INTRODUCTION

The earliest Christians penned stories that narrate Jesus conversing with one or more of his disciples either immediately before his passion or after his resurrection. A number of these texts survive today. In these 'dialogue gospels', Jesus answers the disciples' questions, which are typically centred around the three following issues: how they are to deal with life in his absence, where he intends to go when he leaves them and how they might follow him there. The Gospel of Mary is one example of a dialogue gospel. In this fragmentary text, Jesus answers questions put to him by individual disciples, and in a 'farewell discourse' immediately before his departure, he issues his final instructions that consist of finding the Son of Man within and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. The male disciples cannot cope with his departure; they weep in fear that they will be persecuted if they fulfil his command to preach to the nations. At this point Mary comes to the fore, comforts them and explains how their souls can reach eschatological salvation. Her story does not allay their fears; Peter and Andrew refuse to believe Mary, and Levi must step in to remind them all of Jesus' last instructions.

The form of Jesus answering questions from his disciples finds its companions across a range of texts, from the Johannine Farewell Discourse (13.31–17.1) to the Epistula Apostolorum to the Pistis Sophia. Thirteen texts have been selected to construct the 'dialogue gospels' genre, each converging at two main points: (1) Jesus as revealer on the eve of his departure and (2) dialogue with one or more disciples. All but one of our texts have been brought to light by a series of manuscript discoveries.[1] The dialogue gospels share the

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[1] The texts in view are as follows, in order of their years of discovery and publication: *Pistis Sophia* (PistSoph), 1772/1848; the *Apocalypse of Peter* (ApocPet), Greek 1886–87/1892, Ethiopic publ. 1910; the *Epistula Apostolorum* (EpAp), Coptic c. 1895/1919, Ethiopic publ. 1912; the *Gospel of Mary* (GMary: Berlin Gnostic Codex = BG 8502,1), 1896/1955; the *Apocryphon of John* (ApJohn: BG 8502,2 [+ Nag Hammadi Codices = NHC 2,1, 3,1, 4,1]), 1896/1955; the *Sophia* (or *Wisdom) of Jesus Christ*

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same goal as the canonical gospels, which is to bring their readers/
hearers to a fuller understanding of their salvation, which is through
Jesus. Where the canonical gospels primarily narrate the life and
death of Jesus, dialogue gospels narrate his final revelations as the
risen or glorified Christ. In one sense, the preference for Jesus as
risen Saviour comes closer to Paul than to the Synoptics, but the dia-
logue format and the narrative context place them straight into the
'gospel' category.[2]

These 'dialogue gospels' may be grouped together to construct
a genre, but they hardly form a homogeneous group, varying con-
siderably in setting, characters, length and treatment of their sub-
ject matter. They may be set before the risen Jesus ascends (Book of
Thomas) or before he is crucified (Gospel of Judas). The revelation
may be directed to one privileged disciple (Apocryphon of John), or
two (Apocryphon of James), or to a larger group of twelve apostles
and seven women (Sophia of Jesus Christ). The text may confirm
the authority of the Twelve, with Peter as leader (Epistle of Peter
to Philip), or profess that salvation will only come through a future
generation (Apocryphon of James). It may be concise, with only
a few queries from the disciples (Johannine Farewell Discourse),
or it may be so long that Jesus himself gets annoyed with the
disciples' relentless and repetitive requests for knowledge (Epistula
Apostolorum). What they have in common is Jesus as revealer,
answering the questions of the disciple(s) who are concerned that
they lack the knowledge they need. Dialogue gospels also vary in
content and theological persuasion. They may narrate a tour of the
heavenly realms and their corresponding initiation-mysteries (Pistis

