

**Rescue for the Dead:  
The Posthumous Salvation of  
Non-Christians in Early  
Christianity**

*Jeffrey A. Trumbower*

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## RESCUE FOR THE DEAD

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FOR CHRIS

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## PREFACE

I first conceived the idea for this book in 1994 when Prof. Mark Kiley asked me to provide a new translation of and commentary on *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* 28–31 for a volume he was editing on prayer in the ancient world. As I studied this text, I was struck by Thecla's prayer to rescue the pagan Falconilla, and I wanted to know more about the context of her prayer and whether other early Christians had envisioned similar types of rescue for the non-Christian dead. So, first of all, I wish to thank Prof. Kiley and the other members of the "Prayer in the Greco-Roman World Group" of the Society of Biblical Literature for their inspiration and comments on the early stages of my research.

The next major phase of the work came during my 1998 sabbatical, when I was a fellow at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions. The bulk of the research was carried out during those months. Thanks are due to the Center's director, Prof. Larry Sullivan, and staff members Malgorzata Radziszewska-Hedderick and Janey Bosch for providing me with an excellent environment for research. I also appreciate the efforts of the staff at the Harvard Divinity School Library, Laura Whitney in particular, to secure for me whatever books I needed. While at Harvard, I had many fruitful conversations about the project with a number of scholars, including François Bovon, Annewies van den Hoek, Jon Levenson, Gary Anderson, Avriel Bar-Levav, and Gene McAfee. At the center, two of the fellows in particular made my life there a true home away from home: Lydia Nakashima Degarrod and Puneeta Kala. Even if this book had never been published, their enduring friendship would have made the time spent at Harvard worth all the effort.

After returning to my teaching duties in Vermont, St. Michael's College continued its generous support of this project through summer faculty development grants and resource acquisition. Special thanks go to the Inter-

library Loan staff here, who scrambled to find some very obscure material in a variety of languages. The dean of the college, John Peter Kenney, also a scholar of the early Christian world, provided a helpful sounding board for many of my ideas. I am in tremendous debt to my colleague in the St. Michael's Classics Department, Ron Begley. He generously gave of his time to help me with the translations of several previously untranslated Latin texts found in this volume. Any mistakes that remain are my own, but without his help, I could not have covered so wide a range of material. His contributions are acknowledged in the notes. My colleague Ray Patterson provided some much needed help on the early medieval period, and several of my students challenged me with intriguing insights and questions along the way. No one could ask for a better faculty mentor than Joseph Kroger; I wish to thank him for all the help and advice he has provided over the years. I also need to acknowledge the generous assistance of my neighbor Dawn Hill, who lives just up the road from us. She is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and she provided me with some of the resources on Mormon theology found in the introduction. My own Unitarian Universalist minister in Burlington, Gary Kowalski, has been a great dialogue partner for some of the ideas contained here, and he has also provided me several times with a public forum in the church to present and discuss my research.

As the manuscript began to take its final shape, I received a number of useful comments from readers, many of whose insights have been incorporated into the final product. In addition to the anonymous reviewers for Oxford, I am grateful to Alan F. Segal for his remarks and especially to David Brakke for his extensive commentary. David was able to see some of the larger implications of my work that I had not yet articulated fully, and for that, I am in his debt. Even though I have written this volume alone, the term "monograph" is hardly appropriate, since so many people have helped me along the way. Only I am responsible for the errors and omissions, but they can take much credit for whatever is of value here.

Some of the material on the *Apocalypse of Peter* in relation to Thecla and Perpetua will be published in E. J. Yarnold, ed., *Studia Patristica Vol. XXXVI* (Leuven: Peeters), and is reprinted here by permission. In addition, portions of chapter 3 appeared earlier in my contribution to Mark Kiley, ed., *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 280–84, reprinted here by permission. Biblical passages in English are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

No one can undertake an extensive project such as this without the help of family and friends. As I acknowledged in my first book, which was dedicated to them, I continue to appreciate the support of my parents, Jerrold S. and Anita T. Trumbower. My two sisters, Ann T. Peters and Jean T. Hartsaw, also have followed my scholarly pursuits with great interest and enthusiasm. My friends Richard Thorngren and John Olson helped keep me grounded on

earth while my mind was off exploring the underworld. Finally, this book is dedicated to my life-partner Christopher French, who had to endure months of separation while I was at Harvard, and even worse, years of preoccupation on my part with rescue for the dead. Through it all he has provided a loving home to return to, along with encouragement and inspiration.

*Colchester, Vermont*  
*February 2001*

J. A. T.

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# CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS xv

INTRODUCTION 3

- I GREEK, ROMAN, AND JEWISH SUCCOR FOR THE DEAD 10
- Methodological Considerations 10
  - Archaeology of Grave Sites 12
  - Epitaphs 14
  - Feeding the Dead 16
  - Providing a Proper Burial 19
  - Rescue for the Dead in a “Salvation” Context 23
- 2 THE NEW TESTAMENT AND OTHER EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE 33
- Paul 34
  - Luke 16:19–31 and 2 Clement 8 41
  - 1 Peter 3:19–20 and 4:6 44
  - Shepherd of Hermas*, *Similitudes* 9.16 and *Epistula Apostolorum* 27 47
  - Apocalypse of Peter* 14:1–4 and *Sibylline Oracles* 2:330–38 49
  - Summary 55
- 3 THECLA’S PRAYER FOR FALCONILLA 56
- The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in the Context of the *Acts of Paul* 56
  - Thecla as Woman and Confessor 63

	Falconilla as Dream Figure and Recipient of Grace	66
	Later Interpretations of the Thecla/Falconilla Tradition	70
4	PERPETUA'S PRAYER FOR DINOCRATES	76
	The Historical Perpetua	76
	Events Leading up to the Dinocrates Visions	78
	The Dinocrates Visions	80
	Events Following the Dinocrates Visions	85
	The New Prophecy Movement, Perpetua, and Dinocrates	87
	Later Interpretations of the Dinocrates Visions	89
5	JESUS' DESCENT TO THE UNDERWORLD	91
	Jesus' Descent	91
	Posthumous Rescue for Ancient Righteous Ones	92
	An Offer of Salvation for All the Dead	95
	Varying Opinions in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries	102
	The <i>Gospel of Nicodemus</i>	105
6	POSTHUMOUS PROGRESS AND UNIVERSAL SALVATION	109
	Gnostic Speculations on Posthumous Enlightenment and Reincarnation	110
	Origen	113
	Gregory of Nyssa	119
	Later History of Universalism in the East	122
7	AUGUSTINE'S REJECTION OF POSTHUMOUS SALVATION FOR NON-CHRISTIANS	126
	Antecedents to Augustine	126
	Views of the Early Augustine	128
	Augustine's Rejection of Universal Salvation	130
	Interpreting Jesus' Descent to Hell	131
	The Debate with Vincentius Victor over Perpetua and Dinocrates	133
	The Mature Augustine	137
8	GREGORY THE GREAT'S PRAYER FOR TRAJAN	141
	Gregory's <i>Dialogues</i>	142
	The Gregory/Trajan Story in East and West	143

Trajan, Falconilla, and Posthumous Salvation in West and East	146
Trajan and Falconilla at the Council of Ferrare/Florence through the Present Day	151
CONCLUSIONS	154
NOTES	157
BIBLIOGRAPHY	177
INDEX OF ANCIENT SOURCES	191
INDEX OF MODERN AUTHORS	200
GENERAL INDEX	204

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers*  
ANRW *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*  
API *Acts of Paul*  
APT *Acts of Paul and Thecla*  
CCL *Corpus christianorum, series latina*  
DNOA *Augustine, De natura et origine animae*  
GCS *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei  
Jahrhunderte*  
JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*  
JTS *Journal of Theological Studies*  
KJV *King James Version of the Bible*  
LAB *Pseudo-Philo, Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*  
LCL *Loeb Classical Library*  
NHC *Nag Hammadi Codex*  
NPNF *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*  
NRSV *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*  
NTA *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher  
NTS *New Testament Studies*  
OCTD *Augustine, On the Care to be Taken for the Dead*  
OTP *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth  
PGM *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne  
PL *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne  
PPF *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*  
VC *Vigiliae Christianae*

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RESCUE FOR THE DEAD

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## INTRODUCTION

Christianity is a religion of salvation in which believers have always anticipated some type of postmortem bliss. This belief in salvation for the faithful has usually meant non-salvation for others, variously imagined as eternal torment, alienation from God, or annihilation at some point after death. A self-understanding as a set-apart community of the saved or at least the potentially saved has been a hallmark of Christian communities since their earliest days, and the Christian imagination in the West has usually drawn a sharp boundary at death, following this general principle: If an individual did not join up with the saved community during this life, joining it after death would be impossible. This book examines how and why death came to be perceived as such a firm boundary of salvation chiefly by analyzing exceptions to this general principle from ancient Christianity. It finds that the principle itself was slow to develop and not universally accepted in the Christian movement's first four hundred years. In fact, only in the West was this principle definitively articulated, due in large part to the work and influence of Augustine. Many early Christians were able to retain their sense of chosenness and their sense of God's justice while allowing for the possibility of posthumous salvation for non-Christians. Many others argued vehemently on the other side, and this volume documents the development of that conflict and its resolution in the East and West.

Two examples from American history serve to illustrate what it can mean when a Christian community envisions the possibility of posthumous salvation for non-Christians. These examples will help to define some of the issues at stake in the ancient sources. At the Shaker community in Lebanon, New York, 1842, the first "taking in of the Native Spirits" occurred, a phenomenon in which many Shaker faithful were possessed by the souls of dead Native Americans, as well as Eskimos and Hottentots. The practice soon spread to

other Shaker communities; the scene at a Sabbath meeting in Union Village, Ohio, 1843, was described by one Shaker as “inexpressible, to see so many persons possessed of the Indian spirits acting out all the barbarian gestures, and speaking the Indian language with the utmost fluency.”<sup>1</sup> Shaker author Isaac M. Youngs wrote in 1842 that one purpose of these possessions was to “administer the gospel, and faith and conviction to those rude spirits, who could receive the gospel by coming in contact with us, better than they could of the unbodied spirits.”<sup>2</sup> Youngs’s comment indicates that while posthumous salvation was possible for anyone at any time in Shaker theology, the process could be accelerated if the heathen spirit possessed a living believer. While the intermittent Shaker missions among living Native Americans had not had much success during the previous sixty years,<sup>3</sup> in the 1840s there was no shortage of dead Indian souls who wished to possess the bodies of living Shakers and thereby gain salvation. Shaker hymns attributed to these souls of the dead express their new-found beliefs: “In me canoe me will go to Mudder” (i.e., Shaker founder Mother Ann Lee [1742–1784], the female incarnation of Christ in Shaker theology); likewise, “Me want de joy to fill me soul and love what be de merry. Come holy power and through me roll, old bondage will me bury.”<sup>4</sup>

More recently, a different conception of posthumous salvation has been the cause of great controversy in the United States and Israel. It was reported in the *New York Times*, April 29, 1995, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would issue a new directive against its members’ posthumously baptizing victims of the Holocaust and would remove from church rolls the names of 380,000 Jews who had been so baptized.<sup>5</sup> The ritual entails “proxy baptism,” wherein a living Latter-day Saint is physically baptized with water for the benefit of a specifically named dead person. Ernest W. Michel, founder of the 100,000-member American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, and the son of posthumously baptized Holocaust victims, was instrumental in that group’s lodging a complaint with the church in November 1994.

The practice of proxy baptism was established by the Latter-day Saints prophet Joseph Smith (1805–1844), who was given a vision of his brother Alvin in heaven in January 1836, even though Alvin had died before the revelations that began the new sect.<sup>6</sup> Three months later, on April 3, 1836, the biblical prophet Elijah returned to earth as a resurrected being and appeared to Smith and Oliver Cowdery. This appearance restored a “sealing power of priesthood,” meaning, among other things, that now Smith and his followers were empowered to gain salvation for the dead by baptizing them vicariously.<sup>7</sup> Two biblical passages were key to this development. The first was Mal. 4:6 (3:24 in Hebrew), “He (Elijah) will turn the hearts of the children to their parents,” interpreted to mean that the living can now, with Elijah’s advent, help save the dead. Even more important was 1 Cor. 15:29 (KJV), “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all?

Why then are they baptized for the dead?"<sup>8</sup> More will be said about this famous passage below in chapter 2; here suffice to say that Paul's reference to vicarious baptism in ancient Corinth inspired Smith to revive it among the Latter-day Saints.

The year 1841 saw 6,818 carefully recorded proxy baptisms among the Saints at Nauvoo, Illinois. In addition to dead friends and relatives of the Mormons, the church's salvation was also offered to the dead American heroes John Adams, George and Martha Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and most of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.<sup>9</sup> In the church's theology, the dead who are posthumously baptized have until the general resurrection to accept or reject the salvation offered to them.<sup>10</sup> The idea is that eventually, all human beings who have ever lived will be offered salvation in this way, the work will continue into the millennial reign of Christ, and repentance after death will be possible for those who never heard the gospel while alive. This openness to posthumous repentance does not apply, however, to apostates from the church. According to the *Doctrine and Covenants* 71:31–36, revealed directly to Joseph Smith, those who once possessed the saving knowledge of God but then spurned it will endure eternal punishment. Also, those who had an opportunity to receive the gospel in life, but neglected it, may be saved posthumously from torment, but their reward and station will not be as great as those who became Latter-day Saints in this life.<sup>11</sup>

Baptism for the dead has been controversial in later Mormonism; the small Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints no longer practices it, while it is still well established in the much larger LDS church.<sup>12</sup> Church officials in 1995 claimed that the baptism of Holocaust victims was not sanctioned by the church and that some of the baptisms violated the church's "95-year rule," which forbids the baptizing of anyone born less than 95 years ago unless they are an ancestor of a living church member or unless family permission has been obtained.<sup>13</sup> Monte Brough, executive director of the church's family history department, said that church officials had directed members to stop baptizing Holocaust victims in 1991, "but the ban was violated by some over-zealous record gatherers who were motivated by love and compassion after visiting Holocaust museums and memorials."<sup>14</sup> Brough acknowledged the action could be perceived as insensitive. It is estimated that even after the 380,000 Holocaust victims are removed from the rolls, the official membership of the LDS church will stand at approximately 10 million living members (growing rapidly) and over 200 million dead ones baptized by proxy.<sup>15</sup>

As interesting as the Mormon ritual itself is the reaction of the living Jewish relatives of those baptized. They could have merely shrugged off the Saints' actions as inconsequential, but for many of these relatives, the posthumous "salvation" of the dead clearly violated the sacred memory of Holocaust victims. They had died for one particular religious and ethnic identity, only to

have that identity redefined by strangers after death. The church's "95-year rule" is an attempt to respect such sacred memories while there is still anyone alive left to care, while at the same time it allows for the widespread salvation of those born long ago. Everyone in the world who is interested in family history and genealogy has benefited from the enormous resources the Latter-day Saints have put into research for saving the dead.

From the surviving records of ancient Christianity there is no clear evidence of anything approaching the large-scale salvation of the dead practiced by Shakers and Latter-day Saints. A few ancient Christians speculated about an ultimate universal salvation, notably Origen (third century) and Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century, see chapter 6, this volume). Modern Universalists hold a similar view, but that is not what the Latter-day Saints and Shakers were and are about. In the Shaker examples above, the dead person him- or herself had to make known to the living a desire to be saved. In Mormon theology, only individuals named in the baptismal ceremony can be saved, and in addition, the dead individuals must assent to their posthumous baptism. Apostates were strongly excluded from posthumous salvation by Joseph Smith himself, helping to maintain identity and cohesiveness among the converts. Neither Shakers nor Mormons envision universal salvation, thereby preserving the special privilege of belonging to the chosen group, whether one joins in this life or after death. What do survive from ancient Christianity are isolated incidents of and occasional remarks about rescue for the dead, as the following two examples illustrate.

Two early Christian women, one fictional, the other historical, believing their own deaths to be imminent, prayed for the posthumous rescue of non-Christians. In *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a fictional Greek work of the second century C.E., the heroine Thecla has been condemned to the beasts, but before she is taken to the arena she prays for the posthumous salvation of Falconilla, the dead daughter of her recently acquired pagan friend Tryphaena.<sup>16</sup> In the story, Falconilla had appeared to her mother in a dream to request Thecla's salvific intercession. Similarly, in the early third-century Latin *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, one section purports to be a first-hand diary kept by Perpetua in prison, and in it she recounts a vision of her brother Dinocrates who years earlier had died at age seven of a facial tumor. In the vision he comes out of a dark place, thirsty, with the tumor still present on his face. A chasm separates him from his sister. Nowhere in the vision does Dinocrates speak, and while it is not clear whether Perpetua "saves" him for all eternity, she is at least able to improve his posthumous condition greatly. After her prayer she sees him playing, with the tumor gone, and able to drink.<sup>17</sup>

The fictional character Thecla and the real woman Perpetua have much in common. Though the first was a virgin and the second was married, both were recent converts to Christianity who defied their families and abandoned

the traditional obligations of Greek and Roman women in order to become and remain Christians. Both practiced their extraordinary intercessions before an appointment with the beasts, and while the fictional Thecla miraculously survived her ordeal, the flesh and blood Perpetua died violently in the arena. Like that of Thecla, Perpetua's prayer is directed toward someone known, a family member or relative of a friend. Both were, in some sense, recruiting new members for their sect among the dead, perhaps compensating for the living family and friends who had rejected them. Both Falconilla and Dinocrates, dead recipients of the confessors' largesse, had appeared in dreams, and it is virtually certain that neither had been a member of the Christian community while living. While Falconilla expressed an active desire for salvation when she appeared to her mother in the dream, Dinocrates was the passive recipient of his sister's prayer. Neither the author of the Thecla story nor the historical Perpetua saw anything wrong with praying for the non-Christian dead, though later interpreters of their stories would have serious problems with this simple fact. The re-interpreted tales of each heroine, Perpetua in the West and Thecla in the East, played critical roles in the development of late antique and medieval beliefs about intercession for the non-Christian dead.

Comparing these two ancient examples of posthumous salvation with the more recent American ones, a number of issues emerge that help define the questions of this study. Falconilla's expressing her desire for salvation in a dream is similar to the native spirits' taking the initiative to possess Shaker bodies and obtain salvation. Dinocrates as the passive beneficiary of his sister's action has more similarities to those who are baptized posthumously by the Latter-day Saints. Both Perpetua and Joseph Smith came to their conclusions about posthumous rescue in part because of a vision of a long-dead brother. The settings of the Thecla story, the Perpetua diary, and the early Latter-day Saints were all contexts of fierce persecution by outsiders in which the insiders rescued the dead. This raises the question of the motivating factors of those who practice the posthumous salvation of others. The Latter-day Saints cite love and compassion, God's justice in giving everyone a chance, and a desire for extended families to be "sealed" together in the afterlife; no doubt these factors apply as well in the early Christian contexts. Tryphaena clearly hopes eventually to be with her daughter one day in "the place of the righteous," and Perpetua expresses her deep love and compassion for her suffering brother, even if they cannot be together because of the chasm separating them.

But is there more? In what ways does the practice of posthumous salvation co-opt the dead for viewpoints and opinions they might not have held in life? The recent Mormon baptism of Holocaust victims raises this issue most starkly, but it is a relevant question for the others as well, e.g., would Dinocrates have wanted his sister's help? What was the effect on those still living of Perpetua's claim that she had prayed for him and rescued him from

his agony? How did that rescue help her negotiate her difficult relationship with the hostile world of the living, including her very hostile pagan father? Related are the early Christian notions of Jesus' descent to Hades to rescue the long-dead patriarchs and prophets; does this have any similarities with the Mormon baptism of George Washington? In both cases, famous culture heroes are brought into and co-opted by the new sect, and the insiders expect this will give them added legitimacy in the eyes of both insiders and outsiders. Having the dead on one's side can be a powerful resource in a context of persecution.

What about those who wished to control or stamp out the practice of posthumous salvation? The Shaker sources speak of the elders' "testing" the native spirits to see if they were genuine;<sup>18</sup> some Shakers thought the possessions unseemly and they feared the potential for disorder in the community brought by the uncontrollable native spirits.<sup>19</sup> In the late fourth century, Philaster, Bishop of Brescia, and John Chrysostom, among others, railed against those who believed in the possibility of salvation for the wicked after death. Continuing this line of thought, Augustine in the fifth century engaged in vigorous debate about just who could be helped posthumously and who could not. In all these cases, ideas and practices concerning posthumous salvation were closely related to the concrete religious, social, and political agendas of Christians on various sides of the issue.

This study is concerned with the posthumous salvation of non-Christians in a wide variety of forms in early Christianity. For our purposes, "posthumous salvation" may be defined as a non-Christian's turn toward God after death, or the extension of God's grace to a non-Christian at some point after death. In other words, for "posthumous salvation" to be present, death cannot be conceived as a boundary beyond which the ultimate fate of a non-Christian is sealed. Some forms of posthumous salvation involve intercession by the living or by the dead; some do not. Thus, the study does not focus solely on Thecla and Perpetua, but the brief comparison of the two with each other and with the more recent examples has touched upon many of the topics to be addressed in this book, listed here in the order of chapters to follow.

Chapter 1 looks at Greek, Roman, and Jewish traditions of succor for the dead that formed the cultural milieux of early Christians, helping to explain why some wished to rescue the dead. Chapter 2 examines those Christian traditions earlier than Thecla and Perpetua where the non-Christian dead are imagined as turning toward God or receiving God's grace. There follows a detailed analysis of the Thecla story in chapter 3 and the Perpetua text in chapter 4, considering their intercessions for the non-Christian dead in light of their identities as recent converts, women, soon-to-be martyrs, and the subjects of literary accounts. Chapter 5 explores another way in which Christians expressed hope for the posthumous salvation of non-Christians, outside the contexts of intercessory prayer and martyrdom: traditions about Jesus'

descent to the underworld to rescue some or all of the dead. Chapter 6 examines those early Christian thinkers who posited a posthumous progress for the soul, with or without reincarnation, leading in some cases to speculation about universal salvation.

Chapter 7 focuses on Augustine and asks how and why he came to reject all forms of posthumous salvation for non-Christians, including all those discussed in chapters 2 through 6. How did new ideas about purgatory/purgation as a vehicle for the posthumous salvation of sinful *Christians* replace earlier speculations about the posthumous salvation of non-Christians? Augustine's specific formulations interpreting universalism, the descent to Hell traditions, and the Perpetua/Dinocrates episode played a decisive role. Finally, chapter 8 explores ways in which the interpretation of the Thecla and Perpetua stories, and another similar to them (Gregory the Great's prayer for the posthumous salvation of the Emperor Trajan) relates to the divergent paths taken in Eastern and Western Christendom on posthumous salvation. Some Eastern Orthodox theologians remained relatively more open to the possibility of efficacious prayer for the salvation of non-Christians, while in the Western medieval imagination, the Augustinian limitations held sway. In each case, the formulation of dogma had a profound effect on the directions taken by the religious imagination in later centuries. Official teachings of post-Vatican II Catholicism, influenced as they are by the Enlightenment and European contact with the wider world, have evolved away from some of the harsher Augustinian formulations, meaning that some contemporary Catholics now envision the possibility of posthumous salvation for at least some non-Christians, especially infants.

This book traces the history of theological ideas, but its aim is larger than that. Ideas arise only in specific cultural contexts, and in turn the new ideas help give shape to new cultural contexts. Perpetua, Augustine, the author of the Thecla story, and the other principals of this study did not simply expound ideas but they also acted in concrete situations. For all of them, one major action was the writing of texts with implicit and/or explicit views about the posthumous salvation of non-Christians. Each one's views were formulated in a concrete social context that this study is anxious to explore when the sources are extensive enough to allow it. As with the more recent examples of Shakers and Latter-day Saints, beliefs and practices concerning salvation of the dead can disclose a great deal about the world of the living.

# 1

## GREEK, ROMAN, AND JEWISH SUCCOR FOR THE DEAD

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The character Thecla is portrayed as a Greek-speaking resident of Iconium in Asia Minor.<sup>1</sup> Vibia Perpetua was a literate Roman matron from the area near Carthage in North Africa, probably educated in both Greek and Latin.<sup>2</sup> Both had joined that relatively new form of Judaism known as Christianity, so an acquaintance with at least some of the Jewish scriptures lies in the background of each one. Thus, it is necessary to study these three ancient realms (Greek, Roman, Jewish) for insight into the reported behavior and beliefs of the two women and other early Christians who envisioned rescue for the dead. Specifically, our interest lies in actions taken in those cultures by the living for the benefit of the dead. Solomon Reinach once wrote, “Pagans prayed to the dead, Christians prayed for the dead,” and this statement is quoted with approval by Jacques LeGoff in his landmark study, *The Birth of Purgatory*.<sup>3</sup> LeGoff goes on to cite a few examples where pagans prayed for their dead, but largely he sees prayer for the dead as a Christian innovation. As one casts the net more widely, however, one sees that there were a variety of practices in Greek and Roman antiquity in which the living sought to improve the lot of the dead, and after all, that was the ultimate aim of Christian prayer for the dead. Thus, the Christian practice grew out of ancient concern for the welfare of the dead generally; such concern was not limited to the category “prayer.”

### Methodological Considerations

Before launching into a survey of ancient practices and beliefs, some methodological considerations must be addressed. This chapter will focus on the

Hellenistic, late republican, and imperial periods through the third century C.E. as the time most relevant to the experience of early Christians, including Perpetua and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* author. Older material, such as Homer, Plato, and the texts of the Hebrew Bible, will be introduced inasmuch as they had become “classical” and widely known in later periods. Certainly, not every one of the traditions adduced here would have been known to all the Christians in this study; in fact, probably only a few would have had any direct influence, and those will be highlighted in later chapters. The point here is to understand the wide range of cultural options open to early Christians concerning succor for the dead. Such an understanding will be vital throughout the study and especially at the end of it, when we come to see which of these options perdured into later centuries, which were transformed, and which fell by the wayside. To anticipate one key conclusion, the preoccupation with salvation based on a confessional or religious stance, already present in some forms of Hellenistic Judaism and continued in Christianity, had the potential to create a rupture between the living and the dead. No longer could family-based cultic action for the dead and the continuity of memory and homage be maintained if the dead were not part of the community of the “saved.” The actions of some Christians to rescue the dead should be seen in this light.

Obviously this chapter cannot be a comprehensive survey of ancient Greek, Roman, and Jewish beliefs and practices involving the dead; for that, a number of excellent works already exist.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the focus here is on those traditions wherein the living undertake specific actions to benefit the dead. Some of those traditions may be found as part of the funerary rites, understood as the rite of passage between life and death, while others may be found in the ongoing contexts in which the dead and the living maintained contact over the long term.<sup>5</sup> The motivations of the living can vary. Often they wish to appease the dead to gain some benefit for themselves, but sometimes they may simply wish to do something kind for their dead, with the hope that they, in turn, will be so treated when the time comes. As Sarah Iles Johnston points out, motives can often be mixed, and the line between kindness and appeasement can be a thin one.<sup>6</sup>

The fundamental sources for this inquiry are (1) the archaeology of grave sites, (2) inscriptions associated with burials, and (3) literary sources. Ian Morris has detailed the methodological issues one needs to consider when dealing with grave sites. As he points out, burials generally take place within some type of ritual context, and this context limits the range of interpretations that may legitimately be drawn from graves.<sup>7</sup> The majority of ancient burials were not accompanied by any written material, so speculation on the thoughts and beliefs of the dead person and the survivors can only be inferred from the placement of the body and the types of material remains found with it. Was the body cremated or buried? Were the remains later touched by the

survivors for some purpose? Is the body alone or in a group? How is the tomb constructed? Are there grave goods? In each case, the bare data must be interpreted carefully.

For instance, it is known from archaeology that the Latin-speaking Roman world adopted Greek practice and changed rapidly from cremation to burial during the second and third centuries c.e. Does this represent some deep theological shift or was it simply a matter of fashion? The second-century satirist Lucian made the point that both cremation and burial lead to the same thing, the corruption of the body. Cremation just does it more quickly.<sup>8</sup> Morris thinks that the changeover was largely a result of Roman elites' wishing to jump on the Hellenophile bandwagon in the second century, but it had the effect of unifying the empire under a single type of burial practice, which then became the "Roman way."<sup>9</sup> The change in practice was not accompanied by a change in beliefs about the soul or the resurrection of the body. Thus, a shift in burial practice does not necessarily correspond to a shift in fundamental beliefs. In addition, one must evaluate carefully anecdotal literary evidence, as when Lucian erroneously claims "the Greeks burn" their dead (*On Mourning* 21). He was probably basing his statement on ancient literary sources and not on the Greek practice of his own day.<sup>10</sup>

## Archaeology of Grave Sites

Three aspects of the archaeology of grave sites with bearing on our subject are the existence of so-called "pipe burials," the presence of grave goods, including coins, and the particularly Egyptian practice of mummification, which continued into the Greco-Roman period. "Pipe burials" are found with both cremated and buried remains throughout Italy and are also attested in Roman Britain, Gaul, Greece, and North Africa. In these burials, a pipe was inserted with one end into the grave and the other end above ground. Pausanias, in his second-century c.e. *Description of Greece* 8.4.10, provides evidence for the function of these pipes when he relates that at Tronis in Phocis (a region of Greece), the Phocians every day brought sacrificial animals to the tomb of the founder-hero (either Xanthippus or Phocus; Pausanias is unsure) and poured blood "through a hole into the grave."<sup>11</sup> J. C. M. Toynbee and J. Ward Perkins apply a similar interpretation to pipes and holes found with pre-Christian tombs excavated in the Vatican, seeing the pipes as conduits for wine or other libations for the dead.<sup>12</sup> James Frazer describes a discovery in two Roman cemeteries near Carthage, the city where Perpetua had her vision of Dinocrates:

Each tomb encloses one or more urns containing calcined bones. Each urn is covered with a saucer, in the middle of which there is a hole; and this

hole communicates with the exterior of the tomb by means of an earthenware tube placed either upright so as to come out at the top of the tomb, or slanting so as to come out at one of the sides. Thus libations poured into the tube ran down into the urn.<sup>13</sup>

The living must have thought the dead needed or desired the libations provided through these pipes or otherwise poured onto the ground, as Richmond Lattimore puts it:

What does it mean to spill wine or scatter flowers on a grave? There are many answers. Is it the propitiation of a possibly malignant spirit? Is it the feeding of a hungry ghost? Who profits by the action, the dead man or the survivor who performs such acts of devotion? Is the latter worshipping the dead, or clearing his conscience, or doing an act because it is fashionable, or decorous? Any of the explanations might be true, for all the grave-stones tell us; and several might be true together.<sup>14</sup>

One recently published lead tablet from Selinus, dated to about 450 B.C.E., may help answer these questions, at least in one case. The tablet, discussed by Johnston, clearly indicates that as part of a larger ritual, the pouring of wine on a grave was intended to cleanse the ghost of a polluted ancestor who had been bothering the living.<sup>15</sup>

Grave goods usually imply that the living are providing the deceased with objects they will need in the hereafter, but at times, the grave goods were displayed and then removed by the family, or given away as prizes at funeral games, so one cannot always assume they were meant to benefit the dead person.<sup>16</sup> One particular grave good is of special interest: in a small percentage of burials from the fourth century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E., the dead person was provided with a coin or coins, often in the mouth. Aristophanes (*Frogs* 140), Strabo (8.6.12), Juvenal (3.267), and Lucian (*On Mourning* 10) all attest that the coins were to be used by the dead to pay the ferryman Charon for the journey across the river Styx into Hades. Lucian jokes that it would be better to send the dead off without a coin, so that Charon wouldn't take them and they could come back to life. Morris adds a note of caution, however: he estimates that only 5 percent of the burials studied in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds have coins in them, and the presence of coins does not necessarily indicate a belief in the need to pay the ferryman.<sup>17</sup> The literary sources, however, demonstrate that at least some of the coins can be interpreted this way, and this provides us with an example of the living seeking to help the dead by providing them with a very useful grave good.

In the Greco-Roman world, Egypt was seen as a culture particularly devoted to an elaborate care for the dead. Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.85–91 (fifth century B.C.E.) provides the earliest Greek account of Egyptian practices; Diodorus of Sicily expands on Herodotus's remarks four hundred years later

(1.91.1–93.4). They describe the various types of mummification that were available for a range of prices, as well as other Egyptian death customs. The archaeology of grave sites confirms that it was still customary in the Hellenistic and Roman periods for the survivors of a wealthy Egyptian to supply the mummified body with food, amulets, images of divinities, and figurines representing servants and concubines for the next world, although the number and quality of amulets and figurines declined in the Roman period.<sup>18</sup> Silius Italicus (*Punica* 13.475; first century C.E.) and Lucian (*On Mourning* 21) both claim that the Egyptians held banquets in the presence of the mummified body, and Barbara Borg connects this with the development in Roman Egypt of the realistic death mask, replacing the earlier usage of an idealized image of Osiris. In the Roman period, a realistic portrait of the person covers the mummy's face, and thus, at the banquet, the deceased is regarded as actually present; he or she is a participant in the festival.<sup>19</sup> Such “feeding” is one more example of the living providing for the needs of their dead and will be discussed at greater length later.

## Epitaphs

Turning to evidence from inscriptions, even though the number of edited and published epitaphs from the Greek and Roman worlds is exceedingly large, numbering into the hundreds of thousands,<sup>20</sup> we must remember that most people in the ancient world did not have the financial resources to establish an inscribed memorial for themselves or their loved ones. Keith Hopkins and Melinda Letts give a sobering account of mass graves at Rome, some of which were established to deal with epidemics. One from the late republican period contained the remains of 24,000 bodies.<sup>21</sup> Many of the city's poor were simply thrown into collective pits called *puticuli*, located outside the city.<sup>22</sup> Thus, when one turns to inscriptions, one taps into the values and beliefs of the higher strata of society, though the sample is not so rarefied as the literary sources.

What can the inscriptions reveal about succor for the dead? Most only give the name and perhaps a few bare details about the life of the deceased. Of those that express some notions about the state of the dead, some are wholly negative, as in the famous formula found in both Greek and Latin in various parts of Italy: *ὄκ ἦμην καὶ ἐγενόμην, ὄκ εἰμὶ καὶ οὐ λυποῦμαι* (I was not, and I came into being; I am not, and I do not suffer);<sup>23</sup> *non fui, fui, memini, non sum, non curo* (I was not, I was, I remember, I am not, I don't care).<sup>24</sup> Such sentiments dovetail with the Hellenistic philosophy Epicureanism and its Latin expositor Lucretius, who held that the soul, composed of atoms, simply passes out of existence upon death. “Therefore death is nothing to us, it matters not one bit, since the nature of mind (or soul: *animi*) is understood

to be mortal; and as in time past we felt no distress [before we were born] . . . so, when we shall no longer be . . . nothing at all will be able to happen to us” (*De Rerum Natura* 3.830).<sup>25</sup>

Other epitaphs, however, give an indication of belief in some type of continued existence beyond death, and at times it is asserted that actions of the living can affect the dead. The living can affect the dead negatively by disturbing the tomb, positively by honoring it, as in the following example from Cappadocia, second century C.E.: “Whoever in passing gives me in tribute a rose or some other flower, may he have grace from all the heavenly gods. But if another comes with wicked designs, may he have the hostility of all the underworld gods.”<sup>26</sup> Such blessings and curses are very common, but as Lattimore points out, one cannot automatically assume that they attest to a belief in continued existence of the dead, because protecting the holiness or sanctity of the burial place might be enough to warrant this kind of language.<sup>27</sup>

Sometimes there is a clear indication that the dead benefit from the actions of the living. One such action may be the commissioning of the epitaph itself, in which a living person expresses a wish or prayer for the deceased. Most striking is a second-century C.E. epitaph from Egypt that reads:

ἀλλὰ καταθόνιοι Λήθης οἱ ναίετε χῶρον, δαίμονες ἴλειοι Επιχάρει  
δέχετε

But you underworld divinities who dwell by the plain of Lethe, welcome  
Epichares and be kind to him.<sup>28</sup>

The author of this inscription is in effect “praying” to the chthonic deities for the welfare of the dead person.

Another inscription, this one in Latin of uncertain date, contains a similar view that the living can do something to help the dead, in this case, the living need continually to invoke the name of the deceased and sprinkle wine on the tomb so that the dead person continues to live: “if you, dear parent, wish always to call me with a sweet voice to the deities above, I shall live, as long as you are always safe.”<sup>29</sup> Lattimore interprets this inscription to mean that “immortality depends on the repetition of the dead youth’s name, and the continuance of his cult.”<sup>30</sup> The fact that the mother is supposed to sprinkle wine on the tomb “forever” (*in aevum*) probably indicates the expectation that this aspect of the family cult will be maintained throughout the generations. In this case, it is clear that familial piety has a real effect on the dead person in the imagination of the survivors.

One very common sentiment on epitaphs found in both Greek and Latin is “may the earth be light upon you.” The Greek expressions vary, while the Latin is usually the formulaic “sit tibi terra levis.” It was so common that in Latin inscriptions it is often simply abbreviated s.t.t.l.<sup>31</sup> While people often repeat such common expressions without thinking about them or believing deeply

in their content, it is still significant that this most common of epitaph inscriptions expresses a desire that things go well for the person in his or her post-mortem existence, whatever it is.

## Feeding the Dead

The benefit accruing to the dead could be conceived in a physical way, similar to the Egyptian banquets for the dead discussed above. J. C. M. Toynbee describes a number of Latin inscriptions that attest to the practice of the wealthy leaving behind sums of money to ensure that they would be supplied with food, wine, cakes, sausages, fruits, and flowers after their deaths.<sup>32</sup> An example from the city of Rome expresses hope that the dead couple to whom it was dedicated will “come in good health to the funeral feast and enjoy themselves along with everybody else.”<sup>33</sup> Of course, not everyone believed that providing the dead with offerings at their graves had any effect; the following epitaph states this explicitly:

Do not bring anything for me to drink, for I drank when I was alive, and it does no good; nor anything to eat, I need nothing. All that is nonsense. But if for the sake of remembrance and the life we had together, you bring saffron or frankincense, then, friends, you are giving appropriate gifts to those who have taken me into their keeping. These things belong to the gods below; dead men have nothing to do with the living.<sup>34</sup>

Lattimore thinks this inscription signifies that the dead man has “no part in immortality,”<sup>35</sup> but I would see the phrase “τοῖς με ὑποδεξάμενοις” (those who take me into their keeping) as indicating that the dead person may still exist, but he does not benefit directly from the offerings brought to the grave.

