, writing: '*GosMary* is an apocalypse, in which a seer (in this case, Mary) is given a tour of the cosmos by a privileged being (in this case, Jesus as the Savior). This text is *also* a revelation dialogue.'¹⁰² The confusion that the Gospel of Mary causes about where it belongs demonstrates that texts cannot be pigeonholed. The Gospel of Mary is a gospel, a (revelation) dialogue, a dialogue gospel and an apocalypse.

Assigning a text to a genre does not render clear criteria or conclusions. If genre does act as an interpretative tool, as Burrige and Stanton among many others have suggested, then we need to reassess our understanding of genre, making it more elastic and expansive and recognizing the role of the scholar in assigning a genre to a text. The creation, delimitation and use of a 'dialogue gospel' genre brings out the distinctive features of the resulting group of texts, but it needs to remain open to intertextual links across the breadth of early Christian literature and beyond.

1.3 The Dialogue Gospels

On the definition adopted here, to be a 'dialogue gospel' a text must contain two things: (1) Jesus as revealer on the verge of

⁹⁹ Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, 'The Evaluation of the Teaching of Jesus in Christian Gnostic Revelation Dialogues', *NovT* 30.2 (1988): 163.

¹⁰⁰ Luttikhuisen, 'Evaluation of the Teaching of Jesus', 163–4.

¹⁰¹ Fallon, 'Gnostic Apocalypses', 131.

¹⁰² Italics inserted. Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to 'Gnosticism': Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 269.

departure, and (2) dialogue with one or more disciples. These main characteristics can then be modified in various ways. This already rules out the Hypostasis of the Archons, Zostrianos and Allogenes, none of which has a revealer that is recognizably Jesus. The Second Apocalypse of James and the Gospel of Philip are also excluded due to their lack of dialogue.

For our purposes, thirteen main texts have been selected that fit these criteria.¹⁰³ The Johannine Farewell Discourse is almost certainly the earliest and the Pistis Sophia is probably the latest, but it is not possible to date the rest chronologically. Most scholars agree that the others can be dated to the late second to early third century, but the texts could easily be earlier or later.¹⁰⁴ The Johannine Farewell Discourse is unique as it is embedded in a longer text that narrates Jesus' ministry and death. It will be argued in the following chapter that it is the forerunner of the other dialogue gospels, but

¹⁰³ Those on the periphery include: (1) The Coptic Apocalypse of Peter (NHC 7,3), in which Christ and Peter discuss christology and Jesus' death in the Temple. The reason that it is placed on the periphery of dialogue gospels is that Peter only questions the Lord once. (2) The Books of Jeu (Bruce Codex) opens as a dialogue between the apostles and Jesus, but the majority of the text is an explanation of different treasures (heavenly levels), with a picture on each page, and a gnostic hymn. (3) The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon, once known as the 'Gospel of the Saviour' (P.Berl.22220), is an extremely fragmentary dialogue between the Saviour and his collective disciples before the passion. Suciú argues that it should be classified as a 'pseudo-apostolic memoir' written no earlier than the fifth century, Alin Suciú, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon: A Coptic Apostolic Memoir*, WUNT 370 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017). Although the Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon shares features with the dialogue gospels, Suciú's reclassification of the text (as well as its fragmentary nature) preclude it from our discussion. (4) 'Fragments of a Dialogue between John and Jesus' is too fragmentary to classify as a dialogue gospel. (5) The Gospel of Thomas (NHC 2,1; POxy 1; POxy 654; POxy 655) is a collection of Jesus' sayings and questions-and-answers. However, only two of the logia (60, 61) contain more dialogue than a single question and answer. Although I propose an 'open' view of genre, lines need to be drawn somewhere; otherwise we might include the Gospel of Thomas 60, John 3 or the various short conversations in Mark 10. However, as none of these are premised on Jesus' departure, they will not be included in our genre.

¹⁰⁴ As many of these texts are only extant in Coptic but presumed to be translated from Greek, the dating is difficult. The editors of the collections of dialogue gospels are not very interested in the question of date, usually placing them somewhere between mid- to late second century and early third century (with the exceptions of the Johannine Farewell Discourse and the Pistis Sophia). The 'new philology' school prefers to read the Coptic texts as products of the fourth century, acknowledging that some may have been written then or have undergone considerable editing to reach the version that we have today, see e.g. Hugo Lundhaug, 'An Illusion of Textual Stability: Textual Fluidity, New Philology, and the Nag Hammadi Codices', in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug, TU 175 (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2017), 20–54.

its context does not preclude it from being included in the genre. It encompasses the main elements of dialogue between Jesus and his disciples that deals with two key themes: Jesus' departure and how the community should act in his absence.

The following outlines are intended as a preliminary survey of these texts. In some cases, connections to other dialogue gospels will be drawn out. The Johannine Farewell Discourse will be first, as it stands at the beginning of the genre, but to underline the rhizomatic way of visualizing the texts within the genre, the rest will be arranged alphabetically in order to demonstrate a random approach.

(i) The *Johannine Farewell Discourse* (John 13.31–17.1) is at the same time a revelation dialogue, a farewell discourse and part of a *bios* gospel.¹⁰⁵ In 13.31, following Judas' exit, Jesus begins to speak about his own imminent departure, and a select group of disciples (Peter, Thomas, Philip and Judas 'not Iscariot') ask him about his destination and the possibility of following him there (13.36–37), the way he will take (14.5), the revelation of the Father (14.9), and his secret manifestation (14.22). Jesus answers their questions, also telling them about the eschatological dwelling place and promising them the coming of the paraclete. There is a narrative break at 14.31, in which Jesus says, 'Rise, let us be on our way' (Ἐγείρεσθε, ἄγωμεν ἐντεῦθεν), but a lengthy monologue follows. In the monologue, Jesus speaks about the vine, the Father, the disciples needing to abide in him, love, the hostility of the world, his departure and the paraclete. The cryptic saying, 'A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while and you will see me' (Μικρὸν καὶ οὐκέτι θεωρεῖτέ με, καὶ πάλιν μικρὸν καὶ ὄψεσθέ με [16.16]), prompts the disciples to ask what Jesus meant, also referring back to his earlier words about going to the Father (16.17–18). The disciples put these questions *to each other* (πρὸς ἀλλήλους [16.17]), however, being seemingly afraid to address them directly to Jesus although wishing to do so; but Jesus answers them anyway (16.19–24). He promises them that in the near future he will speak clearly about the Father, and the disciples then claim that he is *now* speaking openly and no longer in figures of speech (16.25–30). He finishes the dialogue by warning the disciples that they will face persecution in the world, but that he has

¹⁰⁵ There is debate on the unity and structure of the Johannine Farewell Discourse as at the end of chapter 14, Jesus says, 'Rise, let us be on our way' (Ἐγείρεσθε, ἄγωμεν ἐντεῦθεν [14.31]), but then continues to speak for another two chapters. For an overview of the various compositional theories, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, XIII–XXI*, ABRL (New York: Yale University Press, 1970), 581–603.

conquered the world (16.33). The discourse finishes with a narratival interjection: ‘After Jesus had spoken these things’ (ταῦτα ἐλάλησεν ἰησοῦς [17.1]).

(ii) The *Apocalypse of Peter* is missing from other lists of dialogue gospels, but it belongs here in view of the requests, questions or comments addressed to Jesus in its opening and closing sections – mostly stemming from Peter. It exists in two Greek fragments¹⁰⁶ and a longer Ethiopic version (in two manuscripts) that is thought to be a relatively reliable translation of the original text.¹⁰⁷ The temporal setting is not specified at the beginning, but a post-resurrection setting is assumed in view of Jesus’ ascension at the end.¹⁰⁸ However, the ascension account in the *Apocalypse of Peter* seems closer to the transfiguration account than to the canonical resurrection appearances. For example, the final scene takes place on ‘the holy mountain’ (15.1), paralleling the transfiguration account in 2 Pet 1.18.¹⁰⁹

The Ethiopic text begins with Christ on the Mount of Olives and the apostles asking him about the parousia, the eschaton and the mission. Jesus interprets the parable of the fig tree and declares that he will come again and that the dead will be resurrected to be judged. There follows a particularly vivid description of the fiery destruction and eternal torments for those who have fallen from faith or sinned. The punishments are specific to the crime – blasphemers are hung by their tongues, adulterers are hung up by their loins, those that lent money with interest are hung up by their knees, and disobedient

¹⁰⁶ Akhmim (P. Cair. 10759) and Rainer, see Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas, *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: Die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ On the manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, see Dennis D. Buchholz, *Your Eyes will be Opened: A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 119–55; Robert C. Helmer, “‘That We May Know and Understand’”: Gospel Tradition in the *Apocalypse of Peter*” (Milwaukee, WI: PhD Thesis, Marquette University, 1998), 14–17.

¹⁰⁸ Helmer writes: ‘Since the setting on the Mount of Olives for a post-resurrection dialogue is a common one among the apocryphal writings, it is probable that the chronological setting of Apoc. Pet. is likewise post-resurrection’, Helmer, ‘Gospel Tradition in the *Apocalypse of Peter*’, 55. Also, Bauckham regards it as post-resurrection due to the ascension and the command to preach the gospels, Richard Bauckham, ‘The Two Fig Tree Parables in the *Apocalypse of Peter*’, *JBL* 104.2 (1985): 275. *Contra* Janssen who argues that the setting is unclear, Janssen, ‘Mystagogus Gnosticus?’, 128.

¹⁰⁹ For the parallels between the *Apocalypse of Peter* 15.1–16.1 and the transfiguration accounts in Matt 17.1–9, Mark 9.2–10, Luke 9.28–36 and 2 Pet 1.18, see Helmer, ‘Gospel Tradition in the *Apocalypse of Peter*’, 135–6. He concludes: ‘The major difference is that in Apoc. Pet., it is not Jesus who is transfigured, but rather Moses and Elijah’ (136).

slaves will chew their tongues forever. There are also birds that eat flesh and insomniac worms that eat entrails.

Jesus then leads the apostles to a second mountain, where, in the Akhmim MS only, the Twelve ask to meet one of the deceased righteous ones. In the Greek, Jesus reveals heaven before hell. In both the Greek and Ethiopic, two of the righteous appear in a beautiful and radiant form. In the Ethiopic version, they are named as Moses and Elijah. Peter asks Jesus where the others are (named Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Ethiopic), and he shows him a paradisiacal garden. The ending is only preserved in the Ethiopic, in which Jesus ascends with Moses and Elijah. The disciples descend the mountain, praising God who has written the names of the righteous in heaven in the book of life.

