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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Steven Mack Trotter entitled, "Paul's Integrated Use of Apocalyptic and Gnostic Imagery in First Thessalonians." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.

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Vice Chancellor and
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PAUL'S INTEGRATED USE OF APOCALYPTIC AND GNOSTIC IMAGERY IN FIRST THESSALONIANS

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee

Steven Mack Trotter
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Marion Gose Trotter († 2003) and Troy Columbus Trotter. On October 13, 1962, my parents presented to me the New Testament/Psalms wherein was inscribed: "This is to you, our darling little boy. May the teachings of this book and the Love of God always be with you. Mother" During my childhood and continuing into adulthood, I have always experienced the encouragement, love, and support of my parents. Truly, I was blessed to have such wonderful parents.

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As an undergraduate student at The University of Tennessee in the mid-1970's, I enrolled in a world religions course taught by Dr. Linge. I still vividly remember many of the dynamic lectures given by him. Of all my undergraduate teachers, he is the most memorable. Simply put, he was the best. As I contemplated returning to The University to pursue studies in early Christianity, I contacted Dr. Linge who agreed to meet with me to discuss the graduate program in Religious Studies. The warm welcome and strong encouragement received from him essentially led to my applying for admission to the program. I am grateful for his encouragement and support across the years.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine and characterize Paul's integrated use of apocalyptic and gnostic imagery as found in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 as well as compare and contrast conclusions based on the analysis with long standing theories regarding: (1) the rise of gnosticism as a result of the delay of the Parousia, and (2) the mutual exclusivity of apocalypticism and gnosticism.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, Paul integrates use of apocalyptic and gnostic imagery. He uses the same apocalyptic imagery as found in Amos and Zechariah, as well as the same gnostic imagery as found in *The Apocryphon of James* and the *Gospel of Truth*. In essence, apocalyptic and gnostic imagery appears side-by-side. Although many scholars believe this to be impossible, we see the integrated use of apocalyptic and gnostic imagery in the earliest writing of the New Testament.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The "historical Paul of Tarsus" is arguably the most influential figure of first century Christianity. In essence, "[Paul's] creativity consisted largely in his capacity to give traditions and traditional material new significance by expounding their implications for situations he confronted. Paul was the bearer and refractor of multiple traditions and inherited motifs" (Keck, 1979/1988, p. 31).

For this study, we shall examine two traditions and their respective motifs. The first of these is the Jewish apocalyptic tradition and its respective imagery. The second is the second-century gnostic tradition and its respective imagery. Paul stands in the midst of these two traditions. Furthermore, consistent with his chronological stance, Paul oscillates between these two traditions with respect to his use of imagery. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, Paul integrates use of apocalyptic and gnostic imagery. He uses the same apocalyptic imagery found in Amos and Zechariah, as well as the same gnostic imagery found in *The Apocryphon of James* and *The Gospel of Truth.*

The purpose of this study is to examine and characterize Paul's integrated use of apocalyptic and gnostic imagery as found in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 as well as compare and contrast conclusions based on the analysis with long standing theories regarding: (1) the rise of gnosticism as a result of delay of the Parousia, and (2) the mutual exclusivity of apocalypticism and gnosticism.

In support of this purpose, the world views of apocalypticism and apocalyptic imagery (Chapter 2) and gnosticism and gnostic imagery (Chapter 3) will be examined

and discussed. Subsequently, Paul's integrated use of apocalyptic and gnostic imagery as found in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 will be examined and characterized (Chapter 4), as well as the implications for the delay of the Parasouia and the mutual exclusivity of apocalypticism and gnosticism (Chapter 5). [For this study, Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) texts are from the Revised Standard Version (RSV), unless otherwise indicated in the respective citations.]

Background

Apocalypticism

"From his first letter to his last Paul's thought is always uniformly dominated by the expectation of the immediate return of Jesus, of the Judgment, and the Messianic glory" (Schweitzer, 1931/1956, p. 52). In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they "serve a living and true God," and they "wait for his Son from heaven, whom he [God] raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

> The notions of a swiftly coming day of judgment, pictured as God's anger against human sin, and of salvation brought from heaven to earth are stock images in early Judaism, especially in that hard-to-define genre of literature that modern scholars call "apocalypses." It is remarkable that the former pagans who formed the new Christian congregation in the Macedonian city should have been persuaded that such apocalyptic images were an apt picture of their world and lives. Yet language of this sort is so frequent in Paul's letters that we must suppose that it was intelligible and important to his followers . . . (Meeks, 1983, p. 171).

Paul's expectation of the immediate return of Jesus is an apocalyptic expectation. In Chapter 2, we shall examine the world view of apocalyticism, and its "stock images in early Judaism" as found in the Old Testament (OT), specifically as found in Amos 5:18-20 and Zechariah 14:1-9.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is a world view characterized by radical dualism. Although the origin and rise of gnosticism is well beyond the scope of this limited study, it is important to introduce aspects regarding the origin and rise of gnosticism so as to address some long standing theories regarding gnosticism and the NT.

After decades of debate, the origin and rise of gnosticism remains a hotly contested issue. At one extreme, "the traditional (and still largely British) view" sees gnosticism "as a second-century inner-Christian heresy" (Robinson, 1982, p. 5). At the other extreme, "the *religions-geschichtlich* (and Continental) view" sees gnosticism as a broad syncretistic phenomenon surfacing at least as early as Christianity in various religions of the day, of which Christianity was only one" (Robinson, 1982, p. 5). This "perennial debate" continues to have proponents on both sides. For example, according to Birger A. Pearson, Simon Petrément and A. H. B. Logan "persist in finding a heretical Christian origin for Gnosticism" (Pearson, 2001, p. 98, 104). Conversely, Pearson and Kurt Rudolph, following in the footsteps of Rudolf Bultmann, see gnosticism as arising "independently of Christianity" and "as a religion in its own right" (Pearson, 2001, pp. 98-99; Rudolph, 1992, p. 1035). One reason for the "perennial debate" is that the

"problem of pre-Christian Gnosticism and of a Gnosticizing Judaism is still completely in flux" (Feine, Behm, and Kümmel, 1965/1966, p. 159). According to James M. Robinson (1982, p. 5), although "the Nag Hammadi texts seem to have come out on the side of the latter alternative, in that several texts document non-Christian Gnosticism of various traditions (Jewish, Hermetic, Neo-Platonic), pre-Christian Gnosticism as such is hardly attested in a way to settle the debate once and for all."

Gnosticism and the New Testament

Rather than assume one extreme position or other of the debate, many scholars choose an intermediary position.

> To assume a mediating position may thus not be the weakness of indecision and vacillation, but rather an approximation of the historical reality more useful than is either horn of the dilemma: One may assume that second-century Gnosticism did not first emerge then in the full-blown form of the Valentinian and Basilidean systems. For such historical developments call for lead-time, just as, at the next stage, Clement and Origen of Alexandria on the one hand and Ireanaeus and Tertullian on the other are inconceivable apart from the century leading up to their systems. Thus even if it were true that Gnosticism as known in the second-century systems did not exist in the Pauline and Johannine schools going back to the first century, the left-wing trajectory out of which second-century Gnosticism emerged must have been contemporary with the Pauline and Johannine schools and could well be a major factor in influencing them. To erect a periodizing barrier between pre-Gnostic apostolic Christianity and second-century Gnosticism would be to falsify history by denying the existence of that trajectory until it reached its outcome in second-century Gnosticism. This would produce the exegetical error of failing to interpret those NT texts in terms of their time as the lead-time for second-century Gnosticism (Robinson, 1982, p. 6).

As such, these scholars attempting to address the "perennial debate" and establish a "mediating position" have focused their studies on potential relationships between gnosticism and writings of the NT.

For example, as early as 1835, F. C. Baur, following the work of J. E. C. Schmidt (1804) and F. Schleiermacher, not only challenged Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, but advocated a relationship between "the polemic of the Pastorals" and "the Gnosticism of the second century" (Feine, Behm, and Kümmel, 1965/1966, p. 261). Similary, Pauline authorship of Colossians was denied, first by Mayherhoff (1838), and subsequently by Baur and his students, "who traced the Epistle back to Gnostic circles of the second century" (Feine, Behm, and Kümmel, 1965/1966, p. 240). In 1903, William Wrede published an article noting that "the religious categories of the evangelist (John) come from a tradition of the gnostic sort..." (as cited by Kümmel, 1970/1972, p. 301). Later, "Bultmann and his students were inclined to see powerful influences from Gnosticism in the New Testament itself . . . ." (Pearson, 2001, p. 99). In 1954, one of Bultmann's students, Walter Schmithals submitted a dissertation examining gnosticism in Corinth, and its potential impacts on the writings of Paul. Schmithals concludes:

> The accounting for Gnosticism out of Christianity is no longer acceptable. The more the study of the New Testament encounters traces of Christian Gnosticism, the more puzzling becomes the question as to its origin, if one does not refer directly to heretical Judaism and does not judge the origin of Christian Gnosticism in principle other than that of later orthodoxy and that of the Judaistic heresy (Schmithals, 1971, p. 299).

