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Antony's Letters and Nag Hammadi Codex I: Sources of Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt

LANCE JENOTT AND ELAINE PAGELS

Scholars have explored Athanasius's conflict with other Christian teachers in Egypt who practiced "open-canon" readings and exegetical discussions on "the deeper parts of Scripture," and who encouraged their students to seek knowledge and heavenly visions apart from the parish clergy. Recent research has shown that many of these groups were not only urban study circles in Alexandria but also various monastic organizations throughout Egypt that admired the Alexandrian theological legacy associated with Origen and the teaching of such revered spiritual guides as St. Antony. By analyzing the tractates of Nag Hammadi Codex I as a fourth-century collection of Christian writings, and comparing its content with themes found in the letters of Antony, we find that the fourth-century reader of this codex, far from encountering teachings typically regarded as "gnostic" (dualism, docetism, a "world-hating spirit") would have found a number of themes strikingly compatible with Antony's letters. Finally, we discuss what appeal both collections would have had to monastic readers during the period of religious controversy that characterizes fourth-century Christianity in Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

Although scholars have long debated the question of who owned the codices collected and buried at Nag Hammadi, and despite our considerable understanding of the social history of contemporary Egypt, few have asked

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what *appeal* these codices held for fourth-century readers.[1] We recall the question recently raised by Michael Williams: what is the fourth-century social context of the Nag Hammadi codices? How did these writings "speak" to the interests and religious needs of fourth-century Egyptians? What relationship did they have to the contemporary political, ecclesiological, and religious issues so well documented in the literary sources?

Investigation into the fourth-century environment of the Nag Hammadi codices, however, is often still impeded by the assertion that they are non-Christian, "Gnostic" books—a characterization that still allows some scholars to relegate them to the shadowy margins of late antique Egypt, or dismiss them as if they existed in a fourth-century vacuum. For example, in an otherwise very fine article about early Christian books, one of the most preeminent authorities on ancient Coptic manuscripts classifies the Nag Hammadi codices as "Gnostic" as opposed to Christian.[2] Similarly, the author of another widely cited study of the codices'

1. One exception is Frederick Wisse's classic hypothesis that monks were interested in the texts for their ascetic content. For a critical review of the various hypotheses (of Doresse, Säve-Söderbergh, Wisse, and Scholten) regarding the production of the codices and how they related to their fourth-century environment, see Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 241–62, where he moves beyond the question of the "library's" general appeal by focusing on different scribal rationales for the production of individual codices. For the *status quaestionis* regarding the codices' provenance, see the excellent discussion by James Goehring, "The Provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices Once More," *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001): 234–53.

2. Stephen Emmel, "The Christian Book in Egypt: Innovation and the Coptic Tradition," in *The Bible as Book: The Manuscript Tradition*, ed. John L. Sharpe III and Kimberly van Kampen (London and Newcastle: The British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 1998), 39: "Throughout its history, Coptic literature was almost entirely Christian, the only major exceptions being several extraordinary hoards of early books of Manichaean, Gnostic, and related literature" (with reference to the Nag Hammadi codices). Classifying books as "Gnostic" not "Christian" illustrates the problems involved with the typological study of Gnosticism and Christianity by which the historian can maintain a *distinction in essence* between the two "religions" so that they become imagined as two distinct social realities. Leaving aside the methodological problems involved with the typological approach, which have been discussed elsewhere (Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 43–53; Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003], 191–217), there is the more basic problem that describing Christianity and Gnosticism as mutually exclusive religions does not accord with ancient *testimonia* about such people. The fourth-century bishop Epiphanius, for example, tells us that the eighty some *Gnostikoi* he encountered were in fact members of the orthodox church and were only excommunicated after he reported their unorthodox ideas and apocryphal books to the local bishops (*Panarion*, 26.17,8–9; ed. K. Holl, *Epiphanius, Ancoratus und Panarion*, GCS 25, 31, 37 [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915–1933]; here GCS 25:298). Likewise, he reports that the

fourth-century owners distances them not only from Egyptian Christians, but also from any known environment, by concluding that "one may go no further than the hypothesis of some religious communities (in the end, only one [?]) as owner of this book collection(s) (with J. Doresse but without characterizing the community under question as Sethian) whose members possessed a strong syncretistic mentality and in no way were traditional (with M. Krause but without speculating one wealthy person as the owner)."[3] To the contrary, we maintain that generalizations such as "Gnostic," "non-Christian," or "some religious communities," which further distance the Nag Hammadi codices from Egyptian Christianity, only obscure our understanding of what appeal these books may have had to Egyptian readers about whom we are better informed. Although some of the codices include a few clearly non-Christian sources, such as a fragment of Plato's *Republic* and Hermetic tractates (both of which we know appealed to Christians) by far the great majority of their content consist of gospels, epistles, apocalypses, and homilies attributed to familiar Christian apostles and other biblical figures (Paul, James, John, Thomas, Philip, Peter, Adam, Seth, Shem, Melchizedek)[4] or anonymous compositions with clearly Christian themes and exegesis meant to supplement, not supplant, biblical sources.[5]

Furthermore, the codices and manuscripts are identifiably Christian in their physical appearance and evident scribal practices, all of which

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hermit Peter was a presbyter in the Palestinian church until he was excommunicated for being a "Gnostic" (40.1,3–5).

3. Alexandr Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi* (Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1995), 98. Apart from the problems involved with the notions of "traditional" and "syncretistic," the principle drawback to Khosroyev's conclusion is that it makes no progress in our understanding of how these codices related to their ancient Egyptian environment. Instead we are drawn back to a modified and even less informative version of Doresse's 1958 hypothesis, leaving us only with the generic idea of "some religious communities."

4. Note that none of the tractates are attributed to subversive biblical figures, such as Cain or Korah, with whom scholars of Gnosticism usually associate Gnostic sympathies. That these texts contain no programmatic sympathy with subversive biblical figures, see Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 54–76, esp. 61–62.

5. For example, the *Gospel of Truth*, *Treatise on the Resurrection*, *Tripartite Tractate*, *Exegesis on the Soul*, the *Holy Book*, *Dialogue of the Savior*, *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*, *Interpretation of Knowledge*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Valentinian Exposition* accompanied with texts for Christian baptism and Eucharist rituals. Even Nag Hammadi writings such as the apocalypses of *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and *Marsanes*, whose religious affiliation according to modern taxonomies remains unclear, are reported by ancient authors to have been produced and read by Christians (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 39.5.1; 40.2.2).

demonstrate continuity with broader Christian scribal culture.[6] Scholars have long recognized the Christian and even monastic nature of some of the cartonnage used to strengthen the leather covers,[7] as well as how the scribal colophons, consonant with Christian liturgical practice ("Remember me in your prayers, my brothers. Peace to the saints and the spiritual" [Codex II, 145]) correlate with what we know of fourth-century Christian

6. Cf. Wolf-Peter Funk, "The Linguistic Aspect of Classifying the Nag Hammadi Codices," in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification*, ed. Louis Painchaud and Anne Pasquier (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1995), 145, who finds "striking similarities . . . at the level of scribal practice and orthography" between some features in the Nag Hammadi codices and contemporary Sahidic biblical manuscripts.

7. See *Nag Hammadi Codices: Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Cartonnage of the Cover*, ed. J. W. B. Barns, G. M. Browne, and J. C. Shelton, NHS 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1981). Fragments of Genesis, a Christian homily on virtue, and monastic correspondence were discovered among the cartonnage used to line the covers of Codex VII. Barns famously misused this evidence to argue for the certainty of a Pachomian provenance, assuming that the Pachomians were the only monastic group in the region. Critics of the Pachomian hypothesis are correct to point out that there were many more monastic groups in the Thebaid from which these documents may have stemmed (Khosroyev, *Bibliothek*, 69–70). Other critics stress that the "secular" nature of the other cartonnage documents (business contracts, account lists, etc.) demonstrates that they could in no way have come from the Pachomian monks or any other monastic community. The papyrologist Ewa Wipszycka, for example, maintains that "Pachomian monks were completely isolated from any contacts with 'the world' and did not undertake such economic activities that are testified by the letters from the covers" ("The Nag Hammadi Library and the Monks: A Papyrologist's Point of View," *Journal of Patristic Papyrology* 30 [2000]: 182–83, 189). Instead, she posits that the mixed nature of the cartonnage can be most easily explained by the fact that it came from a "waste paper trader," though she provides no evidence or bibliographic references for such a trade (188–90). In her view, the hypothesis of a monastic provenance, Pachomian or otherwise, is the result of ignorance on the part of "Patrologists and historians of monasticism" who "know nothing about economy including monastery economy and did not feel like getting engaged in economic reasoning" (183). Her view, however, does not take into account the research of scholars who have examined the vast economic activities of Egyptian monks and their "this-worldly" connections (e.g., James Goehring, "The World Engaged: The Social and Economic World of Early Egyptian Monasticism," in *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World: In Honor of James M. Robinson*, James Goehring et al. [Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1990]: 134–44). The Christian and monastic cartonnage do not of course prove that the Nag Hammadi codices were produced by monks; it is possible that whoever produced the covers might have been someone other than the scribes who copied the texts, or that whoever produced the codices drew all the cartonnage from the town dump. Nevertheless, their existence is proof of the monastic activity in the direct vicinity in which the codices were produced, and at any rate they are only one part of an accumulative argument for a Christian-monastic origin.

and monastic culture.[8] In the instances where the codices' leather covers are decorated, they feature Greek, Egyptian (*crux ansata*), and St. Andrew's style crosses.[9] Moreover, the various scribes who copied the codices used conventional forms of Christian *nomina sacra* and symbols such as the *chi-rho* (⳩) and staurogram (⳨), which researchers now consider to be the most reliable criteria for identifying Christian manuscripts.[10] The *nomina sacra* that appear frequently in Codex I, for example, ⲓⲏ̅ⲥ, ⲡⲭ̅ⲥ̅, ⲡⲉⲭⲣ̅ⲥ, ⲡⲉⲭⲣ̅ⲏ̅ⲥ, ⲡⲛ̅ⲁ (cf. ⲡⲛ̅ⲁⲧⲓⲕⲟⲥ, ⲡⲛ̅ⲁⲧⲓⲕⲟⲛ), ⲡⲥ̅ⲱ̅ⲣ̅, and ϩ̅ⲓⲏ̅ⲗ̅ⲙ̅, correspond to what Larry Hurtado notes are some of the most common forms found in contemporary Christian papyri.[11] The scribe who copied the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* that begins Codex I also embellished the manuscript with Latin and Egyptian crosses, followed by a conventional *chi-rho* Christogram in the colophon "Christ is Holy" [ⲟ ⳩ ⲁⲅⲓⲟⲥ]). That the same scribe repeatedly

