

The Theological Gospel of Peter?

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The Gospel of Peter (GP), often claimed to be theologically unsophisticated, offers a theological reflection upon the saving work of the Lord in his resurrection. GP receives the synoptic tradition, which itself has no narration of the resurrection (but only narrations of ‘appearances’), and fills in this lacuna. The narration of the resurrection is patterned upon GP’s narration of the crucifixion, thereby suggesting that the resurrection and the crucifixion are two coordinated salvific events. GP’s reception of the synoptic tradition is thus not only apologetic or polemical, but also theological.

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1. Introduction

It has become something of a commonplace among scholars to refer to the Gospel of Peter (hereafter GP) as theologically ‘unsophisticated’ or ‘unrefined’. Paul Foster, who has published prolifically on GP in recent years, writes, ‘It needs to be acknowledged that the Gospel of Peter is theologically an unsophisticated text, and it provides minimal reflection on the heightened miraculous depictions it narrates.’¹ While here theological sophistication is tied to ‘reflection’, elsewhere ‘precision’ is key: ‘the author writes at a popular level and is unconcerned about precise distinctions between death or ascension terminology but happily confuses features of different events’.² Pablo Edo, in a slightly different vein, concludes his article on GP by positing some sort of ‘syncretism’ as the reason that GP is ‘a typical unsophisticated and uncritical product of the second-century’.³ Markus Bockmuehl, who would probably agree that the

1 P. Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 167. See the almost identical comment in P. Foster, ‘Polymorphic Christology: Its Origins and Development in Early Christianity’, *JTS* 58 (2007) 66–99, at 79.

2 Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 164.

3 P. Edo, ‘A Revision of the Origin and Role of the Supporting Angels in the Gospel of Peter (10:39b)’, *VC* 68 (2014) 206–25, at 225, quoting J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal Jesus: Legends of*

writer of GP is interested in theological perspectives on Jesus,⁴ articulates a similar scholarly commonplace when he writes, ‘the Gospel of Peter’s Christology is diverse and unrefined without subscribing to any particular “heretical” view’.⁵ This claim can take several forms; but much of it seems to be related to a general understanding of apocryphal literature as ‘popular’ or ‘folk’ literature.⁶

Admittedly much of this discussion – especially Bockmuehl’s comment – finds its place within a long scholarly discussion of GP’s apparent docetism: i.e. the question of whether its Christology is docetic, orthodox, or neither – something unreflective on the question of *how* Jesus is divine.⁷ But even such a framework is indicative of the fact that later ‘sophisticated’ theological norms are being imposed from without upon the text of GP. Indeed, in the discussion of docetism, Eusebius’ late third- to early fourth-century orthodoxy⁸ ends up being the arbiter of the sophisticated theological tradition of the late second, or early third, century.⁹ This is not the only sophisticated norm against which GP’s theology is weighed, however. Foster’s work especially seems to compare the sophistication

the Early Church (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008) 67. Edo goes on to write, ‘he rather inexpertly mixes or superposes elements from canonical tradition with inter-testamental elements, particularly those of an apocalyptic nature’ (225).

4 See, for example, M. Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017) 235: ‘The strangeness of these texts is perhaps in the first instance a mark not of their heretical otherness, but rather of the breadth and diversity of Christians who encountered and appropriated the gospel narrative in the cultural maelstrom of antiquity, to which that story spoke of salvation in many different registers.’

5 Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 142.

6 See R. Brown, ‘The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority’, *NTS* 33 (1987) 321–43; this idea no doubt goes back to the early form critics, who saw the canonical Gospels themselves as folk literature.

7 J. Frey, ‘“Apocryphisierung” im Petrus-evangelium: Überlegungen zum Ort des Petrus-evangeliums in der Entwicklung der Evangelienüberlieferung’, *The Apocryphal Gospels within the Context of Early Christian Theology* (ed. J. Schröter; Leuven: Peeters, 2013) 157–95, at 194, likewise speaks of ‘die relativ unreflektierte Christologie’. Although early assessments of GP, in reliance upon Eusebius’ testimony, judged the work to be ‘docetic’, this consensus has been overturned; see J. McCant, ‘The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered’, *NTS* 30 (1984) 258–73; and P. Head, ‘On the Christology of the Gospel of Peter’, *VC* 46 (1992) 209–24. Foster has gone further than this more recently in his ‘Polymorphic Christology’. On ‘docetism’ as a dubious heresiological category, see J.-D. Dubois, ‘Le docétisme des christologies gnostiques revisité’, *NTS* 63 (2017) 279–304.

8 By Nicene standards, there are, of course, questions which surround Eusebius’ orthodox Christology. See, for example, C. Beeley, ‘Eusebius’ *Contra Marcellum*: Anti-Modalist Doctrine and Orthodox Christology’, *ZAC* 12 (2009) 433–52, who disagrees with the typical assessment of Eusebius as a subordinationist.

