

Interpretations of the Eucharist in the Gospel of Philip

Silke Petersen

1 Eating and the Eucharist in the Nag Hammadi codices and related documents

The Gospel of Philip belongs to those texts that were lost for a long time and have only been rediscovered recently. In this case, this happened in the vicinity of the Upper Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi in 1945. For unknown reasons, thirteen papyrus codices (i.e. bound volumes) were buried there in the fourth century. In addition to these codices, two further retrieved papyrus codices exist that partially contain the same texts: The Codex Berolinensis (= BG) and the Codex Tchacos (= CT), which are for this reason connected to the Nag Hammadi Codices (= NHC). Generally, these texts are associated with the so-called 'gnosis' or 'Gnosticism'. As detailed research projects on the individual texts progress, it becomes more and more evident that the writings do not represent a uniform movement that can be clearly distinguished from, for instance, Christianity. How difficult it is to actually employ the term 'gnosis', which has been inherited from early Christian polemics, is already apparent from the evaluation of the 'gnostic' attitude vis-à-vis sacraments in earlier research. Bousset, for instance, assumes that 'the gnostic religion' was pervaded by sacraments (Bousset 1907: 277), but Schmithals, for example, opined that 'sacramental piety' was principally alien to Gnosticism (Schmithals 1969: 233, with reference to: Irenaeus, *Haer.* I 21,4). In recent research, such mutually exclusive positions are not to be found anymore. A key reason for this is that 'Gnosticism' as a category has been called into question (King 2003; Williams 1999). Instead of an approach that continues evaluations that have been passed on from the church fathers into modern research of Gnosticism, detailed analysis of the individual texts is called for (cf., e.g. DeConick, Shaw and Turner 2013).

When examining the retrieved writings as they were just mentioned in relation to the topic of the present volume, a first observation is that meals are mentioned surprisingly infrequently and also Eucharistic terminology¹ is only mentioned rarely. If 'eating' is mentioned at all, this occurs virtually exclusively in the context of expositions and retellings of the book of Genesis, that is, the 'eating' involved is that from the fruit of the tree of knowledge² – this does little to further our understanding of ancient meals.

However, three exceptions exist. To begin with, two fragmentary texts from NHC XI are of relevance. In scholarship, they have been given the designations 'A Valentinian Exposition: On Eucharist A' and 'Eucharist B',³ as in the first text the word εὐχαριστεῖ (partially restored) occurs and in the second there are multiple instances of the word τροφή (food), in between various lacunae. In terms of content, it is difficult – due to the many gaps in the text – to be more precise than these observations, however. The second exception is the Gospel of Jude (CT 3),⁴ the contextualization and evaluation of which has been a matter of fierce debate ever since its first modern edition. This controversy also pertains to possible references to the Eucharist in the document (cf., e.g. Rouwhorst 2011; Schmid 2012; Schwarz 2012).

In a scene towards the beginning of the writing, Jesus reacts with laughter when he sees how his assembled disciples are sitting together and are 'offering a prayer of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστι) over the bread' (cf. *Gos. Jud.* CT p. 33,26–34,3; trans.: Kasser and Wurst 2007: 187). The laughing is likely to be interpreted as his distancing himself from the behaviour of the others. To what extent this concerns simply an instance of breaking of bread or whether this concerns in principle a critical attitude towards the Eucharist is a matter of debate in scholarship, among other things because of the difficulties to evaluate how the 'Eucharist' mentioned in the beginning of the text relates to the 'sacrifices' that are being critiqued later on. This also makes one aware of a problem in the descriptive vocabulary used here that we will encounter more frequently. Even though the texts use 'Eucharistic' terminology, that is, forms of the Greek verb εὐχαριστεῖν or of the noun εὐχαριστία occur in forms adapted to Coptic, such vocabulary does not determine whether a prayer of thanksgiving, as was common at ancient meals, is in view, or whether these formulations are connected with something that could legitimately be interpreted in association with a ritual praxis such as it occurs in New Testament texts such as 1 Cor. 11.20–34.

The third text contains much more in relation to the topic 'meals' and 'Eucharistic practice'. This text is the Gospel of Philip and it will be the focus of what follows. The Gospel of Philip is the third text contained in the second Nag Hammadi codex (i.e. NHC II.3), where it can be found right after the Gospel of Thomas (*Gos. Thom.*, NHC II.2). Scholarship has typically assigned it to Valentinianism,⁵ even if Valentinus was probably not the author himself, and dated it to the late second or early third century CE. Different from the Gospel of Jude, the Gospel of Philip offers only positive statements about the Eucharist, unfortunately, however, concrete indications as to its performance are almost totally absent. This leads to the difficulty that the Gospel of Philip presumes and interprets something which is unknown to us as readers in as far as its performance is concerned, and which we can only deduce from its interpretation.

2 The Eucharist in the Gospel of Philip

2.1 Methodical considerations

Given the situation as it was just outlined, the interpretation of the available Eucharistic terminology in the Gospel of Philip depends heavily on the manner in

which the writing as a whole is contextualized. In particular, older research assumes that it is a 'gnostic' text and uses patristic polemics against 'gnostic' movements as a key to unlock the context and background of the text.⁶ A particular understanding of the text is thereby introduced *a priori*: as the church fathers wanted to distance themselves from a movement and a theology that they considered to be 'heretical', they emphasized those aspects that did not conform to the characteristics of their understanding of the 'Christian' tradition – aspects that were similar or comparable were of lesser interest to them (for a thoroughgoing critique of this approach, see King 2003). Hans-Georg Gaffron's study of sacraments in the Gospel of Philip of 1969 is paradigmatic in this respect. When reviewing the relevant texts about the Eucharist,⁷ he repeatedly states that what is being said is fully within the spectrum of a common Christian view of things – and proceeds then to look for a specifically 'gnostic' meaning.

