Baptism in the bridal chamber
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5. Ritual

Another test of the hypothesis put forward in this study deals with the sacramental elements referred to in GPhil. If the document actually does consist of notes for baptismal instruction, then a single initiation ritual must lie behind the various sacramental references. In this chapter, I test whether GPhil can be read in this sense, and if so, which ritual elements belong to the initiation.

5.1 Current scholarship

Many scholars subscribe to the idea that there are five sacraments referred to in GPhil. This idea was proposed as early as 1960 by Eric Segelberg. He translates §68 as follows:

The Lord gave (did, worked) all in one mystery, one baptism, one chrism, one eucharist, one redemption, one bride-chamber.

Segelberg finds support for the number of five in the ‘five trees’ in paradise in the Gospel of Thomas (logion 19). But Segelberg also expressed some doubts, wondering why, in §76, there are only three ‘holies’ if indeed there are five sacraments. In the 1960s the damaged text of §76 was taken to read baptism, chrism and bridal chamber. Segelberg therefore suggests that these three might refer to an initiation rite, whereas the other two (eucharist and redemption) would be sacraments regularly celebrated by the believers. In line with this, he suggests that the redemption resembled the anointing of the sick and the dying, like the ‘euchelaion’ in the much later Byzantine rite. Subsequent analysis of the text has convinced modern translators to reconstruct this paragraph differently: baptism, redemption (not chrism), and bridal chamber. Nevertheless, the idea that there are five mysteries in total has become so ‘canonical’ that some scholars unconsciously seem to have forgotten that §68 simply mentions ‘one’ or ‘a’ mystery (see chapter 5.2.3 below). Marvin Meyer, for example, writes:

Throughout the Gospel of Philip sacraments play a major role, and five sacraments, or ‘mysteries’, are enumerated: baptism, chrism, eucharist, redemption and bridal chamber.

In 1991, after a 30-year debate regarding the bridal chamber in GPhil in which Pagels advocated her own views, she concluded that scholars on the opposing sides were

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155 Segelberg corrected a previous textual reconstruction by Schenke (1959): ‘[Das] Mysterium der Hochzeit [ist] groß. [Die sieben] sind es nämlich.’ Subsequent scholarship abandoned this reading. In their commentaries on this passage, Wilson (1962) and Till (1963) either left out this conjecture or added a question mark after ‘sieben’. As Wilson noted, the number seven was difficult to reconcile with the five elements mentioned in §68 ‘but,’ he wrote, ‘there may have been others not mentioned here’.

156 In the Gospel of Thomas, Pistis Sophia and the Books of Jeshu the five trees seem related to the five senses. In the sensate world, the senses of the person baptised can be sealed in order to preserve the spiritual within and to avoid contamination with this world. The Manicheans too knew the concept of ‘the five trees in Paradise’ but had only ‘three seals’, possibly the anointing of mouth, hands and heart. Their ‘five signs/mysteries’ are not related to the trees or the seals (they are: the peace, the right hand, the kiss, the salute and the laying on of hands). See Gardner and Lieu, Texts, pp 232-237.


158 Meyer (2005), Gnostic Discoveries, p 131, emphasis added.
both equally wrong. Instead of identifying the peculiarities of Valentinians and carrying that debate over into the reading of *GPhil*, Pagels is now more concerned with placing ‘Valentinian gnosticism in the context of the social history of second-century Christianity’, wherein the question of marriage had become a topic that concerned all Christian groups.

In 1995, Pagels adds, ‘After 50 years of Nag Hammadi study we are finally learning ... to drop generalizations ... and speak instead about specific texts.’ It is with these two trends in mind (reading the text for itself, and placing it in the larger context of Christian initiation), that she comes to a different assessment of the aspect of ritual in *GPhil*:

As we look again at the sacraments in the Gospel of Philip, let us remind ourselves that it is also misleading to generalize about what is ‘Valentinian’. Doing so has often led us to read into whatever text we are investigating generalizations based on other sources.

I suggest too, that we leave aside certain questions raised by those scholars who pioneered this discussion, including Hans-Martin Schenke and Eric Segelberg, such as how many sacraments Philip presupposes, and what is the function of each.

... When Philip speaks of baptism, he seems to have in mind no separate ritual, but, so far as we can tell, the kind of rite generally referred to in sources as diverse as the *Didache*, Justin’s *Apology*, and Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Constitutions*. On the basis of the sparse and varied evidence available we cannot, of course, assume uniform baptismal practice among second and third-century Christians. And although we cannot say what precise ritual form Philip may have in mind, he does mention divestiture of clothing (75.20-26), descent into water (64.24; 72.30-73.1; 77.10-15), and immersion as the threefold name (‘father, son, and Holy Spirit’) is pronounced over the candidate (67.20-22) apparently followed by chrismation (69.5-14; 67.4-9), and the kiss of peace (59.1-6), and concluded by participation in the eucharist.

... Philip offers, then, a view of the Christian community presently divided between those who have gnosis, and those entangled in erroneous beliefs...

Although Pagels does not want to discuss the total number of mysteries, she implicitly seems to side with scholars like Jean-Marie Sevrin and Gerard Luttikhuizen who suggested that the words ‘redemption’ and ‘bridal chamber’ may not refer to separate rituals. In 1998, April DeConick concluded from Pagels’ article that scholarship on the rituals in *GPhil* was at an impasse. In her paper *Entering God’s Presence*, DeConick proposed to reconstruct the mystery ‘by seeing these traditions as reflective of similar traditions developing simultaneously in early Jewish mystical circles, circles which were advocating mystical ascent through the heavenly Temple and a transforming vision of God.’ Subsequently, in a 2001 article, she adds: ‘... then “redemption” and

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162 See also her work on the *Gospel of Thomas* as a work of ‘Ascent and Vision Mysticism’; DeConick (1996), *Seek to see Him*. 
the “bridal chamber” might not be actual rituals, but instead holy “mysteries” which, in some way, allow the human to connect to the divine source of life.\footnote{DeConick (2001), ‘True Mysteries’.
163}

Einar Thomassen does not see the redemption and the bridal chamber ‘as separate ritual events, but rather as stages in a process of salvation’. He reconstructs the initiation ritual of \textit{GPhil} as follows:\footnote{Thomassen (2005), \textit{Spiritual Seed}, pp 341-350}

(1. Catechesis and preparatory discipline.)
2. Baptism: Undressing, descent into the water, immersion while invoking the threefold Name, ascent from the water.
3. Anointing, by pouring scented oil over the initiand. Dressing.
4. Carrying lamps (?).
5. A kiss (?).
6. Eucharist, with bread and wine mixed with water.