(SophJesChr: BG 8502,3 [+ NHC 3,4]), 1896/1955; the *First Apocalypse of James*
(1ApocJas: NHC 5,3 [+ Codex Tchacos = CT 2]), 1945/1979 the *Apocryphon of James*
(ApJas: NHC 1,2), 1945/1985; the *Book of Thomas* (BookThom: NHC 2,7), 1945/
1989; the *Dialogue of the Saviour* (DialSav: NHC 3,5), 1945/1984; the *Epistle of Peter
to Philip* (EpPetPhil: NHC 8,2 [= CT 1]), 1945/1991; the *Gospel of Judas* (GJudas:
CT 3), publ. 2006. Also included here within the dialogue gospel genre is the Johannine
Farewell Discourse. Except where specified above, the twelve non-canonical texts are
extant only in Coptic, although Greek fragments have been found of the Gospel of
Mary (POxy 3525, PRyl 463) and the Sophia of Jesus Christ (POxy 1081), as well as
a Latin fragment of the Epistula Apostolorum preserved in a palimpsest (Cod. Vind.
16). The selection of these texts will be justified in Chapter 1.

[2] I here follow Tuckett and Gregory in what they deem a 'looser' definition of the
term 'gospel' as referring to 'a text which purports to give information about the life
and teaching of Jesus', Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett, 'Series Preface',
in *Gospel of Mary*, ed. Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007),
vi. On this definition, a text may be a 'gospel' (or gospel-like) even if its ancient or
modern readers view it as an apocalypse, apocryphon, epistle or gospel.

Sophia) or a tour of the regions of hell where different sins receive their corresponding punishments (Apocalypse of Peter). Their agenda may be to promote asceticism due to the corrupt nature of the material world (Book of Thomas) or to confirm the corporeality of the resurrected body (Epistula Apostolorum). They may profess that the material realm is the work of an ignorant demiurge (Apocryphon of John), or they may acknowledge the highest Father as the creator (Dialogue of the Saviour).

The dialogue gospels reflect the complex and diverse literary landscape of emerging Christianity. Traditionally, texts found at Nag Hammadi were labelled 'gnostic', stemming from the non-Christian religion of 'gnosticism', and thought to be at best superficially christianized, while the firmly Christian Epistula Apostolorum was seen as borrowing the dialogue gospel genre to combat those heretical 'gnostics' who created it.[3] However, the concept of 'gnosticism' has changed. Almost all scholars who engage with non-canonical early Christian texts accept that the labels of 'gnostic' and 'gnosticism' need nuancing (whether or not they think that they should be used). The deconstruction of the term and so-called religion of 'gnosticism', led by Williams and King over twenty years ago, has prevailed in most quarters, which has resulted in a backlash against those who hold dear the rigorous bifurcation of orthodoxy and gnosticism.[4] It is now more common to talk of trajectories of early Christianities, of which 'gnosticism' represents just one.[5] Yet there is still a sense that 'gnosticism' is something different to Christianity proper, something that can be separated from it and pinned down as its own thing. And, consequently, the 'gnostic' dialogue gospels will be assumed to share basically the same 'gnostic' ideology, to be at

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[3] For an example, a binary opposition between two competing religions is implied in the title of Birger A. Pearson's book, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004). For Pearson, 'Christianity' is not the same as 'Gnosticism'. According to Klauck, the Epistula Apostolorum 'has a special place among the dialogue gospels: its author has borrowed its genre from his gnostic opponents and turned it into a useful weapon against them', Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*, trans. Brian McNeil (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 159.

[4] Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). More recently David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[5] This concept has been heavily influenced by James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

odds with their 'proto-orthodox' counterparts, and to depict a Jesus who is fundamentally different to the Jesus of the New Testament.

We do not see in the dialogue gospels any such ideology. Those once called 'gnostic' share as much in common with their 'orthodox' neighbours as with each other, with many points of both similarity and difference. The genre itself is thoroughly diverse, and it is this diversity that makes the texts good conversation partners. This work, by putting dialogue gospels into conversation with each other and with New Testament texts, will continue to blur any sort of remaining bifurcation between the 'ortho-' and 'heterodox'. To make the case, I shall develop an 'open' view of genre – one that recognizes both the fluidity of generic categories and the role of the modern scholar in constructing a genre that suits his or her own concerns. Such a view can bring together a variety of texts for comparative analysis, whether they are within the same genre or a literary neighbour. In the case of dialogue gospels, their closest companions are naturally canonical gospels, with which they share the same characters and content even if these are interpreted radically differently. The act of comparing and contrasting can help refine our understanding of the dialogue gospel genre, the intertextual relationships between dialogue gospels and New Testament texts, and the individual texts themselves.

