7. Social setting

In this chapter I will assess the social setting of *GPhil*, how the group behind the text defines itself and its relationship to others, and which social values are presumed by the speaker of the text. These concepts are not, or only to a limited extent, consciously articulated by the speaker. It is therefore necessary to read between the lines.

7.1 Current scholarship

In recent decades, social sciences have begun making an important contribution to the study of the New Testament. These approaches are increasingly being applied to non-canonical writings as well. In 1988 a number of essays appeared under the title *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* while 2006 saw the publication of *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament Apocrypha*. The discussions include such topics as ‘the construction of Christian identity, the Christian martyr, heterodoxy and orthodoxy, conjugal ethics and apostolic home wreckers, trials and temptations, the rhetoric of the body, asceticism, and eroticism’.

Over the years, several scholars have touched upon social aspects of *GPhil* in articles and essays.

7.1.1 Ethnicity and group identity

Klaus Koschorke uses *GPhil* in his analysis of the relationship between gnostic Christians and mainstream Christians. He calls it ‘einer der wichtigsten Texte zum Verständnis gnostischer Polemik überhaupt.’ He gives a useful analysis of the difference with ‘die Pseudochristen’. Unfortunately, he does not analyze whether the polemics in *GPhil* are to be considered polemics within a group, or among several groups. On the basis of his analysis of a number of texts, he concludes that *GPhil* represents a *Haupttypos* of gnostic Christian polemic. He suggests that *GPhil* does not fit a situation in which gnostic Christians were either envied or persecuted. It bespeaks instead a setting in which mainstream Christians denounce gnostic Christian views, without persecuting gnostic Christians. Henriëtte Davelaar provides an interesting refinement of Koschorke’s model with regard to the community behind the *Apocalypse of Peter*, analyzing the discourse in the context of group separation and formation.

In his article ‘Gnostic Views on Jews and Christians in the Gospel of Philip’, Jeffrey Siker argues that some passages are evidence of interaction between Valentinian Gnostics and Jews and Christians. He notes that the group calls itself ‘Christian’, and ‘probably’ uses the word ‘Hebrew’ for non-gnostic Christians, while using the word ‘Jew’ for ethnic and religious Jews. Scholars have expressed different opinions regarding the relationship between Judaism or Jewish Christianity and *GPhil*. Siker notes, for example, how §102 is reconstructed differently by Wilson and by Isenberg:

W. Isenberg advocates the following reconstruction of the fragmented text: ‘No Jew [was ever born] to Greek parents [as long as the world] has existed. And, [as a] Christian [people], we ourselves do not descend] from the Jews.’ Wilson and others

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283 Koschorke (1978), *Polemik*.
reconstruct the text to read. ‘[we too had our origin] from the Jews [before we became Christians].’ If Isenberg is correct, the Gospel of Philip severs any genealogical ties between Christians and Jews. If Wilson is correct, it shows the community of the Gospel of Philip to have Jewish, probably Jewish-Christian, roots.

From the start, attention has been focused on the use of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, various apocrypha and agrapha in GPhil. In 1983, Eric Segelberg summarized the progress made to date. Segelberg points out that GPhil ‘had access to basic Old Testament teaching about the beginning of the world and of the elect people of God in Abraham.’ He notes that numerous writings from the New Testament are quoted: Matthew, Luke, John, I Corinthians, and 1 Peter. It seems that a number of other writings like Romans and Galatians are paraphrased or alluded to. The quotations are either certainly or possibly from the Greek. In some cases there may be influences from Syriac versions, in other cases western variants. On the other hand, there are also agrapha that may ‘belong to a more Gnostic kind of tradition’. From a social perspective, however, I am interested in the question whether GPhil accepted the same traditions as mainstream Christians, and what kind of authority was awarded to such texts. But the analyses that I have seen so far are predominantly philological. Little attention has been paid to the question of how these texts functioned within the rhetorical situation, both within the group and with respect to debates with mainstream Christians.

7.1.2 Gender and marriage

A considerable amount of work has gone into the subject of gender and marriage in GPhil, but current scholarship has thus far been unable to reach definite conclusions.

Michael Williams analyses gender imagery in three texts, including GPhil. He concludes from §61 that GPhil stands out among the ancient texts he analyzed because men and women are saved, as engendered men and women, through unification with an angel of the opposite sex. He also believes that Valentinians regarded earthly marriage as antithetical to spiritual marriage and opted for spiritual marriage. The problem is, however, that §61 is not translated correctly. Williams uses a translation that reads that one receives a male or a female power, but the Coptic actually reads: a male and female power.

Peter Brown devotes a chapter to the attitudes of Valentinians with regard to gender and sexuality. He refers to GPhil no less than twelve times to support his reconstruction of Valentinian opinion. He sees the Valentinians as groups of male and female students at the feet of a male spiritual guide, as the disciples had listened to Christ. But it was not a “holy” group, protected from the outside world by firm boundaries, such as celibacy and abstention from certain foods’. Brown thinks that for Valentinus ‘the female stood for all that was open, aimless, lacking in shape and direction. It stood for all that needed to be formed by being made subject to the hard, clear outlines of the male’. Redemption meant that ‘the female would be swallowed up in the male. It would not simply be disciplined by the male; it would become the male’. He believes that there were two types of Valentinians: pneumatikoi who could abstain from sex, and psychikoi who were not yet able to live the life of spiritual

286 Segelberg refers here to the work by Gaffron (1969), Philippussevangelium.
287 Williams (1986), ‘Gender Imagery’.
people. The problem with his reconstruction, however, is that the analysis is not rooted in an analysis of *GPhil* itself. It presupposes that *GPhil* fits within this description of Valentinians and then, selectively, presents passages as ‘proof texts’.

Yorunn Buckley discusses the roles of the Holy Spirit, Mary and Sophia in *GPhil*. Although her study concentrates more on the theological and sacramental aspects, she also touches on social issues. She concludes that §122 ‘does not warrant a totally negative view of earthly marriage’, as some previous scholars had asserted. In response, Kurt Rudolph suggests, ‘Perhaps the bridal chamber ritual is the lifelong practice of the “free men” and the “virgins” living together in a community but without marrying’, as a sort of ‘spiritual marriage’.

Elaine Pagels discusses the thirty years of differing interpretations of scholars regarding the ‘mystery of marriage’ in *GPhil*. She concludes that both sides (whether *GPhil* advocates celibacy or marriage) are ‘equally right – or equally wrong’. She concludes:

‘There is, furthermore, no unambiguous evidence to prove that Valentinian Christians in general or the author of *Gos. Phil.* in particular advocated either celibacy or marriage’.

Pagels notices that the testimony of the church fathers is not clear. Irenaeus accuses some Valentinians of teaching celibacy for psychic believers (mainstream Christians), but behaving as libertines when among pneumatics (the opposite of what Peter Bergen describes). This is, however, typical outsider testimony as we have seen in chapter 6.2.3 and 6.5.1 above. A polemicist tends to use any information, from whatever uncertain source, as long as it confirms his negative image of his opponents. It may be that Irenaeus is generalizing isolated incidents among the Marcosians he knew; he may also be mixing the opinions of various groups. Other writers with direct knowledge of Valentinians, Clement, Tertullian and Hippolytus, did not repeat these polemics. In fact, Clement is brief but positive about the marriage values of Valentinians (see chapter 7.3.2 below).

7.1.3 **Hierarchy and the position of women**

The subject of hierarchy has not yet received systematic attention. Yorunn Buckley and Deirdre Good discuss the subject of hierarchy in the context of ritual. They argue that §108 is evidence of self-immersion by the baptism candidate. The text reads as follows:

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?

Isenberg translates the opening words as ‘the priest’, but Buckley and Good correctly note that the text simply reads ‘holy man’. In order to understand this passage in its context, I would like to make the following observations: The argument of the speaker comes from another gnostic Christian group that did not baptize by

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289 Buckley (1988), ‘Double Name’
292 Against Heresies 1.6.3-4.
immersing the body into water. The teacher believes that this position is inconsistent with the fact that they do celebrate the eucharist (and possibly also chrismation). The teacher points to Jesus, who came to fulfill or perfect all justice through his baptism by John (§89). The speaker concludes that for the gnostic Christian, baptism is therefore perfected and changed. In §89, Jesus does this not just for himself alone, but explicitly for all those baptized in his name. He is therefore not just the first person to receive gnostic baptism, but rather the person who instituted gnostic baptism for later believers. It seems that the initiate cannot do this on his own, without the work of Jesus. The consecration of the body in our paragraph may well be connected to this consecration of the water. Note that the water of baptism is also called a body in §101. Regardless of whether a priest or an already initiated Valentinian consecrates the ritual elements, it is possible that he re-enacts the consecration by Jesus on behalf of later believers. The notion is similar to the ‘wholly perfect man’ in §100. The heavenly man, here represented in Jesus, gives the sacraments and he who receives them becomes a perfect man himself, down to his very body. But the initiate only becomes this after he starts drinking. In other words, the mystery consecrates the initiate, not the other way round. In §100 it is unclear who says the eucharistic prayer: but it is said over the cup and not necessarily by each of the participants. In §26 we see a eucharistic prayer put in the mouth of Jesus, who is probably to be imagined as speaking on behalf of the disciples.