9 On the dating of GP, see Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 170–2.

of the canonical Gospels with that of GP.¹⁰ Thus the canonical Gospels are theologically sophisticated, whereas GP – being derivative – is theologically unsophisticated.¹¹ While I want to be sensitive to the differences between GP and the canonical Gospels – and indeed between GP and Eusebius (and his forebears, such as Irenaeus and Origen) – this sensitivity should mean not that we ‘write off’ GP as a theological reflection, but instead attempt to understand its own theological project and theological idiom.

Although it would be a worthwhile project to locate some of the theoretical underpinnings or assumptions of the language of sophistication vs unsophistication,¹² my goal in this article is instead to reflect on what it means for an early Christian work to be theological at all. More precisely, my worry is that when we make the claim that something is ‘theologically unsophisticated’, we are really judging the work to be theologically uninteresting, or, worse, altogether untheological.¹³ Admittedly, there is a countercurrent, if a small one, which would emphasise the interesting theological moves made in GP: a number of decades ago Maria Grazia Mara emphasised this, and, more recently, Tobias

10 For example, in his commentary on the signs at the time of the crucifixion, he compares GP to Matthew: ‘Although no explicit link is stated by the Matthean narrator, the series of signs, torn curtain, earthquake, split rocks, and the re-animation of dead corpses, are to be understood as portents that accompany the death of Jesus, and prefigure the eschatological age, or perhaps more accurately they function to collapse the eschatological event horizon into the very moment of Jesus’ death, thereby revealing that this is a key moment in salvation history. The phenomenon described in the Gospel of Peter does not appear to reflect the same degree of theological sophistication. [...] Since the Gospel of Peter derives little, if any, theological insight from this detail ... the report of the shaking of the earth appears rather to function narratologically as a prelude to the expression of fear that is noted as the conclusion of this verse’ (339–40). Though elsewhere Foster is willing to speak of an ‘implicit’ theology – such as take place in the ‘polymorphic’ moments (*Gospel of Peter*, 167) – here he judges Matthew worthy of sophisticated interpretation, but (with Raymond Brown) not GP.

11 There is also the issue of GP’s ‘unrefined’ Greek. See, for example: ‘The Greek of the Akhmim fragment is not particularly refined and consequently no attempt has been made to render the English translation using a more elevated linguistic or syntactical construction’ (Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 197). This is not the kind of unsophistication with which I am here concerned.

12 For an example of the problems of this dichotomy, see K. Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), in which she writes, ‘If, indeed, the form of ancient books can tell us something about their readers – a subject we still have much to learn about – then these apocryphal acts were not read by the “popular” masses or necessarily by “women” but rather by those members of the upper echelons who likewise enjoyed poetry, history, and perhaps philosophy’ (62–3).

13 The latter error is certainly something that Foster does not commit. Indeed, following the opening quotation above, he writes, ‘Nonetheless, there is an implicit Christology that is communicated through the vision of Jesus and his two attendants having enlarged heads’ (Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 167).

Nicklas has published some engaging essays in this regard.¹⁴ My hope is to add to this small eddy of publications – in the now vast river of scholarly works on GP – and thus to present GP as a text which engages with gospel traditions in a theological mode, as it reflects upon the soteriological import of the crucifixion and resurrection.

The way I will go about this is by viewing – as many have – GP as a reception of the synoptic tradition. I will not stake a claim on what kind of ‘dependence’ is here at play; I will, however, argue that GP is a ‘rewriting’ of a sort, in which theological concerns about the resurrection play a central role. Specifically, I argue that GP’s extravagant narration of the resurrection – with all the detail it adds to the synoptic accounts – is constructed on the pattern of the narration of the crucifixion. This mirroring occurs through a number of parallels, which will be adduced throughout the article. It is my contention that, aside from various apologetic reasons for renarrating the resurrection in such a way, there are also theological reasons for doing so: namely making the resurrection, like the crucifixion, into a moment of divine revelation and salvation. The author of GP, familiar with the synoptic accounts, or a synoptic tradition, in which the resurrection is not itself narrated (only post-resurrection ‘appearances’ are), fills in the gap and narrates the moment of the resurrection on the narrative pattern of the event acknowledged throughout the synoptic tradition to be salvific: the crucifixion.

2. Theories of Dependency and Rewrittenness

Since the Akhmim fragment was discovered and subsequently published by Urbain Bouriant, various theories have been advanced as to the relationship between GP and the canonical Gospels. In the early scholarship on the relationship between the canonical Gospels and GP, it was simply assumed that the latter knew and borrowed from the former. Léon Vaganay thus labels the author a *faussaire*, and comes up with several different categories for classifying these borrowings (from strong/certain borrowings to weak/uncertain).¹⁵ Rather later, Mara, in her 1973 edition, largely follows him, but has a less pejorative opinion of his

14 M. Mara, *Évangile de Pierre* (Paris: Cerf, 2006 [1973]); T. Nicklas, ‘Die “Juden” im Petrus-evangelium (PCair 10759): ein Testfall’, *NTS* 47 (2001) 206–21; T. Nicklas, ‘Die Leiblichkeit der Gepeinigten: Das Evangelium nach Petrus und frühchristliche Märtyrerakten’, *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (ed. J. Leemans; Leuven: Peeters, 2010) 195–219; T. Nicklas, ‘Resurrection in the Gospels of Matthew and Peter: Some Developments’, *Life beyond Death in Matthew’s Gospel: Religious Metaphor or Bodily Reality?* (ed. W. Weren, H. van de Sandt and J. Verheyden; Peeters: Leuven, 2011) 27–41.

