View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought to you by CORE

provided by University of Dayton

University of Dayton
eCommons

Religious Studies Faculty Publications

Department of Religious Studies

4-30-2017

Lacerated Lips and Lush Landscapes: Constructing This-Worldly Theological Identities in the Otherworld

Meghan Henning
University of Dayton, mhenning2@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel_fac_pub

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons, and the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

eCommons Citation

Henning, Meghan, "Lacerated Lips and Lush Landscapes: Constructing This-Worldly Theological Identities in the Otherworld" (2017). *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. 133.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel_fac_pub/133

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Religious Studies at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

Lacerated Lips and Lush Landscapes: Constructing This-Worldly Theological Identities in the Otherworld

Meghan Henning
University of Dayton

1. Introduction

When Irenaeus juxtaposed "tradition" and heresy,[1] he moved the image of Early Christian αἵρεσις away from the Pauline usage, which centered primarily upon incorrect behavior (See 1Cor 11:19, Gal 5:20).[2] Irenaeus' definition of heresy, however, does not indicate that all early Christians prioritized belief over behavior, or even maintained orthodoxy and orthopraxis as separate categories. In the otherworldly spaces of the apocryphal apocalypses doxa and praxis seem to be intertwined, and little or no distinction is made between belief and behavior. Instead, in the Otherworld the categories of primary importance are righteous/unrighteous, good/evil, Christian/Other. The Otherworld is a place in which sins can be "sorted" and the identity[3] markers which might have been overlooked or are difficult to see in this world can be seen more clearly.[4] And yet, we are left to wonder how that otherworldly clarity maps onto the lived experience of the ancient audiences of these apocalypses. Thus, we will begin by reflecting upon the ability of these apocalyptic texts to create (and recreate) Christian identity by either describing real categories of people, or by creating the categories themselves, and so prescribing reality.

In each of the apocalypses that we will discuss the reader learns that his or her identity is determined for all of eternity by the choices that are made in this world. In this regard, each depiction of the otherworld establishes its own identity markers, isolating certain beliefs and behaviors as distinctively "Christian." What is startling about the definitions of Christian belief and practice that emerge from each text is that they are rather expansive, covering far more territory than any creed or council.[5] Our discussion will demonstrate that while creedal

[1] I am extremely grateful for the critical feedback of Tobias Nicklas, and the participants of the "The Other Side: Apocryphal Perspectives on Ancient Christian Orthodoxies" conference, held in London on July 3-5, 2014. Any remaining mistakes are my own.

[2] Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.3.1. Here Irenaeus argues that bishops have been chosen who stand in the tradition of the apostles, a tradition that is characterized by bearing no resemblance to the teachings of the heretics. Thus, he concludes, these heretical teachings cannot have apostolic authority.

[3] When I use the term "identity" I am not operating under the assumption that Christian identity was a tangible or singular entity in antiquity. Instead, I have in mind the host of socially constructed boundary markers that an ancient person might use (both beliefs and practices) to indicate to themselves and others that they are part of the group "Christian."

[4] John Chrysostom, *Paenit.* 7, argues that the clear division between what awaits in heaven and hell is motivational: "My master, your promises are good as is your kingdom, which is expected, because it urges on; the Gehenna (γέεννα) with which you threaten is evil because it frightens. In other words, the kingdom incites towards the good, and hell frightens usefully. "

[5] Additionally, in some places there is overlap between Christian Orthopraxis and Non-Christian Orthopraxis, since many of these texts expect that all human beings will be judged according to these behavioral standards, not merely

definitions of orthodoxy (as well as the apocalyptic definitions of correct belief that mirror them) were often aimed at labeling specific groups as "other," the apocalyptic depictions of the otherworld were attempting to be either exhaustive or open-ended, imagining a host of practices that could be used to frame Christian identity.[6] In these imaginary spaces, the theological identities that were crafted could not simply be summarized by simple binaries like orthodoxy/heterodoxy, oppressed/oppressor, or even sinner/sinless. Instead, the apocalyptic visions, which on the surface seem to deal in dichotomies, paradoxically proliferate a range of Christian practices.[7]

2. Hermeneutics and the Otherworld: The History of Interpretation of Hell and the "Truth Games" of Proto-Orthodoxy and Canonicity

Due to the proliferation of scholarship on ancient Christianity, *paideia* and rhetoric, the claim that Christians were using their depictions of hell to construct identity seems a rather obvious one. Nevertheless, scholarship on the texts that describe the otherworld has not always leaned in that direction. Instead, of conceiving of hell's torments as a mechanism for naming, and thus constructing Christian norms, we imagine that the sinners that we find in hell must point to some real life "outsider" in the author's world. In the case of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, Richard Bauckham has argued that the "false messiah" is Bar Kokhbah, and others have imagined that the torments of hell are designed to make persecuted Christians feel vindicated.[8] In many ways these interpretations are natural extensions of the anonymous figures in the text, who do seem to invite readers to map their character traits onto known individuals in the real world. Yet, each of these interpretations of the *Apocalypse of Peter* require that the reader imagine a real life conflict that lies behind the apocalyptic rhetoric. These interpretive strategies are dependent upon the assumptions that apocalyptic literature is "conflict literature," and that early Christians in the

Christians (though Christians have the advantage of knowing these parameters for judgment via the apocalypses). am grateful to Tobias Nicklas for this insight.

[6] I have argued elsewhere that these otherworldly visions are primarily intended to educate early Christians. See Meghan Henning, *Educating Early Christians through the Rhetoric of Hell: "Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth" as Paideia in Matthew and the Early Church*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). As catechetical texts these apocalyptic visions were an important tool for developing early Christian identity, helping to define what it meant to bear the name "Christian."

[7] As David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 133-34, notes the same paradoxical diversity was promulgated by other early Christian efforts to define "proto-orthodoxy": "Although Irenaeus and others hoped to eliminate diversity and establish a single Church with a single truth, their efforts in fact contributed to the rich multiplicity of the imperial Christian culture that emerged in late antiquity."

