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The Place of the *Gospel of Philip* in the Context of Early Christian Claims about Jesus' Marital Status

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It has long been recognized that one of the main topics of the *Gospel of Philip* is ritual, including 'the bridal chamber', and numerous studies have discussed what practices and attitudes toward sexuality and marriage are implied by this imagery. This article will build on these studies to argue that the *Gospel of Philip* portrays the incarnate Jesus as actually married (to Mary Magdalene) and it represents that marriage as a symbolic paradigm for the reunification of believers with their angelic (spiritual) doubles in Christian initiation ritual, a ritual which effectively transforms initiates into members of the body of Christ and also enables 'undefiled marriage' for Christian partners by freeing them from demonic influences. The article aims to show that this distinctive position on Jesus' marital status was catalyzed by reading Ephesians 5 in conjunction with Valentinian incarnational theology.

Keywords: *Gospel of Philip*, marriage (of Jesus), marriage (Christian attitudes toward), incarnation, bridal chamber ritual, Letter to Ephesians

Early Christian literature is replete with discussions about marriage, celibacy, and virginity around issues such as how best to practice the Christian life, the meaning of Jesus' incarnation, the relation of Christ to the church, the effects of ritual practice, the nature of moral perfection, and qualifications for leadership. The image of Christ as a bridegroom appears frequently in these discussions, but seldom is the question of the historical (fleshly or incarnate) Jesus' marital status raised,[1] and never is it asserted that he was married. Now, however, a newly discovered manuscript may offer evidence that some Christians did

1 Historians have discussed whether the historical Jesus was married, but given that the earliest and most historically reliable information about the life of Jesus (largely the NT Gospels) is silent on the issue, arguments about which answer is more probable have not led to a firm consensus. For an overview of the arguments, see William E. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married? The Distortion of Sexuality in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); John

claim just that. In what follows, I want to argue that one of the Valentinian Christian works recovered from Nag Hammadi in 1945, *The Gospel of Philip*, represents the incarnate Jesus actually having been married (to Mary Magdalene), and interprets that marriage as a symbolic paradigm for ritual practices (baptism, chrism, Eucharist, and the ritual exchange of a kiss) that effectively transform initiates into members of the body of Christ. By placing the *Gospel of Philip* in the context of other early Christian claims about Jesus' marital status, especially Ephesians, I hope this study will enable a fuller portrait of ancient Christian views on sexuality and marriage. I begin with a brief overview of relevant attestations about Jesus' marital status, then turn to analysis of the *Gospel of Philip*.

1. The Question of Jesus' Marital Status in Early Christianity

Historians have long known that controversies among Christians over the place of marriage and sexuality occurred early and were often heated.[2] Most of these discussions circle around differing interpretations of statements ascribed to Jesus or Paul. Jesus, for example, affirms marriage as God's purpose in creation (Matt 19.3-9), but also praises those who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven (Matt 19.10-12) and denies marriage a role in the resurrected life (Luke 20.34-36; cp. Mark 12.18-27; Matt 22.23-33). In 1 Cor 6.9–7.39, Paul clearly condemns adultery and sexual immorality, but offers more ambivalent advice regarding marriage and divorce. Especially important for our discussion below is 1 Cor 6.15-16, where he argues against men's use of prostitutes.[3] There Paul appeals both to Gen 2.24 (that in sexual union the two become one flesh) and to the view that Christians' bodies are members of Christ's body, a condition he later links directly to baptism (1 Cor 12.12-13). He concludes that to be united to Christ is to be 'one Spirit' with him (6.17) and with each other (12.13). In the process of defending his gospel against competitors, Paul also offers the metaphorical claim that Christ had a bride—the Church (2 Cor

P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol. 1, The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 332-45.

2 See e.g., Elaine Pagels, 'Adam and Eve, Christ and the Church: A Survey of Second Century Controversies Concerning Marriage,' *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McLachlan Wilson* (ed. A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) 146-75; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University, 1988); Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).

3 On implications for Christian slaves, see Jennifer A. Glancy, 'Obstacles to Slaves' Participation in the Corinthian Church', *JBL* 117 (1998) 481-501.

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11.4-5).[4] He represents those who follow what he preached collectively as the pure and virginal bride of Christ, but simultaneously raises the specter of Eve's error by suggesting that those who follow other 'super apostles' are being led astray as she was. Earlier in the letter, Paul himself had argued that Christians should not 'be mismated with unbelievers', but be separate from them (2 Cor 6.14-18). Both of these passages appeal to the well-known metaphorical analogy that equates Israel's relation to God with betrothal, and idolatrous disobedience to God with sexual immorality (e.g. Hos 2.19-20; 4.12-14).

These materials were used to develop and support widely different positions.[5] Some early Christians apparently took Paul's statements quite literally and in directions Paul is unlikely to have anticipated. By the late second century, Clement of Alexandria seems to know of Christians who cited 2 Cor 6.16-18 to argue that true believers should separate from married people.[6] Eventually, some Christians argued that the life of celibacy, embodied most pristinely by virgins, was the true and highest path to God and a preview of the future resurrection.[7] A few even went so far as to argue that a central purpose of the Savior's mission in the world was to end carnal procreation.[8] On the other hand, letters pseudonymously ascribed to Paul or Peter 'Christianized' marriage by admonishing ecclesial and familial households to retain a patriarchal order based on analogy to the model of divine rule,[9] by requiring bishops to be married (1 Tim 3.2), or by arguing that women are saved by bearing children (1 Tim 2.15). The author of 1 Tim 4.1-5 rebuked those who reject marriage as liars who are possessed by demons. Similarly Heb 13.4 argued vociferously for the honor of the undefiled marriage bed.

Despite the diversity of their views, however, Christians seem to have agreed on one point: that overcoming sexual desire (ἐπιθυμία) was a necessary part of moral purification and spiritual perfection. They disagreed, however, about how to accomplish this, and especially about whether overcoming desire was

4 See also Rev 21.2, 9; and interpretations of the Song of Songs in Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

5 See esp. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 65-90; Benjamin H. Dunning, *Specters of Paul: Sexual Difference in Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

6 For Clement's attempts to correct this view, see *Strom.* III,74.1; Annette Merz, 'Why Did the Pure Bride of Christ (2 Cor 11.2) Become a Wedded Wife (Eph 5.22-33)? Theses about the Intertextual Transformation of an Ecclesiological Metaphor', *JSNT* 79 (2000) 131-47, here 143.

7 See e.g., Tertullian *Exh. cast.* 9.4-5, and *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* 5-6. While the image of Jerusalem as the bride of the Lamb (Christ) in Rev 21.2, 9 does not discuss whether Christians should marry or not, note Rev 14.3-4 which states that 144,000 redeemed 'had not defiled themselves with women for they are virgins' (Rev 14.3-4).

8 See, for example, Clem. Alex. *Strom.* III,9.63; *Testimony of Truth* 30.28-30; cp. *Dial. Sav.* 144.15-22.

9 See, for example, the so-called household codes in Eph 5.21-6.9; Col 3.18-4.1; 1 Pet 2.18-3.7.

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compatible with sexual intercourse in marriage. Paul had feared that believers might be 'aflame with passion' and 'lack self-control' (1 Cor 7.9, 5), but elsewhere he intimated that unlike Gentiles who are ignorant of God, believers could engage in sex without improper, passionate desire (1 Thess 4.3-5).[10] So, too, Clement of Alexandria argued that although some Christians were given the gift of the celibate life, married believers could also lead holy lives since Christians alone are able to have sexual intercourse in marriage without desire because of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. 'We are children of will, not desire', he states.[11] Sexual intercourse, however, should be for the purpose of reproduction alone and be completely without passion—a husband should not have desire even for his wife.[12]

As far as I have discovered, the earliest surviving reference to the historical (incarnate) Jesus' marital state comes only in the late second century. Clement of Alexandria reports that some Christians appealed to an unmarried Jesus to justify virginal celibacy: They 'say outright that marriage is fornication and teach that it was introduced by the devil. They proudly say that *they are imitating the Lord who neither married* nor had any possession in this world, boasting that they understand the gospel better than anyone else.'[13] Although Clement himself opposes this stark rejection of marriage,[14] he does not directly contradict the claim that Jesus did not marry. By the late third to early fourth century, John Chrysostom argued that while sexual intercourse within marriage was allowed, celibacy was superior—far, far superior; after all, he claims, Jesus did not marry—a statement he offers apparently with no anticipation of being contradicted.[15] As the high value placed on celibacy and virginity flourished, the position that Jesus was a virgin who never married becomes widespread. Indeed affirmation of Christ's marriage to the Church tended to produce many 'brides of Christ', virgins who pledged themselves in 'spiritual marriage'.[16]

10 See Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 65-76.

11 Clement Alex. *Strom.* III,58. He may be referring here not to Paul but to John 1.12-13.

12 Clement Alex. *Strom.* III.58; see also my discussion of *The Secret Revelation of John* (Karen L. King, 'Reading Sex and Gender in the *Secret Revelation of John*', *JECS* 19 [2011] 519-38).

