Sacramental Language and Verbs of Generating, Creating, and Begetting in the Gospel of Philip

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The Gos Phil provides a series of observations on practices of Valentinian Christianity. Since sacraments appear prominently, scholarly investigations of the sacramental system abound. Segelberg, for example, suggests that there are five sacraments or mysteries in Gos Phil: baptism, chrism, eucharist, redemption, and bride-chamber. Each is an element in an ascending series. Grant follows this model in principle, rightly

1. The present article is a prolegomenon to a larger study of Gos Phil.
observing that the distinctive aspect of the “mystery of marriage” in *Gos Phil*, whether human or spiritual, is its equivalence to salvation. Turner agrees that the five sacraments are arranged in ascending order: chrism is superior to baptism (74,12–13) and the bridal chamber “is in that which is superior to . . .” (69,28–29); later he points out that according to 86,1–18, becoming a child of the bridal chamber is the only way to receive the light. He notes that there is some overlap, for baptism can include redemption (69,25–26), and chrism the eucharist (74,36–75, 11).4 However, while these and other discussions often cite the relevant texts, they overlook a distinctive feature of *Gos Phil*: the explanation of sacraments by means of verbs of generating, creating, and begetting. We agree that the five sacraments in *Gos Phil* are part of an ascending series. We posit that each sacrament effects union by overcoming separation; verbs emphasizing union describe the function of sacraments. Moreover, these verbs occur in the context of gender. This is particularly true of descriptions of the sacrament of the bridal chamber, in which male unites with female. Thus, as a prolegomenon to further work on the text, we propose first, to discuss sacramental theory in general; second, to identify the verbs describing sacraments in *Gos Phil*; third, to suggest consistent translations for these verbs which we see as technical terms in *Gos Phil*; fourth, to set these verbs within the wider context of derivation both from earlier creation texts and from sacramental language in early Christian texts; and finally, to explore the sacramental understanding of *Gos Phil* itself.

Our argument is that the author understands sacraments to unite hitherto separate elements. Separation of female from male in the beginning results in death, says the text (70,14–16), and sacraments effect the unity of the separated by enacting their union. For example, the union of male and female in the bridal chamber overcomes the original separation of female from male as described in creation (Gen 2.18–25). Male and female participants (and possibly onlookers at the periphery) are present. Since Christ performs the sacraments, no minister or priest need serve as conduit for the presence of Christ at the sacrament or as the guarantor of the sacrament’s efficacy. Absence of human agents distinguishes *Gos Phil* from ancient and modern descriptions of sacra-

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ments. As we shall show, modern translators have difficulty with this notion and therefore read human agents into the text.

Verbs of generation and creation in Gos Phil not only describe sacraments, they also shed light on Valentinian Christianity. The link between verbs of creation and sacraments begins with the soteriology of Gos Phil, as previously noted: “Christ came to repair the separation (of Eve from Adam) which was from the beginning and again unite the two” (70,14–16), and reaches its highest point with the uniting of the Father of all with the virgin in the bridal chamber. Separation is overcome by unity in the bridal chamber; sacraments and generation go together. The verbs “to receive” (xí), “beget” (xíγο), and “unite” (γωντρ), all occur in sacramental contexts and these verbs presuppose creation and separation. Thus, careful attention must be paid to the consistent translation of verbs of separation, creation, union and generation particularly when they appear in sacramental contexts.

SACRAMENT

First, however, the word “sacrament” itself requires discussion. It is the translation for the Greek word μυστήριον (Coptic: ἡγυςτηρίων). For some instances in the Greek biblical text where μυστήριον means “secret,” some Latin bibles rendered it sacramentum, while the Latin mysterium was used in other passages. Originally a military oath, from the third century the word sacramentum came to signify any ritual action in an ecclesiastical context. Writers like Origen and Cyril of Jerusalem explain that Christians have access to the mystery of the salvation wrought through the death and resurrection of Christ through the symbolic and ritual participation in these events. The liturgy of the sacraments “re-presents” or “re-members” (ἀνάμνησις) historic events at present times and places. The resurrection itself breaks the bounds of

5. The principle of translation we follow here is not that of “dynamic equivalence” employed in several modern biblical translations. Nor do we espouse the opposite extreme of wooden literalism. We simply pay attention to the use of verbs and translate them consistently.

6. “Sacrament” in Oxford English Dictionary II on Compact Disc (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). The absence of the term “mystery/sacrament” from Hippolytus’ Apostolic Tradition except in later additions to this text is interesting. See The Treatise on The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, eds. G. Dix and H. Chadwick (London: The Alban Press/Ridgefield, Connecticut: Morehouse, 1991), 10 [Spurious Communion Prayers]. Every issue about this text is debated: authorship, date, use, and the text itself. For the purposes of this article, we take the text to be late third century and use it to reflect a particular idea about sacraments at that time.
time and space, making Christ and the events of his ministry accessible through sacramental rites. Christ’s participation in baptism and eucharist (through the institution of the last supper) renders these sacraments of particular importance. *Gos Phil* explains the timeless or eternal aspect of eucharist by means of a Syriac word-play: “The eucharist is Jesus. For he is called in Syriac *Pharisatha* which is ‘the one who is spread out,’ for Jesus came to crucify the world.”