Although he includes the eucharist in his overview, he believes it is ‘not presented as a part of the initiatory process’. He concludes, ‘The eucharist cannot therefore be understood to add anything that was not already given in anointing.’

I suggest that the divergence of opinion among scholars is to a large extent caused by the absence of an interpretative framework. For those who read \textit{GPhil} as an anthology, each paragraph can be interpreted in its own right and there is little that can provide the context.

5.2 Ritual instruction in the key textual units

The hypothesis of this study provides an interpretative lens through which the references can be studied. In the rhetorical analysis (chapter 4.3 above), I demonstrated that the fourth textual unit can be read as a preliminary discussion of the initiation, but in veiled language as the candidates have not yet been asked to make a final decision. The sixth unit also mentions baptism, chrism and the eucharist. The mystagogical part, units eight to ten, can be taken as a more explicit discussion of the sacraments. I will first assess whether these five units outline an initiation ritual. The next step is to consider other possible references in \textit{GPhil} and assess whether they can be understood as sacramental, and as part of the same ritual. As these secondary references are often only allusive, the assessment requires an intertextual approach.

5.2.1 Preliminary overview in unit four

The final dispute with mainstream Christians in the preceding third unit regards the resurrection. According to the speaker, physical flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God. To prove his point, he refers to I Corinthians 15:50. Believers should instead divest themselves of the garment that is their flesh, and clad themselves in Jesus’ flesh and blood, a likely allusion to the change of garment in baptism. Here the speaker uses John 6:53-54, which early Christians often understood as a reference to the eucharist. The speaker sees Jesus’ flesh and blood as his \textit{logos} and Holy Spirit, both the clothing and food of the initiated. The unit ends by making the point that whereas here the person seems more important than his garment, his new garment is actually more important. Subsequently in unit four, the speaker gives a first and relatively allusive discussion of baptism:
§25 Through water and fire the whole place is cleansed: the revealed ones through the revealed ones, the hidden ones through the hidden ones. There are some who are hidden through the revealed ones. There is water in water, there is fire in chrism.

§26 Jesus took them all up by stealth. For he did not appear as he was, but he appeared in the way that they would be able to see him. [And all of these] he appeared to. He [appeared to the] great ones as great. He appeared to the small ones as small. He [appeared to the] angels as an angel, and to men as a man. Therefore, his _logos_ was hidden from everyone. Some, indeed, saw him, thinking they saw themselves! But when he appeared to his disciples in glory on the mount, he was not small. He became great, but he (also) made his disciples great, so that they would be able to see him in his greatness.

Baptism and chrism are taken together as the first act. Together they cleanse body and soul. The next passage explains how the divine _logos_, or Jesus, assumed lower bodies during his descent; first an angelic or spiritual body, then – when Christ was baptized – a small body, that is, the earthly Jesus. After that, on the mount he assumed a ‘great’ body again. His aim was to make his disciples ‘great’ as well, so they can see him in his glory. The same theme is also found in the martyrium of the _Acts of Philip_ 35 (141).

The speaker proceeds with the eucharist:

He said on that day in the _eucharist_, ‘You, who have united the perfect light with the Holy Spirit, unite the angels with us also, the images’.

§27 Do not look down upon the lamb. For without it, it is not possible to see the king; no one will be able to approach the king, while naked.

§28 The Man from heaven has many more children than the Man from the earth. If the children of Adam are numerous, even though they die, how much more the children of the perfect Man. These do not die, but are being born every time.

§29 The father produces children, but the child is not able to produce children. For someone who has been born is not able to give birth, but the child acquires siblings, not children.

§30 Those who are born in the _cosmos_ are all born in the _physi_. And in [the place] where they were born the others [eat]. Man [receives] food from the promise about the place above. If he [were born] from the mouth [of God] – where the _logos_ comes from -, he would eat from the mouth and he would become perfect.

§31 For the perfect conceive through a kiss and give birth. Therefore, we too kiss one another, receiving conception from the grace that is within one another.

The eucharistic prayer refers to the union of the believer with his or her angel in the heavenly bridal chamber. The lamb is a reference to the flesh and blood of Jesus in unit three: it is both spiritual food and clothing. The next passage also concerns these two themes. The believer is born from the mouth of God; he speaks his _logos_ and a new person is born. The believer is also fed by the words issued from God’s mouth and by what comes through his own mouth. This is reflected not only by the consumption of the eucharist, but also by the kiss on the mouth shared by believers,

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165 The element of stealth in Jesus’ descent to the cosmos is also found in the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah chapters 10 and 11 in Charlesworth ed. (1985), _Pseudepigrapha_ vol 2, pp 172-176.

166 Amsler translates: ‘Il était incorporel et il a revêtu un corps saint, réfutant ainsi le corps du péché; il était grand, et il s’est fait petit à la mesure des hommes, en attendant de faire grandir les petits et de les amener à sa grandeur.’ in: Bovon & Geoltrain eds, _Écrits Apocryphes Chrétiens_ (1997), p 1314.
which in turn refers to heavenly kisses.\textsuperscript{167} There are two possible references to liturgical formulae in the discussion of the eucharist:

- ‘He said on that day...’ This sentence need not refer only to Jesus but may also include the celebrant. This makes sense in view of the ‘us’ in the following sentence. The prayer to ‘unite the angels with us’ may be a Valentinian version of contemporary eucharistic prayer, such as the one found in the \textit{Apostolic Constitutions}: ‘You who have separated us from the community of the godless, unite us with those that are consecrated to you’ (8.15.3).
- ‘Do not look down on the lamb.’ The speaker pre-empts possible criticism of a liturgical element involving a ‘lamb’, the symbol of Jesus’ sacrifice.\textsuperscript{168} As nothing in \textit{GPhil} suggests the presence of an actual lamb, it is quite possible that the lamb metaphor was mentioned in the eucharistic liturgy. This may have been a Valentinian version of the words with which the bread could be presented: ‘The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29).\textsuperscript{169}

The order of the discussion in unit four is the following:

- baptism and chrism
- descent and ascent
- eucharist
- heavenly bridal chamber.\textsuperscript{170}

Can this order be reconciled with the series of five elements in §68? My hypothesis, which I will test in the remainder of this section, is that the same conceptual framework underlies both orders. §68 first describes the rituals in the world today (baptism, chrism and eucharist), and then their hidden realities (redemption and bridal chamber). This is illustrated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>visible image</th>
<th>hidden reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. baptism and 2. chrism</td>
<td>3. eucharist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. redemption</td>
<td>5. bridal chamber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Table 5.1}

\textsuperscript{167} As in the \textit{Gospel of Truth} (NHC I, 41.30-34), the divine emanations keep close to the Father ‘as though to say that they have participated in his face by means of kisses’. This heavenly kiss fits in with the theme of begetting in the heavenly bridal chamber.