13 *Strom.* III,6.49.1 (trans. Henry Chadwick, *Alexandrian Christianity* [The Library of Christian Classics 2; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954] 62-3, my emphasis; Greek text in Otto Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrius, Stromata Buch I–IV* [GCS 15; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906] 218). Clement may be referring here to Tatian (see *Strom.* III.6.81-82); see also Irenaeus *Against Heresies* I.27.1; Eusebius *Eccl. Hist.* IV.29.

14 *Strom.* III.58; see also Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California, 2003) esp. 247-72.

15 *On Virginity* 11.1; 13.4.

16 See the excellent discussion of Elizabeth Clark, 'The Celibate Bridegroom and his Virginal Brides: Metaphor and the Marriage of Jesus in Early Christian Ascetic Exegesis', *Church History* 77 (2008) 1-25.

The first to appeal explicitly to Christ's marriage to the church in support of Christians' marrying seems to be Ephesians.[17] Ephesians 5.22-33 likens hierarchical, heterosexual relationships to Christ's relationship to the church.[18] While Ephesians does not state that the fleshly Jesus was married to a wife and had intercourse with her, it does invoke the relationship of Christ to the church positively in relation to human heterosexual marriage. Merz argues that Ephesians' position is formulated explicitly against other Christians who read Paul as devaluing marriage, if not entirely rejecting it.[19] It would seem that Paul's metaphor of the Church as the bride of Christ was interpreted in two directions: either to require celibacy or to elevate the spiritual value of human marriage.

Yet it was even possible to have it both ways! A century or so later, Tertullian (c. 160–225) refers to Eph 5.31-32 when he suggests that Christ could be considered to be 'a monogamist in spirit' insofar as he has one spouse, the Church.[20] Apparently assuming Paul is the author of Ephesians, he refers his readers to 'the apostle' who taught that the spiritual monogamy of Christ and the church corresponds to the monogamy of the flesh that had been prefigured by Adam and Eve.[21] And yet in this same passage, Tertullian also stated that Christ was 'entirely unmarried' (*innuptus in totem*),[22] and urged believers to a higher perfection by imitating Christ's state as *spado in carne* ('an impotent person' or 'eunuch in flesh').[23] Indeed Tertullian raised the whole issue of Jesus' marital status not to disallow marriage altogether but to convince fellow Christians that a *second* marriage was going too far.[24] In laying out this position, Tertullian makes a clear distinction between Christ's spiritual marriage to the church and his 'totally unmarried' flesh. This capacious position on Jesus' marital status was accompanied by a sexual ethic that allowed marriage within certain social and institutional strictures (including female subservience/obedience to males), but nonetheless valorized virginal celibacy as a higher state of sanctity.

In what follows I want to argue that the *Gospel of Philip* presents an alternative view, but one which draws upon many of the materials and engages some of the same issues discussed above, notably: the Genesis protology; images of Christ and the church in Eph 5; the relationship of sexual desire and (im)purity; and Jesus' marital status.

17 See e.g., the discussion of Andreas J. Kostenberger, 'The Mystery of Christ and the Church: Head and Body, "One Flesh"', *Trinity Journal* NS 12 (1991) 79-94.

18 See e.g., Pagels, 'Adam and Eve', 150.

19 Merz, 'Why Did the Pure Bride', 147.

20 Tertullian may also be alluding to 2 Cor 11.2-3.

21 See *On Monogamy* 5.7 (Paul Mattei, *Tertullien. Le Mariage unique [De monogamia]* [SC 343; Paris: Cerf, 1988] 152). Cp. also *Exh Cas.* 5.

22 See *On Monogamy* 5.5 (Mattei, *Tertullian*, 150, 152).

23 *On Monogamy* 5.6 (Mattei, *Tertullian*, 152); see Matt 19.8-9, 12.

24 See also Jerome *Against Jovinianus* 1.16, citing Eph 5.31-32 and 1 Thess 4.7.

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2. The Gospel of Philip[25]

The single extant copy of the *Gospel of Philip* was discovered in 1945 near the village of Nag Hammadi among a cache of fourth-century codices. Preserved only in Coptic, it is thought to have been originally composed in Greek, probably in the late second century CE.[26] The work's apparent lack of linear-logical coherence has led to considerable speculation,[27] but it is probably best conceived as a set of excerpts or notes, possibly edited over time.[28] Its intellectual milieu is that of the so-called 'Oriental school' of Valentinian Christianity.[29]

It has long been recognized that one of the main topics of the *Gospel of Philip* is ritual, including 'the bridal chamber'.[30] Numerous studies have discussed how this ritual might have been enacted, as well as what practices and attitudes toward sexuality and marriage are implied by its imagery. Three questions particularly have been at issue: Does the *Gospel of Philip* depict the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene as 'spiritual' companionship or 'real' marriage? Was sexual intercourse performed in the ritual of the bridal chamber? What is the

25 See Hans-Martin Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II,3). Neu herausgegeben, übersetzt und erklärt* (Texte und Untersuchungen 143; Berlin: Akademie, 1997). Unless otherwise noted, the English translations are the author's based on Schenke's text, with reference also to Bentley Layton (text) and Wesley W. Isenberg (trans.), 'The Gospel of Philip', *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7* (NHS 20; Leiden: Brill, 1989) 145-215.

26 See Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 4-5; 'Das Philippusevangelium (NHCII,3),' *Antike christlich Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. 1. Band: Evangelien und Verwandtes Teilband 1* (ed. Christoph Markschies and Jens Schröter; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 527-36; Hugo Lundhaug suggests layers dating to different periods (*Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and Exegesis on the Soul* (NHMS 37; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 162, 357-94.

27 See Einar Thomassen, 'How Valentinian Is the *Gospel of Philip*?', *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire; NHS 44; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 252-3; Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 6-8; for an overview of the problem, see Martha Lee Turner, 'On the Coherence of the Gospel according to Philip', *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years* (ed. Turner and McGuire) 223-50; Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 155-62, 345-9.

28 See Martha Lee Turner, *The Gospel according to Philip: The Sources and Coherence of an Early Christian Collection* (NHMS 38; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 5-8; Bas van Os, 'Baptism in the Bridal Chamber: The *Gospel of Philip* as a Valentinian Baptismal Instruction' (PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2007), online: http://dissertations.ub.rug.nl/faculties/ theology/2007/l.k.van.os/).

29 See esp. Thomassen, 'How Valentinian'; idem, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'* (NHMS 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006).

30 For more on the bridal chamber in Valentinian literature, see Minna Heimola, *Christian Identity in the Gospel of Philip* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2011) 149-67. For Valentinian ritual, see Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 333-414, esp. concerning *Gospel of Philip*, see 341-50 and 90-102.

general position of the *Gospel of Philip* on Christians' marrying?[31] In order to address these questions, we will first consider recent work on the bridal chamber ritual before turning to the marital status of Jesus and the relation of the *Gospel of Philip* to Ephesians.

2.1. *The Ritual of the Bridal Chamber*

The *Gospel of Philip* refers to several ritual practices performed by the Savior: ⲁⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓ[ⲥ ⲣ̄]ϩⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ ϩⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲟⲩⲃⲁ[ⲡ]ⲧⲓⲥⲙⲁ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲭⲣⲓⲥⲙⲁ ⲙⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲩⲭⲁⲣ[ⲓⲥⲧ]ⲓⲁ ⲙⲛ̣ⲟⲩⲥⲱⲧⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ ('The Lord did everything in a mysterious mode: baptism and chrism and Eucharist and redemption and a bridal chamber'; *Gos. Phil.* 67.27-30).[32] Scholars have focused discussion on whether these were separate rituals or parts of a single ritual, how these rites were performed, and how to interpret the many statements that the *Gospel of Philip* makes about them. Most persuasive in my opinion are the arguments of those who see these as a single initiation ritual[33] involving water baptism, anointing with oil, exchange of a kiss, and a Eucharist meal.[34] Schmid has argued that this entire complex of ritual actions may have been collectively referred to as 'the bridal chamber',[35] a designation that articulates the *Gospel of Philip*'s conceptuality of salvation as unification.