Elaine Pagels reports that Richard Reitzenstein, "observing parallels between Paul's terminology and that of second-century gnostics," proposes that Paul was a gnostic.

Pagels adds that Ulrich Wilckens and Walter Schmithals dismiss this hypothesis because where Paul uses such language, it is to refute gnostic opponents (Pagels, 1975/1992, pp. 1, 162). One noted scholar of gnosticism and early Christianity, George MacRae (1967), following in footsteps of Hans Jonas, examined the use of gnostic sleep/wake imagery. At the end of his survey, MacRae (1967, p. 505) poses the fundamental question: "what is the earliest more or less datable occurrence of the Gnostic image of sleep and awakening[?]" His response, "This must be Eph 5:14, whether it be regarded as authentically Pauline or not" (MacRae, 1967, p. 505). Birger Pearson (2001, p. 97) cites 1 Timothy 6:20-21 as "[t]he earliest explicit evidence for Gnosticism in the New Testament."

Thus, numerous studies have sought to explore potential relationships between gnosticism and the NT. Historically, most of these studies have focused on John (Feine, Behm, and Kümmel, 1965/1966, pp. 134-175) and the writings of Paul, particularly the epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians (Malherbe, 2000, pp. 79-80). As part of this study, I shall examine potential relationships between gnosticism and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10.

Delay of the Parousia

One long standing theory regarding gnosticism is that gnosticism arose as a result of delay of the Parousia. For the purposes of this study, I propose to refer to this theory simply as the Delay of the Parousia.

The Greek word *parousia* is typically used in the NT to refer to "the arrival or presence of Christ in glory at a particular point in the eschatological process" (Rowland, 1992, p. 166). According to Johannes Weiss (1863-1914):

> The faith of the earliest Gentile Christian congregations is not fully described when we emphasize only the Christ cult and the Mystery faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. We must also mention here the conviction of the imminent end of the world and the *expectation of the parousia*. If the Christ religion had been only the cult of a *Kyrios*, such as Sarapis [sic] or Asclepius, this eschatological-apocalyptic apparatus would have been missing. . . . The Lord Jesus is he who saves from the coming wrath, and the "deliverance" for which his believers hope is that wholly determined by the future world judgment. This concentration on the parousia, which *will bring with it* the actual and overwhelming confirmation of the Lord, is an inheritance from Jewish apocalyptic messianism. Furthermore, there is still much of the Jewish messiah in the *Kyrios* of the Gentile Christian communities (Weiss, 1913, as cited by Kümmel, 1970/1972, p. 278).

The *Delay of the Parousia* refers to "the problem caused for Christians of the nonfulfillment of the expectation" that Christ will return in glory. "The apostle Paul's theology and self-understanding cannot be properly understood without reference to his expectation of the partial presence and imminent expectation of a new age" (Rowland, 1992, p. 168).

Furthermore, Weiss sees the rise of a "new religion" as a result of the Delay of the Parousia, the failure of Christ to return and usher in a new age:

> Generally speaking, it was [in Antioch] . . . that the character of the new religion as being especially the veneration of the Lord in heaven received its full and firm imprint . . . .
>
> In this way, as the eschatological and messianic features in the conception of Jesus are falling more and more into the background, a new factor enters into the new religion. . . . With the subsidence of the national factor, the eschatological factor also subsided to a position if not actually secondary, still a little behind

> the foremost. The relationship with the Risen Lord of course maintained its eschatological perspective; the parousia of Christ remained as an event of the most extreme importance, especially for those members of the church who had come from Judaism. But the majority of the Gentile Christians had now been granted a new *religion of the present*. . . .
>
> Even when they were still predominantly Jewish Christian in character, the churches which arose on Hellenistic soil came in close contact with the ideas of Hellenistic religion, especially with the mystery cults and the mysticism whose importance for primitive Christianity we are coming to recognize more and more clearly. Especially prominent was the conception of a rebirth or of a participation in dying and rising again with the dead and risen Christ. This conception seems to have been still lacking in the primitive church but it emerged suddenly in Hellenistic circles (Weiss, 1913, as cited by Kümmel, 1970/1972, pp. 278-279).

Is Delay of the Parousia and the rise of a new religion associated with the rise of gnosticism? Some scholars believe there is a link between the Delay of the Parousia and the rise of gnosticism. For example, P. W. Schmiedel (1893) observed: "Since the Parousia had not occurred, no one could think that the day of the Lord had already come unless he interpreted it spiritually as a Gnostic" (Schmiedel, 1893, as quoted and cited by Schmithals, 1965/1972, p. 205). Albert Schweitzer notes: "However much obscurity surrounds the rise of Gnosticism, the one thing which is certain is that Christian-Hellenistic Gnosis arose out of Christian Eschatological Gnosis. In both cases the general structure is the same, only that the material out of which it is built consists in one case of purely eschatological, in the other of Oriental-Hellenistic ideas" (Schweitzer, 1931/1956, p. 74). After studying the writings of Paul, Walter Schmithals believes Paul is constantly forced to "debate with Gnostics who reject the church's eschatology, deny the resurrection, boast of their perfection, and reckon on no Parousia" (Schmithals, 1965/1972, p. 205). Schmithals (1965/1972, p. 166) sees "[t]he absence of the promise

of the Parousia in the Gospel of John [a]s based upon such a Gnostic inheritance."

Robert Grant (1959/1966, p. 34) formally proposed that gnosticism was born from "failure of the apocalyptic vision":

> It seems to me that earlier stages of a similar process can be detected in the thought of the apostle Paul. His message to the Greco-Roman world was originally apocalyptic; in his Thessalonian letters we see him trying to correct the exaggerated idea that the day of the Lord has already come (2 Thess. 2.2). Later he modifies his views and the emphasis on apocalyptic diminishes while proto-Gnostic ideas are expressed. Similarly, the Fourth Evangelist reinterprets the Gospel, translating it into terms close to what Gnostic thought became (Grant, 1966, p. 36).

Mutual Exclusivity of Apocalypticism and Gnosticism

A second long standing theory regarding gnosticism is that apocalypticism and gnosticism are mutually exclusive. In colloquial language, "if you have one, you can't have the other." For the purposes of this study, I propose to refer to this theory simply as "Mutual Exclusivity of Apocalypticism and Gnosticism" or more simply as "Mutual Exclusivity."

One proponent of this second theory is Walter Schmithals. According to Schmithals (1965/1972, p. 166):

> The τέλος of the individual Gnostic is attained with his soul's ascent to heaven; the consummation of the universe has occurred "when we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the Pleroma of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), i.e., in the Gnostic sense, when all the members of the primal man have been liberated from the world. Any sort of eschatological happening on earth lies outside the gnostic possibilities of conception. Thus, either the church's eschatology is directly denied or its concepts and conceptions are reinterpreted, when, e.g., the attained knowledge is

> called the resurrection or the resurrection is said to have occurred in the begetting of children.

However, some scholars do not see apocalypticism and gnosticism as being mutually exclusive. For example, George MacRae observes:

> One of the elements most characteristic of apocalyptic eschatology is the conviction that salvation lies in the future, indeed in a future beyond the history of the cosmos. Because of its basic doctrine that it is knowledge that saves, Gnosticism at first sight might seem to be in conflict with this futurity. But in reality both apocalyptic and Gnosticism center on the acquisition (by revelation) and the communication of a knowledge that exercises saving power in the present by its future-oriented content. It is true that the vast bulk of Gnostic revelations are much more obviously centered on the origins of humanity and world, but the perspective is future nevertheless: it is in the return to the precosmic that human destiny lies. And the presence of explicit passages of apocalyptic eschatology in Gnostic revelations is further evidence that the categories of apocalyptic and Gnosticism should not be too sharply divided. The latter is one manifestation of the former, albeit in extreme form (MacRae, 1983, pp. 323-324).

Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine and characterize Paul's integrated use of apocalyptic and gnostic imagery as found in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 as well as compare and contrast conclusions based on the analysis with long standing theories regarding: (1) the rise of gnosticism as a result of delay of the Parousia, and (2) the mutual exclusivity of apocalypticism and gnosticism. In support of this purpose, we shall examine examples of apocalyptic imagery as found in the OT and gnostic imagery as found in Nag Hammadi texts, and compare and contrast these imageries against those used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10.

CHAPTER 2

APOCALYPTICISM AND APOCALYPTIC METAPHORS

Introduction

Although there is a broad spectrum of definitions, "apocalypticism" generally refers to a world view comprised of two core elements: "a lively belief in the supernatural world and the expectation of eschatological salvation" (Collins, 1992, p. 283). In early Jewish apocalypticism, human decisions and actions are embedded in a cosmological framework where people believe in both judgment beyond death and the potential influence of angels and demons on their lives. Thus, "apocalypticism" designates movements which have "adopted the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology" for their ideology. This world view is an extrapolation based on literature referred to as "apocalypses" (Collins, 1992, pp. 282-288; Hanson, 1992, pp. 279-280).

One widely accepted definition of "apocalypse" was put forward in 1979, when the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project defined an "apocalypse" as: "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world." In 1986, David Hellholm proposed the following addition to the definition: "intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority" (Collins, 1984/1998, pp. 4-5, 41).

Although fully developed apocalypses did not emerge in Palestine until the 3d and 2d centuries B.C.E., the apocalyptic world view originated much earlier:

> Its roots were widespread and drew nourishment from many sources, prophetic and mythological, native and foreign, esoteric and exotic; but there can be no doubt that the tap root, as it were, went deep down into Hebrew prophecy, and in particular the writings of the post-exilic prophets whose thought and language provided the soil from which later apocalyptic works were to grow (Russell, 1964, p. 88).

Furthermore, in *The Dawn of the Apocalyptic*, a study focused on apocalyptic eschatology, Paul D. Hanson states:

> . . . the rise of apocalyptic eschatology is neither sudden nor anomalous, but follows the pattern of an unbroken development from pre-exilic and exilic prophecy. Outside influences (e.g., Persian dualism and Hellenism) upon this apocalyptic eschatology appear to be late, coming only after its essential character was fully developed (Hanson, 1975/1979, pp. 7-8).
>
> The apocalyptic eschatology found at the heart of the late apocalyptic compositions can be found fully developed in all of its essentials in works of the mid-fifth century, compositions which at the same time do not yet betray any significant influence from the wisdom tradition or foreign sources (Hanson, 1975/1979, p. 8).

Of particular interest to this study is apocalyptic eschatology, and more specifically, selected apocalyptic imagery used to illustrate "the eschatological word of promise to the faithful that their salvation will come just as swiftly as the judgment upon the wicked" (Hanson, 1975/1979, p. 183).

> To an increasing extent, as the community situation grew ever bleaker for the visionary group, the old era took on the character of utter corruption, which apparently was seen to permeate even the world of nature. The mythic dualism, dividing reality into good and evil epochs, was no longer confined to the role of underscoring the brilliance of the new act which Yahweh was about to perform. Rather the ontological equation, present era

> = evil, future era = good (limited to the chosen), was taken with increasing seriousness, for the visionary group could understand the present situation only as unmitigated evil, and had come to be completely disillusioned with the prospects of realizing its ideal program of restoration in the present world. . . . they were forced to look for the hope of ultimate fulfillment of their ideal, toward a new, decisive act of Yahweh in which he would first eliminate the evil through destruction of the old order and then establish a new order of justice. Since the object of that saving act was no longer Israel as a whole, but only a faithful remnant, it is obvious that that act could no longer be delineated strictly within the context of plain history, but would increasingly be seen within the context of the cosmic-mythic sphere of the Divine Warrior (Hanson, 1975/1979, p. 158-159).

Examples of Apocalyptic Metaphors

Book of Amos

One of the earliest examples of apocalyptic imagery occurs in the *Book of Amos*, ascribed to Amos, an 8th century B.C.E. Hebrew prophet, who although born in the southern kingdom of Judah, addressed his ministry to the northern kingdom of Israel. Although historians disagree regarding whether Israel was in a period of prosperity or decline, they do agree that Amos confronted a disparity between rich and poor. This disparity of wealth in the 8th century B.C.E. "set the atmosphere for the social crimes that Amos so violently abhorred." Moreover, although the Israelites were a religious people, the prosperous began to view their prosperity as symbolic of their righteousness before Yahweh. According to the Deuteronomistic covenant, those who pursue righteousness and justice will prosper, yet the wealthy mistakenly inverted this concept. According to Amos, "the pursuit of wealth rather than righteousness was an unacceptable short cut, and wholly abhorrent to Yahweh." "Amos viewed Israel as "a violent, oppressive, and

exploitative society," and he "decried the social injustice, the oppression of the poor, and the lack of any moral or ethical values on the part of the rich and powerful" (Willoughby, 1992, p. 206).

In Amos 5:18-20, a section of Amos which most historians believe contains "the actual words of Amos" (Willoughby, 1992, p. 208), there are references to the Day of the Lord involving images of darkness and light:

> 5.18. Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light; 19. as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned with his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. 20. Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? (Amos 5:18-20).

D. S. Russell cites Amos 5:18 as an example where an older prophetic message is adapted and used by an apocalyptist. Specifically, Russell states:

> Here we observe as a case in point the use made by them [the apocalyptists] of the prophetic Day of the Lord which is a common feature in the prophetic writings. . . . Some have taken it to refer to God's day of battle when his enemies are to be defeated; others have seen it 'a mythical manifestation of Yahweh in the majesty of terrible natural phenomena conquering hostile powers'; others have traced it back to the cult of the autumnal Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem in which Yahweh was enthroned as king. Whatever its origins may have been, by the eighth century BC it was popularly understood by the people of Israel to signify the time when God would vindicate his people, and in particular give them victory over their enemies in the field of battle. Amos, however, saw that the logical outcome of such a belief was the doom of God's own people, for the holy God could not abide unrighteousness whether it be in the nations or in Israel itself; he thus declared that the Day of the Lord would be 'darkness and not light' (Amos 5:18), a time of judgment not only for the nations but also for Israel (Russell, pp. 92-93).

In Amos 5:18-20, time is dynamic. First, the Day of the Lord is metaphorical language used to portray Yahweh's forthcoming judgment against Israel. The end is

coming; it is coming soon. Second, darkness/light metaphors are used to describe the forthcoming apocalypse. Amos does not point toward the existence of darkness and light as static domains, but rather to the fact that the eschaton will bring darkness – not light. I propose to call this apocalyptic dualism.

Book of Zechariah

The second example occurs in the Zechariah, a writing attributed to a late-6th century B.C.E. Hebrew prophet. It appears to be comprised of texts by two different authors: First Zechariah (chapters 1-8) and Second (or Deutero-) Zechariah (chapters 9-14). Furthermore, Deutero-Zechariah is comprised of two oracles, Oracle One (Zechariah 9-11) and Oracle Two (Zechariah 12-14).

There is no scholarly consensus on authorship or date of origin for Deutero-Zechariah. Lamarche's hypothesis advocates a composition date of 500-480 B.C.E. Otzen sees Zechariah 14 as a late postexilic text. Childs sees Zechariah 9-14 as an expansion, development, and sharpening "the theological pattern of the end time which had begun to emerge in Proto-Zechariah." In essence, First Zechariah focuses on hope of exodus from Babylon whereas Second Zechariah "distinguishes between this new exodus and the anticipated final events" (Meyers and Myers, 1992, pp. 1061-1065; Petersen, 1992, pp. 1065-1068). D. S. Russell notes:

> *Zechariah* 9-14 (generally known as *Deutero-Zechariah*, though it has little in common with *Zechariah* 1-8 either in its language or in its content, takes its place in the continuing line of prophetic tradition, reapplying the message of prophecy to the conditions of its own day. There is no unanimity about its date. Some scholars place it not long after Haggai and Zechariah, but most date it much later, towards the end of the third century BC. The writers of these chapters are much occupied with

> matters relating to the End, the coming of a messianic deliverer and the Golden Age, the final great conflict of God's people with the forces of evil and the ultimate destruction or submission of the Gentiles (Russell, 1964, pp. 90-91; cf. Collins, 1984/1998, pp. 23-25).

For the purposes of this study, the focus is on Second Zechariah, specifically the conclusion to the Second Oracle (Zechariah 14:1-9):

> 14: 1. Behold, a day of the LORD is coming, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in the midst of you. 2. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women ravished; half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. 4. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. 5. And the valley of my mountains shall be stopped up, for the valley of the mountains shall touch the side of it; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzzi'ah king of Judah. Then the LORD your God will come, and all the holy ones with him. 6. On that day there shall be neither cold nor frost. 7. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the LORD), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light. 8. On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter. 9. And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one (Zechariah 14:1-9).