\textsuperscript{168} The Valentinian teacher Heracleon provided a gnostic interpretation that is preserved in Origen’s commentary on John. It concerns the words in John 1:29 ‘Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’ Heracleon comments: ‘Lamb of God’ is said by John as a prophet. The first thing is said about his body, the second about the one who was in the body; for as the lamb is imperfect among the genus of sheep, so also is the body in comparison with him who dwells in it. If he had wanted to indicate by the body what is perfect he would have said ‘the ram, which was going to be sacrificed’’. Translation by Robert Grant (2003), \textit{Second Century}. In other words, it is through leaving the imperfect body that we are saved, and our saviour is not the body that is sacrificed but the one who dwells in it.

\textsuperscript{169} Cf I Cor. 5:7 and the \textit{Liturgy of James} 41; ANF vol 7, p 548. Gero (1979), ‘Lamb’, denies a link between the sacrificial lamb in John 1:29 and the lamb in §27, because he sees no ritual function for the garments needed to meet the king. He proposes to see here only a reference to Matthew 22 and 18, in which case the lamb would not refer to the eucharist but to ‘the little ones’ that should not be ‘despised’. But Gero fails to note that §23 already provides the link with the garments and that the eucharist follows upon baptism (with the candidates still in their baptismal garments).

\textsuperscript{170} One could argue that the kiss is an additional element, but note that in the last passage ‘heavenly kiss’ is the subject. Only secondarily does the speaker return to the earthly kiss. ‘For this reason we \textit{also} kiss one another’. It is quite possible that this simply is the kiss forming part of the eucharist. I come back to this point in chapter 5.3.3 below.
The fourth textual unit has a different order from §68. It first describes the rituals of baptism and chrism, through which the believer divests himself of his physical body and receives a new spiritual body. The mystical counterpart of this is the transformation of the disciples (their redemption). Next, it describes the ritual of communion and unification, which is the eucharist. Its mystical counterpart is the entry of the believer into the divine plerôma, the heavenly bridal chamber. The illustration below shows that the order of unit four can be derived from the same conceptual framework:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>separation</th>
<th>unification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>visible image</td>
<td>1. baptism and 2. chrism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hidden reality</td>
<td>3. redemption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2

5.2.2 The references in unit six

The composition of unit six is concentric, which often means that special attention should be paid to the inclusion and centre. Unit six is enclosed by the roles of God (§43) and Jesus (§54) as a dyer.

§43 God is a dyer. As with the good dyes that are called the true, - they die with those that are dyed - , so it is with those who are dyed by God. Inasmuch as his dyes are immortal, they become immortal through his pharmacy. - But God baptizes the ones that he baptizes in water.

... §48 The pearl, when thrown in the dung, {does} not {become} greatly despised. Neither when anointed with balsam oil, will it become valued. But it has value with its lord always. This is how it is with the children of God in the (situations) that they may get into: they still have value with their father.

... - §53 The eucharist is Jesus, for he is called in the Syrian language ‘Pharisatha’, which is ‘the one spread out’. For Jesus came to be crucified to the cosmos.

§54 The Lord went into the dye-works of Levi. He took seventy-two colours (and) threw them in the cauldron. He took them out all white and said, ‘This is how the Son of Man came to her: as a dyer’.

Looking only at the ritual aspect, I note that this paragraph ends with the notion that God baptises in water, whereas §54 is preceded by a passage that says that Jesus is the eucharist.\textsuperscript{171} The central text is about the anointing of a pearl with oil. Indirectly, then, it seems that these three references refer to a ritual consisting of baptism, chrismation and the eucharist.

\textsuperscript{171} The identity of God in §43 is discussed in chapter 8.2.3 below.
5.2.3 The mystagogy in unit eight

In units eight to ten, the speaker becomes increasingly explicit about the rituals the candidates are about to experience. Unit eight contains the often cited passage §68. But, contrary to its prominence in scholarly works, it plays only a minor role in the composition of this unit. Its function is to explain that Jesus did everything in a hidden way. The composition of the unit is again concentric and the key sentence is a command of the Lord himself: ‘Go into the inner chamber’ (quoted from Matthew 6:6). The inclusion sets this unit in the context of baptism and chrismation, and the next ‘layer’, relates these physical rituals with mystical realities:

§66 From water and fire the soul and the spirit came into being; from water and fire and light the son of the bridal chamber came into being. The fire is the chrism. The light is the fire, - I do not speak of that fire that has no form, but of the other whose form is white, which lights beautifully and which gives beauty.

§67 Truth did not come into the cosmos naked, but she came in types and images. He will not receive her in another manner.
- There is being born again and an image of being born again. It is truly necessary to be born again through the image.
- What is the resurrection and the image? Through the image it is necessary to rise.
- The bridal chamber and the image: through the image it is necessary to come into Truth, that is the restoration.
It is necessary for those who do not only receive the name of ‘Father, Son and Holy Spirit’. But they themselves are acquired by you. If one does not acquire them, even the name shall be taken from him. And one receives them in the chrism with the [resin] of the power of the cross (this (power) the apostles called ‘the right and the left’). For this one is no longer a Christian but he is a christ.
§68 The Lord [did] everything through mystery: baptism and chrism and eucharist and redemption and bridal chamber.

[The central section is about transformation, - see 8.2.5]

§72 ‘My God, my God! Why, o Lord, have you left me behind?’ He spoke these (words) on the cross, for he separated in that place.
- [The Lord] was born from the one who [was born] by God.
- The [Lord rose] from the dead. [He did not go as he] was, but [his body became completely] perfect. [It has] flesh, but this [flesh, indeed, is a] true flesh. [Our flesh, however,] is not true, but a [fleshly] image of the true.
- §73 There is no bridal room for the animals, neither is it for the slaves or defiled women; but it is for free men and virgins.
§74 Out of the Holy Spirit we, indeed, are born again, but we were begotten by Christ twofold. We are anointed by the Spirit. When we were born, we were united.

§75 Nobody will be able to see himself, neither in water nor in a mirror without light. Neither, again, will you be able to see (yourself) in light without water or mirror. For this reason, it is necessary to baptise twofold, in the light and the water. And the light is the chrism.