Thomassen demonstrates convincingly how the *Gospel of Philip* represents this initiation ritual in a complex of overlapping and mutually intersecting layers of protological narrative, historical events of salvation, and effective spiritual transformation.[36] The interrelation of these layers is articulated in terms of 'types and images', which are used in the world to represent spiritual truth. As *Gos. Phil.* 67.9-18 says,

31 See Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved. Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (NHMS 40: Leiden: Brill, 1996) 154.

32 Translation follows the analysis of Einar Thomassen, '*Gos. Philip* 67:27-30: Not "In a Mystery",' *Coptica, gnostica, manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk* (ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier; Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval; Louvain: Peeters, 2006) 925-39, here 939; see also Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 311-16.

33 See esp. Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 251, 372-7; Thomassen, 'How Valentinian', 267; *The Spiritual Seed*, 90-102, 341; Herbert Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus. Anfänge einer Theorie des Sakraments im koptischen Philippusevangelium (NHC II 3)* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 88; Leiden: Brill, 2007) esp. 83-109.

34 Van Os understands the ritual to have two parts, baptism and chrism followed by the Eucharist and greeting with a kiss. These are 'the rituals in the world today' while bridal chamber and redemption are 'their hidden realities' ('Baptism in the Bridal Chamber', 91-9). He also notes that 'our bridal chamber' refers to 'the earthly cult-room and/or the inmost being of the believer, it is an image of the heavenly bridal chamber, the plerôma' (96).

35 Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, 103-5; see also 102 n. 388 for discussion of the specific terminology used; Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 105-9, 325-35.

36 See Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 90-102, 272.

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> ⲧⲁⲗⲏⲑⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲡⲉⲥⲉⲓ ⲉⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲉⲥⲕⲁⲕⲁϩⲏⲩ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲥⲉⲓ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲩⲡⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ⲛ̄ϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲫⲛⲁⲓⲧⲉ̄ ⲁⲛ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲣⲏⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲭⲡⲟ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲥⲟⲡ ⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲙⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩ ϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲛ̄ⲭⲡⲟ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲥⲟⲡ ⲱⲱⲉ ⲁⲗⲏⲱⲥ ⲁⲧⲣⲟⲩⲭⲡⲟⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲥⲟⲡ ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲧϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲁⲱ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲓⲕⲱⲛ ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲟⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲱⲱⲉ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲥⲧⲱⲟⲩⲛ ⲡⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲟⲓⲕⲱⲛ ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲟⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲱⲱⲉ ⲉⲧⲣⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲧⲁⲗⲏⲑⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲉⲓ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲡⲟⲕⲁⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ ('The truth did not come into the cosmos naked, but it came in types and images. It will not receive it in any other way. There is a rebirth and an image of rebirth. It is necessary for truth to be born again through the image. What kind is the resurrection and the image? It is necessary to arise through the image. The bridal chamber and the image? It is necessary to enter into the truth, which is the restoration, through the image.')[37]

Events that happen in the world, whether seen in protological narrative, historical events, or ritual, are not themselves the truth, as such, but only point to the truth as its image or type.[38] In representing events this way, the *Gospel of Philip* does not denigrate the material-linguistic world, but in fact indicates that the material cosmos belongs to the divine plan to bring people to salvation.

At the same time, the names given to things in the world have the capacity to distort the truth, and indeed the powers of the world have used that capacity to lead people astray.[39] As an example, the *Gospel of Philip* polemicizes against the inadequate beliefs and practices of other Christians who misunderstand central terms of the faith (such as father, son, holy spirit, life, light, church, resurrection), mistaking the names given to them in this world for what is ultimately real (*Gos. Phil.* 53.23-35). Nonetheless, such names have utility now for they point toward the truth (*Gos. Phil.* 54.13-15), even though they have no place in the eternal realm (*Gos. Phil.* 54.4-5). This is a lesson that those being instructed for baptism (and perhaps other Christians as well) have yet to learn.

In addition to names, types, and images, the *Gospel of Philip* uses the language of 'mystery' to articulate the interrelation of ritual and Jesus' incarnate activity. In an illuminating exposition of *Gos. Phil.* 67.27 (ⲁⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓ[ⲥ ⲡ̄]ϩⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ ϩⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ, often mistranslated, as 'The Lord did everything *in a mystery*'), Thomassen argues that 'mystery' does not refer to a particular sacrament, but should be understood adverbially, referring to *the mode* in which the Lord did everything. The language of mystery, he argues, refers to 'the symbolic-paradigmatic quality of the incarnated Saviour's acts, and specifically his baptism, where he himself was redeemed and thereby provided the continuously efficient model of the redemption of his followers through ritual acts'.[40] A good example is *Gos. Phil.* 70.34–71.3, which presents the 'historical' action of Jesus'

37 My translation follows Schenke's exegesis (*Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 45, 374-7).

38 See Pagels, 'Ritual', 287-8; Gillian Beattie (*Women and Marriage in Paul and his Early Interpreters* [London: T&T Clark, 2005] 126).

39 See *Gos. Phil.* 53.23–54.31.

40 See Thomassen, '*Gos. Philip* 67.27-30: Not "in a Mystery"', 939.

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baptism in the Jordan river as the revelation of the fullness of the kingdom of God. It is also interpreted as effecting Jesus' own rebirth, anointing, and redemption. Moreover, Thomassen suggests, Jesus being baptized provides the symbolic paradigm for the effective baptismal ritual performed by initiates: 'The Savior saves not simply by virtue of his coming to rescue his own kin lost in the cosmos, but also by himself undergoing and prefiguring a process of salvation which is to be re-enacted in ritual acts'.[41] Although Thomassen here focuses on baptism, his argument encompasses other events of Jesus' bodily existence as well, including his virginal birth and incarnation (*Gos. Phil.* 71.3-15; 67.9-18), ministry,[42] and cross and resurrection (*Gos. Phil.* 70.34–71.3; 73.8-19; 74.18-27)—to these, I will argue below, kissing and marriage should be added. These, too, would have been considered by the *Gospel of Philip* to be paradigmatic events for the ritual-symbolic enactments that simultaneously effected spiritual perfection and reunification in this world and salvation in the divine realm.

Thomassen makes two further points that are crucial to understanding the relation between the acts of the Savior and Christian initiation ritual in the *Gospel of Philip*:

> First, since the acts of the Savior are, by virtue of their character as symbols, in reality one single act, each of the ritual acts will potentially reflect all of the individual components of the Savior's acts. That is to say that baptism, anointing, eucharist, redemption and the bridal chamber may each be correlated with the Saviour's incarnation as well as with his baptism and his crucifixion. Secondly, the symbolic correlation of Saviour and initiand leads to the assumption by the Saviour of the roles of both Saviour and *salvandus*.[43]

When these points are added to the hermeneutical principle that divine truth appears in the world in types and images, it is not surprising to find examples where the spiritual joining of male and female in the bridal chamber ritual is described in relation to Jesus' incarnation, baptism, and, I argue, marriage as well.[44] As Thomassen points out, 'This method of identifying the various events of the Saviour's work with one another, and these again with the various components of the ritual, creates a nearly inexhaustible source of symbolic multivalence'[45]—and, one might add, considerable potential for theological creativity.

41 'How Valentinian', 256.

42 For example, *Gos. Phil.* 73.23-27 may refer to gospel stories of food miracles, or eucharistic allusions to Christ's body as the bread of life.

43 Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 95.

44 See Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 90-102. He argues that the *Gospel of Philip* collapses the sequential narrative of protology (93-4) and salvation history (101, 102) in the service of 'synchronic typology and symbolism'.

45 Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 95.

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In light of these general conceptions, let us now examine more closely how the *Gospel of Philip* understands the inter-relation of events in this world, ritual practice, and salvation with regard to the bridal chamber, marriage, and sexuality.