Despite their timeless aspect, sacraments must be enacted in time and space, by particular persons, and thus require individuals who enact them on behalf of the group of believers. In a sacrificial context one expects to find priests, but need this be so in a sacramental context? Isenberg assumes so at 77,2–7. We propose a different translation:

Isenberg: The priest is completely holy down to his very body. For if he has taken (ξι) the bread, he will consecrate it. Or the cup, or anything else that he gets (ξι), he will consecrate. Then how will he not consecrate the body also?

Buckley/Good: The holy person is altogether holy, including his body. For if he has received (ξι) the bread, he will make it holy, or the cup, or all the rest which he receives (ξι) he will make holy. And how will he not make the body holy also?

The Coptic phrase πρωμε εστογιαν describes a holy person, rather than a priest. π ουγια is the verb “to be a priest” from which the noun ουγια derives. The word “priesthood” ειτογια occurs in 85,2. The Coptic verb ξι may be understood as “receive” or “take” (Crum 747b). Thus, on grammatical grounds and within the wider context of the text in which there is an absence of sacramental agents except for Christ, we judge the above translation to be more accurate.

The quotation uses the language of reception, common to early

7. Origen, *Commentary on John* 2,30–31: “those who have been taken up by Christ into his baptism have been taken up into his death and buried with him, and with him they will rise from the dead on the third day. . . . When therefore you receive the mystery of the third day [baptism], the Lord himself will begin to guide you and show you the way of salvation”; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 20, explains that the recipient of baptism, through the sacramental reenactment of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, participates in the redemption these events accomplished. For discussion, see “Sacraments,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. E. Ferguson (New York/London: Garland, 1990), 811–15.


9. Isenberg, 197.

sacramental theology. We shall discuss the verb that usually means “to receive (sacraments)” in Gos Phil shortly. In that context, we cite an example from The Apostolic Tradition in which the reception of sacraments is discussed. In our translation of Gos Phil 77,2–7, the reception of elements: bread, cup, or anything else, are “made holy” by the person that receives them. This is in complete contrast to Isenberg’s translation in which “the priest consecrates” the elements received. Second or third-century discussions of sacramental theology are few in number. Thus it is hard to weigh in external evidence. We shall, however, consider some early texts.

Although the Didache has been dated as early as the first century, it is probably safer to view it as reflecting second century practices. Didache 9–10 describes the Eucharist.11 Words of the prayer for the cup and the bread are voiced in the first person plural: “We give thanks to thee, our Father. . . .” As for the elements themselves, the bread and wine are holy. Only the baptized may eat or drink of the Eucharist. At 14,1, the eucharist is described as a sacrifice. It is not entirely clear if anyone presides at the eucharist. Justin Martyr reports in the mid-second century that “portions of the Eucharistic bread and wine and water” are carried away to those who are absent.12 This implies that the elements are already consecrated and not made such by their reception. According to Justin, the president offers up praise and gives thanks. As for the elements themselves, he says, “We do not receive them as ordinary food and drink. But just as our Savior Jesus Christ was made flesh through the word of God, and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we are taught that the food which has been eucharistized by the word of prayer from him (that food which by process of assimilation nourishes our flesh and blood) is the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus.”13

These two early texts indicate that in its use of the language of reception and its interest in identifying what is holy, Gos Phil conforms to known early sacramental discussions. However, its understanding of the transformation of the elements through reception, according to the translation we have proposed, is distinctive. Neither the Didache nor Justin answer all questions we might have about the sacraments or how they were understood. For example, while prophets pray at length, it is not clear whether there are sacramental agents in the Didache. In

11. This assertion contradicts an earlier view argued, e.g., by J.-P. Audet, La Didache, Instructions des Apôtres (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1958).
conclusion, we can say that Gos Phil proposes a particular understand-
ing of the effects of reception upon the elements, and that this
understanding does not seem to be found elsewhere. This contribu-
tion needs to be recognized in discussions of sacramental theology. Reception
of a sacrament in Gos Phil not only makes someone holy but also
accomplishes a transformation from a Christian to a Christ (67,26–27).