Turning from the inscriptional evidence for feeding the dead to the literary sources, one finds that providing food, wine, and ointment for the dead has deep roots in preclassical Greece. As Walter Burkert describes the passage in Homer’s *Iliad* 23.218–20, “Achilles pouring wine for his dead friend Patroklos [is] an unforgettable poetical image.”<sup>36</sup> This scene is a funeral libation, but other texts indicate that offerings could be provided for the dead long after the funeral. A famous example from the Roman world is the annual festival of the Feralia, also called Parentales, held in February and described by Ovid in his *Fasti* 2.535–42 (written just before his exile in 8 C.E.):

Appease the souls of your fathers and bring small gifts to the tombs erected to them. Ghosts ask but little; they value piety more than a costly gift . . . a tile wreathed with votive garlands, a sprinkling of corn, a few grains of salt, bread soaked in wine, some loose violets, these are offerings enough: set these on a potsherd and leave it in the middle of the road. Not that I

forbid larger offerings, but even these suffice to appease the shades: add prayers and the appropriate words at the hearths set up for the purpose.<sup>37</sup>

Ovid notes that the dead spirits demand these offerings and become upset if they are not appeased. Once, he says, in time of war, the Romans neglected to celebrate the Parentalia, and the spirits came up from the tombs as “misshapen ghosts and they howled in the city streets and the countryside at large” (*Fasti* 2.547). Another Roman ritual for the dead, the Lemuria held on May 9, 11, and 13, had as its aim not the care and feeding of ghosts, but rather the dismissal of them from the household so that they wouldn’t bother the living (*Fasti* 5.443).

Lucian, in his satirical look at funeral rites of the second century C.E., describes the beliefs of the majority of people:

Those (dead) of the middle way in life, and they are many, wander about in the meadow without their bodies, in the form of shadows that vanish like smoke in your fingers. They get their nourishment, naturally, from the libations that are poured in our world and the burnt-offerings at the tomb; so that if anyone has not left a friend or kinsman behind him on earth, he goes about his business there as an unfeared corpse, in a state of famine. (*On Mourning* 9–10)<sup>38</sup>

Though Lucian is contemptuous of these practices, his account provides valuable evidence of popular attitudes. Clearly, the continuity of family piety toward the dead was an enduring feature of Mediterranean culture, and it was widely held that the dead needed these pious activities of the living to maintain their well-being in the afterlife.

In the Hebrew Bible there are indications that among ancient Judeans there was also a tradition of caring for and feeding the dead, practices similar to the ancient Mesopotamian *kispu*-rituals, which involved the monthly offering of food and libations and the invocation of the dead person’s name.<sup>39</sup> Deut. 26:13–14 concerns the misuse of tithed produce in mortuary offerings: “You shall say before the LORD your God . . . ‘I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not removed any of it while I was unclean, and I have not offered any of it to the dead.’” On this passage, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith remarks, “Offering consecrated food to the dead was sufficiently widespread to require a verbal disavowal.”<sup>40</sup> Ps. 106:28 specifically condemns the Israelites because “they attached themselves to the Baal of Peor and they ate sacrifices offered to the dead.” The Baal of Peor story in Num. 25:1–13 makes no explicit mention of sacrifices to the dead, but this action is a prominent feature of the Psalm; it is likely that “Baal of Peor” represented a chthonic aspect of Baal.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the phrase “other sacrifices” in Deut. 12:27 has been interpreted to mean private family funereal sacrifices or sacrifices for the dead; the Deuteronomists permit the eating of the meat from such sacrifices, but

stipulate that the blood must be poured out onto the altar of Yahweh.<sup>42</sup> This stipulation may have been to counter the practice of offering the blood to the dead. Archaeological remains tend to confirm the picture presented by these biblical passages, as numerous graves in Judah from the period of the monarchy have jars, bowls, animal bones, and other food remains apparently offered to the dead.<sup>43</sup> While wizards, mediums, and necromancy are often condemned by biblical writers, nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is there a blanket prohibition of feeding the dead. Deut. 26:14 and Ps. 106:28 only castigate offerings of tithed produce and eating the offerings in the context of Baal worship.<sup>44</sup> Some rabbis (*Sifre Numbers* 131) associated the latter with the institution of the “marzeah,” also attested at Ugarit (fifteenth century B.C.E.) and described by Marvin Pope as a banquet “held in both mourning and revelry for the dead, with drunkenness and sacral sexual intercourse.”<sup>45</sup>

As just stated, a number of biblical writers do find fault with necromancy and deification of the dead, and the story of the disfavored King Saul in 1 Sam. 28 is the only narrative account of such necromancy in the Hebrew Bible. This is the famous episode of Saul’s seeking advice from the dead prophet Samuel, where Samuel is called a “god” (28:13). The eighth-century prophet Isaiah condemns such necromantic practices most strongly in Isa. 8:19–20: “Now if people say to you, ‘Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living, for teaching and for instruction?’ Surely those who speak like this will have no dawn!”

Similar ridicule and polemic are found in Isa. 19:3 and 29:4, and an outright prohibition of necromancy is found in Deut. 18:11 (cf. Exod. 22:18; Lev. 19:31, 20:6, 20:27). In these cases, the focus is on what the dead might do for the living. This study is interested in the reverse, traditions where the living help the dead and try to improve their postmortem existence. These latter activities do not necessarily imply worship of the dead or asking advice from them, though at times the various activities could be closely linked.

For the Hellenistic period, there are two major pieces of literary evidence for a Jewish practice of feeding the dead in a manner similar to their Mediterranean neighbors, Sirach 30:18 and Tobit 4:17. Around the year 180 B.C.E., Sirach, according to the Septuagint, wrote, “Good things poured out upon a mouth that is closed<sup>46</sup> are like offerings of food placed upon a grave. Of what use to an idol is a sacrifice?” Here, a dead idol and a dead person are equated in that offerings to either one are deemed ridiculous (cf. Dan. 14:1–22 [LXX], the story of Bel and the Dragon, for Jewish ridicule of food offered to idols). Ben Sira is not inveighing against the practice of offering food to the dead, but he is noting its futility, in a manner similar to the sarcastic Greek epitaph discussed earlier. But his ridicule does indicate that such a practice was known among Jews. In addition, while Sirach does ridicule feeding the dead, elsewhere he also says, “do not withhold kindness even from the dead” (7:33).

Tob. 4:17 may encourage feeding the dead, depending on how the verse is read. In the context of this late Persian era or early Hellenistic book, in which providing the dead with a decent burial is the highest virtue (more on this later), Tobit tells his son Tobias, “pour your bread on the grave of the righteous, but give none to sinners.” The concept of “pouring bread” is strange; it is possible that the text originally read “pour wine,” in line with the Aramaic Ahiqar text from which parts of Tobit were derived.<sup>47</sup> The important issue for our purposes is whether the author of Tobit recommends providing offerings to the dead, be they wine, bread, or both. Carey Moore asserts that Deut. 26:14 and Ps. 106:28 would prohibit such offerings, but these passages speak only against offerings of tithed produce and offerings in the context of Baal worship.<sup>48</sup> I am inclined to follow Jonas Greenfield’s view that Tobit did indeed counsel such a “pagan” act, indicating that at least one Jewish author in the Hellenistic era believed in feeding the dead in a manner similar to many Greeks and Romans.<sup>49</sup>

### Providing a Proper Burial

There is one most striking theme related to our topic attested in the literary sources among Greeks, Romans, and Jews: the obligation of the living to provide the dead with a decent burial. This concern is expressed on epitaphs as well.<sup>50</sup> Its centrality is showcased by Diogenes the Cynic (d. 320 B.C.E.), who reportedly shocked his audience by proclaiming he wanted his body to remain unburied, to be devoured by scavengers.<sup>51</sup> Remembering Hopkins and Letts’s caution that many in the Greek and Roman worlds did not receive a decent burial only heightens the impact of these traditions: Among many ancient authors there was a fear that one’s body might not be properly disposed of, and that this might have severe consequences not only for the perception of one’s social position but also for one’s own postmortem existence. Elements of this theme are found in the most classical of sources: Homer, Greek tragedy of the fifth century B.C.E., and the Latin epic poet Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.).

In the *Iliad* 23.62–107, the spirit of Patroclus appears to Achilles in a dream and asks him for a proper cremation. Patroclus says: “Bury me with all speed, so that I may pass within the gates of Hades. Afar do the spirits keep me aloof, the phantoms of men that have done with their toils, neither suffer they me to join myself to them beyond the River, but vainly I wander through the wide-gated house of Hades” (*Iliad* 71–74).

Performing the cremation rites has a clear effect on the dead man’s condition in the afterlife; leaving the body unburied is deleterious.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, as part of Odysseus’s famous trip to the underworld in *Odyssey* Book 11, the shade of Odysseus’s dead comrade Elpenor asks for a decent cremation since his corpse had been left behind by Odysseus and his men (11.51–80). Unlike

Patroclus, Elpenor does not state explicitly that he is suffering in the afterlife because his body was left to rot, or that his condition will improve if Odysseus carries out his request. But even though no clear reason is given, Elpenor does wish to have this service performed, and Odysseus and his men are most eager to oblige (12.8–15).

The need to provide a decent burial was a common theme also in Greek tragedy, as in Antigone's famous need to bury her dead brother Polynices. King Creon wished to leave Polynices' body unburied as a moral example since he had died fighting against his own city (*Antigone* 194–210). In addition to all the issues of earthly honor and justice that motivate her, Antigone says in lines 27–29 that her brother Eteocles, who *had* received a proper burial, “has his honor among the dead men in the earth.” This statement is vague; it could indicate that Antigone's action will improve Polynices' status in the afterlife, and/or it could have as its focus the way the living view the dead (i.e., the unburied dead are held in lower esteem by the living). She labels her pious action as “helping the dead” (τοῖς θανοῦσιν ὀφελεῖν; 560), but speculates aloud in line 521, “who knows if his deed [Polynices' fighting against his own city] is free from blame in the world below?” These passages indicate that something is going on in the world of the dead; moral judgments are made there, concepts of shame and honor may apply, though Antigone is unsure how they would apply to her brother. Aeschylus may help elucidate the issue here: in *Eumenides* 94 we learn that the ghost of Clytaemestra is “dishonored” (αφτιμασμένη) among the other dead because she had committed murder; “they never cease reviling me,” she laments. One could understand that Antigone does not want her brother to be so dishonored.<sup>53</sup> In a depiction similar to that of Homer's Elpenor, Euripides' character Polydorus (*Hecuba* 28–34), whose body is unburied, flutters around the head of his mother Hecuba (probably meaning he appears to her in dreams).<sup>54</sup> The idea that the unburied need to be helped by the living is clearly implied in Homer and in the tragic settings adduced here; in the late Roman republic and early imperial periods, the notion is even more strongly developed in literature and in the reported events from real life, as seen in Virgil and the other examples to follow.

Virgil's counterpart to Book 11 of the *Odyssey* is found in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, and it contains a story similar to the request of Elpenor. Virgil enunciates an explicit doctrine about the terrible fate of the souls of the unburied. Aeneas in his trip to the underworld sees a great crowd of souls at the bank of the river Styx waiting for Charon to ferry them across, and the Sybil tells him that “these are the helpless and graveless . . . Charon may not bear them over the dreadful banks and raging waters until their bones have found a resting place. They wander and flutter around these shores for one hundred years; only then at last, being admitted, do they revisit the longed-for pools” (6.325–30). Soon thereafter Aeneas sees the soul of Palinurus who had fallen overboard from the stern of his ship during the Libyan voyage. It turns out

Palinurus had not died in the sea, but he had managed to swim to the Italian coast, only to be killed there by “barbarian folk” (*gens crudelis*). Now his body remains in the surf, tossed back and forth by the waves. Palinurus’s shade beseeches Aeneas to cast some earth on his corpse and thereby “rescue me from these troubles” (*eripe me his*, 6.365). Palinurus would be ferried across the river one hundred years sooner if Aeneas were able to fulfill his request. Unfortunately for Palinurus, heaven has decreed a different fate for him, and the Sibyl commands him, “stop hoping that the decrees of the gods will be changed through prayer” (6.376). She does offer him comfort, however, telling him that the neighboring people of the region where his body lies will establish a shrine to his memory, bring offerings, and the place will be named in his honor (Capo Palinuro; 6.377–84). This news brings great joy to Palinurus, making the point in a different way that the actions of the living can have a direct beneficial effect on the condition of the dead in the afterlife.<sup>55</sup>

A number of texts indicate that this literary theme was reflected in and perhaps helped to shape the real attitudes of actual people. Pausanias (second century C.E.) reports that the “shade” (εἴδωλον) of Acteon at Orchomenus troubled the people until they performed proper burial rites for him (*Desc. Gr.* 9.38.5). In addition, Pausanias praises the pious actions of ancient worthies who provided the proper burial of strangers and washed up bodies (2.1.3; 10.5.4). Pliny the Younger reports that the philosopher Athenodorus successfully dehaunted a house in Athens by exhuming the bones from the house and giving them a public burial (*Ep.* 7.27; the same story is told by Lucian, *Lover of Lies* 30). In Silius Italicus’s *Punica* 13.475, the ghost of Appius Claudius is not able to find rest because his friends did not cremate and bury his body. All these stories indicate a widespread belief that the dead themselves wished to have a proper burial, that they benefited from this pious action, and that without it they would not leave the living in peace. Though they ask for favors other than a proper burial, the appearance of Falconilla to Tryphaena in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the appearance of Dinocrates to Perpetua just before her martyrdom make sense in these Mediterranean cultural contexts where the dead appeal to the living, often in dreams, for aid and comfort, broadly conceived.

The importance of a proper burial also finds a strong place in some Jewish traditions. In the Hebrew Bible, however, these burial traditions were not clearly tied to any benefit the dead person might derive. Part of Jezebel’s punishment as announced by Elijah in 1 Kings 21:19–23 was that the dogs would lick up her blood, a grisly prophecy that was realized in 2 Kings 9:30–37. The author has Jehu, on learning of Jezebel’s violent death, expand Elijah’s oracle by attributing this saying to the prophet, “the corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung on the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say ‘This is Jezebel’” (2 Kings 9:37). Her status as a king’s daughter entitled her to a decent burial (9:34), but Jehu the usurper and coup leader wished to erase her

memory, probably for political reasons so that no gravesite could serve as a rallying point for supporters of the previous regime. Thus, it is not explicit here that burial or non-burial affects the postmortem existence of the dead person, though it is possible that many people assumed this, since the care and feeding of the dead attested in the archaeology of ancient Judah could not take place without a specific location for the corpse. Rather, the biblical text sees Jezebel's lack of burial as a function of the lack of honor due her by the survivors. The biblical writers use Jehu's denial of burial in a way similar to Sophocles' character Creon: The unburied corpse serves as a negative moral example and makes a clear political statement to the populace. Likewise, Jer. 8:1-3, 22:19, and Deut. 28:26 all use the threat of scattered bones and lack of decent burial as a social weapon to promote certain codes of behavior in this life.

In the book of Tobit, written in the late Persian or early Hellenistic period, providing a decent burial is seen as a primary good worth a great deal of risk. Tobit is a fictional Northern Kingdom Israelite who had always remained loyal to the house of David and Jerusalem, and who was taken into exile when the Assyrians captured Samaria in the eighth century B.C.E. While in exile in Nineveh, Tobit performed many acts of charity: "I would give my food to the hungry and my clothing to the naked, and if I saw the dead body of any of my people thrown out behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury it" (1:17). He also buried the bodies of those Israelites whom King Sennacherib put to death, and this earned him the wrath of Sennacherib, but the praise of the angel Raphael (12:12). Throughout the book a distinction is made between the righteous and the wicked: Though Tobit is righteous, he is afflicted for a time with blindness, but he is eventually cured and rewarded for his good deeds with happiness and a long life. Conversely, one constant refrain of the book is "see what injustice does—it brings death!" (14:11). In this context, the advice of Tobit to his son in 4:17, discussed earlier, becomes even more interesting: "Pour your bread on the grave of the righteous, but give none to sinners." The Ahiqar text from which this is derived reads "My son, pour out your wine on the graves of the righteous rather than drink it with evil men." The Ahiqar text is clear: Rather than drinking with evil men, it is better to pour wine on a grave. The Tobit text is more obscure: Does it mean that Tobit's son should prefer giving bread to the dead over giving it to living sinners, or does it mean that he should give bread only to the righteous dead and not to the sinful dead? If the latter, then the author of Tobit is making a distinction among the dead and limiting human charity to the righteous among them. This would bring Tobit's advice into line with Elijah and Jehu's denial of proper burial to Jezebel and with Creon's attitude toward Polynices: The living treat the dead person in accord with his or her activities while alive. This can be true even in those contexts (1 and 2 Kings, Tobit) where it is not assumed that the actions of the living actually affect the status of the dead person in the other world. Such

attitudes will extend to God's treatment of the dead person when the notion of differentiated fates after death arises among Jews later in the Hellenistic period.

### Rescue for the Dead in a "Salvation" Context

When Qohelet, the "preacher," author of Ecclesiastes, speculates on human fate after death, he treats all humanity as one undifferentiated mass: "Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward into the earth?" (3:21). Similarly, most of the Greek, Roman, and Jewish contexts introduced so far have dealt with actions of the living on behalf of the relatively undifferentiated dead: All the dead can be honored in the Parentalia; all need a decent burial in Homer, Virgil, and Tobit (though some are honored with more elaborate rites than others); all can potentially be honored or appeased with libations. The exceptions have been those contexts, such as that reflected in *Antigone* or in Jehu's treatment of Jezebel's corpse, where the body of a "sinner" is left unburied for political purposes or as a moral example. From Egypt, there is further evidence of an attempt at differentiation of corpses: A "trial" was sometimes held to determine whether or not the corpse should receive the elaborate burial rites, with all the attendant benefits in the afterlife. As Diodorus of Sicily describes it:

If anyone presents himself and makes a charge, and shows that the dead man had led an evil life, the judges announce the decision to all and the body is denied the customary burial; but if it shall appear that the accuser has made an unjust charge he shall be severely punished. When no accuser appears, or the one who presents himself is discovered to be a slanderer, the relatives put their mourning aside and laud the deceased. (I.92.4-5)<sup>56</sup>

Not content to take this anecdotal literary evidence at face value, Rheinhold Merkelbach has confirmed the general reliability of Diodorus's report from the papyri.<sup>57</sup>

There are two pre-Christian contexts, one Greek and one Jewish, where the dead were differentiated between the "saved" and "unsaved," and where succor for the dead lay in attempts of the living to transfer dead persons from one category to the other. For the first time in these contexts we may be able to speak of posthumous "salvation," the category most productive for understanding the early Christian texts. In the *Republic* 2.362E-367E, Plato portrays Adimantus discoursing on justice (δικαιοσύνη) in the company of Glaucon and Socrates. The central point of Adimantus's speech is that people do not do justice for its own sake, but rather for the benefits they can derive, and if it is possible to act unjustly and still derive those benefits, people will do so. True,

he says, Homer, Hesiod, Musaeus, and Orpheus all declare that the gods reward the righteous and punish the wicked both in this life and after death, but there's a way out for those who want to continue in their injustice:

Begging priests and soothsayers go to rich men's doors and make them believe that they, by means of sacrifices and incantations, have accumulated a treasure of power from the gods that can expiate and cure with pleasurable festivals any misdeed of a man or his ancestors, and that if a man wishes to harm an enemy, at slight cost he will be enabled to injure just and unjust alike, since they are masters of spells and enchantments that constrain the gods to serve their end. (364B–C)<sup>58</sup>

Adimantus cites Homer, *Iliad* 9.497, as an authority for this view that the gods can be moved by prayers, sacrifices, soothing vows, incense, and libations. Adimantus then goes on to tell of the “bushels of books” attributed to Musaeus and Orpheus:

These books they use in their ritual, and make not only ordinary men but states believe that there really are remissions of sins and purifications for deeds of injustice, by means of sacrifice and pleasant sport for the living, and that there are also special rites for the defunct (τελευτήσασιν), which they call functions (τελετάς), that deliver us from evils in that other world, while terrible things await those who have neglected to sacrifice. (364E–365A)

These rites for the dead are mentioned again in 366A, as Adimantus sums up his argument in this section of the speech:

For if we are just, we shall, it is true, be unscathed by the gods, but we shall be putting away from us the profits of injustice. But if we are unjust, we shall win those profits and, by the importunity of our prayers, when we transgress and sin we shall persuade them and escape scot free! Yes, it will be objected, but we shall be brought to judgment in the world below for our unjust deeds here, we or our children's children. Nay, my dear sir, our calculating friend will say, here again the rites for the dead (τελεταί) have much efficacy.

Plato has Socrates himself speak to this problem when he advances the types of myths to be allowed in the ideal city: “People must not chant ‘Gifts move the gods and gifts persuade dread kings’” (3.390E). The problem is that the gods might be persuaded to forgive injustice at any time; for Plato's point, no distinction need be made as to whether the persuasion takes place during the lifetime of the unjust person, or after his death. Both are equally objectionable. Plato's own myth of judgment in the afterlife does not include any such persuasion or forgiveness (“Myth of Er,” *Rep.* 10, especially 614C–E and

617E), and his *Laws* 885D and 907E specify that a good religion bolsters morality by doing away with such notions of persuading the gods to transgress justice.

Many commentators have understood these passages in the *Rep.* 364–65 as evidence that Orphic religiosity did contain some sort of ritual for the posthumous remission of dead people’s sins.<sup>59</sup> W. K. C. Guthrie, in his classic work on Orpheus and Greek religion, disagrees. The key word is in *Rep.* 365A, *τελευτήσασιν*, which Guthrie admits could mean that the rites are performed for those who have already died, or (his preferred reading), that the rites are performed now for the living and what they learn therein will also be useful for them after they have died.<sup>60</sup> Discoveries of a number of Orphic/Bacchic texts since 1970 may shed some light on this question; gold lamellae, gold leaves, bone tablets, and other media with short texts have turned up in graves dating from 400–100 B.C.E. in southern Italy, Crete, Thessaly, and southern Russia.<sup>61</sup> Most important for this study are two almost identical gold lamellae from a woman’s grave in fourth century B.C.E. Pelinna:

- (1) Now you have died and now you have come into being, O thrice-happy one, on this same day.
- (2) Tell Persephone that Bakkhios himself has set you free. . . .
- (7) And below the earth there are ready for you the same prizes [or “rites”, *τέλεια*] as for the other blessed ones.<sup>62</sup>

Line 7 only appears on one of the lamellae, not both. After connecting the text with other Orphic traditions, Fritz Graf proceeds to interpret it: “With verse 2, the situation becomes somewhat clearer: the deceased is instructed what to say in the netherworld, where a confrontation with Persephone will occur. . . . There is only one answer possible: the deceased is to refer to the *λύσις*, the freedom procured by Bakchios. . . . One becomes *βακχος* only after personal initiation.”<sup>63</sup>

Graf’s interpretation of this text, therefore, falls into line with Guthrie’s interpretation of the Platonic passages: the initiate has learned something in a ritual during her lifetime that will help her after death, namely, that Bacchus (Dionysus) has delivered her. She doesn’t need any further rituals to be conducted for her after her death.

A case can be made for the other side, however, seeing a true ritual for those already dead in *Rep.* 365A, 366A, and the gold lamella. The arguments include the following: (1) The myth of Orpheus’s near-rescue of Euridyce from the underworld connects up well with the notion of Orphic rituals improving the lot of those who have already died. (2) The *τελταί* of line 7 in the lamella above could refer to rites conducted by the survivors on behalf of the recently deceased woman and all the other blessed ones.<sup>64</sup> (3) *Rep.* 366A (not discussed by Guthrie) repeats the claim about the usefulness of the *τελεταί* in the under-

world; the preceding context describes helpful rituals that take place during the lifetime of the unjust man, and in parallel the τελεταί of 366A would appear to take place after he is already deceased. (4) Johnston invokes a parallel with the recently published lead tablet from Selinus, dating to 450 B.C.E. The text of the tablet clearly outlines a ritual to be performed by the living for the dead that has as its object the cleansing of impure ghosts. The benefit of the ritual is for both the living and the dead.<sup>65</sup>

The case is indeed ambiguous, and I agree with Guthrie's dismissal of the other supposed evidence for the Orphic practice of rites for the dead, *Orphicorum Fragmenta* 232 and *Rep.* 364B.<sup>66</sup> In the matter of *Rep.* 365A, 366A, and the lamella, however, I am inclined to see evidence of rituals that had as their focus posthumous succor for the dead. In the lamella line 7, the τελεταί probably take place after the woman's death, whether under the earth or above ground, and since she was already an initiate, it seems most logical that the dead being helped were those who had already participated in the rituals during their lifetimes. In this way the rituals would not be creating new initiates among the dead, but rather would be of extra assistance to those initiates who had died.

"Orphism" is notoriously difficult to define and interpret, but most agree that it was a broad movement within Greek religion lacking institutional or theological unity, but concerned with "salvation," conceived of as the soul's release from cycles of rebirth and success in reaching the soul's true home.<sup>67</sup> Similar to Christian rituals later, Orphic rituals were not the purview of the extended family unit or the city or the nation, but rather were for individual initiates. In both Christianity and Orphism, the sense of solidarity with the dead is not primarily among family members, but rather among living and dead initiates. If my readings of Plato and the lamella are correct, then we have evidence that some people participating in the Orphic salvation movement wished to extend the benefits of the salvific rituals to those initiates already dead.

Even if my readings of these Greek sources are wrong, however, it is beyond dispute that for at least one Hellenistic Jewish author, a salvific ritual for the posthumous forgiveness of sins was seen as possible and desirable. The key text is 2 Macc. 12:39–45. Here, in an account set in 164 B.C.E., some members of the Jewish community fighting for independence have sinned, and they have been punished by God with death in battle:

On the next day, as had now become necessary, Judas (Maccabaeus) and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kindred in the sepulchers of their ancestors. Then under the tunic of each one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen. So they all blessed the ways of

the Lord, the righteous judge, who reveals the things that are hidden; and they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been committed might be blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened as the result of the sins of those who had fallen. He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of 2,000 drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem as a sin offering. (2 Macc. 12:39–43a, NRSV)

Up to this point there is nothing at all in the text about the posthumous salvation of those who had died. Rather, Judas's collection should be interpreted in line with Joshua 7, where the Israelite community had averted God's wrath by stoning to death one sinner and burning his body along with the illicit plunder he had taken (cf. 2 Sam. 24:24–25).<sup>68</sup> The point was to protect and purify the survivors, without any concern for the postmortem fate of the sinners. It is also possible that Lev. 4:13–21 may be in view in 2 Maccabees: In Leviticus, if the "whole congregation" sins unintentionally and the sin is exposed, a bull of the herd must be offered as a sin offering. Jonathan Goldstein notes that the rabbinic tradition would not have applied this verse to Judas's situation, but Judas lived well before the rabbis. In addition, Goldstein states, "(2 Macc. 12) speaks in v. 43 only of a singular sin offering. Had the sin requiring the sacrifice been the individual sin of the possessors of the idolatrous objects, there would have been an offering for each sinner."<sup>69</sup>

The recounting of the episode ends at 2 Macc. 12:43a, but the narrator in 12:43b–45 inserts an editorial comment to interpret Judas's actions:

In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead (ὕπέρ νεκρῶν εὐχεσθαι). But if he was looking for the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin. (2 Macc. 12:43b–45, NRSV)

From this one learns nothing about the historical Judas's views in 164 B.C.E. Rather, one gains access either to the views of Jason of Cyrene (modern Libya), a Jew who wrote a five-volume history of the Maccabean conflict (2 Macc. 2:23), or to the author who epitomized his work. Jason's five volumes, now lost, were condensed into one volume (now known as 2 Maccabees) by an anonymous epitomizer at some time in the late second or early first century B.C.E. (2 Macc. 2:23–32).<sup>70</sup> Jason, the anonymous epitomizer, or both, thought that Judas's collection for the sacrifice was for the posthumous salvation of the individual sinners.

Why the shift in perspective? It is apparent that the author of 2 Macc. 12:43b–45 adheres to the ideology of differentiation of the dead quite clearly expressed within Judaism in the Book of Daniel, chapter 12 (165 B.C.E.). He

believes that God will provide rewards for the righteous and punishments for the wicked after death in the form of resurrection. In Daniel, the form of new existence for the righteous will be astral, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan. 12:3). In 2 Macc. 7 and 14, the form of resurrection is expressed in terms of a reconstituted body, as the third martyred brother proclaims to his persecutors, “I got these (tongue and hands) from heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again” (2 Macc. 7:11; cf. 14:46). In both Daniel and 2 Maccabees, the hope of resurrection is set in a context of intense persecution of the faithful Jews; if God is just, he cannot let the righteous perish in this way. He must have a plan to set things right by restoring life to the righteous and posthumously punishing the wicked.

It is this context that makes 2 Macc. 12:43b–45 so interesting. After all, the dead soldiers had sinned by relying on idols, so one might assume that they should be classed among the wicked. The narrator even says that they had died in battle precisely because of their sin; one wonders if any of the survivors had worn the tokens, too. No mention is made of a search of the living to test the hypothesis! It is remarkable, then, that Jason and/or the epitomizer wished to extend sympathy to those dead who could no longer repent for their error. Of course, these soldiers were not as wicked as the Greek and Jewish persecutors of the righteous, and indeed they were fighting for the right cause in the view of the author. There is a sense of nationalistic solidarity here, and the author wishes to include within salvation even sinners who are still part of the nation. With this in the background, we can understand why he wished to see these sinners restored to the category of “those who fall asleep in godliness” (v. 45). If the soldiers had remained alive they might have been able to repent of the sin and offer an atoning sacrifice on their own behalf. The author of 2 Macc. 12:43b–45 would not accept death as an artificial boundary that would prevent the glorious resurrection of these sinful soldiers. Later rabbinic tradition asserted that there is no atoning sacrifice for the dead (*b. Zebahim* 9b),<sup>71</sup> but it also developed the theory that suffering and death itself, accompanied by repentance, can atone for sin (*m. Yoma* 8:8).<sup>72</sup> The view underlying 2 Macc. 12:43b–45 is quite different on both issues.

It should be noted that the author here is not depicting a creation of new initiates (Jews) among the dead; the sinful soldiers were presumably born Jews and had received the routine circumcision for infant Jewish males. Contrast this with what Thecla, the Shakers, and the Mormons later do to expand their comparatively new sects in the world of the departed. In these later examples, there was no sense of national solidarity, but rather a transnational grouping based on religious ideology. The sinful soldiers of 2 Macc. 12 have violated the covenant and endangered their status among God’s chosen people, and the author interprets Judah’s sacrifice as an attempt to obtain posthumous

atonement for them without their having repented before death. This is similar to the care and feeding of the dead in family cults from the Greek and Roman worlds, but here in 2 Maccabees an ideology of sharp differentiation of fates for the righteous and wicked has entered into the equation. Care and feeding can be undertaken for any of the relatively undifferentiated dead; the actions of the living in that case do not usually affect the eternal fate of the dead person. In the Maccabean case, however, the expiatory action that the living undertake for the dead is of much greater urgency and significance. The old criteria of national and familial solidarity are fused with the new criterion of dying in the proper religious state, and the result is an attempt by the living to rescue the dead.

The author(s) of 2 Maccabees believed not only in intercession by the living for the dead, but also the reverse.<sup>73</sup> Judas at one point encourages his soldiers by recounting a dream he had in which the recently killed high priest Onias III prayed for the Jewish people and the long-dead prophet Jeremiah handed Judas a sword from God with which he might strike down his enemies (15:11–16).<sup>74</sup> This is ironic because the historical Jeremiah had counseled the Jews not to resist the foreign occupying power (Babylon); it was God's instrument to punish the nation. 2 Maccabees also believes that Greek harshness is God's punishment for Jewish sins (6:16), but it nonetheless champions the Maccabees' resistance movement. In Judas's dream the holy prophet of old is made to authorize a stance that he had opposed during his lifetime (see Jer. 28). Of course, the historical circumstances were entirely different, so no one knows what position Jeremiah might have taken had he lived in the second century B.C.E.

2 Macc. 12:43b–45 is unusual in allowing for a postmortem atonement; more typical Second Temple Jewish texts assume that actions during one's lifetime determine one's postmortem fate (1 En. 5:5, 22:8–11; Dan. 12:10; 2 Bar. 85:11–15; Pseudo-Philo, *LAB* 33:2–3). Some texts indicate that Gentiles who convert to Judaism might participate with the chosen people in postmortem bliss (*Joseph and Aseneth* 8:9, 15:7, 22:13), while others restrict future blessings to righteous Jews circumcised on the eighth day (Jubilees 15:26–27), but in all these cases, the focus is on this life as the time frame for human beings to establish the right relationship with God. Another notable exception, more in line with 2 Macc. 12, is the *Testament of Abraham*, A recension, 14:1–15, probably dating from around 100 C.E.<sup>75</sup> In this text Abraham is given a vision of the final judgment, in which the standards apply equally to Jews and Gentiles. God is shown delaying individuals' deaths so that they might repent (A 10:14), and Abraham is depicted beseeching God for mercy even for some who have already died. In one case Abraham gains release for a soul whose sins were exactly equal to his righteous deeds (14:1–5) and in another he obtains pardon for sinners he had erroneously cursed and destroyed during his lifetime (14:10–15). E. P. Sanders remarks that “this may be the earli-

est instance in Jewish sources in which intercessory prayer is considered effective after the death of the person on whose behalf it is offered.”<sup>76</sup> Curiously, Sanders does not discuss 2 Macc. 12 here, perhaps because it involves intercessory sacrifice, not prayer, but the beneficiaries in both cases are equally dead. The other main difference is that Judas in the story of 2 Macc. 12 is a living person who makes atonement for the dead, Abraham in the *Testament of Abraham* is a long-dead patriarch who has a special relationship with God.<sup>77</sup>

Another Jewish text to address head-on the issue of posthumous forgiveness is 4 Ezra (also known as 2 Esdras). This apocalypse, written soon after the destruction of the Jewish Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E., raises starkly the issue of theodicy (God’s justice) in the face of that great calamity (4 Ezra 3:1–3).<sup>78</sup> In 4 Ezra 7:82 the angel reveals to Ezra that in the time period between death and the final judgment, wicked souls “cannot now repent and do good that they may live.” Ezra then asks in 7:102–103 “whether on the day of judgment the righteous will be able to intercede for the ungodly or to entreat the Most High for them, fathers for sons or sons for fathers, brothers for brothers, relatives for their kinsmen, or friends for friends.” Note the value placed on personal bonds inherent in Ezra’s request; that is, what good is an eternal reward without family and friends? Ezra’s poignant question reflects the prevailing piety among Greeks, Romans, and Jews of his day, and not surprisingly, of most people everywhere: The living are most concerned with the welfare of their dead friends and relatives. But it is clear that the author of the text, through his character the angel, does not agree with his character Ezra. The angel answers with a resounding “no” to Ezra’s query: “No one shall ever pray for another then, neither shall anyone lay a burden on another; for then everyone shall bear his own righteousness and unrighteousness” (7:105). Ezra complains that such harshness is inconsistent with the biblical tradition, in which Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and many other biblical heroes prayed often on behalf of others. Notable in the list is Elijah, whose intercession revived a dead child (1 Kings 17:21–23; 4 Ezra 7:109). The angel responds that what pertains now in this sinful age will not apply on the last day (7:112–115). This might imply that the door is still open for repentance or intercession now, in the interim between death and the final judgment, but that possibility was closed in 4 Ezra 7:82. For 4 Ezra’s angel, who speaks with authority, this life is the only chance to set things right.

As Michael Stone points out, the intercession of the righteous for the less righteous, even in an eschatological context, is a common theme in rabbinic literature (*b. Sukka* 14a; *Gen. R.* 33:3; *Exod. R.* 42:1; *Deut. R.* 3:15), though some texts also hold with 4 Ezra that at the final judgment intercession will no longer take place.<sup>79</sup> As rabbinic tradition develops, Gehinnom comes to be seen as a place of temporary punishment for twelve months (*m. Eduyyot* 2:10; *t. Shabbat* 33b; *t. Rosh Hashanah* 17a), after which most persons will gain release,

“after going down to Gehenna and receiving the punishment due him, the sinner is forgiven all his iniquities, and like an arrow from the bow he is flung forth from Gehenna” (*Pesikta Rabbati* 53:2).<sup>80</sup> At times, a rabbi would express an opinion that some sinners are condemned for eternity: heretics, informers, scoffers, adulterers, those who deny the resurrection (*t. Rosh Hashanah* 17a; *t. Baba Metzia* 58b), but no consistent theory was developed in rabbinic literature. At least two late rabbinic traditions think it is possible for the wicked dead to be redeemed even before the punishment is completed in Gehenna. In *Midrash Rabbah Ecclesiastes*, a collection dating to the seventh century C.E.,<sup>81</sup> it is reported that Rabbi Judah ben Ilai (second century C.E.) said that children who died for the sins of their fathers will plead for their fathers’ salvation and be successful: “And they shall live with their children and shall return’ (*Zech.* 10:9), which means that they returned from the descent to Gehinnom and were rescued through the merit of their children. Therefore every man is under obligation to teach his son Torah so that he may rescue him from Gehinnom” (*Midrash R. Eccl.* 4.1).

Similarly, *Midrash Tanhuma Ha’azinu* 1, f. 339b, of uncertain date but no earlier than 800 C.E.,<sup>82</sup> states that if the living say prayers for the dead on the Day of Atonement and vow charity in their name: “God brings them out of Sheol and they are shot forth as an arrow from a bow. Straightaway a man becomes tender and innocent as a kid. God purifies him as at the hour of his birth, sprinkling pure water on him from a bucket . . . he eats of the tree of life continuously and his body reclines at the table of every single saint and he lives for eternity.”<sup>83</sup>

Thus, in these rabbinic traditions, moral seriousness is upheld, and the threat of posthumous punishment is real, but not necessarily eternal. God’s mercy is permitted to win out in the end. By contrast, 4 Ezra 7:82 makes it clear that an individual’s death is the most significant boundary for salvation. If the person has not repented by that point, there can be no further help from either the living or the righteous dead. The character Ezra is most upset by the prospect that so many human beings will be damned (7:116–126), to which the angel retorts, “Many have been created, but few shall be saved” (8:3).