(iii) The *Apocryphon of James* (_{NHC} 1,2) is a letter penned by James to an unknown recipient,¹¹⁰ containing a revelation that Jesus disclosed to James and Peter in secret. James writes that the revelation should not be communicated to many people; in fact, it is so covert that Jesus did not want all of his twelve disciples to receive it, and James has encrypted it by using the Hebrew alphabet. However, those who receive it and believe will be saved. James begins the story with the Twelve recalling and writing what the Saviour had taught them ‘whether in secret or openly’ (εἶτε ἄπρητῶν· εἶτε ἄπρητοῦρανῆ [2,13–14]). While James writes, Jesus appears. He tells the Twelve that only those who are filled can enter the kingdom of heaven, and he takes James and Peter aside to ‘fill them’ (μαροῦ [2,35]). The ensuing text is a dialogue between Jesus and James and Peter, with instruction about being filled and lacking, believing in the cross, an exhortation to martyrdom and parables about the kingdom of heaven.

Following the dialogue, Jesus departs, and James and Peter send their hearts up to heaven, presumably to follow him. The other disciples, apparently witnessing this, call to Peter and James, asking what Jesus said and where he went. The interruption from the other disciples causes James and Peter to come back down to earth; they never reach the highest heaven, described here as ‘the Majesty’. James and Peter explain that Jesus showed them a future generation of believers who will surpass and save them. The other disciples do not appreciate this, and James disperses them around the world,

¹¹⁰ There is a lacuna where the name of the recipient would have stood: [---]θoc. Williams (among others) suggests Cerinthus. F. E. Williams, ‘The Apocryphon of James (I, 2)’, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. James M. Robinson (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1996), 29–31.

while he goes to Jerusalem praying that he will participate in the salvation of the generation to come.

The Apocryphon of James refers to another ‘apocryphon’ that James has sent the recipient, one that Jesus revealed to James alone (as opposed to James and Peter). There are several instances in which the Apocryphon of James refers to a past revelation from Jesus to James (1,28–35; 8,31–36; 13,38–14,1). In 8,31–36, this previous revelation was about salvation, James’ succession and what to say before the archons. Hartenstein suggests that the Apocryphon of James is referring to the First Apocalypse of James: in both texts, James is the guarantor of a tradition that propagates martyrdom and a tradition that sees the Twelve as lesser than James, and knowledge of the First Apocalypse of James is the only way to make sense of these statements in the Apocryphon of James.¹¹¹ If she is correct, then James must be a composite James, as he appears to be the James who belongs to the Twelve in the Apocryphon of James (1,23–25), but James is the brother of Jesus in the First Apocalypse of James (NHC 24,13–14). Perkins, however, argues that in spite of these connections, ‘the picture of martyrdom and of the death of Christ in ApocryJas comes from a different and more orthodox tradition than that behind [the First Apocalypse of James]’.¹¹² Without closer analysis, all that can be said is that these two James texts have close connections in the intertextual web of gospel literature, while interpreting shared traditions in different ways and even applying them to different James-characters.

(iv) The *Apocryphon of John* (NHC 2,1; NHC 3,1; NHC 4,1; BG 2) is a dialogue between the risen Saviour and John, son of Zebedee, which is preserved in four versions – two short (NHC 3; BG) and two long (NHC 2; NHC 4).¹¹³ It is considered ‘one of the most coherent and

¹¹¹ Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 229–32. Because of this, she argues that whereas the other dialogue gospels know and use the canonical gospels, the Apocryphon of James represents a third stage in that it knows the canonical texts *and* later dialogue gospels (232). This could also be said for the Pistis Sophia and also perhaps any dialogue gospel that refers to the Sophia myth.

¹¹² Perkins, *Gnostic Dialogue*, 147. See also Pheme Perkins, ‘Johannine Traditions in Ap. Jas. (NHC 1,2)’, *JBL* 101.3 (1982): 403.

¹¹³ The two copies of the longer version are virtually identical, whereas the two copies of the shorter version have substantive variants. The longer versions include a lengthy citation from the *Book of Zoroaster* and a concluding monologue from ‘Pronoia: Forethought’. The three versions in the Nag Hammadi Codices each appear at the beginning of their respective codex, potentially demonstrating the text’s importance, see Williams, *Rethinking ‘Gnosticism’*, 235–62, 306–10. The version in BG follows the Gospel of Mary.

comprehensive narrations of the revelatory account traditionally labelled as “Gnostic”¹¹⁴

The text begins with an introductory scene, set in the Temple, with a Pharisee telling John that the ‘Nazorene’ has deceived him and turned him away from the traditions of his fathers. An upset John leaves the Temple and goes to a mountain, where the risen Jesus appears to him in three forms – a child, old person and servant. Jesus announces that he has come to teach John ‘[what] is and [what was] and what will come to pass, that you [may know] the things that are not manifest [and the things that are] manifest, and to teach you about the Perfect [Man]’ (τ[ε]νοϋ δειει] ετογνογειατκ εβ[ολ χε οϋ πε]ϋωοο αγω οϋ πε[νταϋω]πε αγω οϋ πετεϋ[ϋε ετρεϋ]ϋωπε χεκαας εκ[εειμε ε]νιατναϋ (ε) εροοϋ μ[ιν νετοϋ]ναϋ εροοϋ αγω ετ[ογνειατκ] εβολ ετβε πιτελι[οc νρωμε] [BG 22,2–9]). John does not ask a question directly, but simply asks to know it, and the subsequent revelation includes a lengthy monologue from Jesus that explains the transcendent deity as the source of everything; his emanation of a chain of aeons (or light beings) including Sophia and Christ; the birth of Yaldabaoth, begotten from Sophia without a consort, resulting in a monstrous form and jealous nature; and an alternative version of Gen 1–9, retelling the early history of humankind as being entombed in material bodies.¹¹⁵ This includes the famous boast: ‘I am a jealous God, and there is no other God beside me’ (ανοκ ανκ ογνογτε νρεϋ κωε αγω μη κενογτε νcαβλλαϊ [NHC2 13,8–9]), to which the narrator responds, ‘If there were no other God over him, of whom would he be jealous?’ (ενεμν κεογα γαρ ϋωοο νε νιμ πετρηακωε εροϋ [NHC2 13,12–13]). Yaldabaoth and the archons make various attempts to detain and deceive humanity, which results in countermoves from the heavens to rescue humanity.¹¹⁶ In this extensive protological discourse, John intervenes only three times (BG 45,6–7; 58,1–3, 14–15),

¹¹⁴ Zlatko Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe: Narrative and Cosmology in the Apocryphon of John*, NHMS 52 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 1. Turner calls the Apocryphon of John ‘[t]he Sethian Revelation *par excellence*’, John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, BCNH:E 6 (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2001), 69.

¹¹⁵ A useful chart showing the levels of existence in the cosmological narrative can be found in Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 87. King’s description and analysis of the narrative of the Apocryphon of John is helpful. She splits the text into four parts: the ideal (the divine realm), the problem (rupture), the result (the situation of humanity in the world) and the solution (salvation), see 85–156.

¹¹⁶ King sees the Apocryphon of John as a series of ‘Moves and Countermoves’, King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 96–7.

and at every point it is to ask a question of clarification regarding a teaching from the Jewish scriptures.

The section that follows takes a dialogue form and deals with eschatological issues (BG 64,13–71,5). John asks questions about the fate of different souls, in both terms of protology (whether the spirit entered them) and morality (whether they did evil). The Saviour's answers here are not much longer than John's questions. To John's final question on the counterfeit spirit, Jesus offers another long speech regarding Yaldabaoth and the creation of ignorance and fate, with reference to Noah and the archons procreating with human women.

(v) The *Book of Thomas* (NHC 2,7) is a dialogue between Jesus and Judas Thomas, who is described as Jesus' 'twin' (COEUY [138,8]). The text is ascribed to Mathaias, who was listening to the conversation between the two of them. The dialogue has no narrative frame, but the reference to Jesus' impending ascension in 138,23 indicates that it is set after Jesus' resurrection. Thomas requests that Jesus tell him about the hidden and invisible things so he can preach them. The central concern in the dialogue is with asceticism: Jesus teaches Judas Thomas that the elect must abandon the fiery passions of the bestial body that destroy the soul. The body is part of the visible cosmos, and it is only through an ascetic life that one can find truth of the invisible heavenly world. The dialogue moves onto a monologue about coming judgement, heaven and hell, including woes and beatitudes, and polemic against non-ascetic Christians who have 'baptized ... [their] souls in the water of darkness' (ΑΤΕΤΩΜΕ ... ΝΨΥΧΗ ΕΜ ΠΜΟΟΥ ΜΗΚΑΚ[Ε] [144,1]).

(vi) The *Dialogue of the Saviour* (NHC 3,5) is primarily a dialogue between Jesus and three named disciples, Matthew, Judas and Mary; however, a larger group of disciples appears at certain points. The very fragmentary text has no narrative frame and so there is no reference to the time or location of the dialogue. A main point within the discourse is Jesus opening the way (EIH [120,24]) to the heavenly world, which reflects the Johannine reference to him as the *ὁδός* (14.6); thus the Dialogue of the Saviour may be intended as a farewell discourse.¹¹⁷ The text begins with a monologue from the Saviour, teaching about 'rest' and how to overcome the archons, as well as prayer to the Father. Four pages in, the dialogue begins, with Jesus

¹¹⁷ Létourneau sees it as a farewell discourse in the Johannine model with an ambiguous chronological location, Pierre Létourneau, *Le Dialogue du Sauveur* (NH III,5), BCNH:T 29 (Louvain: Peeters, 2003), 15. Pagels and Koester argue that it is not possible to determine whether it is meant to be a pre- or post-resurrection

answering the disciples' questions. In the dialogue, we find a Genesis-based creation myth (with the highest Father as creator). There is also a fragment of an apocalyptic vision of the Son of Man, heaven, and hell, which the Saviour shows to Judas, Mary and Matthew.

(vii) The *Epistle of Peter to Philip* (NHC 8,2; CT 1) consists of an epistolary opening, meetings of the apostles, their dialogue with Christ, several appearances of Jesus and a Pentecost scene. The opening has Peter inviting Philip to rejoin the apostles following a separation, and when Philip receives the letter, he gladly consents. After this point, there is no reference to the letter, and the text does not conclude in epistolary form.

The group of apostles gather on the mountain, where they pray to the Father of light as well as the Son of life and immortality. Jesus appears as a voice emanating from a form of light. The apostles take their chance to ask him about cosmology, the human condition and salvation. Their questions are presented as a unit, in a block quote. Jesus answers with a short paraphrase of a Sophia myth and explains that he is the fullness and was sent down to the world where he was not recognized (cf. John 1.1–18).¹¹⁸ The apostles then ask how to overcome the archons that fight the inner man and Jesus responds. Jesus' revelation is not new; on three occasions he reminds the disciples that they have already heard this information.

The Epistle of Peter to Philip's narrative frame is unusual in including multiple appearances of Jesus with narrative in between. After the first dialogue, he is taken up into heaven with a clap of thunder and a bolt of lightning, and the apostles begin to return to Jerusalem. While they are on the road, they discuss suffering, and Jesus appears again as a voice to tell them that their suffering is necessary. He responds to the apostles' discussion, but they do not engage in conversation with him. After this second epiphany, the disciples heal a crowd and teach in the Temple. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit and preaches a sermon on Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection.¹¹⁹ The apostles then separate. The third and final epiphany in the letter occurs after the apostles have gathered again.

dialogue, but that it is 'best seen as a compilation of various sources and traditions, or as the elaboration and expansion of an older dialogue', Helmut Koester and Elaine Pagels, 'Introduction', in *Nag Hammadi Codex III, 5: The Dialogue of the Savior*, NHMS 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 1.

