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JESUS
FROM EASTER TO VALENTINUS
(OR TO THE APOSTLES' CREED)*

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I

THE first hundred years of Christianity—A.D. 30 to 130, more or less—is the period from Easter to Valentinus, or if you prefer, until the Apostles' Creed. That hundred years is also the time in which the NT was written. It is also the time in which oral traditions about Jesus were in circulation. It is this period, largely for these reasons, that occupies us here.

The present paper will not seek to argue for or presuppose a solution to the perennial debate between the traditional (and still largely British) view of Gnosticism as a second-century inner-Christian heresy and the *religionsgeschichtlich* (and Continental) view of Gnosticism as a broad syncretistic phenomenon surfacing at least as early as Christianity in various religions of the day, of which Christianity was only one. While the Nag Hammadi texts seem to have come out on the side of the latter alternative, in that several texts document non-Christian Gnosticism of various traditions (Jewish, Hermetic, Neo-Platonic), pre-Christian Gnosticism as such is hardly attested in a way to settle the debate once and for all. As a matter of fact the dating of the composition of most Nag Hammadi tractates, much less of their sources, has hardly begun, and so can claim nothing like the degree of relative certainty characteristic of the dating of NT books.

Yet the main reason for not approaching the issue of this paper in terms of that perennial debate is that such an approach tends to obscure rather than clarify the situation. For such a clear-cut polarized choice as that debate tends to call upon us to make could blunt our sensitivity to the actual shade of development a text may represent somewhere in the no-person's-land between those crisp options: If Gnosticism could be safely kept out of the first century A.D., then it could be ignored in interpreting Paul's opponents in Corinth, the world of Colossians and Ephesians, the Prologue of John, and the like, with the result that a traditional and misleading

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exegesis would result. Conversely, the presupposition of pre-Christian Gnosticism invites the anachronism of reading into the situation behind such texts concepts of the second century, from which our knowledge of Gnosticism primarily comes.

To assume a mediating position may thus not be the weakness of indecision and vacillation, but rather an approximation of the historical reality more useful than is either horn of the dilemma: One may assume that second-century Gnosticism did not first emerge then in the full-blown form of the Valentinian and Basilidean systems. For such historical developments call for lead-time, just as, at the next stage, Clement and Origen of Alexandria on the one hand and Irenaeus and Tertullian on the other are inconceivable apart from the century leading up to their systems. Thus even if it were true that Gnosticism as known in the second-century systems did not exist in the Pauline and Johannine schools going back to the first century, the left-wing trajectory out of which second-century Gnosticism emerged must have been contemporary with the Pauline and Johannine schools and could well be a major factor in influencing them. To erect a periodizing barrier between pre-Gnostic apostolic Christianity and second-century Gnosticism would be to falsify history by denying the existence of that trajectory until it reached its outcome in second-century Gnosticism. This would produce the exegetical error of failing to interpret those NT texts in terms of their time as the lead-time for second-century Gnosticism.

The methodological situation is similar when one envisages moving forward from A.D. 30. The apocalyptic radicalism that led John the Baptist to lose his head, Jesus to be hung up, and Paul to become a habitué of forty lashes lest one (2 Cor 11:24) could hardly have failed to have left-wing successors down through the first hundred years, as main-line Christianity, in part following the lead of Judaism at Jamnia, standardized, solidified, domesticated itself and moved, as sects are wont to do in the second and third generations, toward the mainstream of the cultural environment. Thus the lead-time for Gnosticism coincides with the follow-up time for primitive Christian radicalism. Sometimes that radicalism would have expressed itself in sufficient continuity with the original forms it had taken for the radical fringe (charismatics, martyrs, prophets) to have had the support of the more conventional mainstream. But even within such acceptable limits there occur texts such as Colossians, Ephesians and Ignatius where new thought patterns and language worlds become unmistakably audible. Ultimately at least some of apocalyptic radicalism modulated into gnostic radicalism.

The bulk of the NT, written in the second half of the first century A.D., the middle segment of the first hundred years of Christianity, is thus strung on trajectories that lead not only from the pre-Pauline confession of 1 Cor 15:3-5 to the Apostles' Creed of the second century, but also from Easter "enthusiasm" to second-century Gnosticism. It is on currents such as these, rather than on the traditional assumption of a straight-line development

through the “apostolic age” with its unwavering faith once for all delivered to the saints, that we are to discuss the topic before us.

It is indeed in terms of such currents that the polarization of early Christianity into orthodoxy and heresy is to be understood. Heresy is so tenacious and unbending not because of the hardening of its heart, but because of its relatively valid claim to be rooted in an original Christian point. Thus the outcome of the first hundred years of Christianity in orthodoxy vs. heresy does not imply the divine protection of an original revelation from the wiles of the devil, but rather two alternative adjustments of the original position made necessary by the changing circumstances with the passage of time. Hence the theological assessment of such diverging trajectories, though it begins with the historical given that the winner in this competition has been known as orthodox, the loser heretical, has as its first task to acknowledge the historical process leading to this outcome and then to rethink critically what theological validity was gained and lost along each of the diverging trajectories, perhaps with the outcome that values from both trajectories should in fact be affirmed in some formulation for today, which would hence depart from both formulations of yesteryear.

II

The conceptualization or, more literally, the visualization of the appearances of the resurrected Christ are themselves such an instance of a bifurcating morphology. The earliest accessible documentation as a point of departure is Paul. He conceives of the resurrection as bodily, but emphasizes change within the continuity of corporeality (1 Cor 15:40, 43, 48, 54):

There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies.

It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.

As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, . . .

When he comes, the Lord “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil 3:21). Thus it is clear that Paul visualized the resurrected Christ as a heavenly body, luminous. Though the letters of Paul do not narrate the Damascus road experience with its blinding light, this visualization repeatedly narrated in Acts (9:1–19; 22:4–16; 26:9–18) does seem to reflect accurately Paul’s own visualization of his experience.

Yet with regard to the significance of Paul’s experience, Luke does not reflect Paul’s position. Luke demotes the Damascus road experience into Paul’s *conversion*, as the church, following Luke rather than Paul, tends to refer to what Paul himself would have us refer to as the resurrected Christ’s *appearance* to him. In Luke’s hands this event falls outside the period of

forty days to which Luke restricts the normative resurrection appearances (Acts 1:3). Paul himself alluded to the appearance of the resurrected Christ to him in order to validate his claim to be an apostle “not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead” (Gal 1:1). That is to say, Paul was not just a delegate, missionary or emissary from a local church, which is the common meaning of the Greek word we all too readily translate (or unthinkingly transliterate) with the very specific designation apostle. But it is the common meaning of delegate which is the only sense in which Luke concedes Paul to be an apostle. For when the church of Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul as its delegates to evangelize Cyprus (Acts 13:3): “Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and *sent them off*.” The latter verb is the verb whose stem is the same as that of the noun *apostolos*, though here it clearly means the church “delegated” them. It is in this sense that Acts 14:4, 14 refers to “the apostles,” “the apostles Barnabas and Paul,” that is to say, *delegates* of the Antioch church during the “first missionary journey.” Luke goes so far as to present Paul preaching about the resurrection in such a way as to exclude himself from being a witness to the resurrection (Acts 13:30–31): “But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.” After that “first missionary journey” Luke reports (Acts 15:2) that “Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders,” a usage that limits the apostles to those in Jerusalem, conformable to Luke’s limitation of the appearances to the original disciples (Acts 1:22).

And yet Paul is the hero of the book of Acts! Scholars have long since recognized what Luke does to Paul, but have thus far been baffled to provide an adequate explanation. For to understand why Paul is here damned with such faint praise one must place Acts in terms of the trajectory from Easter to Valentinus.

There is relatively strong attestation to the fact that the first appearance to a male was to Peter (1 Cor 15:5; Luke 24:34). (Matthew’s appending of the appearance to “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary” to the Marcan story of the empty tomb in 28:9–10 and the parallel narration of the appearance to Mary Magdalene in John 20:14–18 actually make her the first to see the risen Christ in these Gospels.) Yet, just as Luke does not narrate the tradition of the appearance to Paul within the limits he imposes on appearances (it is not narrated in Luke 24 or Acts 1), just so the story of the appearance to Peter is not among the resurrection appearances narrated in their proper place at the end of the gospels (Matt 28, Luke 24 and John 20–21).

2 Pet 1:16–17 seems to narrate that resurrection appearance, to judge by its use of a luminous story to accredit Peter in the way a resurrection appearance normally would one as an apostle: “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father. . . .”

This seems a striking parallel to the opening words of the Great Commission by the resurrected Christ (Matt 28:18): "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." 2 Peter would thus seem to describe a resurrection appearance . . . were it not for the fact that what follows is similar to a Marcan narration that occurs in the middle of the public ministry, and hence known not as a resurrection appearance but as the transfiguration: "(For when he received honor and glory from God the Father) and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." It is indeed probable that Mark has "historicized" what was originally the resurrection appearance to Peter, tying it down to an unambiguous bodiliness by putting it well before the crucifixion, in spite of its luminousness (Mark 9:3): "His garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them." Matthew compares this luminousness with the sun: "his face shone like the sun" (17:2), language used elsewhere of the resurrected Christ, "his face was like the sun shining in full strength" (Rev 1:16, see below), "brighter than the sun" (Acts 26:13). The original association of the "transfiguration" with Easter may be betrayed in the comment appended to it (Mark 9:9): "And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead."