15 L. Vaganay, *L’Évangile de Pierre* (Paris: Gabalda, 1930).

borrowing. She believes GP is intended to be not an historical account, but a theological interpretation of the synoptics.¹⁶

This consensus was famously challenged by Helmut Koester, and then by John Dominic Crossan, who believes that GP contains a more ancient source (the 'Cross Gospel') upon which the synoptics are also dependent.¹⁷ Raymond Brown defended the older consensus, bringing the criterion of agreement vs disagreement to bear: the canonical Gospels agree with GP on details, but disagree with one another.¹⁸ Thomas Schonhoffer has more recently advanced Brown's thesis (thinking it insufficient on its own), by discussing Matthew and Luke's use of sources, arguing that if Matthew and Luke used GP, then (from what we know of their use of Mark) they would have been going against their customary way of dependence.¹⁹ Even if Brown's argument was generally accepted before Schonhoffer's article, it is now consensus.²⁰

On the other hand, the *nature* of this dependence is far from settled. Several scholars, including Brown, have argued that the kind of dependence is an 'oral' dependence, and that the way in which it uses the synoptics is as a 'popular harmonization'.²¹ That is, the writer of GP does not have the canonical Gospels in front of him, and is familiar with them from oral recitation. Foster argues that this is not the case, but that GP in fact witnesses to a 'literary dependence', for which, in his commentary, he makes a 'cumulative case ... on the basis of shared vocabulary and other features'.²² Bockmuehl wants to do away with such discussion of 'literary dependence', and instead speak about 'literary antecedence', because this allows for a use of the sources which is not wooden, but includes creativity and 'independence'.²³ I am sympathetic to this approach; but, more specifically in the case of GP, as Bockmuehl writes, this antecedence and creative use equals 'an appropriation and *relecture* of ... synoptic tradition, not necessarily in written form'.²⁴ Thus Bockmuehl shifts the topic of discussion: not of literary vs oral, but of creative use of sources (whether literary or oral).

16 Mara, *Évangile de Pierre*.

17 H. Koester, 'Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels', *HTR* 73 (1980) 105–30; J. Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988).

18 Brown, 'Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority'.

19 T. N. Schonhoffer, 'The Relationship of the Gospel of Peter to the Canonical Gospels: A Composition Critical Argument', *ETL* 87 (2011) 229–49.

20 Among many others, see Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 118–19; M. Vinzent and T. Nicklas, 'Das Petrus-evangelium', *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, vol. 1: *Evangelien und Verwandtes* (ed. J. Schröter and C. Marksches; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 688–9.

21 Brown, 'Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority', 336.

22 Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 119.

23 Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 30.

24 Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, 144.

Bockmuehl's *relecture* coincides with a recent discussion of GP as 'rewritten Gospel'. At least two scholars have discussed this, with Timothy Henderson's being theoretically the most thorough.²⁵ Henderson, following Daniel Harrington's definition of 'rewritten Bible', sees the value of the rewritten work as the way in which it elucidates the receiving culture.²⁶ The gaps that are filled, the expanded events, the deleted scenes, are all indicative of the social setting in which the 'rewritten' work was composed. For Henderson, this means that GP, as 'rewritten Gospel', is *apologetic* and *polemical*, and the apology and polemic are directed towards both Jews and Romans. This is a compelling reading of a number of GP's additions. However, it is limited in its scope inasmuch as it follows Harrington's definition. Geza Vermes' original concept of rewritten Bible was by no means rigorously theorised; nevertheless, his intention – as he has indicated in a posthumously published essay – was for rewritten Bible to be primarily about exegesis and theology.²⁷ He notes that of course it can reveal something about the receiving society, but it primarily reveals the 'rewriter' as a close reader and exegete with religious motivations.

I believe that in the case of GP, Vermes' perspective on rewritten Bible can prove helpful. While Mara, as we have seen, emphasises that GP is a theological recasting of the gospel narrative – indeed a theological recasting of the synoptics – she does not do the close work needed to demonstrate a particular theology of GP. Thus, while I will remain non-committal with respect to the debate over oral vs literary dependency (adopting in some respect Bockmuehl's approach), I see GP as a kind of reception (and perhaps rewriting) of the synoptic tradition which indicates less the 'social' or 'cultural' interests of the writer, and more the theological. (Importantly, my argument does not rely upon a particular model of GP's use or reception of the canonical Gospels.) Indeed, as Jens Schröter wrote recently, the value of these later gospel traditions lies less in their contribution to the study of the historical Jesus, and more in what they

25 T. Henderson, *The Gospel of Peter and Early Christian Apologetics: Rewriting the Story of Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection* (WUNT II; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). Also see Frey, "'Apocryphisierung" im Petrus-evangelium', who largely follows Henderson's approach.