Intertextual connections between dialogue gospels and their literary neighbours might be viewed as rhizomatic network. The idea of employing the rhizomatic root system to think with was developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome stands in contrast to arborescent systems (exemplified by the way a tree's roots are constructed). The hierarchical and centred nature of the arborescent system of a tree, they argue, 'has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought'.[6] Deleuze and Guattari explain:

> unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point … It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle from which it grows and which it overspills … In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of

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[6] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980; repr. London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 20.

> communication and pre-established parts, the rhizome is an
> acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system.[7]

This model for thinking can be applied to a number of phenomena.
Deleuze and Guattari use it as a base for which they write their book
(the genre, essentially). Vander Stichele employs it as a useful tool
for intertextuality,[8] and for this project, it is an exemplary tool for
finding connections within gospel literature, and especially dialogue
gospels that are difficult to date. Cavan sees early Christian trade
networks as a rhizomatic net of relations. He writes:

> While arborescent maps trade in linear causality, binary
> oppositions, and clear classifications, a rhizome, with its
> chaotic and wild offshoots, offers a model for thinking
> that relies on interconnected and evolving networks of
> relations that grow, change, dissipate, and expand without a
> prescribed plan and in response to larger, interrelated forces,
> like bamboo roots or a Jackson Pollock painting.[9]

Applying this model to early Christian networks, he offers a picture
of no centre of command, links between different religious people,
ships that carry goods to different centres, religious authorities that
might also be slaves or administers – these small Christian networks
are interconnected with other non-Christian networks, creating a
wider acentered network.

As well as intertextuality, the rhizome model can also be applied
to discussions of uniformity and diversity within a genre of texts –
for us, the dialogue gospels. Although I will put the Johannine
Farewell Discourse as the 'middle' from which the genre grows, the
network of resultant literature is both interconnected and disparate
and any point can connect to any other point. This model can be
expanded to apply to all gospel literature, and in the later discussion,
the canonical resurrection narratives and selected Pauline texts will
be put into conversation with dialogue gospels. Not all points will
fit perfectly within the rhizomatic structure, but it is a useful tool for
mapping and thinking about early Christian literature.

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[7] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 23.

[8] Caroline Vander Stichele, 'The Head of John and its Reception or How
to Conceptualize "Reception History"', in *Reception History and Biblical
Studies: Theory and Practice,* ed. Emma England and William John Lyons (London
and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 84–5.

[9] Cavan W. Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity: Trade, Networks, and the
Letters of Dionysios of Corinth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Outline of the Study

The category of dialogue gospels – what it is, which texts belong in this genre, and why an author might write one – is the subject of Part I. Chapter 1 looks specifically at the genre itself and its creation of a new category of early Christian texts in which Jesus engages in dialogue with his disciples. Previous genre definitions have varied widely, resulting in debates regarding both what to call it and which texts are to be included in it, and the taxonomies always suit the interest of the scholar delimiting them. The present work builds on the monographs of Perkins and Hartenstein, among others, who also investigate dialogue gospels but from the viewpoint of 'gnostic' theology or their narrative frame.[10] I aim to show that the dialogue gospel form does not intrinsically share a link to 'gnosticism'; that the narrative frame and dialogue are often not two separate entities glued together (this is certainly not the case in the Gospel of Mary); and that the dialogical form is a fitting vehicle for eschatological revelation. An overview of the thirteen texts selected to construct our genre is then offered, followed by a cursory analysis of the connections between their depictions of the Saviour and eschatology.