[8] Richard Bauckham, "The Apocalypse of Peter: A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kokhba," in *The Fate of the Dead: Studies in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden Brill, 1998), 160-258. Michael J. Gilmour, "Delighting in the Suffering of Others: Early Christian Schadenfreude and the Function of the Apocalypse of Peter," *BBR* 16 (2006): 129–39, has suggested that this is intended to make the readers of the text feel "vindicated" because those who commit crimes against them will be punished. Eibert Tigchelaar, "Is the Liar Bar Kokhba? Considering the Date and Provenance of the Greek (Ethiopic) *Apocalypse of Peter*," in The *Apocalypse of Peter*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and István Czachesz (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 63-77, has called into question the specific identification with Bar Kokhba, arguing that the description of the false messiah in *Apoc. Pet.* 2 is more generally a function of the genre of apocalyptic literature.

second century C.E. were a codified and homogenous (orthodox) group that was in conflict with some other "outside" group or groups.

This tendency to see a one for one connection between the apocalyptic world and the lives of early Christians is at odds with the idea that the apocrypha are by definition "not real." If the apocrypha are "false" then they do not have a substantive relationship with the realia of early Christianity (or at least less so than the "canonical" and "true" texts). Although some scholars have offered correctives for this perception,[9] the dominance of the canon coupled with our enlightenment consciousness still leads scholars to assume that the "fantastical" ancient depictions of heaven and hell were extraneous to the practical lives of early Christians.[10] As François Bovon has demonstrated, however, early Christians did not categorize their texts according to a simple binary distinction between canonical and apocryphal, but rather many of the texts that we classify as apocrypha were a regular part of daily life.[11] The genius of Bovon's work is not simply the new information about early Christian reading practices that shatters our dichotomous thinking, but the insight that our previous scholarly reading practices were unduly influenced by late antique categories. Where the otherworld is concerned, the dichotomies of orthodoxy/heterodoxy, apocryphal/canonical are bound up in a specific late antique hermeneutic, in which hell and heaven reflect an effort to circumscribe Christian identity in certain terms.

2.1 The Otherworld as Reflexive: Finding the Heterodox in Hell and the Orthodox in Heaven

While many of the depictions of heaven and hell contain unnamed righteous persons and sinners, the late antique depictions of the afterlife more frequently name names. Although we find a few named persons in some of the early Christian apocalypses, they are usually isolated historical figures like King Herod or the patriarchs, persons whose identity as unrighteous or righteous is well established, but not representative of any kind of conflict in the historical present of the apocalyptic author or readers.[12] For other authors like Tertullian, however, name dropping in relation to the afterlife is reflexive of a conflict that is very real, at least to the author himself.[13] Tertullian imagines the Pleroma filled with "the spirit like swarm of Valentinus," an inferior

---

[9] See Tobias Nicklas, Semiotik – Intertextualität – Apokryphität: Eine Annäherung an den Begriff "christlicher Apokryphen," *Apocrypha* 17 (2006) 55-78; Nicklas, "Christian Apocrypha and the Development of the Christian Canon," *Early Christianity* 5 (2014) 220-240, as well as the essay by Christoph Markschies in the present volume.

[10] For example, Marcus Bockmuehl's depiction of the "lived memory" of Peter reveals his tendency to think that the apocryphal texts are "false," and distinguished from the canon on the basis of their "fanciful" elements. For specific evidence of this distinction within his approach see Markus Bockmuehl, *The Remembered Peter in Ancient Reception and Modern Debate* WUNT 262 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 23. See also Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012), 90, 103, 133, 140, 145, and especially 160-61 in which he characterizes the *Acts of Peter* as "largely legendary and apocryphal."

[11] François Bovon, "Besides the Canonical and the Apocryphal Books, the Presence of a Third Category: The Books Useful for the Soul," *HTR* 105 (2012): 125–37.

[12] In the *Apocalypse of Paul* heaven contains a host of named patriarchs, and as we shall see below, its hell is filled with church leaders who have not fulfilled their specifically named role. Likewise, the *Apocalypse of Ezra* identifies King Herod by name, indicating that some of the persons tortured in hell are representative of real life individuals.

[13] Tertullian *Val.* 32. I am extremely grateful to Ismo Dunderberg for this reference.

heaven in which the followers of Valentinus are sexual slaves to the angels. Playfully ridiculing his opponents, Tertullian's bifurcated heaven is simultaneously a product of his imagination and reflexive of a real world tension that he perceives to exist between his own world and the followers of Valentinus. Similarly, when Gregory the Great wishes to decry the followers of Origen, he is working from a similar binary way of thinking to that of Tertullian, in which the so-called heterodox are consigned to lesser eternal fates.[14] In this hermeneutic, the otherworld is a mirror to the present world, and simply reports Divine judgment that mimics the categories that the authors and their communities have already established on earth. This binary rhetoric of the otherworld has a certain allure, which makes it easy to read all of the depictions of heaven and hell through the lenses of orthodox "truth games," assuming that every single negatively characterized individual is someone who would be readily recognizable as "heterodox" to the readers of the text.[15]

2.2 The Otherworld as Constructive: The Use of the "Apocrypha" in Christian Praxis

If we are to avoid being seduced by the reading practices of late antique heresiology, we have to consider not just the texts themselves, but the use of the otherworld in early Christian practice. The Muratorian fragment mentions the *Apocalypse of Peter*, saying "We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church."[16] Here the admission that some people protest the reading of the *Apocalypse of Peter* in church tells us that there were others who did use the text in worship. We find a more specific description of liturgical practice in Sozomen, who recounts the practice of Palestinean churches that read the *Apocalypse of Peter* annually on Good Friday while fasting in memory of the passion.[17] In addition to regular liturgical use, the *Apocalypse of Peter* was also used in a variety of teaching contexts. For Clement of Alexandria its vision of hell was the perfect teaching tool to

[14] Gregory the Great, *Moral.* 34.15.38. See also, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* 4.40-49, in which the deathbed visions of hell that Gregory describes do not confirm the heterodoxy of the persons that the monks see there, but assure the monks and their of divine enforcement of the boundaries that the community had already established. The translation of *Dialogues* is available in Zimmerman Odo John, trans., *Fathers of the Church, a New Translation* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 39:244–60. Although some scholars have questioned the authenticity of this material, Francis Clark has argued that most of the material is Gregorian, but was compiled by a slightly later author who had access to Gregory's notes and sermons. See Francis Clark, *The "Gregorian" Dialogues and the Origins of Benedictine Monasticism* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 7–59, 397–407.