I will proceed differently here: I will take my point of departure in Gaffron's observation concerning the 'common Christian' character of the text and use the findings of Thomassen, who has shown that both Valentinianism and the Gospel of Philip knew of no other sacramental practice than the one that was also known to other Christian communities from the same era (Thomassen 2006: 3; 386, 394; 398–401; Thomassen 2017: 1836; cf. also Turner 1996: 5; Pagels 1997: 281–2).

2.2 Water, wine and blood

The Gospel of Philip mentions the usual material elements of the Eucharist, which are then the subject of reflection:

The cup (ποτήριον) of prayer contains wine and water, since it is appointed as the type (τύπος) of the blood for which thanks is given (ετοργεχαρισται). And it is full of the holy spirit, and it belongs to the wholly perfect man. When we drink this, we shall receive for ourselves the perfect man.⁸

The chalice, wine and water were common material components of the celebration of the Eucharist in early Christianity and also the interpretation of the wine as blood will hardly surprise anyone (cf., e.g. the parallel in Justin, 1 Apol. 65). Furthermore, the text contains allusions to the New Testament. In scholarship,⁹ usually the echo of the Pauline formation in 1 Cor. 10.16 is emphasized: Τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας (in other manuscripts: εὐχαριστίας) ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστίν; (cf., e.g. Gaffron 1969: 174; Wilson 1962: 161; Schmid 2007: 339–41; Schenke 1997: 456). Whereas Paul underlines the communion with the blood and body of Christ, the interpretation in the Gospel of Philip focuses on the 'entire human being' whom we will receive for us. In doing so, the phrasing used in the Gospel of Philip does not oppose 1 Corinthians, rather, it uses a different perspective to consider the same event. In fact, the Gospel of Philip does so in a double-edged manner, as it is typical of this text. To begin with, the blood is 'full of the holy spirit, and it belongs to the wholly perfect man', that is, it is the blood of Christ who is considered to be the

'perfect man' (cf. *Gos. Phil.* #15; p. 55,9f., where Christ is identified as the 'perfect man'; cf. also *Gos. Phil.* #116b; p. 79,33–80,4.). By means of drinking the blood, we absorb Christ into ourselves. Behind this understanding, a second level of meaning appears: By means of drinking the blood we are ourselves transformed into the 'perfect man' and thus become 'christoform'. In a different place in the Gospel of Philip, a text can be found that also interprets sacramental acts and names the result of a successful transformation as follows: 'For this person is no longer a Christian but a Christ.'¹⁰

2.3 Processes of transformation

Following this association one can see that a shift occurs in the Gospel of Philip: The text does not emphasize the 'transformation' of the elements of the meal, but the transformation of the person who consumes them. In the end, the act of drinking changes the body. Whether this line of argument is indeed correct can only be evaluated when considering further texts from the Gospel of Philip. At this point, it can only be pointed out that this way of thinking is anything but uncommon in early Christian theology. The ideal of becoming perfect can be found both in the New Testament (Mt. 5.48; Eph. 4.13; Col. 1.28) and in the writings of the church fathers.¹¹

In view of the Matthean summons to become perfect like God, the perception of the Gospel of Philip that someone is 'no longer a Christian but a Christ' can hardly be classified as exaggeratedly idealistic (or specifically 'gnostic'). Yet, Christ remains the decisive figure for the entire process, which means that no identification of redeemer and redeemed (*salvator* and *salvandus*) occurs and the hierarchical relationship between the two is preserved (Similarly: Thomassen 2006: 101).

The fact that this transformation has something to do with the body is confirmed by the context of the statement. It is immediately followed by a text, which is no longer concerned with the Eucharist, but with baptism:

The living water is a body (σῶμα). It is necessary that we put on the living man. Therefore, when he is about to go down into the water, he unclothes himself, in order that he may put on the living man.¹²

Whereas the previously quoted statement about the Eucharist, refers to the 'perfect human being' in the end ('we shall receive for ourselves the perfect man'), this text concludes with a reference to the 'living human being' ('he may put on the living man'). Because of the parallel structure the expressions 'perfect' and 'living human being' mutually interpret each other, just like the two rituals of baptism and Eucharist are presented in a parallel manner. Also the baptismal text plays with the double-edged nature of what it refers to: Following the 'we' in the beginning of the text, the grammar shifts to the third person singular, thus creating a situation in which 'he' can refer both to Christ at his baptism and to each individually baptized person. By means of this, associations with New Testament texts become possible, for instance with the 'living water' or with 'being clothed with Christ' or 'with the new human being' (Jn 4.10–11; 7.38; Rom. 13.14; Gal. 3.27; Eph. 4.24).

2.4 The body as holy

Another text in the Gospel of Philip is also concerned with Eucharistic praxis and the body. This text quite obviously argues *against* a theology that is hostile to the body:

The holy man is completely holy, down to his very body (σώμα). For if he has taken the bread, he will consecrate it. Or the cup (ποτήριον) or anything else that he gets, he will consecrate. Then how will he not consecrate the body also?¹³

This text can again be interpreted in a double manner: with reference to Jesus Christ who takes the bread, and sanctifies it (by means of an act similar to what is reproduced in the contemporary usage of 'words of institution'), or with reference to the individual believers, who through their 'incorporation' of the bread are assimilated to the holy body. The question at the end of this text may indicate that a counterargument had been provided here against all those who have little regard for the body and do not think it capable of being sanctified. This would, therefore, be an argument against those holding a position that is typically associated with 'Gnosticism'.