Chapter 2 builds on this open categorization of dialogue gospels, asking what themes and issues might have inspired an early Christian author to write one, and reading the texts alongside literature that came to be, or had already been, accorded 'canonical' status. Dialogue gospels have strong and varied intertextual links to the canonical gospels and the Pauline epistles, and their shared themes are the subject of this chapter.[11] I argue that the genre is inspired by the Johannine Farewell Discourse, in both temporal setting and generic form. Other intertextual links are found beyond the Johannine Farewell Discourse and, for the purpose of highlighting

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[10] Pheme Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); Judith Hartenstein, *Die zweite Lehre: Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmenerzählungen frühchristlicher Dialoge*, TU 146 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000).

[11] The general meaning of the concept of 'intertextuality' is not limited to sources, citations and allusions, nor does it preclude these. To speak of an intertextual connection between the First Apocalypse of James and the Apocryphon of James does not suggest that the First Apocalypse of James is dependent on the Apocryphon of James, nor does it suggest that it is not. The concept of intertextuality allows the conversation to broaden: we can speak of a number of texts (or art, or other sources) without assigning a chronological order to them or focusing on details of dependence. I do suggest that the Johannine Farewell Discourse is a starting point for dialogue gospels, and most likely the dialogue gospels are inspired by the Johannine Farewell Discourse, in whatever form.

these links, themes have been selected from Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, John and Pauline epistles, and the differences and similarities between these texts and selected dialogue gospels are discussed. An example of this is the theme of mission shared by Matt 28.19–20, the Gospel of Mary and the Epistle of Peter to Philip, among others. In Matthew, the evangelist does not narrate how the disciples go about enacting the command to 'make disciples of all nations' or how they feel about it. The Gospel of Mary and the Epistle of Peter to Philip fill this gap in the narrative by highlighting the disciples' fear of persecution following Jesus' command to preach. As this small-scale example illustrates, a reason for the composition of later texts in dialogue format possibly was to address perceived deficiencies in earlier gospel literature. By using this comparative approach, Chapter 2 also takes the opportunity for further exegesis on the dialogue gospels themselves.

Whereas the first two chapters cover a wide breadth of dialogue gospels and their intertextual links, Part II takes an in-depth look at the Gospel of Mary. The Gospel of Mary is unique among the dialogue gospels in the extent to which the narrative frame is integrated into the dialogue. Unusually this gospel extends well beyond the departure of Jesus, and the ensuing narrative and dialogue are premised on the new reality of Jesus' absence.[12] It is because of his departure that the disciples worry about being persecuted and quarrel over his words, and it is for the same reason that Mary can come to the fore and explain his eschatological journey and how they can follow him.

Chapter 3 focuses on the narrative frame. There, I explore possibilities for what was contained in the missing six pages of the Berlin Codex that form the beginning of the Gospel of Mary, firmly situating it within the dialogue gospel genre. The extant narrative frame is then divided into three parts: (1) The Saviour's farewell discourse that leads to his final departure, (2) Mary's intervention and (3) the subsequent breach between the disciples and its possible healing. I will argue that the Saviour's farewell discourse encourages the disciples to be active participants in the Christian message of salvation. They must procure Jesus' peace, they are warned against waiting for an apocalyptic Son of Man, and they must find Christ within. They are told to preach the gospel and banned from imposing new

[12] In the Epistle of Peter to Philip and the Gospel of Judas, as examples, Jesus departs but reappears or continues to speak. In the Gospel of Mary, Jesus reappears only indirectly, in the form of Mary explaining her memories of Jesus.

laws of their own devising. Once Jesus has gone, the disciples are left with Mary to comfort them. The section on Mary's intervention focuses on two features of the text's depiction of her character: her relationship with the male disciples and her relationship with Jesus. Attention to the differences between the Greek (POxy 3525; PRyl 463) and Coptic (BG) versions of (parts of) the Gospel of Mary indicate that the Coptic recension heightens antagonism and disunity between Mary and the men. Mary's relationship to Jesus, on the other hand, is one of unity, and I argue that Mary takes on a kind of paraclete role as she 'rises' only as Jesus departs, and she teaches and comforts the other disciples.