Of course in the Marcan text Peter is accompanied by James and John; but this may well be only an aspect of Marcan historicizing, in that he usually presents these three as admitted to intimate scenes (5:37, 14:33; with Andrew as well 1:29; 13:3). Furthermore Jesus is accompanied by two figures, Elijah with Moses. But far from this fact serving to distance the transfiguration from a resurrection appearance, it associates it specifically with the resurrection appearance in . . . the second-century apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*:

They saw the heavens opened and two men come down from there in a great brightness and draw nigh to the sepulchre. . . . and both the young men entered in. . . . They saw again three men come out from the sepulchre, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following them, and the heads of the two reached to heaven, but that of him who was led of them by the hand overpassing the heavens.

Of course in the Marcan version they are not such mythological heavenly "men," but rather the biblical characters Moses and Elijah, who had nonetheless according to Jewish tradition ascended to heaven. Furthermore they in their way reaffirm the association with resurrection, at least in a Valentinian interpretation of Mark (NH I, 48:6–11): "For if you remember reading in the Gospel that Elijah appeared and Moses with him, do not think the resurrection is an illusion." Thus, just as Luke transferred the luminous appearance to Paul outside the normative period by restricting normative resurrection appearances to forty days, Mark would seem to have transferred

the luminous appearance to Peter outside the normative post-crucifixion period back into the public ministry. Mark in fact provides no resurrection appearances, perhaps because those available were so luminous as to seem disembodied. Thus, if Paul had tended to emphasize the difference of the resurrection body, so as to make it possible to affirm the bodiliness of a luminous appearance, the narrations of the empty tomb in the gospels tend to emphasize the continuity of the same body, lest the luminousness of the appearances suggest it was just a ghost, just religious experience.

The only resurrection appearance in the NT that is described in any detail, though it is usually overlooked due to not being placed at the end of a gospel, is in Rev 1:13–16:

... one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Although this appearance took place in the 90s (quite uninhibited by the Lucan doctrine that appearances ended with forty days), it has in common with Paul's much earlier but equally uninhibited luminous visualization of the resurrection in the 30s the fact that these are the only two resurrection appearances recorded by persons who themselves received the appearances, Paul and John of Patmos—and both these authenticated visualizations of a resurrection appearance were of the luminous kind! Thus one may conclude that the original visualizations of resurrection appearances had been luminous, the experiencing of a blinding light, a heavenly body such as Luke reports Stephen saw (Acts 7:55–56): “He, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.’”

Why then would this original visualization have been deprived of its appropriate position at the conclusion of the gospels? Perhaps because these luminous appearances continued, as Stephen, Paul and John of Patmos attest, down through the first century A.D., and, as gnostic sources attest, their increasingly dubious interpretation continued down through the second. And here one can see what they came to mean.

The Letter of Peter to Philip presents a luminous resurrection appearance (NH VIII, 134:9–13)¹: “Then a great light appeared so that the mountain shone from the sight of him who had appeared.” This took place “upon the mountain which is called ‘the (Mount) of Olives,’ the place where they used to gather with the blessed Christ *when he was in the body*” (133:13–17). From

¹ Marvin W. Meyer, *The Letter of Peter to Philip: Text, Translation and Commentary* (SBL DS 53; Chico: Scholars, 1981) 105–12 interprets this text in this broader context.

this language it is clear that the resurrected, luminous Christ is no longer in the body; bodily existence is restricted to Jesus prior to Easter. Thus the Pauline ability to retain both bodiliness and luminousness in his doctrine of the resurrection has given way to a bifurcation: if it is luminous, it is not bodily.

From a gnostic point of view this incorporeality is all to the good. For bodily existence is deficient, stupefied with fatigue, passion, drunkenness, sleepiness, a prison from which the spirit is liberated by its ecstatic trip at conversion and the sloughing off of this mortal coil at death. Thus the gnostics had every reason to retain the original luminous visualization of resurrection appearances, not just because they thereby retained the original Christian perception, but because it was a theological asset in terms of gnostic spiritualism.

In *The Gospel of Mary* (not from Nag Hammadi but from the closely related Coptic Gnostic P. Berol. 8502), Mary not only makes no claim that such a gnostic appearance is bodily; she frankly calls it a vision (10:10–23):

I saw the Lord in a *vision* and I said to him, "Lord, I saw you today in a *vision*." He answered and said to me, "Blessed are you, that you did not waver at the sight of me. For where the mind is, there is the treasure." I said to him, "Lord, now does he who sees the *vision* see it through the soul or through the spirit?" The Savior answered and said, "He does not see through the soul nor through the spirit, but the mind which is between the two—that is what sees the *vision*."

The luminous visualization of resurrection appearances may be the kind of experience that in that day would have been considered a vision. For when it is not a matter of Christ's resurrection, such a luminous appearance can readily be so classified even within the canon. The "two men . . . in dazzling apparel" (Luke 24:4) can be summarized by Luke as "a *vision* of angels" (Luke 24:23). Indeed Paul himself can speak of "*visions* and revelations of the Lord" (2 Cor 12:1). This openness of the luminous visualization to such a visionary interpretation may be what made that visualization increasingly unacceptable when applied to Jesus on the trajectory from Easter to the Apostles' Creed, especially when the disembodied overtones of such visions were exploited in a Gnosticizing way on the trajectory from Easter to Valentinus.

It is just this reduction of resurrection appearances to religious experience that is the foil against which the non-luminous resurrection appearances at the ends of the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John are composed (Luke 24:37–43):

But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a *spirit*. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a *spirit* has not *flesh and bones* as you see that I have." And when he had said this he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

This apologetic against a ghostlike experience has pushed Luke to emphasize the “flesh and bones” of the resurrection, which is clearly one step nearer “orthodoxy” than was Paul (1 Cor 15:50): “I tell you this, brethren: *flesh and blood* cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” It is probably such an apologetic against this spiritualizing the resurrection away, as the orthodox would sense it, that is also intended when that conclusion of Luke is summarized at the opening of Acts (1:3–4): “To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. And while staying (literally: sharing salt, eating) with them.” Similarly Acts 10:41: “us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” Similarly in the traditions used by John (John 20:20, 25, 27–28):

He showed them his hands and his side.

“Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hands in his side, I will not believe.”

“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God.”

This was a bit too materialistic for the “spiritual gospel” that transmitted it, and hence the Fourth Evangelist appended a corrective moving gently in the . . . gnostic direction (John 20:29): “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” Matthew also reports (28:17) that “some doubted.” But he has a somewhat different apologetic against an accusation that the resurrection was not real (28:13, 15): “Tell people, “His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.” . . . And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.” But an apologetic for the physicality of the resurrection similar to that of Luke-Acts and the Johannine tradition may be implicit in Matthew as well (28:9): “And they came up and took hold of his feet. . . .”

It may be this same apologetic that is responsible for Mark’s use of the story of the empty tomb rather than of resurrection appearances. For the emptiness of the tomb makes it clear that it was the same body that was buried which rose from the dead. It must be to underline this point that one finds the otherwise irrelevant details in Luke 24:12: “he saw the linen cloths by themselves,” and in John 20:5–7: “He saw the linen cloths lying there . . . ; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.” Thus the apologetic interest evident in each of the canonical gospels reflects a secondary stage in the transmission of resurrection appearances, a defense against a (mis)interpretation of a more original stage.

Lest it seem that such a spiritualization of the luminously resurrected Christ as is here presupposed would be limited to a specifically gnostic

tendency that could hardly be called primary, one may note that the two instances where the NT contains reports by an eyewitness to the (in each case luminous) appearance of the resurrected Christ, the identification of that appearance as the Spirit seems near at hand. For Paul the resurrection body is “*spiritual*” (1 Cor 15:44), “the last Adam” “a life-giving *spirit*” (1 Cor 15:45). When he comes to speak of the gloriousness of Christ, he calls him the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17–18): “Now the Lord is the *Spirit*, and where the *Spirit* of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the *glory* of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of *glory* to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the *Spirit*.” Similarly John on Patmos sees the resurrected Christ, who dictates the letters to the seven churches, as is indicated by the self-identifications (1:17–18; 2:8): “I am the first and the last, the living one: I died, and behold I am alive for evermore. . . .’ The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.” Yet this takes place while John is “in the *Spirit*” (1:10), and the hermeneutical exhortation familiar at the conclusion of parables recurs at the end of each letter in the remarkable formulation (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22): “He who has an ear, let him hear what the *Spirit* says to the churches.”

This identification of the luminously resurrected Christ as the Spirit is then in substance what Luke rejects as the false assumption that they had seen a ghost. But it is in fact a way in which the luminous visualization would continue to be described in Gnosticism. In *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* the resurrected Christ appeared on a Galilean mountain (NH III, 91:10–13) “not in his first form, but in the invisible *spirit*. And his form was like a great angel of light. And his likeness I must not describe. No mortal flesh can endure it.”