The opening statement (§66) and the conclusion (§75) is that both baptismal water and chrismation are necessary to be saved. Baptism and chrismation result in regeneration, resurrection and unification in the bridal chamber. The eucharist is only mentioned in §68 and is perhaps not so much the entry into the bridal chamber as it is
its celebration. As the following table shows, the divine truth is entered through baptism, chrismation and eucharist, the visible images and steps of regeneration, resurrection (which together may constitute ‘redemption’ in §68) and bridal chamber:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>visible image</th>
<th>baptism</th>
<th>chrism</th>
<th>eucharist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hidden reality</td>
<td>regeneration</td>
<td>resurrection</td>
<td>bridal chamber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3

In the remainder of §67, there is a reference to mainstream Christian baptismal candidates who receive the name of ‘Father, Son and Holy Spirit’. It seems that the gnostic Christian candidates do the same. The chrism is associated with the cross, the symbol of the Lord’s separation from his earthly body (§72). His spiritual or resurrected form is not his reanimated earthly body but a true flesh. Resurrection is achieved ‘potentially’ in the chrism (§95), the oil of the cross, but in actuality upon death of the body – and not afterwards (§21). Jesus received the resurrection (potentially) in his baptism and was resurrected and redeemed (actually) when he died on the cross, not on Easter Sunday.

5.2.4 The mystagogy in unit nine

The theme of three of the five sections of unit nine is the bridal chamber. The relationship between baptism, redemption and bridal chamber is set out in §76:

Baptism has the resurrection in the redemption, being the redemption in the bridal chamber, and the bridal chamber in that which is above [it, to which we belong]. You will find nothing like it.

... [Our] bridal room [is nothing else] but the image [of the bridal chamber that is] above.

In these opening paragraphs we encounter a single yet multi-layered mystery. Baptism leads to the resurrection and redemption of the believer. Neither chrismation nor eucharist is mentioned in §76, and we may assume that the word baptism is used here as a reference to the entire initiation ritual, which leads to redemption and into the bridal chamber. The word bridal chamber refers to several things. Here ‘our bridal room’ is the earthly cult-room and/or the inmost being of the believer, it is an image of the heavenly bridal chamber, the plerôma. This is confirmed in §80b-82:

Then came [Christ to save them and restore them] to themselves. [He revealed to them the] bridal room, so that [men would be saved.] §81 Jesus revealed [in the] Jordan the plerôma of the kingdom of heavens:
- He who [was born] before the all, was born again.
- He who was anointed at first, was anointed again.
- He who was redeemed, redeemed again.

§82 How necessary it is to speak of a mystery! The Father of the all united with the virgin who had come down and a fire enlightened him on that day. He revealed the great bridal room. Therefore his body came into being on that day. It came from the
bridal room as one who came into being from the bridegroom and bride. This is how Jesus established the all in himself through these. And it is necessary that every one of the disciples walks into his Rest.

This single rite of Jesus’ baptism here contains his regeneration, chrismation and redemption, and unification in the bridal chamber.

5.2.5 *Going down into the water*

The tenth unit is enclosed and divided by four occurrences of the words ‘going down into the water’. The common theme is therefore again baptism. One of these four occurrences suggests that, as in mainstream Christian practice, people were baptised naked:

§101 The living water is a body. It is necessary that we clothe ourselves with the living man. Therefore, if one is about to go down into the water, he strips himself so that he will clothe himself with this one.

The next layer within the three sections, concerns the mysteries of chrismation, the eucharist, the bridal chamber, and the ascent. The first section shows again that baptism and chrismation lead to resurrection, which is received in the bridal chamber. Everything is collapsed into one ritual. But there is also a hierarchy: baptism is only the first step, chrismation is needed to make baptism effective:

§90 Those who say that they will die first and (then) will rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection, while they live, they will receive nothing when they die. This way too when they speak about baptism, saying ‘Baptism is great,’ as if they who receive it will live.

... §95 The chrism is lord over baptism. For because of the chrism we are called ‘Christians’, not because of baptism. Also Christ was called (thus) because of the chrism. For the Father anointed the Son, and the Son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us. He who is anointed has the all. He has the resurrection, the light, the cross.

§96 As to the Holy Spirit, the Father gave him this in the bridal chamber (and) he received (him). The Father came to be in the Son, and the Son in the Father. This is the kingdom of heavens.

This element of hierarchy is continued in the second part, which discusses the eucharist:

§98 This way too it is with the bread and the cup and the oil, even though there is something else superior to these.

... §100 The cup of prayer contains wine (and) it contains water, for it serves instituted as the type of his blood, over which eucharist is said, and which fills up with the Holy Spirit, and it is that of the wholly perfect Man. When we drink it we receive the perfect man.

The eucharist is merely an image of the reality hidden behind it. The same point is made in §125. We ‘go in there by means of lowly types and forms of weakness. They are lowly indeed when compared with the perfect glory.’ Superior to everything else are the divine realities (§103).
Interestingly, there are two references to the cup. In the first reference bread, wine and oil are presented. In the second reference we only see a ‘cup of prayer’, filled with water and wine. The two eucharistic prayers attached to A Valentinian Exposition (NHC XI, 2) suggest that these Valentinians also had two prayers around a communal meal or ‘banquet’ as the inscription in Rome reads (see chapter 1.1). This may reflect early Christian practice when the eucharist was still celebrated as part of a communal meal. Also, in Luke 22:17-20 and 1 Corinthians 10:16/11:25 a meal with bread and wine precedes a cup. Didache 9 and 10 consist of two prayers, one at the start of the meal for both wine and bread, and one after the meal – ‘when you have had your fill’ – only for the cup.

The ‘oil’ in the combination of cup, bread and oil is probably an ointment belonging to the eucharistic meal itself. We find the same three elements in Psalm 23, and also in Joseph and Aseneth, where they are called the ‘bread of life’, the ‘cup of immortality’, and the ‘ointment of incorruptibility’ (8:5 and 16:16). In the seventh book of the Apostolic Constitutions, which used the Didache, we see a eucharistic prayer before the meal (25), after the meal (16), and one for the ointment (17). Likewise, Cyril of Jerusalem first discusses baptism and chrismation and then the bread and wine of the eucharist in combination with another anointing (22.7).

The last part again concerns the meaning of the sacraments. No ritual act is added to the trio of baptism, chrism and eucharist. The discussion in this third section is about the bridal chamber and the ascent of the soul. But in order to receive these one has to be baptised (‘clothed in perfect light’, or with the ‘living man’ in §101 above). The speaker feels the need to emphasize that only those who submit to the physical rituals, including bodily immersion, will be saved from the powers that wish to seize the ascending souls:

§106 Not only will it be impossible that the perfect man is seized, but (also) that they see him; for if they see him, they will seize them. In no other manner will one be able to acquire this grace, but that he clothes himself in the perfect light, [and] that he himself becomes perfect light. [The one who has clothed] himself with it shall go [into the light].