¹¹⁸ The Sophia myth is not fully or comprehensively explained, which may imply that the audience would have been familiar with it.

¹¹⁹ Meyer notes the christological tension in Peter's sermon as he affirms the Passion of Christ whilst professing his divinity that is able to transcend suffering, Meyer, *Letter of Peter to Philip*, 156.

Jesus greets them with peace and instructs them to depart without fear, telling them that he will be with them forever. Here, he is not responding to any questions or anxieties. The apostles then leave each other, going out to preach the gospel.

(viii) The *Epistula Apostolorum* exists as a full text in a number of Ethiopic manuscripts, a partial version in a Coptic MS and a small Latin fragment. The gospel begins with a short epistolary greeting from the eleven apostles writing to the churches of the world, followed by a creed-like passage and a short description of miracles performed by the incarnate Lord. The authors declare that the letter was written because of Simon and Cerinthus, the enemies of Jesus, and this is followed by a confessional declaration that the Lord was crucified by Pontius Pilate and Archelaus, and buried.¹²⁰ Then, the Easter story begins: Mary (or Sarah in Ethiopic), Martha and Mary Magdalene go to the empty tomb, and Jesus appears. He instructs the women to tell the apostles that he has risen, but the male disciples do not believe them. Together with the women, Jesus himself now visits the disciples, who touch him and are persuaded that he is not a ghost. At 12.3, the revelatory dialogue starts. From this point on, the women are long forgotten – presumably they are not present, but their departure is not narrated. The sizeable dialogue comprises a number of questions from the apostles, who always feature as a unified ‘we’, on topics including the incarnation, the parousia, the judgement, mission, keeping commandments, and an interpretation of the story of the ten virgins. The text concludes with an account of Jesus’ ascension.

The *Epistula Apostolorum* is often seen as ‘different’ to other dialogue gospels. It has been viewed as a ‘proto-orthodox’ dialogue gospel that adopted the genre from ‘gnostics’ in order to criticize them.¹²¹ The claim that the text polemizes against ‘gnostics’ is based on its opposition to the arch-heretics Simon and Cerinthus, and

¹²⁰ The Coptic passage runs: ‘This one [to whom we] bear witness is the Lord, who was [crucif]ied by Pontius Pilate [and A]rchelaus between the two robbe[r]s [and wa]s buried in a place which is called [Skull]’ (9.1). This follows the apostles’ comment on the reason for writing.

¹²¹ Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 159. Others who think that the *Epistula Apostolorum* borrowed the genre to combat its opponents include Manfred Hornschuh, *Studien zur Epistula Apostolorum*, Patristische Texte und Studien 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965), 4–8; Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 131–2; J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 555; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development and*

the fact that the first virgin to be locked out of heaven is named $\rho\omega\omicron\upsilon\iota\varsigma$ (43.16).¹²² Yet the *Epistula Apostolorum* also includes typically ‘gnostic’ elements, such as the Ogdoad and a cosmology that includes multiple heavens.¹²³ While the argument that the *Epistula Apostolorum* consciously used the dialogue gospel form against its ‘gnostic’ creators might be standard opinion, there is little sign that the *Epistula Apostolorum* has a greater polemical purpose than other texts within the genre.

(ix) The *First Apocalypse of James* ($\text{NHC } 5,3; \text{CT } 2$) recounts two dialogues between Jesus and James, described as non-physical brothers, followed by a lengthy explanation that Jesus’ teaching is to be kept secret for several generations. The first dialogue is set before Jesus’ crucifixion, and the second half after his resurrection. There is no narrative to commence the text, but the setting is explained through the narrative passage in which Jesus departs, James mourns, comforts his disciples and prays, and Jesus returns. This is complemented by narrative at the end, in which James is arrested and stoned. Jesus’ death is not narrated but referred to in the dialogue.

The topics of conversation are mostly the same before and after Jesus’ death and resurrection. These include God (the pre-existent One), femaleness (Sophia and the seven female disciples) and cosmology (a body of seventy-two archons), but the key theme throughout both dialogues is James’ concern about his own impending suffering at the hands of both the earthly rulers and the heavenly toll-collectors who demand souls. Jesus instructs James how to attain eschatological salvation by telling the toll-collectors that he belongs to the pre-existent Father. The two dialogues include a number of questions from James, most of which Jesus answers straightforwardly.

The Codex Tchacos recension, published several decades after the Nag Hammadi version, reveals a third revelatory section (one hidden behind lacunae in the Nag Hammadi text), which states that the revelation is to be handed down to Addai, then to Manael, then to Levi and finally to Levi’s son who will finally communicate it to

Significance (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 182. *Contra* Bauckham who argues that the ‘discourse of the risen Christ to his disciples was a popular genre among the writers of post-canonical Gospel material and was used by orthodox writers as well as (and probably before) Gnostic writers’, Bauckham, ‘Two Fig Tree Parables’, 276.

¹²² On the virgin named ‘gnosis’ and other possible instances of polemic throughout the text, see Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 103–4.

¹²³ See esp. Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 105–7.

others.¹²⁴ James plays no part in this succession discourse, but he then asks three questions about the seven women and spirits of prophecy. The text concludes with a narrative about James preaching to the disciples and then being arrested and killed.

(x) The *Gospel of Mary* (BG 1, POxy 3525; PRyl 463) begins following six missing pages that once opened the Berlin Codex. The first page of the extant text opens with a conversation between Peter (and presumably other disciples) and the Saviour about matter, nature and sin. A page later, after a short self-contained ‘farewell discourse’, Jesus departs, and Mary arises to take his place. She comforts the weeping disciples, who are identified as Peter, Andrew and Levi, allaying their fears about potential persecution and reminding them that Jesus will protect them. As the male disciples debate the interpretation of Jesus’ words, Mary responds to a request from Peter by recounting how ‘the Lord’ appeared to her in a vision, in which he responded to her questions about the vision and taught her about the ascent of the personified soul through hostile cosmic powers. Following another four-page hiatus and the finale of the recollection of vision, the narrative frame continues and Peter and Andrew challenge Mary’s teaching. Previously silent Levi jumps in to defend her, belittling Peter and ultimately reminding them all of the Saviour’s instructions to preach the gospel. The text ends with disciples going out to fulfil those instructions, though there is considerable ambiguity regarding who is included in the group. (See the analysis of the interpretative and textual issues in Chapter 3.)

(xi) The *Gospel of Judas* (CT 3) is a ‘secret discourse’ (λογο[ς] ἐτῆρη [33,1]) that Jesus reveals to Judas shortly before Judas betrays him. The text opens with a short summary of Jesus’ activity on the earth but depicts part of this activity as appearing in different forms and passing freely between the heavens and earth. Then a setting is specified: in Judea, Jesus finds the disciples gathered together. It is unclear whether Jesus arrives in a ‘divine appearance’ as such.¹²⁵ The disciples and Jesus engage in dialogue, and Jesus laughs at the Twelve for their foolish interpretation of the eucharist and tells them that they do not understand his true identity. Namely, he is not the son of ‘their God’, and they are not from the immortal holy race. As in the Apocryphon

¹²⁴ Not a lot of scholarship on the First Apocalypse of James has been published since CT has been available to us.

¹²⁵ According to Gathercole, Jesus came to the disciples in a ‘sudden and mysterious appearance’, Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67.

of James and the First Apocalypse of James, Jesus proclaims that the apostolic generation will not understand him.

Judas recognizes Jesus' true identity, and so Jesus takes him aside and answers his cosmological and eschatological questions about the holy race and personal eschatology. Jesus reveals a cosmological myth featuring the holy and imperishable race of Seth. At the end of the text, either Judas or Jesus ascends into a cloud,¹²⁶ and then Judas betrays Jesus to the Jewish authorities for money. After the publication of the Gospel of Judas in 2006, there was debate over whether the gospel narrated Judas as saved or damned (depending partly on whether Jesus or Judas ascended into the cloud).¹²⁷ It is now generally accepted that Judas was subject to a negative fate.¹²⁸

(xii) The *Pistis Sophia* (Askew Codex) is a post-resurrection dialogue in which the risen Jesus has spent eleven years explaining the mysteries to the disciples. At the beginning, Jesus tells them that he had previously taught only in general terms and that there were many things he had not explained. The *Pistis Sophia* consists of four 'books', separated by titles on the MS.¹²⁹ The first two books mostly comprise an account of the repentances of the *Pistis Sophia*, largely told through interpretation of Psalms. The disciples ask Jesus a number of questions, but also answer questions themselves through their recollection or interpretation of Psalms, the Psalms of Solomon and the Odes of Solomon. Books Three and Four contain Jesus answering the questions of his disciples, with a focus on the different levels of salvation for different souls. The afterlife souls will

¹²⁶ Ambiguities regarding the ascension will be discussed in Chapter 2.

¹²⁷ The disagreement over whether Judas was saved or damned, and whether Jesus instructed Judas to betray him, has resulted in a number of publications on this work – perhaps more than any in the Nag Hammadi Codices or Berlin Codex, barring the Gospel of Thomas. Unfortunately, the other texts in Codex Tchacos have been somewhat neglected.

¹²⁸ For example, April D. DeConick, ed., *The Codex Judas Papers: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Tchacos Codex Held at Rice University, Houston, Texas, March 13–16, 2008*, NHMS 71 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009); Lance Jenott, *The Gospel of Judas: Coptic Text, Translation, and Historical Interpretation of 'the Betrayer's Gospel'*, STAC 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Graeco-Roman Antiquity: Under Pitiless Skies*, NHMS 81 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013).

¹²⁹ As in Carl Schmidt, *Pistis Sophia*, trans. Violet MacDermot, NHMS 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), xiv. Evans challenges the assumption that there were four books, writing that 'Schmidt's fourth book has a lacuna of eight pages, and the contents, themes, and even assumed cosmologies differ dramatically before and after the gap, suggesting they are parts of separate works', Erin Evans, *The Books of Jeu and the Pistis Sophia as Handbooks to Eternity: Exploring the Gnostic Mysteries of the Ineffable*, NHMS 89 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 95.

attain depends on which mysteries they had been initiated into and whether they continued to sin. Book Four opens with a ritual prayer of Jesus after his resurrection and includes prayer and ritual alongside dialogue.¹³⁰ Throughout the books, there is a heavy emphasis on forgiveness of sins and the sacraments.