The word ‘priest’ as a designation for a member of the clergy found its way into Christian discourse only in the course of the third century. It would be an anachronism to translate it into the text. It would also imply an unsupported suggestion that GPhil assumes a clergy similar to that seen among mainstream Christians. But that does not mean there was no hierarchy among Valentinians. The Valentinian Marcus Magus clearly functioned as a leader, even when he invites believers to participate in liturgical tasks. Hippolytus speaks of Marcosian bishops leading the initiation.

Likewise for the community of GPhil, the very idea of an initiation of newcomers into a secret mystery assumes at least some kind of leadership during the ceremony.

Equality

GPhil is regularly referred to in more general descriptions of gnostic and Valentinian Christians, such as Elaine Pagels’ bestseller The Gnostic Gospels, or Marvin Meyer’s recent popular book The Gnostic Discoveries: The Impact of the Nag Hammadi Library. The picture painted of gnostic Christian communities is that of a group with little hierarchy and equal positions for men and women. An important witness in these cases is a text by Tertullian. It reads as follows:

41.1. I must not omit an account of the conduct also of the heretics – how frivolous it is, how worldly, how merely human, without seriousness, without authority, without discipline, as suits their creed.
2. To begin with, it is doubtful who is a catechumen, and who is a believer; they all have access alike, they hear alike, they pray alike – even Gentiles, if any such happen to come among them...

294 Bradshaw (1992, 2002), Search, p 201 ff.
295 Refutation 6.36.
297 Pagels (1979), Gospels, p. 42; Meyer (2005), Discoveries, p 165.
298 On Prescription of Heretics 41-42; ANF vol 3, p 263, with emendations.
4. ...All are puffed up, all offer you knowledge. Their catechumens are perfect before they are fully taught.
5. These heretical women, how impudent they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to promise healings – perhaps even to baptise.
6. Their ordinations are carelessly administered, capricious, and changeable. At one time they put novices in office ...
7. Nowhere is promotion easier than in the camp of the rebels, where the mere fact of being there is a foremost service.
8. And so it comes to pass that today one man is their bishop, tomorrow another; today he is a deacon who tomorrow is a reader; today he is a presbyter who tomorrow is a layman. For even on laymen do they impose the functions of priesthood.

42.1 But what shall I say concerning the ministry of the word, since they make it their business not to convert the Gentiles, but to subvert our people?

Does this text accurately describe the situation of the community behind GPhil? However attractive it may be to modern critics of hierarchy, the text is of very limited value for the historical reconstruction of Valentinian practice. Tertullian here writes against all ‘heretics’, not just Valentinians. Furthermore, these statements are polemics from an outsider, and must be checked for bias, selectiveness and accuracy. Tertullian’s testimony is inconsistent. On the one hand Tertullian says there is no hierarchy, but at the same time he is able to mention a number of functions. We see, then, that Tertullian brings together everything negative (in his eyes) that he could find about any group and presents it as applying to ‘heretics’ in general. But in his treatise specifically against the Valentinians, he paints a completely different picture. Nothing is said about disorderly congregations. On the contrary, hierarchy and procedure are implicit in his statement that catechumens are initiated over a lengthy period. With regard to the position of women, the picture is different as well. Tertullian only mentions male teachers among the Valentinians and he does not claim that Valentinian women baptized.

The figure of Mary Magdalene in GPhil has attracted considerable attention. Does her ‘partnership’ with Jesus and her spiritual superiority over the other disciples tell us anything about the position of women? Antti Marjanen discusses the texts at length, but concludes that ‘it is surprising that in the context of GPhil as a whole, Mary Magdalene personally does not gain any significant position as a transmitter of spiritual mysteries.’299 Indeed, if we look at the role of Mary in GPhil, only Jesus is active (§55): he kisses Mary. Mary does not speak or act on her own. She is only defined in relation to him (§31). As Karen King observes, ‘we must be careful not to appropriate these works uncritically as feminist resources simply on the basis of a positive portrayal of Mary, for they can also employ feminine imagery that denigrates femaleness.’300

Although we cannot use Tertullian’s testimony or the references to Mary as evidence, one can argue in general that women played more prominent roles in small groups in the household setting.301 It is also understandable that in small groups, which attracted educated believers, several people would read and offer explanations in turn. The question is how such groups were organized once they became large enough to organize baptismal instructions for groups of candidates. For that, we need a systematic analysis of GPhil itself.

299 Marjanen (1996), Woman, p168.
300 King (2003), Mary of Magdala, p 147.
301 Cf. Osiek and MacDonald (2006), Woman’s Place.
7.1.4 Methodological concerns and approach

Despite the progress made thus far, I believe there are significant gaps in our understanding of the social setting of GPhil. Some of the results to date have not (yet) been supported by enough evidence. Sometimes this may derive from the fact that GPhil has been used to support certain reconstructions rather than as a subject of research itself. In other cases, it seems that the reconstruction of the social setting has been overshadowed by the discussion of the theology and ritual behind GPhil. These are related but separate subjects, as groups can share a similar theology but nevertheless have different values with regard to the drinking of wine or the enjoyment of sexuality. We can see that today. Some churches have rituals and theology that to a large extent are very similar, yet they differ fundamentally with regard to sexuality, celibacy and gay marriage. There has, in general, been a focus on religious aspects in the texts; relatively little attention has been paid to the intertextuality with non-religious writings about gender and marriage values, such as the contemporary Greek novels. A more general problem regards the use of selected passages without regard for their rhetorical function in GPhil, sometimes with the tacit assumption that the same values underlie all gnostic Christian documents.

I suggest that the discussion can be brought forward if we systematically look at a number of related social aspects:

- What can GPhil tell us about the group behind it: how did the group see themselves, what was their relationship to Gentiles, Jews and other groups of Christians? What was their social location in terms of wealth, education and type of household?
- We have seen that the image of marriage is theologically and sacramentally very important in GPhil. But what kind of values did they share with regard to earthly marriage, sexuality and children, and how did that compare with the society around them?
- The information thus gathered allows us to come back to a key topic for the speaker: how did he see femininity, masculinity and androgyny and how does that influence the position of women in the group?

For each aspect in turn, I will first go through GPhil for possible references. I will look at all references from their rhetorical function within the document, and then also from the perspective of intertextuality. Only when these steps are completed will I compare the results with what other sources can tell us about Valentinians.

7.2 The Christian setting

The starting point for this analysis is the self-identification of the group as ‘Christians’ (§6). As Jeffrey Siker notes:302

One striking feature of the Gospel of Philip is that of all the Nag Hammadi writings, with but one exception, it alone refers explicitly to ‘Christians’.... The reference is always positive, and one with which the author identifies.

The next question is what the speaker means with the term, and how it is differentiated from other identities.

7.2.1 The ethnic and religious background of converts

In §49, the speaker mentions a number of ethnic and social categories. People can be Jews, Romans, Greeks or Barbarians. They can be slaves or free men. But these categories are meaningless for redemption. All people need to become Christians. The inclusion of ‘Romans’ is of some importance as it seems to be a conscious addition to the lists in the New Testament.\(^{303}\) Possibly the origins of the group were drawn from all these ethnic groups (although ‘barbarian’ is not often used as a self-designation). In §102, the list is shorter: Jews, Greeks and Christians. Apparently these three are the most important categories. But the passage does not say that most group members are of Jewish and Greek descent, only that Jews and Greeks form distinct identities. In §19, the teacher speaks about the language of his own group as Greek, while ‘others’ have their own languages (but note that Jews in the western Diaspora used Greek as their language).

Another interesting trajectory is found in the degrees of being in the opening textual unit. In §1-6, the speaker refers to the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gentile</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>Alive, but mortal</td>
<td>Immortal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Fatherless orphan</td>
<td>Legitimate son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Slave</td>
<td>Son</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

table 7.1

From §17, we learn that the word ‘Hebrew’ refers to the ‘apostles and the apostolics’ who claim that Jesus was born of Mary and the Holy Spirit – in other words, to mainstream Christians. This also becomes clear in §46: if one is baptized without gnosis, one has not received the ‘Lord’. They may have received the name ‘Christian’ or have been baptized in the name of the Trinity, but they have not received the (true) Father, Son and Holy Spirit (§59 and 67). They are still Hebrews (§46 and §6). Their converts are made not born; therefore they are like proselytes (§1). The word ‘Christian’ is correctly applied, according to the speaker, to the gnostic Christian only.

When ethnic Jews are referred to, the word Jew is used (in §49 and §102). In other words, mainstream Christians and Jews are two different categories. Their ways have already parted even though they worship the same Hebrew God.

Gentiles are dead. Mainstream Christians have come to life, but risk dying (§4). Only true Christians are immortal and certain of salvation; the only uncertainty left is whether one is, and remains, a true Christian. The distinction between a mainstream Christian and a true or gnostic Christian is also compared to the distinction between an orphan and a (true) son. An orphan is without rights and inheritance, like an illegitimate child. He is enslaved by the powers, like his mother. I agree with Elaine Pagels that Galatians 4:21-31 is behind §2.\(^{304}\) The Spirit-mother of mainstream Christians is the slave woman. Gnostic Christians have been born of the freeborn legitimate wife. This makes them freeborn and legitimate heirs. The pair of slave and son functions in the same way. The slave only wants to become free. The gnostic

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\(^{303}\) Romans 10:12, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11.

\(^{304}\) Pagels (1975), Gnostic Paul, p 108.
Christian is like a son: he wants to inherit his father’s estate (and become the father himself). In §114, the newly initiated gnostic Christian is warned not to fall back into slavery (that is, mainstream Christianity).