This is the perfect [light] §107 [and it is necessary for us] that we become [perfect light completely], before we come [out of the cosmos]. One who has [not] received the all [through images] from these places, will [not] be able to [take part in] that place. But he will [go to the Middle] as imperfect. Only Jesus knows the end of this one.

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172 We find the same blend of water and wine, for example, in the eucharist of Clement of Alexandria, Instructor 2.2, and Ambrose, Sacraments 5.2.

173 Mark and Matthew do not mention this element. The compression of the two liturgical interventions in the paschal meal has led to a Christian eucharist in which the bread and the (postprandial) cup are blessed and consumed almost simultaneously.

174 John Dominic Crossan (1998), Birth, p 437, assumed that one of the prayers is a later interpolation. But Van de Sandt and Flusser (2002), Didache, pp 296-329, showed that both prayers concern one meal and follow Jewish models. Huub van de Sandt recently argued that the ointment in Joseph and Aseneth ‘refers to a Greek version of the Jewish table prayers used in Hellenistic Egypt.’ He concludes, ‘In the formative stage of Christianity in first century Egypt, Jewish “converts” to Christian faith brought with them their rituals, worldview, and lifestyle.... The original Didache text was modified, amended, and updated to fit the version of the table prayers with which the Jewish Christian community in Egypt was familiar.’ See Van de Sandt (2005), ‘Egyptian background’, pp 241-243.

175 Based on this §98, Schenke linked redemption to an ointment ritual at the eucharist. But §76 clearly states that redemption is included in baptism.
§108 The holy man is completely holy, even in his body. For when he has received the bread, he blesses it as holy, - or the cup, or all the rest that he receives. As he cleanses them, how then will he not cleanse the body too?

The question is why the order of the last two elements in the tenth instruction is different from earlier orders: §102-104 is about the bridal chamber and §106-108 about the ascent, even ending with the eucharist? Again, the distinction between the visible rituals and their heavenly realities helps to understand the order in which they are treated. This time the order seems circular and designed to bring us back to our starting point, the visible rituals:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>separation</th>
<th>communion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>visible image</td>
<td>1. baptism and 2. chrism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hidden reality</td>
<td>5. redemption/ascent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 5.4

The mystagogue will have wanted to come back to the point of baptism, if this instruction was spoken just prior to baptism. Very appropriately, then, the inclusion after this section restates that theme:

§109 As Jesus fulfilled the water of baptism, so he has poured out death. Therefore, we indeed go down into the water, but we do not go down into death, so that we are not emptied in the spirit of the cosmos. When he blows, it becomes winter. When the Holy Spirit blows, it becomes summer.

5.2.6 Synthesis

We have seen that the mystery in GPhil consisted of both tangible and hidden elements. The visible baptism ritual consisted of the following elements: undressing, going down into the water, possibly a formula with regard to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and anointing with olive oil. The eucharist consisted of a meal, with bread and mixed wine, and possibly another anointing. It seems there was a final cup and possible traces of two liturgical formulae have been identified. The redemption and the bridal chamber, together with the regeneration, resurrection, the ascent, and the mystery of the union, are not additional tangible rituals but hidden realities.176

5.3 Ritual references in other passages

Thus far, I have looked at paragraphs in the context of entire textual units, and especially at those units featuring rituals as part of their subject matter. This provides us with a basic outline and understanding of the ritual, with which we can now turn to more isolated and allusive references.

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176 NB: The analysis here deals only with the initiation ritual. The heavenly mysteries of redemption and the bridal chamber, however, were not over after baptism. The initiated would regularly participate in the eucharist, which included a fragrant ointment. The ointment (chrism) may have been associated with redemption, the eucharist certainly with the bridal feast. And, finally, dying itself remained associated with redemption of the soul of the believer. Cf. Irenaeus, Heresies 5.5.1.
5.3.1 Salt

In §35 a remark about salt seems to claim an apostolic origin to a ritual element:

The apostles said to the disciples: ‘May our entire offering acquire salt’. They called Sophia ‘salt’, without her no offering is acceptable.

Valentinians explained that Jesus’ words about the role of believers as the ‘salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world’ (Matthew 5:13,14), refer to the spiritual substance in people. But is the language here merely metaphorical or does it refer to an actual ritual? In Mark 9:49, Jesus says that people are salted by fire, and one could argue that the ritual cited is the chrism (according to §66 and §75-76 the chrism is some sort of baptism with fire in which we receive the spirit). But this does not explain the keyword ‘offering’. According to §14 the believer is sacrificed to God during baptism (§76). If he receives the Holy Spirit he will not die when he gives up the body but live free of this world. Some scholars have correctly noted that, in Jewish tradition, the sacrificial meat had to be salted (e.g. Leviticus 2:13) in order to preserve it for human consumption after the ritual. How would this idea express itself in the initiation of people? Given its suggested apostolic origin we need to find a mainstream Christian ritual that may or may not have been shared by gnostic Christians. There is a song by Ephrem Syrus that suggests that salt was thrown into the water for baptism. Ambrose hints at a rite mentioned by Augustine that is closer to this passage in GPhil. In this preparatory rite, a catechumen was signed with the cross and received salt as a symbol of purification and preservation unto the day of his or her baptism. Its full description by John the Deacon is late (6th century CE, Rome), but – with the expression ‘salt of wisdom’ (Sophia) – very to the point:

Now that he is a catechumen he will receive blessed salt, with which he is signed, because just as all flesh is seasoned and preserved by salt, so too the mind, sodden and soft as it is from the waves of the world, is seasoned by the salt of wisdom and of the preaching of the word of God.

Because of the ambiguity of the speaker when referring to the apostles, it remains uncertain whether the speaker refers here only to a mainstream Christian practice or also to one practised by his own group.

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177 ‘Spiritual substance, again, they describe as having been sent forth for this end, that, being here united with that which is animal, it might assume shape, the two elements being simultaneously subjected to the same discipline. And this they declare to be “the salt” and “the light of the world”.’ Irenaeus, Heresies, 1.6.1; cf. also Pistis Sophia chapter 120 (p 308) where the same sayings are explained as something that is given in the mysteries.

178 Ménard suggests that the initiates were given bread and salt as a sort of eucharistic meal. But his references to the Acts of Thomas are not to the point. Eating only salt and bread is not the concern of initiation ritual but points to an ascetic lifestyle. In the Hebrew Bible salt – sometimes in combination with bread – is used to signify an enduring ‘salt covenant’ (Num. 18:19 and 2 Chr. 13:5), but that is far removed from an initiation ritual and bread is not mentioned in our text. More related to initiation is the washing and salting of a newborn child (Ez. 16:4), but no salting of adult proselytes is attested to in Jewish literature.