This gnostic spiritualization also comes to expression in a somewhat different conceptualization in an *Apocalypse of Peter*, where Jesus’ death and resurrection are replaced with the idea of his bifurcation at the time of the passion into “the living Jesus” (NH VII, 81:19) that did not suffer and “his fleshly part” (81:20), “the body” (83:5) that was crucified. This “living Jesus” appeared however like the resurrected Christ (72:23–26): “I saw a new light greater than the light of day. Then it came down upon the Savior.” “The body of his radiance” (71:30), “my incorporeal body” (83:7–8), is actually the Spirit (83:4–15): “So then the one susceptible to suffering shall come, since the body is the substitute. But what they released was my *incorporeal body*. But I am the intellectual *Spirit* filled with radiant *light*. He whom you saw coming to me is our intellectual Pleroma, which united the perfect *light* with my *Holy Spirit*.” Luke on the other hand clearly distinguishes the appearances of the resurrected Christ, which terminate after forty days with the ascension, from the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, ten days later. The resurrected Christ is no ghost!

The primary stage of luminous appearances, in comparison with which the resurrection appearances at the ends of the canonical gospels are

secondary, can be identified from vestiges in the non-luminous resurrection stories at the ends of the canonical gospels themselves as well as from the misplaced luminous resurrection stories in the NT, the identification of the resurrected Christ with the Spirit in Paul and Revelation, and the outcome of these trajectories in second-century Gnosticism.

In the resurrection appearances at the end of the canonical gospels the luminous glory of the resurrected Christ has indeed disappeared, though vestiges of that visualization do survive: The apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, in which the luminous visualization of the resurrected Christ had been presented, had also included "a young man sitting in the midst of the sepulchre, comely and clothed with a brightly shining robe." (This may well be intended to be one of the two men "in a great brightness" who had previously entered the sepulchre and led the resurrected Christ to heaven, since that exaltation scene is followed by the comment that "the heavens were again seen to open, and a man descended and entered into the sepulchre"—a detail that otherwise would have no function.) In the canonical gospels this luminous apparition of the attendant is all that is left of the luminous visualization of the resurrected Christ: "a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe" (Mark 16:5); "an angel of the Lord," whose "appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" (Matt 28:2–3); "two men . . . in dazzling apparel" (Luke 24:4; see also Acts 1:10: "two men . . . in white robes"); "two angels in white" (John 20:12).

This vacillation as to whether the apparition is human or angelic is itself revealing. Even when designated human, the apparition is not human in the ordinary sense of an early Christian witness to the resurrection, such as an apostle or the like. For example, Elaine Pagels completely overlooks this "young *man*" in the authentic ending of Mark in favor of the canonicity of the *woman* in the inauthentic long ending of Mark:²

One can dispute [von] Campenhausen's claim on the basis of New Testament evidence: the gospels of Mark and John both name Mary Magdalene, not Peter, as the first witness of the resurrection. [Footnote 22: Mark 16:9; John 20:11–17.]

This gnostic gospel [*The Gospel of Mary*] recalls traditions recorded in Mark and John, that Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Christ. [Footnote 40: Mark 16:9].

The church has indeed tended to classify this youth in Mark as part of the heavenly realm, not the human, in that (s)he reveals divine truth and makes a luminous appearance, as the other gospels clarify the "white robe." Indeed the other gospels initiate the ecclesiastical exegesis to the effect that the youth is an angel, in that Matthew and John use the word angel, whereas

² Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979) 8 and 11; pp. 9 and 13 of the paperback edition, Vantage Books, 1981.

Luke, who had spoken of two *men*, has a flashback in which the scene is recalled as “a vision of *angels*” (Luke 24:23). The apologetic that apparently caused the resurrected Christ’s luminosity to fade into the solidity of a physical body did not affect the luminosity of the accompanying figure(s).

There are other vestiges of the luminous non-human visualization of the resurrected Christ in the otherwise very human appearances at the end of the canonical gospels. Even the *interpretatio christiana* of the OT at Easter retains the original emphasis on glory (Lk 24:26): “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his *glory*?” In quite docetic style Jesus passes through locked doors (John 20:19, 26):

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.”

This docetic overtone may also be implicit in the abrupt entry of the resurrected Christ in Luke that leads to the thoroughly refuted assumption that they were looking at a spirit (24:36): “As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you.’” The motif is more obvious in his abrupt departures (Luke 24:31, 51; Acts 1:9): “. . . and he vanished out of their sight.” “While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.” “As they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”

The failure to recognize the resurrected Christ may also derive ultimately from the luminous visualization. It is quite understandable that one would not recognize a blinding light (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15): “Who are you, Lord?” But it is less obvious in the case of Jesus returning in the very same human body. The motif of non-recognition recurs in the story of the Emmaus road, where it is explained as divine intervention (Luke 24:16, 31): “But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” “And their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” Mary Magdalene did not recognize him, but took him for a gardener (John 20:14–15): “She did not know that it was Jesus. Supposing him to be the gardener. . . .” This motif also occurs in the redactional chapter added to John (21:4): “Yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.” This motif thus retains the tradition that it is not a matter of normal vision, catching sight of a recognizable human companion, but rather that (John 21:1) “Jesus revealed himself.” Yet it is no longer a matter of a completely different form, such as a blinding light, but a very human form, mistakable for a tourist on the way to Emmaus, a gardener, or a fisherman standing on the shore. But the lack of recognition and then the sudden recognition is now no longer intelligible in terms of this all-too-human visualization, as it had been and continued to be in the luminous visualization. Thus the non-recognition of Jesus, like the luminous apparition of angels and the sudden

appearance and disappearance of Jesus, may be motifs originally developed in connection with luminous visualizations of the resurrected Christ.

Our prevalent view that the church was launched by Easter experiences such as we find at the end of the canonical gospels must as a result be replaced by a recognition that they are secondary to an original luminous visualization of Christ's appearances, replaced as that original Christian experience played more and more into the hands of the trajectory from Easter to Valentinus. Over against that option, emerging orthodoxy, on the trajectory from Easter to the Apostles' Creed, expressed the reality of the bodily resurrection by emphasizing, in spite of supranatural vestiges, the human-like-us appearance of the resurrected Christ: the resurrection of the *flesh*.

To be sure, just as the emerging orthodox alternative retained vestiges of the luminous visualization, the emerging gnostic alternative could on occasion make use of human categories more at home in the orthodox trajectory. For example *The Apocryphon of John* presents the luminous visualization in a kind of fluctuating trinitarian form (NH II, 1:30–2:15):

Straightway, while I was contemplating these things, behold the heavens opened and the whole creation which is under heaven *shone* and the world was shaken. And I was afraid, and behold I saw in the *light* a *youth* who stood by me. While I looked at him he became like an *old man*. And he changed his form (again), becoming like a *servant*. There was not a plurality before me, but there was a likeness with multiple forms in the *light*, and the forms appeared through each other, and the likeness had three forms. He said to me, "John, John, why do you doubt, and why are you afraid? You are not unfamiliar with this likeness, are you? That is to say, be not timid! I am the one who is with you (pl.) for ever. I am the *Father*, I am the *Mother*, I am the *Son*. I am the unpolluted and incorruptible one."

This threefoldness of the apparition, though described as like three human forms, does not eliminate the overarching luminosity, as may be further illustrated from a parallel text where the three forms are more explicitly luminous (*Pistis Sophia* 4):

For he gave more *light* than in the hour that he went up to heaven, so that the men in the world were not able to speak of the *light* which was his, and it cast forth very many rays of *light*, and there was no measure to its rays. And his *light* was not equal throughout, but it was of different kinds, and it was of different types, so that some were many times superior to others, and the whole *light* together was in three forms, and the one was many times superior to the other; the second which was in the middle was superior to the first which was below; and the third which was above them all was superior to the second which was below. And the first ray which was below them all was similar to the *light* which had come down upon Jesus before he went up to heaven, and it was quite equal to it in its *light*. And the three *light*-forms were of different kinds of *light* and they were of different types. And some were many times superior to others.

But on the other hand the Valentinian *Gospel of Philip* could use the orthodox visualization for its purposes by stressing, as had Paul, the otherness of the body, but, with orthodoxy, moving beyond Paul (1 Cor 15:50) to speak

of the resurrection of the flesh, though emphasizing the Pauline, and now gnostic, emphasis upon otherness (NH II, 68:31–37): “The Lord rose from the dead. He became as he used to be, but now his *body* was perfect. He did indeed possess *flesh*, but this flesh is *true flesh*. *Our flesh* is nothing, but we possess only an image of the true.” This is as far as Gnosticism could reach out toward orthodoxy without forsaking its basic position of contrast (which it shared with Paul), expressed in *The Apocryphon of James* (NH I, 14:35–36): “From this moment on I shall strip myself that I may clothe myself.” Thus although orthodoxy and heresy could on occasion accommodate themselves to language actually developed to implement the emphasis of the other alternative, by and large they divided the Pauline doctrine of luminous bodiliness between them: Orthodoxy defended the bodiliness by replacing luminousness with fleshliness, heresy exploited the luminousness by replacing bodiliness with spiritualness.