The *Pistis Sophia* is usually dated later than other dialogue gospels, and it is only on the basis of its late date that Hartenstein excludes it from her analysis, despite acknowledging that it is an ‘appearance dialogue’.¹³¹ At four books, it is also much longer than other dialogue gospels, and at points it can be rather obscure and extremely repetitive. Burkitt goes as far as to call it a ‘dreary Egyptian book’!¹³² But in my opinion, it adds volumes to our understanding of the ways in which early Christians conceived of their world, and it should be referred to much more frequently in such discussions.¹³³ The *Pistis Sophia* is particularly interesting for the intertextual relationship between dialogue gospels and canonical texts as it contains quotations from Matthew, Luke and Romans, as well as numerous Psalms, Isaiah, and the Psalms and Odes of Solomon. Furthermore, it has connections to other texts within the dialogue gospel genre, including a variation of the Sophia myth of the Apocryphon of John (where Sophia repents – although in the *Pistis Sophia* she belongs to the material cosmos) and Andrew’s incomprehension of the ascent of the soul, as in the Gospel of Mary.

(*xiii*) The *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (NHC 3,4; BG 3; POxy 1081¹³⁴) opens with the twelve disciples and seven women on a mountain in Galilee,

¹³⁰ Evans understands the first part of Book Four as ‘serv[ing] as a preparatory tool for someone about to undergo the first baptism’, Evans, *The Books of Jeu and the Pistis Sophia*, 96.

¹³¹ Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 12, 257. *Contra* Bockmuehl who writes that it ‘does not present itself as a gospel’, presumably because it is instead an ‘elaborate disquisition about gnostic mythology’, although he does not offer further explanation, Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 194. It is unclear why Bockmuehl would categorize the Gospel of Philip as a ‘post-resurrection discourse gospel’ but not the *Pistis Sophia*.

¹³² F. C. Burkitt, ‘*Pistis Sophia* Again’, *JTS* 26.104 (1925): 391.

¹³³ With me on this is van der Vliet: ‘The neglect of the *Pistis Sophia* is one of the riddles of modern Gnostic studies. W. C. van Unnik’s authoritative opinion that in the *Pistis Sophia* “nicht nur Wahnsinn vorliegt, wie es beim oberflächlichen Lesen den Anschein hat” and that rather “man durch sorgfältige Einzellexegese Einblicke bekommt in die Bildung gnostischer Systeme” has hardly met with any response. Nevertheless, this compendious volume of Christian Gnostic teaching is a treasure-trove of ideas on soteriology, cosmology, eschatology and biblical exegesis’, Jacques van der Vliet, ‘Fate, Magic and Astrology in *Pistis Sophia*, Chaps 15–21’, in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen*, ed. A. Hilhorst and G. H. van Kooten, AGJU 59 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 519–20.

¹³⁴ The two Coptic MSS are fairly similar but BG has more preserved.

wondering about the universe, the arrangement (ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ) of the cosmos, the powers and the Saviour. The Saviour appears in a form of great light that only pure, perfect flesh could bear, and he greets them with his peace. Five named disciples – Philip, Matthew, Thomas, Mary and Bartholomew – or his disciples as a collective, ask him short questions including about the make-up of the cosmos and their own origins. In contrast to the short questions, the Saviour gives lengthy replies, explaining the intricate and detailed cosmic structure, the deficiency of philosophers, the nature of truth, the One who is Ineffable, the perishable and the imperishable, Yaldabaoth and the cosmos, and the disciples' origins and salvation. Jesus explains a threefold pantheon: the transcendent God (which is the focus of the first part), Man (representing both saved and fallen humanity), and the Son of Man–Christ.¹³⁵ The dialogue leaves no room for narrational interjections, until the end, when having their questions answered, the disciples go out with joy to preach the gospel.¹³⁶

1.4 Eschatology and the Saviour

Our thirteen texts share a number of commonalities and differences, and any point can connect to any other point. Here, we will discuss how the concepts of the Saviour and eschatology are employed throughout the genre. This is where the rhizomatic image is of particular importance: dialogue gospels demonstrate a network of connections that are non-linear, non-bifurcated, non-homogenous and non-hierarchical.

¹³⁵ As suggested by René Falkenberg, 'Matthew 28:16–20 and the Nag Hammadi Library: Reception of the Great Commission in the Sophia of Jesus Christ', in *Mark and Matthew II: Comparative Readings, Reception History, Cultural Hermeneutics, and Theology*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker and Anders Runesson, WUNT 304 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 99–100. Man and the Father are merged into one divinity.

¹³⁶ The usual conversation around the Sophia of Jesus Christ presupposes that it is a Christian narrative frame imposed on the non-Christian dialogue Eugnostos (NHC 3,3; 5,1). The short questions posed by the disciples only serve to move the narrative along, and nothing would be lost without the appearance, the disciples or Jesus' departure. However, the supposition concerning the manner in which the Sophia of Jesus Christ has been 'imposed' on Eugnostos may be too simplistic, and an alternative to the simplistic 'christianization' argument is seeing Christ as fulfilling the role of 'the interpreter who was sent' (πρεφωλ νταγτασογοϋ [BG 94,16–17]) in Eugnostos, as suggested in D. M. Parrott, *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3–4 and V,1, with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,3 and Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1081: Eugnostos and the Sophia of Jesus Christ* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1991), 4. Hartenstein, however, is hesitant to identify the 'interpreter' with Christ, Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 38 n. 22. The 'christianization' assumption may need to be readdressed, but this is not my purpose here, and we will not deal further with Eugnostos.

The overlaps and connections in their teachings demonstrate how problematic it is to taxonomize these texts into particular theological groups. This is meant to be a preliminary comparative survey of these main themes, and it is far from my intention to present a comprehensive analysis of these themes in all thirteen texts. The broad, sweeping overviews are intended only to show the diversity at the point of commonality within the genre and that the dialogue gospel genre cannot and should not be thought to display only linear patterns.

The Saviour

The whole point of a dialogue with Jesus is for him to impart knowledge to his disciples. Dialogue gospels see knowledge as a means of salvation, whether it be knowledge of one's origins, knowledge of how to act properly or knowledge that Jesus is revealer and Saviour. And thus, the texts' soteriological messages are interwoven with the genre. However, although each dialogue gospel is centred around Jesus as Saviour, it is not a given that every depiction of Jesus was remotely the same. Each gospel, both canonical and non-canonical, offers a new interpretation of Jesus.¹³⁷ In Chapter 2, we will look at the differences in the portrayal of the appearance of Jesus, but here we will focus on christological titles.

Christological titles are often used to denote Jesus' identity: he is the Christ, the Lord, the Saviour and the Son of God. Dialogue gospels, in general, predominately use the names Saviour and Lord, with Jesus (Christ) being comparatively rare. σωτηρ and ζωεις are generally employed in *dialogue*, particularly in the introductory formulae 'the Saviour said' and 'the Lord said'. As examples, the two names are alternated in the Dialogue of the Saviour, the Epistula Apostolorum, the Sophia of Jesus Christ, the Apocalypse of Peter (alongside Jesus Christ) and the Book of Thomas (alongside Jesus). The First Apocalypse of James does not use Saviour at all, only Lord

¹³⁷ As Watson writes: 'As Luke indicates to Theophilus, each attempt to write the gospel represents a new answer to the question who Jesus is on the assumption that the answers embodied in earlier gospels are either inadequate or misleading', Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2013), 8. Conversely, Perkins argues that '[t]he Nag Hammadi writings have developed their picture of the Savior from traditions quite different from those which underlie New Testament christological assertions', Pheme Perkins, 'Gnostic Christologies and the New Testament', *CBQ* 43.4 (1981): 606. However, King points out that the Saviour in 'gnostic' texts is depicted in radically different ways, Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 208–10.

(and Rabbi as an address). The Pistis Sophia, by far the longest of the dialogue gospels, uses Jesus and Saviour alternately in Book Three, whereas in Books One and Four he is Jesus, and in Book Two he is generally called the First Mystery but Jesus at the end.

The title Lord is very common in early Christian literature and multifaceted in meaning;¹³⁸ however, the title Saviour has been mistakenly associated with ‘gnostic’ ideology. This most likely stems from Irenaeus’ rebuke of the so-called gnostics’ preference for Saviour (‘For this reason, they say, the Saviour – they refuse to call him Lord – spent thirty years without doing anything in public’ [*Adv. Haer.* 1.1.3]) and has led certain scholars to incorrectly assume that texts that employ this title are ‘gnostic’. For example, POxy 840 is similar to the canonical gospels in style and tone and deals with an encounter between the Saviour and a Pharisee about ritual cleanliness and baptism; it is just a small fragment of a text but uses σωτήρ exclusively. Bovon argued that this christological title was evidence of intra-Christian polemic, writing that the ‘use of the title Savior and the absence of the name Jesus suggest a location for the fragment within a Gnostic or Manichaean milieu using apocryphal tradition’.¹³⁹ However, the title Saviour occurs throughout a wide range of early Christian literature, and in numerous texts that we might imagine Irenaeus would have approved of. As well as the *Epistula Apostolorum* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, Ignatius frequently refers to Jesus Christ as Saviour,¹⁴⁰ and Justin hardly shies away from it, telling us that ‘the name Jesus in the Hebrew language means Σωτήρ in the Greek tongue’ (*I Apol.* 33.7).¹⁴¹ The ‘Saviour’ title then need

¹³⁸ See Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 108–17; Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity*, trans. Harold Knight and George Ogg, Library of Theological Translations (Cambridge: James Clarke Co., 2002), 68–128; Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely, 5th ed. (Nashville, TN and New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), 121–52.

¹³⁹ François Bovon, ‘Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity’, *JBL* 119.4 (2000): 728. *Contra* Kazen who argues against POxy 840 being closer to Christian ‘gnostic’ or Manichaean ideas than the synoptics and Jewish texts regarding purity. See Thomas Kazen, ‘Sectarian Gospels for Some Christians? Intention and Mirror Reading in the Light of Extra-Canonical Texts’, *NTS* 51.4 (2005): 575. Kruger simply argues that this title places the gospel in the second century, Michael J. Kruger, *The Gospel of the Savior: An Analysis of P.Oxy. 840 and Its Place in the Gospel Traditions of Early Christianity*, TENT 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), esp. 203–4.

¹⁴⁰ Epistles to the *Ephesians* 1.1; *Magnesians* 1.1; *Philadelphians* 9.2; *Smyrnaeans* 7.1.

¹⁴¹ Furthermore, 2 Peter and the Pastoral Epistles employ it frequently (2 Pet 1.1, 11; 2.20; 3.2, 18; Tit 1.3, 4; 2.10, 13; 3.4, 6; 1 Tim 1.1; 2.3; 4.10 and 2 Tim 1.10).

not imply any particular theology. It is more appropriate to suggest that the title refers to Jesus' *saving* capacity – through his death and resurrection in the case of Ignatius, through purity in the case of POxy 840 and through revelation in the case of dialogue gospels such as the Sophia of Jesus Christ.