As in other Christian literature, the *Gospel of Philip* turns to Genesis to understand the human condition. Rather than see death as the result of eating the fruit, however, *Gos. Phil.* 70.9-17 states that death came into existence because Eve separated from Adam,[46] so that salvation is achieved by repairing this division through reuniting the two. The separation of woman from man is presumably a reference to Gen 2.21-23, where a 'rib' was removed from the first human and made into a woman. Readers are told that Christ's appearance in the world was intended to bring about their reunification. How? The *Gospel of Philip* 71.16-21 presents the virginal birth of Jesus as a kind of corrective type (a recapitulation?) of Adam's creation:

> ⲁⲁⲇⲁⲙ ⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲥⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲡⲛ̄ⲁ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲕⲁϩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲩⲭⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲭ̄ⲥ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲭⲉⲕⲁⲁⲥ ⲡⲉⲥⲗⲟⲟⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϩⲱⲱⲡⲉ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲉϩⲟⲩⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲉⲩⲛⲁ[ⲥ]ⲉϩⲱⲩ ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲩ ('Adam came into being from two virgins, from the spirit and from the virgin earth. Christ, therefore, was born from a virgin to rectify the fall which occurred in the beginning.')[47]

Since the 'fall' appears to occur not with Adam's creation but in the separation of the woman from him, Jesus' incarnation is understood not only as virginal but also as a proper unification and a product of the 'great' bridal chamber:

> *GosPhil* 71.3-15: ⲉⲱϫⲉ ⲱⲱⲉ ⲉϫⲱ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲁⲡⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲏⲩ ϩⲱⲧⲣ̄ ⲁⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϩⲉⲓ ⲁⲡⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲩⲕⲱⲧ ⲣ̄ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲫⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲁⲩⲃⲱⲗⲡ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲃ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲁⲉⲓ ⲡⲉⲩⲥⲱⲙⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲙ̄ⲫⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲁⲩⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲙ ⲡⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲑⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϩⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲛⲩⲙⲫⲓⲟⲥ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲧⲛⲩⲙⲫⲏ ⲧⲁⲉⲓ ⲧⲉ ⲑⲉ ⲁ⳨ ⲧⲉϩⲟ ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲏⲣⲩ ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲩ ϩⲣⲁⲓ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧⲩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ (Indeed, it is necessary to utter a mystery. The Father of the All united with the virgin who came down. And a fire illuminated him on that day. He appeared in the great bridal chamber. It was because of this that his body came into being on that day. He went from the bridal chamber like one who came into being from the bridegroom and the bride. This is the way Jesus established the All in it through these.')

Two bridal chambers are evident here, the 'great' bridal chamber of the Father and the virgin, and the one belonging to the bridegroom and the bride. These are identified with each other at *Gos. Phil.* 69.36-70: ⲕⲉ[ⲟⲩⲁ ⲁⲛ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲛ̄]ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ

46 See Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 411-13; also Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University, 2008), 55-7.

47 Trans. Isenberg, 185. See also *Gos. Phil.* 55.27-28 which states that Mary (the mother) is 'the virgin whom no power defiled'.

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ⲉⲓⲙⲏ ⲑⲓⲕⲱⲛ̣ [ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲡ]ⲥⲁ ⲛⲧⲡ[ⲉ] ('[Our] bridal chamber is [nothing oth]er than the image [of the bridal chamber that] is [a]bove'). In this way, the *Gospel of Philip* links the joining of the Father and virgin in the heavenly bridal chamber with Jesus' virginal birth and the appearance of his body. The passage further suggests that the 'he' who exits from the ritual of the bridal chamber is like a child born of a wedded couple.

Remembering Thomassen's point that each act of the Savior implies the rest, we can begin to grasp the multiple levels and mutual implications that this passage suggests. Its complexity is usefully aided by the lack of clear identifications and the use of pronouns whose antecedents are ambiguous. For example, who is meant by the 'he' who appeared, whose body came into being, and who went forth from the bridal chamber? Is this one figure or several? Probably several figures (Jesus, the Church, the initiate), and they are all implicated in the several acts that are mentioned (incarnation, bridal chamber, marriage). Thus the incarnation of Jesus is identified with the appearance of the incarnate Church (his body), and the church-body refers to both the collective membership on earth and the individual initiate who through the ritual of the bridal chamber becomes not merely a Christian but a Christ.[48]

Jesus' incarnation results from the unification of the Father of the All with the virgin who came down;[49] it is said to be the revelation of the heavenly bridal chamber in the material world (*Gos. Phil.* 71.3-15). As the child of the Father (bridegroom) and the virgin (bride), his birth is 'an image' for the spiritual (re)birth of all who receive him.[50] Similarly everyone who undergoes the bridal chamber ritual becomes a child and receives the light:

> ⲉⲣϣⲁ ⲟⲩⲁ ϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ϣⲏⲡⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ ⲭⲛⲁϫⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ ⲟⲩⲁ ϫⲓⲧⲟ ⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲉⲓⲙⲁ ⲭⲛⲁϣϫⲓⲧⲟ ⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲕⲉⲙⲁ ('If anyone becomes a child of the bridal chamber, he will receive the light. It anyone does not receive it while he is in this place, he will not receive it in the other place.'[51])

This passage also makes clear that the ritual of the bridal chamber is necessary for salvation. Another passage (*Gos. Phil.* 58.10-14), probably containing a liturgical formula, represents the joining of male and female in the bridal chamber as the union of the redeemed person's true light-self with his or her heavenly twin (σύζυγος) or angel:

48 See *Gos. Phil.* 67.26-27; becoming a Christian is also attributed to the illuminating fire of the anointing (chrism) (*Gos. Phil.* 67.5, 19-27; 74.12-16).

49 Schenke suggests the Father and the virgin refer to the Savior and Sophia-Achamoth (*Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 419-21); Thomassen suggests that they refer to the Savior in his double roles as bridegroom (redeemer) and bride (redeemed) ('How Valentinian', 257-63). Both interpretations are clearly possible and may be mutually implied.

50 See Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 203-7.

51 *Gos. Phil.* 86.4-7, trans. Isenberg, 213.

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> ⲡⲉϫⲁϥ ϧⲫⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲧϧⲙⲁⲩ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲉⲩⲭⲁⲣⲓⲥⲧⲉⲓⲁ ϫⲉ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϩϩⲱⲧⲃ̄ ϧⲡⲧⲉⲗⲉⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ ⲉⲡⲡⲛ̄ⲁ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ ϩⲟⲧⲃ̄ ⲛ̄ⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲉⲣⲟⲛ ϩⲱⲱⲛ ⲁⲛϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ ('He said on that day in the thanksgiving, "You who have joined the perfect light to the holy spirit, join the angels with us also as the images"'.)[52]

Gospel of Philip 71.3-15 concludes by reiterating that Jesus set firm 'the All' (ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ) in it (the bridal chamber) through these (the bride and bridegroom).[53] The All, Schenke argues, should be understood here as 'the entirety of the preexistent body of Christ, which returns to the heavenly Fullness though Jesus' salvific deeds on earth'.[54] The bridal chamber ritual thus effects on earth the establishment of the pre-existent Church, the body of Christ, and thereby simultaneously effects the eschatological salvation of its individual members, the children of light, already in this life ('realized eschatology').[55]

To summarize thus far: Previous scholarship has shown that the *Gospel of Philip* presents Jesus' virginal birth, incarnation, and baptism (among other events[56]) as symbolic paradigms for the ritual of the bridal chamber in which the individual initiate is reunited with his/her spiritual double through practices of baptism, anointing, kissing, and a Eucharist meal. By receiving spiritual rebirth as a child of the bridal chamber and becoming a Christ, the initiate realizes his/her incarnate role as a member of the Church, which is the pre-existent body of Christ. The bridal chamber ritual thus undoes the believer's separation from God (figured in the separation of Eve from Adam) and effects salvation by the spiritual union of the believer with his/her double (figured by analogy to heterosexual marriage).

2.2. *Jesus' Marital Status and its Implications for Christians' Marrying*

As we have seen, Thomassen has argued that a central logic of the *Gospel of Philip* is precisely to inculcate the view that Jesus' incarnate acts *simultaneously* are 'real', have spiritual-symbolic meaning, and are paradigmatic for ritual practices that effect salvation. From this perspective the question of whether Jesus' relation to Mary Magdalene is *either* spiritual (metaphorical) *or* real (actual marriage) poses a false dichotomy. Rather, following Thomassen's logic, I want to argue that, according to the *Gospel of Philip*, the incarnate Jesus' real marital relationship with Mary Magdalene provides the spiritual-symbolic meaning and the paradigm for the image of the initiation ritual as a bridal chamber. That is, the marriage is both actual and spiritual; it does not merely provide the metaphorical meaning of salvation, but effectively enables salvation for those who enter the

52 See Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 248-51.

53 Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 420.