III

A still further bifurcation into heresy/orthodoxy from Easter to Valentinus or to the Apostles’ Creed also has to do with the resurrection, but in this case the believer’s resurrection—whether it has taken place *already*, presumably at baptism, or whether it has *not yet* taken place but is awaited at the end of time. Apparently this was being debated as early as the 50s in 1 Corinthians. For Paul contrasts the posture of the Corinthians with his own (4:8–9): “*Already* you are filled! *Already* you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all. . . .” Apparently this is why baptism is so important to the Corinthians but is played down by Paul (1:12–17): “What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius; lest any one should say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any one else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel. . . .” Apparently the experience called today (baptismal) *regeneration*, a term that is not yet attested in Paul’s time, was at that time designated by some Corinthians as (baptismal) *resurrection*. Thus the ultimate outcome of personal salvation was attained at initiation and need not be reserved for the end time, whose relevance—and even its reality—would tend to disappear. This is apparently the intent of the view Paul criticizes (15:12): “Some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead.” Rather than this being the view of rationalists, who do not believe in resurrection, as used to be assumed, it has been the scholarly assumption for the past half century that this is the view of

fanatics who have already attained spiritual resurrection. Paul's own divergent view is expressed in Philippians (3:10-14, 20-21):

. . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I *may attain* the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have *already* obtained this or am *already* perfect; but I *press on* to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and *straining forward* to what lies ahead, I *press on* toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. . . . But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who *will* change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Hardly a generation before Valentinus in the early Second Century this view still was being strongly opposed in the Pauline School (2 Tim 2:16-18): "Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past *already*." Although Hymenaeus and Philetus are not mentioned by name in Gnostic sources, their view of the resurrection having taken place already is clearly attested in a Valentinian *Treatise on Resurrection* (NH I, 48:30-49:25):

But the resurrection does not have this aforesaid character [of an illusion]; for it is the truth which stands firm. It is the revelation of what is, and the transformation of things, and a transition into newness. For imperishability descends upon the perishable; the light [!] flows down upon the darkness, swallowing it up; and the Pleroma fills up the deficiency. These are the symbols and the images of the resurrection. This is what makes the good. Therefore, do not think in part, O Rheginos, nor live in conformity with this flesh for the sake of unanimity, but flee from the divisions and the fetters, and *already* you have the resurrection. If he who will die knows about himself that he will die—even if he spends many years in this life he is brought to this—why not consider yourself as risen and (already) brought to this?

But this view opposed by Paul and in the Pauline School is here presented by *appeal* to Paul, that is to say, it is a doctrine of the left wing of the bifurcated Pauline School (45:14-46:2):

The Savior swallowed up death—(of this) you are not reckoned as being ignorant—for he put aside the world which is perishing. He transformed himself into an imperishable Aeon and raised himself up, having swallowed the visible by the invisible, and he gave us the way of our immortality. Then, indeed, as the *Apostle* said, "We suffered with him, and we *arose* with him, and we went to heaven with him." Now if we are manifest in this world wearing him, we are that one's beams, and we are embraced by him until our setting, that is to say, our death in this life. We are drawn to heaven by him, like beams by the sun, not being restrained by anything. This is the *spiritual resurrection* which swallows up the psychic in the same way as the fleshly.

Here it is made clear that a future physical resurrection has become superfluous, having been replaced by the spiritual resurrection. The doctrine of

baptismal resurrection already surely deserves at least by this time the Pauline characterization that there is no [future bodily] resurrection of the dead.

Such a spiritual resurrection is also documented in another Valentinian text, *The Gospel of Philip* (NH II, 73:1–8): “Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not *first receive the resurrection while they live*, when they die they will receive nothing. So also when speaking about baptism they say, ‘Baptism is a great thing,’ because if people receive it they will live.”

But how could such a Gnostic view appeal to Paul as “the Apostle” *par excellence*, when in such letters as First Corinthians and Philippians Paul had opposed precisely that view? By appealing not to the historical Paul of the 50s, but rather to the “Paul” of the left wing of the Pauline School a decade or so after Paul (Col 3:1–4): “If then you *have been raised* with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” Similarly Eph 2:5–6: “(God) made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved); and *raised us up* with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

A way to emphasize the basic shift in human existence taking place at baptism was developed on the trajectory moving toward orthodoxy that would not in fact jeopardize the future bodily resurrection. This solution was reached by the introduction of the concept of regeneration to describe the change at baptism, thus reserving the concept resurrection for the future (1 Pet 1:3–5): “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been *born anew* to a living hope through the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” In substance this is almost identical with the position represented in Col 3:1–4, in that our inheritance is present already in heaven, needing only to be revealed in the future, which thus has lost most of its original eventness. But now the concept of having already risen is carefully sidestepped, so as to leave room for lip service to the apocalyptic view of future resurrection as a permanent if relatively passive ingredient in orthodoxy.

The way in which this shift from one terminology to the other could so easily be effected is evident from another Nag Hammadi text, *The Exegesis on the Soul*, in which the two terminologies occur side by side (NH II, 134:6–15):

Now it is fitting that the soul *regenerate* herself and become again as she formerly was. The soul then moves of her own accord. And she received the divine nature

from the Father for her rejuvenation, so that she might be restored to the place where originally she had been. This is the *resurrection* that is from the dead. This is the ransom from captivity. This is the upward journey of ascent to heaven. This is the way of ascent to the Father.

Actually the two conceptualizations coexist already in the Gospel of John, where the resurrection of the believer is attained spiritually in this life (5:24–25; 11:23–26):

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

But the concept of regeneration has already been introduced as an alternative conceptualization (3:3, 7): "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Do not marvel that I say to you, 'You must be born anew.'" And the "redactor" has apparently reintroduced as a protection against dangerous implications of eternal life now (6:40, 47, 51, 54) the resurrection "at the last day" (6:39, 40, 44, 54).

Thus some of the lead-time for Valentinus in the last part of the first century A.D. is documented in the NT itself, once the apocalyptic environment of Easter, with its reservation of much of the eschatological fulfillment until the end had fully come (an eschatological reservation shared by Paul), was replaced by spatial dimensions congenial to Gnosticism. Indeed that lead-time in this case can be traced back to Corinth early in the 50s, or, put conversely, the follow-up to Easter had already within a generation veered in a Gnostic direction.

IV

The hundred years during which the sayings of Jesus circulated orally and thus were still available for inclusion in written sources was the period of time characterized by the two trajectories from Easter to Valentinus or the Apostles' Creed sketched thus far: from the visualization of the resurrected Christ as a luminous heavenly *body* to envisioning him as a gloriously disembodied *spirit*—against which the resurrection of the same *fleshly* body emerged as an orthodox apologetic; and the trajectory from the apocalyptic expectation of a resurrection of believers in a comparably glorious body at the *end* of time to an experience of spiritual resurrection attained *already* at baptism as an ecstatic trip free of the body, needing only to be repeated at death, thereby rendering superfluous and even undesirable a future resurrection of the body—against which a *final* resurrection of the same fleshly

body emerged as orthodoxy. But Easter was itself a hermeneutical event, on any account making sense of Jesus in view of his abrupt end. Hence these trajectories of Easter and resurrection experience inevitably influenced the trajectories through which Jesus' sayings and texts witnessing to them would move. The first two instances of post-Easter trajectories may in fact clarify the directionalities at work on the third.

The gloriousness of the resurrected Christ not only vindicated the ignominiously crucified Jesus; it could also, by way of contrast, put Jesus in the shade. Though Paul did not go so far as to repudiate Jesus, as some spiritualists may have done (1 Cor 12:3: "Jesus be cursed!"), nonetheless an invidious contrast is already reflected in Paul: Jesus was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3), but arose in "his glorious body" (Phil 3:21); "he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God" (2 Cor 13:4). Thus the original disciples and Jesus' family, those who knew him when he was on earth, do not in any way outrank Paul, who never laid eyes on nor was even known to this Jesus (1 Cor 9:1–5):

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen [on the Damascus road] Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle [Acts], at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

This de-evaluation of pre-Easter traditions about Jesus on the part of Paul could, when coordinated with the luminously glorious resurrected Christ of the first trajectory from Easter to Valentinus, ultimately replace the normative role of the sayings of Jesus for primitive Christianity with the much more current and spiritual séances and sayings of the still appearing Lord.

Although Paul would not conceptualize his conversion as already his resurrection, since as an apocalypticist he reserved the resurrection of believers for the future, his conversion was nonetheless for him a comparably dramatic transformation into the spiritual realm, granting him a completely superhuman knowledge of Jesus (2 Cor 5:16): "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer." This de-evaluation of pre-Easter interpretations of Jesus on the part of Paul could, when coordinated with the experience of resurrection already on the second trajectory from Easter to Valentinus, ultimately replace the normative role of traditional interpretations for primitive Christianity with much more current and spiritual understandings of traditional sayings of Jesus.

Over against such spiritualistic trajectories the trajectory from Easter to the Apostles' Creed would have to find some way to revalidate the traditional sayings of Jesus and reaffirm their conventional interpretation. The way that was ultimately found was the canonical Gospel *genre*, whose derivation can

to a considerable extent be explained in terms of these bifurcating trajectories.

The two largest and best-known collections of Jesus' sayings, Q and *The Gospel of Thomas*, do not seem to have become involved in such an apologetic to maintain that the higher level of meaning inheres in the life of Jesus prior to Easter. In fact it is characteristic of such early sayings collections that they contain no thematic discussion of the turning point of death and resurrection about which the subsequent hermeneutical debate revolved, even though in a sense they straddle that turning point. For the authors of such collections stand within the post-Easter period, whereas much of their material goes back to the pre-Easter period. Thus they contain things said by Jesus prior to his crucifixion and also things said by the resurrected Christ; and they imply interpretations inherent in the tradition as well as interpretations recently granted to them by the resurrected Christ.