NON-SACRAMENTAL VERBS OF CREATION

Although Gos Phil understands the action of sacraments in light of
generative verbs, these same verbs may appear in non-sacramental
contexts. For example, the verb “to make” occurs in the opening
sentence of the gospel: “A Hebrew makes another Hebrew, and such a
person is called ‘proselyte.’ But a proselyte does not make another
proselyte. . . .” We propose that “making” here is to be understood as an
allusion to the “making” of creation in Gen 1.26. In the Greek
translation of Gen 1.26, God exhorts the “making” (ποιησις) of humanity.
“Making” is the same as “creating.” Note that God here is a single
parent and that God’s creation is made from unlike elements to produce
life. In Gos Phil there must be two parents, and they must be like
elements, neither of which has been formed from dissimilar elements.
Thus, in Gos Phil the verb “to make” is a form of generation: “A
Hebrew makes a Hebrew” (51,29) and “the father makes a son”
(58,22). However, what is begotten or made remains a son, and can only
beget brothers, not sons. There is one son, however, who does have an
ability both to beget and to create: the son of man.14 He received this
double power from God (81,19–23).

Nevertheless, making is only one form of creation within the semantic
world of Gos Phil. “Joining” is another. For example, the verb “to join”
describes the linking of an unclean spirit with demons (66,2). We
propose that this verb too is to be understood in light of creation. To
understand this, again we go back to Genesis. In Gen 2.24, the man is
“joined” to the woman. Thus, the verbs “to make” (ποιησις) and “to join”
(κοιλλάω) are read as verbs of creation through the prism of Hebrew
Scriptures. In each case, they describe a lateral relationship. A Hebrew
“makes” another Hebrew but cannot beget. A father “makes” a son but

14. We use lowercase, although we recognize the distinctive use of the phrase in
christological discussions. Since the phrase is found here and in, e.g., The Sophia of
Jesus Christ (NHC III.4 & BG 8502,3) in a context of generation, a gendered reading
of son of man seems appropriate. Christology is a subject for further investigation in
our text.
the son cannot beget. For generation—a vertical relationship—*Gos Phil* makes use of the verbs “to beget” and “to create.” These effect not lateral but vertical movement. What is the point of this distinction?

According to *Gos Phil*, the identity of the Hebrews is “the apostles and [the] apostolic people” (55,27–28). At 52,21, the author speaks in the first person plural to include himself among his readers and to draw the distinction between Hebrews (“when we had only our mother”) and Christians (“when we became Christians we had both father and mother”). Thus, “making” refers to the activity of those whose origins are from a single parent: Hebrews, or a human father. Reproducing on the basis of one parent means something like cloning rather than creating. One can of course continue to clone. But to be generative, that is, to give the power itself to generate, one must switch from horizontal activity (“making” or “joining”) to vertical (“begetting”). The texts identify a mode of generation or conversion: “Christians” are children of two parents, not one. Accordingly, we propose that *Gos Phil*’s use of the verbs “to make” and “to join” deliberately alludes to and critiques the single-parenting of the creator God and the (ineffective) union of man with woman in Genesis. Like a clone, what is created by a single parent can only be a reflection of that parent. In contrast, proper sacramental action guarantees effective creation.

“Making” by itself is impermanent. This can be seen by analogy from *Gos Phil*’s use of the verb “to exist.” For example, at 63,8, glass decanters and earthenware jugs exist “by means of fire.” But, the text continues, “if glass decanters break, they are remade, for they exist by means of a breath” (Coptic: ṯΔλ), i.e., they are blown. “If earthenware jugs break, however, they are destroyed, for they came into being without a breath” (63,9–11).  The pot is thrown, not blown. The potter’s wheel brings into being existence without breath. But the connection between manner of making and durability has to do with breath here and with intention elsewhere in *Gos Phil*. For example, in 75,2–14, the one who made the world wanted to make it imperishable and immortal, but he failed to achieve his desire, “for imperishability does not exist among things but among children.”

15. Isenberg’s translation has “made” for the verb we translate as “exist.” It is not the same verb translated as “make” in passages cited earlier. For “remade” he translates “done over.” We prefer “remade” as the Coptic verb here is a habitual tense of the verb translated as “make” earlier.

16. The issue of desire and will is a topic for further investigation.
from the potter’s wheel. Begetting or creating children from two, on the other hand, is long-lasting.

Just as the verb “to make” alludes to Gen 1.26, so the (passive) verb “to be formed” at 60,34\(^{17}\) not only alludes to the forming of Adam by God at Gen 2.7,\(^{18}\) and 15, but traces the origins of evil to this very act. Adultery and murder are the consequence of God’s forming Adam from two dissimilar entities, the dust of the ground and the breath of life. At 61,10–11 this is made explicit: “Every act of sexual intercourse which has occurred between those unlike one another is adultery.” According to Gos Phil, Adam’s sons are begotten from dissimilar entities. One of these was begotten in adultery, whether as the child of the serpent and Eve or as the child of Eve who was thinking of the serpent, her adulterous partner, while she had sexual relations with Adam. Thus the offspring of this coupling became a murderer. The text implies a theory of eugenics: were Adam begotten from two similar entities, rather than “formed” from two dissimilar ones, his seed would be “well-born” (ἐγεννής).