The first of these interpretations is, in a certain way, more conventional: Christ and the holy person (Isenberg translates 'priest') who follows him sanctify the bread and the chalice. The second interpretation, however, can also be contextualized well within early Christianity. This interpretation would indicate that the sacred is 'contagious', that it is able to expand. This is a position that Gerd Theißen has shown to be a key characteristic of the early Christian system of values (Theißen 2000: 156–67). Like in the case of the first Eucharistic text, quoted earlier, this text is also followed by a statement about baptism, by means of which both ritual acts appear in connection with each other:

By perfecting the water of baptism, Jesus emptied it of death. Thus we do go down into the water, but we do not go down into death in order that we may not be poured out into the spirit of the world. When that spirit blows, it brings the winter. When the holy spirit breathes, the summer comes. (*Gos. Phil.* #109; p. 77,7-15)

This text presupposes a rite of baptism that involved the entire body (as it was common in early Christianity). In the case of his own baptism, Jesus changed the water into an element that brings life, rather than death. Again, the account describes a transformative event, which is less surprising in relation to baptism than it is in relation to the Eucharistic texts.

2.5 Sacraments and the hidden truth

The double parallel between Eucharist and baptism in both texts cited above gives rise to the observation that ritual acts in *Gos. Phil.* ought to be interpreted continuously in relation to their symbolic interpretation. This is also evidenced by a further section of the text, which is generally regarded as the starting point for a more general discussion of 'the sacraments' in *Gos. Phil.*, but which ought to be read cautiously:

The lord [did] everything in a mystery (μυστήριον), a baptism (βαπτισμα) and a chrism (χρισμα) and a eucharist (εucharιστια) and a redemption and a bridal chamber (νυμφων).¹⁴

The Coptic text uses a number of Greek loanwords. The first of them, ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ, cannot be interpreted as a *terminus technicus* for the sacraments, as they are enumerated subsequently. Research into the use of the term ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ in the Gospel of Philip has shown that this word refers to what is mysterious and hidden. It does not provide an official designation of the sacraments.¹⁵ Already the use of the singular ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ points in a different direction. Gaffron and others therefore suspect that the Greek background of the term may be μυστηριωδῶς, in a mysterious way (Gaffron 1969: 109; Thomassen 2006: 95). Also the indefinite article that precedes the items that are enumerated shows that this is not a general list containing juxtaposed ritual acts of equal significance in generic use, but that something else is at stake. At the centre of things seems to be the mysterious manner in which Christ acts. Behind this view is the manner in which the Gospel of Philip conceptualizes the way in which human beings can find access to the truth, which is influenced by Platonism:

The mysteries (ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ) of truth (ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ) are revealed, though in type (ΤΥΠΟΣ) and image (ΕΙΚΩΝ). (*Gos. Phil.* #124; p. 84,19-20)

Just like in the first text quoted above, here reference is made to ‘typos’. In the previous text, the chalice with wine was the ‘typos’ of the blood filled with the Holy Spirit, the consumption of which lead to acquiring the ‘perfect man’.¹⁶ When considering these two texts together, then it becomes apparent that Christ reveals the truth through baptism, Eucharist and so on in a ‘typological’ way, that is, by means of an image. The reason for this is that we are only able to receive the truth in this manner, as another text indicated:

The truth (ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ) did not come into the world naked, but it came in types (ΤΥΠΟΣ) and images (ΕΙΚΩΝ). The world will not receive truth in any other way. (*Gos. Phil.* #67a; p. 67,9-12)

Types and images are therefore ‘garments’ of the truth, which cannot exist ‘naked’ in the world. They participate in the truth, but in a hidden, mysterious way. The same applies also to the ‘names’ or ‘concepts’ in the Gospel of Philip, which are both criticized for being insufficient and nonetheless necessary:

Names given to the worldly are very deceptive, for they divert our thoughts from what is correct to what is incorrect. ... But truth brought names into existence in the world for our sakes because it is not possible to learn it without these names. Truth is one single thing; it is many things and for our sakes to teach about this one thing in love through many things. (*Gos. Phil.* #11a; p. 53,23-27; *Gos. Phil.* #12c; p. 54,13-18)¹⁷

This quotation contains the beginning and the end of a longer discussion about the ‘names’ with which the Gospel of Philip associates itself with the (middle-)platonian discussion about ‘names’ that has its starting point in the dialogue *Kratylos*.¹⁸ In doing so, the Gospel of Philip touches on two aspects of the discussion in particular.

First, it goes along with a deep scepticism concerning the sensible nature of earthly designations (see above). Second, the writing also values etymological derivations very highly and uses it as the basis for far-reaching conclusions, to which I will return later.