According to Paul D. Hanson, the opportunity for repentance and purification, and the subsequent restoration of the nation disappears in Zechariah 14, replaced by a new cosmic dualism:

> No vision of restoration for the entire nation remains in *Zechariah* 14; no hope for a national repentance which could lead to purification of Israel; only a bloody purge whereby the wicked would be exterminated, leaving those who were destined to be recipients of the salvation to come. *Thus the last ties with a*

> *conception of salvation along the lines defined by nationalism seem to be severed, yielding to a new dualism distinguishing not between nations but between evil and good on a broader scale* (Hanson, 1975/1983, p. 396, italics added).
>
> But the dualism spawned by the deepening pessimism of the age penetrated beneath the social and political fabric of the world to the realm of nature, with the result of a blending of ethical dualism into ontological dualism. Conditions were so grim that the situation could not be righted by a change within human hearts alone, not even by a universal assize dividing the righteous from the wicked. . . . The world is locked in a struggle between two orders, one ruled by sterility, corruption, death, the other by fertility, vitality, life. It is a struggle that effects not only the political sphere, but also the functions of nature. The end-time would have to produce new sources of energy to recreate a context which would once again be life-sustaining rather than life-destroying (Hanson, 1975/1983, p. 397).
>
> In *Zechariah* 14, the old era would culminate soon in the apocalyptic woes described with shocking vividness. These apocalyptic woes would be ended by Yahweh's final intervention and defeat of the hordes of the nations. Then would begin the universal reign of Yahweh, inaugurated by a new creation terminating the ancient polarities of the universe, and leading to a period of uninterrupted fertility, prosperity, and peace (Hanson, 1975/1983, p. 397).

In Zechariah 14, we see a description of the eschaton, the final battle wherein the Lord defeats his adversaries: "On that day there shall be neither cold nor frost. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the LORD), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light" (Zechariah 14:6-7). In this example, the author initially uses day to refer to the day of the Lord. Subsequently, night/day may be used literally, yet their use may also be symbolic language denoting two opposite domains. If the night/day contrast is read metaphorically, the contrast depicts cosmic extremes. In essence, on the day of the Lord, "Yahweh's theophany will involve not only defeat of the enemy but also

fundamental disturbance of the natural order" (Peterson, 1992, p. 1067). These are all well-known apocalyptic images; a dynamic change is forthcoming.

Summary

In the prophetic books of Amos and Zechariah, there are numerous references to the Day of the Lord or the Lord's Day. Similar terms such as "that day," "the day of," and "the day when" appear approximately 200 times in all the prophetic literature. In apocalyptic literature, the prophetic term acquires new meaning, for it is no longer Yahweh's judgment against the enemies of Israel, but rather Yahweh's judgment against Israel, Judah, or the Jewish People (Hiers, 1992, pp. 82-83). In Amos and Zechariah, references to the Day of the Lord (and similar terms) portray God's forthcoming judgment against the evil order. In essence, there will be a new creation. Similarly, darkness/light imagery is used to depict this cataclysmic change. The arrival of the Day of the Lord is accompanied by darkness for it is a day of judgment, a day wherein the forces of evil are destroyed, a day which ushers in a new creation, a new order symbolized by light. The "Day of the Lord" and the use of "darkness/light" to portray dynamic changes are widely used metaphors of apocalypticism.

CHAPTER 3

GNOSTICISM AND GNOSTIC METAPHORS

Introduction

Gnosticism refers to a world view usually characterized by radical dualism. Although many kinds of dualism may be observed in the philosophy of Plato, Second Temple Judaism, as well as various Oriental religions, the radical dualism of gnosticism is unique. According to gnosticism, "this world is the product of a foolish creator (demiurge) who set to work without the permission of the highest and therefore "Unknown" God. "This foolish creator" was assisted by "a lower angel or planetary being." However, the creation of a non-spiritual, physical world was observed by the highest God, who immediately implemented countermeasures to aid humans. The highest God provided humans with a divine substance, often referred to as a "spirit," "soul," or "spark," which allows them "to see through" the works of the foolish creator and focus on "the spiritual realm of the highest God" (Rudolph, 1992, p. 1033).

In gnostic cosmology,

> the creation of the world (cosmogony), which is intended to offer an explanation for the present condition of man, remote from God, and therefore occupies a considerable space in the texts. The side of this dualistic world view which is opposed to the divine pole – often described as "light" – is "darkness", which is likewise described in very varied fashion but principally in physical terms as matter and body (corpse), or psychologically as ignorance or forgetfulness (Rudolph, 1977/1983, p. 58).

Thus, rather than sin, personal suffering is associated with ignorance, ignorance of the highest God, but through acquisition of knowledge (gnosis) one may attain the true spiritual realm (Layton, 1987/1995, p. 9; Pagels, 1979/1989, p. 124; Rudolph, 1992). Thus, the focus is on "oneself – to one's inner capacity to find one's own direction, to the 'light within'" (Pagels, 1979/1989, p. 120). "The conviction – that whoever explores human experience simultaneously discovers divine reality – is one of the elements that marks gnosticism as a distinctly religious movement" (Pagels, 1979/1989, p. 134).

The historical and cultural origins of gnosticism are vigorously debated (see above, Chapter 1: Introduction). I agree with those who suggest that gnosticism appeared in the west in the 1st century C.E., while "the 2d century is the period of the great gnostic systems and the flourishing of Gnosticism" (Rudolph, 1992, p. 1037). Kurt Rudolph sees gnostic systems losing their influence in the 2d and 3d centuries (Rudolph, 1992, p. 1039), whereas Bentley Layton sees gnosticism continuing to flourish as late as the 3d and 4th centuries (Layton, 1987/1995, p. 8). For the purposes of this study, second century gnostic texts shall serve as our primary examples.

Examples of Gnostic Metaphors

The Apocryphon of James

The Apocryphon of James purports to be a letter written by James, the Lord's brother, wherein an apocryphon (= secret writing) is transmitted to the selected few. In this letter, Jesus appears to the disciples 550 days after the resurrection. However, of the disciples, only Peter and James are pulled aside and provided secret teachings. Francis

Williams believes the work to be pseudonymous, and although the letter is certainly no later than 314 C.E., it may possibly date prior to 150 C.E., "while it was still possible to speak of 'remembering' orally delivered sayings of Jesus and writing them down" (Williams, 1990, pp. 29-30). The specific passages of interest occur in *The Apocryphon of James* 2:40-3:16 and 9:32-10:6:

> You have received mercy [*untranslatable fragments*] Do you not, then, desire to be filled? And your heart is drunken; do you not, then, desire to be sober? Therefore, be ashamed! Henceforth, waking or sleeping, remember that you have seen the Son of Man and spoken with him in person (*Apocryphon of James*, 2:40-3:16, as translated by Williams, 1990, p. 31).

According to *The Apocryphon*, the Savior (= Jesus) selects James and Peter for special teachings, for filling with secret knowledge. The Savior addresses James and Peter, telling them they have received mercy, yet now inquires as to whether they desire to be "filled." This contrast is supplemented with two additional contrasts: drunkenness versus sobriety, sleeping versus waking. This is traditional imagery associated with gnostic dualism (Rudolph, 1977/1983, pp. 110-111).

In gnosticism, the forgetting of the soul's origin, the divine substance ("spirit," "soul," or "spark") is described as "drunkenness," "sleep," or "sexual aberration." These metaphors are used to describe "the suffering of the soul" (Rudolph, 1977/1983, pp. 110-111). "It is the dark and evil powers who wish to hold the soul fast in their realm and therefore infatuate it, lull it to sleep, make it drunk. Only the act of knowledge and the help of the redeemer can deliver her [the initiate] from it; this is the great theme of gnostic soteriology . . ." (Rudolph, 1977/1983, p. 111).

> Can you still bear to sleep, when it behooved you to be awake from the first, so that the kingdom of heaven might receive you? Verily

> I say unto you, it is easier for a pure one to fall into defilement, and for a man of light to fall into darkness, than for you to reign or not reign (*The Apocryphon of James* 9:32-10:6, as translated by Williams, 1990, p. 34).