8. Among the various colopha in the Nag Hammadi codices one finds the Christian acrostic ⲓⲭⲑⲩⲥ, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior" (III,69 [NHS 4, ed. Böhlig and Wisse]; VII,118 [NHS 30, ed. Pearson]), blessings of peace (ⲉⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ ⲧⲟⲓⲥ ⲁⲅⲓⲟⲓⲥ [II,145; NHS 21, ed. Layton]; cf. VII,127) similar to those found in contemporary Christian manuscripts from monastic libraries in the Thebaid (cf. Tommy Wasserman, "P72 and the *Bodmer Miscellaneous* Codex," *New Testament Studies* 51 [2005]: 137–54, esp. 145), and even a cryptogram colophon consonant with styles of encryption popular among monks in Upper Egypt (Frederick Wisse, "Language Mysticism in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Early Coptic Monasticism I: Cryptography," *Enchoria* 9 [1979]: 101–20). For a critical discussion of two colopha (II, 145 and VII, 127) that have been used as evidence for a Pachomian provenance, see Khosroyev, *Bibliothek*, 92–97. Khosroyev's basic argument is that the colopha were not composed by the scribes but merely copied from their exemplars. We disagree with the certainty of his conclusions for reasons that space does not permit us to discuss here; we will only repeat James Robinson's observation, that "even if such a scribal note was not composed by the scribe who copied the codex . . . nevertheless [he] did not feel called upon to eliminate it" ("Introduction," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988], 18).

9. James Robinson, "The Construction of the Nag Hammadi Codices," in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honor of Pahor Labib*, ed. M. Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 170–90, esp. 174–75; Robinson, "Introduction," in *Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 18.

10. Larry Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 43–94 (*nomina sacra*), 136–39 (staurograms); Malcolm Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri* (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2006), 114–18 (*chi-rho* and staurograms), 119–25 (*nomina sacra*). For the classic discussion of *nomina sacra* see Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London: British Academy, 1979).

11. All references and translations of NHC I follow the edition of Harold W. Attridge, *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex). Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*. 2 vols. NHS 22–23 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), sometimes modified for the sake of clarity.

used a *staurogram* to refer to the cross of Christ (ⲥ⳨ⲟⲥ: I 5,17; 5,37; 6,4; 6,5–6; 20,27)[12] is significant in light of Hurtado's conclusion that crosses and staurograms found in ancient manuscripts represent the earliest Christian iconography for remembering Christ's suffering. The accumulated evidence of these features indicates that the various codices were produced and read by Egyptian Christians; and we agree with James Robinson, Michael Williams, James Goehring, and others, that their most likely provenance was among the varieties of Christian monasticism in the Thebaid.[13]

Even some scholars more willing to speculate about the nature of the religious communities that owned these codices are surprisingly reticent to discuss their relationship to broader contemporary religious concerns and socio-political trends in Egypt. For example, the authors of a recent study of the scribal intent, reader experience, and textual interrelationships of Codices I, VII, and XI, offer the intriguing suggestion that this three-volume set was designed to introduce a reader to "a heterodox doctrine of conflict and polemic, in which the reader is invited to identify him- or herself with the embattled minority group"; yet the authors state that they deliberately "refrain from speculating . . . as to the nature and identity of the group or the individuals responsible for this collection in the area of Chenoboskion in the mid-fourth century."[14] After nearly three decades of heated and pitted scholarly debate over the hypothesis of a Pachomian provenance, one can certainly understand the hesitation to assign these codices to a specific group. Nevertheless, given all we know about religious diversity and conflict near Chenoboskion, in the Thebaid, and fourth-century Egypt generally, one would hope for at least a cautious attempt to contextualize such an "embattled minority group" in a less isolated geographical, social, and religious environment.

To address the questions of the codices' social context, we must go beyond conventional characterizations of "the Nag Hammadi library" as a whole, as if the various texts and codices represent a homogenous

12. The spelling ⲥ⳨ⲟⲥ, transcribed as ⲥⲧ(ⲁⲩ)ⲣⲟⲥ in the NHS edition, can clearly be seen in the manuscript photographs in *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codex I*, ed. James Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

13. Robinson "Introduction," in *Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 16–22; Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 261; Goehring "Provenance," 252–53. Even Khosroyev admits that the owners could have been Christian monks in the Thebaid, just not Pachomians, and points to the variety of monasticism in the Thebaid to bolster his argument (*Bibliothek*, 69–77).

14. Louis Painchaud and Michael Kaler, "From the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* to the *Three Steles of Seth*: Codices I, XI and VII from Nag Hammadi Viewed as a Collection," *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007): 445–69, quoted at 469.

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world of thought, to focus on the arrangement of each codex as a textual collection, and take up a question raised by Stephen Emmel: how Coptic readers might have "experienced" reading such a codex.[15] In doing so, we consider a question scholars are now asking about the New Testament canon as well: what hermeneutical impact does the selection, collection, and arrangement of texts into a single volume have on the way readers understand both an individual text and the collection as a whole?[16]

Although scholarly debate will certainly continue, complicated by the limited and often accidental nature of our sources, we offer the present study as a contribution to the ongoing discussion of the relationship of Nag Hammadi Codex I and its readers to their broader Egyptian environment. By focusing on Codex I we by no means intend to imply that it is

15. For an excellent appraisal of scholarship on ancient reading practices and a call for more attention to social contexts of reading, see William A. Johnson, "Toward a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity," *American Journal of Philology* 121 (2000): 593–627. Fifty years after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, Stephen Emmel observed the need for "a theory of Coptic reading and Coptic readers" in order to investigate how the codices would have been read and understood by ancient Coptic readers. According to Emmel, "the task is to read the texts exactly as we have them in the Nag Hammadi Codices in an effort to reconstruct the reading experience of whoever owned each of the Codices. This reading would have to be undertaken in full cognizance of contemporary Coptic literature, and the culture of Upper Egypt, during, say, the third to seventh centuries" ("Religious Tradition, Textual Transmission, and the Nag Hammadi Codices," in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years*, ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire [Leiden: Brill, 1997], 34–43, esp. 42–43). For work in this direction, see Michael A. Williams, "Reading the Nag Hammadi Codices as Collection(s) in the History of Gnosticism(s)," in *Textes de Nag Hammadi*, 3–50; Françoise Morard, "Les Apocalypses du Codex V de Nag Hammadi," in *Textes de Nag Hammadi*, 341–57; Michael A. Williams and Lance Jenott, "Inside the Covers of Codex VI," in *Coptica, Gnostica, Manichaeica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 1025–52; Painchaud and Kaler, "From the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*"; Johanna Brankaer and Hans-Gebhard Bethge, "Die Codex als Sammlung" in *Codex Tchacos: Texte und Analysen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 419–42; Michael Kaler, "The *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* in the Context of Nag Hammadi Codex I," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008): 319–39.

16. For a discussion of the hermeneutical effects of canonization and the method of "canonical criticism," see Robert W. Wall, "Reading the New Testament in Canonical Context," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 370–93; Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament As Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 48–53, esp. 52–53: "Of particular interest to the method being proposed is the concern to deal seriously with the effect which the shape of the canonical collection has on the individual parts. At times the larger corpus exerts a major influence by establishing a different context from that of a single composition."

typical of the entire "library," which after all includes a wide assortment of literature. Even a glance at Codex II, for example, shows that its contents differ considerably from Codex I in terms of theme, language, and conceptual patterns.[17] What these differences require is that instead of classifying all the codices under ambiguous and uninformative labels such as "Gnostic," "non-traditional," or "syncretistic," we investigate them as separate textual collections, each of which offered its own individual content, character, and appeal to Egyptian readers.

For the purpose of the present investigation, we contextualize Codex I and its ancient readers within fourth-century controversies involving Athanasius's attempts to moderate monastic voices that encouraged monks to seek revelation and pursue paths of spiritual progress independent of the clergy. As we shall see, an analysis of the reader experience of Codex I which opens as an "invitation to seek revelation," along with a careful comparison with Antony's letters and information gleaned from Athanasius's *Life of Antony* and the various *Lives* of Pachomius, demonstrate what an enormous challenge Athanasius confronted.