26 Henderson, *Gospel of Peter and Early Christian Apologetics*, 34–41. See D. Harrington, 'Palestinian Adaptations of Biblical Narratives and Prophecies: 1. The Bible Rewritten (Narratives)', *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters* (ed. R. Kraft and G. Nickelsburg; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 239–47.

27 For his original work, in which he coins the term 'rewritten Bible', see G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1962). In the posthumously published essay, 'The Genesis of the Concept of "Rewritten Bible"', *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) 1–9, Vermes writes, 'I designated it as an enquiry "into the motives, exegetical or doctrinal, which originally prompted interpreters to develop, and even to supplement, the biblical narrative"' (2).

contribute to our knowledge of early Christologies.²⁸ In the case of GP, I argue that the resurrection is brought to the fore as a saving event, in parallel with the revelatory and life-giving crucifixion.

3. Rewriting the Crucifixion and Writing the Resurrection

In this section, I will argue not only that GP's reception and rewriting of the synoptic Gospels witnesses to the theological interests of the author, but also that, in a way, it seeks to find a resurrection narrative that is already present in the synoptic tradition. That is, GP writes a resurrection narrative – which is not narrated in the synoptic Gospels as such (only the rolling away of the stone, and resurrection 'appearances') – in the terms of the synoptic tradition's crucifixion account. The author of GP first provides an account of the crucifixion which harmonises the synoptic tradition, and then proceeds to narrate the resurrection according to the pattern of the narration of the crucifixion. The resurrection thus becomes – in a way entirely unlike the synoptic Gospels – a second and coordinated saving event.

3.1 *The Crucifixion*

The crucifixion account in GP closely follows the synoptic Gospels in many respects. In the synoptic accounts, the crucifixion, and the passion immediately preceding it, is already relatively full of details; and GP adds details or creates novel interpretations on only a few occasions. But those few occasions prove important for discerning how GP is adapting its received material. I will highlight just a few aspects of this section of the narrative: the raising of the cross, the speech of the crucified criminals, the divine signs surrounding the crucifixion, and the proclamation made upon witnessing Jesus' death and the signs that accompany it. These changes will also be important as we look to the writing of the resurrection in GP.

First, unlike any of the synoptic Gospels, the raising of Jesus on the cross is narrated: 'And they brought two criminals and crucified the Lord in the middle of them, and he was silent as though having no pain. And when they erected the cross (ὅτε ὄρθωσαν τὸν σταῦρον), they wrote, "This is the king of Israel"' (4.10–11). All three synoptic Gospels also narrate both the criminals and the titulus straightforwardly, if in different orders with different nuances (Mark 15.24–6; Matt 27.34–8; Luke 23.32–8). The difference between these and GP is especially manifest in the titulus' 'Israel' rather than 'the Jews'. Although Jesus is silent in Mark 14.61 // Matt 26.63, the silence occurs in the context of the

28 J. Schröter, 'Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels within the Development of the New Testament Canon', *EC* 7 (2016) 24–46. For a similar assessment, see Nicklas, 'Die Juden im Petrusevangelium', 208–9.

trial before the Sanhedrin – not the crucifixion – and his silence is short-lived. In the context of GP, his silence has the function of demonstrating that while Jesus ('the Lord') does not speak, the cross, by way of the sign erected by his enemies, speaks the truth: 'This is the king of Israel.'

For our purposes, the other substantial difference is, as I noted, that the raising of the cross is narrated at all.²⁹ Although in every Gospel Jesus is 'crucified' (Mark 15.24–5 // Matt 27.35 // Luke 23.32), at no point do we see the cross being erected: in John 3.14, Jesus employs the verb ὑψώω – 'lift up', 'exalt' – to refer to the exaltation of the 'son of man', and there is a clear allusion to, or prophecy of, his later crucifixion; but this is not, of course, narrated at the moment of the crucifixion. On the other hand, the verb used at this point in GP is ὀρθώω, which is used nowhere else in the New Testament to refer to this action; but this word will become important when we turn to GP's account of the resurrection. Here, while slightly reworking the synoptic material, GP is in fact filling in a gap that is not narrated (but is, of course, assumed): the raising of the cross. Jesus, presumably attached to the cross while it is still lying flat, is hoisted upright.

In Mark and Matthew, while the criminals (λησταί) who are crucified hurl abuse (ἐβλασφήμουν) at Jesus, no specific words are provided (Mark 15.26–9 // Matt 27.38–9). Luke's is the only Gospel in which the criminals (κακοῦργοι) speak (Luke 23.32–3; 23.39): the one hurls abuse (ἐβλασφήμουν) at Jesus, whereas the other declares Jesus' righteousness, in comparison to their own unrighteousness – and so also their deserved death, and Jesus' undeserved death: 'But the other rebuked him [the first criminal], saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same judgement? And we indeed have been condemned justly (δικαίως), for we are getting what we deserve for what we have done, but this man has done nothing wrong"' (Luke 23.40–1). On the other hand, in GP, only the good criminal (κάκουργος) speaks, but his speech is not directed to Jesus at all; rather, this criminal hurls abuse at those who crucified Jesus (i.e. who had 'erected the cross'): 'And having laid out the clothes before him, they divided them and cast lots for them. But one of the criminals rebuked (ὠνείδησεν) them saying, "We, because of the evil things we did, are suffering thus, but this man who is the saviour of men, how has he wronged you (τί ἠδίκησεν ὑμᾶς;)" (4.12–13). He, like the good criminal in Luke, declares that Jesus is innocent, and that those crucifying him (and not the crucified criminals themselves) are unjust. This corresponds to the emphases