In *The Apocryphon of James* 9:32-10:6, sleep/wake imagery is used to contrast those who lack secret knowledge, those who are asleep (= ignorant) versus those who possess secret knowledge, those who are awake (= knowledgeable). The latter are able to perceive the kingdom of heaven. Moreover, darkness/light metaphors are used to augment sleep/wake imagery. In essence, sleep is directly tied to this world (≈ darkness) whereas being awake (≈ light) is directly tied to the realm of the higher God (cf. *The Secret Book According to John* V 31:4 (~180 C.E.), translated by Layton, 1987/1995, p. 51).

In this example, sleep/wake and darkness/light are conjoined metaphors used to portray a static, timeless contrast between the unenlightened and the enlightened, the ones who are asleep in darkness versus those who are awake and in light. The conjoined use of these traditional metaphors is characteristic of gnostic dualism.

The Gospel of Truth

The Gospel of Truth "is the earliest surviving sermon of Christian mysticism" and "affords a rare glimpse of the actual human atmosphere of a church meeting, in which a magisterial gnostic preacher addresses a congregation, speaking from personal authority" (Layton, 1987/1995, p. 250). In *Adversus Haerses* (3.11.9), Irenaeus refers to a Valentinian authored work entitled the *Gospel of Truth* (Attridge and MacRae, 1978/1990, p. 38), and some scholars believe the present writing to be that cited by

Irenaeus (Layton, 1987/1995, p. 251; Brown, 1992, p. 668). Although Layton views Valentinus' authorship as hypothetical (since the author's name does not appear in the text), the "stylistic resemblance to other Fragments," as well as other factors, suggest the writing "belongs early in the history of the Valentinian church" (Layton, 1987/1995, p. 251). Although the place and date of composition are unknown, Layton notes that Valentinus died approximately 175 C.E. (1987/1995, p. 251). Attridge and MacRae, assuming the existing manuscript is the same as that cited by Irenaeus, suggest a composition date in the middle of the 2d century, between 140 and 180 C.E. (Attridge and MacRae, 1978/1990, p. 38).

The manuscript's main themes are the "search for the father (god) and the hope of deliverance on the part of those who had fallen ignorant and needed a savior to ransom them from ignorance; and emission of the saving divine Word, who proclaimed the truth about the father and brought joy and acquaintance with the father" (Layton, 1987/1995, p. 250). "One consequence of acquaintance (gnōsis) with the all-containing divine father is to see the illusion that there are material things – indeed the illusion of distinction and structure – fade away into nothingness. This amounts to reunion with the father; it is salvation, and repose" (Layton, 1987/1995, p. 250). Thus, knowledge of the father results in destruction of ignorance (Attridge and MacRae, 1978/1990, p. 38). Of special interest for this study are contrasts between darkness/light, night/day, drunk/sober, and wake/sleep; the two potential states of being: true being versus illusionary existence, wakefulness versus nightmare (Layton, 1987/1995, p. 250). The specific passages under consideration are *The Gospel of Truth* 18:11-22f, 21:25-22:20f, 31:28-36f, and 33:1-10f:

> It is to the perfect that this, the proclamation of the one they search for, has made itself known, through the mercies of the father. By this the hidden mystery Jesus Christ shed light upon those who were, because of forgetfulness, in darkness. He enlightened them and gave them a way, and the way is the truth, about which he instructed them (*The Gospel of Truth* 18:11-22f, as translated by Layton, 1987/1995, p. 254).

In *The Gospel of Truth* 18:11-18f, "the perfect" refers to those who have been chosen for salvation, the elect (Layton, 1987/1995, pp. 250, 254, n. 18.a.). Subsequently, darkness/light metaphors are used to contrast "the perfect" who received light from Jesus Christ versus those who remain forgetful of their divine spark, those who remain in darkness. Also, the way of truth results from teaching, from enlightenment. The metaphorical contrast between darkness and light portrays the contrast between two static domains, the domain of this world (= darkness) and the domain of the highest God (= light).

> Those whose name he knew in advance were called at the end so that one who has knowledge is the one whose name the Father has uttered. . . . Therefore, 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. And 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, (and) having returned to himself, has set right what are his own (*The Gospel of Truth* 21:25-22:20f, as translated by Attridge and MacRae, 1978/1990, p. 42).

In these passages, there is a description of those who respond to "the call from above." If "the call" occurs, the recipient responds and ascends to the realm of the highest God. In essence, the respondent who once was drunk, casts aside drunkenness (= becomes sober), and perceives his true nature. In the same manner as seen in *The*

Apocryphon of James, the contrast between drunkenness and sobriety illustrates differences between those who are under the influence of "dark and evil powers" (= are drunk) versus those who, through knowledge and deliverance, are under the influence of the highest God. (= are sober).

> He became a way for those who had gone astray and acquaintance for those who were without acquaintance; discovery for those who were seeking, and strength for those who were trembling; purity for those who were defiled: since it is he who is the shepherd who left behind the ninety-nine sheep that had not gone astray, and came and searched for the one that had gone astray. He rejoiced when he found it, for 99 is a number expressed with a gesture of the left hand. But when 1 is found, the sum total transfers to the right hand. In this way the thing that is in need of one, namely the whole right hand, draws what is missing, and takes it from the left-hand part so that it transfers to the right hand. And thus the number becomes 100. This is a symbol of the spoken forms of these numbers. The father is he who, even on the Sabbath, when the sheep that he had found had fallen into the ditch, labored over it and kept the sheep alive, once he had brought it up from the ditch.
>
> Understand the interior meaning, for it is you who are the children of interior understanding. What is the Sabbath? That day on which salvation cannot be idle. Speak from (the perspective of) the superior day, in which there is not night, and from the star that does not set, since it is perfect. Speak, therefore, from the heart, for it is you who are the day that is perfect, and it is within you that there dwells the star that does not set. Speak of the truth with those who seek it, and of acquaintance with those who have sinned in the midst of their error (*The Gospel of Truth* 31:28-36f, as translated by Layton, 1987/1995, pp. 259-260).

In these passages, there occurs a *Parable of the Lost Sheep*. The parable is for "the elect," the "children of understanding." Of specific note, the "children of understanding" are told they are the "day that is perfect," and they are to speak "from the superior day." In essence, as children of the "day that is perfect," they are in the light (day → light). Conversely, those who are not "children of understanding" remain in

ignorance. The implication is that they are in the night (night → darkness). Furthermore, there is a distinct partition between day and night for in the superior day, there is no night (= in light, there is no darkness). In these passages, night and day are used as metaphors to contrast static realms, the realm of "children of ignorance" versus the realm of "children of understanding." Night and day are traditional gnostic metaphors used to supplement metaphors of darkness and light. They are used to further illustrate the timeless dualism of gnosticism.

> Make steady the feet of those who have stumbled, and stretch out your hands to those who are sick. Feed those who are hungry, and unto those who are weary give repose; and awaken those who wish to arise, and get up from your sleep. For it is you who are unsheathed intelligence (*The Gospel of Truth* 33:1-10f, as translated by Layton, 1987/1995, p. 260).

After hearing the *Parable of the Lost Sheep*, the "children of understanding" are then instructed as to their responsibilities. First, they are to help those who have stumbled, those who have strayed from the path, who remain in darkness. Second, they are to aid the sick, feed the hungry, and provide rest for the weary. Are these admonitions to be interpreted literally or metaphorically? Finally, they are to awaken those who wish to arise or get up from sleep. The use of sleep/wake metaphors illustrates the difference between those who remain ignorant of their true nature (= are asleep) versus "children of understanding" who are awake. In essence, the "children of understanding" have responsibilities to instruct those who are asleep (= ignorant), and assist them to perceive the realm of light, the realm of the highest God. This imagery further portrays differences between two static domains. This is the imagery of gnosticism.

Summary

In the *The Apocryphon of James* and *The Gospel of Truth*, there are numerous references to darkness/light, night/day, drunk/sober, and sleep/wake. Darkness and light are cosmological metaphors. Darkness describes the "whole world system," a cosmos permeated with evil. Conversely, light refers to the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God (Rudolph, 1977/1983, p. 69). This contrast is a static, timeless contrast. Similarly, night/day imagery augments the imagery of darkness/light. In essence, day → light; night → darkness. In *The Gospel of Truth*, there are references to children being the day, or speaking from the day. This simply means "the elect" are seen as "children of light;" "children of the day." Alternatively, children who remain in darkness, remain in the night. This too is a static, timeless contrast.