BIOGRAPHIES AND THE "DOMESTICATION OF CHARISMA"

As several fine studies have shown, biographers of saints like Antony and Pachomius exercise considerable influence on their readers by selecting,

17. In contrast to Codex I, for example, one sees in Codex II more dualistic theology and malignant demiurgy (especially in the *Ap. John*, *Hyp. Arch.*, and *Orig. World*); various creation narratives and Genesis *midrashim*, with a repeated interest in stories about the loss of Adam's primordial glory and the recovery of humanity's original unity in the image and likeness of God (*Ap. John*, *Gos. Thom.*, *Gos. Phil.*, *Hyp. Arch.*, *Orig. World*, and the *Exeg. Soul*); a preoccupation with demonic powers, their relationship to the human body, and especially how to combat them through ascetic practice (*passim*, and especially *Thom. Cont.*). While a full study of what appeal these texts and stories might have had for fourth-century Egyptian Christians remains to be conducted, it should already be quite easy to see how a book like Codex II fits naturally with the broader interests and concerns of fourth-century Egyptians: for example, the basic need for healing and protection from human and supernatural powers (cf. David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998], 46–52, 111–31), the keen interest of monks to recover Adam's primordial glory (cf. Peter Brown, *Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1988], 220–25), and their rigorous dedication to fighting demons through bodily discipline (cf. David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of a Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006]).

reshaping, amplifying, and moderating the stories and traditions they choose to relate. Much work has already illuminated various ways in which Athanasius's *Life of Antony* and the various *Lives* of Pachomius interpret the political and ecclesiastical controversies in which their authors were engaged.[18]

In his article "The *Life of Antony* and the Domestication of Charismatic Wisdom," Michael Williams challenged Hermann Dörries' long-standing thesis that Athanasius deliberately amplified Antony's spiritual powers to elevate him to the status of a Christian monastic hero. Comparing the Antony traditions of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* against Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, Dörries critically evaluated the *Life*'s tales of wonder working and charismatic power as Athanasius's own literary elaboration. However, Williams convincingly demonstrated the opposite, that rather than idealizing a far more reticent historical Antony, Athanasius's *Life* sought to moderate contemporary representations that depicted him in far more spectacular ways. According to Williams,

> Athanasius was confronting and correcting alternative models for the behavior and role of the ascetic wise man in fourth-century Egypt, models in which the authority of the ascetic was not graciously subordinated to that of the clerics but rather could be indifferent or even inimical to any such claim to authority based more on political choice in "the world" than on divine charisma and revelation granted to the person "dead" to society.[19]

As Williams demonstrates, Athanasius wrote his *Life of Antony* in order to control and reshape the memory of Antony, thus reshaping monastic practice in ways compatible with the unified communion he sought to establish. Before Athanasius wrote his *Life*, he clearly knew various oral traditions that were already circulating widely. He prefaces his work by telling the readers that he is writing in response to *their inquiries* concerning Antony—their interest in his early life, how he started his *askēsis*, how he died, and especially "whether what is said about him is true."[20] Then

18. Hermann Dörries, "Die *Vita Antonii* als Geschichtsquelle," in *Nachrichten der Akadamie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), 359–410; Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981), 131–59; Michael A. Williams, "The *Life of Antony* and the Domestication of Charismatic Wisdom," in *Charisma and Sacred Biography*, ed. Michael A. Williams (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 23–45; Johannes R. Roldanus, "Die *Vita Antonii* als Spiegel der Theologie des Athanasius und ihr Weiterwirken bis ins 5 Jahrhundert," *Theologie und Philosophie* 58 (1983): 194–216; David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

19. Williams, "Domestication," 34.

20. *Life of Antony*, Preface (PG 26:837a).

again toward the end of the *Life*, Athanasius says that Antony had been "talked about everywhere," in Spain, Gaul, Rome, and Africa, and that he was longed for by those who had never met him.[21]

As is well known, whatever stories Athanasius had heard, he decided to have Antony remembered as an ascetic hero, yet one who "showed marvelous respect for the canon of the church, and wished every cleric to be honored above himself." Athanasius's Antony "was not ashamed to bow his head to bishops and presbyters" and, "if a deacon ever came to him for help, would discuss the things which would be helpful, but would give place to the deacon when it came to prayer, since he (Antony) was not ashamed to learn himself."[22] At the same time, scholars have noted that Athanasius omitted or at least downplayed many popular themes found in contemporary ascetic and monastic literature: the ascetic's goal of spiritual perfection; achieving the state of a spiritual person (*pneumatikos*); and the striving for *gnōsis*.[23] While allowing his Antony to lay claim to *gnōsis*, Athanasius nevertheless has him assert that knowledge does not lead to virtue: for "none of us is judged by what he does not know, and none is blessed because he has learned and come to know; rather, each is judged with regard to whether he has kept the faith and genuinely kept the commandments."[24]

As scholars often have noted, Athanasius also strove to temper appeals to authority derived from clairvoyance and the capacity to receive visions, having his Antony warn that visions are often demonic temptations: "Whenever they (the demons) come to you at night, and they wish to tell the future, or they say, 'We are angels,' pay no attention, for they are lying."[25] The reception of visions was such a hallmark of the charismatic monk that Athanasius could not deny such power to his Antony. Nevertheless, he was careful to depict Antony as a man who knew the potential threat that the disclosure of visions could have, for "he did not make a practice of telling others about these things voluntarily."[26] Therefore Williams concludes that

21. *Life of Antony* 93 (PG 26:973b–c).

22. *Life of Antony* 67 (PG 26:937c), trans. Williams, "Domestication," 26.

23. Williams, "Domestication," 30; Richard Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius: Ein philologischer Beitrag zur Geschichte des Mönchtums*. Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akadamie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 5 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1914).

24. *Life of Antony* 33 (PG 26:893a), trans. Williams, "Domestication," 32.

25. *Life of Antony* 35 (PG 26:893b), trans. Williams, "Domestication," 33.

26. *Life of Antony* 66 (PG 26:937b), trans. Williams, "Domestication," 33–34.

> Athanasius' real task was not to elevate Antony but to humanize him, not to make Antony into a charismatic figure but to translate a charismatic authority which was already possessed into a wider social context whose values and expectations called for the articulation of controls. . . . [T]he idealization in the biography involves the anchoring of the hero within human society in such a way that it actually amounts to a "toning down" of power.[27]

Modern scholars often hail Athanasius's employment of the biography genre as a pioneering model for later Christian hagiography. This is certainly true, not only in its literary features, but also in its political strategy which later hagiographers adopted. One sees a similar process of domestication at work in the *Greek Life of Pachomius*. As James Goehring has observed, the *Greek Life* appears to have been produced around the end of the fourth century by an Alexandrian redactor sympathetic to the ecclesiology established by Athanasius and his successors.[28] Like Athanasius, Pachomius's Greek biographer warns against visions that come from demons in disguise as angels or even as Christ himself.[29] He portrays Pachomius as hesitant to disclose his revelations to the brothers, choosing to reveal only "a part" of them, and then only privately (κατ᾽ἰδίαν) to the old, or "great" ones (τοῖς μεγάλοις).[30] The same biographer goes on to portray Pachomius's successor Theodore as a champion of episcopal authority who also is cautiously reticent about disclosing his revelations. After Theodore assumes control of the *koinōnia*, he decides to keep his visions entirely secret lest he be charged with demonic clairvoyance as Pachomius had been at the Synod of Latopolis. Theodore teaches the

27. Williams, "Domestication," 36.

28. James Goehring, "Monastic Diversity and Ideological Boundaries in Fourth-Century Christian Egypt," in *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999; reprinted from *JECS* 5 [1997]), 208–11; "Pachomius's Vision of Heresy: The Development of a Pachomian Tradition," in *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert* (reprinted from *Muséon* 95 [1982]), 138–39, 156. Cf. Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 44–48, 54–55.

29. *Greek Life of Pachomius* 87.

30. *Greek Life* 93, 99; cf. 88, 102. We follow the Greek text of *Vita Sancti Pachomii graecae*, ed. Francis Halkin (Brussels, 1932), 62, 66. For English translation, see Armand Veilleux, *The Life of Saint Pachomius*, *Pachomian Koinonia 1*, Cistercian Studies Series 45 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 360, 365. For a study of the importance of visions in the Pachomian *koinōnia*, see Charles W. Hedrick, "Gnostic Proclivities in the *Greek Life of Pachomius* and the *Sitz im Leben* of the Nag Hammadi Codices," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980): 78–94, esp. 84–86. Visions, of course, need not be seen as a "Gnostic proclivity," but as an important feature of the culture of Egyptian monasticism and fourth-century Christianity broadly speaking.

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monks that instead of seeking visions, they are simply to keep the commandments and orthodox faith by obeying God, the saints, and the clergy. "For we know" says Theodore, "that after the apostles it is the bishops who are the fathers," and "all those who listen to Christ who is in them [i.e. the bishops] are also their children though they do not belong to the clergy and have no ecclesiastical rank."[31]

Like Athanasius, Pachomius's Greek biographer portrays his subject as respectful and subordinate to the clergy. In a clearly anachronistic story not found in the parallel Coptic lives, the Greek biographer aligns Pachomius with orthodox ideology by telling that Pachomius so hated Origen that he prohibited the monks from reading his books, and even destroyed a book of Origen that he found in the monastery by throwing it into the river. According to this biography, Pachomius "gave to the orthodox bishops and successors of the apostles and of Christ himself the heed of one who sees the Lord ever presiding upon the episcopal throne in the church and teaching through it."[32]

Despite this portrayal of Pachomius, scholars have noted that various sources indicate how he came into tension and even outright conflict with church officials. The earliest evidence of such conflict suggests that around 329, after Pachomius began to build his second monastery at Pbow, bishop Serapion of nearby Tentyra (Nitentori) asked Athanasius to force Pachomius to accept ordination that would place him and his monks under direct episcopal authority. Whereas the *Coptic Life* emphasizes Pachomius's negative attitude toward the ordination of monks, the *Greek Life* tones down the tension by saying only that he hid to avoid meeting Athanasius.[33] Some time later, Serapion fiercely opposed Pachomius's building of a church at Tentyra, which, as Brakke observes, could drain tribute and revenues from townspeople whom the bishop apparently regarded as under his own jurisdiction.[34] And while noting that at least one bishop apparently welcomed an expansion of the Pachomian federation, Brakke observes that when Pachomius moved to expand to the south by starting to build a new monastery at Phnoum, the bishop of Latopolis "led a mob in a violent attempt to stop him."[35]

31. *Greek Life* 135 (trans. Veilleux 394–95).

32. *Greek Life* 31 (trans. Veilleux 318). On the anachronistic nature of the story, see Goehring, "Monastic Diversity," 209–11; Samuel Rubenson, "Origen and the Egyptian Monastic Tradition of the Fourth Century," in *Origeniana Septima: Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts*, ed. W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweb (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 319–37, esp. 329–30.

33. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 113–14.

34. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 116–17.

35. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 115.