²⁹ There are, to be sure, other major differences between the synoptic tradition and GP. The one that has most often been noted is an instance of GP's apparent anti-Judaism: whereas in the canonical Gospels the Roman authorities crucify Jesus, in GP it is the Jewish authorities that crucify him. Even if there is some distinction between 'the Jews' and the various Jewish leaders in GP, as is pointed out by Nicklas, 'Die Juden im Petrus-evangelium', and more recently by J. Marcus, 'The Gospel of Peter as a Jewish Christian Document', *NTS* 64 (2018) 473–94, this nevertheless represents a major deviation from the synoptic tradition.

seen in the different Gospels on the nature of the crucifixion: whereas in Matthew and Mark the crucifixion is a sign and a declaration of Jesus as the divine Messiah and Saviour, in GP, as in Luke, the crucifixion is a sign of Jesus' justice and innocence as a human being, in relation to all humankind.³⁰ Again, this will be all the more evident in the contrast between the GP's narrations of the crucifixion and the resurrection.

The signs that accompany the death of Jesus are of course emphasised much more in Matthew than in Luke or Mark. Luke follows Mark more closely: darkness falls, and the temple veil is torn (Mark 15.33, 38 // Luke 23.44–5). In Matthew, on the other hand, various signs of the coming of the messianic kingdom are narrated alongside these, and coordinated with them:

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon ... Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection, they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. (Matt 27.45, 50–3)

As Foster has stated, in Matthew, these represent the coming of Jesus' eschatological kingdom: the rending of the temple veil is coordinated with an earthquake, the breaking of rocks and the opening of the tombs – and with the resurrection of the dead.³¹ But in GP these signs, as Henderson has argued, take on a different significance. Though the exact sequence of events is harder to discern in GP than in the synoptic Gospels, the rending of the veil and the darkness seem to be associated with Jesus' death, and the resumption of daylight and the shaking of the earth are associated with his removal from the cross and the placement of his body on the ground:

³⁰ See, for example, M. Easter, "Certainly This Man Was Righteous": Highlighting a Messianic Reading of the Centurion's Confession in Luke 23:47', *TynBul* 63/1 (2012) 35–51.

³¹ Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 339–40. Foster cites J. K. Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) 237 n. 14. This passage in Matthew has rightly elicited a fair amount of scholarship; in addition to the many commentaries on the Gospel, see D. Senior, 'Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones', *CBQ* 38 (1976) 312–29; R. Brown, 'Eschatological Events Accompanying the Death of Jesus, Especially the Raising of the Holy Ones from their Tombs (Matt 27:51–53)', *Faith and the Future: Studies in Christian Eschatology* (ed. R. Brown, W. Kasper, G. O'Collins and J. Galvin; New York: Paulist, 1994) 43–73; J. Herzer, 'The Riddle of the Holy Ones in Matthew 27:51b–53: A New Proposal for a Crux Interpretum', *What Does the Scripture Say? Studies in the Function of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. C. Evans and D. Zacharias; London: T&T Clark, 2012) 142–57.

And it was noon and darkness covered all Judaea. And they were troubled and distressed that the sun should not have set, since he was still alive. It was written to them that 'the sun is not to set on one who has been put to death'. And one of them said, 'Give him gall with vinegar to drink'. And having mixed it they gave it to him to drink. And they fulfilled everything and they heaped the sins upon their heads. And many were going about with lamps, [and] supposing it was night, they stumbled. And the Lord cried out saying, 'My power, the power, you have left me'. And after he spoke, he was taken up. And at the same hour the curtain of Jerusalem's temple was torn in two. And then they drew the nails from the Lord's hands and placed him upon the earth, and all the earth was shaken and there was great fear. Then the sun shone and it was found to be the ninth hour. (5.15–6.22)

Henderson argues that, as seen in the Jewish leaders' response to the signs (σημεία, 8.28), these, along with the destruction of the temple, indicate the judgement pronounced against the Jews for their complicity in Jesus' death.³² While this is a convincing argument, Henderson does not note that this great sin committed by the Jewish leaders is, as Nicklas notes, followed by repentance: they 'beat their breasts' and proclaim Jesus' *righteousness* (// Luke 24.47–8).³³ Thus, as we will see momentarily, while the signs are signs of judgement, they also seem to be signs that bring about repentance – insofar as they point to the injustice of the crucifixion itself.