81,25–35 describes in some detail the distinction between creating and begetting. The text presupposes that both created and begotten entities are reproducing: what is created has the ability to create and what is begotten has the ability to beget. Even if a created entity should be said to beget, the product is simply a creature rather than a child. We have already seen that the world was created. How is one to distinguish between what is created and what is begotten? By the mode of generation: creating, like pottery, is done openly, while begetting, like sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, belongs in the private domain. While worldly marriage (which presumably entails “begetting”) anticipates the true mystery of unpolluted marriage, creating possesses a visible, public quality that connects it to things of this world.

Gos Phil goes to great lengths to correct mistaken assumptions: it is not the state of creatureliness but rather the mode of begetting that guarantees the capacity to beget. What about the person of Jesus? It is not who he is but how he was begotten that explains his nature. Unlike Adam and his sons, Cain and Abel, Jesus is begotten and not a created entity. It is simply not correct to say of his mode of generation: “Mary conceived by the Spirit that is holy” (55,23–24). People believing such statements (found in the New Testament) are in error, for “when did a woman ever conceive by a woman?”

17. Here, Isenberg translates the Greek verb πλάσσω appearing in the Coptic as “to create.” This translation is better kept for the Coptic verb ἐκοινωνήσα, as he does at 52,19.
Gos Phil speaks of conception only twice. The first passage is the passage above refuting the conception of Jesus from Mary and the Holy Spirit. The second speaks of the perfect who conceive and give birth by a kiss. Conception is received through the grace residing in fellow believers (59,2–6). Here, the traditional image of female (biological) receptivity, “receive conception,” describes the pregnancy of the perfect ones. These perfect ones must be like each other, that is, of the same species. If this is the case, is not Mary like the Spirit—female in gender just as the “Spirit that is holy” is of the feminine gender in Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac? The issue, perhaps, is not that like cannot “receive conception” from like for this is exactly what the perfect do. Of course there may be variations among the perfect to which Gos Phil only alludes. What is under discussion is the mode of Jesus’ conception. The reference by Jesus at the end of this paragraph to “My [father who is in heaven]” rather than simply “My father” must mean, the text argues, that he has another father (55,34). This could refer to the passage describing the coming into being of Jesus’ body from the union of the father of all to the virgin (71,4–13). We will return to this passage shortly. In the meantime, we conclude this provisional discussion of non-sacramental verbs of creation by noting in Gos Phil that those who believe Mary conceived Jesus by the Spirit that is holy misconstrue the nature of Jesus’ conception. Like the Christians for whom Gos Phil was written, Jesus “had both father and mother” (52,24–25). In fact, he had a double conception and begetting. At stake however is a larger issue, the transformation of the believer from Christian to Christ, which derives its shape from the manner of Jesus’ conception and begetting. In any case, the verb “to conceive” indeed uses the traditional image of female receptivity. While the image of receptivity is not foreign to sacramental language, Gos Phil uses the Coptic verb xi (“receive”) extensively, and understands it within a gender-specific context.

GENERATIVE VERBS AND SACRAMENTS

xi (“to receive”) is used in a general sense of inheritance. For instance, in 81,19–22 the child receives from the parent an ability to create or beget; in 67,10–12 the world receives truth through types and images; in 62,5–6 whoever has received something other than the Lord is still a Hebrew. In the sexual sense described in 59,5 above and at 82,12 where the bride

19. See Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition 26,11: “But let everyone be careful to receive the blessed bread from the hand of the presbyter or deacon” (Festinet autem omnis siue a praesbytero siue a diacone accipere benedictionem de manu).
can receive sperm from another man, $x\iota$ is an auxiliary verb meaning “to receive something” (conception or sperm), but its widest usage occurs in sacramental contexts where the verb stresses reception and dependence. At 72,3 and 64,26–7 baptism or the Holy Spirit at baptism is received; at 85,27 chrism will be received; at 57,7 and 81,19–22 food and drink is received at the eucharist. In all these passages $x\iota$ is used.

_Gos Phil_ argues that resurrection, like baptism, must be received while one is still alive (73,1–7), in the same way that one must receive the bridal chamber here, in this realm, or one will not be able to receive it in the other place (86,5–7). The recipient receives from the Father who gives everything: the resurrection, the light, the cross and the holy spirit in the bridal chamber (75,19–22). A son of the bridal chamber will receive the light (86,4–5). Thus, the language of passive receptivity moves from one powerless receptacle to another, from a woman to a child. One must demonstrate the ability to receive before one can give (75,11–14).