The action of Judas as understood in 2 Macc. 12:43b–45 would not have been acceptable to the author of 4 Ezra or his character the angel (who gets the final say), but the character Ezra would have shown much sympathy for Judas’s intent. Ezra’s clear articulation of his request for intercession, as well as the vehemence with which the angel refutes it, may reflect a real debate among Jews at the end of the first century C.E. Alfons Kurfess posits that the character Ezra represents the more lenient view of the nascent rabbinic tradition, while the author himself, through the angel, opposes such lenience.<sup>84</sup> One Jewish-Christian text, probably from the second century, also reflects this debate over intercession at the final judgment: the *Apocalypse of Peter*, to be discussed in the next chapter.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, there were many contexts in Greek, Roman, and Jewish antiquity where people endeavored to do something to help the dead, usually family members or friends; the stakes grew even higher when the context was one of differentiation of the dead between the saved and the damned. Such differentiation had the potential to undermine the familial piety toward the dead so important in all three cultures, and indeed a debate arose among Jews over the extent to which dead family and comrades could be helped by the intercessions of others. This inquiry has set the stage for the study of posthumous salvation in early Christian traditions, early Christianity being a form of Judaism in the Greco-Roman world that made a sharp distinction between the saved and the damned.

## 2

### THE NEW TESTAMENT AND OTHER EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

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At first glance it appears that this chapter should have very little to say, since there is nothing in the New Testament comparable to 2 Macc. 12:43b–45, and indeed the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) effectively closes off the possibility of posthumous salvation when Abraham says to the rich man being tormented in Hades, “Between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to there cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us” (Luke 16:26). It is fair to characterize the general thrust of the New Testament and early Christian literature on posthumous salvation with two statements, one from Paul, “For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10), and one from an anonymous second-century Christian sermon known as 2 Clement, “Once we have departed this world, we can no longer confess there or repent any more” (2 Clem. 8:3). In addition, a number of early Christian texts speak of “eternal” punishment or destruction for the wicked (2 Thess. 1:9; Matt. 25:46; 2 Clem. 6:7), or speak of “birth from water” (baptism) as a requirement to “enter the kingdom of heaven” (John 3:5). In all these cases it appears that death is a boundary beyond which salvation may not be procured.

The early Christian traditions, however, were neither univocal nor unequivocal. Numerous conceptions of posthumous rescue found their way into the earliest Christian speculations: an implicit universal salvation (Rom. 11:32), vicarious baptism “on behalf of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:29), talk of proclaiming the gospel among the dead (1 Pet. 4:6), the dead apostles’ baptizing the righteous dead (*Shepherd of Hermas, Sim.* 9.16.2–7), and even God’s granting the righteous the privilege of saving some of the damned at the final judg-

ment (*Apocalypse of Peter* 14:1–4; *Sibylline Oracles* 2:330–38). We should not be surprised at the appearance of these traditions, since Christianity was a new religious expression embedded in a culture where the boundaries between the living and the dead were often quite permeable, as we saw in the last chapter. This chapter proposes to examine each of the above texts in turn, in roughly chronological order, with an eye toward setting the stage for later Christian treatment of these foundational traditions as the issues were more sharply debated in subsequent centuries.

## Paul

The apostle Paul is the logical place to start since he is the author of the earliest known Christian documents that survived on their own, unincorporated into later texts. As already noted, in 2 Cor. 5:10 Paul stated that each person would be judged for his or her deeds in the body, and the same view is found in Rom. 2:16. At one point, however, Paul indicates that the Christians themselves will be judges over the world and even over the angels (1 Cor. 6:2–3; cf. Matt. 19:28, Luke 22:30, Rev. 20:4). He is also famous for his conviction that faith in Christ, not works of the Law, is the key to salvation (Gal. 2:15–21). He states this clearly in Rom. 3:23–25: “since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.” Some of Paul’s opponents understood all this to imply that ethics should be irrelevant to Paul and that in his view the Christians would escape God’s judgment simply by virtue of their status as Christians. He reports his opponents as caricaturing his position, “Let us do evil so that good may come” (Rom. 3:8). Paul is well aware that his talk about God’s gratuitous grace could lead to the conclusion, “Should we continue in sin, in order that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1).

Much of Rom. 1–8 is Paul’s attempt to answer these charges. He lays stress on the post-faith, post-baptismal transformation of the believer, “How can we who died to sin go on living in it?” (Rom. 6:2); “But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Rom. 8:9). Paul does not naively hold that the new Christian life in the spirit will be automatic, sinless, or easy. Throughout his letters he rails against behavior on the part of Christians inconsistent with what he considers righteous. These transgressions will not go unpunished by God, and they may entail a loss of salvation (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 9:24–10:13; Gal. 5:13–26; Rom. 14:10). In all these cases, the deeds necessary for salvation (belief and participation in Christ’s saving death, correct behavior afterward) occur in this life, and Paul makes no explicit mention of or provision for posthumous salvation.

Three texts, however, give a hint that Paul at times could conceive of the possibility that God's grace for salvation might extend to persons already dead: 1 Cor. 5:5, 1 Cor. 15:29, and Rom. 11:32. In the first, Paul advocates a magical cursing ritual for a sinning Christian, "handing him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh in order that (his?) spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:5). Paul could be hoping here that the excommunication will cause the man to repent in this life, and some scholars think that 2 Cor. 2:5–8 speaks of the restoration of this man.<sup>1</sup> But 1 Cor. 5:5 may also envision the possibility of a salvation for this individual that takes place only after his death, at the final judgment, when his spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord. Alternatively, since the possessive pronoun "his" is absent before the word "spirit," Paul may have in view the salvation of the communal "spirit," purged of the evildoer.<sup>2</sup>

In the second text, 1 Cor. 15:29, Paul is trying to convince the recipients of his letter that there will indeed be a "resurrection of the dead" in the form of a spirit body (σῶμα πνευματικόν, 1 Cor. 15:44) and that believers will receive the same type of resurrected body that Christ received when he was raised up by God. It will not be the same flesh and blood that we have now. To this end Paul invokes a number of arguments. If the dead are not raised, then Christ was not raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then Christian faith is futile and those who have died in Christ have perished forever (1 Cor. 15:16–18). If the dead are not raised, then why are Paul and other Christian missionaries constantly risking death to spread the gospel (15:30)? He even alludes to a specific incident at Ephesus where he "fought with wild animals" (literally?<sup>3</sup>), and he came near to death at various points in his ministry (1 Cor. 15:32; cf. 2 Cor. 1:8–10, Phil. 1:12–26). Only his conviction that the dead will be raised keeps him going; otherwise he should just "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (Isa. 22:13, quoted in 1 Cor. 15:32). In this context Paul alludes to a practice of some Corinthian Christians in 1 Cor. 15:29, "Then what are they doing, those who are baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised, why are they baptized on their behalf?" Paul does not here object to this practice, whatever it is, and he uses it to convince the Corinthians that if they are baptized on behalf of the dead, they must also believe in the resurrection as Paul understands it.

Enormous vats of ink have been emptied in both pre-critical and critical scholarship speculating on precisely what those Corinthian Christians were doing, why they were doing it, and Paul's attitude toward it. A thorough 51-page survey of opinion from the second century down to 1962 was assembled by Mathis Rissi; there is no need to rehearse that entire history here.<sup>4</sup> I agree with Rissi and Hans Conzelmann (and, for that matter, with Mormon prophet Joseph Smith), that the grammar and logic of the passage point to a practice of vicarious baptism of a living person for the benefit of a dead person.<sup>5</sup>

The main issue is to ascertain who was eligible for such a posthumous benefit. Were the Corinthians baptizing by proxy dozens or hundreds of dead

Gentiles and Jews, like the Latter-day Saints began to do 1800 years later? That is certainly a possibility, but it is so alien to Paul's theoretical statements about the effects of baptism and individuals' acceptance of the gospel that I consider it highly unlikely. Perhaps the practice was more limited. Richard DeMaris thinks that the vicarious baptism was performed for members of the Christian community who had died, as an additional ritual to aid them in the afterlife.<sup>6</sup> This view would line up Paul with my reading of the Orphic materials in Plato, *Rep.* 364–65 (see chapter 1, "Rescue for the Dead in a 'Salvation' Context"). DeMaris's conjecture would require positing a second baptism for some believers, one in life, and another vicarious one after death.

Rissi favors an interpretation close to that of the Marcionites as reported in John Chrysostom (fl. 386–403 C.E.), *Hom. in Epist. ad I Cor.* 40.1: Baptism for the dead was performed at Corinth for those who happened to die while preparing for baptism (i.e., those who in later times would be called catechumens).<sup>7</sup> The Marcionites were followers of Marcion, a Christian devoted to Pauline texts who had been deemed a heretic by other Christians in Rome ca. 140 C.E. Most objectionable to more "mainstream" Christians was Marcion's belief that the god of the Old Testament was not the God that Jesus revealed, but rather an inferior demiurge.<sup>8</sup> According to Chrysostom, if a Marcionite catechumen died before baptism, an already-baptized living Marcionite would be placed under the couch on which the corpse was laid; he or she would answer a baptismal question on behalf of the corpse; and then the living person would be baptized with water, the benefits accruing to the dead person. In contrast to the Mormon baptism by proxy, in Chrysostom's account the Marcionites used the rite sparingly and only for individuals who had indicated a clear desire to be baptized while still alive.

In my opinion, such an interpretation is the most logical explanation for the original practice referred to in 1 Cor. 15:29, because it helps explain why Paul could approve of it: It set a posthumous seal onto a faith that was already present in life. Earlier in the same letter, when attempting to deal with factions that had arisen in the Corinthian community, Paul indicates that he had not baptized all his converts, nor did he always do so as a matter of course: "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:14–17).

It is easy to envision the writer of these lines allowing for a posthumous vicarious baptism, so long as the beneficiary had accepted the saving gospel while still alive. Paul obviously left the baptism of many of his converts to others, so why not allow them to be baptized posthumously if the necessity should arise? This also fits in well with the overall argument Paul puts for-

ward in 1 Cor. 15: The vicarious baptism only makes sense if the beneficiaries (already members of the community) one day will rise from the dead (15:23). Another argument supporting this view is the role of vicarious action in Pauline theology generally. Paul's very religion was based on the vicarious salvific effects of the sufferings and death of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 3:25). In addition, either Paul or a close follower of his wrote that Paul's own sufferings were "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church" (Col. 1:24). Given this profound discourse of one person's standing in for another within Pauline theology, it is not a stretch to imagine a Pauline community practicing vicarious baptism for those who had died "in the faith," but without baptism. In other contexts, Paul stresses the transformative centrality of baptism (Rom. 6:3–6; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13), and these passages serve to reinforce my conclusion here. Paul had stressed to the Corinthians the vital importance of baptism, but had not seen to it that all his converts were baptized. Thus, when some of the converts died before baptism, the Corinthians made sure that the deceased did not lose out on the benefits of that saving ritual by giving them a vicarious posthumous baptism.

One may legitimately question John Chrysostom as a source for the practices of the Marcionite Christians, whom he considered to be heretics, but a close reading of two texts of Tertullian, some 200 years before Chrysostom, may serve to confirm the picture painted by the later author. Tertullian refers to 1 Cor. 15:29 in two places. In the earlier text, *De Resurrectione Carnis* 48.11, he admits that perhaps some at Corinth had been baptized on behalf of the dead, and like Paul himself, he goes on to use that fact to argue for a particular understanding of the nature of the resurrection:

Supposing however that some are actually baptized for the dead, we will see if this makes sense. Certainly, on that supposition, their having started such a practice does indicate how far they think that baptism will benefit the flesh, even when it is other than that of the person baptized, and the baptism vicarious. They have the hope of the resurrection in view, and that a bodily resurrection, or it would not be tied up with a bodily baptism—as he says, what good is it for them to be baptized themselves even, if the bodies that are so baptized do not rise again—for the soul is sanctified not by bodily washing but by spiritual response.<sup>9</sup>

This text seems to accept the practice as legitimate, at least in theory.

Tertullian's later text, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.10, refers to the earlier work, but this time, in a context of combating the Marcionites, Tertullian is careful to reject any reading that might imply the legitimacy of vicarious baptism for the dead. The text is worth quoting at length:

Your alleged practice (baptism for the dead) I dismiss as quite out of the question (*Viderit institutio ista*). The Kalends of February and Praying for

the dead (as in that month) will perhaps offer a parallel for it. But you must not on that account stigmatize the Apostle as the immediate originator or as the endorser of it. . . . We have him (St. Paul) elsewhere laying it down that a man can only be baptized once (cf. Eph. 4:5). So then, here too, “to be dipped for the dead” means “to be dipped for corpses”—for we use the word “*mortuum*” or “dead man” to denote a corpse. (So the passage says this): What will they achieve, who are baptized (merely) for corpses if corpses do not rise again?<sup>10</sup>

Note that here Tertullian connects the Christian practice of vicarious baptism with the more general Roman practice of providing for the dead and praying for them during the Parentales festival (chapter 1, “Feeding the Dead”). This means he probably envisions “baptism for the dead” carried out for dead persons known to the living, deceased family members, or friends, as in the Parentalia. This could possibly indicate that the rite in some circles was conducted for more than just deceased catechumens, but the evidence is too thin here to say anything with confidence. Tertullian also presages (in Latin) the later Greek Patristic interpretation of the passage, which will interpret the “dead” in 1 Cor. 15:29 as the “bodies” of living persons being baptized in the normal way for the first and only time.<sup>11</sup> It is significant that Tertullian only makes these moves when combating the Marcionites, leading me to conclude that between the writing of *De Resurrectione* and *Adversus Marcionem* he had learned of their practice based on 1 Corinthians, some 200 years before it received a full reporting in John Chrysostom. He found it distasteful partly because it was associated with Marcionites.

The Marcionites may not have been the only Christian group who practiced a posthumous baptism for dead catechumens. Epiphanius (315–403 C.E.), in his *Panarion Against 80 Heresies* I.28, gives a brief account of the Jewish-Christian heretic Cerinthus from the first century, whose followers in Asia Minor baptized the living on behalf of the dead: “Among them (the Cerinthians) there also exists the tradition of which we have heard, namely that when some of them die before being baptized, others are baptized in place of them in their name, so that when they rise in the resurrection they may not pay the penalty of not having received baptism and become subject to the authority of the one who made the world.”<sup>12</sup>

Epiphanius himself prefers a different interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:29: Paul meant that those catechumens who were *about* to die ought to be granted a speedy baptism.<sup>13</sup> Finally, we should note that the Council of Carthage in 397 issued an explicit directive against baptizing a corpse and offering the Eucharist to a corpse.<sup>14</sup> Though not the same as vicarious baptism, these rituals would have been intended for the same purpose, ensuring that the dead are full participants in the sacramental life of the church.

If my reading of 1 Cor. 15:29 is right, then Paul’s and the Marcionites’ and the Cerinthians’ “baptism on behalf of the dead” cannot truly be categorized

as the posthumous salvation of non-Christians, since in each case the beneficiaries were already within the Christian fold before their deaths, albeit not as fully baptized members. The boundaries of the community are not being thrown open in the realm of the dead, but rather, every possible avenue is being pursued to ensure that the unbaptized but deceased members of the community participate fully in the future salvation. The one passage from Tertullian that makes a parallel with the Parentales ritual might indicate an expanded usage of vicarious baptism in some circles, but the evidence is not very strong.

The last Pauline text concerning the posthumous salvation of non-Christians is more global in its import: Rom. 11:32. In Rom. 9–11 Paul is wrestling with the fact that most of his fellow Jews have not become Christians. At first he attributes this to the predestination of God: Some vessels are simply made for menial use, and God can mold, shape, and even destroy human beings like a potter treats his pots (Rom. 9:21–22). As Paul quotes God from Mal. 1:2–3, “Jacob I loved, Esau I hated” (Rom. 9:13). Contrast this explanation with 2 Cor. 4:4, where Paul attributes Jewish and pagan unbelief to a blinding by the “god of this world” (i.e., Satan). As he continues in Romans, however, Paul is not satisfied with his own explanations of seemingly permanent unbelief, and we know that he is tormented by the question, since he says he would be willing to give up his own salvation if it meant the salvation of the rest of his people, the Jews (Rom. 9:2–3). He ends the section, therefore, by proclaiming:

I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in, and then all Israel will be saved, just as it is written, “Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob” [Isa. 59:20]. “And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins” [Isa. 27:9]. As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake, but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all. (Rom. 11:25–32)

Paul here expresses a notion of universal salvation convincingly explicated by Richard Batey in a 1966 article.<sup>15</sup> Batey documents the tortured exegesis of those who wish to deny that Paul was speaking about the salvation of every individual, and he connects Paul’s introduction of universal salvation with the apostle’s conviction that God’s saving purposes cannot be thwarted. Paul indicates that the “fullness” (πλήρωμα) of the gentiles will enter in, as well as “all Israel” (11:25–26), but he does not speculate on precisely how God will

accomplish this. After all, it is a mystery (Rom. 11:25); God's judgments are unsearchable and his ways inscrutable (11:33). One thing is clear, however, "all" will only be saved on Christian terms, according to Paul. The unbelieving Jews are currently enemies of God, beloved for the sake of their ancestors (11:28), but disobedient (11:30). The only way for them to be saved is for them to have a change of heart analogous to what has occurred among Gentile believers (11:31). Note that Paul cites as a warrant for all this biblical passages in which God promises to "banish ungodliness from Jacob" and "take away their sins" (Isa. 59:20 and 27:9, cited in Rom. 11:26–27). What is Jacob's sin at the present moment, according to Paul? Disobedience and lack of belief in Jesus. Since Paul obviously knows of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles who have died, he can only have in mind here some type of posthumous change of heart and salvation for the "fullness of the Gentiles" and "all Israel." It is possible that the "fullness of the Gentiles" means only the "full number" of the Gentiles, and not all of them. But a posthumous salvation is still clearly in view with regard to unbelieving Jews, and Paul does assert that God will show mercy to "all" (11:32).

Closely related to the posthumous and universal salvation in Rom. 11:32 is the annihilation of all evil powers and God's finally being "all in all" in 1 Cor. 15:24–28, the passage just before the discussion of baptism for the dead. This is a cosmological statement, and it is unclear if any human beings are among the enemies to be destroyed. I agree with M. Eugene Boring that 1 Cor. 15:24–28 presents an image of God's "lordship" over all and not necessarily the "salvation of all," but Rom. 11:32 completes the picture: there the salvation issue is paramount in Paul's mind.<sup>16</sup>

The specific details of the ultimate fates of human beings are anything but clear in Paul's surviving letters. The Christian dead are variously waiting patiently for Jesus' imminent return (1 Thess. 4:16) or are immediately "with Christ" upon death (Phil. 1:23). For Paul and his followers the time was short (1 Thess. 4:15; 1 Cor. 7:29; Rom. 13:11), so consistency and accuracy on these matters were not of utmost importance; God would unfold the true scenario soon enough. Paul often states that the reward for steadfast Christians is eternal life (Rom. 5:21, 6:22–23; Gal. 6:8; 2 Cor. 5:1); the reward is the same for "doing good" (Rom. 2:7), though in this context all people are under the power of sin, so no one can "do good" without Christ (Rom. 3:9–12). Paul believes that "death" (Rom. 6:23) or "wrath and fury" (Rom. 2:8) await the wicked, and he often indicates the possibility that errant Christians might lose their salvation (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:21). Only in 2 Thess. 1:9, a letter considered by many to be pseudonymous,<sup>17</sup> does Paul or someone in his name state clearly an *eternal* penalty for the wicked:

For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting ven-

geance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will suffer the punishment (δίκην) of eternal destruction (ὄλεθρον αἰώνιον) from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his strength. (2 Thess. 1:6–9)

Note the element of reversal in this passage: The justice of God demands a stern future punishment for those who are wicked now and demands a future reward for those who are now suffering unjustly. But the punishment named is eternal destruction, i.e., annihilation, not necessarily torment. This coheres with the eschatological annihilation of all evil powers in 1 Cor. 15:24–28. Paul does not explicitly address in any of these passages the question of what happens between death and the final judgment. This is probably due to the fact that Paul assumed such an interim time period would be very short.

Thus, the Pauline letters contain resources for many of the later Christians who will draw upon them: those who believe the wicked will be annihilated, and those who believe in universal salvation. Those advocating eternal *punishment* of the wicked will have to turn to other New Testament texts, principally Matt. 25:46 and its scene of the final judgment: “These (sinners) will go away into eternal punishment (κόλασιν).” 2 Pet. 2:9 goes a step further and declares that the wicked will even endure punishment between the day of their deaths and the day of the last judgment: “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial and how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.” Thus, the later author of 2 Peter has filled in the logical gap that was not addressed in the earlier Pauline correspondence.

Universal salvation based in part on Rom. 11:32 and 1 Cor. 15:28 will have a vibrant history in subsequent Christian theology; Origen (third century), Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century), and Hosea Ballou (nineteenth-century leader in the Universalist church) will be its chief proponents, while the majority of theologians (Tertullian, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, and many others) will reject it vehemently. A belief in universal salvation necessarily entails the posthumous salvation of non-Christians, and Origen and Gregory of Nyssa each speculated on the process by which God would bring that about, the topic of chapter 6 in this book. Other theologians based their rejection of universal salvation on a variety of factors, chief among them ethical considerations; i.e., why make sacrifices to do the right things now, in this life, if we shall all be saved posthumously in the end? A detailed discussion of some of these debates will be provided in subsequent chapters.

## Luke 16:19–31 and 2 Clement 8

While Paul, writing his letter to the Romans, may have entertained the notion that non-Christians might be saved after their deaths, Luke’s Jesus appears to close the door on such a possibility in the famous story of the rich

man and Lazarus. In the New Testament, this story appears only in the third gospel, but Egyptian, Greek, and Jewish stories with key similarities to the Lukan version are known.<sup>18</sup> It will be helpful to provide the full text from Luke:

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." He said, "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead."

Unlike the Pauline texts, the key to posthumous bliss in this story is not whether one is a believer in the saving power of Jesus' death and resurrection, but rather, whether one is rich or poor. One cardinal theme of Luke's gospel is the eschatological reversal of fortunes for the rich and poor (Luke 1:52–53; 4:18–19; 6:24–25), and in this vein C. F. Evans claims that the story "is not a morality tale, but a story of reversal."<sup>19</sup> I disagree with Evans, however, for while one searches in vain for a clear indication that the poor man was pious and good, the story does make clear that the rich man was particularly greedy, ignoring Lazarus at his gate day in and day out.<sup>20</sup> True, in verse 25 Abraham indicates the reason for their postmortem fates is simply a reversal of fortunes, but Abraham's admonitions in verses 29 and 31 *also* make the parable a morality tale, since they presuppose that there is something the five surviving brothers might do to alter their fates, something they can derive from Moses and the prophets. What did Luke have in mind? Should they give away all their wealth? Engage in a more compassionate treatment of those poor who, like Lazarus, might find themselves at their gate? The story does not specify, though Luke-Acts as a whole does imply such obligations for the wealthy.

Luke's Abraham is not too optimistic that the brothers will take heed, but we, the readers and hearers of the gospel, receive via this story the warning that was denied to the rich man's brothers, and Luke makes his point: repent and act properly now, before it is too late. Two Hellenistic Jewish texts make this same point. The biblical heroine Deborah in Pseudo-Philo *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (LAB) 33:2–3 says, "Direct your heart to the Lord your God during the time of your life, because after your death you cannot repent of those things in which you live." Similarly, in the British Library Cotton Manuscript of *The Book of Jannes and Jambres*, Jannes returns from the dead to his brother Jambres and says to him, "I died and was brought from among the living to the netherworld where there is great burning and the pit of perdition, whence no ascent is possible. Now then, brother Jambres, make sure you do good in your life to your children and friends, for in the netherworld no good exists."<sup>21</sup> It is unclear if this is a call to repentance or simply a call to enjoy life while it is still possible.

Elsewhere, Luke places great faith in the power of repentance even at the last moment of life, as seen in his story of the repentant thief crucified next to Jesus (Luke 23:39–43), in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), and in Peter's speech to the Jews who had killed Jesus "in ignorance" (Acts 3:19). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man has failed in two areas: he neither paid attention to Moses and the prophets nor repented before his death. The stern statement of Abraham in Luke 16:26 reveals the finality of the situation in Luke's mind: "no one can cross from there to us." The rich man has come to a posthumous realization of his error, but it is now too late.<sup>22</sup> The decision has been made. There is no indication in Luke that the rich man's torment might be temporary, even though this issue is not explicitly addressed in the text. It strikes me that any notion of a posthumous salvation or even comfort for the rich man, whether by intercession of the righteous (living or dead), or by forgiveness at the last judgment, or by universal salvation, would violate the spirit of the story. After all, Abraham even denies him the comfort of a drop of water! The rich man has made his bed and now he has to lie in it. Of course, this story does not specifically deal with conversion to Christianity; after all, Lazarus is no Christian, yet he enjoys a posthumous reward. When baptism and becoming a follower of Jesus become the *sine qua non* of salvation in Christian thinking, then this story is reinterpreted to mean that conversion and baptism must be accomplished in this life (see the discussion in chapter 7 on Augustine's interpretation).

Before leaving Luke's gospel, another early Christian text should be introduced, written not long after, which spells out most clearly the conviction that this life is the one and only chance human beings have to establish the right relationship with God. 2 Clement is an anonymous Christian sermon of the second century, of unknown provenance.<sup>23</sup> Karl P. Donfried has noted that chapters 6 through 8 of 2 Clement are addressed to baptized Christians ("thus,

brothers," 2 Clem. 8:4) in the context of an exhortation to repentance for post-baptismal sins.<sup>24</sup> 2 Clement warns:

(8:1) So while we are on earth, let us repent. (2) For we are clay in the hand of the craftsman. It is like a potter making a vessel: if it becomes misshapen or breaks in his hands, he molds it again, but if he has already put it into the kiln, he can no longer repair it. So it is with us. While we are in this world let us repent with all our hearts of the evil we have done in the flesh in order that we may be saved by the Lord while we still have opportunity to repent. (3) For after we have passed out of this world we shall no longer be able in the next either to confess or repent.<sup>25</sup>

As in Luke, for 2 Clement this life is the only chance one has to establish the right relationship with God. If this is true for the Christians addressed by 2 Clem. 8, we can be certain there was no possibility of salvation for non-Christians, as stated in 2 Clem. 1:7, "since [Jesus Christ saw] that we had no hope of salvation unless it came from him."

### 1 Peter 3:19–20 and 4:6

These three verses have received an extraordinary amount of attention through the centuries because they might indicate that a person could die an unrepentant, unconverted sinner, yet still be saved by responding positively to the gospel in the afterlife. For the exposition that follows, the full text of 1 Pet. 3:16b–4:7 will be needed, not because this selection forms any particular "unit" within the epistle, but rather because it covers the territory needed for the discussion:

(3:16b) Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. (17) For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. (18) For Christ also suffered for sins once and for all, the righteous and the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, (19) in which (ἐν ᾧ) also he went and made a proclamation (ἐκήρυξεν) to the spirits in prison, (20) who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. (21) And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22) who has gone into the heavens and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him. (4:1) Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), (2) so as

to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. (3) You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme, but they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. (6) For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead (καὶ νεκροῖς εὐηγγελίσθη), so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does. (7) The end of all things is near, therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.

The list of vexing questions concerning this passage is long; here I shall provide the major ones with relevance to the topic of posthumous salvation for non-Christians.<sup>26</sup> (1) Who is the author of this epistle and when did he live? (2) Who are the “disobedient spirits in prison” to whom Christ preached in 1 Pet. 3:19–20? (3) What was the purpose, content, and effect of that preaching, and can any of these details be known? (4) When did Christ preach to these spirits, in a descent to Hades, in an ascent to heaven, or at some other time? (5) Are the “dead” who received a preaching in 1 Pet. 4:6 the same as the “disobedient spirits” of 1 Pet. 3:19–20? (6) When did the dead of 1 Pet. 4:6 receive a preaching, while they were still alive, or after they were already dead?

William J. Dalton has compiled an excellent survey and categorization of nineteen centuries of opinion on these and other questions related to 1 Pet. 3:19–20 and 4:6.<sup>27</sup> On question (1), the author of 1 Peter, the majority view is that the letter is pseudepigraphical (i.e., not by the apostle Peter, but rather written in his name at some time before 120 C.E., probably well before this date). The epistle was known to Papias, Polycarp, and the author of 2 Peter, all writing near the middle of the second century.<sup>28</sup> Two main options have been proposed to resolve question (2): the disobedient spirits are either the spirits of the fallen angels from 1 En. 6–11 who were imprisoned before the flood (cf. Gen. 6:1–4), or they are the spirits of the people living in Noah’s time who were wiped out in the flood. Bo Reicke put forward the view that both categories of creatures could be covered in the phrase “disobedient spirits.”<sup>29</sup> If the spirits of human beings are to be included,<sup>30</sup> then this raises the possibility of posthumous salvation for these people when Christ preached to them, the heart of the matter in question (3). Why did Christ preach to these spirits, in the author’s mind, and what was the outcome? Was it simply to announce to them that salvation had occurred, without their being able to participate? Or was it an offer of salvation to them? Reicke provides a good caution here:

(The text) does not say that the spirits were released from prison, it does not say that some or all of them became believers, . . . it does not say that Christ pronounced any special judgment over them. . . . It is most prob-

able that the author refrains quite purposely from expressing himself more clearly as to the content and effect of the preaching. He only wished to state that the spirits actually learned the great Messianic secret.<sup>31</sup>

Question (4), figuring out where Christ preached to the spirits, is important because, beginning with Clement of Alexandria in the late second century, this passage from 1 Peter became closely associated with Christ's descent into the realm of the dead in the time between his crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>32</sup> The descent of Christ to the realm of the dead is known from other New Testament texts (Matt. 12:40; Rom. 10:7; Acts 2:24–31; perhaps Eph. 4:8–10<sup>33</sup>), but among texts that later became canonical, only in 1 Pet. 3:19 and 4:6 is there a suggestion that Christ might have preached there (cf. *Gospel of Peter* 41–42, and see chapter 5, this volume). For Clement of Alexandria, 1 Pet. 3:19 means that Christ offered a similar kind of salvation to the dead as to the living (*Stromateis* 6.6.38–53). There is a viable alternative, however, for 1 Pet. 3:19, namely, that Christ preached to the imprisoned spirits on the way up, during his ascension to heaven. The sequence of events in 1 Pet. 3:18–19 speaks in favor of this: Christ was put to death in the flesh, made alive in the spirit, and then he preached to the spirits in prison. In this case, the author would have in mind a heavenly “prison” for the fallen angels’ spirits, perhaps in the second and fifth heavens as described in 2 En. 7:1–3 (cf. *Testament of Levi* 3:2). This is Dalton’s position, and I am inclined to agree.<sup>34</sup>

My agreement with Dalton on question (4) means that I do not think the spirits of dead human beings are in view in 1 Pet. 3:19–20, but I do think they are present in 1 Pet. 4:6. Thus, I would answer question (5) in the negative: The beings in view in 1 Pet. 3:19 are not the same as those in 4:6. “The dead” in 4:6 were real dead human beings who received a preaching, and so the main issue for our purposes becomes question (6) above: Precisely when did they receive that preaching? While they were still alive, or after they were already dead? The former interpretation would make 1 Pet. 4:6 similar to 1 Thess. 4:13–18, where Paul assures his followers that Christians who have died will still share in the resurrected life when Jesus returns.<sup>35</sup> The latter interpretation would make 1 Peter 4:6 similar to *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Sim.* 9.16, and *Epist. Apost.* 27, where some of the dead hear the good news about Christ for the first time after their deaths. If the latter option is chosen, then one must next ask which of the dead were able to receive the message and have a positive response? Was it only those who had led righteous lives, that is, prophets and heroes of the Old Testament, as in the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Epistula Apostolorum*?<sup>36</sup> Or was it the wicked as well? In other words, did 1 Peter envision a true offer of repentance and salvation after death? After carefully delineating the pros and cons of each interpretation, Dalton opts for the first one (i.e., the dead had received the preaching while still alive), but he fully acknowledges the weaknesses even of his favored solution.<sup>37</sup> I am not so

concerned in this study to determine the original meaning of 1 Peter, since a firm consensus can probably never be reached. What is important here is that some later Christians interpreted 1 Pet. 4:6 as involving a true offer of repentance and salvation to the dead after their deaths, a topic to be explored later in chapters 5 and 7. Thus, the passage, even if misinterpreted, offered one way for early Christians to conceive of the posthumous salvation of non-Christians. Its usage in later Christian tradition will be introduced at appropriate points throughout the rest of the book.

*Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes 9.16*  
and *Epistula Apostolorum 27*

Having introduced these two texts, this is the appropriate place to provide the relevant passages and some remarks on their significance for the posthumous salvation of non-Christians. The Muratorian canon, a list of Christian books alternatively dated to the second century or the fourth century,<sup>38</sup> states that the *Shepherd of Hermas* was written by the brother of Pius, bishop of Rome ca. 140–54. It was definitely written in Greek at Rome in the second century, but beyond that nothing certain is known. It was used as an authoritative resource by a number of authors, including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian until he changed his mind about it. The first fourth of it is found in the famous fourth century manuscript of the Greek Bible, Codex Sinaiticus. Thus, for some Christians it was clearly considered scripture, while others objected to its inclusion in the canon of sacred texts.<sup>39</sup> The work consists of three major parts: (1) five Visions of Hermas, four revealed to him by the “elect lady,” and one by the Shepherd; (2) twelve Mandates; and (3) ten Similitudes (Parables) given to Hermas by the Shepherd. In the ninth similitude, the issue of salvation for the ancient dead is raised in the context of an image of the church as a tower made of various stones representing individual church members:<sup>40</sup>

“Why, sir,” said I, “did the stones come up from the deep and were they put into the building of the tower, after they had borne these spirits?” “They had need,” said he, “to come up through the water that they might be made alive, for they could not otherwise enter the Kingdom of God unless they put away the mortality of their former life. So these also who had fallen asleep received the seal of the Son of God and entered into the Kingdom of God. For before,” said he, “a man bears the name of the Son of God he is dead. But when he receives the seal he puts away mortality and receives life. The seal, then, is the water. They go down then into the water dead, and come up alive. This seal, then, was preached to them also, and they made use of it to enter into the kingdom of God.” “Why, Sir,” said I, “did the forty stones also come up with them from the deep, although they had

received the seal already?" "Because," said he, "these apostles and teachers, who preached the name of the Son of God, having fallen asleep in the power and faith of the Son of God, preached also to those who had fallen asleep before them, and themselves gave to them the seal of the preaching. They went down therefore with them into the water and came up again, but the latter went down alive and came up alive; the former who had fallen asleep before, went down dead but came up alive. Through them, therefore, they were made alive, and received the knowledge of the name of the Son of God. For this cause they also came up with them and were joined into the building of the tower, and were used together with them for the building without being hewn. For they had fallen asleep in righteousness and in great purity, only they had not received this seal. You have then the explanation of these things also." (*Sim.* 9.16. 1–7)

Notice in this passage that it is not Christ who preached to and baptized the dead,<sup>41</sup> but rather forty apostles and teachers who performed this service after their own deaths. In the mind of the author of the *Shepherd*, only certain of the dead were worthy to receive the preaching and the baptism, "For they had fallen asleep in righteousness and in great purity, only they had not received this seal." There is no indication of the wicked here being able to amend their ways after death. Even the righteous dead need the seal of baptism, however, and this is what those forty apostles and teachers were sent to do.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike many of the other stones in the tower (i.e., living, imperfect Christians), those who were baptized after falling asleep had no need to be hewn in order to be fitted into the tower. This contrasts with another text, probably from later within the same century, the *Epistula Apostolorum* 27, in which Christ himself baptizes the righteous dead upon his descent:

And on that account I have descended and have spoken with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob,<sup>43</sup> to your fathers the prophets, and have brought them news that they may come from the rest which is below into heaven, and have given them the right hand of the baptism of life and forgiveness and pardon for all wickedness<sup>44</sup> as to you, so from now on also to those who believe in me.

Here, the righteous of the Old Testament were not perfect, but needed forgiveness and pardon as well as baptism (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.6.38–53, discussed in chapter 5, this volume).

These speculations on the economy of salvation for the dead continue and expand ideas that were already current in second-century Christianity generally: Namely, what does the Christian tradition have to say about the salvation of all those who lived before Christ, or those who lived contemporaneously with Christ and after him, but who did not have a chance to hear the Christian message before their deaths? These were important issues for Christian thought to

address, since Christianity claimed to be a universal religion for all people, and Christ died for all humanity, yet there were many who, through the accidents of timing or location of birth, did not have the chance either to accept or reject the message. In addition, part of the problem of legitimacy for early Christianity was that it was such a new religion. Celsus (second century), Porphyry (third century), and other pagan opponents of Christianity used this lack of ancient pedigree to attack the new sect;<sup>45</sup> Jews also challenged the Christian claim to be the legitimate heirs of Jewish patriarchs and prophets.

Christians responded ingeniously in various ways by bringing ancient dead heroes into the Christian fold. According to Justin Martyr (ca. 150 C.E.), Abraham, Socrates, Heraclitus, and others had had a share of the Logos, which was later fully embodied in Christ (*1 Apology* 46). Justin and others could also posit that Plato had read Moses, accounting for what was good and true in the philosophical tradition (*1 Apol.* 44 and elsewhere).<sup>46</sup> Traditions about the baptism of Old Testament heroes accomplished a similar goal in a different way. All these ideas and stories helped resolve the theological tension between the reality of Christianity as a small sect that had appeared recently at a specific historical moment, and the myth of Christianity as a universal religion with an ancient pedigree. The analogy with early Mormon baptism of George Washington could not be more apt.

*Apocalypse of Peter* 14:1–4 and  
*Sibylline Oracles* 2:330–38

In most discussions of Thecla and Perpetua, scholars usually ignore the question of whether there were any Christian texts that might have provided a theoretical justification for their prayers on behalf of dead non-Christians. Such texts would need to show righteous person(s) and/or martyr(s) interceding successfully with God on behalf of those dead suffering the punishment of God in some way. If such texts were known to Perpetua or the author of the Thecla story, they might have served as a warrant for their practices; even if not, such texts would still demonstrate that concern for the posthumous salvation of individual non-Christians was more widespread in early Christianity than is usually supposed. Indeed, there are two such texts: the *Apocalypse of Peter* 14:1–4 and *Sibylline Oracles* 2:330–38.<sup>47</sup> Similar to these, but ultimately staking out different positions, are *Epistula Apostolorum* 40 and the *Apocalypse of Elijah* 5:29.