Whereas darkness/light and night/day metaphors are used to illustrate cosmological contrasts, drunk/sober and wake/sleep metaphors are used to contrast the person's psychological state (Layton, 1987/1995, p. 250; Rudolph, 1977/1983, pp. 104). Does one perceive their inner divine substance? Is one cognizant of the highest God? If so, they see he kingdom of light, the kingdom of day, kingdom of God. Such a person is a member of "the elect." He/she is a child of the light, a child of the day. Furthermore, this person is sober, awake – he/she correctly perceives the highest God. Conversely, those individuals who do not perceive their divine substance, who are not cognizant of

the highest God, remain in darkness, remain in the night. They are said to be drunk, to be asleep. Their perception is distorted; they are unable to perceive the realm of light, the realm of God.

Although darkness/light and night/day metaphors primarily illustrate cosmological differences whereas drunk/sober and wake/sleep metaphors illustrate anthropological (or psychological) differences, all are used as illustrate static, timeless diametric contrasts. As such, darkness/light, night/day, drunk/sober, and wake/sleep are metaphors depicting static gnostic dualism.

CHAPTER 4

PAUL'S INTEGRATED USE OF APOCALYPTIC AND GNOSTIC IMAGERY

Introduction

Identifying the "historical Paul of Tarsus" is a complex task. Wayne Meeks states: "[Paul] alone of first-century Christians left a substantial literary bequest. Letters attributed to him comprise a quarter of the New Testament, and another twelfth of its pages – most of the Book of Acts – is devoted to a description of his career" (Meeks, 1972, p. *xiii*). Thus, "the Paul of the New Testament is a composite, derived from the narrative about him and his mission in the Book of Acts, on the one hand, and from the thirteen letters that claim him as their author, on the other" (Keck, 1979/1988, p. 1). However, these two sources are not of equal importance. "The Paul of the letters must determine our understanding of the man and his thoughts. Acts is a secondary source for historical inquiry; the first-hand sources are the letters" (Keck, 1979/1988, p. 5).

Moreover, all of the letters ascribed to Paul are not of equal importance. Although thirteen letters are ascribed to Paul, fundamental differences among them lead most scholars to conclude that only seven are authentic Pauline letters. "There is virtual unanimity that the following letters are authentic: Romans, 1, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon" (Keck, 1979/1988, p. 5). Of the remaining letters, most believe the Pastorals (1, 2 Timothy, Titus) are not genuine. Opinion seems more divided regarding Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians (Meeks, 1972, pp. 101-104; Keck, 1979/1988, pp. 6-7; Koester, 1980/1987, pp. 97-145, 261-308;

Betz, 1992, p. 186). For the purpose of this study, we shall focus on one authentic Pauline letter, 1 Thessalonians, specifically 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10.

First Epistle to the Thessalonians

In exploring Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians, we are not only examining an authentic Pauline letter, but we are also looking at what is widely considered the oldest document in the New Testament because it is Paul's first letter (Meeks, 1972, p. 3; Koester, 1980/1987, p. 112; Gaventa, 1998, p. 1; Malherbe, 2000, p. 13). Examination of this document provides us the "earliest direct insight into the early Christian mission and the life of an early, fundamentally non-Jewish-Christian church" (Krentz, 1992, p. 516). Although some scholars attempt to place the date of composition as early as 41 CE, most believe Paul wrote the letter while in Corinth between 49-51 CE (Koester, 1980/1987, pp. 112-114; Malherbe, 2000, pp. 71-74; cf. Krentz, 1992, p. 516). Koester (1980/1987, p. 112) believes Paul wrote the letter "a few months after his visit to Thessalonica." Malherbe (2000, p. 72) concurs noting that "a calculation that the letter was written about four months after Paul's departure from Thessalonica would seem reasonable."

> According to 1 Thessalonians, Paul had preached under unfavorable circumstances in Philippi before coming to Thessalonica (2:2). In Thessalonica, he had been successful in his mission, establishing a church that would soon become known throughout all Greece (1:2-10) and to which he ministered before leaving his converts (2:1-12), (Malherbe, 2000, p. 55).
>
> 1 Thessalonians is written with warmth. Paul's affection for his readers is clear. He recalls their reception of the gospel in a time of great pressure (1 Thess 1:6) and their open announcement of the gospel to others (1 Thess 1:8) so that their faith was known

> throughout Achaia as well as Macedonia. When separated from them, he felt the loss, repeatedly striving (in vain) to visit them (1 Thess 2:17-18). His affection for them led him to send Timothy there (1 Thess 3:1-2). And when Timothy returned with the good news of their fidelity in faith and their enduring affection for him, Paul becomes lyrical in his joy (1 Thess 3:7-10), (Krentz, 1992, pp. 520-521).

Paul's purpose in writing the letter "is to strengthen the congregation by reminding them of his initial proclamation and by reinforcing the exhortation he had given them on the founding visit (4:1-2)." The letter is somewhat unique in that "Paul does not write to combat a theological aberration in the church at Thessalonica. There is none" (Krentz, 1992, p. 516; cf. Meeks, 1983, p. 115).

> Despite the absence of any reference in 1 Thessalonians to antagonism in Thessalonica among the Thessalonians or to Paul at the time the letter was written, interpreters who take the letter as essentially apologetic have detected opponents whom Paul supposedly had in view when he wrote. . . . The view that Paul faced competitors in Thessalonica depends more on reconstructions of the situations he eventually confronted in Galatia and Corinth than on the evidence of 1 Thessalonians itself. Such hypotheses sometimes resort to partitioning the letter to gain support, and they import issues not implicit in the letter itself. Ultimately, they shatter on the cordiality and warmth of the letter, which do not fit polemic or apologetic, but rather are appropriate to the friendly, paraenetic style Paul adopted and then adapted to write the first Christian pastoral letter (Malherbe, 2000, pp. 79-80).

Most scholars (Meeks, 1972, pp. 3-4; Koester, 1980/1987, p. 113; Malherbe, 2000, pp. 78-81) typically divide 1 Thessalonians into two major components: 1) an autobiographical section (chapters 1-3), and 2) an exhortative section (chapters 4-5).

In the autobiographical section, Paul greets the Thessalonian Christians (1:1), and then:

> rehearses the history of [his] relationship with the readers: they are exemplary converts (1:2-10), as he has been an exemplary missionary (2:1-12), so that he can be thankful that they, as imitators of himself and of the Palestinian churches, have stood fast under persecution (2:3-16). His personal concern led to the sending of Timothy, whose encouraging report occasions this letter, a temporary substitute for the apostles' own return to visit them, which he prays will be soon (2:17-3:13), (Meeks, 1972, pp. 3-4).

The primary purpose of this autobiographical section is to "strengthen the bond between himself and the Thessalonians, and so to prepare for the advice he will give in chaps. 4 and 5" (Malherbe, 2000, p. 80). For example, the closing prayer (3:11-13) serves both as a transition and introduction to the last two chapters of the letter (Mahlherbe, 2000, p. 216). In this thanksgiving, Paul refers to the Parousia, "the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" (3:13; also see 1:10, 2:19; cf. 2:12, 2:16).

Beginning in chapter 4 and continuing through chapter 5, Paul discusses a number of topics:

> the sanctified life in sexual matters (4:3-8), the church's relationship to outsiders (4:9-12), and the coming of the Lord (4:13-5:11). In addition, he will discuss at some length the Thessalonians' attitude to each other in their mutual ministry (5:12-22). Paul discusses these subjects because they were important to his readers. They may have written him for advice on these issues, but he would in any case have heard from Timothy what their needs were, and he now writes to complete what was lacking in their faith (3:10), (Malherbe, 2000, p. 216).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, "Paul provides the most extensive discussion of the Parousia contained in any of his letters" (Malherbe, 2000, p. 279). For the purposes of this study, the focus is on 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, yet the context of 5:1-10 is established in 4:13-18:

> 4:13. We do not want you to be in ignorance, brethren, about those who are asleep, in order that you may not grieve as the rest do who have no hope. 14. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so also God will gather through Jesus those who have fallen asleep to be with him. 15. For this we tell you as a message from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall by no means have precedence over those who have fallen asleep, 16. because the Lord himself will descend from heaven, with a command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first; 17. then we who are alive, who are left, will be snatched up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18. So, exhort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, as translated by Malherbe, 2000, pp. 261-262).

Commentary

According to Malherbe (2000, p. 261), "The structure of 4:13-18 is straightforward. The subject of the pericope (Christians who have died) and Paul's intention in writing (that his readers not grieve) are stated in v 13." In 4:13, we find a grieving community; someone in the community has died and the Thessalonians are at a loss to understand this death with respect to the forthcoming Parousia. Meeks (1983, p. 175) observes: "The Thessalonian Christians fear that these people who have died prematurely have somehow lost the hope of sharing the benefits promised those who are waiting for God's son from heaven." In response to this fear, "[Paul] adduces his and his readers' belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus, from which he draws the inference that God through Jesus will gather all Christians who had died" (1 Thesslonians 4:14;

Malherbe, 2000, p. 261). Thus, "Paul and his associates are quite clear in their persuasion that God, having raised Jesus, 'will also raise us'" (Meeks, 1983, p. 182).