[15] As Michel Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Random House, 1984), 387, articulated in an interview, the historian who tries to problematize history by looking to "experience" has to consider three main axes or fundamental elements of that experience: 1) a game of truth, 2) relations of power and 3) the forms of relation to oneself and others. Here we are attempting to problematize the "game of truth" that is established by second century heresiology, and the impact of these "truth games" upon the history of interpretation of the "otherworlds."

[16] Muratorian Fragment 71-72 in "The Muratorian Canon," in *Lost Scriptures:Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 331–33. As Attila Jakab, "The Reception of the *Apocalypse of Peter* in Ancient Christianity," in *The Apocalypse of Peter,* ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Istvan Czachesz (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 175, notes "We do not know if they rejected the text because of its content, its authenticity, or for some other reason."

[17] Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 7.19.9 (mid fifth century C.E.), also notes that at this point some were also beginning to hold the text in suspicion.

correct the practice of child exposure.[18] As Tobias Nicklas has demonstrated in this volume, the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* likely relies upon the narrative details of the *Apocalypse of Peter* to describe the Mount of Olives, inviting pilgrims to see this site as the place where Jesus taught his disciples and Moses and Elijah appeared.[19]

These data points are by no means meant to indicate that the early Christian apocalypses were universally embraced in worship and teaching settings. But they do demonstrate that in antiquity and in late antiquity these so-called apocrypha were not viewed by all Christians as false, heterodox, or fanciful. Much to Augustine's chagrin, these texts were employed in worship and teaching by groups that even he would have included in the group "Christian."[20] Within these worship settings the implied purpose is not to shore up the religio-political identity of some group that self-identifies as "orthodox." The teachings of Clement and the liturgical setting of Good Friday suggest that these texts were employed for the edification of early Christian communities, to establish ethical norms and to lead to penitence and corporate reflection.

Although early Christian praxis calls into question the hermeneutics of heresiology, we take to heart the cautions of Christoph Markchies regarding our scholarly tendencies to categorize.[21] The following analysis will not attempt to argue that early Christian depictions of heaven and hell *either* reflect *or* construct early Christian reality. Instead, we will consider the depictions of the otherworld as spaces that likely performed both of these roles, or fell somewhere along a continuum between the two, within the ongoing process of early Christian identity formation.[22]

3. The Otherworld as a Place to Keep them Separated: "Sorting" in Pre-Christian Depictions of the Otherworld

With adamantine bars (Virgil *Aen.* 6.550-560; Matt 16:18; *Apoc. Pet.* 4; *Apoc. Paul* 18) and locked golden gates (Matt 16:19; *Apoc. Paul* 19), hell and heaven seem to lend themselves nicely to being conceived as spaces to cordon off the heterodox from the orthodox. However,

---

[18] See Clement of Alexandria, *Ecl.* 41; 48; 49.

[19] *Itin. Burd.* 18.

[20] Augustine, *Civ.* 21.17-27, takes issue with the *Apocalypse of Peter* because it is not stringent enough, allowing a day of respite for the damned. In this same passage Augustine also differentiates himself from other Christians who have different opinions about eternal judgment, but does not treat them as "outsiders" to Christianity on the basis of these differences.

[21] See the essay by Christoph Markchies in the present volume.

[22] As Michel Foucault noted early in his career, "other spaces" are rarely performing just one function in relation to "real space." See the English translation of Foucault's March 1967 lecture "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986), 22-27. Foucault experiments with a possible theoretical framework for understanding spaces that are set apart from the social norm, or "Des Espaces Autres." In his description of the various ways in which these "heterotopias" function he explains how they relate to other spaces leaving the possibility of movement between the two poles he establishes: "The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory (perhaps that is the role that was played by those famous brothels of which we are now deprived). Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled."

the otherworld was not always such a convenient containment system for the wayward soul. In many pre-Christian understandings of the Otherworld the dead all traveled to a common place, and the dead were not "sorted" in the same way that they are in Christian configurations of heaven and hell. For example many of the references to Sheol within the Hebrew Bible imagine that all of the dead dwell in the same damp, dusty, dark place.[23] In Job 17:13-16 for instance, Sheol is used poetically as a metonym for death, as Job asks rhetorically if he and his hope should "descend together into the dust," into Sheol. Likewise, many of the earliest Greek and Latin texts imagine that everyone goes to Hades upon death, regardless of his or her status, theological identity or character. In the descent to Hades of *Odyssey* 11, Odysseus encounters his mother (*Od.* 11.223-244) and Agamemnon (*Od.* 11.410-44) as well as the famously punished dead (Orion, Tantalus, Sisyphus and Tityos of *Od.* 11.568-600). Virgil's Hades is also the common destination for all of the dead, allowing Aeneas to be reunited with his father (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.688-689), and observe the punishment of the evil souls who are being purified prior to their reincarnation (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.735-751).

3.1 Otherworldly Categories that Demarcate Theological Identity in this World: "Works" and the Reign of Christ

In contrast to these descriptions of the abode of the dead simply as a "container," for later Christians the otherworld became a "label-maker," a means of naming, and thus crafting theological identity in this world. On the surface, sorting in the otherworld is not explicitly about describing or prescribing *doxa* except in a few cases (for instance when the *Apoc. Paul* specifically condemns those who deny the incarnation). In many instances the otherworld separates "insiders" and "outsiders," but often along lines that are drawn according to specific behaviors and not beliefs. These lines demarcate theological boundaries, in so much as they are used to delineate who can claim the title "Christian" in this world and the next.

The idea that earthly behaviors determine whether one can identify themselves with Christ in the afterlife is rooted in New Testament texts. In Revelation 20 those who were "beheaded because of their testimony (τὴν μαρτυρίαν)" and those who resisted worship of the beast enjoy the first resurrection and a thousand year reign with Christ (Rev 20:4). After that reign the dead will all be judged according to their works (κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν), and anyone whose name is not written in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:12-15). Likewise, in Matthew 25 the bridegroom does not recognize the bridesmaids who are unprepared for his arrival, and the

[23] The majority of scholars argue that in the Hebrew Bible "Sheol" was understood primarily as the abode of all dead people. Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926); R. L. Harris, "she'ôl," in *TWOT* ed. G.L. Archer R.L. Harris (Chicago, 1980) 892-93; Minois, *Histoire des Enfers*, (Paris: Fayard, 1991) 8–9; Richard Bauckham, "Hades, Hell," *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3: 14–16; Theodore J. Lewis, "Dead, Abode of the," *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:101–05; Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 140–46; David J. Powys, *"Hell": A Hard Look at a Hard Question: The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998), 83; Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 8–9.