This ambivalence of the sayings tradition and hence of early sayings collections was not fully satisfactory to either side in the emerging polarization. If the orthodox manage to use and lose Q and to block the canonization of *The Gospel of Thomas*, opting for the biographical pre-Easter cast provided by the canonical Gospels, the Gnostics, while accepting *The Gospel of Thomas*, really prefer another *genre* of gospel, the dialogue of the resurrected Christ with his disciples. It is this trajectory from the sayings collection to the Gnostic dialogues, as well as its *pendant* in the orthodox trajectory from Q to the canonical Gospels, that is now to be sketched.

Q for its part had no clear bearing in terms of time and space. To be sure, the story of the temptation between the sayings of John the Baptist and the Sermon on the Mount/Plain seems to be moving toward a biographical cast such as Mark 1 offers. But the temptation is generally regarded as a late addition to Q reflecting early Christian exegetical interests; without it, there had been more nearly just a succession of John's, then Jesus' sayings, brought together as a collection of Wisdom's sayings. At the other end of Q the conclusion is so disappointing, from the more biographical point of view of a canonical Gospel, as to have been used as an argument against the existence of Q: "It 'peters out in miscellaneous oracles.'"³ Since Q, like *The Gospel of Thomas*, refers neither to cross nor to resurrection, it is a moot question whether the author thought of them as spoken before or after Easter.

One may illustrate the problem by comparing the empowering of the resurrected Christ at the opening of the "Great Commission" (Matt 28:18) and the empowering of the Son in the "Johannine Pericope" of Q (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22): "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to

³ Edward C. Hobbs, "A Quarter-Century Without 'Q,'" *Perkins School of Theology Journal* 33 (1980) 13, quoting Austin M. Farrer, "On Dispensing With Q," *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (ed. Dennis E. Nineham; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955) 60.

me.” “All things have been delivered to me by my Father.” If in the case of Matt 28:18 this authorization presupposes the enthronement of Christ as Cosmocrator at the exaltation of Easter (Phil 2:9–11; Acts 2:36), why not in the case of Q? But such a reminiscence of the authorization of Easter in the middle of Q neither implies that Easter falls in the middle of the text, as in the case of Luke-Acts, nor that the “Easter” authorization has been transferred back into the public ministry, as would seem to be the case with the “transfiguration” in Mark, and as the position of the Q text in Matt 11 and Luke 10 might suggest. For Easter does not fall here, or at the beginning or end of Q, or anywhere in Q. Q has the timelessness of eternal truth, or at least of wisdom literature.

The perennial debate about the meaning of the term “the living Jesus” at the opening of *The Gospel of Thomas* also illustrates the problem: Does this expression mean the resurrected Christ, somewhat as, for example, the *Apocalypse of Peter* uses this term to designate the spiritual part of Jesus that ascended to observe from above the crucifixion of “his earthly part” (NH VII, 81:18, 20)? “Living” is indeed tantamount to “resurrected” in Rev 1:17–18: “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the *living* one; I died, and behold I am *alive* for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” Or does “the living Jesus” simply identify Jesus as part of the eternal divine realm, as would be suggested by comparison with the expressions “living Father” (Sayings 3, 50), “living One” (Sayings 35, 59, 111), or, of the redeemed, “living spirit” (Saying 114)?

We have been accustomed to think that probably Q had in mind Jesus prior to Easter. But to what extent is such a view really objective, to what extent due to our knowing Q only within the Marcan outline of Matthew and Luke? Similarly we naturally incline to think of “the living Jesus” of *The Gospel of Thomas* as the resurrected Christ. But to what extent is this view really objective, to what extent the result of our knowing *The Gospel of Thomas* only within the context of the Coptic Gnostic codices? Since, like Q, *The Gospel of Thomas* refers neither to cross nor to resurrection, it is a moot question whether the author thought of sayings as spoken before or after Easter. This seems not to have been relevant to the author. *The Gospel of Thomas* certainly has many sayings that the canonical Gospels place prior to Easter—as do modern scholars, in regarding a good number of the sayings in *The Gospel of Thomas* as “authentic” sayings of Jesus. But such sayings are not distinguished by *The Gospel of Thomas* from those that are clearly “inauthentic.”

The lack of concern in primitive Christianity and in the sayings collections as to whether the sayings were spoken by Jesus before or after Easter, that is to say, by Jesus of Nazareth or the resurrected Christ, runs parallel with Paul’s considering the authority of Jesus represented by the sayings tradition as more or less interchangeable with the guidance of the Spirit given at Easter. For Paul did in fact relativize traditions of Jesus’ sayings to a status hardly superior to the guidance of the Spirit (1 Cor 7:10–12, 25, 40):

To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband . . . and that the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say, not the Lord . . .

Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy . . .

And I think that I have the Spirit of God.

Indeed a priority of the Holy Spirit after Easter to Jesus prior to Easter may already be suggested in Q (Matt 12:32; Luke 12:10): "And every one who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven." To be sure, this usual interpretation of an otherwise obscure saying⁴ does pose the problem that Jesus prior to Easter here has the honorific title of the coming judge, the Son of man, whereas the "resurrected Christ" is actually represented (replaced?) by the Holy Spirit. Mark heard this saying in a much more orthodox way, in that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit in Jesus prior to Easter (3:28–30), without any contrast to the Son of man. But Q apparently lacks the Marcan (1:12) view of the Spirit entering Jesus at baptism; at best Jesus will bestow the Spirit (Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16).

Rudolf Bultmann's famous *dictum*, that Jesus rose into the kerygma (with its neo-orthodox overtone: the social gospel rose into the old-fashioned gospel, which leaves Q out) could perhaps be reformulated from the point of view of Q to the effect that Jesus rose, as the revalidation of his word, into the Holy Spirit. Thus, rather than narrating a resurrection story, Q demonstrates its reality by presenting Jesus' sayings in their revalidated state as the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Easter is then not a point in time in Q, but rather permeates Q as the reality of Jesus' word being valid now. Or at least so it might seem especially for those who understood the resurrected Christ as Spirit. One may in this regard compare a couplet from one of the enthusiastic kerygmatic hymns (1 Tim 3:16): "He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated [or: justified] in the Spirit," with the saying in Q that names the higher power shared by John and Jesus (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:35): "Yet Wisdom is justified [or: vindicated] by (all) her deeds/children." It is as Spirit or Wisdom that Jesus (and John) lives on in the sayings tradition.

The Fourth Gospel brings to expression this spiritual significance of Easter within the canonical gospel *genre*. The Holy Spirit is breathed on the disciples at Easter (John 20:22) as the Counselor who will in effect continue the sayings of Jesus until the disciples reach the ultimate truth not attained prior to Easter (John 14:46; 15:26; 16:13–15):

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

⁴ Wolfgang Schenk, *Synopse zur Redenquelle der Evangelien: Q-Synopse und Rekonstruktion in deutscher Übersetzung mit kurzen Erläuterungen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1981) 88.

But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me.

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Of course the most obvious thing for which the disciples had not been adequately prepared was Jesus' death. Hence their Easter experiences primarily made up for this deficiency. Thus it is not surprising when individual sayings explicitly said to have been clarified at Easter are references to his death (John 2:22): "When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this ['Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,' 2:19], and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." But sometimes there is no such specific reference, but rather Easter has in general become the time when the light dawns (John 12:16): "His disciples did not understand this [Zech 9:9 and the triumphal entry] at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him." Even though a specific time reference is not given in John 13:7, the same may be implied: "What I am doing [washing Peter's feet] you do not know now, but afterward you will understand."

Yet it must be said that the sayings ascribed in the Gospel of John to Jesus prior to Easter have already been so updated in terms of Easter as to leave little remaining to be done when one reaches the actual resurrection at the end of this gospel. Such a saying as John 3:13 obviously must be ascribed to the resurrected Christ: "No one *has ascended* into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." One need only compare a statement of the resurrected Christ in *Pistis Sophia* 6 (see below): "I *have been* to the places from whence I came forth." Thus there is an odd tension in John between the doctrine of a shift to a higher hermeneutical level first with the gift of the Spirit at Easter and the presence of that higher level actually at almost every turn prior to Easter. Jesus prior to Easter has authority in the Gospel of John precisely because of the guidance of the Spirit of truth since Easter. That is to say, the highly interpreted sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John stand in some tension to the canonical gospel *genre* in which they occur, but might seem quite natural in a sayings collection where the question of before or after Easter does not arise.

In this Easter hermeneutic of the Gospel of John the traditions of Jesus are associated with scripture (John 2:22; 12:16, both just cited): "the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken;" "this had been written of him and had been done to him." Here too the hermeneutical pathos at Easter is motivated by the fact that especially cross and resurrection were to be

scripturally supported. But it is nonetheless significant that such hermeneutic is considered distinctive of the period after the resurrection, in that the disciples had not been prepared in advance, as was the case in the Gospel of Mark with its repeated predictions of the passion (John 20:9): "For as yet they did not know the scriptures, that he must rise from the dead."

Luke also seems aware of Easter as the distinctive time of this *interpretatio christiana* of scripture (24:25–26, 32, 44–47):

"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

"Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

"Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

Yet the emphasis on the *interpretatio christiana* of scripture at Easter is not explainable as due merely to its following immediately upon the crucifixion, whose offense could be alleviated through the reassurance that it was predicted. Luke seems to consider Easter to be a distinctive time of hermeneutical revelation. For though not called the Holy Spirit (since Luke reserves that for Pentecost), nonetheless a special divine intervention is intended in the contrasts: "foolish men and slow of heart to believe;" whereupon "he opened to us the scriptures," "he opened their minds." The idea that Easter is on principle the time of a new hermeneutic as the time of the Spirit seems to be established with regard to scripture as well as Jesus' sayings.