If one reads the texts that have been quoted so far in relation to each other, it appears that rituals such as baptism and Eucharist are no special cases when it comes to the road towards the 'truth', understood as an ideal, transcendent quantity, but that the discussion here expresses a general understanding of the structure of the reality in which we exist (i.e. the 'world'), to the essence of which it belongs that we can approach the higher levels of reality only by means of symbols, images and concepts. *Types* and *images* are necessary vehicles to progress on the platonic journey to the realm above, to the truth.¹⁹ Such an interpretation would also help to make sense of a rather opaque remark about the material elements used in the rituals:

So it is also with the bread and the cup and the oil, even though there is another one superior to these. (*Gos. Phil.* #98; p. 74,36–75,2)

Bread and chalice refer to the Eucharist and oil points to the anointing, which is also often interpreted in the Gospel of Philip. In the immediately preceding and only fragmentarily preserved text, the subject is baptism, from which someone apparently emerges while laughing. The connection between that text and this quotation by means of 'so it is also' creates a parallel between different ritual acts once again. In this case, Eucharist and anointing are paralleled with baptism. What is, however, that which is superior to them? I can discern two possibilities. First, when taking one's cue from texts such as *Gos. Phil.* #68 and #95a,²⁰ one could assume that that what is superior is redemption and/or the bridal chamber. Second and alternatively (or additionally), it could also be a reference to the platonic 'change of levels', which is necessary because the truth transcends its 'types' and also the ritual acts are only, even if necessary, *types* and *images*.²¹

2.6 Elements of the Eucharistic discourse and the Genesis account

All of the elements that we have encountered so far can also be found in other parts of the Gospel of Philip. These elements are the following: The idea that the Eucharistic and other rituals are transformative in nature, their multi-layered description, and the numerous New Testament associations and references, which are used in a creative way. To this, Genesis allusions should be added, which opens a further level in the interpretation of the rituals:

Before Christ came there was no bread in the world, just as Paradise, the place where Adam was, had many trees to nourish the animals but no wheat to sustain man. Man used to feed like the animals, but when Christ came, the perfect man, he brought bread from heaven in order that man might be nourished with the food of man. (*Gos. Phil.* #15; p. 55,6-14)

The first sentence is surprising at first. The statement that there was no bread in the world prior to Christ seems to be plainly wrong, given that agriculture and the cultivation of wheat had been around since archaic times. Also, the ancient readers of the Gospel of Philip may well have known that people were eating bread even in the time of the Old Testament. However, 'paradise' should be taken into account as an important element here: Only following the expulsion from the garden of Eden, agriculture began (Gen. 3.17-19), thus concluding a period during which human beings and animals sustained themselves on a simple diet of fruit etc. (cf. Gen. 1.29-30), which is, according to the Gospel of Philip, a period of an 'animalistic' nourishment. This period is contrasted with the time after the coming of Christ, in which he, as the perfect human being establishes a human kind of nourishment by providing 'bread from heaven'.²² This may well be an allusion to the heavenly bread (ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) mentioned in Jn 6.31, where Christ himself is the bread (cf. Jn 6.51: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς). Eating this bread leads to life eternal (cf. Jn 6.52, 54). Whereas the Johannine discourse on the bread of life refers back to motifs from the epoch of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness (Christ, the 'bread from heaven', is interpreted on the background of the heavenly manna – cf. Petersen 2008: 201–34), in the Gospel of Philip the counter-image to the new heavenly bread is the breadless time in paradise. By means of the usage of a comparative particle following the first statement ('just as' – Coptic: *ἵε*), the fact that Christ's gift of the bread did not follow on the expulsion from paradise immediately is glossed over. The period between Genesis 3 until John 6 is contracted to such an extent that it virtually disappears, while the variously intersecting biblical references create the potential for new meanings. Simultaneously, the text contains a stumbling stone right from the very start. It is a kind of riddle that slows down the process of reading intentionally and facilitates the associative recourse to biblical texts. A similar way of steering the reader by means of provoking a certain irritation can also be observed in other parts of the Gospel of Philip.²³

2.7 Eucharist and the incarnation

Recourse to John 6 is made also in another part of the text, thereby confirming the relations in the text quoted above. Additionally to the reference to John 6 also a quotation from 1 Corinthians occurs:

'Flesh (σαρξ) [and blood shall] not inherit the kingdom [of God]' (1 Cor. 15.50). What is this which will not inherit? This which is on us. But what is this, too, which will inherit? It is that which belongs to Jesus and his blood. Because of this he said, 'He who shall not eat my flesh (σαρξ) and drink my blood has not life in him' (Jn 6.53). What is it? His flesh is the word (λογος), and his blood is the holy spirit. He who has received these has food (τροφή) and he has drink and clothing. (*Gos. Phil.* #23b; p. 56,32–57,8)

Here, an exegetical question pertaining to 1 Corinthians is discussed with reference to the Gospel of John. In 1 Corinthians the question is asked with which body the dead will be raised (cf. 1 Cor. 15.35). In line with this, immediately preceding this text the