179 Epiphany, 8.13: ‘[the] fountains... in the mystery of Jesus have been blessed. There was cast into them salt – and they were healed and sweetened: a mystery of this salt, the sweet salt that came from Mary, that was mingled in the water, whereby was healed the noisomeness of our plagues.’

180 Yarnold (1994), Awe-Inspiring Rites, pp 3-5, quoting Expos.Ev.Luc. (10.48) and Confessiones (1.11.17).

181 Ad Senarium 3, in Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, p 5. A similar rite with ‘salt of wisdom’ is also described in the 7th century Galician Sacramentary (chapters 31 and 32).
5.3.2  *Fragrant oil*

It seems that fragrant oil was used for anointments. In §111 the relationship between gnostic and other Christians is described with the following images:

> Spiritual Love is wine and fragrance. They enjoy it all, those who will anoint themselves with her. They too enjoy it who stand on their outside, as (long as) the anointed ones are standing (there). When those anointed with ointment leave them and go away, these who are not anointed, merely standing at their outside, remain again in their (own) evil smell. The Samaritan gave nothing to him who was struck down but wine and oil, - it is nothing else but the ointment. And it healed the wounds, for ‘Love covers a multitude of sins’.

The anointment here is a fragrant chrismation, that is associated with wine. This likely refers to eucharistic anointing, as oil was used in combination with bread and wine in §98 (see chapter 5.2.5 above). That a fragrant oil was also used for the baptismal chrismation is suggested by the prescription for the bride (a metaphor for the newly initiated) in §122:

> Let her only show herself to her father and her mother, and to the friend of the bridegroom and the children of the bridegroom. These are allowed to enter daily into the bridal chamber. But let the others desire just to hear her voice and have the pleasure of (smelling) her ointment. And let them feed from the crumbs that fall from the table, - like dogs. Bridegrooms and brides belong to the bridal chamber. No one will be able to see the bridegroom with the bride unless [he becomes] this (himself).

It seems the ointment is a combination of olive oil (§95) and fragrant substances (§48 and §67).

5.3.3  *Jesus’ kisses*

In §31, discussed in chapter 5.2.1 above, there is a reference to the kiss of believers, possibly in the context of the eucharist:

> For the perfect conceive through a kiss and give birth. Therefore, we too kiss one another, receiving conception from the grace that is within one another.

This is somewhat comparable to what Cyril of Jerusalem told his initiates, ‘This kiss blends souls with one another’\(^2\). A similar idea is found in the discussion of the kiss by John Chrystostom, in his third *Baptismal Homily* of the year 388 CE, paragraph 10.\(^3\)

> Just before we partake of the holy table, we are called to love one another and to greet each other with a holy kiss. This is why: Since we are in separate bodies, we connect each other’s souls in this moment through the kiss, so that our mental communion becomes like the apostolic was: that all believers were of one heart and mind (Acts 4:32).

\(^2\) *Catechetical Lectures* 23.4, or *Mystagogical Cathecheses* 5.3.

There is also another mystical explanation for this kiss. The Holy Spirit has made us a temple of Christ. So when we kiss each other on the mouth, we kiss the entrance to the temple.

Likewise, the *Tripartite Tractate* speaks of a kissing one another with a ‘good, insatiable thought’, which is a kiss of unity between the many that form the *ekklesia* (NHC I, 58.20-35). As with the eucharist, it is quite likely that the candidates were only permitted the communion kiss after their initiation.184

But there is another kiss in §55, where Jesus kissed Mary Magdalene on her mouth (assuming ‘mouth’ is indeed the correct reconstruction of the lacuna here). Is this a reference to the same ritual? The story of Mary is known from other sources as well. In John 20, on Easter Sunday Mary is looking for Jesus, finds him and – but now the text becomes ambiguous – embraces or tries to embrace him. For Cyril of Jerusalem (14th *Catechetical Lecture* 12-13) it is clear that she did and that his baptism candidates should want to do the same. He puts quotations from Solomon’s *Song of Songs* in the mind and on the lips of Mary Magdalene. She came looking for her soul-beloved (3:1), held him, and would not let him go (3:3,4). In this way, Mary becomes the archetypal bride of Christ.185

Other stories could be read in the same way. In Luke 7:36-50 the prostitute washes Jesus’ feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, kisses them and anoints them with myrrh. Ambrose discusses this story and likens her to the Church, the bride in the Song of Songs, as well as to the individual believer.186

‘Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.’187 For by His kisses she wished gradually to quench the burning of that desire, which had grown with looking for the coming of the Lord, and to satisfy her thirst by this gift...

And the same Scripture teaches you concerning the infusion of special grace, that he kisses Christ who receives the Spirit, where the holy prophet says, ‘I opened my mouth and drew in the Spirit.’188

In *Repentance*, Ambrose speaks again about the same story of the prostitute. But here he changes the voice in the quote from the Song of Songs:189

In a kiss is the sign of love, and therefore the Lord Jesus says, ‘Let her kiss Me with the kisses of her mouth.’

So now Jesus kisses the woman on her mouth and she kisses Jesus on his mouth. Through the Song of Songs we no longer talk about kissing his feet. In the kiss on the mouth, the bride shares in Jesus’ breath, in his spirit.190

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184 For a discussion of the kiss as a boundary marker of the initiated, see Penn (2005), *Kissing Christians.*

185 Mary Magdalene is a composite figure in early Christian discourse. Originally, she was the woman exorcised by Jesus from the seven demons. She was also one of four relatively well-to-do women who financed the mission (Luke 8:4), which in those days would have been done with the consent of her husband or independently if she was older and without a husband (e.g. a widow). This ‘matron’ became identified with another Mary, Mary of Bethany who chose to become a disciple of Jesus (Luke 10:38-42) and anointed him for his burial (John 12). She again was identified with an unnamed prostitute who anointed Jesus on a previous occasion in Bethany (Luke 7). This conflation of three characters was not introduced by pope Gregory, as many scholars have maintained, but is already explicit in Porphyry’s *Against the Christians* preserved in Macarius Magnes’ *Apocriticus*: ‘Instead he appeared to Mary Magdalene, a prostitute from some horrible little village and had been possessed by seven demons,’ translation: Hoffman (1994), *Porphyry*, p 34. I note that Porphyry’s was well acquainted with gnostic Christians.