54 *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 421; see also Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 321-4.

55 Christoph Markschies argues that Valentinus held that baptism conferred salvation in this life (*Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)], 1992] 128, 132).

56 For example, the crucifixion or the rending of the temple veil.

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bridal chamber and are united with their spiritual doubles. The marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is thus both real and spiritually effective.

If we turn now to the question of Jesus' marital status, two passages are particularly important. The first is *Gos. Phil.* 59.6-11, which refers to Mary Magdalene as Jesus' ⲕⲟⲓⲛⲱⲛⲟⲥ and ϩⲱⲧⲣⲉ:

> ⲛⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ ϣⲟⲙⲧⲉ ⲙⲟⲟϣⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙ ⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓϣ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲧⲉϥⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲥⲥⲱⲛⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙⲁⲅⲇⲁⲗⲏⲛⲏ ⲧⲁⲉⲓ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲭⲉ ⲧⲉϥⲕⲟⲓⲛⲱⲛⲟⲥ ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉϥⲥⲱⲛⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉϥⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲧⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉϥϩⲱⲧⲣⲉ ⲧⲉ ('There are three who always walked with the Lord: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, who is called his *koinônos*. For Mary is his sister and [Mary is] his mother and [Mary is] his *hôtre*.')

Both terms have been translated neutrally as 'companion',[57] and indeed neither term necessarily implies marriage or sexual intercourse. And yet they often do have such implications, depending upon context. At *Gos. Phil.* 82.1 and 78.18, the related Greco-Coptic verb ⲣ̄ⲕⲟⲓⲛⲱⲛⲉⲓ clearly refers to heterosexual intercourse.[58] The word group ϩⲱⲧⲣ ('join, unite') is used generally to refer to sexual intercourse and marriage,[59] as well as specifically to describe ritual unification in the *Gospel of Philip*.[60] It is therefore plausible to read this passage as a reference by Jesus to Mary Magdalene as 'his spouse'[61] and 'the one he is joined with', i.e., in marriage. Marjanen notes that the *Gospel of Philip* usually uses the term ⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ when referring to someone's 'wife'.[62] The use of these other terms here may work to connect Jesus' relation with her paradigmatically with the marriage of the church with Christ and to invoke their 'joining' as a

57 For example by Isenberg in Layton, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7*, 159; Schenke translates them both as 'Gefährtin', putting the first use in scare quotes (*Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 29); for the range of options, see Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 151-6.

58 In the *Gospel of Philip* this verb is also applied to relations of evil spirits with souls (65.1-4), *logos* with *logos*, light with light, and humans with light (78.30, 31; 79.2).

59 For marriage as a yoking together, ⲡϩⲱⲧⲣ ⲙⲡⲅⲁⲙⲟⲥ, see E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Homilies in the Dialect of Upper Egypt Edited from the Papyrus Codex Oriental 5001 in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1910) 47, referenced by W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) 726b. ϩⲱⲧⲣ can also translate the Greek συζυγία, a word signifying a 'yoke of animals', but also with the sexual connotation of '*coupling, copulation*'. Moreover, in Greek, married partners are commonly referred to as σύζυγος ('*yoked together, paired, united*, esp. by marriage), with the feminine substantive meaning '*wife*' (see Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart James, *A Greek–English Lexicon* [Oxford: Oxford University, 9th ed. 1996]). I thank AnneMarie Luijendijk for this note.

60 See Jorunn J. Buckley and Deirdre J. Good, 'Sacramental Language and Verbs of Generating, Creating, and Begetting in the *Gospel of Philip*,' *JECS* 5 (1997) 1-19, see 2-3, 12, 15; Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, 97-100.

61 Bart D. Ehrman translates the term *koinônos* as 'lover' in *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003) 41.

62 *Gos. Phil.* 65.20; 70.19; 76.7; 82.1; see Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 154.

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technical term for salvific unification in the bridal chamber ritual. In other words, the terms not only work to convey the reality of the marital relation but *also* point toward symbolic-paradigmatic significance in ways that the term ϲϩιмϵ would not. Moreover, the notion that three Marys had a special status in Jesus' life has often been seen as a symbolic pointer toward the triple nature of the Holy Spirit or Christ's *syzugos*. Such an allegorical reading does not, however, imply that Jesus did not have a mother, a sister, and a wife, each named Mary.[63] The *Gospel of Philip*'s logic set out by Thomassen clearly makes the need to choose between the metaphorical and the real to be missing the point: both are required to convey how Jesus' incarnation is effective for ritual practice.

A second passage, *Gos. Phil.* 63.30–64.5, also suggests an intimate relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene:

> ⲧⲥⲱϕⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧ̣[ⲉ ⲉⲣⲟ]ⲥ ⲭⲉ ⲧⲥⲧⲓⲣⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲥ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲙⲁⲁ[ⲩ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲁⲅ]ⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ [ⲧ]ⲕⲟⲓⲛⲱⲛⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲥ[ⲱⲧⲏⲣ ⲙⲁ]ⲣⲓⲁ ⲧⲙⲁⲣ[ⲇⲁ]ⲗⲏⲛⲏ ⲛⲉⲣⲉ ⲡⲥ̣[ⲱⲧⲏⲣ ⲙⲉ] ⲙ̣ⲙⲟ̣[ⲥ ⲛ̄]ϩⲟⲩⲟ ⲁⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧ[ⲏⲥ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉⲩ]ⲁⲥⲡⲁⲍⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ ⲁⲧⲉⲥ̣[ⲧⲁⲡⲣⲟ ⲛ̄ϩⲁϩ] ⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲡ ⲁⲡⲕⲉⲥⲉⲉⲡⲉ ⲙ̣[ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ..]. ⲉⲣⲟ.[.].[..]ⲙⲁ ⲡⲉⲭⲁⲩ ⲛⲁⲩ ⲭⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ ⲕⲙⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲣⲟⲛ ⲧⲏⲣⲛ̄ ⲁⲩⲟⲩⲱϣ̄ ⲛ̄ⲃⲓ ⲡⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣ ⲡⲉⲭⲁⲩ ⲛⲁⲩ {ⲡⲉⲭⲁⲩ ⲛⲁⲩ} ⲭⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ †ⲙⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲱⲧⲛ̄ ⲁⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲥϩⲉ ('Wisdom, who is called "barren", is the mother [of the an]gels and the *koinônos* of the S[avior, Ma]ry Magdalene. The S[avior loved her] more than [all] the discip[le]s [and he] kissed her [mouth many] times. The other [disciples]... They said to him, "Why do you love her more than us?" The Savior answered them, "Why do I not love you like her?"')

While the lacuna makes certainty impossible, the *Gospel of Philip* arguably refers here again to Mary Magdalene as Jesus' ϰοιⲛⲱⲛⲟⲥ, and possibly also identifies her as the type of the heavenly Sophia, whose union with the Savior produces the heavenly image for the earthly bridal chamber.[64]

63 Hans-Josef Klauck has argued that the *Gospel of Philip* is here dependent on John 19.25 ('Die dreifache Maria. Zur Rezeption von John 19,25 in EvPhil 32', *The Four Gospels* [ed. F. van Segbroeck; Leuven: Leuven University, 1992] 3.2343-58); see also Epiphanius *Panarion* 78.8,1; 78.9,6 which says Jesus had a sister named Mary; references from Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 161 n. 61). For further discussion, see Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 269-72, who understands the point of the passage to clarify that the three women with especially close relations to Jesus are all named Mary. He notes that the terminology here could refer to marriage with Mary Magdalene, but in the end prefers an allegorical reading in which the three earthly Marys are a symbol of the three-fold nature of the Holy Spirit as the Savior's mother, sister, and conjugal mate. Alternatively Pagels suggested that they 'serve as images of Christ's spiritual *syzugos* in her triple manifestations, respectively, as Holy Spirit, wisdom (Eve), and as his "companion" and bride, the church (*Gos. Phil.* 55)' ('Adam and Eve', 167); see also Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 160-2; Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 396-7.