This point is relevant to a judgement of theological sophistication or unsophistication. Foster, following his comment, given above, on the relationship between Matthew and GP, writes, 'perhaps with less theological sophistication, the Gospel of Peter affirms the sanctity (if not the divinity) of the body placed on the ground by having the earth shake'.³⁴ He bases the 'less[er] theological sophistication' of GP on its change from the coordinated eschatological signs in Matt 27.51. But this new scene, narrated in GP's idiom, rather than being 'theologically unsophisticated', is merely coordinated differently. Instead of making an eschatological

32 See Henderson, *Gospel of Peter and Early Christian Apologetics*, 109–11; for the parallels he finds in second-century Christian literature, see the following pages (especially on Melito of Sardis, 113–18).

33 Nicklas, 'Die Juden im Petrus-evangelium', mentions this as a lamentation of repentance, but does not expand upon it (219).

34 P. Foster, 'Do Crosses Walk and Talk? A Reconsideration of Gospel of Peter 10.39–42', *JTS* 64 (2013) 89–104, at 98. Also see Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 340: 'The phenomenon described in the Gospel of Peter does not appear to reflect the same degree of theological sophistication [as in Matthew]'; Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 340: 'the Gospel of Peter derives little, if any, theological insight from [the shaking of the ground]'. And in the notes on this page, he writes, 'Mara's attempt to find a theological agenda behind this incident seems somewhat forced. She argues in relation to the author's intention that, "il propose, sous forme de récit, un discours théologique. C'est la présentation du Κύριος, de tout ce qu'il est, de tout ce qu'il a fait et fera"' (Foster, *Gospel of Peter* 340, quoting Mara, *Évangile de Pierre*, 142).

claim, in GP the signs proclaim divine judgement and call to repentance – which repentance we have now heard from the Jewish leaders.

This brings us to the centurion's proclamation. In GP, the centurion responds neither to the crucifixion itself (as in Mark 15.39), nor to the signs (as in Matt 27.54), nor, more ambiguously, to 'what had taken place' (Luke 23.47). Rather, it is the Jewish leaders – the scribes, the elders and the Pharisees – who make a proclamation about Jesus in reaction to these signs. Whereas Luke has the centurion say, 'surely this man was just' (Ὀντως ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος ἦν), GP has these Jewish leaders beat their breasts, and declare, 'If at his death these very great signs have happened, behold how just he was' (εἰ τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ ταῦτα τὰ μέγιστα σημεῖα γέγονεν, ἴδετε ὅτι πόσον δίκαιός ἐστιν, 8.28). Although this does not initially seem like a definitive parallel – especially given the different setting of the quotation – several other points indicate that it is indeed a parallel: first, the centurion's description of Jesus as δίκαιος along with a form of ἐστιν; second, the proclamation is explicitly made in reaction to the signs, as it is in Matthew; third, the 'beating of the breasts', which is the reaction of other onlookers to Jesus' crucifixion in Luke 23.48, also occurs just after the proclamation. This is thus strikingly similar to the Lukan proclamation, with the major difference being that the only narrated reaction to the crucifixion, and the accompanying signs, is placed on the lips of the Jewish leaders. At the same time, as we will go on to see, GP does include Matthew's and Mark's centurion's statement, but separates this proclamation ('God's son') out from the Lukan ('righteous') statements into two different proclamations – one in response to the crucifixion, by the Jews, and one in response to the resurrection, by a centurion.³⁵

3.2 *The Resurrection*

While in the synoptic Gospels the resurrection itself is never narrated, and only the 'empty tomb' and Jesus' later appearances to the disciples are recorded, GP narrates the resurrection in the sight of both Jew and Gentile. As Henderson has pointed out, this scene is probably an apologetic response to criticisms from outsiders – criticisms which are already recorded in the canonical Gospels (Matt 28.12–14).³⁶ However, it seems to be much more than a defensive manoeuvre: as

35 N. Eubank, 'Dying with Power: Mark 15,39 from Ancient to Modern Interpretation', *Biblica* 95 (2014) 247–68, studies the reception of the Markan passage, including GP. He only notes the centurion's post-resurrection proclamation as reception, and does not include the Jewish leaders' declaration.

36 Henderson, *Gospel of Peter and Early Christian Apologetics*, 123–75. Interestingly, we could actually see this narration of the resurrection scene as responding to *this very passage* in the Gospel of Matthew – that is, it is already present in the synoptic tradition – rather than responding to polemical claims *contemporary* to the penning of GP. Henderson appears never to have considered this, since his project is to glean all he can from the Gospel to determine some social historical context.

GP goes about narrating the resurrection, it does not do so without relying on the synoptic tradition. Instead, it creates a resurrection narrative parallel to its narration of the events surrounding the crucifixion: the event which in the synoptic Gospels is already acknowledged to be salvific. That is, GP's resurrection scene, as fantastical as it is, attends at once to the details as given in the synoptic Gospels' empty tomb narratives *and* to the crucifixion scene already narrated in GP. Certainly, there are apologetic motifs: the stone has seven seals put on it to verify that Jesus really was interred in the tomb (8.33), and Romans sentries are keeping watch by twos (9.35). Nevertheless, as we will see, this event is narrated in such a way that it parallels the crucifixion as a saving event. We will proceed with describing the parallels according to the order already laid out in the previous section.