With this desire of the son, a fourth state of being is envisaged: that of the father. For now, the gnostic Christian is only a minor: the estate is not entrusted to him (§37) and he is too young to beget children (§29). But he will grow to be the Father in the other aeon.

It seems that the ‘typical’ pattern for the candidates is reflected in these passages. With Siker, I agree that it does not describe ‘a movement from Judaism to Christianity to Gnosticism’. That is only the theological development. Socially, the typical candidate (or his parents) started out as a Gentile – in this community often a Greek-speaking Gentile. Most of them became mainstream Christians before they became gnostic Christians (§6). This is in line with the rhetorical analysis presented in chapter 4.3 above. The main aim of the teacher seems to be to persuade the candidates to move from mainstream Christianity to gnostic Christianity. This conclusion also confirms the image painted by Tertullian. In On Prescription of Heretics (42.1) he writes about the Valentinians and other groups: ‘They make it their business not to convert the Gentiles, but to subvert our people’. In Against the Valentinians (1.1), he calls them ‘apostates from the truth’.

7.2.2 Shared apostolic traditions

Although the apostles are denounced as mere ‘Hebrews’ without gnosis in §17, it is also clear from §47 and §95 that these gnostic Christians have received divine names and rituals from the apostles.

§47 The apostles before us called out this way: ‘Jesus, the Nazoraean, Messiah’...

§95 ... For the Father anointed the Son, and the Son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us.

In other words, GPhil assumes a shared apostolic sacramental tradition with mainstream Christians, called ‘apostolics’ in §17 and 65. The idea of apostolic succession has been an argument of mainstream Christians from as early as the second century. The difference is that Tertullian also claimed that the ‘rule (of faith)’ was transmitted in this way:

‘… the church has handed down from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God ...’

As both shared apostolic traditions, it is remarkable that GPhil calls only mainstream Christians ‘apostolics’. Does that mean that only mainstream churches claimed to be ‘apostolic’? Tertullian makes this point in a series of arguments in his On Prescription of Heretics (20-36):

305 So Grant (1960), ‘Two Gnostic Gospels’.
306 As Schenke noted, §11 seems to contain a gnostic Christian discussion of a mainstream Christian creed. It is possible that the wording (but not its exegesis) was shared with mainstream Christians. Especially if members of the group still functioning within the mainstream church, the alternative, gnostic Christian, interpretation would allow them to participate. On the other hand, it is also possible that the teacher attacks mainstream Christians on both their creed and their exegesis.
- Mainstream churches can be demonstrated to stand in the tradition of the apostles (20-22); the apostles were not divided as ‘heretics’ claim (23-24), and they did not leave secret doctrines (25-27); as a result the faith of ‘so many’ churches, and also ‘such great’ churches is substantially the same (28).

- The known teachers of Marcionites and Valentinians are all of the second century (29-31); the ‘heretics’ don’t claim apostolic succession or can’t prove it from church records (32), and the apostolic churches around the world do not admit them to communion (32).

- Teachers like Marcion and Valentinus have adopted doctrines already denounced by the apostles in their letters (33), whereas their main teachings are not to be found in the scriptures (34).

- Tertullian concludes that mainstream churches are the voice of the apostles (35-36).

Clement had heard of a rather doubtful story that Valentinus received his doctrine from a certain Theudas, who had received it from Paul.308 But this alternative ‘succession’ is not to be found in GPhil, quite in line with the fact that Tertullian’s ‘Valentinians’ did not want to be seen as followers of Valentinus.309 The community of GPhil positions itself historically in the same apostolic tradition as mainstream Christians, but not as followers of the apostles (cf. Paul’s critique in I Corinthians 3), who were after all criticized for their lack of understanding (§17 and 55/56). The gnostic Christians of GPhil follow Christ or – as they have become christs themselves (§67) – they follow the highest Father.310

7.2.3 Shared scriptures

The research to date (see 7.1.1) has shown that many canonical (or proto-canonical) New Testament works are quoted or alluded to in GPhil. For this analysis of social aspects, the question is how these texts functioned within the group and in discussions with mainstream Christians. It is also relevant to understand whether other texts carried authority in the group. I will conclude with a number of general observations.

The use of canonical and ‘apostolic’ texts in discussions with mainstream Christianity

In my rhetorical analysis in 4.3, I showed how the series of disputes in §17-24 established the authority of the speaker over mainstream Christian teachers, at least in the eyes of his candidates. These debates constitute an imaginary debate with mainstream Christians. In order to defeat them the speaker argues both on the basis of logic as well as on the basis of shared scriptures. In §17 and §18 he quotes passages to prove that Jesus had two heavenly fathers (see chapter 8.2.3 below). In §23, he quotes I Corinthians 15:50 to prove his point on the resurrection.311 In the way that the

308 Miscellanies 7.17.
309 Against the Valentinians 4.
310 They are a christs as they have been anointed. Some scholars have seen this as an expression that is typical of gnostic Christians, as opposed to mainstream Christians. But this idea is also expressed by Cyril of Jerusalem: ‘Having therefore become “partakers of Christ” you are properly called “christs”, and of you, God said: “Touch not my christs (ps 105:15)”; or anointed. Now you have been made christs, by receiving the antitype of the Holy Ghost.’ Lecture 21.1
311 According to Irenaeus, this was a standard gnostic Christian proof text against bodily resurrection (Against Heresies 5.9.1). See also Tertullian: ‘But “flesh and blood”, you say, “cannot inherit the kingdom of God”, We are quite aware that this too is written; ... our opponents place it in the front of the battle...’ (On the Resurrection of the Flesh 48).
speaker treats the texts in §17-24a, it is clear that they hold authority both for his opponents, who were not present, as well as for his audience, who needed to be convinced that gnostic Christianity offers a better exegesis of these authoritative words of Jesus and Paul.

The speaker also uses a vision of an apostolic person in §65. The work referred to must have resembled the mainstream Christian, but non-canonical, *Apocalypse of Paul*. But the speaker does not seem to accept the work as authoritative (the word ‘apostolic’ is used in a negative sense in §17). He merely wants to prove mainstream Christians wrong from their own works.

*The use of canonical texts within the community*

In chapter 4.3, I suggested that §110-123 functioned as the homiletic exhortation to the newly baptized in the presence of the entire community. The unit shows a marked difference in style and language with the previous small-group instructions, which supports this interpretation. One of the peculiarities is that this is the only textual unit with several references to what ‘the Word’ says, indirectly in §117, and two direct quotes in §123:

Therefore, the *logos* says, ‘Already the axe is laid at the root of the trees.’ (Mt 3:10).

...The *logos* says, 8‘As you know the truth, 9the truth shall set you free.’ (Jn 8:32).

John 8:32 not only marks the end of the textual unit in §123, but the verse is also the starting point of exegesis in §110 (‘...that is what is meant by “she makes them free”’). It may well be that the speaker took this verse from a portion of scripture read before the homily.\(^{312}\)

It seems that the reference to the Word in §116 is to Jesus himself. He may be seen as the authority behind the texts above. Matthew 3:10, however, is spoken by John the Baptist, and it seems that both passages have a similar scriptural authority to the speaker and his audience. Interestingly, a common proverb is cited in §121, but this proverb has no authority as the speaker uses it only to disagree with it. This pattern is recognized in the remainder of *GPhil*: Every time he introduces a saying or a human opinion, the speaker disagrees with it (§17-24b, 69, 90, and 124). But quotes or paraphrases of sayings of Jesus, or from the letters of Paul and Peter, always carry authority (§17, 18, 69, 72, 110, 111, and 126).

The situation is different, however, with quotes about the Demiurge, such as in §41 (Genesis 1:31) or §94 (Genesis 2:16-17). Here the speaker disagrees with the Creator, as we would expect.

*The use of other non-canonical logia, narrative gospels and acts*

Some apparent quotations seem to derive from non-canonical traditions. I have listed the passages below and will first comment briefly on their background:

\(^{312}\) The reference to Abraham in §123 may also be prompted by his appearance in John 8:33-58, especially verse 56. The idea that he circumcised himself after seeing is also present in the Dead Sea Scrolls (*Damascus Document* 16.6): ‘Abraham circumcised himself on the day of his knowledge.’
§26 ... 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’.

This logion is not known from any other source, but the wording is typical of Valentinian sacramental thinking. It could be a liturgical formula, perhaps even a revision of the traditional eucharistic narrative (I Corinthians 11:23-26). In chapter 5.2.1 above, I pointed to a parallel in the eucharistic liturgy found in the Apostolic Constitutions.

§34 The holy ones are served by the evil powers. For they are blinded by the Holy Spirit, so that they would think that they are serving their people whenever they do it for the holy ones. Therefore, - (when) a disciple asked the Lord one day for a thing of the cosmos, he said to him ‘Ask your mother and she will give you’, - from another one’s (goods).

This logion is also unknown from any other source. It may be a deliberate rephrasing of a text like Luke 11:11-13.313

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

These words of the apostles are unknown as well. Wilson points to some textual variants of Mark 9:49-50, but that rather different text is spoken by Jesus. The question is whether the logion is authoritative or a testimony to the misunderstanding of the disciples. If they want the salt of Sophia, they may have chosen the barren Sophia (§36). In that case, this may be a paraphrase of a tradition known from the Roman church wherein catechumens were salted with the ‘salt of wisdom/Sophia’ (see chapter 5.3.1 above).

§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’.