problem is mentioned that 'some are afraid lest they rise naked' and therefore want to be raised in the flesh (σάρξ). The Gospel of Philip argues against these 'some': They are not aware of the fact that precisely those who are clothed with flesh are naked – and the other way around.²⁴ This argument is followed by a quotation from 1 Cor. 15.50 (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσαι οὐ δύναται) and the question which kind of flesh will or will not inherit the kingdom of God. The flesh and the blood of Jesus are the kind of flesh and blood that will inherit, in particular by entering into the kingdom of God. Precisely this connection between different kinds of flesh and blood is supported by means of the quotation from John 6: Eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood leads to life.²⁵ This is again met with a question: 'What is it?' The answer is given in terms of an interpretation of the Gospel of John, even if 1 Corinthians remains at the background. The answer is: 'His flesh is the word (λογος), and his blood is the holy spirit. He who has received these has food (τροφή) and he has drink and clothing.' It surprises at first sight because of the seemingly superfluous 'and clothing' at the end of the sentence.²⁶ Whereas food and drink correspond with the flesh and the blood from the previous sentence and the quotation from the Gospel of John, the reference to clothing requires a return to the problem concerning the resurrection body that was discussed initially and that is solved here: by means of the 'consumption' of Jesus a new kind of clothing is acquired, that is, such consumption transforms the body into a body that can enter into the kingdom of God because it is 'christoform'.²⁷ What remains open in this interpretation, however, is the interpretation of flesh and blood in terms of word (λογος) and Holy Spirit, which indicates yet another shift to a further level of meaning. In extant scholarship of this interpretation, recourse is made to, for instance, the mythological idea of the 'syzygies' as it existed in Valentinianism. Gaffron makes an attempt to understand the interpretation along these lines, but he admits himself that there is no evidence for a 'syzygy' out of the *logos* and the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Philip.²⁸ It is more promising, therefore, to take into consideration the fact that the Gospel of Philip engages in textual exegesis here and to make recourse to the context of the Johannine text. The statement 'His flesh is the word' would then allude to Jn 1.14 (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο) as well as to the fact that the quotation from John 6 is a 'word' of Jesus.²⁹ Accordingly, the flesh of Jesus can be described as 'logos' because the 'logos' itself has indeed become flesh. Evidence for the conviction that the Gospel of Philip is not just connecting concepts randomly can also be found in the Gospel of John: Jn 6.51vv. is the only pericope (with one exception) after the prologue in which σὰρξ is used again. An interpretation of the Eucharistic eating in line with the statement about the incarnation in the prologue is therefore already suggested by the Gospel of John itself: The incarnation is a precondition for the salvific effect of Jesus's σὰρξ. With this, the question remains whether the connection which the Gospel of Philip makes between the Holy Spirit and blood ('his blood is the Holy Spirit') can be fitted in this context determined by the notion of the incarnation.³⁰ Again recourse to the Gospel of John provides a way forward, as there in two of the five instances where σὰρξ occurs also the spirit (πνεῦμα) is mentioned (cf. Jn 3.6; 6.63).³¹ Furthermore, Jesus also announces that the spirit of truth will, in the shape of the paraclete, testify on his behalf following his departure and lead the faithful into the full truth (cf. Jn 15.26; 16.13)

By means of locating this spirit in the Eucharistic blood of Jesus, the Gospel of Philip creates a shift in the Johannine statements, namely a shift in the direction of a *less* dualistic way of theologizing, given that *σάρξ* and *πνεῦμα* are not being contrasted, as it happens in Jn 3.6 and 6.63, but are two dimensions that are both simultaneously present in the performance of the Eucharist, in which according to the Johannine line of thought – further developed in the Gospel of Philip – both the body of Jesus and the spirit/paraclete are present and are ‘incorporated’ in such a manner that the human body is transformed in the process.³² Thus, the Gospel of Philip witnesses to a further development of Pauline and Johannine insights that consistently takes seriously ideas and statements about the incarnation. Also, the last text to be discussed here can well be contextualized in this setting.³³ In this case, however, the exegetical starting point is provided not by a quotation of or an allusion to biblical texts, but in an etymological deduction:

The Eucharist (τεῦχαριστία) is Jesus. For in the Syrian language he is called *pharisatha*, which means ‘that which is spread out’. For Jesus became one who was crucified to the world (κόσμος).³⁴

Etymological deductions based on Syriac play a role in the Gospel of Philip in several instances (cf. also *Gos. Phil.* #17.19.39.47). In this case, the root ‘prs’, ‘to divide, break’ provides the background. Its derivate that is at stake here ‘is indeed used in Syriac as a name for the eucharistic bread, with reference to the breaking and the distribution of the bread (cf. τὸ κλάσμα in Greek)’ (Thomassen 2017: 1844, cf. Schmid 2007: 351). Again, therefore, the text is double-edged, in this case concerning the two meanings ‘broken’ and ‘being spread out’ (cf. Schmid 2007: 351). This ambiguity permits the equation of the Eucharistic bread with Jesus, who hangs ‘spread out’ on the cross.³⁵ Attempts in extant scholarship to interpret this in ‘gnostic’ terms, even when scholars admit also that this is not a very obvious course of action,³⁶ seem to be quite unconvincing to me. The text is much rather concerned to take the incarnation seriously to such an extent that also the crucifixion, as the consequence of the incarnation, is integrated into the incarnational understanding of the Eucharist.

3 Conclusion

Eucharistic language is only rarely used in the Nag Hammadi documents and related texts with the sole exception of the Gospel of Philip. There is no indication that the Eucharistic practise behind this Gospel was different from those of other early Christian texts and movements – as far as we are able to reconstruct them. What happens during Eucharistic meals is reinterpreted in the Gospel of Philip applying New Testament texts and even quoting from them. An additional layer is added through the connection with the Genesis account. The content of the (re)interpretation strongly emphasizes the human ability for transformation and for becoming a ‘perfect human being’ like Christ himself. The Eucharist is paralleled with other ‘sacraments’ (even if they are not named in this way since the terminology is later and derives from Latin), which are

given like the Eucharist 'in a mysterious way' by Christ. If we read the complicated and double-layered texts closely we can see that the body has a high value in them and – fitting with this observation – that a special emphasis is given to the incarnation of Christ through a consequent application of Johannine theology, which even includes the crucifixion: The Eucharist is 'spread out' like Jesus on the Cross.