Yet in addition to the factors incisively discussed by Brakke and others, including the power relationships involved in attempted (and resisted) ordinations, reports of disputes within the monasteries, as well as conflicts with clergy over financial and pastoral control, it was also Pachomius's claims to "clairvoyance" (τὸ διορατικόν) and powers of spiritual discernment (διάκρισις τοῦ πνεύματος) that raised suspicion among church leaders, culminating in that famous conflict and imminent danger that he confronted at the Synod of Latopolis in 345.[36] We suggest that these conflicts resulted not only from his opponents' general suspicion of his alleged powers of clairvoyance, but specifically because of his claims to initiate each new building project according to a revelation.[37] Since Pachomius's usual practice, when seeking to establish a new monastery, was to explain that an angelic voice or a God-sent vision had instructed him to do so, clergy who opposed the expansion of Pachomius's federation could hardly leave such justification unchallenged.

What we find, then, in both Athanasius's *Life of Antony* and the *Greek Life of Pachomius*, are responses to the monastic pursuit of visions, charismatic powers, and claims to be guided by the Holy Spirit or providence, responses which attempted to harness and redirect the authority derived from such powers into the service of the hierarchically structured church and its clergy. When now we turn to the teachings found in Antony's letters, and compare them with themes included in Nag Hammadi Codex I, we can more fully appreciate how widespread was the aspiration to seek revelations that Athanasius and Pachomius's Greek biographer sought to moderate and reshape.

36. *Greek Life* 112 (Halkin 72–73; trans. Veilleux 375–76); cf. 52, 73, 87.

37. The *Coptic (Bohairic) Life* develops an interesting pattern according to which Pachomius establishes each new monastery under the guidance of divine inspiration or a vision (17, 49, 52, 57, 58), whereas no revelation is involved when a preexisting monastery joins the federation (50, 51, 56). One exception to this pattern may be the foundation of the monastery at Smin/Panopolis, which was initiated by an invitation from the local bishop, though even then the construction was only completed with the assistance of a guardian angel who appeared to Pachomius in a dream (54). Even more interesting is that the *Greek Life* includes no such pattern, so that visions play no role in the expansion of the federation. There, Pachomius only receives one vision, instructing him to built his first monastery at Tabennesi (12). For the text of the *Coptic (Bohairic) Life*, see L. Th. Lefort, *S. Pachomii vita Bohairice scripta*, CSCO 89 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1925; reprint 1953); English translation in Armand Veilleux, *The Life of Saint Pachomius*, 23–295.

THE LETTERS OF ANTONY AND NAG HAMMADI CODEX I

The letters of Antony, now widely available thanks to the scholarly efforts of Samuel Rubenson, confirm Michael Williams's conclusion that Athanasius was attempting to "tone down" the memory of Antony as a great charismatic teacher of wisdom. Scholars widely recognize that Athanasius chose to portray Antony as an unschooled monk who used his "memory instead of books," who had "no need of letters," and who was known and recognized only for his reverence to God, not "out of writings nor foreign wisdom" (ἐκ συγγραμμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ τῆς ἔξωθεν σοφίας)[38] As Rubenson has shown, however, the Antony of the letters is a wisdom teacher conversant with the concepts and terminology of platonizing Alexandrian Christianity, who writes to his disciples letters of instruction which circulated widely in the fourth century and were translated into various other languages.[39] While Athanasius's Antony is a humble monk, respectful and subordinate to the clergy and "canon of the church," a man who exhorts his hearers to keep "the faith" and observe "the commandments," Antony's letters never mention the clergy, the canon of the church, or the faith.[40] Instead, he directs his disciples to seek *gnōsis*, to "know yourselves," and to let the Holy Spirit instruct their minds. Taking the role of spiritual teacher, he prays for his disciples, the "spiritual Israel," that God will open "the eyes of your hearts" and "the ears of your hearts" so they may learn about all of God's dispensations which he makes through "manifestations and secret revelations" (*Letters* 6.21, 111–13).[41]

A fourth-century reader who turned to Nag Hammadi Codex I—far from encountering teachings typically regarded as "Gnostic" (dualism, docetism, a world-hating spirit)—would find a number of themes strikingly compatible with Antony's letters.[42] After all, both types of sources bear affinities with the Christianity that flourished in Alexandria during

38. *Life of Antony* 3, 73, 93 (PG 26:845a, 945a, 973c)

39. Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 15–21.

40. *Life of Antony* 33, 67 (PG 26:893a, 937c). Samuel Rubenson finds this silence in other early Egyptian monastic correspondence as well. See his "Argument and Authority in Early Monastic Correspondence," in *Foundations of Power and Conflicts of Authority in Late-Antique Monasticism*, ed. A. Camplani and G. Filaramo (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 75–87, esp. 85.

41. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Antony's letters are cited from Samuel Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*.

42. See also Wincenty Myszor, "Antonius-Briefe und Nag-Hammadi-Texte," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 32 (1989): 72–88.

the second, third, and fourth centuries, pioneered by recognized theologians such as Valentinus, Clement, Origen, and Evagrius Ponticus (not to mention spiritual teachers like Hierakas or the Tall Brothers about whom we know much less) who developed schools and monastic organizations independent of the Alexandrian ecclesiastical structure. As we shall see, the similarities between Antony's Letters and Codex I are neither generalized nor superficial. On the contrary, a fourth-century reader could find in both a wholly monistic theology and Christology, a protology of the pre-incarnate, immortal, and intelligible essence (ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ), a spiritual understanding of the resurrection of mind (ⲛⲟⲩⲥ), not flesh, and an eschatological vision of "restoration" (ⲁⲡⲟⲕⲁⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ) to one's spiritual origin. Even more important for our discussion—and for understanding what concerned Athanasius—is that Codex I and Antony's Letters share a commitment to spiritual progress that emphasizes attaining knowledge of God through "self-knowledge," inviting the reader to receive revelations through the pedagogical activity of the Logos and Holy Spirit.

"Know Yourself"

According to Antony, the goal of the spiritual life is to return to one's original nature, the "original condition," "first formation," or "original unity," in which every created being existed as an "intelligible essence" (ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲟⲉⲣⲁ: 1.30; 2.4–10; 5.18).[43] In line with the Platonic concept of the pre-existence of the soul, continued through the writings of such theologians as Origen, Antony understands salvation as a "return" to one's true nature which came forth from the intelligible realm and descended into the body. He describes how this intelligible essence "descended into the abyss, being completely dead," where it lost its "original unity" (5.16–18; trans. Rubenson 213).[44] According to Antony, coming to "know oneself"

43. Antony's fourth letter, fully extant in Coptic, demonstrates that ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲟⲉⲣⲁ was his original Greco-Coptic term, which later Latin translators rendered variously as *sensualis essentia* and *sensualis exstantia*. See Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 61 n 7. For what remains of Antony's letters in Coptic, see Gérard Garitte, *Lettres de S. Antoine version géorgienne et fragments coptes*, CSCO 148, vol. 5 (Leuven: Peeters, 1955), 11–13, 20–22, 28–29, 41–46; cf. E. O. Winstedt, "The Original Text of One of St. Antony's Letters," *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1906): 540–45.

44. Antony also shares with Origen the idea of how all beings, even Satan, originated from one common source: "Now, therefore, understand that, whether it be the holy heavens, or angels or archangels or thrones or dominions or cherubim or seraphim or sun or moon or stars, or patriarchs or prophets or apostles, or devil or Satan or evil spirits or the powers of the air, or (to say no more) whether it be man or woman, in the beginning of their formation they all derive from one, except the perfect and blessed Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (5.40; trans. Rubenson

is to recognize one's origin in the *noetic ousia*, which unites one with the Father. As Samuel Rubenson observes, Antony teaches that "by knowing himself according to the 'spiritual essence' man is able to attain to true knowledge, he is able to know God, to know all."[45]

Since incarnation weighs down one's spiritual essence, drawing it into a state of forgetfulness regarding its true nature as an intelligible being, those who remain ignorant live in a state of oblivion, a spiritual death which ensnares the mind in what Antony calls this "dark house full of war" (7.10–13; trans. Rubenson 226; cf. 5.6–10; 6.69–70). According to Antony, "through much weakness, the heaviness of the body, and the concern for evil, the law of promise has grown cold and the faculties of the mind have been worn out. Thus they have not been able to discover themselves as they were created, namely as an eternal substance" (3.10–12; trans. Rubenson 206; cf. 5.15–16). The goal of spiritual practice, then, is to come to know oneself: "Every rational being for whom the Savior came, ought to examine his way of life and know himself and discern between evil and good, so that he may be freed through his coming" (2.25; trans. Rubenson 204).[46] In his brief fourth letter—the only one of his letters completely preserved in Coptic—Antony writes that:

> Truly, my beloved, I am writing to you as learned people (ϩⲉⲛⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛⲗⲟⲅⲓⲟⲥ) who have become able to know themselves. For he who knows himself knows God. He who knows God is worthy to worship him in the proper way. My beloved in the Lord, know yourselves. For those who have known themselves have known their time. And those who have known their time have been able to stabilize themselves so that they are not moved by wavering speech. (4.15–16 [Garitte 45; our trans.])

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215). These originally intelligible beings came to take on different names and forms, and to inhabit different levels in the universe due to their relative vice or virtue: "Because of the evil conduct of some, it was necessary that God should set names upon them after their works" (5.41; trans. Rubenson 215). Demons too are "all from one (source) in their spiritual essence; but through their flight from God great diversity has arisen between them since their deeds are varying" (6.56; trans. Rubenson 220). The more meritorious who resisted demonic attacks are called "patriarchs, and some prophets and kings and priests and judges and apostles. . . . All these names are given to them, whether male or female, for the sake of the variety of their deeds and in conformity with their own minds, but they are all from one (source)" (6.62; trans. Rubenson 220).

45. Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 61–62.

46. Compare with the opening lines of Antony's third letter: "A sensible man who has prepared himself to be freed at the coming of Jesus knows himself in his spiritual essence, for he who knows himself also knows the dispensations of his Creator" (3.1–2; trans. Rubenson 206; cf. 3.38–40).