Again the story and logion are completely unknown. The story resembles somewhat the Arabic Infancy Gospel of Thomas.314 But there the name of the dyer is Salem and Jesus colours the cloths. The idea that Jesus ‘cleanses of every foreign color’ is found in the incipit of Ignatius’ letter to the Romans. I note that in the composition of the textual unit, §54 is related to §43, and one passage may have influenced the form of the other.

§55 Sophia who is called ‘the barren’, she is the mother of the angels and the partner of the saviour. As for Maria Magdalena: the [saviour loved] her more than the disciples. [As she saw him, he] greeted her (with kisses) on her [mouth, many] times. The other [disciples were angry] with [her. They questioned,] they said to him, ‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’ The saviour answered, {he said to them}, ‘Why do I not love you like her?’.

313 ‘If a son asks bread of anyone who is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?’

314 ‘The Lord Jesus went into the dyer’s workshop, took all these cloths and put them into a cauldron full of indigo. ... and he immediately began to take the cloths out of the cauldron, each of them dyed in the colour the dyer wished, until he had taken them all out.’ Schneemelcher (1991), New Testament Apocrypha, volume 1, p 453.
The story and logion are completely unknown. Most commentators point to parallels in the Gospel of Mary, but our passage is not a quote from that text. Nevertheless, like the Gospel of Mary, it may be an expansion of John 20:17, through conflation of several characters and passages. In the translation above, I have reconstructed the lacunae from this perspective. In chapter 5.3.3 above, I gave several examples of such narrative expansion in baptismal instructions and commentaries.

§57 The Lord said, ‘Blessed is he who is before he had yet become’, for he who is was and shall be.

This first part of the logion is nearly identical to the opening line of logion 19 in the Gospel of Thomas. But it is not a direct quotation: In the Gospel of Thomas, it is Jesus who speaks, the main verb is in a different tense and the second part of the logion is completely different. There must, however, have been a wider tradition in which the saying was known. The first sentence is also found in Irenaeus and Lactantius, where it is applied to Christ, as proof that he is God (the one who is, was, and shall come). The logion here may be a gnostic Christian variant of that tradition.

§69 [Therefore he said], ‘I came to make [those from below] like those from above, [and those from the] outside like those from the [inside].’

This logion resembles logion 22 of the Gospel of Thomas, 2 Clement 12.2, and Acts of Philip 34 (Γ and Δ), and a text attributed to the Gospel of the Egyptians by Clement. Its present formulation, with ‘I came to’, may be related to GPhil’s frequent use of this phrase (‘Christ came’, or ‘he came’).

§91 Philip the apostle said, ‘Joseph the woodworker planted a paradise, because he needed wood for his craft’.

In chapter 8.2.3 below, I note that this text may contain an apocryphal kernel, but that its present form is the result of redactional work by the author of GPhil himself on the basis of §94 (which in turn goes back to Genesis 2:8: ‘God planted a paradise’). The passage does not carry authority in itself: it functions as an anecdote interpreted allegorically. Only through rephrasing and allegorizing does it gain this meaning in GPhil. The text is not known from any other source.

§97 Well said the Lord, ‘Some went into the kingdom of heavens laughing, and came out laughing’. [And another one, ‘He is] a Christian’. [Furthermore, he now said], ‘And at once, [when this one went down] into the water, he came [up as lord] over the all’.

This is again a completely unknown logion. Schenke suggests that these phrases originated in an apocryphal Acts and were spoken by an apostle and bystanders.

With regard to these non-canonical texts, I note that all words attributed to Jesus have authority. This is less clear (in §91), doubtful (in §35), or not the case (in §55), when the words are spoken by the apostles. It seems the speaker credits the non-canonical

316 Irenaeus, Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching 43; Lactantius, Divine Institutes 4.8.
317 Revelation 1:4.
318 Miscellanies 3,13(92.2).
words of Jesus with similar authority as the canonical words. Nevertheless, they do seem to be in a different category, as none of the non-canonical quotes are used in the real or imaginary disputes with mainstream Christians.

General observations

GPhil is relatively ‘loose’ in its quotations. This may be the result of various factors. For one, the speaker may quote from memory or paraphrase as needed. Another factor may be that the notes were taken by a listener in shorthand. The quotations may also have been changed in translation. But there is also an instance where we can see that the speaker made a meaningful, deliberate change to the quotation (§72).

When we come to the non-canonical logia, there seems to be even more variety in their transmission. None of the logia in its present form is known from any other source. This is perhaps more understandable if we assume a period of oral development of these instructions, without the controls of audiences and speakers that knew these logia in an authoritative form. The logia may have been reshaped to better fit the speaker’s purposes, each time the baptism instruction was transmitted orally, without the controls of a widely known or a written authoritative version. In the case of §91, the redactional activity of the author (or his predecessor) can be demonstrated, and in the case of §54 this is a distinct possibility. Possibly certain logia would be repeated and ascribed to Jesus and thus gain in significance.

A related point is that no other gnostic Christian source is quoted in GPhil. There is certainly a significant degree of affinity in language and concepts with other Nag Hammadi documents but there are no explicit excerpts or quotations. There is not a single direct quotation from the present Gospel of Thomas despite the appreciation for both canonical and non-canonical Jesus logia. It seems to me that the teacher did not have access to the present form of the Gospel of Thomas, or did not regard it as authoritative.

We know that Valentinian teachers wrote commentaries and homilies. In narrative and allegorical exegesis, paraphrases, conflations and expansions are not uncommon. The resulting ‘revisions’ would, at first, not carry the same authority as the text being expounded. Any teacher would feel free to use the examples and adapt them as needed. This explains the similarities in language between GPhil and baptismal instructions in general (like those of Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose of Milan), including baptismal poetry (like the Odes of Salomon and certain hymns by Ephrem Syrus), as well as with gnostic Christian writings.

I conclude that (proto-)canonical works and other words of Jesus were held as authoritative by the teacher. There is no information to suggest that the teacher rejected certain canonical works, although the words of God in Genesis are interpreted as the words of the Demiurge and therefore carry no direct authority. This observation is consistent with a comparison between Marcion and Valentinus, drawn by Tertullian.

7. One man perverts the Scriptures by hand, another their meaning by exposition.
8. For although Valentinus seems to use the entire volume, he has nonetheless laid violent hands on the truth only with a more cunning mind and skill than Marcion.

319 Compare how I Corinthians 2:9 may have become logion 17 in the Gospel of Thomas; Roukema (2005), Thomas, p 19.
320 On Prescription of Heretics 38.7-10. ANF vol 3, p 262, with emendations.
9. Marcion expressly and openly used the knife, not the pen, since he made such an excision of the Scriptures as suited his own system.
10. Valentinus, however, abstained from such excision, because he did not invent Scriptures to square with his subject matter, but adapted his matter to the Scriptures; and yet he took away more, and added more, by removing the proper meaning of every particular word, and adding arrangements of unseen things.

It should be noted that when Tertullian speaks about the Scriptures he has an ‘entire volume’ (*integrum instrumentum*) in mind, a canon consisting largely of the books of the bible we have today.\(^{321}\) Whether or not Tertullian (ca 200 CE) is historically correct in assuming such a Christian canon existed in the time of Marcion and Valentinus (140-150 CE) is immaterial for our analysis here. The main point is that the Valentinians and mainstream Christians in the time of Tertullian used the same scriptures. Tertullian may have drawn this conclusion on the basis of the various Old and New Testament books commented on by Valentinians. Tertullian does not want to credit them too much and uses the words ‘it seems’ (he would have preferred to accuse them of the contrary).

7.2.4 *The ambiguity of the relationship*

On the one hand, the community members saw themselves as Christians, and as sharers of the same scriptures and traditions as mainstream churches. On the other hand, they denounced mainstream Christians as mere Hebrews. How did they resolve the tension between these positions? Did they withdraw from the Christian community, or did they remain part of it? As the rhetorical analysis in chapter 4.3 above shows, the reference group is that of mainstream Christianity, and the recruits also seem to have come predominantly from mainstream Christianity. Nevertheless, in this period, Christians probably made up less than 2% of the population of a city (see chapter 9.4 below). We need to assume, therefore, that there were far more personal relationships between gnostic and mainstream Christians than there could have been if the communities were separate. Some passages, like §56 and 58, suggest that it was not visible that gnostic Christians were superior and could see spiritually, but that their presence nevertheless (temporarily) benefited the others. This is also expressed in §111:

\[\text{§111 Spiritual Love is wine and fragrance. They enjoy it all, those who will anoint themselves with her. They too enjoy it who stand on their outside, as (long as) the anointed ones are standing (there). When those anointed with ointment leave them and go away, these who are not anointed, merely standing at their outside, remain again in their (own) evil smell. The Samaritan gave nothing to him who was struck down but wine and oil, - it is nothing else but the ointment. And it healed the wounds, for ‘Love covers a multitude of sins’.}\]

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\(^{321}\) Balla (2002), ‘Evidence’ p 382, notes, ‘Tertullian did not produce a list of what was in his Old Testament and New Testament, but it is significant that he refers to the two parts of the Christian Bible in a collective way as *totum instrumentum utriusque instrumenti*. [Prax. 20] It seems that what we may call his “New Testament canon” included the four gospels, thirteen Pauline letters, Acts, I John, I Peter, Jude, and Revelation. He referred to these writings in an authoritative manner, and called them “an entire volume”. [Praescr. 32] He names the main parts of the New Testament “Gospels” and “the Apostles,” the latter phrase probably denoting the apostolic letters. [Prax. 15] Once again, we note that the boundaries of the apostolic letters are not defined with certainty, but this should not prevent us from seeing that for Tertullian the Bible was a “fixed entity.”’
This passage is part of a large homiletic unit (§110-123) that may have been spoken to the newly initiated. Just like the author of the *Exhortation to the Newly Baptized* (see chapter 3.2.2 above), the speaker gives behavioural instructions for their new life. In *GPhil*, the initiates are urged not to become arrogant with respect to the non-initiated, but to love them (§110). Their love is like that of the good Samaritan for the man who was robbed and beaten (§111).