Son of Man determines the eternal fate of the righteous and the cursed based upon their treatment of the "least of these."[24]

Since the otherworld is often the space of final judgment the theological identities that are assigned there are determinative, impinging upon the self- understanding of this worldly readers, and carrying a distinctive level of authority. In the *Apocalypse of Peter* the audience is warned to avoid false Christs because the final judgment is imminent, in which each man will be judged "according to his work" (*Apoc. Pet.* 1).[25] In this text the description of the final judgment introduces the visions of hell and heaven with a vivid retelling of the gospel story of Christ riding on a cloud (Matt 26 and parallels) consigning sinners to fiery punishments and "the elect who have done good" to eternal life (*Apoc. Pet.* 5). In the visions of hell and heaven that follow, the dichotomy that is established at the text's outset is reinforced: identification with the false Christ leads to wicked deeds and fiery torment, while those who follow the true Christ "do good" and will ascend to heaven. Here, the visions of hell and heaven are used to bolster the theological identity of "true Christians" who follow Christ by delineating the theological identity and fate of the "false Christians" who follow an imposter.[26] The *Apocalypse of Peter* connects Christ's reign and final judgment with human deeds ("recompense every man according to his work," *Apoc. Pet.* 1; *Apoc. Pet.* 6, cf. Matt 16:27), so that Christian identity is equated with a particular lifestyle on earth. In a world that is plagued by charlatans who claim to be "the Christ" (*Apoc. Pet.* 1), the *Apocalypse of Peter* uses the clear categorization of the wicked and righteous in the otherworlds awaken the reader to the need to adjudicate authentic Christianity on earth. Likewise, in the *Acts of Thomas* 51-60 the encratite ideal that is promoted in the vision of hell is explicitly interpreted by the apostle, who explains that belief in Christ Jesus will result in cleansing of one's "bodily desires" (and when Thomas' hearers believe, their behavior seems to change automatically; *Acts Thom.* 58-59).

In other visions of the otherworld the bar is set much higher; identification with Christ does not naturally lead to righteousness and good deeds, and identification of a "Christian" on earth is

[24] Likewise, Paul refers to the eternal judgment of "sinners" or the "wicked," but does so in general terms (See 1 Thess 1:10; 5:3; 1 Cor 15:5; Rom 2:5-11). Paul's references to God's wrath upon the "wicked" share the rhetorical orientation of the "two ways" motif within the Hebrew Bible, emphasizing the choice one has between "wickedness" and life "in Christ." For a fuller discussion of afterlife imagery in Paul's letters, see Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Otherworld and the New Age in the Letters of Paul," in *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World: Early Jewish and Ancient Christian Traditions*, ed. Tobias Nicklas et al. (Boston: Brill, 2010), 189–207.

[25] Unless otherwise noted, all citations of the *Apocalypse of Peter* are from the Ethiopic version of the text and English translations are from C. Detlef G. Müller, "Apocalypse of Peter," in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke, trans. R. Wilson (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 625–38.

[26] As discussed above, we reject the interpretation of these terms as references to Bar Kokhba and the Judean revolt. For an excellent discussion of the problems with assigning a highly specific historical context to the *Apocalypse of Peter* see Tobias Nicklas, "'Insider' und 'Outsider': Überlegungen zum historischen Kontext der Darstellung 'jenseitiger Orte' in der Offenbarung des Petrus," in *Topographie des Jenseits: Studien zur Geschichte des Todes in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike*, ed. Walter Ameling (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2011), 35–48. Although the term *martys* is used, the emphasis in the context of the *Apocalypse of Peter* is on the lives of these "witnesses." See Henning, *Educating Early Christians*, 185.

even more precarious. For instance, the *Ascension of Isaiah* reminds readers that righteousness and holding the correct beliefs are not enough on their own to earn one the "robes and thrones and crowns of glory, which are placed in the seventh heaven"---a person must also "be in the Holy Spirit" (*Ascen. Isa.* 11:40).[27] The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* demonstrates that one's Christian education must be complete, otherwise she will be like the catechumens wandering around Hades blind until they repent (*Apoc. Zeph.* 10).[28] Further complicating any attempt to carve out neat categories in the otherworld, the *Apocalypse of Paul*'s vision of hell includes a wide range of practitioners, who would likely have been identified as Christian on earth. The Christians punished here include churchgoers who misbehave outside of church, a wayward presbyter, a bishop who was not compassionate towards widows and orphans, a deacon who ate the offerings, a lector who did not keep the commandments, and churchgoers who did not pay attention to the Word of God in church (*Apoc. Paul* 31-37).[29] In the *Greek Apocalypse of Mary* it is revealed that one's eternal fate is in jeopardy if "on the morning of the Lord's day" he "sleeps like the dead" ---so ostensibly a person could self identify as a Christian but wreck it all by sleeping in on Sundays if it were not for the crystal clear boundary set by Mary's vision of men and women burning in a cloud of fire (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 12).[30] This stringent differentiation of categories of misled and misleading Christians in the afterlife enables the reader to refine his or her understanding of the label "Christian," and perhaps even to call into question the stability of his or her own Christian identity. Each of these visions of the otherworld focuses on behaviors

---

[27] English translations of the *Ascension of Isaiah* are from C. Detlef G. Müller, "Ascension of Isaiah," in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke, trans. R. Wilson (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 603-619.

[28] Despite its likely origin as a Jewish text, the citation of this text by Clement (*Strom.* 5.11.77), its preservation in the White monastery of Shenoute, and its use of the term "catechumen" all suggest that it had a later Christian readership, and is thus relevant to our conversation here (although in many cases the categories "Jewish" and "Christian" are transcended in the pseudepigrapha). The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* is dated between 100 B.C.E. and 70 C.E. The text is extant in Coptic fragments, which are thought to be translations of the Greek original (no longer extant). See O.S. Wintermute, "Apocalypse of Zephaniah," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* ed. James H Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1983), 1: 500–501. While, Wintermute, "Apocalypse of Zephaniah," 501, notes that despite the text's preservation in a Christian monastery, there are no signs that the text was modified, later scholarship has argued that the extant fragments do reflect distinctively Christian concerns. For summary and discussion of these Christian elements, and the justification of a "Jewish-Christian milieu" as the original context for the Coptic fragments see Bernd J. Diebner, *Zephanjas Apokalypsen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verl. Haus, 2003), 1141-1246; Jan N. Bremmer, "Tours of Hell: Greek, Roman, Jewish and Early Christian," in *Topographie des Jenseits: Studien zur Geschichte des Todes in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike.* ed.Walter Ameling (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011), 13-34, here 29–30.