Although Irenaeus' criticism is incorrect, for his opponents' texts do wish to call Jesus 'Lord', he is right to point out that it is possible to use or reject certain christological titles on theological grounds.¹⁴² In some dialogue gospels, christological titles are important in delimiting the identity of the Saviour and certain titles were not appropriate. This is evident in the scribal changes we see in the recensions of the Sophia of Jesus Christ and the Apocryphon of John. In both recensions of the Sophia of Jesus Christ (BG, NHC 3) it is the 'Saviour' who appears to the disciples, and he is usually called 'the perfect Saviour' in the dialogues. However, in the NH version, Philip, Thomas and Mary address him as 'Lord' (Ⲭϣ),¹⁴³ whereas the parallel passages in BG use 'Christ' (Ⲭϣϣ).¹⁴⁴ The Coptic nomina sacra used for 'Christ' and 'Lord' are very similar, with just a single line difference (Ⲭϣ and Ⲭϣϣ), which may suggest that the variation is a simple mistake or misreading. However, it later becomes clear that human error is not the explanation. The Saviour is teaching the disciples, and we read:

ⲧⲙⲏⲧⲉⲣⲟ ⲗⲉ ⲧⲁ ⲡⲩⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲩⲗⲁⲘⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ⲗⲉ
ⲡⲉⲬϣ (BG 101,6–9).

Now the kingdom is that of the Son of Man, who is called 'Christ'.

ⲧⲙⲏⲧⲣⲟ ⲧⲏⲣϥ ⲙⲡⲩⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲉⲩⲗⲁⲘⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ⲗⲉ
ⲡⲩⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ (NHC 105,19–21).

The whole kingdom of the Son of Man, who is called 'Son of God'.

The change from Christ to Son of God, or vice versa, cannot be explained as a misreading of χ and ξ . It must be more intentional.

¹⁴² We can assume the Apocryphon of John represents a text of Irenaeus' opponents due to the close parallels between the Apocryphon of John and *Adv. Haer.* 1.29–30, and the First Apocalypse of James due to its parallels with 1.21.5. This is not to say that Irenaeus knows or refers to these exact texts.

¹⁴³ BG 86,7; 87,9; 90,1–2.

¹⁴⁴ NHC3 95,19; 96,15; 98,10. In the BG, ⲡⲉⲗⲁⲩ ⲛⲁⲩ ⲛⲃⲓ ⲙⲁⲗⲁⲓⲟⲩ ⲗⲉ ⲡⲱⲩ ⲁⲩⲟⲩⲱⲛⲁ ⲉⲩⲟⲗ ⲛⲃⲓ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ (Matthew said to him, 'How was Man revealed?' [BG 93,12–15])

In the Apocryphon of John, we see the same thing. John repeatedly addresses Jesus as ‘Christ’ in BG and ‘Lord’ in NHC 2 and 3.¹⁴⁵ Yet, except in direct address, he is called the ‘Saviour’. The scribal activity behind the Berlin Codex suggests that Christ was an appropriate title for the Saviour, whereas that of Nag Hammadi Codices 2 and 3 pushes against this identification.¹⁴⁶

As we mentioned above, the name ‘Christ’ is less common in dialogue gospels than other early Christian literature. This may be due to the association with the Jewish Messiah. Whether this was the reasoning behind the change from Christ to Lord, or vice versa, in the Sophia of Jesus Christ and the Apocryphon of John is impossible to say. The Apocryphon of John denies any possibility that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah as the text is in active contradiction with Jewish scripture and its God, and the titles in the Nag Hammadi versions might seek to reinforce this. However, there are many dialogue gospels that do not actively oppose Jewish scripture and its God, and so their exclusion of the name Christ is not necessarily advocating or opposing the identification of Jesus with the Messiah (e.g. the Epistle of Peter to Philip, the First Apocalypse of James, the Apocryphon of James, the Gospel of Mary, the Book of Thomas, the Dialogue of the Saviour, the Sophia of Jesus Christ). This lack of interest might be compared to Colossians, which never quotes the Jewish scriptures nor shows much interest in the role of Jesus as fulfilling them. There was simply no need to profess Jesus’ identity as the Christ¹⁴⁷ – rather, it was more useful to stress the novelty of Jesus as Saviour.

follows the exact same format as the other questions, but there is no address. NHC 3, on the other hand, does have an address: πεδαρ ναρ νβι μαθηαιος δε πλοεις πσωτηρ-πως απρωμε ογωνε εβολ (Matthew said to him, ‘Lord, Saviour, how was Man revealed?’ [100,16–19]).

¹⁴⁵ For example, BG 46,6 // NHC 2 13,18; BG 58,2 // NHC 2 22,10 // NHC 3 28,18. There are many more instances of this. In some cases, it is unclear whether $\chi\tau$ is in reference to Christ or Goodness since he anointed him with his $\mu\eta\tau\chi\tau$ (Christhood $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$, or goodness $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$) (BG 30,15)

¹⁴⁶ This was probably not a conscious choice if they simply inherited Coptic versions of the Sophia of Jesus Christ and the Apocryphon of John, and this is not the case for other texts in NHC 2 and 3. The Gospel of Philip in NHC 2 and the Gospel of the Egyptians in NHC 3 use ‘Christ’.

¹⁴⁷ One reason for this may be that they were written primarily for a Gentile audience. This is one of the two main possible reasons that Foster proposes for the lack of Scriptural citations in Colossians (likewise 1 Thessalonians); the other reason is that the author did not know the Jewish biblical texts (or that Paul did not have access to them while he was in prison), see Paul Foster, *Colossians*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 52–60.

It is often the case in the dialogue gospels that the reason for Jesus' incarnation/descent/appearance is novel revelation. The Sophia of Jesus Christ repeatedly asserts that *Christ came to reveal*, without mention of any other motive (such as an atoning death): 'The perfect Saviour said, "I came from the Infinite that I might teach you all things"' (πεχαδ νβι πτελιος π̄ω̄ρ̄ χε ανοκ αῑει εβολ ε̄μ̄ παπεραντον χε ε̄ῑετσεβε τηγ̄τ̄ν̄ ε̄ν̄κᾱ νιμ [SophJesChr, BG 87,12–15]). The revelatory teaching can either be instigated by Jesus or by the disciples questioning him, but in every dialogue gospel, it is prevalent and explicit:

Johannine Farewell Discourse	<p>Ταῦτα ἐν παροιμαῖς λελάληκα ὑμῖν· ἔρχεται ὥρα ὅτε οὐκέτι ἐν παροιμαῖς λαλήσω ὑμῖν, ἀλλὰ παρηρσίᾳ περὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀπαγγεῶ ὑμῖν (16.25)</p> <p>I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father.</p>
Apocalypse of Peter	<p>The second coming of Christ and resurrection of the dead, which Christ revealed to Peter ... And these things he pondered so that he might understand their mystery. (incipit)</p>
Apocryphon of James	<p>ᾱδ̄[ιρ] ψαρη̄ ε̄ῑῑε̄χε̄ ν̄μ̄η̄τ̄ν̄ ε̄ρ̄η̄ί̄ ε̄ν̄ ε̄μ̄πᾱρᾱβολ̄η̄ · ᾱγ̄ω̄ νε̄ρε̄τ̄η̄ρ̄ νο̄εῑ εν̄ · ϖ̄[ν]ο̄γ̄ αν̄ ϖ̄ῡε̄χε̄ ν̄μ̄η̄τ̄[ν̄ ε̄]ν̄ ο̄γ̄ω̄ν̄ε̄ ᾱβᾱλ̄ (7,1–5)</p> <p>At first I spoke to you in parables, and you did not understand. N[o]w I speak to yo[u] openly.</p>
Apocryphon of John	<p>τ[ε]νο̄γ̄ ᾱεῑεῑ] ε̄το̄γ̄νο̄γ̄εῑᾱτ̄κ̄ ε̄β̄[ο]λ̄ χε̄ ο̄γ̄ π̄ε̄]τ̄ῡο̄ο̄π̄ ᾱγ̄ω̄ ο̄γ̄ π̄ε̄]ν̄τᾱρ̄ψ̄ω̄]π̄ε̄ ᾱγ̄ω̄ ο̄γ̄ π̄ε̄τ̄ε̄ψ̄[ῡε̄ ε̄τ̄ρε̄ᾱ]ψ̄ω̄π̄ε̄ χε̄κᾱᾱς̄ ε̄κ̄[ε̄εῑμ̄ε̄ ε̄]ν̄ιᾱτ̄νᾱγ̄ (ε̄) ε̄ρο̄ο̄γ̄ μ̄[ν̄ν̄ νε̄το̄γ̄]νᾱγ̄ ε̄ρο̄ο̄γ̄ ᾱγ̄ω̄ ε̄τ̄[ο̄γ̄ν̄εῑᾱτ̄κ̄] ε̄βολ̄ ε̄τ̄βε̄ πῑτε̄λῑ[ο̄ς̄ ν̄ρω̄μ̄ε̄] (BG 22,2–9¹⁴⁸).</p> <p>[Now I have come] to teach you [what] is, and [what was] and what will come to pass, that you [may know] the things that are not manifest [and the things that are] manifest, and to teach you about the Perfect [Man].</p>
Book of Thomas	<p>σω̄τ̄η̄ ε̄ρο̄ί̄ ν̄τᾱβ̄ω̄λ̄π̄ νᾱκ̄ ε̄βολ̄ ε̄τ̄βε̄ νε̄ν̄τᾱκ̄ με̄ε̄γε̄ ε̄ρο̄ο̄γ̄ ε̄ρᾱί̄ ε̄μ̄ πε̄κ̄ ε̄η̄τ̄ (138,6–8)</p> <p>Listen to me, and I will reveal to you the things you have pondered in your mind.</p>
Dialogue of the Saviour	<p>ϖ̄νᾱτ̄σᾱβ̄ω̄τ̄η̄ (122,1–2)</p> <p>I will teach you.</p>

¹⁴⁸ Largely reconstructed from NHC 4.