Crum’s _Coptic Dictionary_ (778b) lists the verb $j\pi\o$ as having two meanings: “to beget, (give) birth, or bear” and “to acquire,” and this verb also appears in sacramental contexts. Both these meanings occur in _Gos Phil_, and Isenberg’s full range of translations, “sire, beget, give birth, produce, bring forth, acquire, attain, have” needs to be kept in mind when examining the place of generative language in explicating sacraments. To be sure, context helps to determine nuances of meaning. Layton is helpful here when at 56,19 he translates “If one does not first get resurrection . . . ,” and then adds a telling footnote to “get”: “or: produce.” “Get” carries a different connotation from “produce,” at least in modern English!

A connection between $x\iota$ and $j\pi\o$ confirms that the author of _Gos Phil_ uses a range of meanings for the verb “to receive.” The text describes the necessity of rebirth through the image,

Not only must those who engender ($x\pi\o$) the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit do so, but also <those who> have engendered ($x\pi\o$) them for you. If one does not engender ($x\pi\o$) them, the name too will be taken from

20. Isenberg mistranslates at 75,11–13, “Nothing will be able to receive imperishability if it does not first become a son.” There is no verb “to receive.” The Coptic reads in English thus: “For imperishability doesn’t exist among things but among children.”

21. Layton, “The Gospel according to Philip,” 332. Isenberg reverses himself at 75,26–27 where he translates three instances of the same verb by three different English verbs: sire, beget, bring forth. All other translators keep the same translation for the Coptic verb.
that person. But one receives (ἐπιστεύεται) them in the chrism of [...] the power of the cross. (67,13–24)22

Because the text concludes “this person is no longer a Christian but a Christ” (67,26), it is possible to connect three events: the engendering of the names, the creation of spiritual offspring, and the resulting identification with Christ.23 What one receives, one can in turn generate, and even give the generated to others. Receiving and engendering belong together: parent and sibling occupy a lateral relationship to each other, in that they have both passively received and actively engendered. As the above passage shows, it is even possible to generate the spiritual children on behalf of someone else. One may, for example, “create” children in order to bequeath them to fellow-believers.

“Faith receives, love gives,” states 62,1. As we have just seen, faith is the prerequisite for the receiving of names; next, love produces the giving or dispensing. The Greek subjunctive indicating purpose makes the sequence clear: believe so as to receive; love so as to give (62, 2–3). In the preceding passage (67), we might see the reception of chrism as an intermediary stage. In the present passage, receiving represents a transitional stage toward giving.

64,22–26 presents a negative example of reception, in the context of baptism:

If anyone goes down to the water and comes up without having received anything and says, “I am a Christian,” he has borrowed the name at interest. But if he receive the holy spirit, he has the name as a gift.

Those who falsely claim to have received the holy spirit would be incapable of dispensing the name to others. Whether this is an intentional false claim or merely lack of discernment is unclear from the text; the claimant is responsible for the consequences, interest, and presumably, an obligation to return the name in any case. Since the name is not theirs, they cannot transmit it to others. Gos Phil implies that such persons lack faith, for real faith would genuinely receive, as 62,1 points out.

The pattern of “receiving so as to dispense” also appears in the discussion of resurrection. As has been shown, it is necessary for believers to generate the resurrection. In 73,3–5, a discussion of the time-

22. Here, we translate ἐπιστεύεται by “engender.” For the three instances of this verb in the paragraph, Isenberg uses “produce” in the first two instances and then “acquire” once.

sequence of the resurrection makes it clear that if people do not receive
the resurrection while still alive, when they die they will receive nothing.
Generating and receiving the resurrection convey an ability to actualize
the resurrection in the bridal chamber. The consistently gendered
imagery is taken from a female viewpoint, because the participants
receive (the seed) and then engender or give birth to the new spiritual
child who is also one’s own sibling.

The Coptic verb ⲡⲟⲩⲣ (“to unite”) is at the heart of Gos Phil’s
understanding of sacraments. It is the only verb used to describe the
sacramental effect of eucharist, baptism, and the bridal chamber as
uniting originally separate elements. Moreover, it occurs in two passages
that might well be liturgical fragments. Even though these passages are
embedded without preface or rubric into their present context, there are
internal and external arguments to read them as alluding to words used
in sacramental contexts.

The first instance of the verb ⲡⲟⲩⲣ occurs at 58,10–14. Isenberg and
Layton both separate this paragraph from the preceding material
unnecessarily. Jesus speaks.

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 as being the images.24

How should we translate the Greek loan word ἐὑχαριστία in the first
line? Most scholars (Isenberg, Cartlidge and Dungan, Wilson, Schenke,
Layton) translate: “He said on that day in the thanksgiving . . .” and
some add the Greek ἐὑχαριστία in parenthesis. Layton translates “in the
prayer of thanksgiving” and adds a footnote with the Greek. Yet at
63,21 and 67,29 these same scholars translate the same word as
“eucharist.” We see no reason not to do the same at 58,11.25 The words
spoken by Jesus conform to the pattern of the eucharistic sacrament. The
first line is an anamnesis, a recollection of sacramental action: “You who
have . . .,” and the second an epiclesis, the invocation of the spirit for the
efficacy of the sacrament: “Unite . . . .” External arguments support a
reading of this text as a liturgical fragment. The third century text, the

24. Isenberg translates the same verb as “join” in l.1 and “unite” in l.2. Other
scholars translate “join” in both clauses. We have reserved this for the Greek verb
κολλάω.