[29] When compared with the *Apoc. Pet.*, the *Apoc. Paul* is much more interested in the inner differentiation of the community, likely because it is written in a post-Theodosian era. English translations of the *Apocalypse of Paul* are from Hugo Duensing and Aurelio de Santos Otero, "Apocalypse of Paul," in *New Testament Apocrypha,* ed.Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke, trans. R. Wilson, (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 1991).The Latin is available in Theodore Silverstein and A. Hilhorst, eds., *Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions* (Geneve: P.Cramer, 1997).

[30] The *Greek Apocalypse of Mary* is most commonly titled "The Apocalypse of the All-holy Mother of God Concerning the Punishments" in the manuscripts. Unless otherwise noted, the English translations of *Greek Apocalypse of Mary* that are cited are from Andrew Rutherford, "The Apocalypse of the Virgin," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 10:167–74. The Greek text is available in M. R James, *Apocrypha Anecdota: A Collection of Thirteen Apocryphal Books and Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 115–26.

that are incongruous with the person's earthly moniker but that likely went unnoticed, begging the reader to take notice of human behavior rather than the categories assigned in the present world. As such, visions of the otherworld use strictly defined behavioral categories in order to redraw theological boundary lines, demonstrating that identification with Christ in the otherworld is more demanding than simply claiming the title "Christian," holding a church office, or even attending church. While the categories in the text become more demanding, they also call into question the fixity of the categories like "Christian," using the flexibility of hell as "heterotopia" to rethink these titles in the present world.

4.1 Lacerated Lips: Defining Christian Identity through Heteropraxis in the Netherworld

In the *Apocalypse of Paul* 36 we read about the lector who did not keep the commandments, who is in a river of fire up to his knees as a punishing angel lacerates his lips and tongue with "a great blazing razor." This lector with the lacerated lips is just one of the group of "unexpected" sinners who are identified in the "river of boiling fire" in the *Apocalypse of Paul* 31-37. Like so many of the others we find in the netherworld of the early Christian apocalypses, he is unnamed and is identified primarily by his deeds (and in this case also by his social role and inability to perform it). For example there are those who are punished because of their sexual sins (*Apoc. Pet.*7, 10-11; *Acts Thom.* 55-57; *Apoc. Paul* 38; *Gk. Apoc. Mary* 20),[31] women who do not fulfill their social role as "mother" (*Apoc. Pet.* 8; *Apoc. Paul* 40; *Gk. Apoc. Mary* 23), sorcerers and magicians (*2 En.* 10; *Apoc. Pet.* 12; *Apoc. Paul* 38), and the host of individuals who fail to live up to the ethical ruberic of the Sermon on the Mount (*2 En.* 10; *Apoc. Pet.* 9; *Acts Thom.* 56; *Apoc. Paul* 31, 39, 40, 44),[32] just to name a few.[33]

In each of these examples the unnamed wicked person is being punished for a very specific behavior, emphasizing that the behavior itself is determinative. Among the specific behaviors that are isolated in hell there is also a very high level of differentiation.[34] In some depictions of hell distinct subcategories of the same sin are punished. For instance in the *Apoc. Pet.* 7 we find the women who plaited their hair (for the purpose of fornication) hung up by their hair, while those who did not keep their virginity until marriage have their flesh torn to pieces in a separate

---

[31] These citations are not exhaustive, but simply offer a few examples. For a detailed discussion of the sexual sins punished in the tours of hell see Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 68-105.

[32] See Henning, *Educating Early Christians*, 189-90, for a complete list of texts in which eternal punishment is assigned for those who fail to meet the ethical demands of the Sermon on the Mount.

[33] The one named person we find in hell is Herod, who is punished on a fiery throne *Latin Vis. Ezra* 37-39 and *Gk. Apoc. Ezra* 4.8-12.

[34] As Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995 [1975]), 192-94, argues, disciplinary structures reverse the traditional "axis of individualization" of a society, so that those with less power are actually more highly individualized. He explains, the way that he sees this at work in his history of the modern penal system: "In a disciplinary regime, on the other hand, individualization is 'descending': as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized." We do not intend to imply that the ancient and late antique depictions of the otherworld are comparable to the modern penal system. However, we take his methodological hypothesis regarding disciplinary regimes to have some merit with respect to the unseen power dynamics at play in texts across historical contexts.

place (*Apoc. Pet.* 11). And elsewhere in the *Apocalypse of Peter* distinct punishments are described for those who blasphemed the way of righteousness (hanging punishments, *Apoc. Pet.* 7), those who have denied righteousness (a burning pit, *Apoc. Pet.* 7), as well as for those slanderers "who doubt my [Christ's] righteousness" (chewing their tongues and having their eyes burned with red hot irons, *Apoc. Pet* 8). In the *Greek Apocalypse of Mary* men and women are punished separately for similar sins: men who charged usury are hung up by their feet and devoured by worms (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 9) and the "money loving" women who charged interest on accounts and were immodest are hung up over fire and devoured by beasts (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 21). This high level of differentiation among the sins and punishments in hell gives the impression that the minute details of one's behavior are under scrutiny and subject to punishment (in this regard the God of these apocalyptic texts is very much like Santa Claus).[35] The level of detail also conveys a sense of comprehensiveness-that every sin has a special place in hell.