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Now while monks in Egypt and beyond were reading and copying Antony's letters, readers of Nag Hammadi Codex I in the Thebaid were finding in its various tractates a similar message about the importance of self-knowledge to purify the body and recover one's original nature. Whoever opened the codex's cover would have found, and likely repeated, the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* (I,1) inscribed on its front fly-leaf, requesting "healing for my body," and beseeching Christ to "redeem me, for I am yours, the one who has come forth from you" (A,4–6; A,19–20).[47] Readers who went on to turn a few more pages into the codex's first tractate would have found a secret book written by James (I,2), in which Jesus exhorts James and Peter to "know yourselves," and to purify their souls from bodily illness through instruction in the Spirit (11,38–12,22).[48] Reading on to the

47. For the suggestion that the reader(s) of Codex I would have identified with Paul as they repeated his commencement prayer, see Kaler, "*Prayer of the Apostle Paul.*"

48. Even though ancient readers, like their modern counterparts, must not have read books linearly all or even most of the time, there is some evidence which indicates that ancient authors, editors, and teachers did in fact arrange books to be read linearly, in specific orders and arrangements. We know that even before the popularization of the codex, instructors of Greek philosophy developed curriculums of Plato's dialogues in which the pupil would advance from simple readings on morality and virtue to more advanced lessons in theology and cosmology (see John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977], 184–85 [on Thrasyllus's *tetralogies*] and 397 [on Theon of Smyrna]). The invention of the codex naturally lent an even greater sense of coherence to otherwise discrete tractates. It also provided the possibility of a linear reading experience in place of reading a number of scrolls in a prescribed order. Porphyry deliberately rearranged Plotinus's writings to form a curriculum that started with readings on the virtues (*Enneads* 1) and then led the pupil all the way through the more abstract metaphysical philosophy culminating with the treatise on "the One" (*Enneads* 5–6). See Porphyry, *On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of his Books,* 4, 24, and Pierre Hadot's analysis of Porphyry's editorial arrangement of the *Enneads* in his "La métaphysique de Porphyre," in *Porphyre: 8 exposés suivis de discussions*, ed. Heinrich Dörrie, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 12 (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1966), 127–57, esp. 127–29. Augustine also took care to have his *De civitate Dei* organized according to specific arrangements in multiple codices (see Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995], 134). Moreover, the Christian canon also reflects a linear logic in its organization, moving from the Old Testament portion to New Testament, so that Old becomes interpreted in terms of New. Hence Malachi's prophecy of Elijah as messianic forerunner, strategically placed at the end of the Christian Old Testament and directly followed by the New Testament gospels creates the sense of prophetic fulfillment. The New Testament is then arranged according to a linear plan that begins with gospels, followed by the letters of the apostles, and concludes, fittingly, with eschatology. See François Bovon, "The Canonical Structure of the Gospel and Apostle," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 516–27; cf. Williams, "Reading the Nag Hammadi Codices," 14–15, 28–29.

next tractate,which proclaims a "gospel of truth" (I,3), they would see a continued emphasis on the importance of self-knowledge and the eradication of evil in its injunction to "be concerned with yourselves" and "not become a place for the devil" (33,11–21). According to this gospel, those who are truly alive receive instruction "about themselves . . . receiving it from the Father, turning back to him again" (21,3–8).[49] Like Antony's letters, this gospel teaches that self-knowledge involves learning about one's true origin and spiritual destination:

> If one has knowledge, he is from above. If he is called, he hears, he answers, and he turns to him who is calling him, and ascends to him. He knows in what manner he is called. Having knowledge, he does the will of the one who called him, he wishes to be pleasing to him, he receives rest. Each one's name comes to him. He who is to have knowledge in this manner *knows where he comes from and where he is going*. He knows as one who having become drunk has turned away from his drunkenness, having *returned to himself*, has set right what are his own. (22,3–20)

Whoever read Antony's letters or Codex I would also have learned that self-knowledge does not draw one away from this-worldly concerns or foster some kind of world-negating or anti-social attitude. To the contrary, readers would see that self-knowledge involves important ethical implications. For Antony, perhaps under Origen's influence, all beings originated from one source before they came to inhabit their respective positions in the universal hierarchy. Because of this common relationship, Antony teaches that "whoever sins against his neighbor sins against himself, and whoever does evil to his neighbor does evil to himself" (6.57–63). When one achieves self-knowledge, he understands that he is unified with others as members of the body of Christ (6.85–91), a unity maintained through mutual love. By coming to know ourselves, we come to "know all," just as by coming to love ourselves we come to "love all" (6.69–71). "Therefore," says Antony, "we ought to love one another warmly, for he who loves his neighbor loves God, and he who loves God loves his own soul" (6.92).

In a similar vein, readers of Codex I would see that while self-knowledge restores one "to himself," setting right "what are his own," he is also responsible to care for others. The *Gospel of Truth* tells its readers to "be concerned with yourselves," yet in the same passage exhorts them to strengthen the foot of the one who stumbles, care for those who are ill,

49. Cf. *Gos. Truth* 25,10–14: "It is within unity that each one will attain himself; within knowledge he will purify himself from multiplicity into unity, consuming matter within himself like fire, and darkness by light, death by life."

50. Rubenson, *Letters*, 69–70.

feed the hungry, and give rest to the weary. Thus this homiletic interpretation of the gospel teaches that one who knows God, far from withdrawing from social and ethical responsibility, is to act as God's agent to serve and help others, for "you are the perfect day, and in you dwells the light that does not fail" (32,32–33,11).

The Spirit as Guide to Adoption

Throughout his letters, Antony teaches that the Holy Spirit directs those on the path to self-knowledge, leading them toward adoption as "brothers" of Christ. Those taught by the Holy Spirit, he says, grow in courage, come to know themselves in their spiritual essence (2.27–28). Yet Antony does not equate the Spirit with the mind or any other human faculty; on the contrary, he teaches that one needs the Spirit, as a divine gift sent from God, to teach one's mind to purify the soul and body, thus leading those who are lost back to their origin, and so back to God (1.27–32, 42–48, 56–59, 69; 2.7; 5.35).

Writing of a "Spirit of Repentance" (1.19, 25–32, 42–48, 56–59, 66–70, 77) and a "Spirit of Wisdom" that teach spiritual discernment, Antony tells his disciples that he prays that this spirit will be given them (3.3; 6.29; 7.63), but warns that the "holy power" which is the "Spirit of Adoption" only comes to one who has purified himself and prepared to receive it (2.7, 27–29; 3.31; 4.11–14). In his fourth letter, Antony draws upon Johannine and Pauline passages to explain that the path to divine adoption follows upon perfection in self-knowledge:

> Everyone who fears God and keeps his commandments is a servant of God. Now perfection is not in this servitude, yet it is righteous since it is a guide to adoption. . . . Therefore the letter of the law works with us in the manner of a benevolent servant, until we become strong enough to master every passion and we perfect a benevolent service of virtue through this apostolic fashion. When they draw near to grace then Jesus will say to them, "I will no longer call you 'servants'; instead, I will call you 'my friends' *and* '*my brothers*.' For everything that I have heard from my Father I will teach you" (cf. John 15.15). Those who have drawn near, since they have been taught by the Holy Spirit, know themselves according to their intelligible substance (ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲛⲟⲉⲣⲁ). Now by knowing themselves, they cry out saying, "Indeed, we have not received a spirit of servitude, but a spirit of adoption, in which we cry out 'Abba, Father!' so that we may know the things God has given us" (cf. Rom 8.15–17; 1 Cor 2:12). (4.4–5, 8–11 [Garitte 42–44; our trans.])

For Antony, one must begin the spiritual journey in the righteous servitude of keeping God's commandments; only then, after receiving the Holy

Spirit's instruction, can one receive divine adoption. Strikingly, Antony adds to the words of Jesus in John 15.15 ("I will no longer call you 'servants'; instead, I will call you 'friends'") the words "and my brothers," underscoring his theme of their hope for adoption as children of God (cf. *Letters* 3.30).

Like Antony of the letters, Codex I offers repeated instruction about the activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of its readers—how they need it to cleanse them from the illnesses of the flesh, to lead them toward adoption into the divine family, and to restore them to harmony and union with the Father. For as noted above, its readers would have been likely to begin their devotional study of the codex, when turning to its opening *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, by calling on the Redeemer to grant bodily healing and spiritual illumination, among other gifts, through "the Son of Man, the Spirit, the Paraclete" (A,11–24). Proceeding to the first tractate (the *Secret Book of James*), readers would see Jesus teaching James and Peter that one must be "full of the Spirit" to enter the kingdom of heaven (2,29–33; 4,18–19). Here Jesus teaches that one must receive the Spirit in order to overcome fleshly desires, since without the Spirit the soul cannot be saved. But when the Spirit delivers the soul, "then the body becomes free from sin" as well (11,38–12,2); for those who become full of the Spirit are protected by its power "like an encircling wall" (5,21–23). The reader who proceeded to the following tractate (the *Gospel of Truth*) would then read of the soteriological work of the Spirit, how it is "the manifestation of the Father and his revelation to his aeons" through which one becomes rejoined with the Father (26,28–27,7). Describing the terror, anguish, and confusion of the person alienated from God, this gospel tells how "the Spirit ran after him, hastening from wakening him up" (30,4–19), and then how one rests in communion with God when one is "refreshed in the Spirit" (42,25–33).

Readers of Codex I would find here too, as in Antony's letters, repeated insistence that it is the Spirit that leads to divine adoption. The first tractate (*Secret Book of James*) teaches that Jesus calls to those "outside the Father's inheritance," exhorting them to "make yourselves like the son of the Holy Spirit" and "rejoice and be glad as sons of God" (6,19–20; 10,10; 11,1). Telling Jesus that "we have forsaken our fathers and mothers and villages and followed you; grant us therefore not to be tempted by the devil" (4,25–30; cf. Luke 14.26, Matt 10.37), the disciples rejoice to learn from him that now they may become sons of the true Father, who sends the Spirit to protect them from assaults of the devil. Jesus promises those who "do the will of the Father" that the Father "will love you"

and even "make you equal to me" (5,1–3). Readers may well have seen a promise of their own adoption in the tractate's conclusion, which refers to the coming of certain "children" and "those to be born, . . . those for whom the proclamation was made, those whom the Lord has made his sons" (15,35–16,30). They would then naturally see the fulfillment of this promise in the next tractate's theme of the Father's adoption of "the little children" (19,27–20,21) and be assured, by this tractate's own conclusion, that they are the "true brothers" who "rest in Him who is at rest," for "it is children of this kind that he loves" (43,5–11; 43,20–24).