Notes

- 1 I do not intend to give a *a priori* definition of 'Eucharist' or 'Eucharistic terminology' here. Instead I am looking for words like εὐχαριστία linked with references for bread/body and wine/blood which are according to my prior experience with early Christian texts often connected to something we may now call 'Eucharist'. My method is thus inductive rather than deductive, which I find more fitting to the subject in question since nobody really knows what Eucharist is.
- 2 See for instance Gos. Truth (NHC I,3: p. 18); Tri. Trac. (NHC, I,5: p. 107); Gos. Phil. (NHC II,3: #88, p. 71); Ap. John (NHC III,1: p. 28 / BG 2: p. 57f); Hyp. Archons (NHC II,4: p. 88–90); Orig. World (NHC II,5: p. 110.118–120); Testim. Truth (NHC IX,3: p. 45–47). On the hermetic texts from NHC VI, cf. the contribution of Jan Heilmann in this volume.
- 3 NHC XI,5, p. 43, 20–44, 37; see Turner 1990: 148–51; cf. also Thomassen 2006: 355–60; Lundhaug 2013, who doubts the connection between the fragments and Valentinianism.
- 4 The first edition with an English translation is: Kasser, Meyer and Wurst 2006; the first edition to include a Coptic text is: Kasser and Wurst 2007.
- 5 This is generally assumed, for the discussion, see Thomassen 1997. On Valentinus and the surviving fragments of his writings, see Markschiefs 1992; Thomassen 2006: 417–90.
- 6 The polemic against the 'magician Marcus' plays a special role as it can be found in: Irenaeus, *Haer.* I, 13. I will not discuss this texts and texts similar to it in what follows, because I assume, with Förster, 1999: 401, that the acts that Irenaeus describes are not eucharistic in nature. For a different view, see Thomassen 2017: 1846–8.
- 7 Cf. Gaffron 1969: 174–85. The more recent study Schmid 2007 proceeds in a similar manner. Doubt concerning such an approach is already voiced by Van Eijk 1971.
- 8 NHC II,3; #100; p. 75, 14–21; transl. Isenberg 1989: 193. The references first provide the numbering according to Schenke, 1997 = Schenke, 2013, followed by the page and line number of the Coptic papyrus. Unless indicated otherwise, I will use the translation of Isenberg. Square brackets indicate restorations of the text.
- 9 Schenke even makes a conjecture in the Coptic text in order to assimilate it to 1 Cor. 10.16, which does not seem to be necessary to me, however.
- 10 Gos. Phil. #44, p. 67, 23–24. The context indicates that this is not an automatic effect. Cf. Gos. Phil 67,19–27; Thomassen 2006: 354–5. – It should be noted that here like elsewhere in the Gospel of Philip a clearly Christian self-understanding can be found.
- 11 Cf., e.g. Clement, *Strom.* VI, Book, XII 104,2; Origen, *Cels.* VI,63; Irenaeus, *Haer.* III, 19,1 (cf. also Fragm. 28 in Theodoret, *Eran.* 1; Brox, FC 8,3, 1995: 238): 'Denn dazu ist das Wort Gottes Mensch geworden und der Sohn Gottes Menschensohn, damit der Mensch das Wort in sich aufnehme und, die Sohnschaft annehmend, zum Sohn Gottes werde. Denn anders konnten wir die Unvergänglichkeit und Unsterblichkeit

nicht empfangen, als indem wir mit der Unvergänglichkeit und Unsterblichkeit vereinigt wurden.’ – Reference may also be made to an appeal to Plato, Theaet. 176ab, that was used frequently in Neoplatonism. Here the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ is presented as an ethical goal, cf. on this, for instance: Zintzen 1981: X; Dillon 1977: 44. 114. 122f. 145. 299f.

- 12 *Gos. Phil.* #101, p. 75, 21–5.
- 13 *Gos. Phil.* #108; p. 77, 2–7. Different from Isenberg, I do not translate the subject of the first sentence not with ‘priest’, but with ‘holy man’, in order to retain the verbal repetition in the Coptic text (πρω̅νε̅ ε̅τογα̅β̅ φο̅γα̅β̅ τη̅ρη̅) and in order to avoid narrowing down the meaning of the text. This of importance the Gospel of Philip refers to the ‘priest’ as ιε̅ρευ̅ς elsewhere and because such a person is only mentioned in relation to the Holy of the Holies (cf. p. 69, 21; p. 85, 5). Accordingly, Schenke offers the translation ‘Der heilige Mensch ist ganz und gar heilig einschließlich seines Leibes.’
- 14 *Gos. Phil.* #68, p. 67, 27–30. According to Thomassen 2006: 355, 376, 405, 427, 457 ‘redemption’ and ‘bridal chamber’ are not reference to distinct rituals, rather they are different interpretations of a ritual. Similarly: Lundhaug 2010: 325–6.
- 15 Cf. Gaffron 1969: 108–9; Schmid 2007: 28–33. – The use of the term ‘sacraments’ could also be regarded as anachronistic when used to analyse the Gospel of Philip, because it constitutes a Latin category that refers to a sophisticated and official system of cultic acts. It is striking how many contributions to the discussion refer to ‘sacraments’ already in their titles, cf. Segelberg 1960; Gaffron 1969; Tripp 1982; DeConick 2001; Schmid 2007.
- 16 Gaffron 1969: 175, remarks concerning this: ‘Es liegt also keine Transsubstantiation vor, sondern die abbildliche Anwesenheit einer geistlichen Wirklichkeit.’
- 17 Schenke translates the latter text as follows: ‘Aber die Wahrheit ließ Namen in der Welt entstehen um unseretwillen, die wir sie nicht erkennen können ohne die Namen. Eine einzige ist die Wahrheit. Und doch ist sie vielgestaltig und zwar unseretwegen, um (uns) diesen einen, so weit wie möglich, erkennen zu lassen durch vieles.’
- 18 Cf., e.g. Dillon 1977: 181–2. The opposite of the scepticism regarding names in the Gospel of Philip can be found in, for instance, the middle-platonic teaching manual *Didaskalikos* VI, 10–11 (text in Summerell/Zimmer 2007, 16–19), where the names are qualified as sensible. In the platonic dialogue *Kratylos* both positions are being discussed. The emphasis on etymology found in this text is also extant in the works of Philo of Alexandria.
- 19 Cf. Gaffron 1969: 109, who paraphrases #68 as follows: ‘Christus offenbarte alles (= das Verborgene, die Wahrheit, sich selbst) in geheimnisvoller Weise, nämlich in Taufe, Salbung, Eucharistie, Erösung und Brautgemach. Diese Handlungen sind insofern geheimnisvoll, als sie τύποι und εἰκόνες der höheren Wirklichkeit sind. Sie sind gewissermaßen die irdische Hülle, in der die Wahrheit in der Welt anwesend wird, wie § 67 (= S.67,9–11) es ausdrückt.’
- 20 *Gos. Phil.* #68 was quoted above, #95a reads as follows: ‘The chrism is superior to baptism, for it is from the word ‘chrism’ that we have been called ‘Christians’, certainly not because of the word ‘baptism’. And it is because of the chrism that ‘the Christ’ has his name. For the father anointed the son, and the son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us’ (p. 74, 12–18).
- 21 On *types* and *images* as foundational concepts in the Gospel of Philip see Schmid 2007: 34–44.
- 22 Related is also another reference to food which occurs in the Gospel of Philip in a context where the trees of paradise are mentioned again: ‘This world (κοσμος) is a