The final part of the narrative frame sees the disciples split into two factions, with Mary and Levi on one side and Peter and Andrew on the other. The split is the result of Mary's recollection of the ascent of the soul. Andrew and Peter will not accept this teaching as it is not consistent with what they know of Jesus and because Jesus revealed it to Mary alone. They condemn Mary's revelation as heterodox. By challenging Mary, Peter is cast as an adversary akin to the hostile cosmic powers that attempt to prevent the soul from attaining her eschatological 'rest'. The text gives Levi the last words, and he reminds them all of the Saviour's teaching in his farewell discourse. The Gospel of Mary concludes with the enactment of Jesus' command to preach – although in the Greek Rylands papyrus, Levi preaches alone, whereas in the Coptic MS, there is an ambiguous '*they* departed to preach'. If the narrative frame of the Coptic Gospel of Mary creates greater tension between the male disciples and Mary, does the word 'they' allow for a greater reconciliation between the two parties, or does 'they' refer to Mary and Levi and thus rule out reconciliation altogether? This is explored in light of other textual evidence, especially the Pistis Sophia.

There are two sets of eschatological teachings in the Gospel of Mary – the dissolution of matter, revealed to the group by the Saviour, and the ascent of the soul, revealed alone to Mary who then recounts it to the group. These themes are the focus of Chapters 4 and 5. The cosmic eschatology of the Gospel of Mary is essentially that the created heavens and earth will be restored through dissolution into its original constituent parts. This presupposes a cosmology in which matter is the raw material of the cosmos and has been moulded into the composite created entities called in the Gospel of Mary 'every nature, every form, every creature'. This cosmology does not imply an inferior-demiurgic creator deity, and the author's view of the contingent nature of the material world is shared

among many second-century Christian thinkers, including Justin and Irenaeus. Chapter 4 firstly deals with the cosmological make-up of matter, nature, form and creature, and secondly argues that dissolution must occur because humanity lives under sin and death because of its enslavement to passion. This is essentially a Pauline view. I then discuss the christological reading of 'the Good' as the instigator of the cosmic eschaton, and how this relates to the 'Son of Man', whom Jesus proclaims is living within the disciples. The Son of Man in the Gospel of Mary contradicts a parousia theology, in which Jesus will come again to judge and destroy the world. But the Son of Man is still Jesus – just as he can live within his disciples in Paul and John, he lives within his disciples in the Gospel of Mary. There is no expectation of a future external figure, nor need there be one: with Christ's coming, the end time has begun. The Son of Man is within. The Good dissolves the cosmos. Christ is both.

Chapter 5 explores the individual eschatology of the Gospel of Mary, which is narrated through the ascent of the individual and paradigmatic soul to its heavenly 'rest'. I will argue that the anonymous soul is in the first instance Jesus himself: It is the ascension of John 20.17. Yet it is also the disciple's soul, who follows Jesus into heaven. The soul must ascend past malevolent archons who challenge her, and by declaring her heavenly origins, she can overcome them and return home. In the First Apocalypse of James, we see that Jesus' ascension past fearsome archons paves the way for James to follow, and at the time of James' own ascension he must profess his own heavenly ancestry to these archons (cf. the Gospel of Thomas 50). The comparable scheme in the Gospel of Mary extends the ascension reference in John 20.17 to the disciple's salvation.

The characterization of Mary here suggests that she has already (partly) followed Jesus into eternal 'rest'. At the culmination of the ascent, Mary mirrors the soul in her silence. She is called 'blessed', the Saviour loves her more than the other disciples, and she receives private revelation from him. She does not appear to be under the influence of passions, sin and death. I propose that, in the Gospel of Mary, 'rest' can be partly realized in the present Christian experience, much like the Johannine eternal life, and fully attained after death.