Jesus' Passion, Crucifixion, and the Spiritual Resurrection

Furthermore, both Antony's letters and the texts in Codex I emphasize that it is not only the Spirit that draws people back to God, but also the incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. According to Antony, Christ's death and resurrection are the powerful acts that deliver Christians from sinful passions and from ignorance of God, conquer the power of death, and reunite believers within the body of Christ. Drawing from Pauline letters, Antony recalls how Jesus descended from glory, becoming incarnate in human form in order to destroy death; he "even took the form of our weakness, that through his weakness he might strengthen us. He became obedient to the Father in everything until death, even the death of the cross that he might resurrect us all through his death and destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (7.42–44; trans. Rubenson 228; cf. Phil 2.8, Heb 2.14). Throughout his letters, Antony repeatedly asserts that Jesus' suffering "gathered us from all lands . . . *resurrecting our minds*, giving us remission from our sins, and teaching us that we are members of one another" (2.20–23; trans. Rubenson 204; cf. 3.25; 5.28; 6.91; 7.26–30). Antony's Christ is the "true mind of the Father," the "head of all creatures and the body of the Church. Therefore we are members of one another and the body of Christ" (6.86; trans. Rubenson 222; cf. 1 Cor 12.12–27; Col 1.17–18; Eph 5.23, 29–30). Thus through his death, Jesus joined believers to one another in himself, in "the mind of the Father."

Reading Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Antony observed that Paul speaks of a resurrection of a spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν [1 Cor 15.44]) and not, as other Christians argued, a resurrection of the flesh. As Rubenson summarizes,

> For man to regain knowledge about his origin and essence and achieve control of himself, his mind must be called back to life; it must learn how

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> to purify soul and body. Consequently, the resurrection that Christ brought is to Antony a resurrection of the mind, and the task of the Spirit is to teach the mind and guide it in the acts of repentance.[50]

For Antony—as for the authors of Colossians (3.1, 9–10) and Ephesians (2.1–6)—Christians whom the Spirit has purified may already enjoy some of the blessings of this spiritual resurrection. Discussing the Spirit's cathartic power over the fleshly body, Antony comments that "[even] now this dwelling has taken on something of that other *spiritual body* which will be taken on at the resurrection of the just" (1.71; trans. Rubenson 201–2; cf. 6.80–81).[51] For Antony teaches that although the body of flesh may be purified in this life, ultimately it dies and passes away. What is raised is one's original "invisible essence," which will not "pass away with the body" (6.80; trans. Rubenson 221; cf. 5.1). At present, however, the "spiritual essence" remains hidden within "this corruptible body which it did not have from the beginning, and from which it will be called away" (6.69–70; trans. Rubenson 221; 3.11).

Fourth-century readers of Codex I would have found in its tractates a similar emphasis on the centrality of Jesus' actual suffering, death, and resurrection. While scholars have often associated such texts with some kind of "docetic" teaching, as a generic characteristic of Gnosticism, every one of the tractates in Codex I, on the contrary, clearly affirms that Jesus became incarnate, and bore his suffering and death for the sake of human salvation.[52] The *Secret Book of James* makes this clear by echoing Mark's account of Peter's denial of the necessity of his impending crucifixion (Mark 8.31–33). Thus here, too, when Jesus exhorts Peter and James to "remem-

51. Thus Rubenson translates the Georgian recension as the more authentic reading of this passage. But note that the Syriac translation differs significantly: "that when *the whole body is purified* and has accepted the fullness of the Spirit, *it has all it will receive* at the resurrection of the just." A Syriac redactor has evidently eliminated Antony's reference to the "spiritual body" which will be resurrected, so that his text's reference to the "the whole body" could be reconciled with the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh. Therefore we probably have in this passage an example of how Antony's original thinking, influenced by the Alexandrian theological tradition of Clement and Origen, had to be sanitized by later orthodox scribes, just as Rufinus sanitized Origen's writings for orthodox audiences (as he tells us himself in the preface to his Latin translation of Origen's *Peri archōn*).

52. On theme of Christ's suffering and death in the *Gospel of Truth*, *Treatise on the Resurrection*, and *Tripartite Tractate* in particular, see Elaine Pagels, "Gnostic and Orthodox Views of Christ's Passion: Paradigms for the Christian's Response to Persecution?" in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 1: The School of Valentinus*, ed. B. Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 262–88.

ber my cross and my death, and you shall live," his disciples rebuke him: "Lord, do not speak of suffering and death, for they are far from you!" Yet here, too, Jesus sternly insists that "none will be saved unless they believe (ⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ) in my cross, for the kingdom of God belongs to those who have believed in my cross" (5,33–6,7; cf. 13,23–25), and urges them to embrace suffering and death, as he himself has done.

The reader who continued on to the *Gospel of Truth* would note how it echoes Pauline images and teaching about the cross. Thus, this homily says, when Jesus was "nailed to a tree," in effect he transformed the cross into a signpost on which he published the names of God's children—those whose names are revealed in the primordial "book of life." Through the cross, then, "those who have believed in salvation" came into being: "For this reason the merciful one, the faithful one, Jesus, was patient in accepting these sufferings until he took that book, since he knows that his death is life for many. . . . He put on that book; he was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the Father on the cross" (19,28–20,30). Furthermore, this gospel describes how Jesus "was nailed to a tree; he became a fruit of the knowledge of the Father. He (Jesus/the fruit) did not, however, cause destruction because he was eaten, but to those who ate him, he let them rejoice in the discovery." In this powerfully creative synthesis of biblical symbolism, which juxtaposes the tree of knowledge, the cross as "tree," and the eating of its "fruit"—the body of the crucified savior (i.e. the Eucharist)—this gospel suggests that Jesus' crucifixion and death undoes the destruction caused by Adam's transgression, unites those who "eat this fruit" with the Father through Christ, whom this gospel, like Antony, calls "the mind of the Father" (16,36). Those who partake of the body of the crucified Christ thus "discover that they exist in him, and he in them" (18,21–31).

Like the *Secret Book of James* and the *Gospel of Truth*, the two tractates that conclude Codex I continue to teach the reality of Christ's death and its soteriological significance. The *Treatise on the Resurrection* (I,4) also declares that Jesus conquered the power of death through his incarnation, suffering, and death. Readers of Codex I would naturally have identified with the treatise's original recipients, Rheginos and his "brothers," who have asked their teacher to help them understand the mystery of Christ's resurrection (43,1; 50,2), and would have been encouraged to hear that "the mind (ⲛⲟⲩⲥ) of those who have known him shall not perish" (46,24). Drawing on Paul's discussion in 1 Cor 15, this anonymous teacher explains that the resurrection is "the transformation of things, and a transition into newness. For imperishability (ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲧⲉⲕⲟ) [descends] upon the perishable;

the light flows down upon the darkness, swallowing it up" (48,30–49,2; cf. 1 Cor 15.50–54). An attentive reader would have seen here an echo of the previous tractate's discussion of how the crucified Christ "stripped himself of perishable rags" and "put on imperishability (ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲧⲉⲕⲟ)" (20,23–32). Like Antony, then, the teacher in the *Treatise on the Resurrection* maintains that what is raised is not corporeal flesh, but insists that the "spiritual resurrection" (ⲧⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁⲧⲓⲕⲏ [45,40–46, 1]) is a present reality.[53] Appealing to Paul's authority, he declares that "indeed, as the Apostle said, 'We have suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him'" (45,24–28; cf. Eph 2.6; Col 3.1). Thus this teacher, like Antony, encourages his students to consider themselves already living the resurrection life. He tells those who refuse to conform to the flesh and who flee from "the divisions and fetters" that "you already have the resurrection. . . . Why not consider yourself as risen and (already) brought to this?" (49,9–24).

The concluding tractate in Codex I, the *Tripartite Tractate* (I,5), also strongly affirms Jesus' human birth, suffering, and death (113,5–34). Invok-

53. Some commentators on the *Treatise of the Resurrection* interpret the author's question—"Why will you not receive the flesh when you ascend into the aeon?" (47,6–8)—as a rhetorical assertion that one will in fact receive a kind of "spiritual flesh" during ascent into the heavenly realm. See Malcolm Peel, "Treatise on the Resurrection" in *Nag Hammadi Codex I,* 2:178–81; Hugo Lundhaug, "'These are the Symbols and Likenesses of the Resurrection': Conceptualizations of Death and Transformation in the *Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC I,4)," in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity*, ed. Turid Karlsen and Jorunn Økland (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 187–205. According to this interpretation, the author distinguishes between a corruptible flesh that perishes, and a "spiritual flesh" that one receives in the resurrection. However, the author of *Treat. Res.* never speaks of a "spiritual flesh." He speaks clearly of a "spiritual resurrection" (ⲧⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁⲧⲓⲕⲏ [45,40–46,1]) and of a "transformation of things and a transition into newness" (48,34–38), but he never applies this transformation to any kind of flesh. To the contrary, he insists that "the visible members which are dead shall not be saved," but the "living members within them" will rise (47,36–48,3), and that "the spiritual resurrection . . . swallows up the psychic in the same way as the fleshly (ⲥⲁⲣⲕⲓⲕⲏ)" (45,39–46,2). He says that before coming into this world, "you were not existing in the flesh" (47,4–6), and that he who experiences resurrection "receives again what was at first" (49,35–36). The author of *Treat. Res.*, therefore, accords with what Paul wrote about the flesh in 1 Cor 15.50–53 (NRSV): "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable . . . the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality." Paul, like the author of *Treat. Res.*, distinguishes between bodies of flesh and bodies of spirit. For Paul, a body (σῶμα) will indeed rise, but it will be an imperishable "spiritual body" (σῶμα πνευματικόν, 1 Cor 15.42–44).

ing primarily Johannine language, this text tells how the divine Logos, "in willing compassion" for a lost humanity, became incarnate as Savior, in order to become "what they were. For their sake he became manifest in involuntary suffering . . . Not only did he take upon <himself> the death of those whom he intended to save, but he also accepted their smallness . . . in which they were born in body and soul; because he had let himself be conceived and born as an infant, in body and soul" (114,34–115,11).