The setting in each of these texts is the final judgment, and in the background of each one lies a tradition of the righteous wishing to save some of the damned. As discussed in chapter 1, “Rescue for the Dead in a ‘Salvation’ Context,” 4 Ezra 7 manifests this sentiment quite clearly: Ezra knows that the saved will want to plead for their damned relatives and friends on the last day,

but the angel informs him that God will forbid it. Likewise, 2 Bar. 85:12 spells out in no uncertain terms that intercession or mercy of any kind for the wicked will be impossible at the final judgment.

The *Apoc. Pet.* 14 and *Sib. Or.* 2 contain a similar scene, but the outcome is different. In these two texts, the righteous are granted their wish, and they are able to save some from eternal damnation. The study of the *Apocalypse of Peter* has been greatly enhanced recently by the work of Dennis D. Buchholz.<sup>48</sup> Not to be confused with a Nag Hammadi text also called the *Apocalypse of Peter* (NHC VII, 3), here we are referring to the text written in Greek, first alluded to ca. 180 C.E. by Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autolyicum* 2.19), quoted soon thereafter by Clement of Alexandria (*Eclogae Propheticae* 1.41, 48–49), and surviving in Ethiopic and a number of Greek fragments, including a papyrus from the Rainer collection in Vienna containing the fourteenth chapter.<sup>49</sup> It is precisely *Apoc. Pet.* 14 that is most important for this study.

Earlier in the text the punishment for the wicked has been described as eternal (6:5–6), and the wicked themselves have acknowledged that God's judgment is just; they wish to repent now that they are dead and have seen the punishments of God (13:1–2). The angel Tatirokos comes and punishes them all the more, taunting them with a line reminiscent of 2 Clem. 8:3 and Luke 16:19–31, "Now you repent when there is no time for repentance and life did not remain!?" (13:3). The wicked respond, "Righteous is the judgment of God, for we heard and knew that his judgment (is) good. For we have been paid back each one according to our deed" (13:4). It is hard to tell whether this response means that the wicked have now accepted their fate, or that they are trying to assert they have been punished enough already. Perhaps both.

At any rate, there follows chapter 14, extant in both Ethiopic and Greek (the Rainer fragment, third or fourth century). Buchholz has confirmed the earlier opinion of M. R. James that the Greek Rainer fragment preserves more closely the original text; the Ethiopic reflects a deliberate change to avoid any suggestion of the posthumous salvation of these wicked sinners.<sup>50</sup>

*Greek* (Rainer Fragment, trans. James)

Then I shall give unto my called and my chosen whomsoever they shall ask me for (ὄν ἐάν αἰτήσωνταί<sup>51</sup>), out of torment, and will give them a fair baptism in (or unto) salvation from the Acherusian Lake<sup>52</sup> which men so call in the Elysian Field, even a portion of righteousness with the holy ones.

*Ethiopic* (trans. Buchholz):

And then I will give my elect, my righteous ones the baptism and the salvation which they ask of me in the field of Akeroseya which is called Aneslasaleya. And I will give the portion of the righteous ones and I will go now rejoicing with the patriarchs into my eternal kingdom.

One can see that the Ethiopic has tried to erase all traces of successful intercession for the wicked by the righteous. This change could have occurred already during transmission of the text in Greek, it could have occurred during translation into Arabic or Ethiopic,<sup>53</sup> or perhaps in the course of further copying the text in Ethiopic.<sup>54</sup> This much is certain: The earlier version of the text, originating in the second century, envisioned the posthumous salvation of at least some wicked sinners at the last judgment, while a subsequent copyist or translator found this idea objectionable and expunged it as best he could.

Buchholz sees the doctrine in the Greek Rainer fragment as one of universal salvation, since he believes “it is implied that no saved person could be happy as long as any are being punished, and therefore all will receive salvation.”<sup>55</sup> I disagree for the following reasons: (1) Punishment is called eternal at other points in the text (6:5–6, 13:3). (2) Some of the wicked described in this text are so wicked it is hard to imagine the righteous interceding for them. (3) The comparable scene in 4 Ezra 7:103 indicates that friends and relatives are the main beneficiaries of the proposed intercession. (4) Two roughly contemporary Christians who are depicted interceding with God for non-Christians (fictional Thecla and real Perpetua) do not have in mind universal salvation—far from it, for if they believed in that doctrine there might be no urgent need for them to rescue individual dead persons by intercession. I think it is a mistake to confuse the philosophical speculation about universal salvation, prominent in the rarefied school atmosphere at Alexandria and among fourth-century admirers of Origen, with the viewpoints of a text like the *Apocalypse of Peter* or *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. These texts still envision an ultimate division between the righteous and the wicked, but they also believe in the intercessory power of the holy ones to save “whomsoever they ask for.”

Richard Bauckham’s persuasive arguments concerning the provenance of the *Apocalypse of Peter* may offer insight into the social and historical context in which this eschatological rescue for the dead emerged. Based on the text’s polemic against a false messiah figure who has killed those who do not believe in him (*Apoc. Pet.* 2:8–13; cf. Justin Martyr, 1 *Apol.* 31.6), Bauckham thinks the *Apocalypse of Peter* was written by Jewish-Christians during the revolt of Bar Kochba in the 130s C.E.<sup>56</sup> In such a context of strife and division of families over the response to Bar Kochba, some Jewish-Christian author imagined that his small circle of the elect would be enabled by God to intercede for specifically chosen damned persons at the final judgment. These damned ones may have been Christian apostates to Bar Kochba’s side and/or they may have been Jews or pagans who had never followed Jesus. The text does not specify who should be helped; God will leave it to the discretion of the saint who has been faithful to Jesus’ cause.

M. R. James pointed out long ago that *Sib. Or.* 2:194–338 is a poetic paraphrase of most of the *Apocalypse of Peter*.<sup>57</sup> Of particular importance for this

study is *Sib. Or.* 2:330–38.<sup>58</sup> The first two Sibylline Oracles form a unit within the larger text; these two chapters consist of an original Jewish substratum that has been reworked by a Christian author.<sup>59</sup> John J. Collins assigns 2:330–38 to that category of Sibylline passages that could be either Jewish or Christian in origin, though surprisingly he does not discuss the connections with the *Apocalypse of Peter*.<sup>60</sup> Given its dependence on the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Sib. Or.* 2:330–38 should be classed as a Christian text, one that expresses belief in the posthumous salvation of non-Christians (trans. Collins):

To these pious ones the imperishable God, the universal ruler, will also give another thing. Whenever they ask the imperishable God to save men from the raging fire and deathless gnashing he will grant it, and he will do this. For he will pick them out again from the undying fire and set them elsewhere and send them on account of his own people to another eternal life with the immortals in the Elysian plain where he has the long waves of the deep perennial Acherusian lake.

While the *Apocalypse of Peter*, Rainer fragment, promises the saved wicked ones a “portion of righteousness with the holy ones,” the *Sibylline Oracles* does not use this language. Rather, the text seems to differentiate between the highest reward for the pious ones and “another eternal life” “elsewhere” for those lucky sinners who are rescued. The *Sibylline Oracles* retains the concept of successful intercession at the final judgment, taken from the *Apocalypse of Peter*, but tempers it by making sure the categories of pious and wicked are not ultimately collapsed.

The fifteenth-century copyist who was responsible for one family of *Sibylline Oracles* manuscripts added a notation in the margin of the Sibylline text at this point: “Plainly false. For the fire which tortures the condemned will never cease. Even I would pray that this be so, though I am marked with very great scars of faults, which have need of very great mercy. But let babbling Origen be ashamed of saying that there is a limit to punishment.”<sup>61</sup> Unlike Buchholz’s reading of the *Apoc. Pet.* 14:1–4, this fifteenth-century copyist has not found universal salvation in the *Sibylline Oracles*, but rather he has found a doctrine of limited punishment for some of the wicked. Both views can be associated with Origen, and both were considered heresy in the fifteenth century West.

Whence comes this idea of successful intercession asserted in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Sibylline Oracles*? If Bauckham is right on the origin of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, then it may come from a circle of Jewish-Christians living in Palestine at the time of Bar Kochba. Were there Jews who held such a view before these Jewish-Christians did? Alfons Kurfess traces the concept to those Jews opposed by 4 Ezra 7:102–15 and 2 Bar. 85:12. These texts are so

polemical against intercession at the last judgment, they make little sense unless one posits circles of Jews who claimed that God would indeed allow for limited punishment and eschatological intercession.<sup>62</sup> According to the Mishnah, Rabbi Akiba, a contemporary of Bar Kochba, is reported to have said “the judgment of the unrighteous in Gehenna shall endure twelve months” (*m. Eduyoth* 2:10). Thus, one can surmise that the duration of punishment was discussed at this time in Jewish and Jewish-Christian circles, a discussion manifested as well in the *Apocalypse of Peter*. As we saw earlier in chapter 1, this notion of a limited twelve-month punishment, with intercession possible, eventually became quite widespread in the rabbinic tradition (*Gen. R.* 33:3; *b. Sukka* 14a). Thus, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch may be understood in opposition to some Jews’ emphasis on God’s mercy. Such a vision of eschatological mercy based on the intercession of the righteous also found its way into Jewish-Christian circles, as evidenced by the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Sibylline Oracles*.

The language in two other Christian texts echoes that found in *Apocalypse of Peter* and *Sibylline Oracles*, but in different contexts with different meaning: *Epist. Apost.* 40 and the *Apoc. Elij.* 5:29. In the *Epistula Apostolorum*, a second-century Greek text now surviving only in Coptic and Ethiopic versions, the eschatological fate of Christian heretics is described, those who, as Christ says, “have acknowledged me yet deny me” or who “pervert my words” (*Epist. Apost.* 39). They will be “eternally ruined, being punished by fire in flesh and spirit” (Ethiopic), or alternatively “lost eternally. They will be tormented alive and will be scourged in their flesh and in their soul” (Coptic).<sup>63</sup>

At this point the righteous speak up:

And we said to him, “O Lord, we are truly troubled on their account.” And he said to us, “You do well, for so are the righteous anxious about the sinners and they pray and implore God and ask him.” And we said to him “O Lord, does not one entreat you?”<sup>64</sup> And he said to us “Yes I will hear the requests of the righteous concerning them.” (*Epist. Apost.* 40, Ethiopic; Coptic is substantially the same, trans. Elliot)

At first glance this sounds quite similar to the eschatological requests in *Apocalypse of Peter* and *Sibylline Oracles*; in all three cases the righteous beseech God on behalf of sinners, and God hears their request. In the *Epistula Apostolorum*, however, the “sinners” should probably be understood as Christians who are heretical from the author’s point of view, and the requests of the righteous are not set at the final judgment, but rather amidst the ongoing life of the community.<sup>65</sup> The text goes on to speak of the possibility of repentance and restoration for Christian sinners in this life (*Epist. Apost.* 47–48).

A similar but much more limited request motif is found in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* 5:29.<sup>66</sup> David Frankfurter situates this text in late third century

Upper Egypt in a Christian community experiencing persecution.<sup>67</sup> In 5:27–29, the wicked and the righteous are able to see each other at the final judgment (cf. Luke 16:23–26; Jub. 23:30; 1 En. 62:11 and 108:14–15). The wicked are being punished and the righteous gloat.<sup>68</sup> Following this, the Akhmimic version of the text states, “In that time, what the Righteous request will be given to them many times over.”<sup>69</sup> Having just studied the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Sibylline Oracles*, one might expect here that the righteous would request the posthumous salvation of some of the wicked, but such a request is not forthcoming. It could be implied in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, but it would run counter to the triumphant reversal-of-fortune motif so prominent in the rest of the text. Perhaps the author knew of the tradition about an eschatological request for the wicked, but has changed it to the more vague, “that which the Righteous request will be granted to them.” This opens the door to several interpretations: They could request the salvation of some of the wicked, they could ask for something for themselves, or they could even ask that the wicked be utterly destroyed! This last option is what the righteous request in the oracle of Hystaspes, according to Lactantius (d. ca. 320 C.E.), *Divine Institutes* 7.18.<sup>70</sup> The *Apocalypse of Elijah* leaves the nature of the request unspecified.

In one famous tradition, attested later among both Jews and Christians, the prayers of the righteous succeed not in securing a true rescue or salvation for the wicked, but only a palliative from God: the wicked get a reprieve from torments on the Sabbath day, either Saturday or Sunday depending on the source. Israel Lévi thinks that this tradition can be traced back to the third century C.E. within Jewish sources (*Gen. R.* 11; *b.Sanh.* 65b).<sup>71</sup> Among Christian sources it is attested in the late *Apoc. Paul* 31–44 and Augustine, *Enchiridion* 112–13 (cf. Augustine, *In Ioh. tract.* 98.9, the earliest sure citation of the *Apocalypse of Paul*).<sup>72</sup> John Chrysostom also makes reference to the tradition (*Hom. in Act. Ap.* 21.3). In the *Apocalypse of Paul*, based on Paul’s journey to Paradise alluded to in 2 Cor. 12:4, Paul weeps upon seeing the punishments meted out to the wicked sinners now, even before the final judgment. The wicked cry out to God for some kind of respite, and the Son of God responds by enumerating all the chances they had to repent during their lifetimes:

In all these things I gave you the opportunity for repentance, and you were not willing. Now however, for the sake of Michael, the archangel of my covenant, and the angels who are with him, and for the sake of Paul, my dearly beloved, whom I would not sadden, and for the sake of your brethren who are in the world and who present offerings, and for the sake of your children, because my commandments are in them, and even more for my own goodness—on the very day on which I rose from the dead (i.e., Sunday), I grant to you all who are being punished a day and a night of ease forever. (*Apoc. Paul* 44)<sup>73</sup>

It is possible that the *Apocalypse of Peter* was known to the *Apocalypse of Paul*,<sup>74</sup> but in place of the former's grant of posthumous salvation to the wicked, the latter only allows for one day of rest from torment per week. Both texts exemplify the motif that the righteous are concerned for the fate of the wicked, and in some sense wish to be more merciful than God himself. In the *Apocalypse of Paul*, living people, too (e.g., Paul and the "brethren who are in the world"), through their prayers even for the wicked dead, can have an effect on God.<sup>75</sup>

## Summary

This chapter has explored a number of contexts in early Christianity in which the issue of the posthumous salvation for non-Christians arose. In some cases it was salvation for some of those who lived before Christ, in others it was speculation about the eschatological salvation of all persons, and in still others it was the intercession of righteous persons for specific damned individuals at the final judgment. The main thing linking these traditions is that they all entail the posthumous salvation of non-Christians, wherein a non-Christian turns toward God after death, or is the recipient of God's mercy after death. There were also a number of texts and traditions on the other side, particularly Luke 16:19–31 and 2 Clement. Both of these authors seemed to be aware of a desire on the part of some Christians to extend opportunities of salvation beyond the grave, and both expressed their opinion that such a feat was impossible. The next two chapters treat the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* as two specific examples of the posthumous salvation of non-Christians. Unlike many of the texts discussed previously, in these two cases a bit more is known about the social and historical contexts of the writings, so we will be able to say something more concrete about their motivations for rescuing the dead, and the social implications of their actions.<sup>76</sup>

### 3

## THECLA'S PRAYER FOR FALCONILLA

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### The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in the Context of the *Acts of Paul*

The text in which Thecla's story is found, the *Acts of Paul*, presents a number of complex problems that need to be addressed before one can fully appreciate the import of the prayer for Falconilla. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (APT) constitutes a portion of the larger *Acts of Paul* (APL), and it is almost certain that elements of the Thecla story predate the larger composite text. There are several factors leading to this conclusion: (1) The predominant focus is on Thecla rather than Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, while in all other sections of the *Acts of Paul*, Paul takes center stage. (2) Paul abruptly disappears from the narrative after the encounter with Alexander in chapter 26. (3) Paul reappears in Myra in chapter 40, forming a bridge to the next episode of the *Acts of Paul*.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the author of the *Acts of Paul* probably incorporated pre-existing Thecla traditions into the wider narrative, and some of the seams still show. Whether these early Thecla stories were in written or oral form is an unresolved issue, but this much is certain: The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* often circulated independently from, was more popular than, and was better preserved than other sections of the *Acts of Paul*, which survive today only in fragmentary form.<sup>2</sup> The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is attested in eleven Greek manuscripts, at least four independent Latin translations, Syriac, Slavic, and Arabic versions, and a Coptic papyrus now in Heidelberg (PHeid) that clearly includes the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* with the rest of the *Acts of Paul*.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, apart from the Thecla section, the rest of the *Acts of Paul* survives only fragmentarily on a handful of Greek and Coptic papyri (including PHeid).<sup>4</sup> Having said this, however, it is still important to interpret the Thecla stories

in the context of what is known about the *Acts of Paul* as a whole, something many commentators fail to do. The warrant for this is the fact that at least one second-century author saw the Thecla stories contributing to a larger project, and this same author may have reworked some of the Thecla traditions in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* while incorporating them into the larger narrative. The imprint of that compiler remained to influence subsequent generations of Thecla devotees.

In addition, the *Acts of Paul* is just one of five apocryphal acts surviving from antiquity that in turn describe the exploits of the apostles Peter, Paul, Andrew, John, and Thomas after the death of Jesus. While each of these texts must be interpreted on its own, selected episodes from the other Apocryphal Acts and the canonical Acts may help promote a better understanding of Thecla's prayer for Falconilla. Regarding the question of genre, I prefer the term "historical fiction" for the Apocryphal Acts (including the *Acts of Paul*), and I would also use it for the canonical gospels and Acts. There can be no doubt that the authors of these works utilized pre-existing materials in varying degree, some of them with a basis in history. And the author of Luke/Acts at least seems to have been aware of some of the canons and standards of ancient historical writing. But the texts before us are the products of decades-long processes of storytelling, both oral and written, from particular theological points of view, with additional touches supplied by the authors/compiler themselves who identified with the insider viewpoints of their main characters.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for example, even though Paul was a historical person, the stories about him formulated by his devotees may legitimately be termed "historical fiction."<sup>6</sup> This is not to be confused with pure fiction, in which the author freely invents all that is written, unbound by sources.<sup>7</sup> The authors of the gospels and the various acts were interested in depicting history-like episodes and in some cases were drawing on older traditions.

Concerning the identity of the second-century compiler of the *Acts of Paul*, one famous passage in Tertullian provides a clue: "But if certain Acts of Paul,<sup>8</sup> which are falsely so named, claim the example of Thecla for allowing women to teach and to baptize, let men know that in Asia the presbyter who compiled that document, thinking to add of his own to Paul's reputation, was found out, and though he professed he had done it for love of Paul, was deposed from his position" (*De Baptismo* 17.5).<sup>9</sup>

Most scholars are confident that Tertullian here was speaking of the *Acts of Paul* now extant, but Stevan Davies holds that he was referring to a now lost pseudepigraphon attributed to Paul.<sup>10</sup> In my view, Thomas MacKay, Willy Rordorf, and A. Hilhorst have effectively refuted the arguments of Davies, based in part on Davies' erroneous view that Tertullian's Latin referred to writings *by* Paul rather than writings *about* Paul.<sup>11</sup> The latter is a perfectly plausible reading and lines up with what we know about the *Acts of Paul*. Another objection, that nowhere in the extant text does Paul encourage Thecla to bap-

tize, has more force, but we must remember that Thecla does baptize herself in the story (*APT* 34), and Paul does exhort her to “go and teach the word of God” (*APT* 41)—just after he has learned about her self-baptism. As Hilhorst points out, what good would it be for Thecla to teach if she could not follow up that teaching by baptizing her converts?<sup>12</sup> Thus, it is entirely plausible that some in the Carthaginian church at the turn of the third century used the Thecla story to promote teaching and baptism by women, a use that Tertullian found objectionable. Tertullian further claims that the compiler of the *Acts of Paul* was a male presbyter of Asia Minor who lost his position in the church because of his zeal to add to the stature and legend of Paul. This presbyter is usually assumed to have lived in the mid-second century, although Jerome placed him in the era between 68 and 98 c.e., and Hilhorst has argued that the earlier date is at least possible.<sup>13</sup> The descriptions of martyrdom in the text, however, and the knowledge of persecution simply on the basis of the name “Christian,” line up more closely with what we know of second-century Roman policies rather than first-century,<sup>14</sup> so I favor the later dating.

It will be useful here to provide a brief summary of the plot of the entire *Acts of Paul*, including the Thecla section, highlighting themes that will help illuminate Thecla’s prayer for Falconilla, and providing a translation of that prayer at the appropriate point. The story appears to have begun with Paul’s conversion outside Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1–9), but the beginning sections are almost totally lost; only a few fragments of PHeid give a hint about their contents. The story of Paul’s baptizing a talking lion was probably to be found early on, as the episode is mentioned later in the text when this same lion refuses to devour Paul in the arena.

The next scene finds Paul in Antioch (whether Syrian or Pisidian is not known<sup>15</sup>), where Paul raises up a dead boy, the son of Anchares and Phila. This is the first of four resurrections performed by Paul in the *Acts of Paul*: Paul also raises Dion of Myra (*API* 4), Frontina of Philippi (*API* 8), and Patroclus of Rome, a youth who fell out of a window while listening to Paul’s words (*API* 11). These resurrections become significant for our purposes when compared to the action that Thecla accomplishes for Falconilla. In all five cases a dead person is “rescued” in some way, but while Paul always resuscitates the very recently departed, similar to biblical miracles of the same sort (1 Kings 17:17–24; 2 Kings 4:18–37; Mark 5:35–45, par.; John 11:28–44; Acts 20:9–12), Thecla improves the posthumous condition of a person dead for some time, without bringing her body back to life. The uniqueness of Thecla’s action in all the Apocryphal Acts may be another indication that in the Falconilla episode we are dealing with a legend that predates the composition of the *Acts of Paul*. The circles responsible for it believed in the efficacy of prayer for a dead polytheist who expressed a desire for salvation from the grave, as did the compiler of the *Acts of Paul*, who included it in the larger narrative. In addition, the compiler thought that Paul had the

power to revive recently dead polytheists, an ability Paul also has in the canonical Acts (20:9–12).

Resurrections such as these theoretically give the dead person a renewed chance to accept the gospel, whether or not such a story is recounted. The resurrection of Callimachus in the *Acts of John* is a significant example of this principle: Callimachus dies during the sinful act of defiling Drusiana's corpse, but when raised up by John he repents of his error and becomes a Christian (*Acts Jn.* 73–78). The *Acts Thom.* 51–58 has a similar story in which a pagan girl has been murdered by her Christian suitor since she did not wish to enter into a celibate union with him. Thomas raises her from the dead, and she relates the torments of hell she has seen,<sup>16</sup> along with her new desire to convert to Christianity now that she knows about the penalties awaiting those who do not do so (cf. Plato's "Myth of Er," *Rep.* 10.613E–621D). The raising of Patroclus in *API* 11 has a similar flavor since he bears witness to his Christian faith only after he has been raised by Paul. Unique in all the apocryphal acts, Thecla secures Falconilla's salvation without actually raising her lifeless body. Since acceptance of the gospel is clearly stated as a requirement for eternal salvation throughout the *Acts of Paul* (*APT* 37; *API* 11:4–5), in the stories of Falconilla and the four resurrected ones in the *Acts of Paul*, we see that, in the minds of the storytellers, it was still possible for a person to accept the gospel after death, either by being raised up again or by communication from beyond the grave.

As the story in the *Acts of Paul* continues, Paul is forcibly expelled from Antioch, at which point he goes to Iconium, the setting of the first part of the Thecla narrative. Paul is accompanied on his journey by Demas and Hermogenes, who later turn out to be false friends and hypocrites, the same roles applied to them in 2 Tim. 1:15 and 4:10. Richard Bauckham has put forward a strong argument that the author of the *Acts of Paul* conducted a close exegesis of 2 Timothy as well as 1 Corinthians, making use of and expanding various elements of these letters.<sup>17</sup> Onesiphorus and his family receive Paul into their home (cf. 2 Tim. 1:16 and 4:19), where Paul delivers a sermon on the greatness of the virgin life, including the line, "Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well pleasing to God, and shall not lose the reward of their virginity." This sermon at several points echoes the Beatitudes of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1–11; cf. Luke 6:20–22). Thecla, listening intently to Paul from a nearby window, is converted to Christianity and the virgin life upon hearing his words day after day, much to the consternation of her mother Theocleia and her fiancé Thamyris. Many motifs in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* clearly echo some of the themes of the second-century Hellenistic romance novels: Thecla will not eat or drink as she becomes enraptured by Paul's words (cf. Philetas in *Daphnis and Chloe* 2.7),<sup>18</sup> and she preserves her chastity against unwanted suitors (cf. Anthia in Xenophon of Ephesus's *An Ephesian Tale* 3.6–7, 3.11).<sup>19</sup> The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* author

even heightens the erotic charge of the story by having Thecla roll around on the spot in prison where Paul had lain, but without any consummation of the sexual relationship (*APT* 20).<sup>20</sup> Unlike the characters in *An Ephesian Tale*, Thecla does not temporarily preserve her chastity for a reunion with a separated lover, but rather she preserves it permanently out of devotion to God and Paul. Thus, the Thecla narrative echoes themes from the popular literature of the second century, but it has recast them to express a particular brand of Christian values.

Thecla must endure two near-martyrdoms before embarking on her glorious career of preaching and teaching, ending with a peaceful death. In the first, she is condemned to die by fire in her native city, at the enthusiastic instigation of her own mother, for failing to live up to her obligation to marry Thamyris. Interestingly, Paul's punishment is simply to be banished from the city. Thus, Paul and Thecla are punished here not for being Christians per se, but rather for adopting a form of Christianity which devalues marriage. Demas and Hermogenes had thought that they could secure Paul's execution from the mere charge of Christianity (*APT* 16), a detail indicating a second-century provenance for the work,<sup>21</sup> but the plot did not unfold according to their plan. The plans of all of Thecla's opponents are thwarted by God himself when he sends a storm of rain and hail to extinguish the flames (*APT* 22).

Thecla finds Paul, and together they travel to Antioch (again, either Pisidian or Syrian could be meant), where a man named Alexander wishes to possess Thecla and forcibly embraces her on the street. Paul mysteriously disappears from the narrative at this point, and the events leading up to the prayer for Falconilla unfold. Alexander has Thecla condemned to the beasts because she rebuffs his advances by publicly humiliating him. Once again, there is no clear charge of Christianity per se, although the charge on the inscription reads "Sacrilege" (ἱερόσυλος), and Thecla asks to "remain pure" until her contest, no doubt fearing rape during her imprisonment.<sup>22</sup> She is given into the care of a rich woman named Tryphaena, who was a kinswoman of the emperor and whose daughter Falconilla had died some time earlier. There was in fact a historical Queen Tryphaena in Paul's day, though the evidence associates her with Thrace and Pontus, not with Pisidian or Syrian Antioch.<sup>23</sup> Paul also greets a Tryphaena in Rom. 16:12, but there is nothing other than the name to link this figure with the character in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

Here follows my own translation of Thecla's prayer for Falconilla:

*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 28–31<sup>24</sup>

(28) As the beasts led the procession, Thecla was bound to a fierce lioness, and Queen Tryphaena followed close behind. While Thecla was seated upon her, the lioness licked her feet, and the entire crowd was amazed. The

charge written on her inscription read: Sacrilege. The women, however, along with their children, cried out from above, "O God! An unholy judgment has come forth in this city!" After the procession, Tryphaena again took Thecla into her care, for her deceased daughter Falconilla had said to her in a dream, "Mother, you shall have the abandoned stranger Thecla in my stead, in order that she might pray on my behalf and I might be transferred to the place of the righteous (μεταθετῶ εἰς τὸν τῶν δικαίων τόπον)."

(29) Therefore, when Tryphaena took her in after the procession, she mourned because Thecla was going into battle with the beasts on the next day, but at the same time she loved her earnestly like her own daughter Falconilla. She said, "My second child Thecla, come pray on behalf of my daughter, that she might live forever, for this I saw while sleeping." So Thecla, without delay, raised her voice and said, "O my God, the Son of the Most High, who is in heaven, grant to her according to her wish, that her daughter Falconilla might live forever." After Thecla said these things, Tryphaena mourned as she contemplated such beauty being thrown to the beasts.

(30) When dawn came, Alexander came to take Thecla away, for he himself was responsible for the games. He said, "The governor has taken his place and the crowd is clamoring for us. Hand over the combatant that I might take her away!" But Tryphaena cried out, "Grief for my Falconilla has come upon this house a second time, and there is no one to help—no child, for she is dead, and no kinsman, for I am a widow. O God of my child Thecla, help Thecla!" Her outburst caused Alexander to flee.

(31) The governor then sent soldiers so that Thecla might be brought. Tryphaena did not withdraw, but taking Thecla's hands she led her out saying, "My daughter Falconilla I delivered to the tomb; you, Thecla, I deliver to the beasts." Thecla wept bitterly and groaned to the Lord, "Lord God in whom I believe, in whom I took refuge, who saved me from the fire, grant a reward to Tryphaena, who has shown sympathy for me your servant, because she has kept me pure."

Once in the arena, a lioness protects Thecla by fending off the other beasts, and the women of the town hypnotize the animals by throwing perfumes from their seats. Tryphaena faints at the spectacle, at which point Alexander pleads for Thecla's release. Thecla goes free, Tryphaena and all her female slaves convert to Christianity, and finally Tryphaena exclaims, "Now I know that my child (i.e., Falconilla) lives!" (APT 39).

Much is made in this text of the contrast between Tryphaena and Alexander: She is courageous and resolute, whereas he is a coward; she is a benevolent patron and role model for Thecla, whereas he is a negative example on those counts.<sup>25</sup> While Thecla makes converts of Tryphaena and all the female slaves in her house, nothing is said of their baptism. Tryphaena makes arrangements to hand over her wealth to Thecla, in line with a common phenomenon in the early centuries of Christianity: the support of Christian missionaries and

teachers by wealthy women.<sup>26</sup> Thecla dresses as a man and goes to Myra to find Paul, who greets her and exhorts her to “Go and teach the word of God!” (APT 41). Her cross-dressing would have facilitated travel and helped her preserve her virginity along the way.<sup>27</sup> Thecla returns to Iconium for one last encounter with her mother, the outcome of which is not stated. Luckily for Thecla, Thamyras is now dead. She then goes to Seleucia to enlighten many with the word of God, ending her life there peacefully. As we shall see, Seleucia was the center of a vibrant Thecla cult in subsequent centuries, and it is possible that the cult predates the compilation of the Thecla stories in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

The *Acts of Paul* continues in Myra, where Dion and Hermippus, two sons of Hermocrates, become bitterly divided over their attitudes toward Paul and his healing of their father. The section in which Dion dies is no longer extant, but we do know that Paul raises him up, and this spurs Hermippus to repent and ask forgiveness from Paul and the Lord.

API 5 and 6, where Paul is in Sidon and Tyre, are badly preserved, but the Ephesus narrative in API 7, preserved only on the Hamburg papyrus and in an unpublished Coptic papyrus,<sup>28</sup> merits attention here because it offers some insights into the Thecla story. In Ephesus, Paul states that the governor and people must convert to Christianity, “lest God be wroth and burn you with unquenchable fire, and the memory of you perish.” This helps illustrate the fate that Falconilla was trying to avoid when she appeared to her mother in the dream. Also in this section we learn of Eubula, the wife of Diophantes the freedman, and Artemilla, the wife of Hieronymus, Diophantes’ former owner. The two women fall under Paul’s spell while their husbands plot to have Paul killed by the beasts in the arena. As in the Thecla story, the women are the ones who more readily accept Paul’s message, and thus Paul’s preaching sows marital discord.

In the arena at Ephesus Paul meets up with the talking lion he had baptized earlier in the story. The baptism of the lion episode is preserved on a Coptic papyrus given a provisional translation in Schneemelcher.<sup>29</sup> Similar to the roughly contemporary Roman tale of Androcles and the lion,<sup>30</sup> the lion in Ephesus will not devour Paul, saving Paul from yet another close brush with death. A lioness also acts to save Thecla in APT 33; not only does she not devour Thecla, but she also fends off the other beasts who would try to harm her. Much has been made of the fantastic nature of the *Acts of Paul*, sometimes in contrast to the canonical Acts, though we should remember that the canonical Acts also has its share of miraculous escapes (Acts 12:6–11), healings (3:2–10; 5:12–16; 9:32–35), and even resuscitations of the dead performed by Peter (9:40–41) and Paul (20:9–11). There is also the famous talking donkey in the Torah (Num. 22:28–30).<sup>31</sup>

Paul next finds himself in Philippi, where he must respond to a dispute in Corinth over the resurrection of the flesh versus the resurrection of the spirit only. This prompts the inclusion of two letters into the *Acts of Paul*, one from

the Corinthians to Paul and then Paul's response, known as 3 Corinthians. It is probable that these letters were originally independent of the *Acts of Paul* and have been worked into the narrative by the compiler.<sup>32</sup> 3 Corinthians has long been considered canonical in the Armenian church. After writing his letter, Paul raises Frontina from the dead, echoing the promise contained in 3 Corinthians that dead bodies will indeed rise in the future.

After a short stay in Corinth (*API* 9), Paul proceeds to Rome where he makes many converts, even from Caesar's household. Paul confronts the Emperor Nero, converts his own executioners to Christianity, is beheaded, and then immediately after death appears to the still-living Nero and his entourage. This is the end of the *Acts of Paul* as we have it. Paul's postmortem appearance to Nero shows the compiler's belief not only in a future resurrection, but also in a viable, surviving personal entity that can be seen by others soon after death. Falconilla fits into this same category, though she had to rely on Thecla's intercession to come anywhere near the blessed postmortem status that Paul enjoyed. In addition, she appeared in a dream, while Paul appears in a waking vision.

### Thecla as Woman and Confessor

The first main task in understanding Thecla's prayer for Falconilla is to assess the character Thecla. Just who is this woman in the narrative and why is she able to rescue the dead, from the author's point of view? Thecla has been the subject of numerous recent studies, some at odds with each other over how Thecla and her exploits should be interpreted, and over the conclusions that may be drawn about the social world of the storyteller(s) revealed by the text. Most prominent are those who see the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and its heroine as indicative of a real attitude toward women's roles in society and the church, opposed to attitudes like those expressed in 1 Timothy. Whereas in 1 Tim. 2:15 a woman "will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty," in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Acts of Paul* the virgin life is extolled, though not necessarily required for salvation.<sup>33</sup> Even the baptized lion of the *Acts of Paul* refuses sexual intercourse with a lioness!<sup>34</sup> Whereas the probably pseudepigraphical Paul in 1 Tim. 2:12 "permits no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent," the character Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* exhorts Thecla, "Go and teach the word of God" (*APT* 41). Rosemary Radford Ruether makes the point that adopting the ascetic life, as the character Thecla does, enabled real Christian women to escape the "curses of Eve": pain in childbirth and domination by a husband (Gen. 3:16).<sup>35</sup> Stevan Davies posits that the emphasis on celibacy so championed in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* arose in circles of early Christian widows and other celibate women as a revolt

against the limited and oppressive options for women in Christianity and in the wider society.<sup>36</sup> Dennis R. MacDonald claims that the oral narratives behind the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* stem from circles of women in direct opposition to the kind of Christianity expressed in 1 Timothy and the other Pastoral Epistles.<sup>37</sup> Virginia Burrus extends this kind of analysis to other “chastity” stories from the Apocryphal Acts, claiming that they reflected the interests of early Christian women.<sup>38</sup> Kate Cooper sees the real contest in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* as one between men, the apostle versus the householder. Each one wishes to define the proper role for a woman, either virgin or bride.<sup>39</sup>

In the interest of conserving space for the main topic of this study, I cannot here explicate all the nuances and implications of these recent works. I should point out, however, that aspects of them have been criticized by a number of authors, including Jean-Daniel Kaestli, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, Lynne C. Boughton, and Peter W. Dunn.<sup>40</sup> Schneemelcher goes so far as to call the studies by Davies, MacDonald, and Burrus “ahistorical travesties.”<sup>41</sup> While I agree with the critics that it goes beyond our meager evidence to claim that circles of celibate women produced the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* or the earlier stories behind the text, it also seems clear to me that at the very least the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* presents a feminine role model at odds with 1 Timothy. Tertullian’s testimony in *De Baptismo* 17.5 is a witness to this. Dunn makes much of the fact that the later church both accepted 1 Timothy and revered Thecla as a saint. He takes this to mean that the two texts should not be seen as opposing one another in their original settings.<sup>42</sup> Two considerations speak against Dunn’s conclusion. (1) Quite often among even the canonical texts, we find originally opposing viewpoints brought into harmony as later interpreters ignore key aspects of one tradition or the other (e.g., Epistle of James versus Galatians, or Rom. 13:1–7 versus Rev. 17–18). (2) The later interpretations of Thecla by figures such as Methodius and Ambrose ignore key features of the story and make Thecla a spokeswoman for their own values (see “Later Interpretations of the Thecla/Falconilla Tradition,” this chapter). Tertullian’s testimony stands as a witness to other, more subversive uses to which Thecla could legitimately be put.

There can be no doubt that Thecla is portrayed as a strong woman who takes charge of her own destiny, at first reliant on Paul but then also quite independent of him. With her prayer for Falconilla she begins to assert her own unique role in the narrative as a source of blessing, even salvation for others. While many recent studies have focused on Thecla as woman, not enough attention has been given to Thecla as confessor (meaning one who has taken a stand for one’s faith and is awaiting probable martyrdom). Her willingness to submit to death twice, even though she escapes, may be seen as a source of her holy power, including her power to intercede for the non-Christian dead.

The ability of confessors to pronounce forgiveness for the sins of the living holds a firm place in the early Christian traditions, sometimes to the dis-

comfort of bishops and other more established ecclesiastical authorities. The roots of this phenomenon lie in biblical practice. Biblical heroes often intercede with God to secure forgiveness for others (Moses in Exod. 32:11–14 and Deut. 9:20; Joshua in Josh. 7:6–9; Samuel in 1 Sam. 7:8–9; David in 2 Sam. 24:17). The seventh martyred brother in 4 Maccabees calls upon God to be merciful to the rest of the Jewish nation just before he is killed (4 Macc. 12:17). Jesus, the paradigmatic martyr for Christians, is portrayed as pronouncing forgiveness shortly before his death (Luke 23:34, 42–43), and Stephen, the first Christian martyr, does the same thing (Acts 7:60).