- corpse-eater. All the things eaten in it themselves die also. Truth (ἀληθεία) is a life-eater. Therefore no one nourished by [truth] will die. It was from that place that Jesus came and brought food (τροφή). To those who so desired he gave [life, that] they might not die' (#93, p. 73,19–27).
- 23 See statements like 'For it is by a kiss that the perfect conceive and give birth' (#31, p. 59, 2f.). In my view, such statements are intended to provoke the reader and to further a questioning and searching attitude in the process of interpretation and an openness for level shifts concerning meaning and reference.
- 24 At this point the text is damaged, but it is clear that it has contained an inverse variation of the preceding half sentence. Schenke fills out the damaged parts and translates it as follows: 'Einige fürchten sich davor, entblößt aufzuerstehen. Deswegen wollen sie auferstehen im Fleisch. Und sie wissen nicht (, daß da gilt): Die mit dem [Fleisch] bekleidet sind, sind es, die entblößt sind; die sich (von ihm) entblößen [können, sind es, die] nicht entblößt sind' (*Gos. Phil.* #23a, p. 56, 26–32).
- 25 The quotation is not exact, but Jn 6.53 (ἐὰν μὴ φάγητε τὴν σάρκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πῖητε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς) is, by means of using a singular and the replacement of the expression 'son of man' (as in Jn 6.54; ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον) adapted in such a manner that it suits the context in the Gospel of Philip. For a discussion of New Testament quotations in the Gospel of Philip in general, see Gaffron 1969: 32–62.
- 26 Cf. Turner 1996: 233: 'The inclusion of 'clothing' along with food and drink is interesting: the clothing in a white robe after baptism is a minor element in some relatively early Syrian baptism rites, while the image of the oil and the water as a garment clothing the person is prominently featured in the understanding of the change wrought by initiation in several.'
- 27 Cf. above on physical transformation in *Gos. Phil.* #100, which is confirmed in this way. See also the interpretation of Thomassen 2017: 1840: 'The Eucharist provides us with the flesh in which we will rise, and it does so by means of the food and drink offered in the sacred meal, which also provide "clothing".'
- 28 Gaffron 1969: 178–9; also Schmid 2007: 172–3.320–37, who undertakes a 'gnostic' interpretation of this passage, in particular by making use of the polemics of Irenaeus.
- 29 Cf. Jn 6.60, where the preceding discourse of Jesus is called ὁ λόγος οὗτος.
- 30 It is worth recalling that this connection also occurs in the first quotation from the Gospel of Philip, cf. #100; p. 75, 14–21.
- 31 Cf. Jn 3.6: τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς σὰρξ ἐστίν, καὶ τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος πνεῦμά ἐστι, and Jn 6.63: τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιούν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὀφείλει οὐδέν· τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστίν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστίν.
- 32 Cf. also Thomassen 2017: 1839: "The "reception" of "the perfect human" in the sacramental meal in the form of the wine and the bread representing his flesh and blood is conceptually homologized with the reception of the incarnated Saviour as a salvation historical event and is seen as a ritual enactment of that event.'
- 33 I refrain from an interpretation of *Gos. Phil.* #26b, p. 58, 10–14 (He said on that day in the thanksgiving [εὐχὰς εὐχαριστίας], 'You who have joined the perfect light with the holy spirit, unite the angels with us also, as being the images'), as I do not consider this to be a text referring to the Eucharist. To mark this Schenke translates here 'Danksagung' and Isenberg 'thanksgiving'. At the beginning of the text, 'on that day' refers to the previous paragraph that deals with the New Testament account of the transfiguration and neither the Eucharist nor eating plays any role whatsoever.

- 34 *Gos. Phil.* #53; p. 63.21-24; Translation by Thomassen 2017: 1844. Isenberg translates at the end: 'for Jesus came to crucify the world.' The last subordinate clause is difficult (εὐ`σταυροῦ ἢ –πικροσμος); its context suggests, however, that a passive interpretation of the verb with an indirect indication of the object is the more plausible interpretation. For a more detailed discussion, see Schenke 1997: 330; Thomassen 2017: 1844f; Gaffron 1969: 182–3; different: Schmid 2007: 356–9.
- 35 Cf. Thomassen 2017: 1844: 'The point the *Gospel of Philip* wishes to make consists in the association between the distribution of the bread in communion and the "spreading out" of Jesus' body on the Cross.'
- 36 Cf. Gaffron 1969: 183: 'Der ganze Paragraph weist nicht spezifisch Gnostisches auf; nicht einmal der Schlußsatz müßte einem orthodoxen Christen anstößig erscheinen.'