What is more, the anonymity of these sinners also allows for almost any earthly identity to be superimposed upon their tortured bodies, so that a reader can readily see themselves or their enemies in their stead. The text of the *Apocalypse of Peter* suggests such an interpretation when the unnamed children are seen watching the punishment of those who did not honor their mother and father (11). Here a tortured body is an explicit opportunity for personal reflection. Elsewhere, the murdered look on as their murderers are cast into the fire in the place with the venomous beasts (*Apoc. Pet.* 7).[36] These anonymous sinners are taunted by their victims who say "righteousness and justice is the judgment of God," again reinforcing the hard line that is drawn between those who behave righteously and identify with Christ, and those who sin and are tortured and mocked for eternity. The anonymity in these depictions of hell allows maximal flexibility in re-assigning identity-anyone can be subject to these torments and separated from identification with the Son of God in the afterlife.[37]

Despite the prominence of the punishments for specific sins, earthly misdeeds are not the only disqualifier for eternal identification with Christ. In the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* a person can also be marked for eternal torment because of missed opportunities to perform good deeds. In *Apoc. Zeph.* 7 the seer is able to read the two manuscripts that record his sins and good deeds respectively. On the manuscript that catalogs the seer's sins he finds that all of his shortcomings are recorded, including any time that he did not visit a sick person, widow, or orphan and any

---

[35] As Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 199, noted with respect to the plague, this high degree of individulization among those with the least power creates "dualistic mechanisms of exclusion." These mechanisms rely upon the binaries of "mad/sane, dangerous/harmless, normal/abnormal" to ensure that the social hierarchy is easily enforced because every person has a well defined place.

[36] As noted above, Gilmour, "Delighting in the Suffering of Others" 129–39, suggests that this is intended to make the readers of the text feel "vindicated." While "delighting in the suffering of others" could be the basis for these audiences of righteous onlookers in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, this explanation overlays a modern idea on the ancient text. These audiences could just as easily be present to enhance the shame of the tortured (having to face those they have wronged), or to heighten the established dichotomy between the wicked and righteous.

[37] See for instance, the *Apocalypse of Paul* 44, in which the Son of God chastises those who are punished in hell for asking for mercy in the afterlife when they failed to repent on earth.

day on which he did not fast or pray at the appointed time. Appalled at all of his failings, he begs for mercy, and is saved from Hades. In this passage, the identity of the righteous person is not merely formed according to what a person does, but is claimed by those who take every opportunity to care for others and practice their faith. For early Christian readers of the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* the story of the two manuscripts characterizes the "in group" as those persons who practice their faith industriously and without fail.

Finally, in the later apocalypses, we find that Christian identity is not only fashioned through visions of hell that delineate heteropraxis, but also by isolating mistaken beliefs. The last two stops on Paul's tour of hell in the *Apocalypse of Paul* are dedicated sites of punishment for the heterodox. Paul first sees a well that is sealed with seven seals, and is told by his angelic guide to "stand back" because he will "not be able to bear the stench of this place" (*Apoc. Paul* 41). Looking down into the well Paul sees a narrow passage with fiery masses burning all around it, and is told by the angel that if a person comes to this place the passage is sealed above him and no mention will ever be made of that person to the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, or holy angels. When Paul asks who is condemned to such a punishment, the angel responds: "They are those who have not confessed that Christ came in the flesh and that the Virgin Mary bore him, and who say that the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of blessing are not the body and blood of Christ" (*Apoc. Paul* 41). Next Paul is taken to the place where the worm (a cubit in size) never rests and there is gnashing of teeth and cold and snow. The men and women there who gnash their teeth are identified by the angel as "those who say that Christ has not risen from the dead and that this flesh does not rise" (*Apoc. Paul* 42). In both of these places of punishment Paul sees torment taken to an extreme, be it permanent disassociation with all persons of the Trinity or banishment to a place of extreme cold. The sins of disbelief that are punished in these places are extremely specific, explicitly naming those with incorrect theologies of the incarnation, Eucharist or resurrection as "outsiders." Here orthodoxy is both generated and reinforced by sorting the dead into specific categories of punishment and then isolating the heterodox as particularly deserving of the worst kinds of punishments, sending a message that stepping outside of those theological boundaries carries serious eternal consequences.

In the *Greek Apocalypse of Mary* practice and belief are defined and linked in the first two spaces that Mary sees. In Hades she sees those who did not worship the "Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 3) and in the place of great darkness she sees those who are covered in a flow of pitch: "they who did not believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and did not confess thee to be the Mother of God, and that the Lord Jesus Christ was born of the and took flesh" (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 4). In these two passages incorrect worship and incorrect belief are inextricably linked and defined as punishable. Later in the apocalypse Mary makes explicit that her entreaties for mercy upon the damned are only for the "Christians" and not "for the unbelieving Jews," emphasizing that belief is what defines Christian identity over and against Jewish identity (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 26). The Lord responds to Mary's demands for mercy by saying that "anyone who names and calls upon thy name, I will not forsake him, either in heaven or on

earth" (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 26). Here, the Lord promises that eternal identification with the divine is as simple as calling upon Mary correctly, allowing the Holy Mother to function as a proxy for the role played by Jesus in the Gospel of John (John 3:18; 14:14; 15:16; 16:23-26). While people throughout the apocalypse are tortured for the things that they have done in this life, the text as a whole constructs Christian identity as a matter of correct belief, including proper relationship with the Holy Mother herself.

4.2 Lush Landscapes: Constructing Christian Identity through Orthopraxis in the Heavenly realms

Within the heavenly realms the definition of what it means to be in the "in" group, or "Christian" seems easy. The righteous are quickly identified by the seer as such, and their surroundings are undeniably pleasant, leading one to believe that ecstasy awaits those who craft their identity according to the boundaries set by each text. In *2 Enoch* 8-9 Enoch is taken up to the third heaven, which is filled with trees in full bloom, a plethora of ripe fruit, a garden with a profusion of good food, an olive tree with a perpetual flow of oil, angels singing, and four gently flowing rivers, all of which surrounds the tree of life whose fragrance is "indescribably" pleasant (the tree of life is a common feature in visions of heaven, receiving extensive treatment in *3 Baruch* 4).[38] Enoch is told that this place is prepared for the righteous, namely those who meet the requirements of righteousness that are outlined by Matthew 25 and the Hebrew Bible prophets: this heaven is for those who suffer tribulation, give bread to the hungry, cloth the naked, help the fallen and injured, and worship the Lord alone (*2 En.* 9 cf. Isa 1:17; 58:7; Jer 22:3; Ezek 18:7; Matt 25:34-37). This lush landscape, then, identifies the righteous who faithfully worship the Lord according to the Matthean vision of the "sheep" who are recognized by the king in the afterlife.