An account of those who were martyred at Lyons and Vienne in the year 177 has been preserved by Eusebius and describes the power of forgiveness thought to infuse these confessors before their deaths. These confessors were praying for those Christians who had denied Christ under torture or threat of torture:

They defended all and accused none; they loosed all and bound none; they prayed for those who treated them so cruelly, as did Stephen the fulfilled martyr: “Lord, do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60). If he pleaded for those who were stoning him, how much more for brother Christians? . . . They did not crow over the fallen [i.e., lapsed Christians], but the things they had in abundance they bestowed with motherly affection on those who lacked them. Shedding many tears on their behalf in supplication to the Father, they asked for life and he gave it to them. (Eusebius *H. E.* 5.2)

The recipients of these confessors' mercy were still living, but it is not a great leap to imagine a confessor using such holy power to benefit a dead person who appeared in a dream to ask for it, precisely what the author of the Thecla story did.

From the third century there is further evidence of the power of forgiveness attributed to those who were willing to submit to death for their Christian faith. Hippolytus of Rome assumes a tradition whereby a male confessor released from prison immediately became a presbyter in the church with the power to bind and loose sins (*Apostolic Tradition* 10; cf. Matt. 16:19 and 18:18). Hippolytus does not question this practice per se, but he objects to the fact that his rival Callistus was so honored, since in Hippolytus's view Callistus had been imprisoned for theft, not for his Christian faith.<sup>43</sup>

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage from 249–258, describes in many of his epistles the lenient attitudes of some confessors toward those Christians who had renounced their faith during the Decian persecution.<sup>44</sup> These renouncers were known as the “lapsi,” or the “fallen.” Cyprian's opposition to the overzealous martyrs is complex: On one hand, he acknowledges that the martyrs are friends of God and will participate in the final judgment, judging along-

side Christ,<sup>45</sup> but on the other hand he believes that they sometimes usurp the authority vested in the bishop to oversee the community and ensure proper discipline within it.<sup>46</sup> As was the case with the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne, the recipients of the martyrs' mercy during the Decian persecution are clearly still alive, and Cyprian must allow for special urgency in the reconciliation of those penitent lapsi who are on their death beds.<sup>47</sup> There is no clear evidence from Cyprian's writings of martyrs' interceding for the dead in the manner of Thecla and Perpetua, but the same issues of episcopal authority and church discipline will resurface when later bishops and theologians interpret the Thecla and Perpetua stories.

Peter Brown has analyzed the differences in perspective ushered into Greco-Roman culture by Christianity with respect to the power of the dead. In Mediterranean hero cults, he says, once-mortal dead heroes might be honored and worshipped, but within limits:

Above all, what appears to be almost totally absent from pagan belief about the role of the heroes is the insistence of all Christian writers that the martyrs, precisely because they had died as human beings, enjoyed close intimacy with God. Their intimacy with God was the *sine qua non* of their ability to intercede for and, so, to protect their fellow mortals. The martyr was the "friend of God." He was an intercessor in a way in which the hero could never have been.<sup>48</sup>

This power of forgiveness acquired by confessors continued to reside in their dead bodies after they were martyred. Of course, the usual practice was for the beneficiaries of this power to be still among the living, but the extension of such benefits to the dead is also attested. For example, Augustine wrote an entire treatise in response to those Christians who thought that burial near the shrine of a martyr would provide extra benefits for the deceased, *On the Care to be Taken for the Dead*. His response was in line with his overarching principle that a person's actions during his or her lifetime are the most important in God's view; burial near a martyr will make no difference if the person so buried was wicked and unrepentant while living. Though in his extant writings he never discussed Falconilla directly, Augustine would most certainly have thought that no confessor or martyr had the power to rescue one such as she after her death. His interpretation of the Perpetua/Dinocrates episode allows us to say this with confidence (see chapter 7).

### Falconilla as Dream Figure and Recipient of Grace

According to the story, Falconilla had appeared to her mother in a dream, so it is necessary to explore some of the cultural understandings of dreaming in the second-century Mediterranean world that would have been presup-

posed by the storyteller(s). As Luther Martin has described it, the Greek language categorized three different types of dreams; “the ἐνύπνιον, or non-predictive dream; the χρηματισμός, or oracular dream, and the ὄνειρος, or predictive dream.”<sup>49</sup> In the one great surviving second-century C.E. work of dream interpretation, Artemidorus’s *Oneirocritica*, Artemidorus states that some predictive dreams are “theorematic,” or self-evident, while others are allegorical and the meaning must be sought.<sup>50</sup> He also believed that some dreams were divinely sent, while others merely reflected the thoughts of the dreamer.<sup>51</sup> Cicero, in his *De Divinatione* (45 B.C.E.), heaped ridicule on the idea that dreams could foretell the future, but most people in his surrounding culture were convinced of their efficacy on precisely this score.<sup>52</sup> There may be a predictive element to the dream recounted by Tryphaena in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, since it is not clear in the narrative whether Thecla and Tryphaena had yet met when Falconilla told her mother about the “desolate stranger” in the dream. If they had already met, then the dream is not predictive, but in either case the primary focus of the dream is directive: Falconilla instructs her mother and Thecla to take a certain course of action, one that will benefit all three women: Falconilla gets to “live forever” (*APT* 29), Thecla gains a wealthy patron and her virginity is preserved, and Tryphaena gains a substitute daughter and becomes a Christian.

It was (and of course still is) quite common for the dead to appear in dreams and waking visions to living survivors. Artemidorus says that “one must consider the dead [who speak in dreams] to be persons worthy of credence . . . those who have nothing to hope for or nothing to fear naturally speak the truth. And this is especially true of the dead” (*Oneir.* 2.69).<sup>53</sup> The Falconilla story belies this statement, since Falconilla did have an agenda and something to hope for. Even so, her mother considered her completely trustworthy. The difference between Artemidorus’s assumptions and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is that the Christian text is written in a religious context where eternal salvation depends on a confessional stance. The dead have much to hope for and much to fear.

One Latin story may help illuminate some of the cultural assumptions evident in the Falconilla episode: the tenth declamation attributed to the rhetorician Quintilian (35–96 C.E.), but almost certainly written a century or two later.<sup>54</sup> This declamation concerns a grief-stricken mother who was visited and comforted by her only son on the night after his cremation and again on subsequent nights. Note that Falconilla is also said to have been an only child, making the loss to each mother that much more devastating. The preface to the case states that the visitations were “in somnis,” implying that the mother was asleep, though the mother denies this and insists that she was fully awake (Pseudo-Quintilian, *Decl.* 10.5).

When the boy’s father hears about the visitations, he fears the malevolent power of the dead and hires a sorcerer to cast a spell around the tomb and

bind the stones with iron so that the shade of the dead boy can no longer get out. "Now all is well, he finally breathed his last, he cannot be seen, nor can he come out," says the sorcerer (10.15), and indeed the boy never appears again to his mother or anyone else.<sup>55</sup> The mother brings the father to court for his action of cruelty, and the declamation is an appeal to the court, the father, and the sorcerer to remove the spells and allow the boy's spirit to return and comfort his mother.

One key issue arising in the declamation is whether or not the boy was really present or only a figment of the mother's imagination, as the father asserts (10.16). The declaimer easily dispenses with this issue: If the father truly believed the ghost was not real, why did he hire a sorcerer to bind it? Besides, even if the nocturnal visits were all in the mother's imagination, it is still cruel to deprive her of comfort by making her believe the boy's spirit has been bound: "If this (visitation) really happened to her, the mother's loss was great, no less than if it only seemed to be happening to her" (10.2). In this example, in the Thecla story, and in Artemidorus's *Oneir.* 2.69, the basic assumption is that the shade appearing either in the dream or in a waking vision is really a manifestation of the will and personality of the dead person. Other options were available in antiquity to explain an appearance by the dead. (1) The dream was produced merely by the thoughts of the dreamer and the partial operation of the soul in sleep.<sup>56</sup> (2) The apparition was really a manifestation of a shape-shifting god like Morpheus who, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 11.400–750 (7 C.E.), was able to appear in the guise of various persons living and dead.<sup>57</sup> (3) The apparition was really a demon impersonating the dead (Tertullian, *De anima* 57). None of these options is taken in Pseudo-Quintilian's tenth declamation or in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*; the assumption is that the dead youth and Falconilla have really appeared to their respective mothers in some form. Even if both accounts are the fictional products of an author's imagination, they indicate strong cultural attitudes about the reality of apparitions from the dead, whether in dreams or in waking visions, and this conclusion is confirmed by Artemidorus.

Before leaving the dream world, it should be noted that the nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917) asserted that appearances of the dead in dreams lie at the heart of human belief in the afterlife and are responsible for much religious thought generally.<sup>58</sup> I would point out that Christianity itself owes its origins in part to visions of Jesus after his death; it is possible that some of the appearances in Paul's account could have occurred in dreams (1 Cor. 15:5–8). The fictional story of Falconilla and Tryphaena presupposes the power of a dream appearance by the dead to change a noble woman's behavior and help lead her to a religious conversion. It is far beyond the scope of this book to prove Tylor's thesis, if indeed the thesis is capable of proof, but the Thecla text does add to our understanding of the centrality of dreams in human religious expression.

Just where is Falconilla thought to be when she appears to her mother? She is obviously not in the “place of the righteous” (τὸν τῶν δικαίων τόπον, *APT* 28), since that is the place into which she wants to be transferred. Thus, in the imagination of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* author, the world of the dead was divided into at least two, and perhaps more, “topoi” or places for the dead based upon their behavior in life. One is immediately reminded of the rich man and Lazarus story, Luke 16:19–31, discussed earlier in chapter 2. In that influential author’s imagination, there were two regions for the dead even before the final judgment, one containing Abraham and Lazarus (a place where Lazarus is “comforted” [παρκαλεῖται]), and another place of torment called “Hades” with burning flames. Similarly, and much earlier, 1 Enoch 22:9–11 describes Enoch’s vision of the differentiated souls held in storage until the final judgment; the righteous and the wicked do not mix during the interim period. In Pseudo-Philo *LAB* 23:13, probably written in the early first century C.E.,<sup>59</sup> God promises the chosen Israelites, “I will take your souls and store them in peace until the time allotted the world is complete,” while in *LAB* 44:10 the wicked are said to suffer immediately after the separation of soul and body. In Luke, 1 Enoch, and the *LAB*, the boundaries are fixed; after death there is no transference to the place of the righteous for one not already there. Given this background, it is probable that the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* author knew that Falconilla’s request would be perceived as an audacious one. The fact that Thecla goes on to fulfill it heightens the sense of power and authority accorded to the heroine in the story.

Unlike the rich man of Luke 16, Falconilla does not seem to be in torment or pain of any kind. In Tryphaena’s request and Thecla’s prayer there is a clear indication that the end result of the transference will be that Falconilla “may live forever” (*APT* 29), and the alternative expressed in the text is to “die forever” (*APT* 37). Thus, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* the two options for post-judgment fate appear to be eternal life or annihilation, similar to the two options found in 2 Thess. 1:9. This coheres with the rest of the *Acts of Paul*, but not with other apocryphal acts, particularly the *Acts Thom.* 51–58, where torment is the clear fate of the wicked.

The closest Christian tradition available to help explain how Falconilla could become a recipient of grace after her death is found in the Rainer fragment of the *Apoc. Pet.* 14:1–4, which is probably earlier than the story in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. There is no evidence to support literary dependence here, as there may be in the case of the Perpetua text, but nonetheless there are a few similarities in thought. In *Apoc. Pet.* 14, analyzed in chapter 2, “Apocalypse of Peter,” the righteous are accorded the privilege of rescuing some of the wicked from their torments at the final judgment. Thecla’s prayer for Falconilla does not take place at the final judgment, and as just noted there is nothing in the text to indicate that Falconilla is in torment, but the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* does clearly connect Thecla’s ordeal in the arena to traditional

eschatological language. Thecla says, jumping into the pool of vicious sea creatures, “In the name of Jesus Christ I baptize myself on the last day” (APT 34). Of course, the character Thecla believes that this will be her last day on earth, but after surviving the ordeal she then depicts it as analogous to the final judgment: “He who clothed me when I was naked among the beasts shall clothe me with salvation in the day of judgment” (APT 38). For the author there is a connection between Thecla’s combat with the beasts and the “last day” of judgment. The first is a prefiguration of the second, and this could be yet one more reason why Thecla has the power to rescue even a dead polytheist like Falconilla. Thecla clearly tells the Roman governor, “Whoever does not believe in [the Son of God] shall not live, but shall die forever” (APT 37). Through her prayer, she has rescued Falconilla from such a terrible fate. Though the dream figure Falconilla did not express a saving belief in the Son of God explicitly, it was implied when she commended Thecla to her mother’s care. Like the sinful dead soldiers of 2 Macc. 12, and like the wicked dead rescued at the final judgment in *Apoc. Pet.* 14, Falconilla is the recipient of posthumous grace procured for her by one of God’s heroes.

### Later Interpretations of the Thecla/ Falconilla Tradition

The personality of Thecla and the stories about her provided a rich trove of images and motifs for many later Christians. Tertullian gives clear evidence that some Christians in Carthage championed Thecla as an exemplar for women who taught and baptized others (*De Baptismo* 17). Later figures such as Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (*Ep.* 75.11.1; ca. 256 c.e.)<sup>60</sup> and Gelasius, Bishop of Rome, 492–496 c.e., complained that women were continuing to teach, baptize, and even celebrate the Eucharist in some Christian circles.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps these women also invoked the example of Thecla, though their opponents do not indicate this explicitly.

Two Greek authors continue and extend the motif of Thecla as teacher. Methodius of Olympus (fl. late third century, early fourth century c.e.) makes Thecla the chief spokesperson for the virgin life in his *Symposium of the Ten Virgins*, patterned after Plato’s *Symposium*.<sup>62</sup> In this text, Thecla is a master of scripture, the intellectual leader of the virgins, and an articulate advocate of the view that while marriage is acceptable, virginity is better. Thecla is also considered an intellectual heroine by Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–ca. 394) and the rest of his family of theologians, as he relates a vision his mother had while giving birth to his learned sister Macrina (*Life of St. Macrina* 2.24–31). The figure in the vision revealed that the girl’s secret name would be Thecla, signifying that Macrina would choose the same type of life as the famous virgin. Gregory makes it clear that Macrina taught many, including himself (*Life*

6.8–10; 12.13; *De anima et resurrectione*, passim),<sup>63</sup> and thus Thecla's intellectual reputation, as well as her virginity, were no doubt uppermost in the family's mind. Other Greek authors highlight other aspects of Thecla's virtue: Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330–ca. 389) notes that she was able to extinguish all of her passions (*Hom. 15 in Canticum Canticorum* 6), and John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407) praises her for surrendering her gold jewelry to see Paul in prison. He contrasts this behavior with the stinginess of his own flock (*Hom. in Acta Apostolorum* 25.4). The Latin pilgrim Egeria visited Thecla's shrine in Seleucia in the late fourth or early fifth century, where she met a number of male and female virgins devoted to Thecla's memory and heard the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* read aloud (*Iten. Egeriae* 23).<sup>64</sup> All of this indicates the high esteem in which Thecla was held in the Greek-speaking parts of the Roman Empire, especially Asia Minor.

By contrast, in the west, Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339–397) claims that while Thecla's virginity gave her a holy power that protected her from the beasts in the arena, it did not allow her to teach in the Christian church (*De virginibus* 2.19). On this score Ambrose was in continuity with Tertullian and Cyprian, anticipating Pope Gelasius. Augustine invokes Thecla as a worthy example of virginity, but in contexts that also stress the validity of marriage (*Contra Faust.* 30.4; *Sancta virg.* 1.44). Augustine passes over in silence the more controversial aspects of Thecla's career. Léonie Hayne has noted that the Latin authors tend to relativize Thecla and give her much less attention, often replacing her with Agnes, about whom much less was known, as the paradigm of a virgin martyr.<sup>65</sup> As Hayne puts it, "in the west, the adulation [of Thecla] can almost be regarded as perfunctory. Thecla is a name, rather than a person." None of the authors discussed so far, Greek or Latin, nor any others we know about until the mid-fifth century, made any mention of Thecla's prayer for Falconilla. Even in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, when controversies over posthumous salvation were heating up (see chapters 5–7), Thecla and Falconilla were not brought into the discussions, as far as we can tell. The silence may indicate that Thecla's example was not often invoked to justify prayer for the non-Christian dead. If it had been, we might expect more polemics against it. One wonders if these authors, who praised Thecla in so many other ways, simply failed to notice the Falconilla episode, or if they deliberately chose to ignore it.

The earliest surviving interpretation of the Falconilla episode is found in a hagiographical text, *The Life and Miracles of St. Thecla*, attributed to Basil of Seleucia in the fifth century (fl. 431–459). Gilbert Dagron, who edited this text and translated it into French, has demonstrated on the basis of Miracle 12 (previously unedited) that Basil is not its author, but that it comes from a presbyter of Seleucia whom Basil had excommunicated and whose excommunication was lifted after three days thanks to the intervention of Saints Thomas and Thecla.<sup>66</sup> The issues between Basil and the author appear to have been

moral (charges of intoxication) and disciplinary rather than doctrinal.<sup>67</sup> This presbyter's text greatly expands the Falconilla story (as it does with most other episodes from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*), in a way that makes even clearer than the original the extraordinary power and efficacy of Thecla's prayer for a dead pagan. This is the first Greek work in a long series of texts that highlight the prayer for Falconilla and invoke it to justify prayer for the dead generally, sometimes even including dead pagans. The subsequent texts will be discussed in chapter 8. No such comparable tradition about Falconilla survives from the Latin west.

It will be useful here to provide an English translation of relevant portions of the fifth-century *Life and Miracles* text so that it may be compared with the second-century *Acts of Paul and Thecla* on which it is based. This procedure will provide some clues about the later author's attitude toward the posthumous salvation of non-Christians. All translations from the text are mine, based on Dagron's critical edition. We learn in the text that Falconilla had died only recently (ἀρτι, 16.21), and she makes her dream appearance to her mother on the very night that Thecla is staying with her (17.1–5), details not at all clear in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Falconilla's speech to her mother is lengthened considerably:

I urge you, mother, to abandon the great grief you have on my account, and to stop weeping in vain, and to cease destroying your own soul with lamentations. For you do not benefit me at all with these things, and you might end up adding your own death to mine! Request, therefore, of Thecla, who is staying with you, and who has become a child to you in my place, that she make some intercession (πρεσβείαν) for me to God, that I might obtain his love of humanity (φιλανθρωπίας) and his calm gaze, and that I might be transferred to the place of the righteous. For even here, too, the fame of Thecla is great because she struggles brilliantly and courageously for the sake of Christ. (17.7–17)

After this Falconilla disappears, and the narrator adds a comment about the fleeting and ethereal nature of dream appearances.

Tryphaena immediately wakes up and rises from her bed to inform Thecla of the dream and make her request:

O, my child, my God-given child, God has led you here and has cast you into my arms in order that you might alleviate completely my misfortune and join the soul of my daughter Falconilla to Christ, and that you might procure for her through your prayer what she lacks from faith (τὸ παρὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐλλείφθην). Pray and request of Christ the King to give to you grace from himself so that my daughter might rest and have eternal life. For Falconilla herself has asked for this from you in a vision that came to me this very night. (17.24–32)

This speech of Tryphaena makes clear that Falconilla's soul is to be "united with Christ" and that such a union, with its attendant eternal life, should normally come from faith, but cannot in Falconilla's case because she is already dead. What is implicit in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is spelled out clearly in this text. The narrator goes on to say that Thecla considered the request "reasonable" (εὐλόγον, 17.35), an indication of the author's own attitude toward the scenario he depicts.

Thecla immediately fulfills Tryphaena's request with the following lengthy prayer:

Christ, King of the Heavens, Child of the Great and Most High Father, who has bestowed grace upon me such that I believe in you and am saved, and who has made the light of your truth shine before me, and who has already deemed me worthy that I might suffer for you, grant also to your servant Tryphaena the fulfillment of her wish concerning her daughter. Her wish is that the soul of her daughter be numbered among the souls who have already believed in you and that she enjoy a dwelling and luxury in paradise. Make this reward payment to Tryphaena and to me, Master Christ, for behold, as you see, she has become the guardian of my virginity, she has stood beside me (in addition to your own Paul), she has snatched me from the fury of Alexander, and she has comforted me on her breast in her home after my terror with the beasts. Although she is a Queen, she has been reduced to my debased level out of desire and fear towards you. In exchange for all these things she desires and requests this: that her only and beloved child obtain some rest. (17.38–53)

In this version, the virtues of Tryphaena herself are stressed much more than they were in the original *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, and this probably has something to do with the literary and social setting of the text. In the second half of this text, the "Miracles" section, Thecla herself, now dead, grants favors and intercedes on behalf of supplicants; the supplicants need to be worthy as Tryphaena is depicted here. As Patricia Cox Miller notes, based on the *Life and Miracles* text, it is known that by the fifth century Thecla was the patron of an incubatory cult center at Seleucia, a Christianized version of the healing centers formerly associated with Asclepius in Greek religion. Like Asclepius, Thecla herself would appear in dreams to perform healing for her devotees.<sup>68</sup> The depiction of Tryphaena in this prayer would be a model for those who wished to petition for Thecla's help.

Also striking in Thecla's prayer is the explicit description of the benefits Falconilla is to receive, benefits much more developed than the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*'s "transferred to the place of the righteous." Falconilla's soul is to be "joined with Christ," and she is to enjoy a habitation and luxury with those who believed in Christ while they were still alive. Later in the text Thecla re-

hearses for Paul all that she has learned from him, and in the course of the speech she states:

I came to know through you that from Tartaros, the fire, the Pyriphlegeton, the horrors and punishments of the underworld and from the prison there is no way out and they cannot be avoided. I came to know through you the abundance of Paradise, the effortless pleasure, the banquet prepared automatically without work. I came to know through you the grace and power of the divine bath and baptism, in word and act. (*Life and Miracles* 26)<sup>69</sup>

This speech throws into high relief what Thecla has accomplished for Falconilla in the imagination of our fifth-century author: Even without the benefit of baptism, Tryphaena's dead daughter will receive all these benefits and escape all those torments that otherwise could not be avoided. This goes well beyond the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, which had nothing at all to say about torments for the wicked. The two options in that earlier text seemed to have been eternal life or annihilation. There is no hint of universal salvation in either the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* or the *Life and Miracles* text: Falconilla is a very special case, and she should consider herself fortunate in the extreme.

There is one last consideration to make before leaving the *Life and Miracles* text. In the same speech to Paul discussed earlier, Thecla also stresses the orthodox Trinitarian teachings she received from Paul, even using the term "homouosios." This removes from our heroine any possible taint of Arianism, and in *Miracles* 10 and 14 she even instructs a convert to express belief in Mary Theotokos, a clear reflection of the Christological controversies of the mid-fifth century. The author, through his character Thecla, was surely attempting to demonstrate his own orthodoxy.<sup>70</sup> What is interesting for our purposes is that this Greek author of the fifth century combined Nicene and Chalcedonian Orthodoxy with a belief in the efficacy of a prayer for the non-Christian dead. Repeating the traditional Falconilla story and heightening its emphasis on salvation of the non-Christian dead did not, in the author's mind, endanger his classification among the orthodox. Incidentally, Thecla also baptizes many converts in this text, so the notion of a woman baptizing was also not a problem for this author.

Many subsequent Greek theologians did not hesitate to invoke the example of Thecla's prayer for Falconilla and another similar to it, Gregory the Great's prayer for Trajan, in their discourse on prayer for the dead. The earliest of these is a text attributed to John Damascene (d. 749) titled Περὶ τῶν ἐν πίστει κεκοιμημένων, "Concerning those who have fallen asleep (died) in the faith." E. Diekamp has argued that this work is authentic,<sup>71</sup> but most scholars list it among the dubious writings of John. In the context of proving that prayers for the Christian dead are efficacious, the author invokes the example of Thecla and Falconilla:

Did not the first female martyr (Thecla) save Falconilla after death? But you will say that she was worthy to do so, since she was the first female martyr, and it was fitting that her prayer be heard. But I say to you, yes she was the first female martyr, but look at the sort of person for whom she made the request: a pagan idol worshipper, an altogether unholy servant of another lord! (*Concerning those who fall asleep in the faith* 9)<sup>72</sup>

The text clearly sees this example as exceptional, but not impossible. God is sovereign and can do as he pleases, even to the point of saving a dead pagan. Other examples of this type of interpretation in eastern Christendom will be discussed in chapter 8. The situation was entirely different in the West, where the Perpetua/Dinocrates text was the major one in view and where Augustine's interpretation of it held sway for centuries. It is to the early third-century Perpetua text that we now turn.

## 4

### PERPETUA'S PRAYER FOR DINOCRATES

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Some years after the Thecla text was written, an actual North African Christian named Perpetua believed she had accomplished in fact something similar to what Thecla had achieved: She staged a posthumous rescue of a dead non-Christian, her little brother Dinocrates. Unlike Thecla, she did not think she had “transferred him to the place of the righteous.” In fact, Dinocrates remained in the place where Perpetua first saw him, though his condition was greatly improved. Whether she believed in a posthumous “salvation” for Dinocrates is not explicit; the account must be examined more closely to make any suggestions about that. At the very least, however, she believed she had helped him in some way, and she accomplished this through her power as a confessor. This places the real Perpetua in a category similar to the fictional Thecla, though the sources about Perpetua’s life and death do not draw any explicit connection to the earlier figure.

#### The Historical Perpetua

Knowledge about Perpetua and her companions derives from an account of their martyrdom written in Latin, and surviving in several manuscripts, only one of which is close to complete.<sup>1</sup> The account is known as the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (PPF). It was probably written very soon after the events it narrates, and its compiler is anonymous, though some have speculated that the compiler is none other than Perpetua’s contemporary, the Latin theologian Tertullian.<sup>2</sup> A Greek translation of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* was discovered in 1889,<sup>3</sup> and a number of Latin authors also discuss Perpetua’s story. Tertullian (*De anima* 55.4)

invokes Perpetua's authority to bolster one of his theological arguments, though he is not necessarily referring to the text before us,<sup>4</sup> and over two hundred years later Augustine and Quodvultdeus make explicit use of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, attesting to the public reading of this text, at least in North Africa. The feast day of Perpetua appeared in the official calendar of the church of Rome as early as Constantine's era.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there is a Latin text of uncertain date called the *Acta Perpetuae*, surviving in two recensions (A and B), which details the exchanges between the Christians and their Roman judge and then relates the subsequent events of the martyrs' deaths in abbreviated form.<sup>6</sup> Neither recension of the *Acta* text contains the Dinocrates visions. Perpetua and her companion Saturus turn up on a fourth-century Christian sarcophagus from Spain,<sup>7</sup> and Perpetua is featured in sixth-century mosaics from San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna and the basilica of Perenzo, further indications of the importance of her story in late antiquity.<sup>8</sup>

What make the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* so remarkable are two sections written in the first person, purporting to record the visions, thoughts, and feelings of Perpetua (PPF 3–10) and Saturus (11–13) in prison awaiting execution. The compiler claims that these portions of the text derive from the martyrs themselves, "Now from this point on the entire account of her ordeal is [Perpetua's] own, according to her own ideas and in the way that she herself wrote it down" (2.3). Likewise, the compiler says of Saturus's vision, "But the blessed Saturus has also made known his own vision and he has written it out with his own hand" (11.1). The text indicates a great deal of intercourse between the martyrs in prison and those Christians still outside (3.7; 9.1; 15.7), and just as Paul was able to write while in prison (Phil. 1:13; Phlmn. 1), and the confessors of Cyprian's day (Cyprian, *Ep.* 28.2.1), so also it would have been possible for these confessors. The style and tone of the Perpetua section are quite different from the surrounding framework, as E. R. Dodds, Jacqueline Amat, and Brent Shaw have all shown.<sup>9</sup> All of these authors believe the Perpetua section is attributable to the martyr herself, while they differ with respect to the authenticity of Saturus's vision. All three agree that Saturus's vision contains more conventional Christian imagery and is more concerned with ecclesiastical hierarchy than Perpetua's visions. But whereas Dodds and Shaw use these facts to suggest the compiler has invented Saturus's vision, Amat thinks the vision reflects the distinct personality of Saturus himself.<sup>10</sup> I am inclined to follow Amat, and I will return to this issue later when discussing the *Apocalypse of Peter* and its possible influence on both visionaries.

Just what can be known about Vibia Perpetua? According to the compiler of the text she was "a newly married woman of good family and upbringing. Her mother and father were still alive, and one of her two brothers was a catechumen like herself. She was about twenty-two years old<sup>11</sup> and had an infant son at the breast" (2.1–3). Nowhere in the text is Perpetua's husband

mentioned, and he is attested only briefly in the *Acta* (6.2, recension A), so it is possible that Perpetua was widowed shortly after her marriage. It is also possible that he dissociated himself from her when she became a catechumen or at her arrest, and this explains why she does not mention him.<sup>12</sup> According to the Greek version of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (2.1), she and her family hailed from Thuburbo Minus, about thirty miles from Carthage, but it is also possible that they were Carthaginians. It is virtually certain that her death took place in the arena at Carthage, even though the location is not named in the text.<sup>13</sup> The educational level apparent in her first-person account, the Roman family name “Vibius,” and the compiler’s remarks all indicate a high social status for Perpetua with a fair amount of wealth and prestige.<sup>14</sup> She probably knew both Greek and Latin; Dodds thinks that while most of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* was originally written in Latin, Perpetua’s diary in chapters 3–11 was originally written in Greek and translated by the compiler.<sup>15</sup> While there is not enough evidence to prove this, it is clear that Dinocrates is a Greek name, so at the very least it is probable that Perpetua’s father was a Hellenophile. In addition, Saturus’s vision depicts Perpetua speaking Greek in heaven (*PPF* 13.4), and thus it is likely that Perpetua had received some education in that language. The date of her martyrdom was most likely March 7, 203 C.E., at games in honor of the emperor Geta’s birthday (*PPF* 7.9), though 202 and 204 have also been put forward as possible years.<sup>16</sup>

### Events Leading up to the Dinocrates Visions

As the compiler narrates the story, Perpetua was arrested along with two slaves, Revocatus and Felicitas, and two other catechumens, Saturninus and Secundulus. Perpetua herself relates that their teacher Saturus (“the builder of our strength”) had not been present when they were arrested, but gave himself up to the authorities, presumably so that he could join his converts in prison and die with them if need be (*PPF* 4.4–5). His action demonstrates the fuzzy line between martyrdom and suicide in the context of Roman persecution of Christians.<sup>17</sup> Of course, without the unjust Roman policy (sporadically implemented) of execution simply for being a Christian and refusing to sacrifice to the gods, there would have been no martyrs. But in that context, many Christians of various stripes (and not just “heretics” like the Montanists) eagerly volunteered to imitate Christ by suffering and dying a death like his.<sup>18</sup> Other Christians thought voluntary martyrdom dangerous and even counseled flight and hiding in the face of persecution; only those who were forcibly arrested could be considered true martyrs (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 4.1–6.2). Interesting in this regard are the Christians mentioned in

the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* who were not arrested by the authorities, even though they were visiting the confessors in prison (*PPF* 3.7, 9.1). Clearly there was no wholesale persecution of Christians in and around Carthage in Perpetua's day, so one is left to speculate precisely why Perpetua and her companions were singled out. Perhaps only recent converts were targeted, or perhaps they provocatively called attention to themselves. Another possibility is that Perpetua and her companions were the only Christians whose accusers were willing to be named, in line with the policy set forth in the previous century by the emperor Trajan (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96).<sup>19</sup> The evidence is too sketchy to know for certain.

Perpetua was baptized while under initial detention, and then "a few days later we were lodged in the prison." The prison was crowded and the heat stifling; Perpetua was terrified and concerned because she had been separated from her baby. Soon she was able to nurse the baby in prison, and this made her stay there more bearable. At this point, before the hearing and sentencing, Perpetua experienced her first vision, at the request of her brother who was in prison with her. She was already known as an adept visionary, since she claims, "I knew that I could speak with the Lord, whose great blessings I had experienced before" (4.2). In the vision she saw a tremendous bronze ladder reaching into the heavens, wide enough only for one person, with sharp metal weapons attached to each side (cf. Jacob's ladder, Gen. 28:12). At the foot of the ladder lay a huge dragon attacking those who tried to climb it. Saturus ascended first and called for her to follow him. She stepped on the dragon's head (cf. Gen. 3:15), went up, and saw at the top an immense garden containing a tall old shepherd milking sheep. Standing around him were thousands of people clothed in white (*candidati milia multa*). The old man welcomed her and gave her a mouthful of the sheep's cheese, and all those standing around said "Amen." At that point Perpetua woke up with a sweet taste still in her mouth. She and her brother interpreted the dream as an indication that they would suffer and die.

Unlike the Dinocrates visions that follow, Perpetua's vision of the ladder and garden is predictive and combines elements of the allegorical and the self-evident dreams as described by Artemidorus (*Oneir.* 1.2, discussed in the previous chapter). The meanings of the ladder, the dragon, and the metal implements are not obvious without interpretation in the light of Christian symbolism, but Perpetua's experiences in the garden may be taken as a fairly straightforward account of what she expected to happen after her death. In this respect the *candidati milia multa* of *PPF* 4.8 assume great importance as one tries to understand the Dinocrates visions and Perpetua's eschatology in general. Many thousands dressed in white will be in the heavenly garden with her, but just who are these people? All the deceased Christians? Only the previous Christian martyrs? Does her prayer for Dinocrates mean she could envision his being there with her as well? I will return to these

questions and many others, after providing a translation of the Dinocrates visions.

In scenes charged with emotion, Perpetua's father tries to persuade her three times to renounce her Christianity (*PPF* 3.1–3, 5.1–6, 6.2–5). These encounters depict an extraordinary reversal of the usual father-daughter relationship.<sup>20</sup> Perpetua presents herself as the stronger of the two; she is resolute and powerful, acknowledged by him as “domina” (powerful lady or goddess, *PPF* 5.5),<sup>21</sup> while his arguments are “diabolical” (3.3). She pities him and recognizes that he loves her, but ultimately she portrays him as pitiful and downcast, a man beaten figuratively by his failure to persuade his daughter, and beaten literally on the order of the judge at her hearing (6.5). She makes an interesting remark that, alone among all her relatives, her father will not be joyful when she suffers (*solus de passione meo gavisurus non esset de toto genere meo*, 5.1). Does this mean that all the others will rejoice because they are supportive of her suffering for Christ? *PPF* 16.4 might speak in favor of this interpretation, as the compiler reports that Perpetua's brothers came to visit her just before her ordeal. Alternatively, does it mean that the others will rejoice because they are glad to be rid of her? There is evidence of a struggle in the family over their loyalty to Perpetua, since just after the hearing and sentencing, but before the Dinocrates visions, Perpetua's father refuses to send her baby back to her in prison, a forced weaning that Perpetua interprets as God's will (6.7). Obviously the father wants to gain control over his grandson, keeping him away from the foul influence of his stubborn mother. It should not be a surprise, then, that immediately after the loss of her baby, Perpetua imagines she has gained the support of another member of the family, her long-dead brother Dinocrates.

## The Dinocrates Visions

### *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas 7–8*

(7) Some days (after being sentenced to the beasts) when we were all at prayer, suddenly while praying I spoke out and uttered the name Dinocrates. I was surprised, for the name had never entered my mind until that moment. And I was pained when I recalled what had happened to him. At once I realized I was privileged to pray for him. I began to pray for him and sigh deeply before the Lord. That very night I had the following vision. I saw Dinocrates coming out of a dark hole, where there were many others with him, very hot and thirsty, pale and dirty. On his face was the wound he had when he died. Now Dinocrates had been my brother according to the flesh; but he had died horribly of cancer of the face when he was seven years old, and his death was a source of loathing to everyone. Thus it was for him that I made my prayer. There was a great abyss between us: nei-

ther could approach the other [cf. Luke 16:26]. Where Dinocrates stood there was a pool full of water; and its rim was higher than the child's height, so that he had to stretch himself up to drink. I was sorry that, though the pool had water in it, Dinocrates could not drink because of the height of the rim [cf. Tantalus in Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.582–91]. Then I woke up, realizing that my brother was suffering (*laborare*). But I was confident I could help him in his trouble; and I prayed for him every day until we were transferred to the military prison. For we were supposed to fight with the beasts at the military games to be held on the occasion of the emperor Geta's birthday. And I prayed for my brother day and night with tears and sighs that this favor might be granted me.

(8) On the day we were kept in chains, I had this vision shown to me. I saw the same spot that I had seen before, but there was Dinocrates all clean, well dressed, and refreshed (*refrigerantem*). I saw a scar where the wound had been; and the pool that I had seen before now had its rim lowered to the level of the child's waist. And Dinocrates kept drinking water from it, and there above the rim was a golden bowl full of water. And Dinocrates drew close and began to drink from it, yet the bowl remained full. And when he had drunk enough of the water, he began to play as children do. Then I awoke, and I realized that he had been delivered from his penalty (*tunc intellexi translatum eum esse de poena*).<sup>22</sup>

Perpetua herself does not attempt to draw out a systematic theology or eschatology from her visions, and in some sense one does violence to her sensibilities when attempting to do so. But the visions are not totally innocent of theological categorization; after all, she sees a great chasm between herself and Dinocrates, and this must signify some type of distinction between them. She even respects, in her dream imagination, Luke's dictum that no one can cross the abyss. She certainly does not see *herself* coming out of a dark hole, thirsty and wounded! In addition, a number of motifs from Perpetua's cultural and religious background may be seen in the visions (e.g., Homer's *Odyssey* and the Gospel of Luke, noted by Musurillo in his translation). Thus, it is fair to put theological and historical questions to her visions without demanding of her the consistency of a systematic theologian.