The apologetic view of Easter as the time for interpreting scripture as well as Jesus' sayings so as to find in them the cross and resurrection recurs in Justin Martyr (*Apology* 1.50; *Dialogue with Trypho* 106):

Afterwards, when He had risen from the dead and appeared to them, and had taught them to read the prophecies in which all these things were foretold as coming to pass. . . .

[The apostles] who repented of their flight from Him when He was crucified, after He rose from the dead, and after they were persuaded by Himself that, before His passion He had mentioned to them that He must suffer these things, and that they were announced beforehand by the prophets. . . .

Once the sayings of Jesus are associated with scripture in terms of authoritative texts to be interpreted, they could hardly fail to have been associated with it in terms of obscurity. For if the Jewish scriptures are not explicitly a Christian book, the sayings of Jesus are not explicitly like the Easter gospel. But the hermeneutical methods already available for providing an *interpretatio christiana* to scripture could be carried over to the sayings of Jesus as well. These hermeneutical methods for updating outmoded but

authoritative texts had begun with the Alexandrian interpretation of Homer, and had been adapted within Judaism as the Platonizing interpretation by Philo, the Essene interpretation at Qumran, the gnostic interpretation by Sethians and the Christian interpretation by the early Church.

The theological presupposition of such interpretation can be illustrated from the comment to Hab 2:2 in the Qumran *Commentary on the Book of Habakkuk* (1QpHab):⁵

God told Habakkuk to write the things that are coming upon the last generation; but the fulness of that time He did not make known to him.

As for that which He said, "for the sake of him who reads it" (or, "that he who reads it may run [may divulge])," its interpretation concerns the Righteous Teacher to whom God has made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the prophets.

The appropriation of this hermeneutic by primitive Christianity is documented by 1 Pet 1:10–12:

The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

That is to say, the modern heirs of scripture have a special revelation providing them with the key to its meaning. This is why average persons do not accept the sectarian interpretation—they are unenlightened. For though the text seems to mean only the superficial statement any reader sees (the literal meaning), God has revealed to the sectarians his real, esoteric meaning (the higher, deeper, fuller, spiritual meaning).

Technical terminology for such a two-level interpretation of scripture occurs, for example, in Justin's effort to convince Trypho the Jew of the validity of the *interpretatio christiana* (Dialogue 52.1; 68.6):

The Holy Spirit had uttered these truths in a *parable*, and obscurely.

There were many sayings written obscurely, or *parabolically*, or mysteriously, and symbolic actions, which the prophets who lived after the persons who said or did them expounded.

⁵ William H. Brownlee, *The Midrash Peshier of Habakkuk* (SBLMS 24; Missoula: Scholars, 1979) 107. See also his exposition, pp. 110–11: "The prophets did not know all that the messianic age would contain. According to the Babylonian Talmud (Yalk. ii, 368, Eccl. Rabbah i,8) only part of the future glory was shown to the prophets. According to Midr. Shoher Țob to Ps. 90:1, 'With the exception of Moses and Isaiah, none of the prophets knew the content of their prophecies.' Cf. also I Peter 1:10–12. Philo went even further. In Special Laws I, 65, he asserted that the prophets were so completely under the control of God that they did not even know what they were speaking."

Similarly in *Pistis Sophia* (18): "Now concerning this word, my Lord, the power within the prophet Isaiah has spoken thus and has related once in a spiritual *parable*, speaking about the vision of Egypt" [Isa 19:3, 12]. The term "parable" and its synonyms really mean riddle, coded authoritative text.

But the term "parable" can also be used in *Pistis Sophia* to introduce a saying of Jesus that the canonical Gospels placed before the crucifixion, but a saying that is no more than is the Old Testament what one would normally consider a parable; the saying is designated "parable" only in the technical sense of a coded authoritative message subject to a higher interpretation (*Pistis Sophia* 50, 104, 105, 107):

"O Lord, concerning this, thou didst once say to us in a *parable* [Luke 22:28–30]."

"I answered, I spake to you in a *parable*, saying [Matt 18:22]."

"For concerning the souls of men such as these I spoke to you once in a *parable*, saying [Matt 18:15–17; Luke 17:3]."

"Now concerning such men, I spoke to you once in a *parable*, saying [Matt 10:12–13 parr.]."

This technical use of the term "parable" is clearly intended to set the saying or text in question off from a higher and clearer level "without parable" characteristic of the resurrected Christ's teaching in *Pistis Sophia* (88, 90, 100, 114). That higher level can be designated in its own right as Jesus teaching "openly" (*parrhēsia*: *Pistis Sophia* 17, 18, 19, 24, 25, 43, 65, 67, 69, 71, 74, 80, etc.). Thus the two technical terms come to be juxtaposed as a contrasting pair (*Pistis Sophia* 128; similarly 107, 110): "The Savior answered and said to Maria: 'Question everything which thou dost wish to question, and I will reveal them *openly* without *parable*.'"

To be sure, just as a series of synonyms can occur for the term "in parables," such as "sayings written obscurely, or parabolically, or mysteriously, and symbolic actions" quoted above from Justin, just so there are synonyms for "openly," for example in *Pistis Sophia*: "with assurance and certainty" (88, 90); "face to face" (100); "more and more, openly without parable, and with certainty" (107); "face to face without parable" (114).

Irenaeus accuses the Valentinians of this two-level interpretation of Jesus' sayings, making use of this fluid but technical terminology (1.1.5): "They tell us, however, that this knowledge has not been *openly* [*phanerōs*] divulged, because all are not capable of receiving it, but has been mystically revealed by the Savior through means of *parables* to those qualified for understanding it." Thus when Morton Smith⁶ sees a "libertine" implication in an excerpt from the Valentinian Theodotus quoted by Clement of Alexandria and ascribed by Smith to a pre-Markan Aramaic gospel, a much less exciting, indeed pedantic but methodologically more reliable interpretation would be to the effect that again one has (here divided into three progressive levels)

⁶ Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1973) 142.

the same contrasting hermeneutic pair expressed in a series of synonyms:⁷ “The Savior taught the Apostles at first figuratively and mystically, later in parables and riddles, and thirdly clearly and *openly* [as R. P. Casey freely but accurately translates *gymnōs*, in this context meant as a synonym for *parrhēsia*, but which Smith translates literally but tendentiously as ‘nakedly’] when they were *alone* [also a hermeneutical cliché—see below—rather than documentation for something ‘libertine’].”

The frequent use of the term “parable” to designate a coded authoritative text would readily attract to it instances in the sayings tradition of the same term “parable” occurring in the more normal meaning of a simple sermon illustration. Thus in the pre-Markan collection of three parables imbedded in Mark 4 (vss 2–10, 13–20, 26–29, 30–34: the Parables of the Sower, of the Seed Growing Secretly, and of the Mustard Seed) the first parable is accompanied by its interpretation, introduced by the comment (vs 10): “And when he was *alone*, those who were about him . . . asked him concerning the *parable(s)*.” Thereupon followed the higher allegorical interpretation. The pre-Markan collection also concluded with a specific reference to the two-level procedure (vss 33, 34b): “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; . . . but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.”

The Gospel of Mark only heightens the esoteric hermeneutic of this pre-Markan collection by interpolating a still more exclusivistic characterization of those to whom the higher meaning is granted (vss 11–12): “To you has been given the *secret (mysterion)* of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in *parables*; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven.” This heightening of the esoteric language is also reflected in the sayings Mark adds to the collection of parables (vss 21–25, especially vss 22 and 25): “For there is nothing *hid (krypton)*, except to be made *manifest (phanerōthē)*; nor is anything *secret (apokryphon)*, except to come to *light (phaneron)*.” “For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

Much of the same esoteric concept recurs as the introductory saying in a cluster of parables imbedded in *The Gospel of Thomas* that Helmut Koester has suggested may be a source antedating that gospel (Sayings 62–66):⁸ “It is to those who are worthy of My *mysteries* that I tell My *mysteries*. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” In this context (in distinction from that of almsgiving in Matt 6:3) the latter part must mean

⁷ R. P. Casey, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (London: Christophers, 1934) 82–83.

⁸ Helmut Koester, “Introduction” to *The Gospel of Thomas*, in *Nag Hammadi Tractates II, 2-II,7*, (ed. Bentley Layton; The Coptic Gnostic Library; Nag Hammadi Studies; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

something to the effect that common people (the “left hand”) should not have access to the higher meaning of the “mysteries” known to the inner circle (the “right hand”).

The esoteric, not to say eerie, context of a resurrection appearance would almost by definition be such a private setting for higher meaning, especially in view of the hermeneutical importance of Easter. Thus it is not surprising that the technical contrasting terms for designating the literal and spiritual levels of meaning, especially “in parables” and “openly,” are used to distinguish the sayings of Jesus before and after Easter. In *The Apocryphon of James* the resurrected Christ says (NH I, 7:1–6): “At first I spoke to you *in parables* and you did not understand; now I speak to you *openly*, and you (still) do not perceive.”

In gnostic perspective the resurrected Christ would also have the higher spiritual status of speaking from heaven and being free of the body. This Easter setting for the higher esoteric interpretation would also have the advantage of being able tacitly to concede to emerging orthodoxy the traditions of Jesus prior to Easter, as being only at the lower level, without those traditions being able to challenge the validity of a private séance with the resurrected Christ to which the orthodox were by definition not invited.