The next passages urge them to focus on Jesus (§112) and seek the company of other gnostic Christians (§113) in order that they will not be enslaved again (§114) – they must not fall back into mainstream Christianity. They must be rooted in faith and, fed through hope, they must grow through love and ripen through knowledge (§115).

Passages §116-119 teach the initiates how to deal sensitively with the ‘others’. Each outsider is to be given only that which he or she can handle, in order to avoid trouble and pain. This is then illustrated with a metaphor (§119):

§119 A householder had acquired everything, be it children or slaves or cattle, or dogs, or pigs, or wheat, or barley, or chaff, or grass, or […], or meat and acorns. But he was wise and he knew everyone’s (proper) food. Before the children, indeed, he placed [ready-made] bread [and meat]. But before the slaves he placed [coarse bread and] grain. And before the cattle [he threw barley] and chaff and grass. Before the dogs he threw bones [and to the pigs] he threw acorns and mouldy bread. This is how it is with the disciple of God. If he is wise and perceptive in discipleship, the bodily forms will not mislead him, but he will observe the disposition of everyone’s soul and speak to them (accordingly). There are many animals in the *cosmos* that are in the form of man. If he recognizes these as pigs, indeed, he will throw acorns to them, but to the cattle he will throw barley and chaff and grass. To the dogs he will throw bones. To the slaves he will give the primary (things), to the children he will give the perfect (things).

The remaining passages (§120-122) urge the believer to understand the difference between creating and begetting. As a gnostic Christian, he can beget and give birth, but only in the secrecy of the bridal chamber. The last passage (§123) concerns the ongoing fight against ignorance, which does not concern us now.

It seems, therefore, that *GPhil* opts for a careful and sensitive approach towards mainstream Christians, one that will not upset them and keep the relationships intact. Judging from the writings of Tertullian, this strategy may have frustrated the attempts of mainstream Christians who wanted to excommunicate gnostic Christians, or at least delayed the process.\(^{322}\)

1.1 The Valentinians ... care for nothing so much as to obscure what they preach, if indeed (you can say that people) ‘preach’ when they obscure their doctrine. The officiousness with which they guard their doctrine is an officiousness, which betrays their guilt...

1.3 ...In like manner, the heretics who are now the object of our remarks, the Valentinians, with the holy names and titles and doctrines of the true religion, have made up the vainest phantasy ... and formed Eleusinian dissipations of their own, consecrated by a profound silence.\(^{323}\) ...

- 1.4 If you propose to them inquiries sincere and honest, they answer you with stern look and contracted brow, and say: ‘The subject is profound.’

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\(^{322}\) *ANF* vol 3, pp 503-505, with emendations.

\(^{323}\) Tertullian claims that the initiates at Eleusis were subjected to five years of instruction before they were granted perfect knowledge, and that afterwards they were bound to silence.
- If you try them with subtle questions, with the ambiguities of their double tongue, they affirm a community of faith (with yourself).
- If you intimate to them that you understand their opinions, they insist on not knowing anything themselves.
- If you come to a close engagement with them, they destroy your own fond hope of a victory over them by a self-immolation.

Not even to their own disciples do they commit a secret before they have made sure of them. They have the knack of persuading men before instructing them.

... 4.1 We know, I say, most fully their actual origin, and we are aware of why we call them Valentinians, although they affect to disavow the name.

If we disregard the polemics, here we can see how Tertullian is frustrated by the fact that he cannot use the writings of Irenaeus and others to confront, defeat and, probably, excommunicate the Valentinians in his area. It seems they still functioned within the church and ‘affirmed a communion of faith’. They would not admit to being Valentinians, nor to the doctrines Tertullian accused them of. Tertullian could not get sufficient information from interested people who had attended some meetings, and concludes that the secret doctrines were only revealed after the candidates had been tried.

A second baptism?

As long as Valentinians still functioned within the mainstream churches in parallel to their own gatherings, where some of them may even have served in ecclesiastical functions, it is not unlikely that some of them had submitted to mainstream baptism as well. This also seems to follow from §6, where it is stated that the group ‘became’ Hebrews, before they ‘became’ Christians. Irenaeus claims that Valentinians explained the difference between mainstream and gnostic baptism as follows:

For the baptism instituted by the visible Jesus was for the remission of sins, but the redemption brought in by that Christ who descended upon him, was for perfection; and they allege that the former is psychic, but the latter spiritual. And the baptism of John was proclaimed with a view to repentance, but the redemption by Jesus was brought in for the sake of perfection.

Heracleon, too, in his comments on John 1, sees John the Baptist as an image of the Demiurge. Likewise, Hippolytus describes the Marcosian redemption as a baptism ritual for people who had already been baptised as mainstream Christians. It is indeed plausible that some if not most recruits from mainstream churches had been baptised as mainstream Christians before they were baptised as gnostic Christians.

Perhaps the Valentinian liturgical fragments in NHC xi.2 should also be read in this light:

The first [baptism] is the forgiveness [of sin]. We are brought [from those] by [it into] those of the right, [that is], into the [imperishability which is] the Jordan. But that

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324 This seems to have been the case with the presbyter Florinus in Rome (Eusebius Hist. 5.20).
325 Against Heresies 1.21.2; ANF vol 1, p 345.
326 Quoted in Origen’s Commentary on John 6.39. Likewise, §43 in GPhil sees the Hebrew God as a baptizer (cf chapter 8.2.3 below).
327 Refutation 6.36,37
place is [of] the world. So we have [been sent] out [of the world] into the Aeon. For [the] interpretation of John is the Aeon, while the interpretation of that which [is] the Jord[an] is the descent.

The words ‘those of the right’ refer to the scheme of the cross. The cross functions as a separator between three areas: left (evil), right (righteous), and above (the plerōma). These three areas correspond often with the material, the psychic, and the spiritual realm. If first baptism brings the believer from the left to the right, he is brought from the material to the psychic realm. Only when he is brought to the upper part, he is saved (cf §9-10).

7.2.5 The group

As we saw in the rhetorical analysis (chapter 4), the polemics of the speaker are mostly in regard to mainstream Christianity. Thus the identity of the group, at least in its discourse with baptism candidates, is largely defined in terms of its differences with mainstream Christianity. Although Christianity at the time was still a small minority movement in the Roman Empire, mainstream Christianity is the dominant culture that GPhil sometimes wants to improve upon and sometimes opposes. There is virtually no subcultural or contra cultural discourse in relation to Hellenism or Judaism. Another gnostic Christian group receives limited attention (most notably in §23b). This, however, does not mean that Christians were dominant in the city where GPhil originated. Rather it means that the group had relatively numerous and relatively strong relationships with mainstream Christians. It is fair to assume that many of the candidates came from a mainstream Christian background. This is in marked contrast with the fourth-century mainstream Christian baptismal instructions. There, a wide variety of audiences or mixed audiences are addressed from a wide range of backgrounds, including Gentiles, Jews, and (former) heretics. As GPhil assumes sacraments and rules of admission, the community should be characterized as a corporate group. It forms a permanent body to which new members are admitted through initiation.

In his analysis of the rise of Christianity, Rodney Stark distinguishes between sects and cults. A sect is a group within an existing religion, with a higher religious tension than the main group. A cult represents a new religion in relation to the people it recruits. A sect attracts a relatively higher proportion of lower-educated, rural people, and males. A cult, on the other hand, attracts a relatively higher proportion of educated, urban people, and initially also relatively more females. He describes the Christian movement as a cult rather than a sect. It started as a Jewish cult, but the divine entity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is in the eyes of most Jews fundamentally different from their idea of a monotheistic Yahweh.

In the case of GPhil we seem to be dealing with a ‘cult within the Christian cult’. It also appeals to the city dwellers and the educated. It does not imply a sectarian higher tension as many Christians were already engaged in a high-tension religion, including martyrdom. Like a cult, the religion of GPhil implies a new religion, as it radical breaks with the Hebrew God and the ideas of the ‘apostolics’. Sociologically, therefore, Valentinians are a Christian cult. But although Valentinians call themselves

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328 Cf. the Procatechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem and the Great Catechism of Gregory of Nyssa.
329 Robbins (1996), Texture pp 100-101, gives a classification of groups, based on the work of Jeremy Boissevain, which Bruce Malina also used in New Testament studies.
330 Stark (1996), Rise, pp 33f.
‘Christians’, they mean something fundamentally different with the word than mainstream Christians do. *GPhil* does not accept mainstream believers as Christians but calls them ‘Hebrews’. Also, the fact that they share the same rituals, divine names and scriptures does not necessarily mean they share the same religion, as their interpretation is radically different. The God of Valentinus is, according to both mainstream and gnostic Christians, a very different God than the God of mainstream Christianity.