Several such questions merit our attention. Returning to her first vision of the ladder and the garden, who did she think her companions might be in the heavenly garden, and did she now think they might include Dinocrates? Perpetua's contemporary Tertullian was very clear on this point: He thought only Christian martyrs would be admitted to Paradise immediately upon death, basing himself on Rev. 6:9 where John sees the martyrs under the altar in the throne room of God. All others would have to wait until the final judgment. Tertullian also uses the authority of Perpetua's vision as a support to Rev. 6:9 in order to prove his point that only martyrs currently reside in heaven (*De anima* 55.4).<sup>23</sup> Many have argued that Tertullian mistakenly re-

ferred to Satorius's vision (*PPF* 11.9, 13.8), because Satorius sees martyrs, but Cecil Robeck has rightly pointed out that Satorius may also see others besides martyrs in heaven.<sup>24</sup> Perpetua's word "candidati" could mean any white-robed beings in heaven. Even though in Rev. 6:11 it is specifically the martyrs who receive a white robe,<sup>25</sup> such raiment is worn by many others as well (Rev. 4:4; 7:9, 13–14; 15:6; 19:14).<sup>26</sup> The "others" in the Book of Revelation include the 24 elders, the 144,000 who come through the tribulation, 7 angels, and the armies of heaven. It is difficult to see how Perpetua could have included Dinocrates in such white-robed company, and thus she probably did not think that Dinocrates would join her in the heavenly garden, at least not in the period before the resurrection and final judgment.

According to Tertullian, all non-martyrs, Christian and non-Christian alike, go to temporary storage facilities upon death to await the final judgment. These facilities are differentiated between the "bosom of Abraham" for the righteous and a place of anticipatory punishment for the wicked (*De anima* 55, 58; *Adv. Marc.* 4.34).<sup>27</sup> The roughly contemporary Greek writer Hippolytus of Rome has a very similar depiction of a two-tiered Hades, if his treatise *Against Plato, on the Cause of the Universe* can be considered genuine.<sup>28</sup> For both Hippolytus and Tertullian, the decision about a person's ultimate fate appears to be made at death; there is no purgation in the afterlife, since postmortem punishments are simply anticipatory and do not perform any cleansing function.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, for the righteous Christians who do not die as martyrs, Tertullian says, "why may it not be possible . . . that by Abraham's bosom is meant some temporary receptacle of faithful souls, wherein is even now delineated an image of the future, and where is given some foresight of the glory of both judgments?" (*Adv. Marc.* 4.34). Tertullian does believe in offerings for the Christian dead on the anniversary of their deaths, called their "birthday," and he treats this as a well-established Christian custom based in tradition, not scripture (*De corona* 3.2–3). But Tertullian does not articulate any theory about precisely what these offerings might have accomplished for the deceased; it does not appear to have affected God's judgment of them.<sup>30</sup>

The writings of Hippolytus and Tertullian on these subjects help illuminate Perpetua's Dinocrates visions. Dinocrates comes out of a dark hole and is suffering; Perpetua terms the suffering a "penalty" (*poena*, 8.4), and a chasm separates the two siblings. This description sounds a great deal like the interim fate of the wicked before the final judgment in Tertullian's *De anima* 55–58: Their material souls suffer now in anticipation of the suffering of both body and soul after the resurrection and final judgment. Tertullian even posits that souls in Hades retain the same age and form they had at their deaths, until the resurrection (*De anima* 56).<sup>31</sup> This corresponds to Dinocrates' retention of the facial cancer that killed him, and Tertullian could have had the example of Dinocrates in mind when he penned these lines, coming so close as they do to his one invocation of Perpetua. Thus, the fact that Perpetua effects a

change for Dinocrates in the interim period, wiping away the cancer, canceling the penalty, and providing “refreshment” (refrigerantem) probably means that she thought he would be saved at the last judgment, though she says nothing explicit about that. All of this puts her at odds with Tertullian, who believed that the judgment took place upon each individual’s death (*De anima* 55 and 58; *Adv. Marc.* 4.34). There is little reason to suppose that she equated Dinocrates’ drinking from the fountain with baptism; *drinking* the baptismal waters is not part of early Christian baptism, and Perpetua states clearly that the purpose of the water was to slake his thirst. But Dinocrates is “saved” nonetheless, probably for all time in Perpetua’s belief.

Perpetua does not have a vision of “purgatory,” at least as purgatory comes to be defined in later centuries.<sup>32</sup> If Dinocrates were a baptized Christian suffering punishment to purify him of his sins, then we could say that Perpetua saw purgatory. Such an interpretation of Perpetua’s visions, though later championed by Augustine (*De natura animae et eius origine* 1.12; 3.12), is virtually impossible for the historical Perpetua. It is inconceivable to imagine the pagan father of Dinocrates allowing his child to be baptized, and the boy died so many years earlier that probably no one in the family had yet become a Christian (remember, Perpetua was still a catechumen at her arrest). It is equally unlikely that Perpetua would envision postmortem agony for Dinocrates if he had been a baptized Christian. Even if Dinocrates *had* been baptized, there is no reason to think that notions of purgatorial punishment had developed in Carthage by Perpetua’s day; Tertullian’s postmortem scenarios do not include them. Thus, Perpetua cannot be connected with the doctrine of purgatory, except in the sense that later generations reinterpreted her visions in that direction. She did offer to posterity a notion of the efficacy of prayer for the dead, which became incorporated into the cultural construction of Purgatory, but only with limits on who could be helped that were not part of Perpetua’s original conception.

The questions remain: Why indeed was Dinocrates suffering in Perpetua’s imagination, and why was she able to help him? Franz Joseph Dölger posits that he was suffering in the afterlife because he had died a premature death, in line with common Greek and Roman beliefs.<sup>33</sup> This would mean that Perpetua’s understanding of Dinocrates’ fate was influenced more by her pagan upbringing than by anything she had learned as a Christian catechumen. Obviously the culture in which Perpetua was raised had a profound influence on her dream imagination, as may be seen in her belief that the dead carry with them to Hades the bodily deformities they had in life, a concept well attested in Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman sources.<sup>34</sup> But as we saw, a very similar idea is also attested in Tertullian (*De anima* 56). Thus, here is a case where traditional pagan and new Christian teaching could have dovetailed for Perpetua. Similarly, there was a strong tradition of pagan women defying tyranny and choosing death over shame, invoked by Tertullian to in-

spire the Christian martyrs (*Ad Martyras* 4).<sup>35</sup> Perpetua no doubt was inspired by them and by examples from the Jewish and Christian traditions as well. Therefore, the supposedly “pagan” elements of Perpetua’s visions should not lead one to think, as many scholars do, that she was “unschooled” in Christian theology, or that she was naïve in thinking she could rescue a dead pagan.<sup>36</sup> One must be careful making claims of this sort, for it is not known precisely what was considered orthodox Christian teaching in Perpetua’s circle. As was demonstrated in chapter 2, there was no clear uniform position on posthumous rescue for the pagan dead in the first four centuries of Christianity.

I think it likely that Perpetua believed Dinocrates was suffering simply because he had not been a Christian, and that she, as a soon-to-be Christian martyr, had the power to ease his suffering. Surely as a catechumen she had been taught that steadfast followers of Christ would find postmortem bliss while others would not; such a message is basic to most New Testament texts. She characterized Dinocrates’ predicament as a “poena” (penalty, 8.4)—for what, one may ask? The simplest explanation is that he was penalized for not having been a Christian; i.e., he was suffering the common fate of all non-Christians. She also would have known about the extraordinary power of confessors to intercede for the living: Jesus, Stephen, the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne, and others were all available as precedents. Tertullian attests to such a doctrine alive in the Carthage of Perpetua’s day.<sup>37</sup> She could have heard about Judas Maccabeus’s prayer for his sinful dead soldiers, and she may even have known about the example of Thecla’s intercession for the dead pagan Falconilla.<sup>38</sup> Tertullian certainly knew about Thecla (*De Bapt.* 17.5), though he does not mention her role as intercessor. All these traditions about intercession help explain Perpetua’s statement, “At once I realized that I was privileged to pray for him” (*PPF* 7.2). She might even have considered rescue for a dead pagan to be in line with the teaching of the apostle Peter, if she had been reading the *Apocalypse of Peter* and if she, like Clement of Alexandria, Methodius of Olympus, and many others, considered it to be an authoritative text of scripture.<sup>39</sup> Thus, her prayer for Dinocrates may show that, far from being unschooled, she had absorbed a great deal of Christian teaching about intercession and rescue for the dead.

Is there any evidence that Perpetua and her companions knew the *Apocalypse of Peter*? M. R. James certainly thought that it had influenced Saturus’s vision, and in 1892 he compiled a list of parallels.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, some of the parallels were drawn from the Akhmim fragments of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, generally conceded now to be less reliable than the Ethiopic version.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, two significant parallels are found between Saturus’s vision and the Ethiopic version of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Saturus says, “A great open space appeared, which seemed to be a garden, with rose bushes and all manner of flowers. The trees were constantly falling” (*PPF* 11). This corresponds to *Apoc. Pet.* 16, “And he showed us a great open garden. It was full of fair trees

and blessed fruits.” More significantly, Saturus says, “All of us were sustained by a most delicious odor that seemed to satisfy us” (*PPF* 13), corresponding to *Apoc. Pet.* 16, “[The garden’s] fragrance was beautiful and that fragrance reached to us.” Of course, there is no question of Saturus’s quoting from the text verbatim in prison, but only that his visionary experience might have been shaped by a memory of the text. Even so, Buchholz is “inclined to attribute the parallels [between the vision of Saturus and the *Apocalypse of Peter*] to the standard paraphernalia of Paradise rather than to dependence of the vision on our apocalypse.”<sup>42</sup>

Even amid his skepticism, Buchholz still notes a possible parallel between Perpetua’s vision of Dinocrates and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, albeit from the problematic Akhmim version. Akhmim fragment 21 reads, “I saw also another place, opposite that one, very gloomy; and this was the place of punishment, and those who were punished there and the angels who punished had dark raiment, clothed according to the air of the place.” Could a description like this in the *Apocalypse of Peter* have fueled the imagination of Perpetua, who saw Dinocrates “coming out of a dark hole, where there were many others with him, very hot and thirsty, pale and dirty?” This passage could just as well, however, be a later addition to the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

I would add one further piece of evidence, neglected by Buchholz, in favor of the Carthaginian martyrs’ knowledge of the *Apocalypse of Peter*: the very act of praying for Dinocrates, which corresponds loosely to the Rainer Fragment of the *Apoc. Pet.* 14:1–4. In that text, God’s elect are given the privilege of rescuing some of the damned at the final judgment (see chapter 2, this volume). True, Perpetua does not rescue Dinocrates at the final judgment, but she does get to improve his condition in the interim period before the judgment, and she “knew that he had been delivered from his penalty” (tunc intellexi translatum eum esse de poena, 8.4). It is probably safe to assume she thought “delivered for all time,” though she does not say this explicitly. This is not enough to prove the influence of the *Apocalypse of Peter* on Perpetua’s imagination, but it is suggestive. At the very least one can say this: both authors agreed that the saints could intercede for dead non-Christians, either now, or at the final judgment.

### Events Following the Dinocrates Visions

Immediately after the Dinocrates visions, Perpetua notes that Pudens, the man in charge of the prison, “began to show us great honor, realizing that we possessed some great power within us” (*PPF* 9.1). Perpetua’s father then appears one last time to try to persuade his daughter. Though Perpetua herself does not make the connection directly, her attitudes toward these two authority

figures may have been shaped by her experience of rescuing Dinocrates. She had just witnessed a strong manifestation of the power within her, and she had also lined up one more family member on her side as opposed to her father's side. At least three siblings (two living, one dead) now stood against their father and Perpetua's baby in his control; perhaps they stood against everyone else in the family, too (*PPF* 5.5, but see 16.4). Knowing that she had helped Dinocrates no doubt strengthened the pity she felt for her father, "I felt sorry for his unhappy old age" (*PPF* 9.3). If only he saw things her way! If only he understood the power lodged within her—power even to rescue his long-dead little boy—then he would support her resolve to die rather than pleading "diabolically" to stop her.

Both Thecla and Perpetua engage in a process of creating a new family among the dead, in part replacing their living families who have rejected them. One sees this process at work also in nineteenth-century Mormon practice, as discussed in the introduction. In all three cases the persons undergoing persecution for their faith find meaning and solace in their ability to rescue the dead, and the primary focus is on persons close to the one persecuted: the daughter of a friend, a long-lost little brother, and, for the Mormons, any person who can be specifically named, the majority of whom in the early years were deceased friends and relatives.

Perpetua recorded one last vision before her death, the famous dream of her battle in the arena, in which she was changed into a man to fight with a vicious Egyptian. Others have written extensively on this vision, so it will not be necessary to go into detail here.<sup>43</sup> Like the dragon in the first vision, the Egyptian in this dream symbolizes the devil, and she steps upon his head after defeating him, just as she had done with the dragon. At this point the compiler inserts Satorus's vision, after which he goes on to relate the gruesome deaths of the martyrs. Satorus's vision has one interesting connection with Perpetua's second Dinocrates vision: in both, at least one reward in the afterlife is the ability to "play." After she rescues him, Perpetua sees Dinocrates playing as children do (*ludere* more *infantum*, 8.3), and the heavenly elders in Satorus's vision tell Satorus and Perpetua to "go and play" (*Ite et ludite*, 12.6). In the minds of both confessors, an afterlife of blissful play contrasts sharply with the reality of life in prison awaiting certain death.

Satorus's vision also casts some light on the ecclesiastical politics of the churches at Carthage, as he imagines the still-living bishop Optatus and the presbyter Aspasius outside the gates of heaven far apart from each other and in sorrow. The two men throw themselves at the martyrs' feet and beg them to heal the rift between them. The martyrs question this reversal of roles—after all, Optatus and Aspasius are church leaders—but Perpetua begins to speak with them in Greek. Angels scold the bishop and presbyter for disturbing the martyrs with their petty quarrels and for allowing factions in the Christian flock. Satorus and/or the compiler have clearly intended this ac-

count to send a message to the Christian community that survives: strive for unity and revere the martyrs, who in some sense have an authority higher than the clergy. One cannot be certain about the nature of the dispute between Optatus and Aspasius, but it may have had something to do with budding controversy over the “New Prophecy” or Montanist movement, discussed in the next section of this chapter.

After Saturus’s vision, the compiler completes the text by taking up Perpetua’s challenge: “About what happened at the contest itself, let him write of it who will” (*PPF* 10.15). He reports that Secundulus died in prison before facing the beasts, and then relates the story of the pregnant slave girl, Felicitas. She gave birth prematurely in prison (a miracle from God induced by the prayers of her companions) so that she might die with the others rather than having to wait, since Roman law forbade the execution of pregnant women (15.1–7). The baby girl is delivered to one of the “sisters,” no doubt a Christian not under arrest. No reader can remain unaffected by the compiler’s account of the brutal carnage inflicted upon Perpetua, Felicitas, Saturus, and their companions; a summary cannot do it justice, so none will be attempted. Many have remarked that the compiler portrays Perpetua in these scenes quite differently than she seems in her first-hand account. Suddenly she is concerned with modesty and disorderly hair while being tossed about by a mad heifer (*PPF* 20.4–5).<sup>44</sup> The compiler also adds commentary to put forward his own views about the continuing work of the Holy Spirit through these martyrs. They are as important as the examples of heroes and martyrs from scripture (*PPF* 1.1–5 and 21.11). This is an indication that the compiler was an adherent of the Montanist or “New Prophecy” movement, the topic of the next section.

### The New Prophecy Movement, Perpetua, and Dinocrates

Montanus was a Christian prophet from Phrygia in Asia Minor who, along with his two companions Priscilla and Maximilla, began a movement that caused great controversy in Christian circles in the late second and early third centuries. The date for these three prophets’ activity has been variously placed between the 150s and early 170s c.e.<sup>45</sup> The sources for the New Prophecy movement are notoriously skewed by the polemical agendas of heresy hunters, but in rough outline it is known that Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla claimed that the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete promised in John 14:16, 15:26, and 16:7, was speaking anew through them. They announced the imminent second coming of Christ and claimed to have seen the heavenly Jerusalem hovering near the towns of Pepuza and Tymion in Phrygia, Asia Minor. The Montanist movement also developed a particular ethic more rigorous than

other Christians, including longer fasts, a prohibition against fleeing in persecution, and the forbidding of second marriages among those widowed. Since the Christian churches had always believed in prophecy, and since, unlike Marcion, the Montanists held orthodox views about the God of the Old Testament, Christians not affiliated with the New Prophecy took varying stances with respect to it. An anonymous writer from the 190s quoted by Eusebius claims that synods of believers in Asia Minor formally excommunicated the Montanists (*H.E.* 5.16.10),<sup>46</sup> and Tertullian reports that a bishop of Rome came close to recognizing the New Prophecy but then changed his mind about it (*Adv. Prax.* 1.5). It is important to note that Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (ca. 180 C.E.), who hailed from Asia Minor, never explicitly names the movement in his extant works and thus never condemns it. Quite the contrary, he praises prophecy in general and condemns those (anti-Montanists?) who wished to reject the Gospel of John because of its emphasis on the Paraclete (*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.9). The New Prophecy's rigorist stance appealed to a Christian like Tertullian, who began to identify with the movement in the early third century and began to call some of the Catholics merely "psychic" Christians since they would not recognize the new work of the Spirit (*De pudicitia* 12.1; *De ieiunio* 1.3, 11.1; and elsewhere).<sup>47</sup> He is the principal witness for the movement's success in North Africa.

Thus, the compiler of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, with his emphasis on new revelations of the spirit, and on new heroes as important as old scriptural ones, may safely be connected with the New Prophecy. This has led to centuries-long speculation that perhaps the compiler was none other than Tertullian himself. I tend to think not, based in large part on René Braun's persuasive linguistic objections to the identification,<sup>48</sup> and in small part on Perpetua's prayer for Dinocrates. Nowhere in his postmortem and eschatological scenarios does Tertullian indicate the possibility of an ease from punishment for one such as Dinocrates. If Tertullian were the compiler of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* one might expect some mention of Perpetua's action in his other writings, or else one might have expected him to edit Perpetua's diary to reflect his own views. Tertullian and the compiler therefore probably represent two different Carthaginian Montanists.

All this raises the obvious question: What about Perpetua, Saturus, Felicitas, and the others? Are they to be associated with the New Prophecy movement as well? Some scholars have posited this, and it has implications for the way in which they interpret the Dinocrates visions. T. D. Barnes gives the following evidence for the Montanism of Perpetua and Saturus: (1) According to Perpetua (*PPF* 4.3), Saturus was a voluntary martyr. (2) Perpetua's death, too, was "close to suicide," as she had to guide the nervous executioner's hand to her throat (*PPF* 21.4). (3) Saturus's dream indicates his and Perpetua's superiority to a presbyter and bishop. (4) Perpetua's visions of Dinocrates "clearly imply that a martyr (but perhaps not anyone else) can effect release

of a soul from hell and secure its admittance to heaven.” According to Barnes, all of this evidence is “hard to interpret in any strict orthodox sense.”<sup>49</sup> Frederick Klawiter and Patricia Cox-Miller follow Barnes on the last point, claiming Perpetua’s use of the “power of the keys” to free Dinocrates may indicate Montanist influence.<sup>50</sup> The problem with Barnes’s list of evidence is that it presupposes that only Montanists would volunteer for martyrdom, that only Montanist confessors would consider themselves superior to clergy, and only a Montanist would think she could rescue the non-Christian dead. But these actions and attitudes are attested across the wide spectrum of early Christianity. Concerning the last point, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is not a Montanist document, yet the confessor there rescues the non-Christian dead. Barnes does allow that the church at Carthage had not yet split into clear Montanist and anti-Montanist factions by 203, and in this he is probably correct.<sup>51</sup> Christine Trevett maintains that there was no clear rupture at Carthage even by the end of Tertullian’s life.<sup>52</sup> It is for this reason that Perpetua was revered as a martyr in both communities, and the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* was read in Catholic circles despite its Montanist flavor.

Perpetua may have been influenced by the New Prophecy—after all, she was already adept at receiving revelations before her imprisonment (*PPF* 4.2). She may have been attracted by the emphasis the New Prophecy placed on women’s prophetic experience. But this has no direct bearing on her rescue of Dinocrates. Nowhere is there evidence that intercession for the dead was specially associated with Montanism. Tertullian believed that the ultimate judgment was made at the death of each individual (*De anima* 55 and 58; *Adv. Marc.* 4.34); if intercession for the non-Christian dead had been a bone of contention between Catholics and Montanists, we might have expected him to mention it. Likewise the sources about Montanism from Eusebius and Epiphanius do not mention intercession for the dead. Perpetua believed she had the power to rescue Dinocrates because she was about to become a Christian martyr, not because of any particular ideology ushered in with the New Prophecy.

## Later Interpretations of the Dinocrates Visions

As stated before, neither recension A nor B of the *Acta Perpetuae* includes the Dinocrates visions. It is possible that they were left out for doctrinal reasons, but no definitive conclusion may be reached. There is no evidence of the Dinocrates visions’ being discussed for over 200 years after Perpetua experienced them. Then, around 419, a North African Christian named Vincentius Victor used them to justify his view that Christian prayer for the unbaptized dead was a good and necessary activity. Augustine responded to Victor’s pro-

nouncements on this and other subjects, resulting in the text *On the Nature of the Soul and its Origin*. This text will be discussed at length in chapter 7. Suffice to say here that Augustine did not accept Victor's interpretation of Perpetua's visions, and he argued for the idea that Dinocrates indeed *had* been baptized during his lifetime, but had committed sins before he died. In Augustine's mind, only this scenario could account for Dinocrates' pitiful condition in the afterlife and the efficacy of his sister's prayer. Augustine's pronouncements determined how Perpetua's visions would be read in the West up until the modern era.

Just a few years before his encounter with Victor, Augustine had also rejected the view, current in his day, that Christ had emptied hell at his descent and that a general offer of repentance and salvation was offered to all the dead on that occasion (*Ep.* 164, to Evodius). Augustine saw such teachings as a threat to the role of the church on earth as the source of salvation, the same threat that he saw in Victor's proposal to pray for unbaptized infants. The next chapter of this book treats the history of this myth of Christ's descent as yet another way in which early Christians envisioned the posthumous salvation of non-Christians.

## 5

### JESUS' DESCENT TO THE UNDERWORLD

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#### Jesus' Descent

As already discussed in chapter 2, the idea that Christ spent some time in the realm of the dead between his death and resurrection is widespread in the New Testament (Matt. 12:40; Rom. 10:7; Acts 2:24–31; perhaps also Eph. 4:8–10 and 1 Pet. 3:19–20 and 4:6). In addition, there are a number of other early Christian texts that posit the presence of Christ and/or the apostles in the underworld, where some type of posthumous rescue for non-Christians takes place, variously conceived by different authors in different contexts. The purpose of this chapter is to categorize more fully these texts and traditions, analyze their purpose and function for Christian communities, and trace their continued development up to Augustine. Augustine's treatment of these traditions in connection with other types of posthumous salvation for non-Christians will be taken up in chapter 7.

The historical fact of Jesus' death, and the very early Christian conviction of his resurrection "on the third day" (1 Cor. 15:4), would inevitably raise the question of his whereabouts in the interim. Luke 23:43 gives one answer to the question, when Jesus says to the repentant thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." But given the standard biblical, Second Temple Jewish, and Greek notions of the dead residing in an underworld of some sort (Sheol, Hades), it is no surprise that other early Christians conceived of Christ's being in the underworld while he was dead. In Second Temple-era Jewish apocalyptic circles, a category that includes the earliest Christians, the dead were usually thought to be in the underworld, sometimes differentiated by virtue, awaiting the final judgment (1 Enoch 22; Pseudo-Philo LAB, 16:3, 23:13, 32:13; 2 Bar. 21:23, 42:7–8). Many Jewish traditions speak of dramatic

events involving the righteous dead at some point in the future, when God acts decisively in history, with or without a messianic figure (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:1–4; 2 Enoch 42:3–5; 2 Bar. 30:1–5).

In addition, some Jewish texts speak of the action of God on the last day: He will “command Sheol to release the souls of the dead” (2 Bar. 42:8) or “abolish death” and “close the mouth of Sheol” (Pseudo-Philo, *LAB* 3:10).<sup>1</sup> For the early Christians, the decisive eschatological action of God had occurred in the career of Jesus, so naturally the dead would be affected. In addition, Hellenistic culture had no shortage of gods and heroes who had descended to the underworld to rescue someone: e.g., Aphrodite’s rescue of Adonis, based on the old Babylonian story of Ishtar and Tammuz; Heracles’ rescue of Alcestis; Orpheus’s near-rescue of Eurydice.<sup>2</sup> While scholars argue over whether these Hellenistic tales constitute the source of the myth of Christ’s descent,<sup>3</sup> at the very least, knowledge of them helps us to understand the mythic world in which the Christ story was told. Others have written extensive and learned speculations about the historical development of the myth of Christ’s descent, most notably J. A. MacCulloch and Jean Daniélou, available in English,<sup>4</sup> as well as Josef Kroll, Heinz-Juergen Vogels, Wilhelm Maas, and Markwart Herzog in German.<sup>5</sup> This chapter will not attempt to reinvent that wheel, but it will attempt a categorization of the various descent traditions to further the aim of understanding when, how, and why various Christians conceived of the posthumous salvation of non-Christians.

Asserting the salvation of some of those who were already dead at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion is a great example of the living co-opting the dead for their cause by means of myth, on a much grander scale than that accomplished by the prayers of Thecla and Perpetua. The dead are rescued en masse and brought into the fold of the new religion, giving it added legitimacy both in the eyes of insiders and (the insiders hope) outsiders. The conviction that the dead, especially the righteous dead, would want to be on one’s own side is a powerful motif for any new controversial movement, and Jesus’ visit to the underworld gives the dead the opportunity to hear the message and respond appropriately. The dead who are “saved” in this manner are not personal acquaintances or relatives of the living, but rather are culture heroes from the distant past and/or a mass of unnamed and unknown dead.

## Posthumous Rescue for Ancient Righteous Ones

Many of the earliest descent traditions indicate clearly that only the righteous of the Old Testament were rescued by Christ, and thus, these traditions do not truly represent the posthumous *salvation* of non-Christians. In Christian ideology these ancient worthies pointed forward to Christ and anticipated him, so there was no need for them to “convert” or change their fundamental stance

toward God after death. Their faith when they were alive was essentially the same as the faith of Christians living in the present (Heb. 11:39–40). Matt. 27:52 says that many bodies of the “saints” (ἀγίων) were raised upon Jesus’ death (cf. Isa. 26:19 and Ezek. 37:12); the designation “saints” means that in some way they had proved themselves worthy during their lifetimes before the advent of Christ. After Jesus’ resurrection they leave the tombs and are seen by many (Matt. 27:53). Similarly, Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110 C.E.), *Mag.* 9:2, states, “How shall we be able to live apart from [Christ], seeing that even the prophets, being his disciples, were expecting him as their teacher through the Spirit? And for this cause he whom they rightly awaited, when he came, raised them from the dead.” We may categorize this experience of the prophets in Ignatius and the “saints” in Matthew as a posthumous rescue, but not posthumous salvation. In both cases the rescue from death takes the form of bodily resurrection. Neither text goes on to address whether these raised-up righteous ones died again, ascended into heaven, or were still living on earth as the author wrote. Answering such questions was obviously not their concern, though these questions are addressed in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, discussed later in this chapter.

The *Shep. Herm. Sim.* 9.16, examined in chapter 2, is another text that makes clear that only the worthy of the Old Testament were rescued from (and baptized in) the underworld, in this case by forty Christian apostles and teachers after their own deaths. It also points out metaphorically that those righteous stones brought up from the sea had no need to be hewn, meaning that all they needed was the seal of baptism, not repentance and forgiveness of sins (see chapter 2, “Shepherd of Hermas”).

The importance of Christ’s descent to rescue the Old Testament heroes may be seen in its reversal in the second century by Marcion. Because of his belief that the god of the Old Testament was an inferior creator god, Marcion interpreted the heroes of the Old Testament as villains and the villains as heroes. According to Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.27.3, the Marcionites asserted that Cain, the Sodomites, the Egyptians, and others who had disobeyed Yahweh in the Hebrew Scriptures instantly ran toward Christ when he descended to the dead. They recognized that he was sent from the true High God. By contrast, Abel, Enoch, Noah, the patriarchs, the prophets, and all who did Yahweh’s will in the Old Testament did not accept Christ in the underworld: “because they knew their god was always tempting them, they suspected him of tempting them, and accordingly did not hasten to Jesus, nor believe his preaching, and accordingly their souls remained in Hades.”<sup>6</sup> If we can believe Irenaeus’s report, the realm of the dead in Marcionite imagination was much like the realm of the living, with people responding or not responding correctly to the savior in inverse relation to their faith in the creator. Just like the scenarios of Ignatius and the Shepherd of Hermas discussed earlier, there was no question for Marcion of conversion in the underworld; rather, the attitudes and

behaviors of each person in life determined his or her response to the savior in the realm of the dead. These Marcionites are the same Christians who practiced a vicarious baptism on behalf of dead catechumens who happened to die before baptism (John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Epist. ad I Cor.* 40.1; see chapter 2, “Paul”). In this practice, too, a person could be rescued after death, i.e., brought fully into the fold after death, but only based on correct attitudes and behaviors in life. These two pieces of evidence for Marcionite belief and practice demonstrate consistency on this point.

Two other texts in this category merit attention because they assert that while Jesus’ descent to the dead was only for the benefit of the righteous of the Old Testament, those righteous ones were not perfect. In the *Epist. Apost.* 27 (second century C.E.), Jesus indicates that in addition to baptism they also needed forgiveness: “And on that account I have descended and have spoken with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob,<sup>7</sup> to your fathers the prophets, and have brought them news that they may come from the rest which is below into heaven, and have given them the right hand of the baptism of life and forgiveness and pardon for all wickedness<sup>8</sup> as to you, so from now on also to those who believe in me.”

Similarly, Irenaeus’s view, expressed in *Adv. Haer.* 4.27, focuses much attention on the salvation of the righteous of the Old Testament, in the context of proving, against Marcion, that the same God is responsible for both the old and new covenants. Irenaeus reminds his readers that David and Solomon had both been punished by God for their sins on earth (2 Sam. 12:1 ff.; 1 Kings 11:1); all persons come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Thus, in his view of the descent, Christ had to declare the remission of sins:

And this is why the Lord went down under the earth, to proclaim to them his coming, the remission of sins for those who believe in him. They all believed in him, those who set their hope in him, that is, proclaimed his coming in advance and served his “economies,” the just and the prophets and the patriarchs. And he remitted their sins like ours, so that we can no longer blame them for them without despising the grace of God. (*Adv. Haer.* 4.27.2)<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Irenaeus makes it clear that only certain of the dead were eligible to receive the gospel, but they still needed remission of sins just like the Christian recruits among the living. In his view there was a posthumous rescue and salvation, but only for persons from the past deemed most worthy.

Around the turn of the third century, Hippolytus, *De Antichristo* 26, and Tertullian, *De anima* 55.2, manifest the same idea: The purpose of Christ’s descent was to “preach to the souls of the saints” (ἀγίων, Hippolytus) or “for the purpose of informing the patriarchs and prophets that he had appeared” (Tertullian).<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the clearly Christian *Sib. Or.* 8.310 has Christ at his

descent “announce hope for all the holy ones” (cf. *Test. Dan* 5.11).<sup>11</sup> Another scenario is found in the late first- or early second-century *Ascension of Isaiah*, a Christian work based on an earlier Jewish story.<sup>12</sup> In that text, Isaiah is given a vision of the seventh heaven, where he sees Abel, Enoch, and all the righteous who had lived since the beginning of creation. They are wearing robes, but are not yet seated on their thrones wearing their crowns. For that they must wait until the career of Christ. After Christ descends to earth, is put to death, and “plunders the angel of death,” more righteous persons will “ascend with him,” and all the righteous, both new and old, will receive their robes, thrones, and crowns (9:6–18). In all these cases the authors appear to limit the dead recipients of Christ’s preaching to those who had lived correctly in this life.

Early on, as seen in the “plundering” language of the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the motif of Jesus’ sojourn in the underworld began to be expressed in combat language. Harold Attridge thinks that a myth of combat at Christ’s descent already underlies Heb. 2:14–15: “[Jesus] himself likewise shared [flesh and blood], so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.”<sup>13</sup> Richard Bauckham has collected passages from early Christian literature in which Jesus breaks down the gates of the underworld (*Odes Sol.* 17:9–11; *Teachings of Silvanus*, NHC VII.110.19–34; Tertullian, *De Res. Carn.* 44), releases the captive dead (*Odes Sol.* 17:12, 22:4; *Acts Thom.* 10), or destroys death or Hades (Melito, *Peri Pascha* 102).<sup>14</sup> These themes are expounded fully in the late but highly influential *Gospel of Nicodemus*, discussed later in this chapter. The key point for this study is that the combat motif could and sometimes did lend itself to an interpretation wherein many or even all of the dead were rescued, not just the holy ones of the Old Testament. In addition, a general offer of salvation was sometimes envisioned in the absence of a combat motif.

## An Offer of Salvation for All the Dead

We move now from texts with a rescue for the righteous dead, to texts which imply or make explicit that Jesus’ descent entails a broader offer of salvation for all the dead, both righteous and wicked. Discussing the texts in this order implies no particular theory of development, though in at least one case, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, it may be that a tradition of general offer of salvation was reinterpreted in the direction of a more narrow posthumous rescue for saints only. There would seem to be a logical inconsistency in early traditions of the “general offer” sort, since the status of those who have died since the crucifixion, but by accident of location never heard of Jesus, is not addressed until later systematians take up the question. The function of these tradi-

tions was not, however, to provide a scenario that would satisfy all possible questions concerning salvation, but rather their aim was to demonstrate the dramatic novelty and power of Jesus, both among the living and the dead.

1 Pet. 4:6, discussed extensively in chapter 2, may fall into the “general offer” category, since the text reads “for this reason the gospel was preached also to the dead”; there is no differentiation of the dead and no mention of saints, prophets, or patriarchs. If combined with the “disobedient spirits” of 3:19–20 (a move which I think erroneous but nonetheless is followed by many interpreters, ancient and modern), then 1 Peter can be read to indicate a broad offer of salvation even to egregious sinners among the dead in connection with Jesus’ descent. The language of 1 Pet. 4:6 is sufficiently sparse to admit various interpretations on this score.

The same is true of the *Gospel of Peter* 39–42. This Greek text, discovered in an eighth- to ninth-century Egyptian tomb in 1887, was in existence at least by the end of the second century c.e.<sup>15</sup> It provides a passion narrative that some have seen as a pastiche of elements from the canonical gospels, and others have seen as an early independent witness to the passion narrative tradition.<sup>16</sup> The relevant portion reads as follows:

And while [the soldiers] were relating what they had seen [i.e., the empty tomb], they saw again three men come out from the sepulcher, two of them supporting the other, and a cross following them. And the heads of two of them reached to the heavens, and that of him who was led by their hands reached beyond the heavens. And they heard a voice out of the heavens saying, “Have you preached to those who have fallen asleep?” And an answer was heard from the cross, “Yes.”<sup>17</sup>

There are a number of fascinating features to this text, including the giant heads or bodies (cf. *Shep. Herm. Sim.* 9.6.1; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 9.13.3; *Acts John* 90; MacCulloch, *Harrowing*, pp. 337–38) and the talking cross.<sup>18</sup> Of interest to this study is the notion that some kind of preaching has been accomplished among those “who have fallen asleep” (cf. Matt. 27:52). The nature and results of the preaching are not specified, nor are the recipients identified as “saints” or “prophets.” Did the author of this text have in view a general preaching to all the dead with an offer of salvation attached? This is a possible interpretation, but as with 1 Peter, the wording is too sparse to know for certain.

Another witness to this theme from the early second century is the so-called Jeremiah apocryphon, quoted by Justin, *Dial.* 72.4 and by Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.20.4 and 4.22.1 (cf. 4.33.1, 12; 5.31.1). Justin claims that the Jews have removed this passage from their text of Jeremiah because it is a clear prophecy of the career of Christ. In fact, the text is almost certainly a Christian invention, reflecting an already-formed belief in Christ’s descent to rescue ancient Israelites. Justin quotes the apocryphon as follows: “The Lord God

remembered his dead from Israel (ἀπὸ Ἰσραήλ τῶν νεκρῶν αὐτοῦ) who had fallen asleep in an earthly tomb, and he went down to them, to proclaim to them the good news (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) of his salvation (σωτήριον αὐτοῦ).<sup>19</sup> When the same passage is quoted twice by Irenaeus, the surviving Latin translation is slightly different in each case but carries the same general thought. In all three citations the dead who will receive the preaching are referred to as “God’s dead” even before Jesus’ arrival, perhaps because, as is stressed in Justin, they are “his dead from Israel.” Danièlou interprets this to mean that the original apocryphon was concerned with “the fate of the saints of Israel, the patriarchs and prophets.”<sup>20</sup> These specific terms, however, are found in neither Justin’s nor Irenaeus’s quotations, so it could also be the case that the Christian author of the apocryphon envisioned a general preaching by Jesus to *all* the Israelite dead. Notice that the apocryphon uses the terms “evangelize” and “salvation”; the recipients are drawn from ancient Israel, and they are in some sense “God’s dead,” but there is no explicit mention of their special status as saints or prophets or heroes while they were living.

Justin is well known for his concept, expressed elsewhere, that righteous persons among the ancients, Socrates, Heraclitus, and Abraham among them, had a share of the “spermatikos logos,” making them partial witnesses to the truth fully embodied only in Christ (1 *Apol.* 46). This is found in Justin in an apologetic context, as he attempts to secure an ancient foundation for Christianity that can be persuasive to both Jews and pagans alike.<sup>21</sup> Justin also affirms, in *Dial.* 45, that those ancient Jews who were pious and followed the law will indeed be saved by Christ at the final judgment along with those Jews and Gentiles who have known Christ now. The Jeremiah apocryphon serves a similar purpose for Justin in that it not only “proves” that the Jews have tampered with the scriptures, but it also indicates that the salvific activity of Christ is not limited to his relatively recent appearance in an obscure corner of the world. Justin himself limits salvation of the dead to ancient worthies; it is not clear that the apocryphon originally did so. Irenaeus reinterprets the apocryphon in the direction championed by Danièlou; for both of them only the saints and prophets of the Old Testament were offered salvation at Christ’s descent. As Irenaeus puts it, Christ preached to “those who set their hope in him, that is, proclaimed his coming in advance and served his ‘economies,’ the just and the prophets and the patriarchs,” *Adv. Haer.* 4.27.2.<sup>22</sup>

The *Odes of Solomon* is another key text for understanding early second-century conceptions of the beneficiaries of Christ’s descent. This beautiful collection of Christian hymns, preserved in Syriac (probably their original language), manifests a realized eschatology similar to that usually associated with the Gospel of John (*Odes Sol.* 10:2; 15:10; cf. John 3:18–21, 11:25, 12:31).<sup>23</sup> Already the Odist is experiencing the bliss and joy traditionally associated with God’s rewards at the end of time; descriptions of the future eschaton are not found in these hymns.<sup>24</sup> In one place the Odist’s language faintly echoes 1 Cor.