25. One can only speculate about the avoidance of this translation: doubts about
the legitimacy of Christian Gnostic sacraments or the Protestant sensibilities of some
scholars. Segelberg, a published liturgical scholar, translates: “He said that day in
thanksgiving (or in the Eucharist),” 194.
Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, records the dual aspect of the canon in a fuller form:

Taking bread <and> making eucharist [i.e. giving thanks] to Thee said:
   Take, eat . . . likewise also the cup, saying: This is my blood . . .
When ye do this [ye] do my “anamnesis . . . .”
And we pray that thou wouldst send thy Holy Spirit upon the oblation of thy holy Church,
   Thou wouldst grant to all who partake to be united [to Thee] that they may be fulfilled
   with the Holy Spirit for the confirmation of <their> faith in truth.26

In Gos Phil, what has been united is perfect light and holy spirit. The text itself indicates that the perfect light is “put on” through baptism in a form of union; thus the baptized can be said to be “the perfect.” Being clothed in the perfect light enables one to evade the powers of the lower world (70,5–9). Christ’s soteriological function (whether in eucharist or baptism or by means of the resurrection) is to overcome the original separation, which is that of woman from man, a separation resulting in death (70,11–12). Their reunification is accomplished sacramentally.

In the sacramental understanding of Gos Phil, eucharist is inextricably linked to baptism and resurrection. It is difficult to understand the text if one adopts categories from discussions of sacramental theology that treat these as separate.27 Similarly, early Christian baptismal texts like I Peter in the New Testament understood baptism’s soteriological function as a request to God for support by the resurrection and ascension of Jesus (I Peter 3.21–22).

SACRAMENTS IN GOS PHIL

A general review of sacramental theology in Gos Phil will assist us in understanding what might be a liturgical fragment at 58,10–14. The author of Gos Phil opens discussion of the resurrection with exposition

of Paul’s statement (I Cor 15.50), “Flesh [and blood shall] not inherit the kingdom [of God].” What will inherit is that which belongs to Jesus and his blood, that is, a resurrection of those who have received the flesh and the blood, the word and the spirit, of Jesus as food, drink and clothing (56,26–57,9). To maintain this teaching, the text argues against two other positions: that there is no resurrection of the flesh and that flesh alone will rise. In the lines, “It is necessary to rise in this flesh, since everything exists in it,” only the flesh of Jesus is meant. One encounters the flesh of Jesus only in the mediated sacraments of material existence, just as Truth does not appear naked but in transformed “types” (symbols) and images (67,9–11).

Herein lies the importance of sacraments for Gos Phil. The character of Truth, refracted though it be, conveys to this world access to salvation. Enacting sacraments in this world enables an individual to put on Christ the perfect human, to be clothed in the resurrection, to be united with the image in the bridal chamber. Each sacrament connects this material existence to the other world: what we sow in the world, which is winter, we may reap in summer, the eternal realm (52,25–30).

Gos Phil continues to reflect on the eucharist. Christ, the perfect human, brought bread from heaven to nourish humans. So too, when a human receives and eats the bread, he or she becomes holy. The one who receives is to provide; the one who is nourished must nourish. But the world contains many kinds of food and many human and animal forms requiring nourishment. As an aid to discernment, Gos Phil relates the parable of the householder. A householder had every conceivable thing: child, slave, bread, cattle, corn, barley, grass, chaff, meat or acorn. How was he to match the food to the hungry? Being wise, “he knew what the food of each one was.” Thus he served grass to the cattle, bones to the dog, acorns to the pigs, and bread to the children. Likewise, the discerning disciple will know how to feed the animals, give elementary instruction to the slaves and a complete meal to the children (80,24–81,14).


The analogy to eucharist is through the bread given to the child. Eating bread and drinking wine connects like to like: it establishes not just inheritance but identity. A person without a spiritual identity sees things without becoming them. But in the sacramental understanding of Gos Phil, “You . . . became those things. You saw the spirit, you became spirit. You saw Christ, you became Christ” (61,20–36). Thus, the analogy of putting on clothing describes becoming identical with the thing or person. It is a way of coming into one’s inheritance, of finding one’s true self.31

At this point, the possibility of understanding the language of uniting within a sacramental context appears. As noted, sacraments exist in themselves as refractions of truth. To receive them and thereby become part of their reflected truth overcomes separation and restores unity. 69,4–14 discusses the appropriateness of being baptized in the double elements of light and water. No one can see what is reflected either in water or in a mirror without light. Nor can one see in light without water or mirror. The suggested liturgical eucharistic fragment in 58,10–14 (cited above) may speak of a double reality: the accomplished union of the perfect one (the Gnostic) with the spirit or blood of Christ, effected in the eucharist (line 1), and the forthcoming union of the recipients (“the images”) with the beings of the other aeon, joined in the imperative “Unite” (line 2).