As a ‘cult within a cult’, the attractiveness of the group appears to be relatively limited to people without a Christian background. The group provides an answer to Christian problems using the means of Christian language and ritual. Once mainstream churches had identified and excommunicated Valentinians, and thus cut off the source for new recruits from mainstream churches, the Valentinian movement may have lost a great deal of its growth potential.\footnote{This may have a precedent in Judaism. Once post-70CE Judaism had emerged, in which Christians were identified as *minim*, the number of Jewish converts decreased. According to Neusner (1969), *History* p183, this happened earlier in regions where Pharisaic/Rabbinic Judaism had already established itself than in regions where Judaism was still somewhat undefined.}

### 7.3 The Graeco-Roman setting

*GPhil* draws many examples of everyday life. Through these examples we can reconstruct something of the social location of the speaker and his audience in the same way that social historians use the contemporary Graeco-Roman novels.\footnote{E.g. Scarcella (1996), ‘Social and Economic Structures’.} Fergus Millar explains their usefulness and pitfalls for understanding the social and economic history of the Roman Empire.\footnote{Millar (1999), ‘World’.} The novels reveal something of the perspectives and fantasies of the writers and their intended audiences, not necessarily of the conditions of other classes. In other words, they do not give a precise and complete description of society, but rather the perception of that reality by a certain group of people.

#### 7.3.1 Social location

In *GPhil* we encounter a number of human figures, apart from the biblical characters. Their relations are often used in arguments to present analogies, as types or antitypes of heavenly things – a marriage on earth is like X; the spiritual marriage is more than Y / the opposite of Y. As the argument deals with the spiritual element, the earthly example has to be relatively undisputed. In other words, the example functions as common knowledge (everybody agrees that...). In this sense, the examples reveal some of the perceptions of the speaker, and of his audience – or, at least, of the dominant members of his audience.

The key social location for *GPhil* is indicated in §2. There is a father who owns a country estate (*ousia*). Such estates were owned by upper class citizens, who divided their time between their estate and their city home. The estates provided the income needed to sustain a certain lifestyle in the city. The father has a son who already knows that he will inherit the estate. The slave, even if he was the manager of the estate, can only hope that when the master passes away, he will bequeath him his freedom. In §119 we encounter the country estate again. The lord of the house rules over children, slaves and animals.
The theme of inheritance after death underlies §3 as well. In §37, however, we see how the son can assume authority over his father’s possessions when he comes of age. In all passages, a family with a certain fortune is assumed. Some subtle indicators of familiarity with wealth are also contained in §22 (‘often’ someone puts a lot of money away) and §48 (the pearl is oiled to shine more).

The slave serves the free citizen (§87). But one can become a slave in two ways (§114): some are made slaves against their will, as freeborn citizens enslaved by robbers. Others are former slaves who could not pay their debts. The speaker does not seem to note that this financial predicament may also have been against their will. It seems, therefore, that the speaker identifies more with the free citizens that were robbed of their freedom, as in §9.

We may infer that the perspective of the speaker is that of the freeborn, rather than that of the slave. We may also infer that the social structure with which the audience is familiar is that of the upper middle or upper class household with children and slaves. The audience may in fact be members of such households (parents, children or slaves). It is remarkable that there are no parallels with middle class occupations, which we would expect in mainstream Christianity, except in passages where the Hebrew God (the Demiurge) is typified, such as in §43/54 (Levi the dyer) and §91 (Joseph the carpenter). Finally, I note that when the archons are typified, they take the form of robbers (§9), as in other writings.

There is a parallel here with the novels, which also focus on city elites and their household slaves, as well as their country estate servants. The middle class is often ignored. The heroes and heroines experience predicaments outside the safety of their home-town, and often are taken into slavery by robbers. But in the end they regain their freedom. They often stand out because of their physical appearance, which is proof that they are not really slaves but freeborn:

‘Leonas,’ he said, ‘a person not freeborn cannot be beautiful. Don’t you know that the poets say that beautiful people are the children of gods? All the more reason for their human parents to be nobly born.’

This clarifies §41 in GPhil, where the creation of Man by the Demiurge, and his offspring, is discussed as an act of manumission, making them at best former slaves without the nobility of freeborn citizens:

§41 [The one who] is created ‘was [very good’ or: ‘is beautiful’] (Genesis 1:31). Would you find his children to be creations of noble descent? If he had not been created but was begotten, you would find his seed to be of noble descent. But now he was created (and then) he begat. What sort of noble descent is this?

It seems, therefore, that GPhil fits with Peter Lampe’s findings for the Valentinians in Rome. He notes that Valentinian teachers like Valentinus, Ptolemy and Heracleon had received a good education. Ptolemy’s letter to Flora was addressed to an upper-

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334 Contrary to Schenke and others, I do not see Exodus 21:2-6 reflected in this passage. In Exodus, the slave wants to stay with his master out of loyalty or because his wife and children are slaves in the household. In GPhil the slave had previously been freed by his master, but now has to sell himself, possibly to another master and probably because he could not pay his debts.

335 The examples are taken from B.P. Reardon (ed), Collected Ancient Greek Novels, University of California Press (Berkeley, 1989).

336 Chaereas and Callirhoe II.1; cf. also Daphnis and Chloe 17: ‘I am in love with someone who has the body of a slave, but the beauty of a free man.’

class lady and Marcus was accused of targeting upper-class women as well (but Lampe also notes that the group as a whole may have been more stratified). One inscription he evaluated points to a wealthy patron under whose auspices a Valentinian group celebrated its sacraments. Another inscription, also in Greek, relates to an expensive marble grave monument in a wealthy suburban part of Rome. Lampe notes that Christian intellectuals were likely recruits for Valentinian groups (page 316-317):

A wealthy intellectual, however, brings with him the ability and energy for political activity. Only his being Christian prevents him from exercising this energy, and it is precisely this that leads to its introversion. In other words, it is not a general political incapacitation of the intellectual class of the second century that leads to the Valentinians’ escapism from the world, but much more a combination of intellectual existence/affluence and Christianity that de facto incapacitated them politically and encapsulated their political energy.

... What is denied the Valentinian in public life (the empirical world is a ‘shackle’) he wins back through gnostic consciousness, the feeling of κυριευειν, the consciousness of superiority over what surrounds him.

Lampe’s analysis may explain why *GPhil*, despite its social location among free citizens, contains no examples of civic life. Furthermore, his psychological interpretation is almost literally mirrored in §58:

§58 The superiority of Man is not visible, but it is hidden. Therefore he is lord over the animals that are stronger than he, ...

The same situation that Lampe found for Rome seems to have existed in Alexandria as well. When Origen responded to the criticisms of Celsus, he connected the rise of ‘heresies’, like those of the Valentinians, to Christians of higher class and education:

So then, since Christianity appeared to men as something worthy of serious attention, not only to people of the lower classes as Celsus thinks, but also to many scholars among the Greeks, sects inevitably came to exist, not at all on account of factions and love of strife, but because several learned men made a serious attempt to understand the doctrines of Christianity. The result of this was that they interpreted differently the scriptures universally believed to be divine, and sects arose named after those who, although they admired the origin of the word, were impelled by certain reasons which convinced them to disagree with one another.

7.3.2 Marriage and sexuality

We see, then, that the social location of the speaker is the upper middle or upper class household, with a male head, a wife, children, slaves and animals. The speaker seems to identify with the freeborn father and the son. Indeed, his perspective seems to be male. Although females are mentioned as typical virgins, brides and mothers, the human characters in *GPhil* are predominantly male. The only time a female slave is introduced, in §123, she is the personification of ignorance, not an ‘in-group’ personality. It should also be noted that nowhere in *GPhil* does a female character

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Cf. also Tertullian in *On Prescription of Heretics* 7: ‘Indeed heresies themselves are instigated by philosophy.’
speak. The speakers are always male. When the Holy Spirit, otherwise a female character, acts as a ‘manager’ in §40, masculine verb forms are used. When we look at the character of Mary, she is always defined in terms of her relationship to Jesus: mother, sister and partner (§32 and 55).

The observation that women are always defined in relation to their gender (virgin, bride, mother, barren woman, harlot) has its parallel in Graeco-Roman culture. Ariadne Staples observed:\textsuperscript{339}

\begin{quote}
It is a fair assertion that the way in which women were ritually defined always encompassed in some way their gender and sexuality. Men were rarely thus defined.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
... The lesson from Roman religion was, as I showed, that women never had a ritual identity independent of their relationship to men. ... A woman is rarely introduced in historical writing without an accompanying litany of her male relationships: her father, her husband ..., her sons or her brothers, ...
\end{quote}

In other aspects as well, GPhil conforms to Graeco-Roman upper middle or upper class social values with regard to marriage and sexuality. In §73, we read:

\begin{quote}
§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.
\end{quote}

It is not said that one remains a virgin in the mystery of the bridal chamber. After all, the purpose of the bridal chamber is for virginity to give way to communion. By analogy, the speaker argues that only those who have become free and purified through baptism can enter the heavenly bridal chamber. After baptism, there would be spiritual communion for the believers with their angel. The image assumes that sexuality is a normal part of married life.