Restoration to the Father

Finally, we have seen that Antony taught that one must return to what is original, to the "nature of our essence," complete in the knowledge of the virtues and alien to the power of sin (7.12–13, 41, 51). The process of restoration could not occur without Christ's descent into human flesh, his suffering, death, and resurrection, and the work of the Spirit, purifying believers' souls and minds and leading them into divine adoption. Antony describes the original state to which one shall return as existing beyond the body and its gender distinctions, in a condition "neither male nor female" (6.5–6, 70; cf. 5.15).

Readers of Codex I would have seen throughout its tractates a similar eschatological emphasis on the final "return" (ϲⲧⲟ) and "restoration" (ⲁⲡⲟⲕⲁⲧⲁϲⲧⲁϲⲓϲ) to the Father, envisioned as spiritual "rest" (ⲁⲛⲁⲡⲁⲩϲⲓϲ or ⲙⲁⲧⲛ̄), even from Paul's opening prayer invoking the Redeemer as "[my] mind" and "rest."[54] The codex's following tractates, especially the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, and the *Tripartite Tractate,* offer clear, repeated, and sometimes sweeping visions of the final restoration to the Father "from whom the beginning came forth," as the *Gospel of Truth* says, and "to whom all will return who have come from him" (38,1–4).[55] According to this gospel, the Father retains the fullness

54. For specific studies on the concept of *anapausis* in the *Ap. James* and *Gos. Truth*, see Jan Helderman, "Anapausis in the Epistula Jacobi Apocrypha," in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis*, ed. R. McL. Wilson (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 34–43, and *Die Anapausis im Evangelium Veritatis* (Leiden: Brill, 1984). For a study comparing the importance of *anapausis* in Nag Hammadi and monastic sources, including the letters of Antony, see Heinrich Holtze, "*ANAPAUSIS* im anachoretischen Mönchtum und in der Gnosis," *ZKG* 106 (1995): 1–17.

55. *Gos. Truth* further describes the beings who constitute the All as having preexisted and "come forth" from the Father: "they have known that they came forth from him like children who are from a grown man. They knew that they had not yet received form nor yet received a name, each one of which the Father begets" (27,9–19; cf. 33,30–32). When reading *Ap. James* along side these texts, readers could naturally understand Jesus' teaching about entering the kingdom in terms of "restoration" to the divine world of intelligible existence. That *Ap. James* imagines the heavenly

of all beings within himself, granting it to them "as a return to him" (18,31–19,7). This "return is called repentance (ⲙⲉⲧⲁⲛⲟⲓⲁ)" (35,22–23). To begin the process of restoration, the Father sent Christ into the world, "so that those who were disturbed might receive a *return*" (36,14–16). After Christ's passion, death, and resurrection revealed the gospel message, those who heed it "will *return* and awaken" (29,12–14), finally "receiving knowledge about the one who is hidden . . . the Father from whom the beginning came forth, to whom all will *return* who have come forth from him" (37,37–38,4; cf. 42,11–33).

As we have seen, the *Treatise on the Resurrection* teaches that restoration into "rest" (43,34–38) comes not only through Christ's incarnation and crucifixion, as in the *Gospel of Truth* and *Tripartite Tractate*, but also through his resurrection in which believers may already participate. Its anonymous teacher explains that by Christ's divine and human natures, he "vanquished death through his being Son of God," and made possible "the *restoration* to the fullness" through his being Son of Man (44,20–33). In contrast to believers who "have known the Son of Man" and "believed (ⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ) that he rose from among the dead" (46,10–17), the teacher goes so far as to criticize "the philosopher in this world" who foolishly imagines that he "returns himself by himself" (ⲕⲧⲟ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁϥ ⲟⲩ[ⲁ]ⲉ̣ⲉⲧϥ̄) ignorant that restoration occurs only through "our faith in Christ" (46, 13).

Codex I concludes, appropriately, with an extensive theological treatise (the *Tripartite Tractate*), which envisions the entire sweep of salvation history, beginning from the original unity with the Father (I 51–74), discussing at length the Savior's soteriological work (I 85–122), and finally envisioning the anticipated "restoration" (ⲁⲡⲟⲕⲁⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ, I 122–138). This tractate declares that "when the redemption was proclaimed, the perfect man received knowledge immediately so as to return in haste to his unitary state . . . to return there joyfully, to the place from which he came, to the place from which he flowed forth" (123,3–11). Readers of Codex I working through this tractate's extensive teachings probably saw a reference to themselves in its description of those members of the church who require further instruction before they are to be united with the Father; yet they would be encouraged to hear of that time when "all the members of the body of the church are in a single place and receive the restoration (ⲁⲡⲟⲕⲁⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ) at one time, when they have been manifested as the

kingdom as a place of intelligible being is suggested when James and Peter ascend to the Father by leaving behind their bodies and sending up their "minds" (ⲛⲟⲩⲥ) and "spirits" (ⲡ̄ⲛ̄ⲁ̄) (15,5–34).

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whole body, namely the restoration into the fullness" (123,11–22). This tractate then evokes Pauline baptismal language to conclude the entire codex, fittingly enough, with a vision of the eschatological redemption as a state of total unity, which, like Antony's vision, exists beyond the body, and distinctions of gender:

> For when we confessed the kingdom which is in Christ, <we> escaped from the whole multiplicity of forms and from inequality and change. For the end will receive a unitary existence just as the beginning is unitary, where there is no male nor female, nor slave nor free, nor circumcision and uncircumcision, neither angel nor man, but Christ is all in all. (132,16–28; cf. Gal 3.28, 1 Cor 12.13, Col 3.11)

Such similarities between the letters of Antony and the tractates of Codex I lends further support to the idea that this codex would have appealed to Egyptian monks, especially those interested in the kind of Alexandrian-intellectualist speculation that we know was widespread throughout Egypt in the fourth century, including the Thebaid where Codex I was produced. Indeed, the variety of literature found among the codices from Nag Hammadi, and more specifically, within any single codex, suggests a social environment that conforms to Brakke's model of an intellectual Christian *paideia* based on an "open canon" of readings.[56] Brakke suggests that the letters of Antony were read in just this kind of environment, as "a monasticized form of the teaching authority exercised in the study circles of urban Alexandria: an academic Christianity of the desert, with its attendant dangers to the authority wielded by the clergy."[57]

Brakke's observation reflects an increasing awareness among scholars that the Alexandrian theological legacy and "study circle" model of education also attained widespread popularity among fourth-century Egyptian monks.[58] Even the *Greek Life of Pachomius*, with its anachronistic and anti-Origenist tendencies (absent in the parallel Coptic lives), reveals that monks in the Thebaid not only sought to receive visions and spiritual progress leading from faith to "perfect knowledge" (τελείαν γνῶσιν) but also gathered around Pachomius to learn about the Scriptures, "especially the

56. David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth *Festal Letter*," *HTR* 87 (1994): 395–419, esp. 398–402.

57. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 213.

58. Samuel Rubenson, "Origen in the Egyptian Monastic Tradition of the Fourth Century" in *Origeniana Septima*, 319–37. Jon Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988).

parts not easily understood and deep" (μάλιστα τὰ μὴ εὐνόητα καὶ βαθέα), the "spiritual resurrection" (τὴν πνευματικὴν ἀνάστασιν) and the "true knowledge" (ἐπιγνώσεως ἀληθινῆς) required to understand the letters of Paul.[59] Although we need not assume that monastic pupils would have entirely agreed with a given text's cosmology or theology (or for that matter, would have been concerned with the same issues that engage modern scholars), we can see how students studying in such monastic environments would have found the tractates in Codex I compatible with other monastic instruction.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we observe that the opening tractates of Codex I (*Prayer of Paul* and the *Secret Book of James*) function to invite their readers to seek revelation and to offer techniques for doing so—techniques that include invocatory prayer, cultivating the necessary attitudes, encouraging exegetical inquiry, and demonstrating practices of prayer that facilitate spiritual ascent. Following these first two tractates, the reader would find others (the *Gospel of Truth*, *Treatise on Resurrection*, and the *Tripartite Tractate*) that collectively offer an advanced-level curriculum, even a syllabus of readings,[60] for those who devote themselves to seeking "the

59. *Greek Life* 21, 56–57 (Halkin 13, 38–39). The *Greek Life* provides a nice image of an intellectual monastic study circle organized around a charismatic leader in the Thebaid. It describes how "sitting in the evening . . . was their custom," searching the Scriptures (34; trans. Veilleux 321). Pachomius would call the brothers to gather around him to teach them about allegorical interpretations, visions, "hidden things," or "a spiritual saying" (cf. 34, 46, 48, 56, 71, 75–76, 83, 96, 125). He taught out of the Scriptures "every evening" (88; trans. Veilleux 357), sometimes all night (61), and even employed a translator for the Greek-speaking brothers who could not understand Egyptian (95). At times he would ask another brother to teach in order do demonstrate equality in the *koinōnia* (110), and even if a brother had not received "great *gnōsis* from God," Pachomius would encourage him to teach in parables (118; trans. Veilleux 380). Apparently these study sessions involved exegetical writing activity as well, for when Pachomius taught the brothers "the word of God," some of them "wrote down many interpretations of the scriptures they had heard from him" (99; trans. Veilleux 365).

60. An ostracon letter from the Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes (*Mon. Epiph.* 140), dating to the late sixth or early seventh century, demonstrates that monastic teachers selected and organized texts in books for the education of their pupils, and also that even at this time, ecclesiastical authorities were still concerned with the problem of non-canonical readings on monastic syllabi. In the letter, a monastic teacher writes to his superior, addressed as "your holiness" (perhaps a bishop?), to reassure him that he has *not* copied anything "beyond the Scriptures" (ϩⲓⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲅⲣⲁⲫⲏ) into a book which he prepared for the education of a young boy (ϣⲏⲣⲉ [ⲕⲟⲩ]ï). For Cop-

deeper parts of Scripture" beyond what most would have heard preached in the churches.