186 Letter 41.10-22, the quotes are from 41.14 and 15; NPNF II vol 10, p 448.

187 *Song of Songs* 1:2

188 Psalm 119:131, LXX

189 *Repentance* 2.8(69); NPNF II vol 10, p 352.
Although many have interpreted the reference in *GPhil* as an apocryphal reference to Jesus and Mary, it seems that *GPhil* itself uses the story in a different way. In the remainder of §55, Jesus invites his disciples to have the same relationship with him. We also find the kiss in the *First Apocalypse of James* (NHC V,3), where the risen or spiritual Lord appears to his brother James. James embraces and kisses him (31.1-5). A kiss on the lips follows in the *Second Apocalypse of James* (NHC V,4), where Jesus kisses his brother at the moment of his illumination:

> And he kissed my mouth. He took hold of me, saying, ‘My beloved! Behold, I shall reveal to you those (things) that (neither) [the] heavens nor their archons have known.’ (56.14-20)

These passages reveal the shared interest of these gnostic Christians, Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose: ‘koinônia’ with the divine Jesus. Mary was his first ‘koinônos’, because she was the first to truly see and embrace the resurrected or spiritual Jesus. The kiss is not only the kiss of unity, but also a kiss of illumination from the revealer to his beloved.

Could this mystical kiss from the saviour have been represented in a baptismal ritual? There is, indeed, a possibility that should be discussed here. According to the *Apostolic Tradition* 22, the bishop laid his hands on each newly baptised person, prayed that he or she be filled with the Holy Spirit, anointed the forehead, and kissed him or her. Then they prayed together with the community and exchanged the kiss of peace in anticipation of the eucharist. The kiss is also known from a letter of Cyprian (58) to a certain Fidus. Fidus did not like kissing newly born babies at baptism. He proposed delaying their baptism to at least a week after their birth. Cyprian encourages him with the thought that kissing a newborn is just like kissing the hand of God who made the infant. The one and only kiss of the bishop after initiation matches well with the reference to the kiss between Jesus and James. It is unclear, however, how widespread this custom was. John Chrysostom does not specify a sole kiss from the bishop.\(^{191}\)

As soon as they come up from those holy floods, all those present embrace them, greet them, kiss them, congratulate and rejoice with them, because the former slaves and captives have all at once become free men and sons, and invited at the royal table.

The question is whether a post-baptismal kiss applies to §55. Ambrose gives us an opportunity to understand the kiss from the perspective of the eucharist. He uses the words from the *Song of Songs* in his baptismal instructions, most explicitly when he talks about the eucharist. In *Sacraments* 5.5.5-8, Ambrose likens the bride not only to the Church, but also to the soul of the newly baptised person:\(^{192}\)

> You have come to the altar; the Lord Jesus calls you, or your soul, or the Church, and says, ‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his lips’.... He sees that you are cleared of all sin, because your trespasses are brushed away. Therefore he finds you worthy of the heavenly sacraments, and therefore he invites you to the heavenly dish. ‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his lips’ ... that is, ‘Let Christ give me a kiss’. Why? ‘Because

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\(^{190}\) To symbolize baptism in the spirit, Jesus breathes on his disciples in John 20:22.

\(^{191}\) This is taken from §27 of the second *Baptismal Homily* of series dated to a year between 389 and 397 CE; my translation from the 1992 text edition given in *Fontes Christiani*, Johannes Chrysostomus, *Taufkatechesen II*, p 354-355.

\(^{192}\) My translation.
your breasts are better than wine’. ... Now then, therefore Solomon refers to bridal feasts of Christ and the Church, or of the spirit and the flesh, or of the spirit and the soul.

When Ambrose compares the soul to both prostitute and bride, he is quite in line with gnostic Christian *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,131.13-19, 132.2.7-13):

As long as the soul keeps running around about everywhere copulating with whomever she meets and defiling herself, she is suffering her just deserts. But when she perceives the straits she is in and weeps before the father and repents, then the father will have mercy on her .... That is her baptism.... From heaven the father sent her man, who is her brother, the firstborn. Then the bridegroom came down to the bride. She gave up her former prostitution and cleansed herself of the pollutions of the adulterers, and she was renewed so as to be a bride. She cleansed herself in the bridal chamber; she filled it with perfume...

The ex-prostitute therefore symbolizes, in this context, the soul that fell astray into prostitution, returned to herself, received the spirit, and became a bride. In baptism, she was cleansed and accepted in marriage. After cleansing, Ambrose says, she becomes worthy of receiving the kisses of Jesus, the sacraments of bread and wine. The eucharist is the wedding feast, and eating and drinking symbolize the kiss of Jesus on the mouth.

This is exactly what we find in *GPhil*. The *logos* and the *pneuma* are represented by bread and wine (§23). The kiss by Jesus on Mary’s mouth may be represented by the eating and drinking of the eucharist. The earthly kiss §31 between believers, as part of the eucharistic rite, is for *GPhil* an additional expression of the kisses in the heavenly bridal chamber. There are therefore two explanations for the kiss; it deals both with the communion between one another and the communion with Jesus.

5.3.4 Pharisatha

In §53, a Syriac word for the eucharistic bread is used:

The *eucharist* is Jesus, for he is called in the Syrian language ‘Pharisatha’, which is ‘the one spread out’. For Jesus came to be crucified to the *cosmos*.

Ménard (1988), in his comments on this passage, has suggested that this text may refer to a practice known from the later Jacobite rite, in which the eucharistic bread was broken in the shape of a cross. Unfortunately we have no evidence that this was already done in the second or third century. But that does not necessarily mean that the community behind *GPhil* also used this term for eucharistic bread, especially given the fact that the speaker seems unaware of the fact that the Aramaic ‘pĕrisata’ is a plural. Schenke believes that a liturgical formula may stand behind the tradition: These pieces are the flesh of Jesus, who was crucified to the *cosmos.* The speaker has, however, learned about the double meaning of word, as it apply is applied to Jesus: because he was spread in crucifiction, he is called ‘Pharisatha’. If the

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193 In the context of §32 and the entire fifth unit Mary represents the various roles of the Holy Spirit / Sophia. The fall of the soul, and its redemption through marriage with her brother, is an image of the fall and restoration of Sophia, see chapter 8.2.4 below.
194 For the etymology of the word ‘Pharisatha’ see chapter 9.2.1 below.
community did not use the Syrian formula itself, there is no reason to assume that they broke the eucharist in a cruciform shape.

In the translation of the last sentence I follow Schenke, and note a passage in Cyril’s Catechetical Lectures (13.28) which uses the same imagery to make another point: ‘He stretched out his hands on the cross, that he might embrace the ends of the world.’

5.3.5 Circumstances

A number of references do not relate to the rituals themselves but to the circumstances in which they took place.