15:28 when he proclaims, “For he destroys whatever is foreign, and everything is of the Lord. For thus it has been from the beginning, and (will be) until the end. So that nothing will be contrary, and nothing will rise up against him” (6:3–5, trans. Charlesworth). In spite of this confidence, however, the Odist speaks of outsiders, enemies who have not believed in Christ (5:4), but as far as the Odist is concerned they have lost their power and in some sense have already been destroyed (23:30). These themes all play out in *Odes Sol.* 42:10–20, the final hymn, which describes Christ’s descent to the underworld in the first person:

I was not rejected although I was considered to be so, and I did not perish although they thought it of me. Sheol saw me and was shattered, and Death ejected me and many with me.

I have been vinegar and bitterness to it, and I went down as far as its depth.

Then the feet and the head it released, because it was not able to endure my face.

And I made a congregation of the living among his dead; and I spoke with them by living lips; in order that my word may not fail.

And those who had died ran toward me; and they cried out and said, “Son of God, have pity on us.

And deal with us according to your kindness, and bring us out from the chains of darkness.

And open for us the door by which we may go forth to you, for we perceive that our death does not approach you.

May we also be saved with you, because you are our Savior.”

Then I heard their voice, and placed their faith in my heart.

And I placed my name upon their head, because they are free and they are mine.

Hallelujah.<sup>25</sup>

The context is clearly the descent to Sheol after Jesus’ death on the cross (42:10), and there is a hint of struggle between Jesus on one side and Sheol and Death personified on the other. Verse 42:13 implies that Jesus was held by Death momentarily but was then released because “it could not endure my face” (cf. Acts 2:24).<sup>26</sup> With respect to this study, the first thing to be noticed is that there is no explicit limitation of Christ’s benefits to the patriarchs, prophets, and other worthies of the Old Testament. It is possible that they are intended as the ones who respond properly, but that is not spelled out. Not all the dead were rescued by Christ in the *Odes of Solomon*, as the text says, “Death ejected me and many with me” (42:11), as well as “I made a congregation of living among his dead.” Both lines imply that some of the dead were left behind. But the response of these dead sounds very much like the response of the living toward Christ; there is no hint here that they had lived a certain virtuous kind of life or had anticipated Christ in any way. One could read

the text to indicate that their “conversion” is effected after their deaths. Later figures from the Syriac tradition, notably Aphrahat and Ephrem (fourth century C.E.), took pains to clarify that only the righteous among the dead benefited from Christ’s descent (Aphrahat, *Homily 22*; Ephrem, *Carmina Nisibena* 36.208–09).<sup>27</sup> This places them with two other fourth-century figures, Philaster of Brescia and John Chrysostom, discussed later.

Another text from the Syriac tradition, the early third-century *Acts of Thomas*, has an account of the descent very similar to that of the *Odes of Solomon*. In *Acts Thom.* 156, the apostle delivers a prayer in which he recounts Jesus’ activities in Hades: “who didst descend into Hades with great power, the sight of whom the princes of death did not endure, and thou didst ascend with great glory, and gathering all those who took refuge in thee thou didst prepare a way, and in thy footsteps they all journeyed whom thou didst redeem, and thou didst bring them to thine own flock and unite them with thy sheep.”<sup>28</sup> Again, “all those who took refuge in thee” is rather open-ended, not explicitly limited to the patriarchs and prophets.<sup>29</sup>

Clement of Alexandria (late second century) is another Christian who envisioned the salvation of various types of dead at Christ’s descent, expressing himself in theological and exegetical treatises rather than in poetry or prayer. Clement discusses Christ’s descent in connection with the *Shep. Herm. Sim.* 9.16, once by itself (*Strom.* 2.9.43.5–44.4), and once in combination with 1 Pet. 3:19–20 (*Strom.* 6.6.38–53). Clement ingeniously combines the *Shepherd* and 1 Peter by positing that Christ descended first to Hades, preached perhaps only to dead Jews or perhaps Gentiles as well, transferred some of the dead to a better place (Matt. 27:52), and then later the best among the apostles and teachers descended to convert and baptize dead Gentiles.<sup>30</sup> In an extraordinary statement, Clement even indicates that the dead were able to be more receptive to the Gospel than the living:

If [the Lord descended to Hades to preach to all], then all who believe shall be saved making their confession there, even though they may be Gentiles. The reason for this is that God’s punishments are saving and educative (σωτήριοι καὶ παιδευτικοί), leading to conversion (ἐπιστροφὴν), and preferring the repentance of, rather than the death of the sinner, especially since souls, although darkened by passions, when released from their bodies are able to perceive more clearly, no longer burdened by the flesh. (*Strom.* 6.6.46; trans. mine)

Clement does not speak of an inevitable universal salvation here; his language clearly presupposes that some might reject the offer. There is an important unresolved question, however: Does Clement presuppose at least a universal *offer* of salvation to all the dead when Christ and the apostles descended? On this issue he equivocates. At one point he appears to strike a compromise between 1 Peter and the *Shepherd*, for the *Shepherd* had emphasized that only

those who were pure and righteous in life could receive the posthumous rescue, while in 1 Pet. 3:19–20 the recipients of the preaching were termed “disobedient spirits.” Clement states that the dead recipients of the preaching were those “who had lived in righteousness according to the Law and Philosophy [i.e., both righteous Jews and Gentiles], but not perfectly, but they passed from this life sinfully” (*Strom.* 6.6.45). This sounds like the offer of salvation in Hades was limited, but at least expanded to include righteous Gentiles. In the very next sentence, however, Clement states that it is indeed the savior’s work to save, and perhaps he preached to “all” (πάντας) in Hades (the long passage quoted earlier). But, then again, in the next section, perhaps Christ preached only to dead Jews and sent the apostles to preach “to those Gentiles fit for conversion” (ἐπιτηδείους εἰς επιστροφήν, *Strom.* 6.46). Clement does not provide a clear answer to our question, but his very equivocation indicates that the issue was a live one for him: Just who was eligible for salvation at Christ’s descent? He does envision some persons having a change of heart toward God in the realm of the dead, and thus he does believe to some extent in posthumous salvation as defined in this study. This type of thinking will become characteristic of Alexandrian Christianity for some time to come, open to speculation about the conversion and salvation of the soul after death. It is well known that Christianity in Alexandria was not isolated, but experienced a great deal of mixing and interchange among “orthodox” Christians, gnostic schools, and pagan philosophers.<sup>31</sup> The permeability of boundaries among the living also appears to have manifested itself in Alexandrian speculation about the realm of the dead. Clement does not specifically address the issue of those non-Christians who have died since the activity of Christ and the apostles in Hades, and this may make sense in the context of his discussion of Greek philosophy as preparatory for the Gospel. His main concern is to include a rescue for the ancient Gentile dead as well as Jewish, but an inference from his logic could be that God needs to offer salvation to everyone, especially everyone who is righteous, whether they hear the gospel on earth or have to hear it in Hades.

Clement’s successor Origen of Alexandria added a number of speculations concerning Christ’s descent, including the claim that John the Baptist preceded Christ into the underworld to make a preparatory announcement, just as he had done on earth.<sup>32</sup> Origen had to defend the Christian doctrine of the descent against a pagan attack, since Celsus had written ca. 180 c.e., “You will not say of [Christ], I presume, that having failed to convince men on earth he traveled to Hades to convince them there” (*Contra Celsum* 2.43).<sup>33</sup> This shows that at the end of the second century the descent motif was well known even among pagans, and Celsus appears to have known the expansive version of it—that Jesus provided a true offer of salvation to the dead just as he had done among the living. After asserting that indeed Christ did convince many during his lifetime, Origen goes on to give his own understanding of the de-

scent: “when [Christ] became a soul unclothed by a body he conversed with souls unclothed by bodies, converting (ἐπιστρέφων) also those of them who were willing to accept him, or those who, for reasons which he himself knew, he saw to be ready to do so” (*C. Cels.* 2.43). Like Clement, Origen imagines Christ’s sojourn in Hades to be quite similar to his sojourn on earth. Sinners are able to repent even after they are dead. Also like Clement, Origen makes use of 1 Pet. 3:18–21 to indicate that God gave sinners (the wicked of Noah’s day) a chance to repent when Christ descended (*De Prin.* 2.5.3). We should be careful to note that there is no hint in these Origen passages of any universal salvation or emptying of Hades at Christ’s descent.<sup>34</sup> Rather, some of the dead, using their free will, chose to accept Christ on that occasion, and some did not.

With this in mind it is important for our purposes to maintain the distinction Origen drew between “Hades” (=“Sheol”; found in the Old and New testaments) and “Gehenna” (found only in the New Testament). Hades, according to Origen, was the place where all the dead went before Christ’s descent, including Abraham, Samuel, and John the Baptist.<sup>35</sup> Until Christ’s descent, these just ones could not leave Hades due to the sin of Adam and Eve.<sup>36</sup> Christ’s activity in Hades allows some of the dead to be transferred to Paradise, just as acceptance of Christ by the living allows them to enter Paradise upon their deaths. At times Origen can use the concept of Hades in a symbolic way as a metaphor for death (*Hom. Exod.* 6.6), but usually he understands Christ’s descent to Hades quite literally (*C. Cels.* 2.43; *Commentary on John* 32.32.394–400).<sup>37</sup> Gehenna, distinct from Hades, is a place of fiery torment for the wicked; Christ did not travel there at his descent. One should not confuse the fires of Gehenna with the purifying fire of God himself in Origen’s thought.<sup>38</sup> Origen often describes the fires of Gehenna as “eternal” and “inextinguishable” (*Hom. Jer.* 12.5; *Hom. Josh.* 9.7).<sup>39</sup> Some texts of Origen indicate, however, that the pains of Gehenna might come to an end, at least for human beings (*Comm. Matt.* 17.24), and Origen is well known for sometimes defining αἰώνιος (“eternal”) as “a very long time” (*Comm. Rom.* 6.5).<sup>40</sup> The key point here is that Origen speculates on hope for the ongoing conversion, salvation, and perfection of the dead in many ways, some related to the descensus motif and others not.

Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–394), strongly influenced by Origen’s writings, tends to spiritualize Christ’s descent more than Origen did. As Gregory reports learning from his sister Macrina, “Hades” was not so much a place as a condition of the soul after death (*On the Soul and Resurrection*, PGM 46.68, 83–84).<sup>41</sup> Gregory also wrote a treatise on Christ’s three days in Hades, but the focus there is on the whereabouts of Christ, not on who was saved.<sup>42</sup> Death, for both Origen and Gregory, was not a boundary beyond which all hope of salvation was lost; the many ways in which these two theologians allowed for posthumous salvation will be taken up in the next chapter.

## Varying Opinions in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Some later Greek theologians expanded on Clement's and Origen's speculations about Christ's descent to the underworld, affirming that indeed the realm of the dead had been emptied on this occasion. Gregory of Nazianzus (330–389) entertains this possibility (Oratio 45.24),<sup>43</sup> and Cyril of Alexandria (375–444) favors it as a solution (*Hom. Pasch.* 7.2.185–89).<sup>44</sup> Conversely, John Chrysostom of Antioch, bishop of Constantinople from 397 to 404, stands firmly against such an interpretation. In his exhortatory sermons, he wants nothing that could lead his congregation to think that a person might set things right after death. A key text in this regard is Chrysostom's *Homily 36 on Matthew*, delivered at Antioch probably in the year 390.<sup>45</sup> It is worth quoting him at length from chapter 3 of this text:

For the present life indeed is the season for right conversation, but after death is judgment and punishment. "For in hell," it is said, "who will confess unto thee?" (Ps. 6:6). How then were "the gates of brass burst, and the bars of iron broken in sunder?" (Ps. 107:16). By his body, for then first was a body shown, immortal, and destroying the tyranny of death. And besides, this indicates the destruction of the might of death, not the loosing of the sins of those who had died before his coming. And if this were not so, but if he had delivered all who were before him from hell, how saith he, "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah?" (Matt. 10:15). For this saying supposes they are to be punished; more mildly indeed, yet still that they are to be punished. . . . "What then," one may say, "were they wronged, who lived before his coming?" By no means, for back then people might be saved, even though they had not confessed Christ. For this was not required of them, but not to worship idols, and to know the true God."<sup>46</sup>

Chrysostom presses into service here two Psalm passages to depict Christ's descent, and he stresses that in God's eyes, one's actions in this life only determine one's ultimate fate. Sinners in the underworld had no chance to repent when Christ descended, but even ancient Gentiles may have been eligible for Christ's benefits so long as they had overcome their cultural predisposition toward polytheism while they were still alive. Paul shows that this was possible even before Christ's advent, as seen in Rom. 2:10, "But glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek," quoted by Chrysostom in defense of his argument.

In this same sermon, Chrysostom clearly sees that there is a danger in the belief that Christ gave the dead a true offer of repentance at his descent:

And besides, if unbelievers are after death to be saved on their believing, no one shall ever perish. For all will then repent and adore. And in proof

that this is true, hear Paul saying, “Every tongue shall confess, and every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things on earth, and things under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). And, “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26). But there is no advantage in that submission, for it comes not of a rightly disposed choice, but of the necessity of things, as one may say, thenceforth taking place.

In a fascinating twist, here Chrysostom uses one of Paul’s most universalistic passages, Phil. 2:10, to argue *against* repentance in the afterlife. The sermon ends with a stress on the importance of the threat of hell; Chrysostom and his audience must strive to live an upright life now, and must not place any hope in a second chance after death.

Just as in the East there were varying opinions about Christ’s descent, so also in the West in the fourth and early fifth centuries. Hilary of Poitiers was exiled to Phrygia during the years 356–361 C.E. for his anti-Arian viewpoints; there he came into contact with Origen’s thought and methods of scriptural exegesis.<sup>47</sup> When commenting upon Psalm 118, Hilary posits that, based on 1 Pet. 3:18, the wicked received a preaching in hell (*Comm. Ps. 118, 11.3; PL 9. 572–73*).<sup>48</sup> While Hilary clearly believes that each person is judged at death, consigned either to Abraham’s bosom or to punishment (*Comm. Ps. 2, 49*), he also holds out hope for the possibility of mercy from God after death, even though confession and repentance are impossible: “There is hope of mercy in time and eternity; but there is confession in time only, and not in eternity” (*Comm. Ps. 51, 23*).

Similarly, Ambrosiaster, the name given to an anonymous fourth-century Latin author whose works were later attributed to Ambrose, believes that Jesus had simply appeared in Hades after his death, and by his mere presence some of the dead felt themselves drawn to him (*In Eph. 4.8–9, PL 17.408–409*).<sup>49</sup> 1 Peter 4:6 clearly comes into play in Ambrosiaster’s interpretation: “Having spoiled Hades by the power of the Father, and rising after having conquered Death, he ascended to Heaven with the souls snatched away. For every one whosoever, having seen the Savior in Hades, hoped for salvation from Him, was set free, Peter testifying to this” (*In Epist. ad Rom. 10, PL 17.150*).<sup>50</sup> Neither Hilary nor Ambrosiaster sees any problem with a general offer of mercy to the dead in Hades at Christ’s descent.

Ambrose, bishop of Milan from 374–397, Augustine’s mentor, and towering figure of late fourth-century Latin Christianity, was also open to an expansive interpretation of who was saved at Christ’s descent. In his treatise *De Fide*, where he exalts Christ’s divine power in order to combat Arian theology, Ambrose indicates that Christ remitted sins in the underworld: “The substance of Christ was present in the underworld—for truly he did exert his power in the lower world to set free, in the soul which animated his own body, the souls of the dead, to loose the bands of death, to remit sins” (*De Fide 3.14.111; cf. 3.4.27–28*).

Ambrose does not spell out precisely whose sins were remitted, and as time goes forward this unresolved issue will trouble Augustine and Bishop Evodius of Uzalis, two inheritors of Ambrose's legacy (Augustine, *Ep.* 164; see chapter 7, "Jesus' Descent to Hell").

Related, but ultimately a different issue, is Ambrose's positing a "baptism of desire" for the deceased emperor Valentinian II at his funeral oration in 392. The twenty-year-old emperor had been assassinated (or committed suicide) while still a catechumen, and rather than consign him to the flames of hell, Ambrose compassionately assures his audience that the mere intention to be baptized will be sufficient for Valentinian's salvation (Ambrose, *On Valentinian*, 51). Ambrose's "baptism of desire" fulfills the same function as the Marcionites' vicarious baptism for the dead based on 1 Cor. 15:29; both are attempts to reconcile a loving, merciful God with the unexpected sudden death of one of that God's devotees. Neither is truly posthumous salvation, since the person in question is thought to have had the correct orientation toward God already in this life, a point emphasized throughout Ambrose's funeral oration for Valentinian.

The Western context of Hilary, Ambrosiaster, and Ambrose throws into high relief the comments of Philaster of Brescia, the earliest Western figure to argue in an extended fashion that there was no posthumous conversion and salvation at Christ's descent. He also explicitly connects his doctrine on the descent with the larger issue concerning posthumous salvation for those who die now. Philaster catalogs and fiercely opposes what he considers to be heresies, similar to the roughly contemporary project of Epiphanius of Salamis in the East. Philaster composed his work in the 380s C.E., and he counted 128 heresies that had arisen since the dawn of the Christian era. Like John Chrysostom in Antioch just a few years later, Philaster uses Ps. 6:6, Rom. 2:12, and Matt. 10:15 to insist that there was no true repentance or conversion among the dead when Christ descended. Immediately upon death there is a judgment for each individual, and anyone who thinks that an opportunity for repentance is now or has ever been given after death is a heretic:

There are other heretics who say that the Lord descended into hell (infernus), and even there announced to all that they could be saved after death, confessing there. But this is contrary to what the prophet David said, "In hell who will confess you?" [Ps. 6:6]. And also the apostle: "Whoever sinned without the law will perish without the law" [Rom. 2:12]. But when the Lord says, "Surely it will be easier for those people [of Sodom and Gomorrah] than for that city which did not believe in the doctrines of the apostles and the gospel" [cf. Matt. 10:11-15; 11:20-24; Luke 10:10-16], he says they will sustain lesser torments in comparison with the multitude of punishments, but he does not affirm that they are thereby saved. Whoever thinks that the false poets and vain philosophers, rebels against God, can be saved, errs even worse than they, and he dissents from the truth,

because it was none other than those vain poets and philosophers who sowed the seeds of pagan impiety, the names of the gods and goddesses. . . . If therefore the just sinners who are still in this life accept the penitential grace only with great difficulty, as Solomon says [cf. 1 Kings 8:46–53], and if the just person is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinners appear? Now, if they had believed in God, and if they had not promulgated the ugly names of the gods and goddesses, then in Christ's descent to hell they could have obtained pardon. Therefore, since the impious and enemies of God are everywhere, how can they be saved after death, confessing there? The apostle teaches that it is necessary for all people to die, as it is written, and after this to be judged before the throne of Christ, and to receive in accord with what was done in this world [2 Cor. 5:10]. The savior therefore confirms this, speaking of those who did not believe in the Father, when he declares that even they are judged [John 3:18]. He who, however, believed in the Father before Christ came in the flesh is transferred from the judgment of the impious. In comparing, however, the sinners and the impious, there is a diversity of penalties and punishments, not a full absolution for both, but just distinctions, and a proper recompense for the sins committed, even for those who drowned in the time of Noah [cf. 1 Pet. 3:18], as the scripture teaches. (*Div. haer. lib. 125; PL 12.1250–52*)<sup>51</sup>

There are a number of important features in Philaster's argument. The final sentences make clear that posthumous salvation at Christ's descent cannot be allowed because that would open the door to posthumous salvation now. Philaster also has an ingenious way of dealing with 1 Pet. 3:18. He admits that some of the people of Noah's day were saved, but only based on their actions in life, a distinction not at all present in the scripture itself. The combination of Ps. 6:6, Rom. 2:12, and Matt. 10:15 as a refutation of posthumous salvation at Christ's descent, along with the argument that pagans who overcame paganism could have been saved, is strikingly similar to John Chrysostom's *Homily 36 on Matthew*, discussed earlier. Philaster wrote in Latin and Chrysostom in Greek, and it is not known if the two ever encountered one another, since very little is known of Philaster's biography. This similarity points to the possibility that both were drawing upon some type of handbook or common tradition that stated the case for rejecting posthumous salvation at Christ's descent. Augustine did not consider Philaster to be the most learned of the church's theologians (*Ep. 222*, to Quodvultdeus, written ca. 427), but on this issue he eventually sided with the Bishop of Brescia against other figures of the Western tradition. The reasons for this will be discussed in chapter 7.

### The *Gospel of Nicodemus*

This chapter comes to a close with a discussion of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, one of the most influential texts in the medieval world depicting the descent

of Christ.<sup>52</sup> The *Gospel of Nicodemus* is a composite document, consisting of the *Acts of Pilate* (a passion narrative focusing on Pontius Pilate), and then an account of Christ's descent to hell. The two parts of the text are of uncertain date, with estimates ranging from 200 C.E. for the earliest version of the descensus narrative<sup>53</sup> to late sixth century C.E. for the text as it has been preserved.<sup>54</sup> The text survives in Greek and in Latin (two recensions) and was translated into Syriac, Coptic, and most of the European languages.<sup>55</sup> The section that relates Christ's descent is supposed to be the testimony of Simeon (the old man who had held the infant Jesus in his arms in Luke 2:25–35) and his two sons, who, according to this text, were three of the "saints" raised from the dead in Matt. 27:52–53. The text resolves the problem of what happened to them after their resurrection: They and the others who were raised went to the Jordan river to be baptized; they went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and the Resurrection; and after giving their written testimony to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, they vanished (*Gosp. Nicod.* 27). With respect to the topic of this study, the Greek text and the Latin translations diverge significantly over precisely who was saved at Christ's descent.

According to the Greek text, the three men were present in Hades with "all who have died since the beginning of the world" (*Gosp. Nicod.* 18). Suddenly a light shone in the darkness, and Abraham, the patriarchs, and the prophets recognized it as a significant salvific moment. Then John the Baptist appeared, in his role as forerunner, and he preached to the dead at the instigation of the patriarchs:

For this reason he sent me to you, to preach that the only begotten son of God comes here, in order that whoever believes in him should be saved, and whoever does not believe in him should be condemned. Therefore I say to you all: When you see him, all of you worship him. For now only have you opportunity for repentance because you worshipped idols in the vain world above and sinned. At another time it is impossible. (*Gosp. Nicod.* 18)<sup>56</sup>

It is clear from the reference to idol worship that the recipients of this preaching in the Greek text are the dead generally, not just the patriarchs and prophets.

When Jesus actually arrives, Hades personified complains to Satan that *all* the dead have left him and the implication seems to be that Hades has been emptied: "Turn and see that not one dead man is left in me, but that all which you gained through the tree of knowledge you have lost through the tree of the cross. . . . How were you bent on bringing down such a man (Jesus) into this darkness, through whom you have been deprived of all who have died since the beginning?" (*Gosp. Nicod.* 23). After he rescues Adam, Jesus says to the multitude of the dead, "Come with me, all you who have suffered death through the tree which this man touched. For behold, I raise

you all up again through the tree of the cross.' With that he put them all out" (24).

After this scene, however, the text only refers to Adam, the patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, and the righteous. These people receive the sign of the cross on their foreheads, and then they are handed over to Michael the Archangel in Paradise. There they see Enoch and Elijah (the two figures from the Hebrew Bible who had never died), along with the repentant thief of Luke 23:43. The thief reports that Michael had said to him, "Wait a short while. For Adam also, the forefather of the race of men, comes with the righteous, that they may also enter in" (*Gosp. Nicod.* 26). Taken by themselves, without all the earlier universalistic language, these final scenes might lead to an interpretation that only the righteous were rescued. Indeed, this is the interpretation of Josef Kroll, who posits that the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, much like Origen, presupposes a "Straforte" (place of punishment) to which Jesus did not travel and from which no one was rescued. He adduces 4 Ezra 7:80 and 93 as a parallel: the righteous dead go to storehouses while the wicked dead must wander and contemplate their coming judgment with no hope of repentance.<sup>57</sup> One problem with Kroll's interpretation is that the Greek *Gospel of Nicodemus* does not mention such a differentiation of the underworld. That, combined with the fact that those who received John the Baptist's preaching were termed "idol worshippers" and "sinners," leads me to believe that the author of this story envisioned a general offer of salvation and an emptying of hell, but he only saw fit to mention explicitly the entrance of the righteous ones, along with Adam, into Paradise. Perhaps a later judgment is presupposed, but none is explicitly mentioned. The ambiguity does not admit of systematic categorization in the Greek.

The Latin recensions are a different story, however. Both Latin A and B omit John the Baptist's call to repentance, thereby limiting the recipients of his preaching to the holy ones among the dead, along with Adam.<sup>58</sup> In these versions, the offer of salvation is not open to idol worshippers and sinners. Thus, in the Latin, the story has been retold to limit the activity of Christ's rescue to the saints only. Adam is a special case, since he is the father of the human race, and even though there is no biblical story of his repentance during his lifetime, he nonetheless is eligible in the myth for Christ's saving grace after his death.

The Greek version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* shows that the motifs of preaching among the dead and Christ's storming the underworld can lead easily and logically to the notion of a large-scale, perhaps even universal rescue of the dead at that time. The late fourth-century churchmen John Chrysostom and Philaster of Brescia, however, saw danger in such an open-ended version of the myth. They were afraid that some believers would assume that what was possible then might still be possible now, thereby lessening the

moral urgency of putting things right in this life. This line of thought seems to have been followed by the Latin translators of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* itself. The question of who was saved at the descent was not settled in the first four centuries of Christianity, though Augustine and Gregory the Great were highly influential in making normative, in the West, the notion that a person's actions in this life only are determinative. For them, repentance or receiving God's grace for the first time in the afterlife was, is now, and ever shall be, impossible.

## 6

### POSTHUMOUS PROGRESS AND UNIVERSAL SALVATION

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The second-century author of 2 Pet. 3:9 clearly indicated that God at least *desired* the salvation of all people: “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” The apostle Paul, in a couple of passages, had gone even further, as he penned lines that could be taken to imply that God’s plan included the ultimate salvation of all persons—Rom. 11:32 and 1 Cor. 15:24–28. Acts 3:21 speaks of an “apocatastasis,” a restoration of all things at the end of time, but the context of Peter’s speech also indicates that people who reject God and his prophet will also be rejected by God (Acts 3:23). As far as we can ascertain from the surviving evidence, the issue of universal salvation lay dormant for about 150 years, as Christians of various stripes focused on insiders and outsiders, those favored by God on one side and those who rejected him and/or were rejected by him on the other. “Universalism” and “universal salvation” in this study mean the salvation of all individual human beings who have ever lived, not a universal *offer* of salvation regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation, as some scholars use the term.<sup>1</sup> The first definition, employed here, necessarily entails the posthumous salvation of some people.

As we saw in chapter 5, Clement of Alexandria wished to extend the salvation at Jesus’ descent to Gentiles in Hades, and he spoke of postmortem punishments from God as medicinal or educative. He even stated that souls would be more strongly disposed to turn toward God after leaving the body than they were while in the body (*Strom.* 6.6.46). Repentance and turning toward God are still possible after death in Clement’s writings (*Strom.* 6.14.109, 7.16.102).<sup>2</sup> But he also often speaks about hell and eternal punishment (*Strom.* 5.14.90, 4.24.154), so he does not necessarily believe that everyone,

even in the afterlife, will accept God's call. Clement also occasionally discussed the apocatastasis, and, in the words of W. E. G. Floyd, he could speak of "God's discerning (*not devouring*) fire [which] will purify all polluted souls in the baptism by fire (*Strom.* 7.34; *Protr.* 53; *Paed.* 3.44; *Ecl. Proph.* 25.4) in preparation for the final restoration or apocatastasis (*Strom.* 7.56)."<sup>3</sup> Such an allowance for the posthumous progress of the soul after death is characteristic of the Alexandrians, and Origen extended these themes to suggest even more clearly the possibility of universal salvation, though at times with differing degrees of enjoyment of God. One of the fourth-century Cappadocian fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, would pick up Origen's universalist themes, clarifying and elaborating them significantly, and other admirers of Origen, like Evagrius Ponticus and the early Jerome (before he became an anti-Origenist), also had universalist leanings. The opponents of Origen would caricature his positions, take them out of context, and at times report them accurately, leading to the Origenist controversies of the late fourth through the sixth centuries.<sup>4</sup> These controversies focused on a number of issues in Origen's teaching, posthumous repentance and universalism among them, but not as the most important. In addition, though Origen at times did suggest a universalist view, he also could speak of eternal punishment of the wicked and the need to set things right in this life. Making sense of these sometimes disparate views will take up part of this chapter. Clement and Origen could speak about the posthumous progress of the soul, striving toward salvation after death, with or without universalism, but they were not the first Christians to do so. For that we must look into other currents of Christianity present at Alexandria in the second century.

## Gnostic Speculations on Posthumous Enlightenment and Reincarnation

Walter Bauer pointed out long ago that in Alexandria in the second century C.E., what would later be called "heresy" may actually have constituted the majority of Christians in that intellectual city.<sup>5</sup> It is also the case that the line between "heresy" and "orthodoxy" could be a fluid one in Alexandria, witnessed in 202–203 C.E. by the wealthy patron who supported both Origen and a so-called heretic named Paul in her home after the martyrdom of Origen's father. Eusebius says that Origen drew a sharp distinction between himself and his colleague, but evidently this wealthy Christian lady did not (Eusebius, *H.E.*, 6.2.12–14). There is evidence of two ideas about posthumous salvation, later to be associated with Origen, present among these "heretical" circles (traditionally designated "gnostic") in Alexandria and elsewhere. One is a notion of posthumous progress for eventual admittance into the heavenly realm, and another is the reincarnation of the soul into bodies. In both of

these kinds of speculations, there might be a chance for posthumous salvation as defined in this study, since this life is not necessarily the only sphere for aligning oneself with the highest power of the universe.

Before delving into the gnostic materials, a few words should be said regarding recent discussions about the appropriateness of this term. Michael Allen Williams has written an entire book devoted to the subject, *Rethinking "Gnosticism."* He prefers the term "biblical demiurgical" to encompass "all sources that made a distinction between the creator(s) and controllers of the material world and the most transcendent divine being, and that in so doing made use of the Jewish or Christian scriptural traditions."<sup>6</sup> Bentley Layton would restrict the term "Gnostic" to that group specifically designated γῳστικοί with its origins in the second century C.E., and he would prefer to call the other sects by their specific names, e.g., Valentinians, Basileidians, Sethians, etc.<sup>7</sup> These studies represent an advance over the loose usage of the term "gnostic" among scholars, and in what follows I will try to distinguish among the various movements, keeping in mind Williams's definition of "biblical demiurgical" as a category that can bind together these sometimes disparate traditions.

The *Apocryphon of John*, found in three different codices at Nag Hammadi in 1945, and also in the Berlin gnostic papyrus (BG), is considered by Layton to contain "one of the most classic narrations of the gnostic myth."<sup>8</sup> In the text, presented as a dialogue between the risen Savior and the apostle John, there is a section that speaks of the potential for posthumous salvation among various types of souls. The first type discussed, the souls of the immovable race, will achieve salvation immediately upon death (NHC II.25.16–26.7). Then there are others who understand their true origin, but who must struggle with the counterfeit spirit. John asks: "Lord, where will the souls of these go when they have come out of their flesh?" And he smiled and said to me, "The soul in which the power will become stronger than the counterfeit spirit, is strong and it flees from evil and, through the intervention of the incorruptible one, it is saved and it is taken up to the rest of the aeons"<sup>9</sup> (II.26.22–32). It appears that part of this struggle may take place after death, as the disembodied soul struggles with the counterfeit spirit, but that ultimately salvation is achieved.

Next, John asks about yet another category of souls:

"Lord, those, however, who have not known to whom they belong, where will their souls be?" And he said to me, "In those the despicable spirit has gained strength when they went astray. And he burdens the soul and draws it to the works of evil, and he casts it down into forgetfulness. And after it comes out of (the body), it is handed over to the authorities, who came into being through the archon, and they bind it with chains and cast it into prison and consort with it until it is liberated from the forgetfulness and acquires knowledge. And if thus it becomes perfect, it is saved." And I said, "Lord, how can the soul become smaller and return into the nature of its

mother or into man?" Then he rejoiced when I asked him this, and he said to me, "Truly you are blessed, for you have understood! That soul is made to follow another one, since the Spirit of life is in it. It is saved through him. It is not again cast into another flesh." (II. 26.32–27.21)<sup>10</sup>

Both Layton and Williams interpret this passage as professing a belief in reincarnation for some souls. They must be reborn in human form until liberation from forgetfulness is accomplished.<sup>11</sup> Their reading is confirmed by the other surviving versions of text, which make even clearer the reincarnation aspect of this passage: "[the archons] again [put] them into (bodily) parts" (III.35.4), and "they again cast them into fetters" (BG 69.4).<sup>12</sup>

Finally, there are some souls in the *Apocryphon of John* who are beyond hope: those "who have turned away" (II.27.23). The Savior says that "they will be taken to the place where there is no repentance. And they will be kept for the day on which those who have blasphemed the spirit will be tortured, and they will be punished with eternal punishment" (II.27.26–30). It is significant that the only souls without hope are those of apostates, strikingly similar to Mormon theology as discussed above in the introduction. Leaving the elect group is the only unforgivable sin, quite an effective strategy to maintain group identity, cohesiveness, and control. For everyone except apostates, however, the *Apocryphon of John* envisions opportunities for salvation even beyond death, through a series of rebirths if necessary. This is not universal salvation, but it is a form of posthumous salvation.

Other Christian groups of a "biblical demiurgical" type may also have believed in reincarnation as a vehicle for posthumous salvation. Irenaeus reports that the Carpocratians encouraged people to do every type of deed, including wicked acts, because the soul had to suffer continual reincarnation until it had participated in every conceivable human behavior and lifestyle (*Adv. Haer.* 1.25.4). Williams points out, however, the problems with this interpretation of Carpocratian ethics, which may have been based on Irenaeus's misunderstanding of texts rather than firsthand knowledge of their practices (1.25.5).<sup>13</sup> Even if their view did not lead to libertinism, the Carpocratians still may have believed in some form of reincarnation, similar to that found in the *Apocryphon of John*. In addition, Clement (*Strom.* 4.83.2) and Origen (*Comm. Matt.* 13.1; *Comm. Rom.* 5.1) both report that Basilides taught reincarnation as punishment for the sins of a previous life.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, reincarnation, also called "metempsychosis," or "metensomatosis," or "transmigration of the soul," has a long and distinguished history in Hinduism, Buddhism, and countless other more localized traditions the world over, and in Greek philosophy as well.<sup>15</sup> The idea has been associated with Empedocles (490–430 B.C.E.), the Orphics, and most important for our study of early Christianity, Plato (*Phaedrus* 248D–E, 249 B–D; *Laws* 10; *Re-*

public 10; *Timaeus* 42 B–C, 91A). In Plato there is a notion of possible improvement through the various incarnations, as the soul gradually divorces itself from the pleasures of the body and the material world. Bliss is achieved as the appetites are placed under the governance of reason. There is also the possibility of decline, if the soul moves deeper into injustice and sloth. While usually the soul is reincarnated into another human body, Plato also allows for a reincarnation into animals, even plants, and then back into human beings again. Incarnation into a woman can be described as punishment for a wicked soul that had inhabited a man (*Timaeus* 42B–C). As with all of Plato’s myths, one cannot necessarily take these speculations on reincarnation as a direct indication of his literal beliefs. The important point for this study is that in later times Plato was associated with reincarnation and the posthumous progress or regression of the soul, and his influence was felt throughout the Greco-Roman world. For example, Philo of Alexandria, the first-century Jewish philosopher, taught that those souls who love the earth and mortal bodies would be reincarnated here. Only when they come to see the body as a prison and a grave do they soar upward; all of this is clearly influenced by Plato (Philo, *De Somnis* 1.138–39).<sup>16</sup> Plutarch, also in the first century, repeated and developed Plato’s reincarnation ideas.<sup>17</sup> Certainly with a belief in reincarnation, any particular incarnation is not the final chance at salvation for an individual soul. With the exception of Philo and some of the “biblical demiurgical” traditions, however, most Hellenistic Jews and early Christians that we know about either ignored or rejected the reincarnation option, at least for most human beings.<sup>18</sup> The gospel authors report that some Jews believed Elijah was reborn in John the Baptist, and others thought John the Baptist was reincarnated into Jesus (Mark 6:14–15, 8:28, and parallels), but these are all exceptional individuals, especially Elijah, who had been taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1–12). There is no evidence for widespread Jewish or early Christian belief in a theory of reincarnation for everyone. Later, reincarnation became incorporated into Manichean doctrine, the same Manichee sect in which Augustine spent nine years.<sup>19</sup> Origen, as a Christian Platonist, was often accused of espousing a doctrine of reincarnation, and the logic of some of his related speculations might seem to lead to it. He may have affirmed reincarnation in the *De Principiis*, but in other writings he emphatically states that he did not believe in it. He *did*, however, entertain the potential for the soul’s posthumous progress toward salvation, even if not reincarnated on earth in another body.