Epistula Apostolorum	τω[νε α]ου̅ ϰνα̅βωλ(π) νη̅τηνε̅ α̅βαλ̅ ν̅νη̅τη̅π̅κα̅[ε̅]ρε̅ ν̅π̅πη̅γε̅ μ̅ν̅ νε̅τε̅ρ̅ν̅ ν̅π̅η̅γε̅ α̅ου̅ τε̅τ̅η̅να̅πα̅υ̅σι̅ς̅ ε̅τε̅ρ̅ν̅ τ̅η̅ν̅τ̅ρο̅ ν̅π̅η̅γε̅ (12.3) Ri[se, a]nd I will reveal to you the things abo[v]e the heavens and the things in the heavens and your rest, which is in the kingdom of the heavens.
Epistle of Peter to Philip	ν̅τω̅τ̅ν̅ ο̅γα̅τ̅ τ̅η̅γ̅τ̅ν̅ ε̅τ̅ρ̅ μ̅ν̅τ̅ρε̅ δε̅ α̅ιε̅ξε̅ ν̅α̅ι̅ τ̅η̅ρο̅υ̅ η̅η̅τ̅ν̅ α̅λ̅[λ̅]α̅ [ε̅]τ̅ε̅ τε̅τ̅η̅μ̅η̅τ̅ α̅τ̅ ν̅α̅ε̅τε̅ ϰ[ν]α̅υ̅α̅δε̅ ν̅κ̅ε̅σο̅π̅· <small>(NHC 135,4–8)</small> It is you yourselves who witness that I spoke all these things to you. But because of your unbelief, I will speak again.
First Apocalypse of James	[ε̅ι̅ς̅] ε̅η̅τε̅ ϰ̅να̅ β̅ω̅λ̅η̅ ν̅α̅κ̅ ε̅βο̅λ̅ μ̅πε̅κ̅σω̅τε̅· <small>(NHC 32,29–33,1)</small> [Behold], I shall reveal to you your redemption.
Gospel of Judas	α̅φ̅α̅ρ̅χ̅[ε̅ι̅] ν̅υ̅α̅[δε̅] ν̅μ̅μα̅γ̅ ε̅μ̅ν̅[υ̅ς̅]τ̅η̅ρ̅ι̅[ο̅]ν̅ ε̅τ̅ε̅ δ̅ν̅ ϰ̅κο̅ς̅μο̅ς̅ α̅γω̅ νε̅τ̅να̅υ̅υ̅η̅ε̅ υ̅α̅βο̅λ̅ (33,15–18) And he beg[an] to spe[ak] with them about the m[ys]teri[e]s above the world and what will happen up to the end.
Gospel of Mary	π̅ε̅θη̅π̅ ε̅ρω̅τ̅η̅ ϰ̅να̅τα̅μα̅ τ̅η̅γ̅τ̅η̅ ε̅ρο̅ϰ̅ (10,8–9) What is hidden from you, I will proclaim to you.
Pistis Sophia	ζ̅ι̅ν̅ πο̅ο̅γ̅ β̅ε̅ ε̅βο̅λ̅ ϰ̅να̅υ̅α̅δε̅ ν̅μ̅μ̅η̅τ̅η̅ν̅ ε̅ν̅ ο̅υ̅πα̅ρ̅ρη̅σι̅α̅ ζ̅ι̅ν̅ τα̅ρ̅χη̅ ν̅τα̅λ̅η̅θ̅ε̅ια̅ υ̅α̅ πε̅ς̅ζ̅ω̅κ̅ · α̅γω̅ ϰ̅να̅υ̅α̅δε̅ ν̅μ̅μ̅η̅τ̅η̅ν̅ ν̅ε̅ο̅ ε̅ι̅ ε̅ο̅ α̅δ̅ν̅ πα̅ρα̅βο̅λη̅ · (1.6 [8,23–9,2]) ¹⁴⁹ From today on, I will speak with you openly from the beginning of the truth until its completion. And I will speak with you face to face, without parable.
Sophia of Jesus Christ	μα̅τα̅β̅α̅vo̅ν̅ ε̅β̅η̅ν̅ ο̅υ̅ω̅ν̅ε̅ ε̅βο̅λ̅· <small>(BG 102,8–9)</small> πα̅λ̅ι̅ν̅ νε̅ϰ̅μ̅α̅θη̅τ̅η̅ς̅ πε̅δα̅γ̅ δε̅ μα̅τα̅μο̅ν̅ ε̅β̅η̅ ο̅υ̅ω̅ν̅ε̅ ε̅βο̅λ̅· <small>(NHC 106,9–11)</small> Teach us openly. Again, his disciples said: ‘Tell us openly.’

The theme is the same, but the details vary. Some of these quotations reveal that the teaching will be redemptive, some appear simply to placate the disciples’ worries or questions, some reveal what was previously hidden, and in some it is the disciples who ask Jesus to educate them. In the Gospel of Mary quotation above, it is Mary who speaks – she is the one who will pass on the Saviour’s teachings.

The theme of revelation goes hand in hand with understanding. Jesus often speaks about those who have not understood (e.g. ‘he who spoke concerning this scripture had a limited understanding’)

¹⁴⁹ References to the Pistis Sophia follow the format of (chapter,section [page,verse]) as some chapters are very long. This follows the page and line numbers in Schmidt, *Pistis Sophia*.

[πετα`ϝ'ϙαδε θα τείγραφн нταϙσοογн ϙα πέιμα, 1ΑροсJas^{NHC} 26,6–7]), as well as rejoicing at the disciples' questions when they demonstrate comprehension (e.g. 'Then he rejoiced when I asked him this, and he said to me: "Truly, you are blessed for you have understood"' [τοτε αϙραϙε нταριζноοϙ επαї αϙω πεδαϙ ναї δε αληθωс нтк оγμακαριос еπιδн ακρнοει, ΑρJohn^{NHC2} 27,14–17]).

In several of these dialogues, the disciples are confused or upset as they do not understand Jesus' teachings:

πετροс нде αοογϙϙβ ннаερн неει πα[χ]εϙ δε εнсап мен κρ προτρεπε йман αοογн αтннτρο нмпнγε εенкесап ан ксто йман авал· пхаеис εнсап· мен κρ πιθε αϙω ксωк· йман αοογн атпистис αϙω кϙпωп нен йпωνε εенкесап ан кεварвρ йман авал нтннтерο нмпнγε (ΑρJas 13,25–36)

Then Peter replied to these words and said, 'Sometimes you urge us toward the kingdom of heaven, and at other times you turn us back. Lord, sometimes you persuade and draw us to faith and promise us life, and at other times you cast us forth from the kingdom of heaven.'

Incomprehension is an especially pressing problem in the dialogue gospels due to Jesus' imminent absence. We frequently find the idea that the disciples feel that it is *necessary* to question Jesus, either for purposes of salvific understanding or mission:

ερτйтеογ[α ειμε κεн] тапкωεт· ϙωπε н[α]ϙ нε[ε]ϙнарωкε нεραї нεнтй· εβ[ολ] δεнϙсоογн ан нтеϙноγнε (DialSav 134,1–4)

If [one] does not [understand how] fire came into existence, he will burn in it because he does not know its root.

παλιη [αν] παθεν νεϙ δε пхаеис оγанаγκн гαρ нен те атнϙине авал εптоотк авал δε коγασαεне нен атнταϙεαеиϙ (ΕρΑρ 23.1)

Again we said to him, 'Lord, it is necessary for us to question you, for you command us to preach.'

The Pistis Sophia develops this, referring to a synoptic passage (Matt 7.7 // Luke 11.9). Mary says:

παχοеис мпρβωпт ерої εйϙине ймок· δε енϙине нса εωв ним εн оγωρχ мн оγасφαλια· акзоос гαρ ерон йпιογоеиϙ· δε ϙине тарεтнбине αϙω тωεμтарογογων ннтн δε оγон

γαρ νιμ ετυwine φναβине · αγω ογον νιμ εττωε̄μ εσοyn ·
 σεναογων ναϋ · τενοϋ βε παχοεις νιμ πεφναδ̄ντϋ η νιμ
 πετ̄ννατωε̄μ εροϋ · η νιμ ν̄τοϋ πετε οϋν̄ωβom μμοϋ
 εχω ερον ν̄ταποφασιc ν̄νωαδε ε̄τ̄νναϋντκ̄ εροοϋ · η νιμ
 ν̄τοϋ νε ετσοοyn ν̄τβοm ν̄νωαδε ε̄τ̄νναϋwine ν̄σωοϋ ...
 εβολ δε νε̄ωwine αν ν̄σα θε ετοϋwine μμοc ν̄βι ν̄ρωμε
 ν̄τε πκοcμοc · αλλα ενwine ανον ε̄μ πσοοyn̄ ν̄τε παcε
 πᾱι εντακτααϋ ναn αγω ενwine οn ε̄μ πτγποc ν̄τβινwine
 ετογοτ̄β · τᾱι ν̄τακταcαvon εροc ετρενωwine ν̄ηητ̄ · τενοϋ
 βε παχοεις μ̄πρβωντ̄ ερο̄ι · αλλα βωλ̄π νᾱι εβολ μ̄πωαδε
 ε̄τ̄ναϋντκ̄ εροϋ · (2.83 [184,8–19; 185,2–9])

My Lord, be not angry with me that I question you, for we question all things with assurance and certainty. For you once said to us, ‘Seek and you shall find, and knock and it shall be opened to you, for everyone who seeks will find, and to everyone who knocks, it will be opened to him.’ Now at this time, my Lord, whom will I find, or to whom shall we knock, or rather who is able to say to us the answer to the words on which we question you, or rather who knows the power of the words which we will question? ... For we do not question in the way that the people of the world question, but we question with the knowledge of the height that you have given to us, and we question with the type of the superior questioning that you have taught us, that we should question therewith. Now at this time, my Lord, do not be angry with me, but reveal to me the subject on which I will question you.

Jesus responds and says that he is glad to answer her questions since she has asked them in the right way (i.e. with assurance).

The request for the revelatory teaching that Jesus must provide can be relentless (especially when the disciples never quite grasp the point). In the quotation above, Mary twice asks Jesus not to be angry with her for her questions, and she even attempts to justify her own questioning methods. The disciples of the *Epistula Apostolorum* explain that they need answers because Jesus has commanded them to preach (23.1), but he still gets infuriated by their relentless questioning:

[αϋβ]ωλκ αραν εϋχοϋ μ̄μαc νεn δε ω νατπι[cτiς]ε̄ημ ϋα ε̄z
 ν̄βοοϋε ε̄τετ̄ωwine (EpAp 24.4)

[He was a]ngry with us, saying to us, ‘O you of little faith, how long will you question?’

In spite of all the differences in the theological content of the revelations, the dialogue gospels depict a similar relationship between Jesus and his disciple(s). Jesus is the revealer and Saviour, and the disciples desperately need him to reveal the truths of their salvation before he leaves them

Eschatology

The revelations of Jesus in the dialogue gospels are generally concerned with the broad concepts of eschatology and soteriology. In these texts, eschatology and soteriology are not easily distinguished as salvation is the eschatological aim of humanity. In order to encompass both the cosmic and individual ‘end’, our discussion will be conceived in terms of ‘eschatology’. Even the texts that focus on one’s origins are soteriological and often eschatological, as in many dialogue gospels salvation is a return to one’s root.¹⁵⁰ Hartenstein notes that the form of the dialogue gospel, especially the lists of questions, mirrors its concern with revelatory salvation: ‘The popularity of the lists of questions is to be understood in the context of gnostic theology. Since knowledge [*Erkenntnis*], especially the knowledge [*Wissen*] about one’s own origin, signifies salvation, searching and questioning have high priority; it may even have its own soteriological quality.’¹⁵¹

As we saw earlier, Fallon divided the ‘gnostic apocalypses’ into those that include cosmic eschatology and those that include only personal. The dialogue gospels do not neatly bifurcate into these two categories, as in several texts a cosmic eschatology can at least be inferred – although it is not a primary concern of the text, it is in the background. Often it is simply said that the cosmos is perishable (e.g. *SophJesChr*_{BG} 89,9–12, *GJudas* 50,11–14). Other texts deal with this theme more explicitly. In the Gospel of Mary the disciples ask about the dissolution of matter (7,1–2), and Jesus explains that it will return to its root. In the *Pistis Sophia*, it is said that ‘world matter’ (ἑλλην ἴπκοσμος) will ‘dissolve completely’ (φναβωλ εβολ επτηρε) (2.93 [212,22–23]). The disciples see this dissolution as the work of Jesus, as when he ascends to heaven an earthquake occurs and the disciples

¹⁵⁰ For an analysis of the range of eschatological perspectives in ‘gnostic’ texts, see Tobias Nicklas, ‘Gnostic “Eschatologies”’, in *Eschatology of the New Testament and Some Related Documents*, ed. J. van der Watt, WUNT II 315 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 601–28.