Indeed gnostics could shift their higher illumination from the first Easter Sunday forward down into the future beyond the limit of the physical appearances to which the orthodox had come to appeal, in that such physical transactions would in gnostic perspective be no better than the earth-bound sayings prior to Easter. This may be the significance of the gnostic motif of Jesus’ appearance for gnostic instruction long after the first Easter, since it is only at this later time then that he achieves the true knowledge. Irenaeus (1.28.7) reports the gnostic view: “But after his resurrection he tarried [on earth] *eighteen months*; and knowledge descending into him from above, he taught what was clear. He instructed a few of his disciples, whom he knew to be capable of understanding so great *mysteries*, in these things, and was then received up into heaven.”

Similarly *Pistis Sophia* 1–6 actually deferred the normative resurrection appearance eleven years, since it is clear that only after that lapse of time does the luminous status and higher instruction emerge:

But it happened that after Jesus had risen from the dead he spent *eleven years* speaking with his disciples. And he taught them only as far as the places of the first ordinance and as far as the places of the First Mystery which is within the veil. . . . And the disciples did not know and understand that there was anything within that mystery. . . . But he had only spoken to them in general, teaching them that they existed. But he had not told them the extent and the rank of their places according to how they exist. Because of this they also did not know that other places existed within that mystery. . . .

Now it happened when the light-power had come down upon Jesus, it gradually surrounded him completely. Then Jesus rose or ascended to the height, giving light exceedingly, with a light to which there was no measure. And the disciples gazed after

him, and not one of them spoke until he had reached heaven, but they all kept a great silence. . . . As they were saying these things and were weeping to one another, on the ninth hour of the following day the heavens opened, and they saw Jesus coming down, giving light exceedingly, and there was no measure to the light in which he was.

Then Jesus, the compassionate, said to them: "Rejoice and be glad from this hour because I have been to the places from whence I came forth. From today onwards now I speak with you *openly* from the beginning of the truth until its completion. And I will speak with you face to face, without *parable*. I will not conceal from you, from this hour onwards, anything of the things of the height and of the place of the truth."

This same concept of the deferment of the gnostic teaching of the resurrected Christ is attested as 550 days in *The Apocryphon of James* itself (NH I:2, 19–20). There may have even been a reference to eighteen months, if one may take its reference to eighteen *days* as a textual corruption. Here the related concept of decoding the parabolic level is associated with the tradition of Jesus' parables in the normal sense of the term, in what seems to be a reference to a collection of such parables (NH I:7,35–8,11):

"Since I have already been glorified in this fashion, why do you hold me back in my eagerness to go? For after the end you have compelled me to stay with you another *eighteen days* for the sake of the *parables*. It was enough for some to listen to the teaching and understand 'The Shepherds' and 'The Seed' and 'The Building' and 'The Lamps of the Virgins' and 'The Wage of the Workmen' and 'The Didrachmae' and 'The Woman.' Become earnest about the word!"

To be sure, Gnostics could when need be take the other alternative, in claiming that Jesus even prior to Easter had taught gnostic truth, if one only had the understanding to comprehend it. For one of the things the Nag Hammadi texts are teaching us about Gnosticism is that it did not consist of the pure but largely undocumented construct that scholarship had postulated, but rather that it evolved with the changing times and thus could come to expression within Christianity not only in its own pro-Gnostic categories, and not only as an interpretation of the earliest Christian position, but also as an adaptation of later pro-orthodox positions, in this case secondary to the orthodox trajectory identifying sayings of Jesus pointedly with the period prior to Easter as they are found in the canonical gospels (see below). Thus at the luminous appearance at the opening of *The Letter of Peter to Philip* (NH VIII, 135:3–8): "Then a voice came to them out of the light, saying, 'It is yourselves who are witnesses that *I spoke all these things to you*. But because of your unbelief I shall speak again.'" This approach of claiming the pre-Easter sayings for Gnosticism is used in the gnostic *Apocalypse of Peter*, a text that in various ways attacks orthodoxy, in order with this technique also to claim Peter for Gnosticism (NH VII, 72:9–26):

And he said to me, "Peter, *I have told you many times* that they are blind ones who have no guide. If you want to know their blindness, put your hands upon (your) eyes—your robe—and say what you see."

But when I had done it, I did not see anything. I said, "No one sees (this way)."

Again he told me, "Do it again."
 And there came in me fear with joy, for I saw a new light greater than the light
 of day. Then it came down upon the Savior.

This secondary gnosticizing of the canonical tradition on the part of Valentinians is criticized by Irenaeus (1.1.6): "And it is not only from the writings of the evangelists and the apostles that they endeavour to derive proofs for their opinions by means of perverse interpretations and deceitful expositions; they deal in the same way with the law and the prophets, which contain many *parables* and allegories that can frequently be drawn into various senses, according to the kind of exegesis to which they are subjected."

The usual gnostic way of laying claim to the sayings of Jesus, by providing a higher spiritual interpretation at Easter, did not even find the sayings collection really suitable to its purposes. Rather Gnosticism found it most practical to modulate from the sayings collection to the dialogue, especially the question-and-answer version. Apart from the general proclivity for brief segments of dialogue to occur in sayings collections when needed to make a saying intelligible, the shift from the sayings collection to the dialogue may have been motivated by the greater suitability of the dialogue for the two-level interpretation constitutive of the Gnostic method. This conjecture would seem to be suggested by a survey of the use of the two-level interpretation at the opening of sayings collections.

The collection of Jesus' sayings inserted at the opening of the *Didache* begins with the format of text plus interpretation (*Did* 1:2-3):

The Way of Life is this: "First, thou shalt love the God who made thee, secondly, thy neighbor as thyself; and whatsoever thou wouldst not have done to thyself, do not thou do another."

Now, the *teaching* [*didachē*] of these words is this: "Bless those that curse you, . . ."

Thus the collection is presented as the "teaching" implicit in the summary of the law as love and in the (negative) Golden Rule. But much of the collection is only in a very general way such an explication, nor are the individual sayings in the "teaching" themselves subjected to such a secondary interpretation. The two-level format with which the collection is introduced is not carried through consistently and thus seems largely extraneous to the collection as such.

The Marcan apocalypse is also a sayings collection. It has at its opening a similar text-plus-interpretation format (Mark 13:1-5):

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"

And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down."

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him *privately*, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?"

And Jesus began to say to them, . . .

Yet here too the initial warnings against thinking the time has come (vss 5–8) are followed by exhortation (vss 9–13) that does not directly interpret the cryptic saying. Though a discussion of signs follows (vs 14ff), other apocalyptic material is freely added (through vs 37), so that the apocalyptic discourse tends to lose sight of its point of departure. Nor are the specific sayings in the body of the apocalypse themselves accompanied by interpretations. Thus the text-plus-interpretation format with which the Marcan apocalypse opens does not seem to be constitutive of the sayings collection itself.

The Gospel of Thomas may also have a similar opening. Saying 1 has been adapted from the tradition (see John 8:52) to provide a hermeneutical introduction to the collection calling for a two-level approach: “Whoever *finds* the interpretation [*hermēneia*] of these sayings will not experience death.” Saying 2 is not just what happened to come next by way of independent saying, loosely associated by a catch-word connection (“find”), but seems to have been intentionally chosen as an interpretation of the first saying’s offer of escape from death. For it provides a step-by-step *ordo salutis* of the stages between the initial seeking and finding and the ultimate salvation: “Let him who *seeks* continue seeking until he *finds*. When he finds, he will become *troubled*. When he becomes troubled, he will be *astonished*, and he will *rule* over the All.” Yet such a text-plus-interpretation relationship, even if present at the opening, does not pervade the collection as such, which moves on without any discernible overall organization other than a loose catch-word kind of association and occasional smaller clusters of sayings that may have circulated together prior to *The Gospel of Thomas*. Some sayings are in a rather primitive form, needing interpretation, others are presented in highly interpreted form, but the text-plus-interpretation format itself does not recur.

The collection of parables used by Mark also presents the two-level format at its opening (the Parable of the Sower), where the text (vss 3–8) and the interpretation (vss 14–20) stand side by side, connected by a hermeneutical comment similar to that in Mark 13:3 (Mark 4:10): “And when he was *alone*, those who were about him . . . asked him concerning the parable.” Rather than being referred to as a *didachē* (*Did* 1:3) or a *hermēneia* (*The Gospel of Thomas*, Saying 1), the hermeneutical procedure in this instance would be called by a third synonym, *epilysis*, a “resolution” or “explanation.” This term occurs in its substantive form frequently in the *Similitudes* of *The Shepherd of Hermas*, though in the pre-Markan collection only in its verbal form and then only at the conclusion (Mark 4:33, 34b): “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; . . . but privately to his own disciples he *explained* everything.” Yet in spite of the conclusion thus claiming the text-plus-interpretation format, that format is limited to the first of the three parables, and so would not seem to be constitutive of the collection as such.

It may be no coincidence that this format occurs at the beginnings of such collections. This would tend to cast upon the whole collection the aura of

a higher meaning latent in the text. But the *genre* of sayings collection as such is not particularly suited to implementing that implication, as these instances tend to illustrate. Nor do all sayings collections begin with that format—there is no evidence of it at the beginning of Q, and it is not characteristic of Jewish wisdom literature. The text-plus-interpretation format seems rather to be at home in the interpretation of the individual saying.