Furthermore, Paul tells the Thessalonians that "we who are alive" will have "no precedence over those who have fallen asleep" (= died), (4:15). In 4:16-17, Paul tells the Thessalonians that at the Parousia, "the dead in Christ will rise first," followed by "we who are alive," and that together (the dead and the living) will "meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord." "He applies this message from the Lord to the immediate situation, a fear of some of his readers that those alive at the coming of the Lord will in some way have an advantage over those who will have died by then (vv 15-17)" (Malherbe, 2000, p. 261).

Paul is not giving his personal opinion, but rather invokes "the word of the Lord" (4:15). In this situation, the Thessalonians are pressing for answers; Paul's back is against the wall. "It is not clear whether 'the word of the Lord' in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 is a tradition (or rests on traditional materials) from the pre-Easter Jesus or a word of the risen Lord" (Keck, 1988, p. 40). Regardless, Paul almost never invokes "the word of the Lord." The only other examples wherein Paul invokes "the word of the Lord" are associated with teachings about divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10); about the Lord's command "that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14); and about the Lord's supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), (Dungan, 1971, pp. xxix – xxxiii).

In summary, the Thessalonian Christians are concerned about the fates of those members of their community who have died. What's going to happen to them? What are the fates of those Christians who have been baptized and for some reason died prior to

the Parousia? In one sense, the unspoken question is, "What's going to happen to me if I get baptized into Christ and then die before the Parousia?" In 4:13-18, Paul begins to respond to these questions, and his initial responses are embedded in traditional Jewish apocalyptic imagery (albeit now applied to Jesus Christ). His responses depict "a lively belief in the supernatural world and the expectation of eschatological salvation" (Collins, 1992, p. 283). However, further questions remain: When is the Parousia coming? What should we do until arrival of the Parousia? Paul anticipates and responds to these questions in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, and his unique response is the focus of this study:

First Thessalonians 5:1-10

> 5:1. About the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need to be written to; 2. for you yourselves know accurately that the Day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3. When they say, "Peace and security," it is then that sudden ruin comes upon them as birth pangs do upon a pregnant woman, and they shall in no way escape. 4. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, for the Day to surprise you like a thief in the night, 5. for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We do not belong to night or darkness. 6. So then, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay awake and be sober. 7. For those who sleep do so at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8. But as for us, since we belong to the day, let us be sober; putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation, 9. because God did not destine us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord, Jesus Christ, 10. who died for us in order that, whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, as translated by Malherbe, 2000, p. 288).

Commentary

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, Paul discusses the forthcoming Parousia. He begins by reminding the Thessalonian Christians that they already know the answer to the question: "When is the Parousia coming?" The Parousia (≈ day of the Lord) will come as a "thief in the night" (5:2), "as birth pangs do upon a pregnant woman" (5:3). In other words, there will be no signs, no warning.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:2, we see one of the earliest (first) examples wherein the apocalyptic "Day of Yahweh" is appropriated and applied to Jesus Christ (Meeks, 1983, p. 94; Hiers, 1992; Malherbe, 2000, pp. 290-291). Furthermore, still following traditional apocalyptic imagery, "the Day" will arrive as a "thief in the night" (cf. 2 Peter 3:10; Revelations 3:3; Revelations 16:15). "The image of thief is used in the OT (Job 30:5; Jer 2:26; 49:9; Joel 2:9; Obad 5), but it is not used of the Day of the Lord before the NT" (Malherbe, 2000, p. 290). It will arrive suddenly, without warning. This language foretells a dynamic, imminent change, the return of Christ. Although now applied to the return of Christ, this is the language of Amos, of Zechariah, of apocalypticism.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:3, Paul further describes the forthcoming "Day of the Lord." For when "they" (and we shall return to discuss "they") believe "they" reside in "Peace and security," the forthcoming "Day of the Lord" will result in their utter ruin. In colloquial language, "just when they thought they had it made" the "Day of the Lord" shall arrive. "The Day" will come like labor pains: unpredictably; as "birth pangs do upon a pregnant woman." This imagery regarding the Age to Come appears in Jewish

prophetic literature (see below, Isaiah 26:17 and Jeremiah 30:4-7), and "became popular in Jewish apocalyptic and rabbinic writings . . ." (Malherbe, 2000, p. 293).

For example, in Isaiah 26, the imagery of birth pains is used to describe the pain of God's people, the righteous, as they await the forthcoming judgment of God:

> 26.16. O Lord, in distress they sought thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them. 17. Like a woman with child, who writhes and cries out in her pangs, when she is near her time, so were we because of thee, O Lord; 18. we were with child, we writhed, we have as it were brought forth wind. We have wrought no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen. 19. Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For thy dew is a dew of light, and on the land of the shades thou wilt let it fall. 20. Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past. 21. For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her, and will no more cover her slain (Isaiah 26:16-21).

The same imagery is found in Jeremiah, where it is again used to describe the pain of God's people:

> 30.1. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2. "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. 3. For behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and I will bring them back to the land which I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it. 4. These are the words which the Lord spoke concerning Israel and Judah: 5. "Thus says the Lord: We have heard a cry of panic, of terror, and no peace. 6. Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale? 7. Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it. 8. And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord of hosts, that I will break the yoke from off their neck, and I will burst their bonds, and strangers shall no more

> make servants of them. 9. But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them (Jeremiah 30:1-9).

Although Paul uses this imagery to suggest the distress or pain associated with the Parousia, he also uses the imagery to stress the inevitability of forthcoming ruin, an event from which there is no escape. The use of this motif to stress the inescapability of the Parousia is similar to apocalyptic imagery found in the mid-first century writing 4 Ezra (2 Esdras), (Gaventa, 1998, pp. 76-79; Malherbe, 2000, p. 293):

> 16:35. Listen now to these things, and understand them, O servants of the Lord. 36. Behold the word of the Lord, receive it; do not disbelieve what the Lord says. 37. Behold, the calamities draw near, and are not delayed. 38. Just as a woman with child, in the ninth month, when the time of her delivery draws near, has great pains about her womb for two or three hours beforehand, and when the child comes forth from the womb, there will not be a moments delay, 39. so the calamities will not delay in coming forth upon the earth, and the world will groan, and pains will seize it on every side. 40. Hear my words, O my people; prepare for battle, and in the midst of the calamites be like strangers on the earth (4 Ezra [2 Esdras] 16:35-40).

Paul's use of these metaphors clearly reflects the traditional eschatological End of History concept associated with the imminent Parousia of Jesus Christ. Up to this point, Paul has been applying traditional Jewish apocalyptic imagery in his answer to the problem faced by the Christian congregation at Thessalonica.

Paul continues in 1 Thessalonians 5:4a by saying, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness." This is more emphatic than simply saying the converse, "You are in the light." In 1 Thessalonians 5:3, "they" refers to those non-believers whose destruction will occur on the "Day of the Lord." In 1 Thessalonians 5:4a, Paul implies that "they," the non-believers, are in darkness. Since the brethren "are not in darkness," he implies

that they are in light. Thus, Paul contrasts the realm of darkness versus the realm of light, the realm of non-believers versus the realm of those who follow Jesus Christ and the teachings of Paul. At this point, Paul is beginning to transition to darkness/light imagery which contrasts two static, timeless realms: one of darkness versus one of light. In the process, Paul's language moves closer to the dualistic darkness/light language of *The Apocryphon of James*, of *The Gospel of Truth.* In scholarly terms, Paul switches from using apocalyptic imagery to using gnostic imagery.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:4b, Paul again refers to the "Day of the Lord." Paul's followers will not be surprised by the "Day of the Lord" because they are "in the light." Paul goes on in 1 Thessalonians 5:5 to tell the Thessalonians that they are "of light" and "of day," they are neither "of night" nor "of darkness." By this point, Paul is using straight gnostic imagery. Paul is using darkness/light and night/day imagery to contrast two timeless domains, the domain of the highest God (= light) versus the domain of this world (= darkness and evil). Malherbe (2000, pp. 294-295) observes, "Night and darkness represent the moral realm for those who are not in the light, who are therefore in danger of being surprised by the Day (v 4)." In later gnostic writings, darkness and light, as well as night and day, are frequently used metaphors contrasting a dualistic cosmos: the evil world of darkness, matter, and evil, versus the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God (cf. Rudolph, 1977/1983, p. 69). So in this case, Paul has used dualistic metaphors of darkness/light and night/day to evoke the same static, timeless contrast between the realm of this evil world of darkness versus the realm of Light. This is precisely the language of *The Gospel of Truth*; this is the language of later gnosticism. Thus, Paul has

switched in this passage from using apocalyptic imagery in 1 Thessalonians 5:4b to using gnostic imagery in 1 Thessalonians 5:5, *using the same words* light/dark and day/night.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8a, Paul continues to use well-known gnostic imagery: sleep/wake and drunkenness/sobriety. These metaphors are traditional second century gnostic images used to illustrate the contrast between non-believers, who "asleep/drunk" (i.e., under the influence of "dark and evil powers"), versus believers, who are "awake/sober" (i.e, under the influence of Jesus Christ), (cf. Gaventa, 1998, p. 73).