We see the values [and double standards] of the free citizens reflected in §73: marriage is not for slaves. As to virginity, for men it is enough that they are free, but women should also be virgins. Girls married in their teens, while boys were supposed to experiment first and settle down in their mid-twenties. Interestingly, the same phrase is used for the temple of Artemis: only men and virgins could enter it.\textsuperscript{340} If a man has extra-marital sex it is to an extent understandable and will not disqualify him from marriage. Likewise, a slave girl could not be expected to be able to protect her virginity from her male masters. This is also seen in Greek novels, where heroines must preserve their virginity under all circumstances, but where the men occasionally have sexual relations with other women (without ever questioning the fact that the heroine is their one true love).\textsuperscript{341} If a woman has extramarital sex, it disqualifies her from marriage and the ‘happy ending’ (reunification with her true lover). An interesting difference in the degree of empathy the speaker has for the two sexes in the case of extramarital sex can be found in §61:

\begin{quote}
Whenever the foolish women see a male sitting alone, they jump on him, they tease him (and) defile him. This way, too, if foolish men see a woman sitting alone, beautiful: They persuade here and violate her as they wish, defiling her.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{340} ‘From ancient days this temple had been forbidden to free women who were not virgins. Only men and virgins were permitted here. If a non-virgin passed inside, the penalty was death, unless she was a slave accusing her master...’ \textit{Leucippe and Clitophon} 7.13.
\textsuperscript{341} E.g. Daphnis in \textit{Daphnis and Chloe}, and Clitophon in \textit{Leucippe and Clitophon}.
In the first sentence, we see that a single male, any single male, is helpless in the face of wanton women. They can easily seduce him. The speaker seems to show empathy with the man. A man alone cannot help it if he falls prey to women who behave as prostitutes. In the second sentence, we enter the thinking of the lecherous men: they are aroused by the sight of beauty (they cannot really help it). But it is not easy to get the woman: they try persuasion and they try force. They wish to defile the beautiful woman. A male perspective can also be found in §122, where earthly marriage consists of ‘taking a wife’, an often used but nevertheless masculine term. Another instance of upper middle or upper class values is seen in the remainder of §122:

If a marriage is stripped naked it has become prostitution. And the bride, - not only when she receives the seed of another man, but also when she leaves her bedroom and is seen -, has prostituted herself. 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.

B.P. Reardon explains that the fictional character Chaereas ‘could not yet take his bride out’ because:

It was customary for a woman on marrying not to appear in public for a time. When she had proved her loyalty by producing a child, she was entrusted with domestic responsibilities and with greater freedom.

Only well-to-do males could afford to keep their bride at home, and make sure that she was not seen by men not belonging to the household. Slaves or menial workers had no choice. In GPhil, the modesty of the bride is supposed to include her thinking. If she thought of another man during love-making this would make the child resemble her illegitimate lover (§112). This belief was widely recognized by late-antique writers and was a motif in the period novels as well. Adultery is condemned in §112, and seen as a cause of evil in §42. Likewise it is clear that ‘barrenness’ is a negative term in §36 and §55. A sexual relationship outside marriage can be broken up and is not secure (§79).

A woman who loses her virginity outside marriage is defiled (§17). Marriage is for men as well the only certain guarantee against defilement (§61). In the whole of GPhil, the metaphor of marriage is used to symbolize divine union and salvation. That does not mean, however, that sexuality was not fairly problematic for the speaker. Earthly marriage is ‘defiled’ (§60 and §122) as it involves the inferior physical world; it is nevertheless praiseworthy because it is the birthplace of humans (§60). The latter point is consistent with the Greek values of free citizens, in the sense that the institute of marriage is ‘for the procreation of children’. Within marriage, the standard for sexuality remains modesty: earthly marriage is enjoyed at night (§126), hidden from everyone but the bride and bridegroom (§122).

I conclude that in GPhil, virginity, modesty, marriage and childbearing were all valued. Although human sexuality is ‘defiled’, it is not forbidden. In fact, Graeco-Roman social values with regard to civil marriage are the basis of GPhil’s teaching

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342 Reardon (1989), Novels, p 25 footnote 11. See also An Ethiopian Story 6.11: ‘the modesty she felt as a newly wedded bride’.
343 Reardon (1989), Novels, p 433 footnote 114.
344 Cf. Chaereas and Callirhoe 3.2: ‘...you did not believe that I would take you as my lawful wife, for the procreation of children, according to Greek law. If I did not love you, I should not have begged you to marry me on those terms.’

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about spiritual marriage. This position is neither libertine nor encratic.\footnote{Similarly, the use of wine in the eucharist (§100) does not suggest an encratic background for GPhil.} It is in line with what the church fathers want to remain silent about, or have to admit reluctantly. Irenaeus criticized the Marcosians in his area for immoral behavior, but does not criticize Valentinians at large. Clement devotes the entire third book of his \textit{Miscellanies} to the opinions regarding marriage among ‘those who masquerade under the false name of knowledge’. He criticizes at length gnostic and encratite Christian groups, like the followers of Basilides, Carpocrates, Marcion, and Tatian, for either their sexual immorality or for their denunciation of marriage. But he has no criticism of Valentinians in this respect. On the contrary, he can only state in the opening sentence:

\begin{quote}
The Valentinians, who hold that the union of man and woman is derived from the divine emanation in heaven above, approve of marriage.
\end{quote}

Tertullian makes it more absolute, as if Valentinians prescribed marriage and sexual union with a woman (Tertullian, too, wrote from a male perspective). But he also notes that there are singles among them.\footnote{Against the Valentinians 30.3.} All in all, it seems that a large proportion did marry and held a positive attitude towards marriage and children. This may help to explain why the Valentinians were a relatively large and enduring group. Apart from converts they would also include the children raised by Valentinians.

\subsection*{7.3.3 Femininity and androgyny}

The first passage that distinguishes between male and female is §6, which reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
§6 In the days that we were Hebrews, we were orphans, having our mother. But when we became Christians we received father and mother.
\end{quote}

It is clear that to have only a mother is seen as inferior. Not that the mother is without power (§34), but it is essential not only to be born but also to be begotten (§74). A parallel of this is found in the \textit{ExcTh} (68 and 79):

\begin{quote}
For as long as we were children of the Female only, as from a shameful relationship, incomplete and childish and foolish and weak and formless, brought forth like abortions, we were ‘children of the Man’, but once formed by the Saviour, we have become ‘children of the Man and of the Bridal Chamber’.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
As long as the seed is still formless, so they say, it is the ‘child of the Female’; but once formed, it is changed into ‘Man’ and becomes a ‘son of the Bridegroom’. It is no longer weak and subject to cosmic powers, both the visible and the invisible; but, changed into Man, it becomes a male fruit.
\end{quote}

These descriptions mix social and legal aspects of illegitimate births with biological concepts regarding conception in late antiquity. Greek thinkers believed that the female element was formless matter and that the male contributed form.\footnote{E.g. Plutarch in \textit{Isis and Osiris} 374F: ‘Some think the seed of woman is not a power or origin, but only material and nurture of generation. To this thought we should cling fast...’ See also Aristotle \textit{Generation of Animals}, book II, chapters 4 and 5.}
The next series of passages concern Sophia and Mary. Mary is depicted as the mother, sister and consort of Jesus (§31 and 17). She is a type of Sophia, who can be barren and childless but can also be the mother of angels and become fruitful (§36 and §55). She can lead her offspring to life or death (§38 and 39). In these passages, femininity touches on the world of taboo. It is both powerful and dangerous. As Sophia needs the leadership of the Christ to be purified, and his seed to be fruitful, Mary needs Jesus to make her his bride (§55). As observed above, he is the actor, she the recipient.

The prominence of Sophia and Mary does not indicate leading positions for women in a cult. Most mystery cults involved the worship of female deities even though the priesthood was often male. Even when femininity was at the core of the mystery and women could play important roles, males often acted as mystagogues and controlled the boundaries. Helen Foley observed the following about the Hymn of Demeter:348

In short, the text seems to stress that the Mysteries emerge from the private and even secret world of female experience; on both the divine and human level the male role is to integrate these Mysteries into the larger social structure and to control the access of initiates.

She sees a similar pattern in Euripides’ Bacchae. The same could be said for Cybele and, perhaps even stronger, for Isis in her roles as sister, lover, and mother of Osiris and Horus. In societies with a strong separation of men and women, the mysteries of fertility and birth are in the domain of women and taboo for men. Foley observes how this separation in society may have created a psychological need for males to identify with the female:349

The Mysteries involve an undifferentiated group of initiates, who leave behind their roles in the social and political hierarchy, coming face to face with marriage, death and birth; they occur in a dark and private space; they mediate between earth, Hades and Olympus.

... Indeed, the degree to which the male initiate engages in a symbolic identification with female deity may be reflected in the story that the eccentric emperor Gallienus commemorated his initiation by putting Gallienæ Augustæ in the feminine on his coins.

If the Mysteries in some sense permit universal access to (and imitation of) a secret or private world of the female, and to the mysteries of death, fertility, magic, and even connected anger with her, one can perhaps understand some of its appeal – so puzzling to Jung – for the male initiate.

In GPhil we see several instances where men are invited to assume the role of the bride. In §55, Jesus asks his disciples, ‘Why do I not love you in her way?’ referring to Mary Magdalene / Sophia in her role as ‘consort’. In §112 and §122, the believer is compared to a bride (of Christ). As we saw in chapter 5.3.3 above, this is also found in mainstream Christian baptism instructions.

GPhil sees the union of male and female as life, and the separation of male and female as death. Christ came to undo that separation. This is expressed in §71 and 78:

348 Foley (1994), Homeric Hymn, pp 138-139.
349 Foley (1994), Homeric Hymn, pp 139-140.
§71 When Eve was [in] Adam, death did not exist. When she separated from him, death came into being. Yet again: if he goes in and if he receives himself, there will be no death.