We find a similar scene in the closing chapters of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, in which Peter looks upon a verdant garden that is full of "fair trees and blessed fruits, full of the fragrance of perfume," a garden that is prepared for those "who will be persecuted for my righteousness' sake" (*Apoc. Pet.* 16 (Ethiopic) cf. Matt 5:10). This lavish garden uses a heavenly space to bolster the text's emphasis on suffering in the face of a false Christ, and reinforces the dividing line between those who follow that false Christ blindly (falling into a myriad of sinful behaviors) and those who stand their ground and suffer. Perhaps the most dramatic and breathtaking vision of paradise is found in the second heaven of the *Apocalypse of Paul* 21-30, including four rivers, of milk, honey, wine and oil. The trees have ten thousand branches which each hold ten thousand clusters of dates, each cluster holding ten thousand dates (or other fruits in the same proportion).

---

[38] *2 Enoch* is a "Jewish Christian" apocalypse in the sense that the composition of the text involved both Jews and Christians over a number of years. The text contains a number of Christian glosses, suggesting that early Christians influence of some kind. F. I. Andersen, "2 Enoch," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 2:95-96, has dismissed a Christian influence on the text because it does not reflect a "Christian scheme of salvation." We argue that readers of Matthew or the book of Revelation would readily recognize the scheme of salvation that is present in 2 Enoch as "Christian."

Along each of the rivers Paul meets a different group of righteous people: the prophets, the patriarchs, the infants whom King Herod had slain, and those who dedicated themselves to God with their whole heart and humility (*Apoc. Paul* 25-28). In each of these heavenly visions, the lush landscapes are used to mark a general type of righteous person as a member of the "in" group, constructing Christian identity around exemplars with varying righteousness résumés.

In contrast to the anonymity of the sinners in hell, the inhabitants of heaven are often famous righteous persons. As the apocalyptic seers tour the heavens they take note of the saints who are there, calling them out by name.[39] Peter's vision of heaven recalls the transfiguration, featuring Moses and Elijah and locating Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the great garden of paradise (*Apoc. Pet.* 16-17); Zephaniah runs to greet Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Enoch, Elijah and David (*Apoc. Zeph.* 9); Isaiah sees "the righteous from the time of Adam onwards" including Abel, Enoch and Seth in the seventh heaven (*Ascen. Isa.* 9); Paul sees the major and minor prophets (identified by name and as "major and minor prophets," *Apoc. Paul* 25), David (*Apoc. Paul* 29), the Virgin Mary (*Apoc. Paul* 46), the patriarchs of the Hebrew Bible, Moses, Lot, Job, Noah, Adam, Abel (*Apoc. Paul* 47-51), and the Apostles (identified by name and as a group, *Apoc. Paul* 51); and upon arriving in heaven Mary asks where she might find Moses, the prophets, the patriarchs and Paul, some of whom call out to her in response (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 27). Since the reputations of these saints precede them, their qualifications for dwelling in heaven need not be listed. The readers expect to see Moses in heaven, so he and the rest of the patriarchs are as much part of the heavenly landscape as they are its occupants.

There are other unnamed righteous persons in heaven, but unlike the unrighteous persons we find in hell, they are very rarely identified by specific earthly deeds (or their behaviors are described with a much lower level of specificity).[40] In the final words of the *Apocalypse of Peter* God is praised for having "written the names of the righteous in heaven in the book of life." Apart from the named "righteous fathers" of chapter 16, this is all we know about the inhabitants of heaven from this text-they are righteous and their names are written in the book (cf. Daniel 12:1; Rev.17:8). In the *Ascension of Isaiah* the reader is given a host of details regarding the different levels of heaven, and their inhabitants, but those details do not delineate specific behaviors. Instead we learn that the seventh heaven is inhabited by the "righteous" whose identity is primarily crafted in terms of their beliefs and by way of contrast to the pseudo-prophets.[41] In the *Apoc. Paul* 21-22 we meet the heaven dwellers who "hunger and thirst for righteousness," a righteousness that seems to be axiomatic since we aren't given any further definition of their righteous qualities.

---

[39] See the *Testament of Abraham*, the *Testament of Isaac*, and the *Testament of Jacob* for later explanations of how the patriarchs who were already buried had their souls removed to be with God in heaven. See also, the *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra* in which Jesus says that he "called Adam up out of Hades."

[40] The vision of heaven in *2 En.* 8-9 provides the most specific picture of deeds that merit eternal reward.

[41] For further discussion of identity matters in the *Ascension of Isaiah* see Jan N. Bremmer and Tobias Nicklas eds., *The Ascension of Isaiah* (Leuven: Brill, 2014).

Apart from those rare occasions where specific righteous behaviors are used to craft the identity of the "Christian" in heaven, the apocalypses primarily use the differentiation of fates to distinguish between those who are "in" the community and the "other." In the *Apocalypse of Peter* those who are "written in the book of life" dwell in heaven as a single homogenous group in contrast to the dozens of anonymous sinners who are isolated according to their infractions and tormented eternally (*Apoc. Pet.* 17). Similar to the *Apocalypse of Peter's* insistence that the inhabitants of heaven are those who resist the "false Christ," the *Ascension of Isaiah* presents a vision of the heavens that is couched in terms of an ongoing conflict between the "false prophets" and the "righteous." At the text's outset these "pseudo-prophets" and their violent acts are juxtaposed against the "true prophets" who dwell destitute in the mountains and lament Israel's failings (*Ascen. Isa.* 2:11-16). Later, the righteous are contrasted with the Christians who will go astray in the last days, falling into chaotic speech, bad leadership, and the love of money (*Ascen. Isa* 3:21-31). In this way, the vision of heaven that follows in the *Ascension of Isaiah* defines the identity of its "in" group of righteous believers not in terms of their own behaviors, but in terms of the deeds that they do not do.[42] That is, the "lush landscapes" themselves are a mechanism for dividing the Christian from the other in the afterlife, but in this life these texts raise as many questions as they answer. If heaven is my goal, do I get there by imitating the named righteous persons who are there? Or simply by not performing the deeds done by those who are punished in hell (in texts where such an antipode exists)? Or like the named patriarchs, must my behavior on earth be so notoriously "good" and my identification with the Christian faith so renowned that my presence in heaven is "expected" by everyone who knows me? In this regard, the relative ambiguity of these heavenly visions may be intentional, allowing for a malleable definition of orthopraxis that demands maximal effort from the Christian on earth who cannot simply tick a box and then breathe a sigh of relief that he is heaven-bound.