Of special note, Paul's use here of drunk/sober dualistic imagery in 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8a is unique to the New Testament. The terms μεθύσκω and/or μεθύω (= to get drunk and/or to be drunk, respectively) also appear in Matthew 24:49, Luke 12:45, John 2:10, 1 Corinthians 11:21, Ephesians 5:18, and Revelation 17:2, 6. The term νήφω (= to be sober) also appears in 2 Timothy 4:5, and 1 Peter 1:13, 4:7, 5:8). However, only in 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8a, are the terms μεθύσκω (= to get drunk) or μεθύω (= to be drunk) used in conjunction with νήφω (= to be sober) to create a dualistic motif. Also, in 1 Thessalonians 5:8a, Paul specifically links an attribute of believers (sobriety) with the cosmological realm (day).

In 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8a, Paul integrates, in good gnostic dualistic fashion, the motifs of drunk/sober, sleep/wake, and night/day to portray the chasm between non-believers and followers of Jesus Christ. Paul's language at this point contains a radical dualism that is identical to use of these terms in later gnostic texts: *The Apocryphon of James* and *The Gospel of Truth.*

Then, in 1 Thessalonians 5:8b, Paul begins to transition from using gnostic metaphors back to using apocalyptic metaphors, and he continues on with the apocalyptic

imagery through 1 Thessalonians 5:10. Paul uses martial metaphors (breastplate and helmet) in urging the Thessalonians to maintain their faith, love, and hope of salvation. The use of martial imagery may result from the prevalent use of breastplates and helmets in their culture, and also to the fact that wrath is coming – battle is imminent. However, the Thessalonians will not experience the wrath for their salvation is ensured through Jesus Christ. Rather than dreading the forthcoming *Parousia*, it should be looked forward to as an event of vindication (Keck, 1988, p. 120; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:12-15, 2 Corinthians 5:10).

In 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Paul once again uses awake/asleep language, but as the result of switching from gnostic dualism to apocalyptic expectation, the meaning of the words differs: "awake" now means "alive" and "asleep" now means "dead," as commonly used in the OT. At this point, the actual concern Paul had in writing this whole passage comes into view: he is offering consolation to members of the community because some of them have died. In essence, he assures them that salvation is not only available for those who are alive at the Parousia, but also for those who have died (and inherently, those who may die) prior to the Parousia.

In reviewing 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, Paul integrates several of the same terms into an apocalyptic framework followed by use of the same terms in a gnostic dualistic sense to convey his message. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, Paul uses traditional Jewish apocalyptic imagery. Beginning in 1 Thessalonians 5:4 and continuing through 5:8a, Paul switches to use of gnostic imagery, interwoven with segued use of the "Day of the Lord." Beginning in 5:8a and continuing through 5:10, Paul returns to use of apocalyptic

imagery. Thus, in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, Paul oscillates between use of apocalyptic metaphors and use of gnostic metaphors, between apocalypticism and gnosticism.

Moreover, Paul's metaphors seem to be multivalent: although he uses the same identical word, the word can have different meanings. For example, Paul's use of "day" occurs four times. It is used twice – referring to the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4b). It is also used twice to illustrate the cosmic realm of the highest God (1 Thessalonians 5:5, 8). Similarly, Paul's use of sleep/wake imagery appears twice. In 1 Thessalonians 5:6, sleep/wake are used to contrast attributes of non-believers versus believers. Such use is characteristic of gnosticism; the terms are used as metaphors to illustrate the static, timeless contrast between non-believers and believers. In 1 Thessalonians 5:7, sleep is again used and linked to night. Although some scholars simply view this as a literal fact (cf. Malherbe, 2000, p. 295), the metaphorical use of sleep links an attribute of the non-believer with the cosmic realm of the non-believer, night. Such usage is characteristic of later gnosticism. In 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Paul uses sleep/wake imagery, but this time wake (= alive) and asleep (= dead), as commonly used in the OT.

To illustrate Paul's meaning, I will quote 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 again. However, this time, apocalyptic passages are printed in bold and gnostic passages are italicized:

> **5:1. About the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to be written to; 2. for you yourselves know accurately that the Day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3. When they say, "Peace and security," it is then that sudden ruin comes upon them as birth pangs do upon a pregnant woman, and they shall in no way escape.** *4. But you, brethren, are not in darkness*, **for the Day to surprise you like a thief in**

the night, *5. for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We do not belong to night or darkness. 6. So then, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay awake and be sober. 7. For those who sleep do so at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8. But as for us, since we belong to the day, let us be sober;* **putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation, 9. because God did not destine us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord, Jesus Christ, 10. who died for us in order that, whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him** (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, as translated by Malherbe, 2000, p. 288).

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The purpose of this study has been to examine Paul's use of imagery in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10. The approach to this study has centered on examination of imagery in two pre-Christian, Jewish apocalyptic writings, specifically Amos 5:18-20 and Zechariah 9:1-14, and two second-century C.E. gnostic writings, *The Apocryphon of James* and *The Gospel of Truth*. Paul stands in the middle between these two "snapshots," one "snapshot" of apocalyptic imagery and one "snapshot" of gnostic imagery. Furthermore, Paul appears to draw on both traditions. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, Paul integrates use of apocalyptic and gnostic imagery. He uses the same apocalyptic imagery as found in Amos and Zechariah, as well as the same gnostic imagery as found in *The Apocryphon of James* and *The Gospel of Truth*. Furthermore, Paul's metaphors are often multivalent. He uses the same identical word to mean different things. The same word may be used as part of a dynamic, apocalyptic contrast; and as part of a static, timeless, gnostic contrast. In such cases, both the meaning and inherent use of the word oscillates between apocalypticism and gnosticism.

Delay of the Parousia

After examining 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 5:1-10, it is abundantly clear that Delay of the Parousia is exactly the problem confronting Paul. The Thessalonian Christians are troubled by delay of the Parousia. They are pressing for answers, and

Paul's back is against the wall. What does Paul do? He responds, and his response includes invocation of "the word of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:15) and a series of metaphors depicting both apocalyptic and gnostic imagery. In essence, Paul integrates use of apocalyptic and gnostic imagery (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10). He oscillates between dynamic apocalyptic imagery and static timeless gnostic imagery. Does Paul's transition from dynamic apocalyptic imagery to static timeless imagery reveal something about his beliefs and delay of the Parousia? Is 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 the earliest evidence for identification of a potential link between "failure of the apocalyptic vision" (= delay of the Parousia) and the rise of gnosticism?

Mutual Exclusivity of Apocalypticism and Gnosticism

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, we see apocalyptic imagery and gnostic imagery side-by-side. Many scholars believe this to be impossible, yet we see this in the earliest writing of the NT. Schmithals belief that "[a]ny sort of eschatological happening on earth lies outside the gnostic possibilities of conception" does not seem to apply in this situation. Conversely, MacRae's warning that "categories of apocalyptic and Gnosticism should not be too sharply divided" appears not only to be on target, but perhaps understated.

In conclusion, I propose that 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 is the earliest explicit evidence for gnosticism in the NT. 1 Thessalonians is the earliest writing of the NT, and easily pre-dates the deutero-Pauline writings of Ephesians 5:14 and 1 Timothy 6:20-21. Regarding future studies, is the side-by-side presence of dynamic apocalyptic imagery

and static timeless gnostic imagery unique to 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 in the New Testament? Are there additional examples in the Gospel of John or other Pauline letters wherein the author(s) oscillates between apocalyptic and gnostic language? Further studies examining these issues would shed great light on interpretation of the NT and the relationship between the NT and gnosticism in early Christianity.

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