64 The Coptic text here follows the restoration of Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 36, but he understands Sophia, not Mary Magdalene, to be the *koinônos* of the Savior (*Das Philippus-*

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The statement that Jesus kissed Mary offers further support. While kissing can be read to refer metaphorically to spiritual, not carnal relations, there is again no reason to see these interpretive options as mutually exclusive. Moreover, if there were no actual kissing, it would be difficult to understand the jealousy of the disciples, which in this context appears to be an indication that they failed to grasp the spiritual meaning of the kissing. Jesus' reply is a challenge to them (and the reader) to consider further. This perspective is strengthened by considering *Gos. Phil.* 59.2-6, where the practice of greeting each other with a kiss is explicitly presented as effecting *spiritual* reproduction: ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲅⲁⲣ ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲡⲉⲓ ⲉⲩϣⲱ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲩⲭⲡⲟ ⲇⲓⲁ ⲧⲟⲩⲧⲟ ⲁⲛⲟⲛ ϩⲱⲱⲛ ⲧⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲓ ⲉⲣⲏ̄ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲣⲏⲩ ⲉⲛⲭⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲱ̂ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲭⲁⲣⲓⲥ ⲉⲧϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲣⲏⲩ ('For it is by a kiss that the perfect conceive and give birth. For this reason we also kiss one another, receiving conception from the grace which is in one another').[65] The initiation ritual of the bridal chamber would very likely have included this common Christian practice of exchanging a kiss[66]

Evangelium, 37, 333-6). He takes 'Mary Magdalene' in *Gos. Phil.* 63.33 as the preposed subject of a new sentence, which would result in the English translation: 'Wisdom, who is called "barren", is the mother [of the an]gels and the *koinônos* of the S[avior]. The S[avior] loved Ma]ry Magdalene more than [all] the discip[le]s [and he] kissed her [mouth many] times.' Nonetheless Schenke concludes that the direct proximity of these sayings about Sophia and Mary Magdalene makes it appear that the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene is represented as the image of the heavenly syzygy between the Savior and Sophia, a pairing that replays the Valentinian syzygy of Christ and the Holy Spirit. He concludes, '[I]m Blick auf das, was als Kontext im EvPhil noch kommt, wird wohl kein Leser den Gedanken vermeiden können, daß die κοινωνία zwischen Jesus und Maria Magdalena *auch* ein Typos für das Mysterium des Brautgemachs ist' (*Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 336). In contrast, my reading understands 'Mary Magdalene' in *Gos. Phil.* 63.33 to stand in apposition to *koinônos*, such that Mary Magdalene is presented as the type of the heavenly Sophia. This reading is supported by *Gos. Phil.* 59.6-11 where the term *koinônos* is clearly used to refer to Mary Magdalene. Isenberg offers yet a third reading (see 'The Gospel of Philip', 166-7). He restores *Gos. Phil.* 63.33 with ⲙ̄ⲡⲥ[ⲱ̄ⲣ̄ ⲧⲉ ⲙⲁ]ⲣⲓⲁ, abbreviating 'Savior' to make room for the subject (theme) of a nominal sentence (ⲧⲉ), so that the English translation would now read: 'Wisdom, who is called "barren", is the mother [of the an]gels. And the *koinônos* of the S[avior is Ma]ry Magalene. [The S[avior loved her] more than [all] the discip[le]s [and he] kissed her [mouth many] times.' My reading agrees with Isenberg in identifying Mary Magdalene as Jesus' *koinônos*, but is distinguished from him in identifying Wisdom with Mary Magdalene.

65 Trans. Isenberg.

66 *Gos. Phil.* 59.2-6; see esp. Schenke's discussion in *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 264-9; Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, 87 n. 331. Michael Penn shows that the common practice of greeting family members with a kiss to a great extent defined the boundaries of family relations. By making the exchange of kisses central to Christian practice, Christians were engaged in producing a new kind of family ('Performing Family: Ritual Kissing and the Construction of Early Christian Kinship,' *JECS* 10 [2002] 167). He also notes that both Christian ritual kisses and familial kisses were on the lips (156, 159), which I suggest supports the likelihood of

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(perhaps in conjunction with the Eucharist), and again Jesus' kissing Mary would have a symbolic-paradigmatic value. The disciples' jealousy becomes a pedagogical opportunity to instruct them not to mistake the things of this world for what is ultimately real (*Gos. Phil.* 53.23-35), but rather to understand that such acts as kissing are the types through which truth comes into the world (*Gos. Phil.* 67.9-18). Thus the multivalent representation of Mary as Jesus' *koinônos* and *hotre*, her link with the heavenly Sophia or Holy Spirit, as well as Jesus kissing her, all function as symbolic-paradigms for the salvation effected in the bridal chamber.

This logic, however, raises the question of whether sexual intercourse took place between initiates in the bridal chamber, as has sometimes been suggested.[67] For me, the decisive point is simply that the rite would have been for individuals, not couples. In the same way that Jesus' actual baptism is an image for Christian

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the restoration of ⲧⲁⲡⲣⲟ ('mouth') at *Gos. Phil.* 64.36. Moreover, I would argue that the verb ⲁⲥⲡⲁⲍⲉ (Greek ἀσπάζεσθαι), often translated neutrally as 'greet', probably implies a kiss of greeting (e.g. *Gos. Mary* 8.12-13). See also Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 158-60; Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 298-9; van Os, 'Baptism in the Bridal Chamber', 101-4.

67 Some scholars have argued that the bridal chamber involved only symbolic or spiritual union of male and female (see, e.g., Hans-Martin Schenke, '"Das Evangelium nach Philippus". Ein Evangelium der Valentinianer aus dem Funde von Nag Hammadi,' *Theologische Literatur Zeitung* 84 [1959] 1-26, esp. 5; Michael A. Williams, 'Realized Eschatology in the Gospel of Philip,' *Restoration Quarterly* 3 [1971] 1-17; Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1996] 148-50; Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 151-60; Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 405; Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, 108 n. 413, 120-7, 486; Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 275-9, 302-3 understands the primary 'joining' to be of the Christian with Christ). Others have argued for actual marriage/intercourse (see, e.g., Jorunn J. Buckley, 'A Cult Mystery in the Gospel of Philip,' *JBL* 99 [1980] 569-81; April D. DeConick, 'The True Mysteries: Sacramentalism in *The Gospel of Philip*,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 55 [2001] 225-61, esp. 257-8). Pagels argues that the problem arises in part because 'there is *no unambiguous evidence*, either in the *Gospel of Philip* or in the church fathers to show how this author intended to use sexual imagery' ('The "Mystery of Marriage" in the *Gospel of Philip* Revisited', *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* [ed. Birger A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991] 446, emphasis original); rather, the author of the *Gospel of Philip* purposefully 'refrains from offering specific instructions, and, in particular, refrains from exclusively advocating either celibacy or marriage' (453; see also 442-5; Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* [New York: Random House, 1988] 70-2; see also Beattie, *Women and Marriage*, 127-31). My position is that framing the question as exclusively *either* spiritual *or* real poses a distinction the text is not making; its goal is to teach the spiritual meanings (or misconceptions) of what 'really' occurs in the world.

It should also be noted that different conceptualities of ritual theory are operating in the disagreements about whether to regard the bridal chamber as 'mystery', 'sacrament', or 'ritual' (see here esp. Buckley, 'A Cult Mystery'; Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus*, 26-44). In calling the bridal chamber a 'ritual', I follow Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1992).

baptism, the *Gospel of Philip* presents the marriage of Jesus and Mary as also an actual historical reality that provides a symbolic-paradigmatic model for the spiritual reunification of male and female (the initiate and his/her angel) in the ritual of the bridal chamber.[68] Thus the bridal chamber is not a ceremony in which two people are actually married or engage in intercourse, but a ritual which unites the individual initiate with his/her angelic/spiritual double. Something 'real' happens, but it is reunification not sex.

What does all this imply about the *Gospel of Philip*'s attitude toward Christians' marrying? The facts that marriage and kissing are described spiritually (*Gos. Phil.* 59.2-6) and that sexual intercourse was not part of the ritual of the bridal chamber do not mean that Christians who went through this initiation ritual did not marry and have children.[69] A variety of sources indicates that the Christian group associated with the *Gospel of Philip*, the Valentinians,[70] married. Clement of Alexandria writes, 'The Valentinians, who derive marital unions (*syzygies*) from the divine emanations from above, find marriage acceptable' (εὐαρεστοῦνται 'well pleasing').[71] Irenaeus also indicates that the Valentinians believed that 'the ineffable and unnamable *syzygia* came down from above' and that it is necessary to marry in this life to attain to the truth.[72] And the anonymous *Testimony of Truth* (NHC IX, 3.56-58), probably dating to the third century CE, condemns heretics who allowed sexual intercourse, among them apparently Valentinus and his disciples. It would therefore be entirely plausible that, as a Valentinian work, the *Gospel of Philip*, too, would approve of marriage between Christians.[73]

68 A similar line of discussion is offered by Ruben Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis. Traditionsgeschichte und Theologie eines Bildfelds in Urchristentum und antiker Umwelt* (WUNT 122; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001) 580-99.