¹⁵¹ Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 278.

wonder if the world will ‘be rolled up’ (εγναδ̄λ-πκοσμοσ [1.3 (6,14)]) and whether Jesus will ‘dissolve all places’ (ναβωλ εβολ ν̄ντοποσ τηρογ [1.4 (7,4)]). The Apocryphon of John, which is concerned primarily with origins over eschatology, sees a protological end: ‘It is because of you [the Invisible Spirit] that all things have come into being, and (it is) to you (that) all things will return’ (ετβητκ ἀπτηρϩ ϣωπε αγω ερεπτηρϩ ναναγζϩ εροκ [NHC2 9,7–8]). The Dialogue of the Saviour refers to the ‘time of dissolution’ (πεογοειϣ ἡβωλ εβολ [122,3]) and later to ‘weeping and [gnashing] of teeth over the end of a[ll] these things’ (πριμε μ̄ν [π...] ν̄νωβθε εχ̄θαδ ν̄ναϊ τη[ρογ] [127,17–19]). The Apocalypse of Peter also refers to the whole creation dissolving (5.7), which brings judgement and the parousia. On the whole, cosmic eschatology is a less pressing concern in the dialogue gospels than individual salvation; however, sometimes they are complementary. In the background of Jesus’ teaching about the resurrection of the flesh to be judged, or the ascent of the soul through the archons, is a dissolving cosmos.

On the topic of salvation, Hartenstein groups together the Apocryphon of John, the Sophia of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of Mary and the First Apocalypse of James (and to an extent the Epistle of Peter to Philip), arguing that they have a similar cosmology and report similar conditions of the creation of humankind:

These mythological explanations are to be understood against the background that knowledge of the heavenly events and, above all, about one’s own origin has a redeeming effect. Such knowledge allows the ascension of the person or their soul, which is explicitly addressed in the Sophia of Jesus Christ (BG p.122,5–125,10 par.) and the Apocryphon of John (BG p.64,14–71,2 par.). In the Gospel of Mary and the First Apocalypse of James, there is a focus on an aspect of the ascension, which means only a shift in the thematic focus. The dialogue gospels as a genre appear to have such an affinity to questions of (gnostic) soteriology.¹⁵²

The Sophia of Jesus Christ explains that Jesus has broken the bonds of the archons by teaching humanity about the Immortal Man. Having this knowledge, humans can ‘ascend to the One Who Is’ (βωκ εραϊ επεϣοοπ [BG 122,13–15]). The Apocryphon of John also discusses how knowledge and action allow the soul to ascend.

¹⁵² Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre*, 260.

In short, the Apocryphon of John conjectures a transcendent God whose divine essence is protologically given to humans made in its image. Once humans understand their divine heritage, they become free from ‘fate’ and can be saved (unlike Judas in the Gospel of Judas whose fate dooms him beyond salvation¹⁵³). In the First Apocalypse of James, Jesus explains how James will ascend through the archons by declaring his divine heritage, and in the Gospel of Mary we see a comparable ascent of an individual soul narrated. Each of these texts understands salvation and personal eschatology as protological: the person returns to their origins. This group may be extended to include the Pistis Sophia, in which all souls ascend at the end of age, but the individual soul will only reach the realm according to which it has received the mysteries. The ascent is therefore conditional and hierarchical. In the Apocryphon of John and the Pistis Sophia, souls that have not received the mysteries or correct knowledge, or that have acted out of accordance with them, face the prospect of reincarnation.

The Apocryphon of James presupposes knowledge of this kind of journey-through-archons eschatology, although the text is not interested in reproducing that teaching:

εΤΒΕ ΠΕΕΙ ΞΟΥ ΜΜΑΣ ΝΝΗΤΗ ΧΕ ΕΡΙ ΝΗΦΕ· ΜΠΩΡ· ΑΡΠΛΑΝΑ
 ΑΥΩ ΖΑΖ ΝΣΑΠ ΔΕΙΧΟΟΣ ΝΗΤΗ ΜΗ ΝΕΤΝΕΡΗΥ· ΑΥΩ ΑΝ ΝΤΑΚ
 ΟΥΑΕΕΤΚ· Ω ΙΑΚΚΩΒΟΣ ΔΕΙΧΟΟΣ ΧΕ ΟΥΧΕΕΙ· ΑΥΩ ΔΕΙΞΩΝ
 ΑΤΟΟΤΚ· ΑΤΡΕΚΟΥΔΑΚ ΝΩΕΙ ΑΥΩ ΔΕΙΤΣΕΒΕ ΕΙΕΤΚ ΑΒΑΛ
 ΑΘΥΠΟΘΕΣΙΣ ΝΝΑΞΡΗ ΝΝΑΡΧΩΝ ΕΝΕΥ ΧΕ ΑΝΑΚ ΔΕΙΕΤ ΑΠΙΤΗ
 ΑΥΩ ΔΕΙΥΧΕΧΕ ΑΥΩ ΔΑ<Ι>Ρ ΚΥΛΛΕ ΜΜΑΕΙ· ΑΥΩ ΔΕΙΟΙ
 ΜΠΑΚΛΑΜ· ΝΤΑΡΙΝΟΥΞΗ ΜΜΩΤΗ ΔΕΙΕΙ ΓΑΡ ΑΠΙΤΗ ΑΤΡΑΟΥΩΞ
 ΝΜΜΗΤΗ ΧΕΚΑΧΕ· Ε<ΡΕΤ>ΝΑΟΥΩΞ ΝΜΗΙ ΖΩΤ· ΤΗΝΕ (ApJas
 8,26–9,4)

This is why I say to you: Be sober; do not be deceived. And many times have I said to you all together, and also to you alone, James, have I said ‘Be saved’. And I have commanded you to follow me, and I have taught you what to say before the archons. Observe that I have descended and have spoken and undergone tribulation and carried off my crown after

¹⁵³ According to Denzey Lewis, the Gospel of Judas does not propound escape from astral fatalism, in contrast to the Apocryphon of John; see Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate*, 165–80. On the Apocryphon of John’s understanding of fate, King writes, ‘despite the oft-repeated cliché that Gnostics felt themselves to be enslaved by fate, in fact, the *Secret Revelation of John* affirms that spiritual humanity was always under the care of the true Pronoia’, King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 108.

saving you. For I came down to dwell with you so that you in turn might dwell with me.

Reading the Apocryphon of James alone, it is unclear who or what the archons are. But reading it in light of texts such as the Gospel of Mary and the First Apocalypse of James, it can be assumed that they are the cosmic powers that the human (soul) must conquer on its way to heaven, mirrored in the earthly realm as authorities that persecute Christians. The Apocryphon of James explicitly links this to its incarnation theology: Jesus has descended from the heavens and been crucified in order that Christians can dwell with him in the heavens, presumably after producing the necessary verbal declarations to pass the cosmic powers.

This cosmic/earthly powers parallelism is typical of the ‘martyrdom’ dialogue gospels. Alongside the Apocryphon of James, these are the First Apocalypse of James and the Epistle of Peter to Philip.¹⁵⁴ In the First Apocalypse of James, James must be martyred, and the text concludes with his death by stoning at which he imitates Jesus, crying: ‘Forgive them, for they do (not) [know] what they are doing’ (ΚΩ ΝΑΥ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΣ[ΕΡΟΟΥ]ΝΕ ΓΑΡ (ΔΝ) ΧΕ ΕΥΡ ΟΥ [CT 30,25–26]). Jesus prepares James for his impending death by teaching him about the heavenly realms and, as Haxby argues, ‘by focusing so deeply on the revelation which James receives, *IApocJas* narrates a martyrdom which focuses far more on the transmission of knowledge than on the testing and trial of the hero martyr’.¹⁵⁵ In the Epistle of Peter to Philip, the apostles ask Jesus to ‘give us our power, for they seek to kill us’ (ΜΑΤ Γ ΝΑΝ ΝΝΟΥΒΑΜ ΕΠΙΔΗ ΣΕΚΩΤΕ ΝΩΝ ΕΣΟΤΒΝ [NHC 134,8–9]). Throughout the text, Jesus tells them that their suffering is necessary. The potential persecution is related to mission, but there are also cosmic powers that they must fight against. The earthly martyrdom, in which the disciple battles the authorities and dies, is paralleled in the cosmos, where the disciple battles the archons and gains immortality.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ These are both found in Codex Tchacos, and King proposes that, along with the Gospel of Judas, these texts could be read together as preparation for martyrdom, Karen L. King, ‘Martyrdom and Its Discontents in the Tchacos Codex’, in *The Codex Judas Papers: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Tchacos Codex Held at Rice University, Houston, Texas, March 13–16, 2008*, ed. April D. DeConick, NHMS 71 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 23–42.

¹⁵⁵ Mikael Haxby, ‘The First Apocalypse of James: Martyrdom and Sexual Difference’ (Cambridge, MA: PhD Thesis, Harvard University Press, 2013), 14. He focuses on how James prepares for martyrdom through gaining knowledge about the heavens and femaleness, and thus sees it as a ‘non-standard martyrdom’.

¹⁵⁶ For a deeper analysis of these themes in the First Apocalypse of James, see Sarah Parkhouse, ‘Identity, Death and Ascension in the Gospel of John and the First Apocalypse of James’, forthcoming.

In the *Epistula Apostolorum*, the Book of Thomas and the Apocalypse of Peter, humankind must face judgement and heaven or hell. In the *Epistula Apostolorum* and the Apocalypse of Peter, judgement is linked with the parousia.¹⁵⁷ In the Apocalypse of Peter, Jesus says that he will return ‘on a cloud of heaven with great power and in my glory, my cross going before my face ... shining seven times more than the sun ... that I might judge the living and the dead’ (1.6–7). In the *Epistula Apostolorum*, he says:

ἸΝΗΥ ΓΑΡ ΝΤΞΕ ΝΠΡΙ ΕΠΠΡΙΩΟΥ ΔΟΥ ΕΙΕ ΝΟΥΑΕΙΝΕ ΝΣΑΞΟΥ
 ΝΚΩΒ ΠΑΡΑΡΑΥ ΞΝ ΠΑΕΑΥ ΕΝΤΝΞ ΝΚΛΟΟΛΕ ΞΙ[ΟΥΣ]ΔΗΞΑΡΑΪ
 ΞΝ ΟΥΕΑΥ ΕΠΣΗΜΕΙΟΝ [ΝΠΣ]ΤΑΥΡΟΣ ΞΙΤΑΞΕΙ ΔΟΥ ἸΝΗΥ ΔΡΗΗ
 ΔΔΝ ΠΚΑΞ ΤΑΞΕΠ ΔΝΕΤΑΝΞ ΜΝ ΝΕΤΜΑΥΤ (ΕρΑρ 16.3–5)

I am coming like the sun that shines, and the light will be seven times greater than it, in my glory. On the wings of clouds, I shall be carried in glory, the sign of the cross before me. And I am coming down upon the earth, and I give judgement to the living and the dead.