In a few cases the early Christian apocalypses also use belief as a qualifier for eternal reward, defining correct belief through heavenly categories. In the *Ascension of Isaiah* belief is a key identity marker of the "righteous" who are able to ascend to the seventh heaven: belief in the cross leads to salvation (3:18), belief in "Jesus the Lord Christ" is a defining feature of the "faithful saints" (4:13), and the crowns, robes and thrones of the seventh heaven "are placed (there) for the righteous, for those who believe in the Lord who will descend in your form"(8:26). Here, the vision of heaven assures the readers that those who believe in this incarnate Lord are going to receive a rich heavenly reward (*Ascen. Isa.* 9:24-26). Readers are also reminded of the importance of keeping the "words of Jesus Christ" (*Ascen. Isa.* 9:26) and are exhorted to "be in the Holy Spirit" (*Ascen. Isa.* 11:40), but belief in the incarnation seems to be the distinguishing feature of those who ascend to the seventh heaven.

[42] See also *Zost.* 4.26, 42-44, in which different groups of souls are "classified" without material analogies for heavenly existence. Here the contrast is between agency or freedom and withdrawal into god. Like *1 En.* 22, this text does not speak of actual rewards and punishments but of differentiated fates. Nevertheless, in *Zostrianos* those differentiated fates still outline the paragon of earthly behavior---acting so that you might "dwell within."

Similarly, the *Greek Apocalypse of Mary* contains a brief heavenly scene in which specific texts are isolated as central to Christian identity. When Mary is lifted to heaven to have an audience with the Father she finds herself in the company of Moses, John and Paul, who join her in her entreaty for clemency for the damned (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 26-27). The Father responds by reminding them that these Christians were judged "according to the law which Moses gave, and according to the gospel which John gave, and according to the epistles which Paul carried" (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 27). This brief vision of heaven establishes specific texts (namely the law, the gospel of John and the Pauline epistles) as the standard by which Christians are judged. While the text is still discussing the behaviour of "Christian sinners," the emphasis is on the core texts that are to be used to separate these Christians from the saints (Mary, Moses, Paul, John, the prophets and the martyrs) that we find in heaven. This "mini-canon," if you will, is then used to create a behavioural standard for the final judgment in which ignorance of heavenly expectations is not a legitimate excuse (*Gk. Apoc. Mary* 28). For the late antique audience of the *Greek Apocalypse of Mary* the textual core listed as the paradisiacal ruberic conveyed that the serious study of these particular texts was a hallmark of Christian faith. Even well after the canon is established, the *Greek Apocalypse of Mary* represents an effort to construct more specific early Christian reading practices within that canon.[43]

5. Conclusion

In the majority of otherworldly visions the theological identity of the Christian is crafted through a kind of oppositional consciousness, clarifying who is not included in the group "Christian." Multiple differentiations in the netherworld yield a novel take on the dichotomized understanding of this world: there is only one "in" group, but there are a plethora of ways to be identified as "other" or "out." As we have seen in a number of the apocalypses this higher level of differentiation among the damned, demonstrates an attempt to exert power over readers of the text by making it very difficult not to self-identify with the beliefs and behaviors described in hell. Interpreting the scenes of eternal judgment that are found in the New Testament, the apocalypses closely identify a person's earthly behavior and his eternal fate. Thus, the definition of "orthodoxy" that we find in the apocalypses is primarily crafted in terms of deeds or practices, making it more accurate to talk about "orthopraxy" in the otherworld.

Where belief *is* the focus, orthodoxy is defined variously, seeming to construct different models of orthodoxy for each reading community. Several of the visions of the otherworld require Christians to know what is expected of them in this life, recognizing every opportunity to perform a good deed (as in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*), heeding the "words of Christ" or even

---

[43] The *Greek Apocalypse of Mary* was written sometime between the early fifth and eleventh centuries, and relies upon the *Apocalypse of Paul*. See Bauckham, "The Four Apocalypses of the Virgin Mary," in *The Fate of the Dead: Studies in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden Brill, 1998), 335–6; Jane Ralls Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 16–18. Baun argues for a later date between 9th -11th centuries based upon the development of the cult of Mary as intercessor around this time.

the words of specific texts (as in the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Greek Apocalypse of Mary*). Other visions of heaven and hell adjudicate specific beliefs. In the *Ascension of Isaiah* belief in the incarnation and person of Jesus Christ is the primary marker of Christian faith, and leads to ascent to the seventh heaven. Likewise the *Apocalypse of Paul* and the *Apocalypse of Mary* demarcate particular beliefs as punishable in hell, drawing a theological line around the Christian community and excluding those who deny fundamentals like the incarnation or the bodily resurrection. Although we cannot infer a singular historical context in which orthodoxy becomes of interest for the Christian otherworld, we can say that earlier texts are more preoccupied with "outsiders" (as in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* and *Ascension of Isaiah*), whereas there is greater concern for managing these boundaries from within the Christian community in post-Theodosian contexts (like those of the *Apocalypse of Paul* and the *Greek Apocalypse of Mary*).

These diverse definitions of orthodoxy are perhaps the natural result of texts that seem to define Christian identity in negative terms. Even in visions of heaven, where we would expect a greater differentiation of the righteous, we instead find a single group of celebrated saints and rather open-ended definitions of righteous behavior. The lush landscapes invite the reader to compare the reputations of the saints who are ensconced in heaven with the pseudo-prophets, the Christian sinners, or the damned, whose wicked deeds are enumerated elsewhere in the apocalypse. Do these tensions within the text reflect some kind of real world conflict between early Christian groups and those they wished to identify as "outsiders"? If so, then the different models of orthodoxy that we find in these apocalypses necessitate the imagination of *orthodoxies* in the plural, in which praxis is constantly redefined in a conscious effort to articulate Christian identity in changing contexts. The texts we have discussed beg us to consider that heaven and hell might be doing more than simply filtering for "right belief" or "right practices," even in later contexts as in the *Apocalypse of Paul* or the *Greek Apocalypse of Mary*. These texts remind us that even the categories of "deacon" and "canon" are part of early Christian lived experience, and thus are simultaneously reflecting and redefining what it means to be Christian.