In the background of these passages are the differing creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 1:27, it says that the human is created male and female in the image of God. In Genesis 2:22, the female is created from the male. The distinction between the human beings of Genesis 1 and 2 has previously been drawn by Philo:

After this, Moses says that ‘God made man, having taken clay from the earth, and he breathed into his face the breath of life.’ And by this expression he shows most clearly that there is a vast difference between man as generated now, and the first man who was made according to the image of God. For man as formed now ... man or woman (is) by nature mortal. But man, made in the image of God, was ... incorporeal, neither male nor female, imperishable by nature.

Elsewhere, GPhil seems to provide us with a Valentinian reading of Romans 7:1-6:

§78 Had not the woman separated from the man, she would not die with the man. His separation became the beginning of death. Therefore Christ came, so that the separation that existed from the first will be ended and to unite them both again, and to give life to those who have died in the separation, and to unite them.

In the above passage, the woman stands for the soul of the believer, which is female. She formed a union with the spirit, the perfect man. But after her separation (in creation, see §79), she united with the body, the outer man, which is mortal. Christ came to separate the soul from the body, the man that holds authority over her and makes her mortal, and re-unite her with her spiritual man. Adam and Eve are therefore not prototypes of men and women, but rather of the tripartite human being: body, soul and spirit. In §71, the ‘he’ that should return to his former self refers to Eve. Likewise, §69 speaks not of uniting Adam and Eve, but of two men, one above and one below, one outside and one inside. In §80, the partnership is not between man and woman, but between soul and spirit:

§80 The psyche of Adam came into being from a breath. Her partner is the spirit; that which was given to him is his mother. They took his psyche (and) they gave him their [spirits] in her place, for when he was united he spoke words that are superior to the powers. They envied him. [They separated once again his] spiritual partner [from psychic flesh]. They [clothed] the hidden flesh in skin. Then came [Christ to save them and restore them] to themselves. [He revealed to them the] bridal room, so that [men would be saved.]

350 On the Creation 134
351 I note that Valentinians would not have had the same exegetical problems with this passage as modern commentators have. They believed that Paul spoke of humans as tripartite beings consisting of spirit, soul and body. The soul can be led by the spirit or by the body, or be on our own (hence the designations pneumatikoi, sarkikoi and psychikoi). The body, the outer man, dies in baptism, whereas the soul, the inner human is resurrected in baptism and becomes the bride of the spiritual man. For a discussion of Valentinian interpretations of Paul’s letters, including passages from GPhil, see Pagels (1975), Gnostic Paul.
352 Cf Exegesis on the Soul NHC II,6; see also the story of Amor and Psyche in Apuleius’ The Golden Ass, books 4-6.
353 My restoration here is based on a textual parallel with Philo’s description of Abraham: The Holy Spirit, which, being breathed into him from above, took up its lodging in his soul, clothing his body with extraordinary beauty, and investing his words with persuasiveness... On the Virtues 217. I suggest, therefore, that Adam’s psyche was not taken away, but received a spirit into her place (as into a house). In the Apocryphon of John (version NHC II, 19.20-33) the spirit is breathed into the psychic body; cf Lutti (2006), Revisions p 61, 66-71.
We can now turn to §61:

§61 The appearances of unclean spirits are as males and females. The males indeed partner with souls that inhabit a female appearance. And the females are those who are mingled with the (souls) in a male appearance, promiscuously. And nobody will be able to escape these when they seize him unless he receives a male power and a female: the bridegroom and the bride. But one receives (them) from the imaginary bridal chamber.

Contrary to what Williams thought (see chapter 7.1.2 above), the initiates are not saved according to gender, they are only seduced according to gender. In order to be saved, one needs to receive a power that is male and female. In this passage the discussion concerns the risk of mainstream Christians. They, the Hebrews of §4, are alive but at risk. They have received their mother, but not their ‘father and mother’, an androgynous force that is both male and female.

In the remainder of §61, we encounter yet a different metaphor: the initiands need to be united with their angel:

This is how it is if the image and the angel unite with one another: neither will anybody be able to (even) dare to go down on the man or the woman.

This notion can also be found in §26: ‘You who have joined the perfect light with the Holy Spirit also unite the angels with us, as being the images.’ Tertullian tries to ridicule the Valentinian concept of the angelic marriage. He pictures bearded Valentinian fathers and grandfathers as the brides of angels.354

In GPhil, it seems, the same concept is communicated in several different metaphors: the soul needs to be one with spirit, the female with the male, the bride with the bridegroom, the believer with Christ, the mother with the father, the image with the angel, the outside with the inside and the below with the above. The male element is the guiding element (the bridegroom, the spirit, the angel, the Christ), whereas the initiate is the female element (the bride, the soul).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>spirit</th>
<th>male</th>
<th>Christ</th>
<th>groom</th>
<th>father</th>
<th>angel</th>
<th>above</th>
<th>inside</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>soul</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>bride</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>image</td>
<td>below</td>
<td>outside</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar tripartite anthropology underlies the Gospel of the Egyptians:355

‘When Salome asked when what she had inquired about would be known, the Lord said: “When you have trampled on the garment of shame and when the two become one and the male with the female (is) neither male nor female.”’

In this passage, the lowest level should be left behind (the garment of shameful flesh), whereas the higher two, the male and the female should unite. Such a tripartite anthropology can also be found in mainstream Christian and non-Christian

354 Against the Valentinians 32.
writings. Of these three levels, the speaker believes that the lowest level is to be left behind, and the two higher levels are to be united.

Androgyny in GPhil, therefore, is not proof of a sense of equality between the sexes but testifies to a perception that the relationship between man and woman is a necessary union of strong and weak, even of human and divine. Only in the other aeon, we can speak of a marriage between equal genderless beings, as is clear from §103-104:

§103 The union in this cosmos exists as man and woman, the place of strength and weakness. In the aeon the likeness of the union is different, §104 although we call them by these names. But they are different things, they are superior to every name that is named (in the cosmos). And they are superior to the strong one. For where there is violence, there are the mighty elect. The ones over there are not this one and the other one, rather they are both one single thing. This is what not will ‘come up in the heart of flesh’.

7.3.4 Social rhetoric

According to Vernon Robbins, social rhetoric reveals the response of a religious group to the surrounding world: How can one cope with that world? GPhil does not try to improve this world through conversion, revolution, reform or utopia. According to §7, we should not seek to harvest in this world, nor ask a divine power for blessings in this world (let alone use magic). It also does not advocate separation from this world, but rather to live inoffensively among other people (§118) and be careful with what knowledge is shared with outsiders (§119). It sees the creation of the world as a mistake, even a crime (§99), and people as enslaved to evil (§125). Only secret gnosis and mysteries can bring redemption (§67). Through knowledge and sacrament can salvation be attained, the world can be escaped and, in the experience of the initiated, even be transformed into the other Aeon (§127).

This ideology is not aimed at changing the power structures in society. The status quo seems to serve and balance the interests of educated, well-to-do urban male Christians in the late Roman empire. In view of the increasing centralization of government, and their exclusion of positions in the imperial hierarchy as Christians, there were no significant advances open to upper class Christians in society and politics. Gnostic manipulation allowed them to seek these advances on a
spiritual level. At the same time, this type of rhetoric also prevented women and slaves in the group from claiming material rights. They were fully accepted, spiritually, but nothing changed in terms of ‘earthly’ benefits. The discourse supporting this ideology is most explicit in §7: It is not fitting for us to pray to receive any benefits in the winter/cosmos. If we do that, we risk our harvest in the summer/aeon.

In chapter 7.3.1 and 7.3.2 above, I suggested a number of parallels between the social conventions in GPhil and the novels of late antiquity. It seems that there are more parallels between the late antique novel and the great gnostic and mainstream Christian narratives of the second century. Christians developed their own ‘novels’ with similar themes in the apocryphal Acta of various apostles, which all seem to be a mix between the canonical book of Acts and the romantic novels. The journeys are not made by couples, but by the apostles, the male heroes. The heroines remain mostly upper class women who accept the apostle’s message and want to preserve their chastity through various perils, not for the heroic apostle, but for their divine lover, Christ (a development also seen in the pagan story of Amor and Psyche). Niklas Holzberg locates the rise of the novel within the educated upper classes of the Greek polis, deprived of its previous (exclusively male) civic power. Renate Johne sees in these novels an increased focus on domestic life and religion with a more inclusive approach towards women.

7.4 Conclusion

The social setting of GPhil can be summarized as follows. In one of the cities of the Roman Empire, in which there was a sizeable Christian community, one or several gnostic Christian groups were active. The community of GPhil saw itself as a group of true Christians within a larger but fundamentally different Christian community. Mainstream Christians shared the same traditions but GPhil still calls them ‘Hebrews’. Most of the group considered their culture to be Hellenistic. The leadership seems to have consisted of educated, upper middle class males. The group was inclusive towards women and slaves, but did not seek to change their social position.

This social location may be depicted as three concentric circles, both in terms of intensity of the relationships and of relative size:

![Diagram of concentric circles]

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361 Cf. Thomas (2003), Rewriting the Past; see also Pervo (1996), ‘Ancient Novel’.
362 Holzberg (1986), Antike Roman.
The relationship with the direct mainstream Christian environment was a sensitive one: the group drew most of its recruits from it and did not wish to upset the relationship. The group baptized new initiates who may have been baptized earlier in mainstream churches. The group tried to reduce the tension through secrecy and a step-wise introduction process. This fits the description of Valentinian behaviour as encountered by Tertullian (even though his description of it is highly polemical).