Both texts describe clouds, glory, the cross and light seven times more powerful than the sun, and combine these images with the portrayal of Christ as the ‘judge of the living and the dead’.¹⁵⁸

In the *Epistula Apostolorum* and the Apocalypse of Peter, judgement is linked with fleshly resurrection (ΕρΑρ 21.6; ApocPet 1.8, 4.1, 4.12). In the Book of Thomas, there is a passing reference to ‘the day of judgement’ (143,7), but without explanation. It must be conceived differently to the *Epistula Apostolorum* and the Apocalypse of Peter as the idea of bodily resurrection is contested – in the Book of Thomas, it is the soul alone that is punished. The text makes it clear that flesh will never rise again: ‘Now that which changes will decay and perish, and has no hope of life from then on, since that body is bestial’ (ΠΕΤΨΙΒΕ ΔΕ ΟΝΑΤΕΚΟ ΝΩΔΑΝ ΑΥΩ ΜΝΤΕΥ ΞΕΛΠΙΣ ΝΩΝΞ ΔΜ ΠΙΝΑΥ ΞΕ ΠΙΣΩΜΑ ΓΑΡ ΟΥΤΒΗΝ ΠΕ [139,4–6]), and ‘the vessel of their flesh will dissolve’ (ΠΚΕΥΟΣ ΓΑΡ ΝΤΟΥΣΑΡΞ ΝΑΒΩΛ

¹⁵⁷ The question of dependency (the *Epistula Apostolorum* on the Apocalypse of Peter) has been raised, but as Bauckham writes: ‘the *Epistle of the Apostles* seems to show no other sign of dependence on the *Apocalypse of Peter*. It is at least equally likely that both works reflect common traditional descriptions of the parousia’, Bauckham, ‘Two Fig Tree Parables’, 274.

¹⁵⁸ Helmer writes that ‘judge of the living and the dead’ ‘quickly became codified as a stock phrase in the creedal formulas of the early Church’, Helmer, ‘Gospel Tradition in the Apocalypse of Peter’, 82. In the NT, it is found in Acts 10.42, 2 Tim 4.1 and 1 Pet 4.5.

εβολ [141,6–7]). Humans love the material world made of fire, but it is the fire that will consume those who loved it.

The all-consuming fire is an intertextual motif between the Book of Thomas and the Apocalypse of Peter:

αεν φραγελλογ ν̄σατε εγνεα ῑκ τ̄κ εβολ εβογ(ν) [ε]ν̄
φο ῑπετογπ̄ητ ν̄σωγ εγπ̄ητ απ̄αμ̄ντε εγβι[ν]ε ν̄τασατε
εγψ̄ανκτογ αρ̄ησ εγβ̄ντ̄ ο̄ν̄ ῑμαγ εγψ̄ανκτογ ᾱητ
ψ̄αστωμ̄τ ερογ αν̄ ν̄βι ταπιλη ν̄σατε εσβ̄ρβ̄ρ μαγβ̄ινε δε
ν̄τογ ν̄θ̄ιη ῑπαδειβ̄τε απ̄ωτ εμαγ ν̄γογ ᾱαι ῑπεγβ̄ντ̄ γαρ
ῑφοογ εγε̄ν̄ σωμ̄[α] ᾱεκααδ εγναβ̄ντ̄ ῑφοογ ν̄τκρ̄ιςις
(BookThom 143,1–7)

fiery scourges that cast a shower of sparks into the face of the one who is pursued. If he flees westward, he finds the fire. If he turns southward, he finds it there as well. If he turns northward, the threat of seething fire meets him again. Nor does he find the way to the east so as to flee there and be saved, for he did not find it in the day he was in the body, so that he might find it in the day of judgement.

And so as soon as the whole creation dissolves, the men that are in the east shall flee to the west, and those who are in the west to the east; those in the south shall flee to the north, and those who are in the north to the south. And in all places shall the wrath of a fearful fire overtake them; and an unquenchable flame driving them shall bring them to the judgement of wrath, to the stream of unquenchable fire that flows, flaming with fire, and when its waves part themselves one from another, burning, there shall be a great gnashing of teeth among the children of men. (ApocPet 5.7–9)¹⁵⁹

The extensive fire acts as a barricade in both of these texts, also being linked with judgement. The Book of Thomas uses this motif to promote its ascetic ideology: non-ascetic Christians are pursued by fire as a reflection of their desire for material things. In the Apocalypse of Peter, fire acts to drive sinners towards judgement.

Torments of hell is another common thread within the theme of eschatology in the Book of Thomas, the Apocalypse of Peter and the *Epistula Apostolorum*. In the Book of Thomas, those who love

¹⁵⁹ This translation is taken from J. K. Elliott, ‘The Apocalypse of Peter’, in *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 593–612.

their beastly nature and those who sneer at the Christian message will be thrown down to the abyss and tormented, not being able to move, and if they try to flee, they will be met with fire (141,33–35; 142,26–143,13). Here there is a long list of ‘woe’ proclamations to those who have not understood the true nature of the material world. In the Apocalypse of Peter, the bulk of the text is a vision of the punishments of sinners, as described earlier. The *Epistula Apostolorum*’s focus is not on the fate of sinners, yet we do find the teaching that the one who did not keep Jesus’ commandments will remain outside the kingdom, and ‘he will be terribly tortured and lacerated and torn apart with a great punishment, [and he will] be in agony’ (44.4).¹⁶⁰ The three texts have largely different emphases and diverge in key theological teachings, and yet we find certain points of convergence regarding teachings of judgement, fire and torments.

Another text that incorporates torments is the Apocryphon of John, which present them as an alternative to the ascending soul or reincarnation. It is said of the souls that knew the All but turned away from it:

Ἰναιερὲς ἐροοῦ ἐπεσοῦ ἐτοῦνακολαζε ἔραϊ νῆητῆ οὔον
 ΝΙΜ ΝΤΑϞΕ ΟΥΑ ΕΠΕΠΝΑ ΕΤΟΥΑΔΒ ΣΕΝΑΒΑΣΑΝΙΖΕ ΜΜΟΥ ἔΝ
 ΟΥΚΟΛΑΙΣ ΝΥΑ ΕΝΕΣ (BG 70,16–71,2)

They will be kept for the day on which everyone who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit will be punished. They will be tortured with eternal punishment.

The inclusion of this sentiment in the Apocryphon of John shows how wide-ranging the idea of post-mortem punishment is in early Christian literature. Torment is not exclusively reserved for flesh nor souls, as either can be subjected to eternal woes, and thus the theme of punishment is not linked to any particular stance towards materiality, nor theology nor christology.

The Apocalypse of Peter and the *Epistula Apostolorum* may appear to be more similar to each other than to other dialogue gospels, in their confirmation of judgement, torments and fleshly resurrection; however, the two texts present diametrically opposed depictions of ‘heaven’. In the Apocalypse of Peter, the Akhmim

¹⁶⁰ The translation follows the Ethiopic text. The Coptic corresponds, but there are lacunae: $\epsilon\tau[\eta\alpha] \tau\epsilon\mu\kappa\omicron \eta\mu\alpha\iota \kappa\alpha\kappa \iota\eta\alpha \alpha\gamma[\eta\alpha \dots \delta\omicron\upsilon\gamma \epsilon\eta\alpha\beta\alpha\sigma\alpha\eta\lambda\alpha\zeta\epsilon] \eta\mu\alpha\iota \epsilon\eta\eta \epsilon\eta\eta\alpha\delta\beta$ [Ἰκολαίσις δούφνα]ζώ πε ζα βασανός (37.5–8). Schmidt’s restoration of the Coptic text does not sufficiently take the Ethiopic into account, and so his reconstructions are often unreliable.

fragment describes a large, light, sunny place. It is a great sensory experience, with a powerful scent of unfading flowers, spices and fruit plants. The inhabitants are dressed in shining clothes and walk among angels (15–20). Conversely, the picture of heaven in the *Epistula Apostolorum* is devoid of sensory experience—it is described in terms of being a place without eating or drinking, sorrow or singing, earthly clothing or decay (19.13–15). It is described as ‘rest’ (ἀναπαύσις [12.3, 19.14, 26.5]), which aligns salvation in the *Epistula Apostolorum* with salvation in the Gospel of Mary (17,15), the Epistle of Peter to Philip (NHC 137,10), the Dialogue of the Saviour (120,5–8) and the Book of Thomas (145,8–16).

Certain eschatological themes arise repeatedly throughout the diverse group of dialogue gospels, and this brief overview of selected themes in selected texts has served to show that they are variable and capricious. Dialogue gospels cannot be categorized into ‘types’ of eschatology. Each is concerned with individual salvation, whether it be ascension, reincarnation or resurrection.¹⁶¹ Some include judgement and a fiery punishment, but this is not conditional on their stance towards materiality or the body. Often a dissolving cosmos is in the background, which may directly affect the individual or play two separate parts of a larger eschatological scheme. The eschatologies of dialogue gospels do not form binary oppositions; rather, they relate a web of interconnected networks and are best seen through a rhizomatic model. With all their divergences, the texts converge in their focus on Jesus as the way to salvation: Christ is the middle from which the varying eschatologies grow.

1.5 Conclusion

The thirteen dialogue gospels chosen to be part of our genre have as much and as little in common with each other as they do with other early Christian literature. ‘Dialogue gospels’ is a constructed genre, or group, which is always constructed around the interests of the constructor. For our purposes, the genre was created for the purpose of comparison, to highlight the similarities and differences within a group of thirteen texts that have (1) Jesus, as the central character, on the verge of departure, and (2) dialogue (broadly conceived) with one or more of his disciples. To bring these thirteen texts together allows

¹⁶¹ A point that we have not touched on is the varying views of resurrection. For this, see Outi Lehtipuu, *Debates over the Resurrection of the Dead*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

us to uncover and analyse connections that resist binary opposition or strict organization. As with the model of a rhizome, any point within a dialogue gospel can connect to any other within the same text, a different dialogue gospel or a text outside of the genre. We must remain flexible and open towards genre, as pigeonholing texts into one category or another hinders the discovery of links between texts that might not otherwise be obvious. As demonstrated through the cursory discussion of the depictions of the Saviour and eschatology within the dialogue gospel genre, there are multiple points of connections and divergences within the group, which can sometimes be quite unexpected and sometimes cause us to view the text in a new light.