GP's resurrection scene has been commented upon very frequently in recent scholarship. The two 'supporting angels' have received some attention, and I agree wholeheartedly that it is worth asking the question, 'Why would the risen Lord need angels to support him?' Edo has recently described these angels as 'Psychopompoi', a description that seems fitting to me.³⁷ But why do they need to 'support' him? 'While they were reporting what they had seen, again they saw coming out from the tomb three men, and the two were supporting the one (τρεις ἄνδρες καὶ τοὺς δύο τὸν ἕνα ὑπορθοῦντας), and a cross following them' (10.39). The key to understanding the reason for the 'support' is the lemma itself: ὑπορθόω. Just as Jesus has been raised up (ὀρθόω) along with the cross when he was crucified, so now in the resurrection he is also raised up. The explanation for the use of this uncommon word³⁸ is found in the use of the much more common, and coordinated, word ὀρθόω, used of the crucifixion. Here is our first indication that the resurrection is being narrated as a saving event, coordinated with the crucifixion which has already been narrated.

A little further on in the narrative, we read, 'And they were hearing a voice from the heavens saying, "Have you preached to those who sleep?" And a response was heard from the cross, "Yes"' (10.41-2). This is, of course, one of the more frequently commented upon sections of the resurrection narrative, with Mark Goodacre and Paul Foster engaging in debate surrounding it a number of years ago. Goodacre wanted to amend 'cross' (σταυρόν) to 'crucified one' (σταυρωθέντα).³⁹ Foster was right to deny this; and, indeed, the peculiarity of the speaking cross is further explained when we understand that GP's narration of the crucifixion is informing that of the resurrection. In the crucifixion, the Lord

37 Edo, 'A Revision of the Origin and Role of the Supporting Angels'.

38 A search for this lemma in the *Thesaurus linguae Graecae* returns only twenty-three results - none of which seems to be a significant parallel. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961) s.v. ὑπορθόω provides 'raise up' as a definition.

39 Foster, 'Do Crosses Walk and Talk?' See the compelling explanation of the cross in D. Galbraith, 'Whence the Giant Jesus and his Talking Cross? The Resurrection in Gospel of Peter 10.39-42 as Prophetic Fulfilment of LXX Psalm 18', *NTS* 63 (2017) 473-91.

is silent, while the cross witnesses to the truth of the matter: the 'King of Israel' is being crucified by his own people. In the resurrection, the cross again witnesses to the truth: that the Lord has brought victory over death, even to those who have already died. Further, the correlation of two criminals with the two angels,⁴⁰ while admittedly a little thinner, carries this same witnessing function: whereas the good criminal had spoken of the justice of Jesus and the injustice of the crucifixion, the angels, without speaking, witness to Jesus' divinity: 'And the head of the two reached as far as heaven, but that of the one being led by them surpassed the heavens' (10.40).

Certainly, the correspondence between the signs at the crucifixion and those at the resurrection – for which there is no verbal correspondence – is a little more tenuous. Nevertheless, we do see that while darkness accompanied the crucifixion as a 'sign' (5.15; 8.28), now light characterises the resurrection: we hear twice that the day has dawned, and the angels 'have much light' (9.34–6).

Apart from the parallel 'raisings' (ὀρθόω/ὑπορθόω) of Jesus, the most compelling evidence that these two events are intentionally coordinated divine salutary events are the proclamations that follow upon the saving acts and their coordinated signs. We have already seen that Jesus was proclaimed righteous by the Jews at the crucifixion, according to a Lukan sort of proclamation. In reaction to the resurrection, however, a couple of persons accompanying the Markan–Matthean centurion (Matt 27.54 // Mark 15.39) make a Markan–Matthean type of proclamation: 'Seeing these things, those who accompanied the centurion rushed by night to Pilate, leaving the tomb which they were guarding, and related everything which they saw, being greatly distressed and saying, "Truly this was God's son"' (11.45). As in the case of GP's Lukan proclamation following the crucifixion, so also in the case of the resurrection the Lord's identity is announced 'offstage', heightening the parallel. Here, rather than the Jewish leaders proclaiming it to one another, Gentile authorities proclaim to one another, and fully acknowledge, Jesus' divinity. Indeed, just as the crucifixion is a sign of judgement against the Jews (per Henderson), and also a sign of Jesus' *righteousness* among the Jewish leaders/Israel, so the resurrection is a sign of Jesus' divinity to *all the nations*: Jew and Gentile alike.

4. Conclusion: Two Saving Events

In Mara's edition of GP, she argues against Vaganay's characterisation of GP's author as a *faussaire* that GP is concerned not to reinterpret the synoptic

40 As is also the case with the Lukan and Matthean–Markan proclamations, GP has separated out the two versions into two different events. In the resurrection scene, GP follows Luke, who has two angels waiting in the tomb; Mark's 'young man' (Mark 16.5) will meet Mary later in GP when she comes surreptitiously to the tomb (13.55).