69 See Heimola, *Christian Identity*, 265-84.

70 On Valentinian Christianity, see Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*; Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*.

71 *Strom.* III,1.1; Greek text in Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 195; English translation by the author.

72 *Against Heresies* I,6.4; see Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, ed. and trans., *Irénée de Lyon. Contre les Hérésies Livre Un* (Paris: Cerf, 1979) 68-101. Irenaeus may be mistaking the requirement of the bridal chamber ritual for actual marriage. In any case, he implies polemically that the Valentinian ritual licensed sexual immorality, a charge Dunderberg (correctly in my opinion) labels 'mudslinging' (see *Beyond Gnosticism*, 137-8). Irenaeus himself notes that the Valentinians distinguished marriage of the truth from worldly marriages which are driven by the passion of desire (ἐπιθυμία), a distinction also made by *Gos. Phil.* 82.2-8. See the discussion of DeConick, 'The True Mysteries', 249-50.

73 This position is taken already by Phipps, *Was Jesus Married?* 135-8. I do not, however, find plausible his suggestion that this tradition in the *Gospel of Philip* goes back to first-century Palestine and 'provides documentary validation of the hypothesis that Jesus married, and marriage to Mary Magdalene is one possible option that could fit into the New Testament portrayal of Jesus' (137). In my opinion, the *Gospel of Philip* does not provide evidence useful in resolving the question of the historical Jesus' marital status.

This point is supported by noting that the *Gospel of Philip* refers to human marriage without negative connotations. For example, *Gos. Phil.* 69.1-4 states that marriage is properly something that belongs to human beings, not animals. It further contrasts those who can properly marry (free men and virgins) with those who cannot (slaves and prostitutes). Schenke even suggests that this passage (like *Gos. Phil.* 69.36–70.1 and 81.34–82.10) indicates that, in the most noble form of earthly marriage, the *Gospel* of Philip can perceive an image of the heavenly *koinônia*.[74]

Moreover, I would argue that the effective performance of the ritual of the bridal chamber could have a real impact on how actual marriage was conceived.[75] Insofar as these Christians believed that baptism exorcised polluting demons from the soul, they could conceive their own marriages to be pure. For example, while *Gos. Phil.* 65.1-12 reproduces the ancient view that people are often besieged by impure demons who defile them, it states clearly that when the image and angel are united with one another—presumably in the bridal chamber ritual—then demons cannot enter them.[76] This point is confirmed at *Gos. Phil.* 66.2-4, which states that unclear demons are not able to join with anyone who has received the Holy Spirit.[77] Just as Clement of Alexandria argued that Christians could marry without passion, so, too, *Gos. Phil.* 81.34-82.10 indicates that baptismal exorcism enables Christians to engage in marital intercourse not from lustful desire, but by the exercise of the will:

> *Gos. Phil.* 81.34-82.10: ⲙⲛ̣ [ⲗⲁⲁⲩ ⲛⲁⲱ]ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲭⲉ ⲁⲱ ⲡⲉ ⲫⲟ[ⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲫⲟⲟⲩⲧ] ⲙⲛ̄ ⲧⲥ̀ⲓⲙⲉ ⲣ̄ⲕⲟⲓⲛⲱⲛⲉⲓ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲣⲏⲩ ⲉⲓⲙⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲟⲩ ⲟⲩⲁⲁⲩ ⲟⲩⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲣ̣ⲁⲣ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲣ̣ⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁϩⲓ ϩⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲱⲭⲉ ⲡⲣ̣ⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲭⲱϩⲙ ϥϩⲏⲡ ⲡⲟⲥⲱ ⲙⲁⲗⲗⲟⲛ ⲡⲣ̣ⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲁⲧⲭⲱϩⲙ ⲟⲩ ⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ⲁⲗⲏⲑⲓⲛⲟⲛ ⲟⲩⲥⲁⲣⲕⲓⲕⲟⲛ ⲁⲛ ⲡⲉ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲉϥⲧ̄ⲃ̄ⲏⲩ ⲉϥϩⲏⲡ ⲁⲛ ⲁⲧⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲉⲡⲟⲩⲱϣ ⲉϥⲏⲡ ⲁⲛ ⲉⲡⲕⲁⲕⲉ ⲏ ⲧⲟⲩϣⲏ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲉϥⲏⲡ ⲉⲡⲉϩⲟⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ
> ('No one can know what is the day that the husband and wife are joined with each other except they themselves. For the marriage of the world is a mystery for those who have acquired a wife. If the marriage of defilement is

74 See Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 397-9, 497-9.

75 Although we disagree on particular points, April D. DeConick also argues that 'human marriage is reflective of the perfect marriage that takes place in the heavenly realm' ('The True Mysteries', 246-7, see also 246-51, 252-3), and I want to acknowledge that her argument was extremely stimulating for the development of my perspective here. In addition, while I am not persuaded by her thesis that Jewish mystical traditions provide keys to interpreting the *Gospel of Philip*, she helpfully shows that comparable kinds of thought and practice can be seen among some Jews and Hermeticists as well (245, 250-6). See also Zimmermann, *Geschlechtermetaphorik*, 586-8.

76 See Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium*, 350-2.

77 Markschies notes that the notion that people are inhabited by demons is conventional and widespread in Christian literature, and he ties Valentinus's saying (cited in Clem. Alex. *Strom.* II.114,3-6) to baptismal practice (*Valentinus Gnosticus?*, 69-80).

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> hidden, how much more is the undefiled marriage a true mystery. It is not fleshly, but pure. It belongs not to desire but to the will. It belongs not to the darkness or the night but it belongs to the day and the light.')

The *Gospel of Philip*'s distinction between the defiled intercourse of non-Christians and the undefiled marriage of those who have entered the bridal chamber emphasizes that only Christian marriage can be pure. This position is comparable to that of Paul in 1 Thess 4.4-5 or Clem. Alex. *Strom.* III.58, both of whom insist that marriage must be holy and free from lustful passion. My argument is that the bridal chamber ritual offers no human pairing at all, only the unification of the initiand with his/her angelic double; human pairing in marriage between Christians, when it happens, takes place in usual ways apart from the ritual and does involve sexual intercourse and the reproduction which may be expected to follow from it. Such marriages are considered to be 'undefiled' not because they exclude sexual activity but because they are untouched by demonic influence and improper desire.[78]

To summarize: With regard to images and practices of marriage, the *Gospel of Philip* intricately overlays and inter-relates protology (the separation of Adam and Eve), historical events of salvation (Jesus' acts collectively as a symbolic-paradigm, including his relation to Mary Magdalene as his spousal partner), spiritually transformative ritual (baptism, anointing, exchange of a kiss, and Eucharist, that is the ritual of the bridal chamber which effects purification and unification with one's angelic double), and a moral-social ethos (including proper sexual relations in marriage that are pure because they occur according to a will directed to spiritual matters including love of the Lord,[79] and that are not polluted by improper desire and demonic influence).

To answer the three questions initially raised: Jesus' relation to Mary Magdalene is represented as both actual and spiritually effective. There is no sexual intercourse in the bridal chamber ritual. And finally, the *Gospel of Philip* distinguishes non-Christian carnal relations that are polluted by demonic influence and lust from Christian marriages that are not. It does not exclude virginity or celibacy as a way of practicing the Christian life, but it does not promote them or mark them as superior to pure marriage.

78 In contrast, Williams interprets the reference to 'undefiled marriage' to mean 'a marriage lacking sexual intercourse', and concludes that 'it is possible to read the entire text of *Gos. Phil.* assuming this encratic perspective' (*Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, 148). He stresses that 'the *pairing* of the man and the woman…says nothing about sexual intercourse between them', but rather 'the married couple depicted here as protected by union in the bridal chamber ritual from demonic sexual attack have been joined in a "spiritual marriage"' (*Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, 149, emphasis original).

79 E.g., the notion of the Christian's marriage to Christ (*Gos. Phil.* 78.12-25; see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 273-5).