This may be illustrated by the striking parallel between the presentation of the Parable of the Sower with its interpretation and the presentation about ceremonial impurity in Mark 7:⁹

Mark 4	Mark 7
3 "Listen!"	14 "Hear me, all of you, and understand:"
3-8 (The Parable of the Sower)	15 "There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him."
9 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."	16 ["If any man has ears to hear, let him hear" (variant reading relegated to a footnote)]
10 "And when he was <i>alone</i> , those who were about him . . . asked him concerning the parable."	17 And when he had entered the <i>house</i> , and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable.
13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"	18 And he said to them "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that . . ."
14-20 (The interpretation)	18b-23 (The interpretation)

A somewhat less detailed instance of such a text-plus-interpretation format also occurs in Mark 10, where Jesus' response to the question concerning divorce (vss 5-9) and the appended interpretation (vss 11-12) are connected by a statement including the secrecy motif familiar from Mark 4:10; 7:17; 13:3 (Mark 10:10): "And in the *house* the disciples asked him again about this matter."

This text-plus-interpretation format is comparable to the Peshet method of Qumran, where a text of scripture is quoted and then an interpretation is appended with the introductory formula "its interpretation (*peshet*) is about . . .," from which this kind of exegesis received its name. But such a Peshet can continue down to the end of a text, in that a verse and its interpretation are followed by the next verse and its interpretation, etc. Or in the case of longer quotations each subdivision can be recalled to introduce its specific interpretation, as in the case of the interpretation of the Parable of the Sower, or of the answers to the battery of questions posed by the apostles in *The Letter of Peter to Philip* (NH VIII, 134:18-137:13). Although a saying-by-saying

⁹ Willi Marxsen, "Redaktionsgeschichtliche Erklärung der sogenannten Parabeltheorie des Markus," *ZThK* 52 (1955) 255-71.

commentary on a sayings collection is conceivable (and suggested by the title of Papias's five-volume *Exegesis of the Lord's Sayings*), the Gnostics did not seem ready to give up the pretense of recording an oral communication in favor of the commentary proper. They hence moved to the *genre* of dialogues of the resurrected Christ with his disciples, which thus became the distinctive gnostic *genre* of gospel. To be sure these dialogues are no longer genuine dialogues, where the discussion partners share a common innate *logos* or rationality, but rather are in the question-and-answer format of the *erotapokrisis*, where the authority figure is interrogated by the seeker.¹⁰ Here the resurrected Christ responds to inquiries by the apostles, who either inquire as to the true meaning of the preceding saying, or pose a question at times itself rooted in a saying. This format is ideally suited to dissolving the rigidity of the given tradition and providing ample opportunity for creative innovation.

The substantive outcome of this third trajectory from Easter to Valentinus, from the sayings collection to the dialogue of the resurrected Christ with his disciples, is summarized by Polycarp (*Phil* 7.1): "Whosoever perverts the oracles [*logia*] of the Lord for his own lusts, and says that there is neither resurrection nor judgment,—this man is the first-born of Satan." Here is precisely the heresy of the second trajectory from Easter to Valentinus, denying the future resurrection presumably because it has taken place spiritually in the ecstasy of baptism, that is associated with the unorthodox trajectory of Jesus' sayings.

Now the same pair of technical terms, derived from scriptural exegesis and used by Gnosticism for its invidious distinction between the gnostic higher meaning imparted by the resurrected Christ and the lower meaning of the usual sayings tradition, recurs in the canonical Gospel of John (16:25, 29) with the minor variation that for *parabolē* the Gospel of John uses *paroimia*, a synonym, as is evident from the fact that it is used at John 10:6 in the normal meaning of parable: "I have said this to you *in figures*; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you *in figures* but tell you *plainly* of the Father.' His disciples said, 'Ah, now you are speaking *plainly*, not *in any figure*!'" Although this takes place at the climax of John (16:32: "The hour is coming, indeed it has come."), it is not quite at Easter; rather what would be expected to be located at Easter is pushed back into the parting discourses prior to the crucifixion, leaving for the Johannine resurrection appearances not much more to be said than *Shalom*.

¹⁰ Kurt Rudolph, "Der gnostische 'Dialog' als literarische Genus," in Peter Nagel, ed., *Probleme der koptischen Literatur* (Wissenschaftliche Beiträge der Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg 1968/1 [K2]; Halle [Salle] 1968) 85–107; PHEME PERKINS, *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism* (Theological Inquiries: Studies in Contemporary Biblical and Theological Problems; New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980); STEPHEN EMMEL, "Post-Resurrection Dialogues Between Jesus Christ and His Disciples or Apostles as a Literary Genre" (1980, unpublished).

In Mark this turning point from coded to uncoded sayings is pushed still further back. Mark had appended to the collection of parables he had incorporated in chapter 4 the pointed comment (4:34): "He did not speak to them without a *parable*." But then this coded message is presented in uncoded form after Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi in Mark 8, when Jesus begins to talk like a Christian. The first prediction of the passion is what the quest of the historical Jesus took uncritically to be a turning point in the life of Jesus rather than in the Marcan composition. Though Rudolf Otto also still attributed the shift to Jesus, he did at least recognize it as the first time Mark's frequent allusions to Jesus teaching are actually accompanied by the explicit teaching. Julius Wellhausen first recognized it as a basic shift from the time of Jesus to the time of Mark.¹¹ It is at this crucial juncture that Mark inserts the pointed remark (8:32): "And he said this *plainly*." Thus both Mark and John seem aware of the pair of contrasting terms, and both agree in placing the shift from one level to the other before rather than after Easter.

William Wrede overlooked this Marcan use of the pair of technical terms, understandable enough given the fact that in Mark the pair is not side by side, but widely separated. As a matter of fact the source material in which they occur side by side and thus emerge clearly as such a pair of contrasting technical terms was not yet available to Wrede. As a result Wrede in effect assimilated Mark to the view that the shift in levels took place at Easter, rather than recognizing Mark—and the canonical Gospel *genre*—to be a variant upon, indeed a corrective of, precisely that view. For the Easter timing Wrede appealed to Mark 9:9, where the resurrection is given as the time when the transfiguration is to be told. But this is more likely due to the association specifically of the transfiguration with Easter than to a general Marcan turning point at Easter. Wrede failed to recognize that Mark has, apparently intentionally, shifted that turning point back into the middle of his Gospel.

This may indeed be the key to the perennial problem of the gospel *genre*. The fact that Mark and John transfer the shift to the higher level of meaning back prior to the crucifixion may be their most explicit rationale for playing down didactic revelations at Easter and filling almost their whole books with the period prior to Easter, the period when Jesus was teaching in his physical body on earth. Luke would in his way carry this to its logical outcome in defining the qualifications of an apostle so as to include not just, à la Paul, the resurrection, but the whole period since John the Baptist (thus reaching the position made standard in the English language tradition through the idiom "public ministry" (Acts 1:21–22): "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning

¹¹ Rudolf Otto, *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man* (London: Lutterworth, reprint of new and revised edition, 1951) 247. Julius Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (2d ed., Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1911) 72.

from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”

The gospels of Matthew and Luke, by obscuring the Marcan turning point at Caesarea Philippi (they omit Mark 8:32) and by imbedding Q throughout Mark, have carried to its ultimate orthodox outcome this trend, in that the authoritative Christian sayings of Jesus are unmistakably fleshed out in the whole body of the Marcan narrative framework from the time of John the Baptist on. Rather than Easter marking a decisive shift in the truth value, authority, and quasi-canoncity of Jesus' sayings, the Evangelists' logical outcome is brought to expression in Luke 24:44: “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you.” The resurrected Christ only repeats what Jesus had said prior to Easter. Or, put conversely, Jesus had always talked like a Christian.

The trajectory from Easter to the Apostles' Creed reached the somewhat paradoxical outcome in a creed omitting entirely Jesus' “public ministry” and the whole sayings tradition—or at least so it seems to us. To them it may have seemed quite the reverse: The Roman baptismal confession of the early second century was the faith of the apostles, that is to say, the whole orthodox creed was taught them by Jesus.

If the two-level interpretation of the sayings of Jesus on the trajectory from Easter to Valentinus meant exploiting the original orientation of the shift in levels to Easter as a rationale for extrapolating from the tradition new interpretations, indeed new sayings, and in the process modulated from the sayings collection, itself poorly suited to two-level exegesis, into the dialogue *genre* whose question-and-answer format invited the engendering of higher interpretations, then conversely the trajectory from Easter to the Apostles' Creed claimed both levels of meaning increasingly for Jesus prior to Easter, creating in the process the canonical gospel *genre* as a replacement for the all too ambivalent Q.

For Jesus to rise in disembodied radiance, for the initiate to reenact this kind of resurrection in ecstasy, and for this religiosity to mystify the sayings of Jesus by means of hermeneutically loaded dialogues of the resurrected Christ with his gnostic disciples is as consistent a position as is the orthodox insistence upon the physical bodiliness of the resurrected Christ, the futurity of the believer's resurrection back into the same physical body, and the incarnation of Jesus' sayings within the pre-Easter biography of Jesus in the canonical Gospels. Neither is the original Christian position; both are serious efforts to interpret it. Neither can be literally espoused by serious critical thinkers of today; both should be hearkened to as worthy segments of the heritage of transmission and interpretation through which Jesus is mediated to the world today.