Time of day. It seems that the ritual itself played with the transition from darkness to light. The pupils could see their reflections in the water when the oil lamps were brought near (§75). This is in line with the Valentinian inscriptions discussed by Lampe (see chapter 1.1 above) where baptism is ‘celebrated with torches’.195 Seemingly contradictory, however, is the reference in §122, which says that the spiritual marriage takes place in the light and during the day. But §126 and §127 seem to imply that this should be taken as metaphor: that light and day have an eternal quality, that light is ‘received’ in the bridal chamber.

Time of year. In §7 and more clearly in §109, baptism is associated with the transition from winter to summer. We see the same metaphors used in Christian baptismal instructions given around Easter (spring).196 There are many references to the crucifixion and the cross, and even one to the (paschal) lamb, which is remarkable for a gnostic Christian writing. This does not force us to conclude that baptism in GPhil always took place around the time of Easter, but it would fit the discourse better than another time of year.

Preparation time. In the second-century Didache, a final pre-baptismal instruction is given just prior to immersion; in the case of the fourth-century Cyril of Jerusalem there were 21 pre-baptismal instructions in the forty days before Easter. Between these extremes stands GPhil: we see seven pre-baptismal textual units. Each textual unit can stand in its own right, and can be understood within a consistent rhetorical strategy (see chapter 4.3). Although we cannot draw a firm conclusion here, the number seven would fit well with a preparation period of a week. The three mystagogical instructions, on the other hand, were probably all delivered on the night of baptism.

Place. In unit ten, discussed in chapter 5.2.5 above, we saw that the group celebrated a cult meal, appropriate to a small community. We also saw that the mystagogue can instruct his pupils in both baptism and the eucharist at the same location. This suggests a community small enough to have a common meal and at the same time large, or at least rich, enough to build an in-house baptistery. Such requirements could be met by urban villas, with running water fed by aqueducts, and which had adjoining rooms that could be converted into a baptistery. In third-century Dura Europos, both the synagogue and the church were converted houses with water available.197 The church had a baptistery in one room, while two other spaces were joined together as the main room of worship. This too is in line with the third-century

196 E.g. Cyril of Jerusalem Catecheses 14.10, quoting Song of Songs: ‘The winter is past...’...it is already spring. And this is the season, the first month with the Hebrews, in which occurs the festival of the Passover...’
inscriptions reconstructed by Lampe (see chapter 1.1 above), where the ‘baths are celebrated’ by the ‘joint-brothers of the bridal chambers’.

5.4 Rituals of other groups

5.4.1 Other gnostic Christians

The third unit consists of three debates with mainstream Christians. In the last dispute, §23, GPhil positions itself between mainstream Christianity and another group of gnostic Christians:

§23 Some are afraid, lest they rise naked. This is why they wish to rise in the flesh!
And [they] do not know that those who wear the [flesh] are naked. It is those who [are able to] strip [themselves] that are not naked.
‘Flesh [and blood will] not inherit the kingdom [of God]’. Which (flesh) is this that will not inherit? That which is upon us. And which (flesh), moreover, is this that will inherit? It is that of Jesus and his blood. For this reason, he said, ‘He who does not eat my flesh and drink my blood does not have life within him’. What is it? His flesh is the logos, and his blood is the Holy Spirit. He who has received these has food and he has drink, and clothing.
I find fault with the others who say that it will not rise; or, rather, both are wrong.
You say it: ‘The flesh will not rise’, - but tell me what will rise, so that we may pay respect to you. You say, ‘The spirit in the flesh’. And even this is a light ‘in the flesh’! Even a logos is something which is ‘in the flesh’. Whatever you will say, you say nothing outside the flesh. It is necessary to rise in this flesh, as everything is within it.

The ‘others’ seem to share GPhil’s criticism of mainstream Christianity, but they go one step further: the flesh has no function whatsoever in the redemption of the believer; only the spirit is relevant. The speaker rejects this as shortsighted. The spirit (breath) is still a material element. In addition, the word is still spoken in this world.

The speaker seems to refer again to this group in §26b-27; refusing the lamb in the eucharist means that they will not see the divine:

§27 Do not look down upon the lamb. For without it, it is not possible to see the king; no one will be able to approach the king, while naked.

This does not mean that the other group does not celebrate some sort of eucharistic meal. It could be that they simply do not believe that the sacrifice of Jesus’ body as a paschal lamb can have any relevance. They do not want to associate the spiritual Christ with the material Jesus any more than necessary. They do not want to be clad in Jesus’ flesh and blood, but it cannot be excluded that they found a different meaning in this ritual. This could be the case if §108 also contains a response to this type of gnostic Christianity:

The holy man is completely holy, even in his body. For when he has received the bread, he blesses it as holy, - or the cup, or all the rest that he receives. As he cleanses them, how then will he not cleanse the body too?
In this passage the eucharist is mentioned before baptism. This reverse order would be appropriate if it refers to other gnostic Christians, who did celebrate a cup but not baptism of the body. Again, this does not have to mean that there was no baptism at all; it may be the case that the other group practised baptism through sprinkling either water or a prepared ointment.198

5.4.2 Mainstream Christians

In §6, the speaker presents himself and his audience as formerly mainstream Christians. In my rhetorical analysis (see chapter 4.3 above), I demonstrated that the speaker, through a combination of instruction and polemics in units two to seven, aims to show that their understanding of the divine is fundamentally wrong. Nowhere, however, does he attack the form of their rituals. Instead he identifies them as followers of the apostles as their leaders (§17 and 65), from whom the gnostic Christians also received their names and rituals (§47, 67 and 95).

Mainstream and gnostic Christians would then share a ritual of baptism, chrismation and the eucharist. The essential difference is not its form, but its interpretation. As we saw earlier, it may be that the reference to salt in §35 (probably given to catechumens) was only practised by mainstream Christians.

5.5 Conclusion

If we approach GPhil as a baptismal instruction, it is indeed possible to distinguish a single initiation ritual. After undergoing the pre-baptismal instructions (the first seven textual units) and taking their final decisions, the group gathered for the initiation. In the mystagogical instructions, the candidates may have been shown how their images reflected in the water, as the lights were brought closer. The candidates then undressed and entered the water. They may have spoken a formula with reference to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, before receiving an outpouring of water or dipping themselves underwater. After this, they were anointed with a chrism made of olive oil. If, as in mainstream Christianity, the candidates received white garments and candles, this would fit with the allusion in the text to the garment of light. Baptism and chrism gave the initiates access to the community that celebrated the eucharist. Possibly after receiving a kiss on the lips, the group members celebrated a ceremonial meal with bread, mixed wine, and fragrant oil.

198 Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.21, discerned between (1) those who retained baptism of the body, (2) those who replaced it by a ritual that did not focus on the whole body, e.g. chrismation, and (3) those who rejected material sacraments all together. See chapter 6.5.1 below.