Thus Codex I sets forth a curriculum that encourages an open attitude toward ongoing revelation, by contrast with the curriculum that Athanasius would seek to institute within Egyptian monasteries. For in his *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter,* where Athanasius expresses concern about the proliferation of "other books, the so-called apocrypha," that have "the same name as the genuine books," some of which, like the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul* (I A 25–29), urge readers to search for "things that eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have arisen upon the human heart" (cf. 1 Cor 2.9),[61] he advocates instead a closed canon of written Scriptures, which he preferred to see expounded by ecclesiastical experts trained in scholastic methods of exegesis.[62]

The *Secret Book of James,* by contrast, opens Codex I with a scene intended to show that unmediated access to the risen Savior, and to revelation, is still—even now—available for those who belong to the privileged group "whom the Lord has made his sons" (16,29–30). To make this point, the *Secret Book of James* simultaneously takes up and revises the opening scene of the book of Acts. Thus the tractate opens with a startling scene: the risen Jesus suddenly appears among his disciples long after his resurrection—"five hundred and fifty days" later (2,19–20). Unlike many other accounts in which the disciples gather in anticipation that they will see the risen Jesus (e.g. Matt 28.16; *Ep. Pet. Phil.* 133,8–134,10), this opening scene clearly indicates that the disciples have *no expectation* of seeing him. Instead, James's secret book initially pictures "the twelve disciples" acting on the view set forth in Acts 1, that since the risen Jesus was no longer available to speak directly with them, now, about a year and a half

tic text with English translation see H. E. Winlock and W. E. Crum, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes*, 2 vols. (New York, 1926), 2:40, 188. Cf. Chrysi Kotsifou, "Books and Book Production in The Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt," in *The Early Christian Book*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2007), 48–66, esp. 57–58.

61. *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*; trans. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 327, 329.

62. See Richard Layton, *Didymus the Blind and His Circle in Late Antique Alexandria: Virtue and Narrative in Biblical Scholarship* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), esp. 8–12, 135–63. Layton demonstrates how Athanasius's patronage served to help shift exegetical practice toward a scholastic tradition that sought "to secure the rational foundation of a received authoritative tradition," mandating a series of systematic and formulaic questions—a method that "ultimately legitimized its teaching by appeal to (the Scriptures as) transpersonal sources of authority, rather than the personal qualities or spiritual attainments of the teacher" (11).

after his death and resurrection, they are all conscientiously engaged in writing down what Jesus had revealed to each of them, whether openly or privately. James says that he too was busy writing when—to their complete astonishment—"behold, the Savior appeared, [although] he had departed from [us] 'as [we] gazed' after him" (2,17–19).[63]

Readers of James's secret book would have seen that the twelve disciples apparently had accepted a view that they too may well have heard set forth from Acts: that although the risen Jesus had been available to speak directly with his disciples for forty days after his resurrection, he then definitely departed, ascending through the clouds as his disciples watched, "gazing up toward heaven." Luke then has two angels explain that Jesus has been "taken up from you into heaven," and will only return at that eschatological moment when he shall descend the way he departed (Acts 1.9–11). As Peter later reiterates, Jesus "must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration" (Acts 3.21).

Although Acts does tell how some of the apostles received visions of Christ after his ascension (9.1–6; 10.9–16), many Christians in later generations interpreted its teaching to mean that believers born after the apostles have access to him only by means of oral and written "apostolic tradition." Bishops like Athanasius who based their authority on apostolic succession

63. Strikingly, there are a number of other instances in which codices open with a dialogic "invitation to revelation" given to an apostle who does not expect it. For example, NHC II, III, and IV, all of which open with the *Apocryphon of John*, present Jesus' sudden appearance to John as a shocking surprise, in which Jesus declares that he has appeared "so that you [may know] the things which are not manifest [and those which are manifest]" (II 2,18–19, NHS 33, ed. Waldstein and Wisse]). Here the risen Jesus assures John that—far from having definitively departed from his followers who remain on earth—"I am the one who [is with you (pl.)] always" available and willing to offer instruction through revelation (II 2,11–12). In Codex II, as in Codex I, the reader would find the opening invitation to revelation followed by instructional texts—first, two that expound the deeper meaning of Jesus' sayings (the Gospels of Thomas and Philip [II,2–3]), and then a tractate interpreting the words of "the great apostle" Paul (*Hyp. Arch.* [II,4]). Similarly, NHC VIII opens with the story of Zostrianos's unexpected revelation when he flees to the wilderness to commit suicide. In the opening tractate of NHC VI (*Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*), Jesus, disguised as a pearl merchant, invites the apostles to "come to my city" (4,12, NHS 11, ed. Parrott), which according to the rich symbolism of this text implies a heavenly ascent culminating in dialogue with the undisguised Lord. The following tractates in the codex then offer a collection of various oracular pronouncements (see Williams and Jenott, "Inside the Covers of Codex VI"). This pattern of tractate arrangement, perhaps even deliberate on the part of the scribes, has the effect of encouraging readers to seek revelations that they, like the apostles and other visionaries, did not expect to receive.

came to regard the written sources of the apostles as the primary means of access to Christ, the "Word of God," in which they were believed to have recorded Jesus' revelation for the benefit of posterity. Hence Athanasius asserts in his *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter* that "the words that the disciples proclaim do not belong to them; rather, they heard them from the Savior," and that these words are now embodied in "the Holy Scriptures, which are sufficient to instruct us perfectly."[64]

The opening scene in James's secret book, then, pictures the disciples responding to Jesus' unexpected appearance with an incredulous statement—virtually an objection—that echoes the account in Acts: "And five hundred and fifty days after he had risen from the dead, we said to him, 'You have departed, and were far from us'" (2,19–22). But here Jesus increases their astonishment, and so that of the readers, by answering, "No, but I shall go to the place from which I came." Then he extends to them an open invitation, "If you wish to come with me, come!" Still hesitant, they reply that they will come only if he orders them to. Jesus answers that no one enters the kingdom unless the person is "full," then bids them to "become full of the Spirit" (2,23–28; 4,19–20). The Savior goes on to explain that contrary to their expectations, it was not only during his earthly lifetime that he descends to reveal divine truth, but that even now, "I came down to dwell with you so that you in turn might dwell with me. And finding your houses without ceiling, I have come to dwell in the houses that could receive me at the time of my descent" (9,1–9).

As noted above, what readers learn next are techniques intended to facilitate receiving the kind of unmediated revelation previously requested in Paul's prayer. First, they must come to believe Jesus' teaching that such revelations are available, and take to heart his exhortation to "become full of the Spirit"; next, they must engage in exegetical inquiry into Jesus' parables and sayings, while maintaining a receptive disposition, having "opened your heart" (14,26–29); finally, they must learn to practice focused forms of prayer that progressively send one's heart, mind, and spirit upward into the heavens where they may witness, and even participate in, liturgical "hymns, angelic benedictions, and angelic rejoicing" (15,6–28). After James and Peter heed his exhortations and accept what he reveals, the Savior offers his closing message: that ongoing revelation will continue to be available even in the future, not only to the first generation of disciples, but also to those whom James calls the "children who are

64. *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 328.

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to come after us." However, when the other disciples hear of this, "they indeed believed the revelation, but they were angry (ⲛⲟⲩϭⲥ) about those who were to be born" (15,23–16,11).

What angered "the other disciples," however, is precisely what would gladden those who read this secret book in later generations, including, of course, the fourth-century readers of Codex I: the unexpected news that even now one may attain access to divine revelation. But unlike the disciples who became angry, James receives this revelation gladly. Far from claiming any priority over those in later generations, he humbly professes his hope that he himself may "obtain a portion with them," and rejoices that "those who are not yet born" also may become "sons of the Lord" (16,8–30).

One sees, then, how the teachings in Codex I would appeal to fourth-century Egyptians who sought revelations and advanced understanding of the Scriptures. In his study of rhetorical strategies employed in fourth-century monastic correspondence, Samuel Rubenson points to the theme of "belonging to a privileged group" as a primary way that monastic leaders like Antony encouraged their disciples, and engendered among them a sense of spiritual elitism:

> The addressees are constantly told that they are God's "friends" and "servants," "children of the promise," "joint heirs with the saints," "partakers of the kingdom" and recipients of the Spirit, of "divine power" or "divine grace" . . . they are those who are loved by God and who really love God . . . [they] know only what has been revealed to a few . . . they know themselves . . . sharing in secret knowledge. . . . Part of their privileged status is that they are among the few able to receive revelations and see secrets in heaven.[65]

As we have seen, Codex I fosters in its readers precisely this kind of spiritual identity and sense of belonging to a privileged group, and it is precisely such ideas that Athanasius challenges in his *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter* when he writes against self-proclaimed teachers who base their authority on revelations and appeal to apocryphal books. Athanasius directly opposes the idea found in the *Secret Book of James*, that those who *did not* see and hear the "Son of Man" in person are more blessed than those, like James and Peter, who did (3,8–25; 12,31–13,1). To the contrary, Athanasius insists that it is the original apostles who are the true teachers from whom later Christians must learn. In fact, Athanasius asserts that not even the apostles, nor any other human being, should truly be called "teacher," for, he says

65. Rubenson, "Argument and Authority," 80–81.

quoting Matt 23.8–11, "your teacher, Christ, is one."[66] For Athanasius, the original apostles were mere conduits through whom Christ spoke, and Christians of later generations can only access his authentic teaching through the authentic Scriptures, Athanasius's canon.

While we have chosen to limit the present study to Nag Hammadi Codex I and the letters of Antony in their fourth-century context, we anticipate that further study of these sources along with other codices from Nag Hammadi will contribute much more to our understanding of religious controversy during the crucial time when Athanasius and many others sought to effect an entire "reformation" of Egyptian Christianity, not only defining what would come to be called the "orthodox" canon and teaching, but also transforming its exegetical practice and institutional structure.

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66. *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 327.