Gospels historically, but to interpret the events theologically.⁴¹ We have now seen one significant way in which her claim is correct: the crucifixion and the resurrection are written, or rewritten, as parallel accounts of saving events. A narration of the resurrection is added into GP precisely because it is so conspicuously missing from the Gospel of Mark and the synoptics that follow that outline – and, indeed, from the Gospel of John (whatever its relationship to the synoptics). No doubt this gap is filled for apologetic reasons, but we have now seen that various aspects of the narration of the resurrection demonstrate interesting theological perspectives, and perhaps motivations as well. Thus the resurrection is written on the pattern of the crucifixion as it is present in the synoptic tradition.

I suggest that we can learn even more about the crucifixion and the resurrection than just that they are coordinated salvific works, as I have already indicated throughout the paper in a limited way. They also serve different saving functions, and they reveal the person of the Lord, and his saving work, to different audiences. First, as in the Gospel of Luke, in GP the unjust crucifixion of this just man, along with the miraculous signs accompanying it, serves as a demonstration of the Lord's righteousness, and in turn his rightful status as the 'King of Israel'. Just as the Jewish leaders proclaimed this, and repented and beat their breasts, so the reader is meant to recognise the righteousness of Jesus – and the justice of his claim to be Messiah and Lord – and the injustice of those who crucified him. It is an event that saves by bringing one to repentance, and to a recognition of the Lord's righteousness and sovereignty. Further, the primary audience for whom the crucifixion and accompanying signs are narrated are the Jews. These narrative elements are meant, along with the knowledge that the temple has been destroyed, to bring Jews to repentance, and, I would suggest, also to faith.⁴² In this sense, the crucifixion becomes not merely a *polemical* event, as Henderson has it, but an evangelistic and protreptic one: it is meant to persuade in favour of Jesus' righteousness.

GP's corresponding saving event of the resurrection becomes, on the other hand, a sign of Jesus' divinity: he is accompanied by angels, his head reaches the heavens, he is declared God's son. Whatever other apologetic functions the narration of the resurrection might be seen to achieve, it is certainly also a demonstration to all – not only the Jews in the case – that Jesus is divine, and is the Lord and son of God. Henderson is right that this is apologetic: both Jews and Romans witness the resurrection of Jesus, which fact leaves no doubt that he was truly raised from the dead. But, in this way, Jesus' resurrection also becomes a proclamation of Jesus' divinity not just to the Jews, but to all the nations: he is finally seen to be in all its fullness the 'son of God'. The Lord is 'raised up' for all to see, not only as high as the cross in a demonstration of his

41 Mara, *Évangile de Pierre*; see above.

42 See Nicklas, 'Die Juden im Petrusévangélium'.

righteous kingship, but as high as the heavens as a sign of his divinity and his sovereignty over all the earth. And this Lord is not only God and King, but also the one who has himself overcome death, and who has preached and offered his salvation to both the living and the dead.

We must readily admit that GP is not always written in a ‘sophisticated’ manner. It can hardly be judged elegant according to ancient rhetorical conventions, and the narration itself is a bit confused and scattered: for example, it frequently lacks transitions, and sometimes does not provide the subject of the verbs at crucial junctures. Nevertheless, it still represents an attempt to read the gospel tradition theologically, as a tradition which witnesses to the person of the Lord and to the salvation that he offers. That is, this otherwise apparently unsophisticated work represents a profoundly theological reading of the canonical Gospels – or at least of a tradition in keeping with the contours of the synoptic Gospels. Indeed, it does the work of filling in the gap in the Markan narrative outline, a tendency which is also seen, earlier than GP, throughout the rest of the New Testament in the proliferation of witnesses to the resurrection (i.e. ‘appearances’), as, for example, in the Emmaus episode (Luke 24.13–15), and even in Paul’s early account of the proclamation of Christ (1 Cor 15.5–8). We can readily imagine that the author of GP, like other early Christian texts,⁴³ has paused, and asked himself, ‘Didn’t Jesus prophesy about his own resurrection (Mark 8.31)? So – where is it? How did it happen?’ At the same time, GP’s resurrection narrative, by the very fact of its imitation of the crucifixion narrative, proclaims the resurrection to be a saving event like the one which is already alive and well in the synoptic tradition: Jesus’ death as a ‘ransom for many’ (Mark 10.45 // Matt 20.28). Thus, although Mark leaves the resurrection unnarrated, we find that GP attempts to do as little violence as possible to the Markan outline which it has received: even the resurrection which is not narrated in the synoptic Gospels ends up looking a lot like the crucifixion as it is narrated in the same.

In conclusion, while I have not set out to argue that GP is a theologically *sophisticated* Gospel – if this can even be considered a valid category – I have demonstrated that the author of GP is a theological reader of the synoptic Gospels. Not unlike those apocryphal traditions about the harrowing of hell (of which we also have a hint in GP (10.41–2)),⁴⁴ GP reads the gaps it finds in the synoptic Gospel tradition to discover the salvation wrought by the Lord.

43 In a way not unlike, for example, the Secret Book of James in that the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension are filled in with his secret teaching.

44 Also in, for example, the Pilate cycle.