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2.3. *The* Gospel of Philip *and the Letter to the Ephesians*

How now can the *Gospel of Philip* be situated with regard to the discussions of Jesus' marital status with which we began this essay? While it does not provide reliable historical evidence that Jesus was married, it does illustrate one position taken by some Valentinian Christians in the late second and third centuries. Like other Christian theologies, it focuses on the Genesis narrative of Adam and Eve to understand both the human condition and the saving work of Jesus Christ. It draws on widespread Pauline imagery in articulating the efficacy of baptismal ritual to make individuals into members of the body of Christ, the Church, and in figuring the church as the virginal bride of Christ. The *Gospel of Philip*, I would argue, weaves these common threads within an incarnational theology, which while distinctive, nonetheless participates in the move that other Christians, such as Irenaeus,[80] are making in this period as they develop the implications of claims like that of John 1.14, that in Jesus God 'became flesh and dwelt among us…full of grace and truth'. The most important intertext for the topic of Jesus' marital status, however, is Eph 5.23-32.

That Ephesians and the *Gospel of Philip* both use the term 'mystery' to refer to marriage has frequently been noted,[81] but the two texts have other similarities as well. Ephesians contrasts the fornication, impurity, and idolatry of outsiders (Eph 5.3, 5) to Christians who are exhorted to marital behavior that is modeled by Christ's relation to the Church. Christ 'gave himself up' for the Church and sanctified her through baptism, with the result that the church, which is comprised of the members of Christ's body, is holy and without blemish (Eph 5.25-27). As we have seen, the *Gospel of Philip* also contrasts the defiled marriage of outsiders with the pure marriage of those who have been baptized, and it, too, understands the Church as the body of Christ. The conjunction of heterosexual marriage, the salvific and purifying effects of baptism, the image of the Church as the body of Christ, and the analogy of Christ's relation to the Church as heterosexual marriage is striking.

In addition, both texts contrast what is done in secret and darkness with what is done in the light. In particular Eph 5.12-14 ('For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light') resonates with *Gos. Phil.* 82.8-10's statement about undefiled marriage ('It belongs not to the darkness or the night but it belongs to the day and the light'). While Ephesians is referring to darkness and light as metaphors of immoral vs. righteous behavior, *Gos. Phil.* 70.7-9 seems also to have in mind the bridal chamber: 'For one will clothe himself

80 See *Adversus Haereses* V.1,1.

81 See, among others, Robert McL. Wilson, 'The New Testament in the Nag Hammadi Gospel of Philip,' *NTS* 9 (1962-63) 292; Pagels, 'Adam and Eve', 164; Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 405; Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 104-5.

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with (perfect) light in the mystery of the union (ⲡⲙⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡϩⲱⲧⲣ̄)'. Or again, both point to the first union of man and woman in Gen 2.24 (LXX) to expose the limits of non-Christian marriage (Eph 5.31-32; *Gos. Phil.* 70.9-17). Annette Merz's conclusion about Ephesians might equally well be applied to the *Gospel of Philip*: 'No longer do Adam and Eve function as imperfect models [of marriage]; now, the models are Christ the second Adam and his spotless wife the church, for in the context of Ephesians, where salvation is understood as something present here and now, it is only the reality of the redemption that can possess normative character'.[82] Somewhat less clear parallels, but no less intriguing, are the ways in which baptism is figured. In Eph 5.25-26, Christ 'giving himself up' is tied to baptismal ritual in which the Church—the body and wife of Christ—receives 'the washing of water with the word'. The *Gospel of Philip* understands the ritual of the bridal chamber to include baptism, as well as the celebration of the Eucharist meal in which eating the bread and wine effectively reproduces the symbolic paradigm of Christ's fleshly crucifixion—in Ephesians' terms 'he gave himself up' for the Church.[83]

Although some of these similarities taken individually may indicate knowledge of common materials rather than direct literary reliance, collectively they support the view that Ephesians is one catalyst for the *Gospel of Philip*'s theological reflection.[84] At the same time, however, it is clear that the *Gospel of Philip* recontextualizes these similar elements within Valentinian protology and incarnational theology, and thus it differs in many important respects from Ephesians. One of the more notable differences is the marital status of the fleshly (incarnate) Jesus.[85] While Ephesians can be read to understand the church as Christ's wife (Eph 5.29-30), it does not indicate that the fleshly Jesus married. But while the *Gospel of Philip*'s image of an actually married Jesus therefore cannot be

82 Merz, 'The Pure Bride of Christ', 139, who concludes, 'This model leaves no niche free for an unmarried imitation of Christ that would possess the same value as marriage'.

83 While Ephesians probably understands 'Christ giving himself up' in terms of his incarnation and (sacrificial) death, Valentinians understand his incarnation and his crucifixion as salvific acts performed for the sake of his enfleshed body, the Church. It also figures Jesus' own baptism as reception of the *logos*. See esp. Thomassen's discussion of *Tripartite Tractate* 125.1-11 ('*Gos. Phil.* 67:27-30', 936).

84 Scholars have previously suggested that Ephesians was written either against Gnosticism or was influenced by it (see Markus Barth, *Ephesians* [2 vols.; AB 34; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974] 12-18, 644-5, 695). My position with regard to the *Gospel of Philip* is that some Valentinian Christians built upon Ephesians to articulate their distinctive ritual practice theologically. Ephesians was not influenced by Valentinians (who only emerged later), and the letter can be adequately interpreted without reference to them.

85 Differences include notions of Jesus' death as sacrifice, the hierarchical ordering of marriage in terms of a wife's obedience to her husband, and interpretations of Christian opposition, not to flesh and blood, but to the principalities, powers, and rulers of the present darkness (Eph 6.12).

derived from Ephesians, it could conceivably arise in a context in which Ephesians 5 was being read in conjunction with a developing incarnational theology in which Jesus' fleshly life was viewed as a model for Christian behavior. The *Gospel of Philip* may well have drawn upon the teaching of Eph 5.22-33 in articulating its affirmation that Jesus' marriage functions as a symbolic-paradigm for the mystery of marriage between Christ and the church, and that works effectively—as does all Christian initial ritual—to make believers members of the community and to free them from demonic influence by the reception of the Holy Spirit. The *Gospel of Philip* offers evidence of an early Christian theology which presented the view that Jesus Christ in his incarnate life established the paradigm for the undefiled marriage of Christians.

3. Concluding Reflections

Contextualization of the *Gospel of Philip* has often been limited by restricting it to Valentinianism, by labeling it either as heresy or by treating it as only marginally Christian, and, most problematically, by reinscribing it within polemical inner-Christian denunciations of 'Gnostics' (including Valentinians) as body-hating, docetic ascetics—a characterization that clearly does not apply in this case. By placing the *Gospel of Philip* within the wider historical and theological framework of early Christian discussions of Jesus' marital status, however, its contributions to the history of ancient Christianity become more fully apparent.[86] In terms of Christology, the *Gospel of Philip* offers an incarnational theology that includes sexuality and marriage within the compass of the incarnate Jesus' full humanity. In terms of ritual, the *Gospel of Philip* introduces a rich set of images into the arena of Christian ritual or sacramental theology by referring to Christian initiation as entrance into the bridal chamber, and by theologically elaborating the reception of the Spirit as a reunification of male and female that is modeled paradigmatically in Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene. With regard to ecclesiology, the widespread notion of the church as the body of Christ was interpreted as the corporate incarnate Christ.[87] And finally, with regard to sexual ethics (or moral theology), the representation of a married Jesus affirms the potential of human sexual relations to be pure and even to reflect the divine pattern of salvation whose image is revealed in the incarnation. These

86 See esp. the argument of Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 349-56.

87 That the body of Christ is not entirely metaphorical is already found in Paul, who conceptualized 'being in Christ' as a material condition since baptism involved the reception of a holy 'stuff', that is, a particularly fine material *pneuma* (see Stanley K. Stowers, 'What Is "Pauline Participation in Christ?"', *Redefining First-century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders* [ed. Fabian E. Udoh; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2008] 352-71).

positions expand the historical portrait of Christians' theological, ritual, and ethical reflections and practices concerning sexuality and marriage.

I hope to have shown that the *Gospel of Philip*'s views, while distinctive, are not particularly radical when viewed within the context of ancient Christianity. Although perhaps striking in hindsight, they are nonetheless entirely comprehensible within Christian hermeneutics, incarnational theology, and pro-marriage ethics of the first centuries of Christianity.