Bibliography

- Bousset, W. (1907), *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Brox, N., ed. (1995), *Irenäus von Lyon, Adversus haereses / Gegen die Häresien III*, Freiburg: Herder.
- DeConick, A. D. (2001), 'The True Mysteries: Sacramentalism in the Gospel of Philip', *VC* 55: 225–61.
- DeConick, A. D., G. Shaw and J. D. Turner, eds (2013), *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature*, Leiden: Brill.
- Dillon, J. (1977), *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, London: Duckworth.
- Förster, N. (1999), *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischer Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Gaffron, H.-G. (1969), 'Studien zum koptischen Philippusevangelium unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Sakramente', Ph.D. diss., Faculty of Protestant Theology, University of Bonn.
- Isenberg, W. B. (trans.) and B. Layton (text) (1989), 'The Gospel According to Philip, Nag Hammadi Codex II,3', in B. Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2–7, Bd. I, Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, Indexes*, 129–217, Leiden: Brill.
- Kasser, R., M. Meyer and G. Wurst (2006), *The Gospel of Judas from Codex Tchacos*, Washington: National Geographic Society.
- Kasser, R. and G. Wurst, eds (2007), *The Gospel of Judas, together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos*, Washington: National Geographic Society.
- King, K. L. (2003), *What Is Gnosticism?*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lundhaug, H. (2010), *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul*, Leiden: Brill.
- Lundhaug, H. (2013), 'Evidence of "Valentinian" Ritual Practice? The Liturgical Fragments of Nag Hammadi Codex XI (NHC XI,2a-e)', in K. Corrigan and T. Rasmus (eds), *Gnosticism, Platonism, and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honor of John D. Turner*, 225–43, Leiden: Brill,

- Markschies, C. (1992), *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Pagels, E. (1997), 'Ritual in the Gospel of Philip', in J. D. Turner and A. McGuire (eds), *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, 280–91, Leiden: Brill.
- Petersen, S. (2008), *Brot Licht und Weinstock. Intertextuelle Analysen johanneischer Ich-bin-Worte*, Leiden: Brill.
- Rouwhorst, G. (2011), 'The Gospel of Judas and Early Christian Eucharist', in J. van den Berg, A. Kotzé, T. Nicklas and M. Scopello (eds), *'In Search of Truth': Augustine, Manichaeism and other Gnosticism*, 611–25, Leiden: Brill.
- Schenke, H.-M. (1997), *Das Philippus-Evangelium (Nag Hammadi-Codex II,3)*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- Schenke, H.-M. (2013), 'Das Evangelium nach Philippus', in H.-M. Schenke, U. U. Kaiser and H.-G. Bethge (eds), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch. NHC I-XII, Codex Berlinensis 1 und 4, Codex Tchacos 3 und 4*, 140–63, 3rd edn, Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Schmid, H. (2007), *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus: Anfänge einer Theorie des Sakraments im koptischen Philippusevangelium (NHC II 3)*, Leiden: Brill.
- Schmid, H. (2012), 'Eucharistie und Opfer. Das "Evangelium des Judas" im Kontext von Eucharistiedeutungen des zweiten Jahrhunderts', *Early Christianity* 3: 85–108.
- Schmithals, W. (1969), *Die Gnosis in Korinth*, 3rd edn, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Schwarz, K. (2012), 'Die Kultpolemik im Evangelium des Judas', *Early Christianity* 3: 59–84.
- Segelberg, E. (1960), 'The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel According to Philip and its Sacramental System', *Numen* 7: 189–200.
- Summerell, O. F. and T. Zimmer, eds and trans (2007), *Alkinoos, Didaskalikos. Lehrbuch der Grundsätze Platons*, Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Theißen, G. (2000), *Die Religion der ersten Christen. Eine Theorie des Urchristentums*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- Thomassen, E. (1997), 'How Valentinian is the Gospel of Philip?', in J. D. Turner (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years*, 251–79, Leiden: Brill.
- Thomassen, E. (2006), *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'*, Leiden: Brill.
- Thomassen, E. (2017), 'The Eucharist in Valentinianism', in D. Hellholm and D. Sänger (eds), *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts. Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* Vol. III, 1833–49, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Tripp, D. H. (1982), 'The "Sacramental System" of the Gospel of Philip', *StPatr* 17: 251–60.
- Turner, J. D. (text and trans.) (1990), 'NHC XI,2: A Valentinian Exposition, with 2a: On the Anointing; 2b,c: On Baptism A and B; 2d,e: On the Eucharist A and B', in C. W. Hedrick (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, 89–172, Leiden: Brill.
- Turner, M. L. (1996), *The Gospel According to Philip. The Sources and Coherence of an Early Christian Collection*, Leiden: Brill.
- Van Eijk, A. H. C. (1971), 'The Gospel of Philip and Clement of Alexandria. Gnostic and Ecclesiastical Theology on the Resurrection and the Eucharist', *VC* 25: 94–120.
- Williams, M. A. (1999), *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'. An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wilson, R. McL. (1962), *The Gospel of Philip: Translated from the Coptic Text with an Introduction and Commentary*, London: Mowbray.
- Zintzen, C., ed. (1981), *Der Mittelplatonismus*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.