As the separation of elements is overcome through receiving the identity of one’s true self in baptism and eucharist, so the primal rift between Adam and Eve heals in the sacrament of the bridal chamber.32 Although the separation of Eve from Adam caused adultery, murder, and death, now the woman (wife) is united to her husband in the bridal chamber.33 The living united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated. But how does Christ repair the original separation and offer life to those who have died?

This question is particularly interesting in light of the interpretation Gos Phil gives to the words of the dying Jesus on the cross, “My God, my God, why, O Lord, have you forsaken me?” According to Gos Phil, these words are said specifically to indicate that “he separated from that

31. See pp. 2, 4, 10.
32. Borchert, An Analysis, 268, discusses the sacramental aspect of union and its use as a soteriological metaphor.
33. Borchert, An Analysis, 273–74, likewise sees the unity of marriage overcoming the separation of male and female in Gen 1.26–27 and the alienation of Adam and Eve (Gen 2.7, 20–24; 3.1–20).
Thus Christ experiences a separation similar to that of Adam from Eve. Just as Adam and Eve’s separation is overcome in sacrament, so also is Jesus’ separation overcome. First, a fragmentary passage (70,34–71,3) interprets the baptism of Jesus as indicating that since Jesus was begotten twice and anointed twice, so, presumably, can others be begotten and anointed twice. Baptized, anointed, and redeemed, Jesus redeems others. Then follows the key passage and second liturgical fragment (71,3–15):

Indeed it is fitting to speak of a mystery: the Father of the All united with the virgin who came down and fire made light for him. On that day the great bridal chamber was revealed. Because of this his body came into being on that day. He left the bridal chamber as what came into being from bridegroom and bride. This is the way Jesus established everything in it through these; so it is fitting for each one of the disciples to enter into his rest.

In the first place, the term “mystery” signifies the sacramental understanding of ritual in the spoken word. Next, we note the singular phrase “on that day.” It occurs only three times in Gos Phil: twice here and once in the other liturgical fragment at 58,10: “He said on that day in the Eucharist. . . .” Recurrence of the phrase supports the understanding that both passages allude to the same thing, a ritual. The phrase itself sounds a temporal note. In a broader narrative context, such a phrase would seem unremarkable: it occurs, for example, in the narrative context of Mark 4:35: “He said to them on that day. . . .” Lacking a narrative context, the phrase in Gos Phil at 58,10 and 71,6 and 10 suggests two distinct uses: the spoken origin of the eucharistic ritual at 58,10 and the effects of the rite of the bridal chamber at 71,6 and 10, the revelation of the great bridal chamber and the coming into being of his body.

The different use of the same phrase in two separate liturgical contexts with two distinct meanings is one argument, we think, against collapsing the ritual of the bridal chamber into the ritual of baptism. Thomassen, for example, argues concerning 70,34–71,15 that “at the Jordan Jesus himself was reborn, as well as united with the Father, revealing the bridal

34. Again, we translate the verb πορεύομαι “to separate” with Wilson and Till. Isenberg’s translation “for he had departed from that place” completely severs all connection to the separate/unite verbal dyad.

35. Our translation of 70,34–71,3 differs from that of Isenberg. For example, he obscures the repetition of the phrase “on that day” by translating the second instance “on that very day.” The phrase is identical in Coptic.
chamber.” 36 In this reading, Jesus is “the virgin who came down.” In our reading, the heavenly Mary has this role. As there is an earthly father and a heavenly father, so there is an earthly mother and a heavenly mother. To be sure, elements of uniting and receiving are common to sacramental language in Gos Phil, but this does not compel us to read the text in such a way that all sacraments are collapsed into baptism. One might ask whether such interpretations are seeking to fit Gos Phil into the glass slipper not just of “respectable” sacramental theology but of Valentinian sacramental understanding found particularly in the Tripartate Tractate (NHC I,5) 127,25 wherein baptism is equivalent to redemption. After all, Gos Phil itself distinguishes the sacraments: “The Lord did everything in a sacrament, a baptism and a chrism, and a eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber” (67,27–31).

To return to the passage under discussion, we follow Wilson’s proposal to understand 71,3–15 as the emerging of the body of Jesus in the manner of one who has come forth from the bridegroom and the bride. 37 67,4–5 describes the genesis between the son (child) of the bridal chamber and water, fire and light. Thus, the bridal chamber is the place of union between both the father and the virgin and the elements of fire and light. The term “rest” (Ἀναπαύσις) also alludes, for us paradoxically, to generative activity. For 72,8–10 describes the offspring of a man coming into being “in a moment of rest” (Ἀναπαύσις). 38 The passage exhorts the disciples to engage in generative activity. The last part of the text speaks of a child of the bride chamber receiving light and also describes the bride chamber as the “holy of holies” from which the access-preventing veil has now been rent.

CONCLUSION

To note generative verbs as describing sacraments in Gos Phil is to document gendered language in a ritual context. Sacraments overcome an earlier division by means of uniting separate elements. Community members receive sacraments in the same way that a woman receives

38. Isenberg translates “in a moment of ease.” Elsewhere, even in the following paragraph discussing that name of children of the bridal chamber, he translates Αναπαύσις by “rest.” Various renderings of Αναπαύσις make it hard to establish one consistent meaning or to see connections between passages.
conception. To receive sacraments carries with it the responsibility of generating others as new members of the community.

Such an exposition provides an alternative to the spiritualizing (and influential) interpretations of Gos Phil, as perpetrated by Peter Brown, for example. Against them one can only propose concrete readings and specific translations of the text: Brown sets Gos Phil not only into a Valentinian but also into an encratite context by prefacing his discussion with quotations from the Nag Hammadi tractates Testimony of Truth and The Sophia of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the passage from Gos Phil 83,18–21 (“Let each one of us dig down after the root of evil that is within one, and let one pluck it out of one’s heart from the root”) is followed in Brown’s explication by a dramatic reference to self-castration by a young man in the apocryphal Acts of John. Juxtaposing the two passages, Brown claims that the young man’s words, “There you have the pattern and cause of all this!” give corporeal substance to Gos Phil’s “root of evil” in 83,18–21.40

Brown’s attempt to read Gos Phil against an encratite background at least points correctly to the hortatory language of the text. What does the text exhort its readers to do? Gos Phil’s attention to the verbs “to make” and “to join” as allusions to Hebrew Scriptures is distinctive. They form the preliminary understandings of a series of connections whose fullest expression takes shape in the union of the bridal chamber. The readers of the gospel recognize the allusions to Genesis and place them in a context of “seeing through a glass darkly.” But the movement from the verbs “to make” and “to join” to the unity of the bridal chamber does not mark a progression from the material to the spiritual. Rather, these verbs form a whole pattern intended to let generative language appear at the heart of sacramental understanding. One can after all (re)produce in many ways. How one generates depends upon one’s own genesis.

In the view of Gos Phil most people are ignorant of their origins. Gos Phil wishes to overcome such ignorance. Proper generation amounts to conversion, and conversion effects (re)generation. It entails a new level of knowledge, one that emphasizes solidarity. Those who have self-knowledge are able to enjoy their inheritance (76,19–22). Anointing in the bridal chamber transfers the inheritance, the resurrection, the light, the cross, the holy spirit (74,19–21). All this the father (parent) gives to the

child, and the resulting identity between the father and the child is the kingdom of heaven. This is the most succinct statement in the entire text regarding what identity between receiver and dispenser might look like. The “succession of chrismation”\textsuperscript{41} evolves thus: the father anoints the child, the child the apostles, the apostles “us” (74,16–17).

Is awareness of Gnostic sacraments and their function a private matter for the author of Gos Phil? Far from it: knowledge implies social responsibility:

The one who is really free through knowledge is a slave because of love for those who have not yet been able to attain to the freedom of knowledge. Love never calls something its own . . . it never says “This is yours” or “This is mine,” [but “All these] are yours.” Spiritual love is wine and fragrance. All those who anoint themselves with it take pleasure in it. While those who are anointed are present, those nearby also profit from (the fragrance). (77,26–78,4)

This text clearly speaks of two groups of people, and in what follows, the anointed (those who are spiritually advanced) let their fragrance waft onto those who are standing nearby. The author of Gos Phil acknowledges the responsibility of the anointed for the others. The text seems to frown on the possibility that the anointed might withdraw from the unanointed, an act that would leave the unfortunate ones in “their bad odor” (78,8). An allusion to the parable of the Good Samaritan follows to undergird the duty of responsibility towards those less adept. The text emphasizes the oil as healer and as a scent in the community’s atmosphere.

Although the Gos Phil knows of a “tribe of the priesthood” who will enter with the high priest beyond the veil, according to the eschatological section at the conclusion of the text (85,3–5), we do not see this as a reference to other sacramental agents. Rather, the sacramental agency of Christ alone, together with the language of receptivity, engendering, and giving out of love in imitatio Christi, obviates the need for other sacramental agents. It is important to acknowledge the seriousness of Gos Phil’s assertion that the “real” Christians are Christ. Far from exemplifying the language of a self-absorbed elite, Gos Phil points to the extraordinary depth and richness of sacramental thought in Valentinian Christianity.

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