## Origen

Origen of Alexandria (186–ca. 254) was one of the early church’s greatest theologians. He was born to Christian parents, schooled in Greek philosophy

and the Bible, and was both loved and reviled by his contemporaries. He had a major dispute in mid-career with his own Alexandrian bishop Demetrius, and he eventually settled in Caesarea, Palestine, where he had numerous friends and supporters. He died after a harsh imprisonment during the Decian persecution, so he can justifiably be called a martyr for his Christian faith.<sup>20</sup> We must begin by noting that we possess today only a fraction of Origen's original work. As Fredrick Norris has put it: "Of two hundred and ninety-one commentaries written in Greek, two hundred seventy-five are lost. Eusebius had a nine-volume collection of Origen's letters, but only three letters remain."<sup>21</sup> In addition, most of what survives of Origen's fundamental early work, the *De Principiis*, comes down to us only through the Latin translation of Rufinus (ca. 345–411), an apologist for Origen. He had an agenda in suppressing certain of Origen's views, and he claimed that "heretics" had tampered with Origen's text, obligating Rufinus to make corrections.<sup>22</sup> Thus, figuring out exactly what Origen believed at any one time in his career is a challenge and, in some cases, not possible.<sup>23</sup>

Henri Crouzel rightly points out that the more speculative parts of Origen's theology, particularly concerning the life of the soul after death and the final culmination of all things, were precisely that: speculative. Origen had what Crouzel calls a "research theology," attempting to answer difficult questions while remaining faithful to scripture and the orthodox consensus of the day. In Origen's day there was no clear orthodox Christian consensus on posthumous salvation, universal salvation, the pre-existence of the soul, and many other questions. Ancient and modern commentators do an injustice to Origen when they codify and turn into "dogma" tenets about which Origen hesitated or expressed varying views.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, we can state that Origen began with certain fundamental convictions, chief among them each individual's responsibility, God's justice, and each human being's freedom of choice to reject or turn toward God. Book Three of the *De Principiis* is the classic locus where Origen lays out these convictions.<sup>25</sup> He also stresses them throughout his corpus of writings, especially when he is combating what he perceives to be gnostic determinism, predestination (even the kind derived from Paul's letters), and the Valentinian Christians' idea of fixed natures for human beings.<sup>26</sup> Through his stress on the freedom of the rational soul, Origen insulates God from any involvement in evil, since the soul is free to rebel against God. God certainly does not predetermine the choices made by the soul, nor does God compel the soul to love him.

Origen adopts Plato's view that the life of the soul on this earth is simply one stage in its life; each person's soul existed long before coming into the body, and it will continue to exist long after it leaves. The rational souls in their precosmic state chose to fall away from God, rebelling against him in varying degrees, with the result that angels, human beings, and demons were created by God as vehicles for the education and gradual restoration of the fallen

rational souls.<sup>27</sup> For the present study, the important aspect to consider is how Origen envisioned the postmortem potential for salvation among those whose souls did not begin the process of restoration by following Christ in this life (and this would include the vast majority of humanity in Origen's day). There is a large constellation of issues to consider. (1) Was the soul reincarnated into human and/or animal bodies, to live again on this earth? (2) If not reincarnated, in what ways might the soul repent, make progress, and be purified after death? (3) Are all souls eligible for postmortem improvement, or are some so hardened by sin in this life that death is a boundary of salvation? (4) Does Origen's understanding of the apocatastasis (the culmination of all things) include the ultimate salvation of every human soul? (5) Is there any differentiation of souls at this final stage? (6) And is this stage truly final, or might the souls rebel again and fall away, starting the entire cycle all over again?

On the first issue, reincarnation, there is considerable ancient and modern disagreement on what Origen actually wrote in the *De Principiis*, and in a number of other texts he makes pronouncements on the subject at odds with the testimony of a later witness to the *De Principiis*. The controversial passage is *De Prin.* 1.8.4. Jerome (347–419 c.e.), in the midst of the Origenist controversy almost 150 years after Origen's death, states that Origen believed human souls could transmigrate into the bodies of beasts and fishes (*Ep. ad Avitum* 4). The Emperor Justinian, writing in the sixth century, agrees with Jerome's assessment (*Ep. ad Mennam*). In Rufinus's translation of *De Prin.* 1.8.4, however, he has Origen say precisely the opposite, that this is a "perverse doctrine." Gilles Dorival has put forward numerous arguments that it is unlikely that Origen ever taught the transmigration of human souls into animals.<sup>28</sup> Among these arguments are other texts of Origen himself: *De Prin.* 2.9.3 dismisses beasts and fish as relatively unimportant in the scheme of salvation, and in other works, Origen explicitly rejects the doctrine of reincarnation altogether, even reincarnation into human bodies. When discussing Elijah's return in his *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen says:

In this place it does not appear to me that by Elijah the soul is spoken of, lest I should fall into the dogma of transmigration, which is foreign to the church of God, and not handed down by the Apostles, nor anywhere set forth in the Scriptures; for it is also in opposition to the saying that "things seen are temporal" (2 Cor. 4:18), and that "this age shall have a consummation," and also to the fulfillment of the saying, "Heaven and earth shall pass away." (Matt. 24:35) (*Comm. Matt.* 13.1)<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 2.5, Origen uses the short life span of this world to argue against reincarnation.<sup>30</sup> Thus, regardless of what Origen may have written in *De Prin.* 1.8.4, and it is likely we shall never know, elsewhere Origen decided to deny vehemently any connection with the

doctrine of reincarnation, and Rufinus would insert this vehemence into the *De Principiis*. This does not, however, cancel out Origen's hope for the posthumous improvement of the soul, on a path toward salvation. Even if not reincarnated, the soul somehow can be educated and improve.

On the second issue, that of posthumous improvement of the soul, Celia Rabinowitz stresses a distinction between the process of personal salvation on one hand and the apocatastasis on the other in Origen's thought.<sup>31</sup> Individual souls can experience progress in their postmortem existence, even before the final culmination, when God will finally be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28). The following passage from *De Prin.* 2.11.6 makes this clear, and here there is substantial agreement between Rufinus's Latin translation and Jerome's account of the text:

We may speak in some such way about the abode in the air. I think that the saints as they depart from this life will remain in some place situated on the earth, which the divine scripture calls "paradise." This will be a place of instruction and, so to speak, a lecture room or school for souls, in which they may be taught about all that they had seen on earth and may also receive some indications of what is to follow in the future.

After passing through this spiritual academy, extremely well suited to the tastes of an intellectual like Origen, the souls are continually perfected, passing through the heavenly realms, until they finally come to see the rational and spiritual beings "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). We should note that for Origen, the soul is not completely disembodied at this point; he speaks in Platonic fashion of a "vehicle" (ὄχημα) for the soul made of invisible matter.<sup>32</sup> This is Origen's description of what he thinks will happen to those who were "saints," i.e., already good Christians in this life; but what about those who need more postmortem help, or who merit punishment after death?

On the third issue, that of postmortem distinctions between the sinners and the saints, Lawrence Hennessey has written a concise article covering a wide range of Origen's surviving works.<sup>33</sup> He points out that in Origen's view, all human souls undergo a purification upon death, but for baptized Christians who remain unstained by post-baptismal sin, the purifying fire is painless. For repentant Christian sinners, the purifying fire is painful but effective and allows the soul eventually to press toward salvation. Finally, there is the category of hardened, unrepentant sinners. For them, the fire does not purify, but rather they are sent to Gehenna, where there is eternal fire (Origen, *Hom. in Jer.* 12.5; 18.1; 19.15; *Hom. in Josh.* 9.7).<sup>34</sup> Origen's Homily 14 on Leviticus stresses putting things right in this life; one must repent here and now. Death itself may serve to atone for some sins, but it is better to ask forgiveness now.<sup>35</sup> In the same homiletic contexts, however, Origen can speak of the remedial nature of God's punishments and the possibility of an end to

torments for the damned (*Hom in Jer.* 1.15; 20.4). In his commentary on John, Origen admits frankly that he does not know whether the punishment of the damned lasts forever (*Comm. Jn.* 28.8), and in his commentary on Matthew he opines that a temporary, remedial punishment is more in line with God's mercy (*Comm. Matt.* 18.24).<sup>36</sup> In one famous passage, Origen interprets the biblical word "eternal" as meaning only "a very long time": "Eternity (αἰών) signifies in Scripture sometimes the fact that we do not know the end, sometimes the fact that there is no end in the present world, but there will be one in the next. Sometimes eternity means a certain length of time, even that of a human life" (*Comm. Rom.* 6.5).<sup>37</sup> Thus, while Origen often speaks of eternal punishments, his emphasis on God's mercy and the freedom of even disembodied souls sometimes leads him to allow for the possibility of an end to punishment.

Closely related is the fourth issue, whether the apocatastasis includes the salvation of every human soul, or perhaps every rational soul, which would include the devil. *De Prin.* 3.6.5 is the passage usually taken to indicate the ultimate salvation of even the devil, here probably to be identified with "death" as the last enemy destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26):

For the destruction of the last enemy must be understood in this way, not that its substance which was made by God shall perish, but that the hostile purpose and will which proceeded not from God but from itself will come to an end. It will be destroyed, therefore, not in the sense of ceasing to exist, but of being no longer an enemy and no longer death. For to the Almighty nothing is impossible, nor is anything beyond the reach of cure by its Maker.<sup>38</sup>

In his *Letter to Friends in Alexandria*, however, as reported by both Jerome and Rufinus, Origen states that people charge him with the belief that the devil will be saved, but that such a belief is absurd.<sup>39</sup> Crouzel masterfully points out the contradictions and hesitations of Origen's statements on this subject, sometimes even within the same work.<sup>40</sup> For our purposes it is not necessary to harmonize Origen's statements and turn them into a "system." It will suffice here to show that Origen at times entertained the *possibility* that souls could turn toward God after their earthly life. The question for him was sometimes open, and this places him in the category of those Christians for whom death was not always a firm boundary of salvation, as the following excerpts will show.

Origen's *Contra Celsum* is an apologetic work written near the end of his career against Celsus, a long-dead pagan opponent of Christianity. Michael Frede surmises that the audience most likely to read Origen's work would have been educated persons interested in Christianity, but hesitant in their commitment because of cogent pagan objections like those of Celsus.<sup>41</sup> Contrast-

ing the Christian notion of apocatastasis explicitly with the Stoic notion of a final conflagration of all things, Origen tells Celsus that when the human soul returns to God in the apocatastasis, it will be due to each soul's free will, and not due to any compulsion from God: "We believe that at some time the Logos will have overcome the entire rational nature, and will have remodeled every soul to his own perfection, when each individual simply by the exercise of his freedom will choose what the Logos wills and will be in that state which he has chosen" (*C. Cels.* 8.72).<sup>42</sup> Origen goes on to quote Zeph. 3:7–13 "that they may all call upon the name of the Lord and serve him under one yoke," as a scriptural warrant for his universalism: "the prophecies say much in obscure terms about the total abolition of evils and the correction of every soul" (*C. Cels.* 8.72).<sup>43</sup>

In his treatise *On Prayer* 27.15, Origen considers the divine mercy and also considers the succession of ages in which God could work his forgiveness to accomplish the salvation of all. The key biblical text is Eph. 2:7, "That in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us." Based on this text, Origen wonders whether, after death and in a succeeding age, even the so-called unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29) might ultimately be forgiven by God:

If I may hazard a guess at so great a puzzle, I think that just as the end of the year is the last month after which the beginning of another month takes place, so perhaps when many ages have been accomplished as, so to speak, a year of ages, the end is the present age, after which certain ages to come will take place, whose beginning is the age to come. And in those ages to come God will show the riches "of his grace in kindness," since the worst sinner, who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit and been ruled by sin from beginning to end in this present age, will afterward in the age to come be brought into order, I know not how.<sup>44</sup>

We should note how speculative and hesitant Origen is here; in no way is he propounding a "system." Rather, he is trying to reconcile the need for justice in the punishment of sin with his sense that God's love and mercy should ultimately result in the salvation of all rational creatures. If one wants to avoid difficult and painful punishment, one should set things right in this life, but the freedom of the soul and God's mercy mean that our death here does not necessarily mark the final chance at salvation.

In a few passages, Origen indicates that there might be a differentiation of reward at the final culmination. Charles Bigg has collected some of these together: In *Hom. Num.* 11.4.5, Origen compares the final states of souls to the Gentiles and Israelites in the Old Testament; all have a guardian angel, but the Israelites are the special portion of God (see also *Hom. Num.* 21.1). In *Hom. Luc.* 3 he states that all the redeemed will be together, but only the pure of heart will be able to see God. Similarly, in *Hom. Luc.* 17, the twice-married

person may be saved, but not crowned.<sup>45</sup> Thus, torments may cease, but there is still an advantage in cleansing the soul now and beginning the upward journey already in this life.

Because of his emphasis on the soul's free will, it would seem that Origen should also acknowledge the possibility of yet another fall, if the souls once again, after the apocatastasis, grow sated or bored with the Divine Presence and choose to rebel.<sup>46</sup> This may be the logic of his position, and both Jerome and later Justinian charged Origen with teaching this in the *De Principiis*, but Origen himself denied it in several places. Christ's soul was so allied to the good that in effect it lost the capacity for sin (*De Prin.* 2.6.5–6); likewise in his commentaries and homilies Origen affirms an acquired immutability among perfected human souls. As Crouzel paraphrases Origen, "Free will cannot separate from charity those who have given themselves to charity (*Comm. Rom.* 5.10), and he who draws near to God shares in his immutability (*Hom. 1 Sam.* 1.4)."<sup>47</sup> Once again we may have an instance of Origen's rethinking positions he had taken in the *De Principiis*, though what that text said on this subject is open to debate. The most important point for this study is that Origen *does* often assert (at times inconsistently) that death is not a firm boundary of salvation, and that the love and mercy of God will triumph in the end. Over one hundred years later, Origen's admirer Gregory of Nyssa takes these speculations, modifies them significantly, and develops a more consistent theory about the apocatastasis and universal salvation.

## Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–ca. 394) was born into a Cappadocian family of ten children, four of whom became important church leaders and theologians. In addition to Gregory himself, his brother Peter was bishop of Sebaste in Armenia; another brother was Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea in Asia Minor; and his sister was Macrina, founder of a women's monastic community and, according to Gregory's testimony, a learned theologian in her own right.<sup>48</sup> This family was introduced in chapter 3, in connection with Gregory's report that Macrina's secret name was Thecla, since she lived a life similar to the famous virgin. Gregory's thought, infused with that of Plato and Origen, led him in a universalist direction, a universalism much more confident and clear than that of the great Alexandrian one hundred years earlier.

Unlike Origen, Gregory's universalist views did not spark controversy in his own day, there was no "Gregorianist" controversy after his death, and he was never condemned by an emperor or a council. On the contrary, Gregory is considered to be one of the three great "Cappadocian Fathers" (along with his brother Basil and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus), and his writings have been highly influential up to the present day, especially in Eastern Orthodoxy.

It is true that Gregory of Nyssa's views on universal salvation caused embarrassment to some, and at times later editors tried to expunge offending passages from his writings.<sup>49</sup> But this treatment is mild compared to what befell Origen. Gregory's ultimate success has to do with a number of factors, chiefly his tireless efforts on behalf of Nicene orthodoxy against the Arianism of the late fourth century. Clearly, speculation about universal salvation was still within the orbit of mainstream Christianity in the fourth century, just as were other types of posthumous salvation. For example, in a manner similar to Origen, but less confident than Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus acknowledges that he is unsure whether all human beings will be saved at the end (*Oratio* 40.36).<sup>50</sup> In addition, Gregory of Nyssa, unlike Origen, avoids some of the more controversial aspects of his predecessor's thought, particularly the preexistence and precosmic fall of souls, as well as the possibility that the souls might fall again once they have attained to God.<sup>51</sup>

In many ways more systematic than Origen, Gregory develops a thoroughgoing explication of salvation. His system, culminating in the apocatastasis, is outlined concisely by C. N. Tsirpanlis.<sup>52</sup> Tsirpanlis adduces three major types of arguments used by Gregory to justify his teaching on universal salvation: (1) biblical, especially the subjection of all things to Christ in Phil. 2:10, 1 Cor. 15:12–58, Acts 2:21, and Ps. 2:4–9; (2) philosophical, resting on the finiteness of evil and infiniteness of good, and also upon the unity of human nature; and (3) theological, focusing on the medicinal nature of God's punishment, which is not eternal. Several of these themes become clear in the following passage from *On the Soul and Resurrection*:

[God's] end is one and one only; it is this: when the complete whole of our race shall have been perfected from the first man to the last—some having at once in this life been cleansed from evil, others having afterwards in the necessary periods been healed by the Fire, others having in their life here been unconscious equally of good and of evil—to offer to every one of us participating in the blessings which are in Him. . . . But the difference between the virtuous and the vicious life led at the present time will be illustrated in this way: in the quicker or more tardy participation of each in the promised blessedness. According to the amount of the ingrained wickedness of each will be computed the duration of his cure. This cure consists in the cleansing of his soul, and that cannot be achieved without an excruciating condition.<sup>53</sup>

The fullness (πλήρωμα) of all humanity is a key concept for Gregory. At the beginning of the passage above (“the complete whole of our race”), it is a touchstone for why there must be universal salvation for everyone who ever lived. We are all fundamentally of the same nature and so our ultimate status with God will be the same. Notice that the wicked do not get away with

anything. They are still punished for a long time in the afterlife, but the love of God wins the day in the end. In addition, Gregory's understanding of God is infinite, so there will be no chance for boredom or satiety among the perfected souls; there will always be more to strive for, more to achieve.<sup>54</sup>

It is worth noting that the "fullness of all humanity" has important implications for Gregory's teaching about human life now, even before the apocatastasis. Unique among early Christian theologians, Gregory denounces the institution of slavery in the Greco-Roman world (*Hom. in Eccl.* 4). Part of his denunciation rests upon our common humanity; he rejects Aristotle's argument, found in the *Politics* 1255a, that some human beings are by nature slaves. Gregory says that human beings were created to be masters of the earth (Gen. 1:26–30), so therefore no human being should be master over another. Gregory praises his sister Macrina for having persuaded their mother to make "all the slave-girls and servants she had with her her sisters, her equals" (*Life of Macrina* 7).<sup>55</sup> Thus, Gregory and Macrina's ideas about the solidarity of all human beings at the culmination of all things had concrete social implications for living life in this world as well.

Gregory's *On the Soul and Resurrection* is presented as a dialogue with Macrina, whom he calls "the Teacher" in this text. In one section, Macrina gives an allegorizing interpretation of the rich man and Lazarus story from Luke 16:19–31.<sup>56</sup> She ingeniously takes a story which indicates that death is a firm boundary of salvation (see chapter 2 "Luke and 2 Clement"), and she reinterprets it in a universalist direction. She reads the chasm separating the rich man and Lazarus as "those decisions in this life which result in the separating of opposite characters."<sup>57</sup> It is important to make the right choices in life, she says, in order to avoid the types of postmortem punishments indicated in the story, but the state of the soul at death is not ultimately determinative:

I think our Lord teaches us this; that those still living in the flesh must as much as ever they can separate and free themselves in a way from its attachments by virtuous conduct, in order that after death they may not need a second death to cleanse them from the remnants that are owing to this cement [κόλλης, cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 82E] of the flesh, and, when once the bonds are loosed from around the soul, her soaring up to the Good may be swift and unimpeded, with no anguish of the body to distract her. . . . If then, whether by forethought here, or by purgation hereafter, our soul becomes free from any emotional connection with the brute creation, there will be nothing to impede its contemplation of the Beautiful.<sup>58</sup>

Harold Cherniss discusses the passages from Plato that underlie the dialogue between Gregory and Macrina here; particularly important are those that posit a second death in the afterlife as a punishment for sins (*Phaedo* 114B; *Laws* 870E, 872E).<sup>59</sup> Clearly, for Macrina and Gregory, the soul should rid it-

self of the bodily influences in this life, but there is a postmortem purgation for those who do not do so. Their discussion of the Lucan parable ends with the following summation by Gregory:

Then it seems, I said, that it is not punishment chiefly and principally that the Deity, as Judge, afflicts sinners with; but He operates, as your argument has shown, only to get the good separated from the evil and to attract it into the communion of blessedness. That, said the Teacher, is my meaning; and also that the agony will be measured by the amount of evil there is in each individual.<sup>60</sup>

Because of occasional mentions of an “eternal fire” in Gregory’s writings, J. Daniélou has argued that Gregory did not really profess a belief in universal salvation.<sup>61</sup> Many scholars have challenged this assessment, including Tsirpanlis and Mouhana. Like Origen, Gregory can interpret “eternal” as meaning “a very long time”:

When, after long periods of time, the evil of our nature, which is now mixed up with it and has grown with its growth, has been expelled, and when there has been a restoration of those now lying in sin to their primal state, a hymn of thanksgiving will arise from all creation, as well as from those who in the process of purgation have suffered chastisement, as from those who needed not any purgation at all. (*Or. Cat.* 26)<sup>62</sup>

In this chapter, Gregory goes on to assert even that the devil would be saved, “[Christ] freed man from evil and healed the very author of evil himself.” True, the final chapter of this work speaks of a fire which never dies (*Or. Cat.* 40), but this does not seem for Gregory to take away the fire’s purgatorial, medicinal nature. In addition, Gregory’s convictions about the salvation of every human being are presented in much less hesitant terms than those of Origen. This does not mean, however, that Gregory abandons the seriousness of the call to virtue via Christianity in this life. For instance, Gregory wrote against those who would delay baptism because they risk dying in sin.<sup>63</sup> The consequences of such neglect, a painful posthumous purgation, are indeed dire in Gregory’s thought, but they do not necessarily last forever.

## Later History of Universalism in the East

Fortunately for Gregory of Nyssa and his long-term reputation, the major controversies surrounding Origen’s teachings did not erupt until after the Cappadocian’s death in the mid-390s. There were stirrings of trouble long before this, however. Already around 300 C.E. Methodius of Olympus had accused Origen of denying the bodily resurrection, and he also attacked

Origen's doctrine of the preexistence of the soul, which implies that our bodies are prisons.<sup>64</sup> In 376, Epiphanius of Salamis repeated Methodius's charges, and added others, including the allegation that Origen had wrongly taught an Arian subordination of Christ to the Father (*Panarion* 64).<sup>65</sup> These early anti-Origenist writings did not attack the posthumous progress for sinful souls or universalism, but as the controversy heated up in the late 390s, these teachings came under scrutiny as well.

In the meantime, admirers of Origen were continuing to teach a doctrine of universal salvation, most notably Evagrius Ponticus and even the early Jerome. Evagrius Ponticus (346–399) was a monk who had the Cappadocians Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus as mentors and who lived with the Egyptian monks, inspiring them with the teachings of Origen.<sup>66</sup> He clearly taught the ultimate salvation of all rational creatures, including the devil (*Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.40; 3.51; 6.15; 6.27; *Scholia ad Proverba* 95; 143).<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Clark points out that Jerome, too, before the Origenist controversies of the mid-390s, upheld a position of universal salvation (*Comm. Ps.* 145:9, CCL 72, 244; *Comm. Eph.* II [on Eph. 4:16], PL 26, 535).<sup>68</sup>

It was Epiphanius who led the charge against Origen's universalism in a letter written in 394 C.E. to John of Jerusalem, accusing the latter of being an Origenist. Unlike Epiphanius's *Panarion* twenty years earlier, which had not touched on universalism, one main issue of contention in this new letter was the notion that the devil could be co-heir with the righteous prophets and apostles in heaven. Jerome sided with Epiphanius in this dispute, as he expressed his horror at the prospect of unrepentant whoremongers one day rating equal to the virgins in heaven.<sup>69</sup> Clark has demonstrated how the intricate social networks that existed among the principals already before the dispute help us to understand the sides taken and the positions articulated.<sup>70</sup> Once again, as we saw in the last chapter, the ethical issue comes into play at the end of the fourth century in both East and West to deny the possibility of posthumous salvation. Philaster of Brescia in the 380s and John Chrysostom in 390 had both claimed that moral seriousness would be weakened if posthumous salvation were allowed at Christ's descent to hell (see chapter 5, "Varying Opinions in the Fourth and Fifth Century"). Similarly here, Epiphanius and Jerome now invoke the specter of rampant immorality and unfairness to the righteous, if universal salvation were to be accepted as orthodox teaching.

The heroic Christianity of the ascetics, the fact that by now the majority of the Empire's population was Christian, and the emperor Theodosius's proscriptions of pagan sacrifice (391) all surely played a role in these issues coming to the fore at the end of the fourth century. Joining the church in this life and living a life of strict self-discipline must not only count for something (as they certainly did for Origen and Gregory of Nyssa), but they must count for everything. There must be no alternative paths to the postmortem bliss for

which Philaster, Epiphanius, Jerome, John Chrysostom, and the others have worked so hard. It was also around this time, as we saw in chapter 2, “Paul,” that the Council of Carthage in 397 explicitly condemned baptism of dead bodies and even the feeding of the eucharist to the dead.<sup>71</sup> John Chrysostom put a sharp edge on the point in his *Hom. John 25.3*, which was preached to get people to move swiftly out of the ranks of catechumens and into the ranks of the baptized: “For if it should come to pass (which God forbid!) that through the sudden arrival of death we depart hence unbaptized, though we have ten thousand virtues, our portion will be no other than hell, and the venomous worm, and fire unquenchable, and bonds indissoluble.”<sup>72</sup>

This is strikingly different from Ambrose’s allowance for a “baptism of desire” (see chapter 5, “Varying Opinions”), but then, unlike Ambrose, Chrysostom was not preaching at the funeral of an unbaptized Christian emperor. For many in the church, death was becoming a firmer boundary of salvation than it had ever been before. Augustine, who became bishop of Hippo in 395, was not involved in the intricacies of the Origenist debates—he could not have been, since by his own admission his facility in Greek was not so great. But we will see in the next chapter some of these same themes related to ethics and the role of the church on earth echoed in the various places where he mounts his assaults on all forms of posthumous salvation.

Origen himself, Origenism, and Universal Salvation were ultimately condemned in two stages during the sixth century, after a revival of Origen’s ideas (as interpreted by Evagrius Ponticus) among Egyptian and Palestinian monks. First came the emperor Justinian’s edict against Origenism in 543 and then came the anathemas of the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. The history surrounding these condemnations is too complex to enter into here; suffice to say that at the end of this process universal salvation was placed outside the bounds of orthodox catholic teaching.<sup>73</sup> For some Eastern Orthodox theologians, these rulings have not taken away the possibility of posthumous salvation for at least *some* sinners and unbaptized persons (see chapter 8, “Trajan and Falconilla”). By the sixth century in the West, however, Augustine’s views denying all forms of posthumous salvation, including universalism, had taken hold.

The condemnation of Origen had an effect on the reception of Gregory of Nyssa as well. For instance, Germanus of Constantinople (c. 640–c. 733) tried to remove the universalist passages from Gregory’s writings, claiming that Gregory had been interpolated. But the universalism was too tightly woven into Gregory’s thought to be extricated in such a manner.<sup>74</sup> Gregory’s stature was so great for other reasons that his convictions about universal salvation did not bring about any formal condemnation. The subsequent history of universalism, up to and including Hosea Ballou and the Universalist denomination of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is a fascinating story,

but limitations of space and the author's expertise prevent its telling here.<sup>75</sup> One distinction must be made, however. Unlike most members of the Unitarian Universalist denomination, the ancient universalists still believed that all would be saved only on *Christian* terms. Only when all human souls have "seen the light," so to speak, will the culmination be complete. Modern Universalists tend to believe in a greater diversity of paths to the divine.

Chapters 2 through 6 have documented a number of types of posthumous salvation in early Christianity: scenarios of the final judgment where the elect are allowed to save some of the damned, intercession for the non-Christian dead by confessors, a general offer of salvation to the dead at Christ's descent to hell, and finally, speculations about posthumous progress even for the wicked dead, in some cases leading to universal salvation. The first two types reflect a desire to maintain family and social network solidarity, or else create an alternative family among the dead, as the Christian church was gradually replacing the family-based and nation-based piety of the Greco-Roman world. The third had implications for the cultural status of Christianity as it tried to justify itself as an ancient religion with a valid pedigree, and it also turned on notions of God's justice in offering salvation to those who died before the advent of Christ. The fourth is based largely on philosophical and theological concerns about the ultimate justice of God's plan for the universe, the ultimate triumph of God's love, and an emphasis on certain universalizing passages of scripture over others that speak of eternal damnation. At different stages of his career, Augustine will turn his attention to each of these types of posthumous salvation, and he will argue vigorously that they are all impossible. That story will be taken up in the next chapter.

## 7

### AUGUSTINE'S REJECTION OF POSTHUMOUS SALVATION FOR NON-CHRISTIANS

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Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa from 395 until his death in 430 C.E., at one time or another in his career dealt with nearly all the issues raised thus far in this book. By the time he wrote the *City of God*, Book 21, in the mid-420s, he had formulated what would become the clear position in the West rejecting all forms of posthumous salvation. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the story of how and why Augustine arrived at the views he did. Augustine's influence was far-reaching, and in many cases his interpretations became the decisive ones for all later western Christianity. Peter Brown has identified the age of Ambrose and Augustine as a time when the imaginative horizon shifted, especially in the West. Many theologians began to stress the fact that the Christianization of the empire had only just begun, in spite of almost one hundred years of Christian emperors. Augustine's sermons at Carthage, 397–404, reflect this shift: It is not enough for Christians to remain pure and avoid contamination with pagan rites; the whole society requires purification. The pagan past must be purged, most especially from Christians themselves.<sup>1</sup> Any blurring of the boundaries between pagan and Christian, in this world or the next, must be avoided. It is against this backdrop that we should explore Augustine's pronouncements about posthumous salvation.

#### Antecedents to Augustine

We should not think that Augustine rejected posthumous salvation merely due to his own peculiar agenda and circumstances, or on a whim. Latin Christianity had a long tradition of writers who claimed that this life was the realm in which one must act to set things right with God. No earlier figure, how-

ever, had expounded on the subject so broadly and clearly as Augustine, covering all the nuances and implications. For instance, Hippolytus of Rome, writing in the early third century in his *Commentary on Daniel* 4.18, states, "Each person should know that the day on which he leaves this world he is already judged. For that person, all is consummated."<sup>2</sup> Hippolytus's description of Hades as a way station for souls awaiting the final judgment, and with two separated areas for the righteous and unrighteous dead, fits in with his view that the ultimate judgment is made at the death of each individual.<sup>3</sup> Tertullian is of like mind (*De anima* 55, 58; *Adv. Marc.* 4.34).<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Cyprian of Carthage, mid-third century, has a great deal to say about the fate of those who die out of communion with the church. In the aftermath of the Decian persecution of 250–251, in which so many Christians had given in to the authorities' demands to renounce their faith, Cyprian and other church leaders had to figure out what to do with all the lapsed Christians. Many wanted back into the church, in part to ensure once again their eternal salvation. Cyprian tries to chart a moderate course between those who would make it very difficult, if not impossible, to reenter the church (Novatian's position) and those who would grant forgiveness freely with few or no conditions (a position held by some of the confessors). Cyprian's early formula was that the lapsed could be readmitted to communion with the church only on their deathbeds. His reasoning is clear: "In the case of those [who had lapsed by sacrificing to the gods], comfort should be brought to them at the hour of their death; our reasoning was that in the grave (apud inferos) there is no confession, and that we cannot insist that a man does penitence if the fruits of that penitence are withheld from him" (Cyprian, *Ep.* 55.17.3).<sup>5</sup> Again, "And because in the grave (apud inferos) there is no confession and the rite of reconciliation cannot take place there, those who are genuinely repentant and who ask ought for the time being to be accepted into the Church and there be kept for the Lord. One day He will come to His Church and will surely pass judgment on those whom he finds within it" (Cyprian, *Ep.* 55.29.2).

For Cyprian, death is a boundary; one must secure the correct relationship with God before death occurs. Since he also believes in the doctrine that what the church binds and looses on earth is ratified in heaven (Matt. 16:19, 18:18; *Ep.* 57.1.1), he believes that full communion should be allowed just before death, though this is no guarantee of a favorable judgment from God.

In Cyprian's mind, a dead lapsed Christian who was not restored to the church was equivalent to a dead pagan who had never known Christ. This is clear in his letter to the pagan Proconsul of Africa Demetrianus: "Believe and live, and you who persecute us will in time rejoice with us for eternity. When you have once departed thither, there is no longer any place for repentance, and no possibility of making satisfaction. Here life is either lost or saved; here eternal safety is provided for by the worship of God and the fruits of faith" (*Ad Dem.* 25).<sup>6</sup>

In 252–253, a new persecution was feared, and a council of African bishops led by Cyprian issued a new directive that all the penitent lapsi should be immediately restored to the church (*Ep.* 57). In these contexts, a plea for the conversion of a pagan persecutor and the urgent restoration of the lapsed, time is of the essence. This world, here and now, is the only chance. One can see how different is the sensibility here from the roughly contemporary writings of Origen. It is also quite different from Perpetua's attitude. She was a Latin-speaking confessor facing persecution at Carthage just fifty years before Cyprian, yet for her God's final word on a person's postmortem fate was not necessarily decided at death. In a context of persecution Christians could and did take varying positions on posthumous salvation. In addition, one should recall that some Western figures believed in a general offer of salvation to all the dead at Christ's descent (Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrosiaster), while others held firmly that only the "saints" were rescued (Philaster, bishop of Brescia). Augustine had all of these traditions in his background, and it remained to be seen which trajectories he would choose to follow as he wove together the various strands of tradition into a coherent position on the posthumous salvation of non-Christians. The fact that Western *bishops* like Cyprian and Philaster had generally stressed the necessity of putting things right in this life is significant; it should come as no surprise that Augustine as bishop would follow their lead.

### Views of the Early Augustine

The early Augustine rarely discusses a change of fates after death. In the 83 *Different Questions*, compiled between 388 and 396, and addressed to his fellow monks, the only place where the issue of posthumous salvation arises is in Question 44, and here it has to do with the salvation of those who lived long ago. Augustine articulates the view that will become commonplace throughout his career: All those who achieved wisdom before the coming of Christ "have been illumined by the same truth in accord with the opportunity of their own respective periods of life." In other words, the ancient worthies were Christians before the incarnation, and thus they needed no posthumous salvation since they had lived properly during their lifetimes. Augustine is generally consistent on this point throughout his life, and he only wavers when faced with interpreting 1 Pet. 4:6, discussed later.

In his *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount* I. II. 30, written in the years 393–394, Augustine confronts Jesus' statement in Matt. 5:26 that a person who does not come to terms quickly with his accuser will be thrown into prison until he pays the last penny. Augustine takes this as a certain metaphor for the final judgment, but he is troubled by the phrasing "until he pays." Might the sinner get out of hell? Here in 393 the not-yet bishop Augustine

expresses some ambiguity: His preference is to believe that the man is punished eternally. He arrives at this conclusion by interpreting the passage in line with Ps. 110:1, "Sit at my right hand, until I have put all enemies under your feet." Of course, says Augustine, the "until" in this sentence does not imply that Christ gives up his seat after the enemies are vanquished; so likewise the man in the prison is punished eternally. But Augustine shows the tentative nature of his interpretation when he says, "I would not assert this with such assurance as to seem to have precluded a more diligent treatment of the punishment of sins, in order to determine the sense in which the Scriptures call it an eternal punishment. At any rate, it is better to escape it than to learn its nature."<sup>7</sup> Augustine holds out the possibility here for a change of fate after death, an escape from punishment.

In the *Confessions* of 397, one finds the well-known prayer for his mother where Augustine fears the exacting justice of God even upon this baptized woman, but he is confident that "you have already done what I am asking of you," namely, to grant her a share of the eternal kingdom (*Confessions* 9.36). Here, and again consistently throughout his career, baptism is no automatic guarantee of eternal salvation (see his *De Fide et Operibus*, written in 413), but prayers for the baptized dead can be employed to some effect. Prayers for the dead were an integral part of the Christianity of Augustine's milieu, and part of his theological project over the course of his career will be to define precisely who among the dead might be helped by such prayer, and what benefits the dead might obtain.

Soon afterward, in 399, Augustine tackles the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. In the *Quaestiones Evangeliorum* II, 38, the bishop of Hippo is unequivocal that there is no hope for the rich man, and that no one, not even one as righteous as Lazarus, can intercede for him. His fate is completely sealed. A sermon from the same year, Sermon 113B, draws out the pastoral implications of this story, "There is no room, you see, for putting things right when life is over." His interpretation is precisely the opposite of that of Gregory of Nyssa and Macrina, discussed in chapter 6, "Gregory of Nyssa." Augustine has not yet fully articulated all the implications of this basic principle; such articulation only happens after his thinking on the subject is stimulated by the Pelagian controversy and then by various questions, first from friends, and later from enemies.

It is well known that Augustine, as he became aware of the views of Pelagius in the years 411–412, unequivocally declared that unbaptized infants who died were subject to condemnation as inheritors of original sin. Their punishment after death might be light, but it was still punishment all the same (*De Pecc. Mer.* 1.21). Augustine rejected the Pelagian view that unbaptized infants might be excluded from the Kingdom of God, but nonetheless might still receive some type of salvation and eternal life (*De Pecc. Mer.* 1.60). Many aspects of the Pelagian controversy played a decisive role in Augustine's re-

jection of posthumous salvation. For instance, Pelagius and his followers had a firm belief in human potential and human freedom to obey or reject God's demands and the teachings of Christ. Augustine feared that their interpretation of the Christian message might obviate the absolute necessity of Christ's salvific death in the economy of salvation. Faith in that saving death and resurrection, and baptism by water or blood as the outward sign of that faith, became the minimum requirements of salvation in Augustine's view, and of course these activities could only take place in this life.

Augustine had long believed that baptism effects a real change in the person, as seen already in two places in the *Confessions*. In one case the baptism of his unconscious friend manages to change the friend's attitude toward God after he awakes (*Conf.* 4.8). In the other, Augustine thinks that he might have avoided many of the sins of his youth if his corrupt will had received the medicine of baptism early on (1.18). Without that medicine, the human being is justly condemned by God as a sinner, and it appears that nothing can be done after death for the unbaptized person (5.16). The Pelagian view, as Augustine comes to understand it, undermines this economy of salvation and the necessity of baptism.<sup>8</sup>

As the Pelagian controversy progressed, Augustine received a number of communications from both friends and enemies that led him to think ever more deeply about posthumous salvation. Might God ultimately provide a universal salvation? Had God bestowed posthumous salvation on sinners when Christ descended to hell, and was it still possible for more recent arrivals in hell to repent? Could living Christians now pray and intercede on behalf of the unbaptized dead, as some were claiming the holy martyr Perpetua had done? Augustine comes to answer all these questions in the negative, but not without struggle.

### Augustine's Rejection of Universal Salvation

In the years 414–415, in the midst of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine received two communications from friends that caused him to think afresh about posthumous salvation and its social and ecclesiastical implications. First, he learned about the central tenets of Origenism from Orosius, a young Spanish priest who would become the trusted liaison between Augustine and Jerome.<sup>9</sup> Among these tenets as reported by Orosius was the notion propounded by two Spanish Origenists named Avitus that “all the souls of sinners will return to the unity of the body of Christ after the purification of their conscience.” Orosius continues, “They also tried to maintain the same thing about the devil, but they were unsuccessful” (Orosius, *Commonitorium* 3). This statement indicates that the preaching of Origen's ideas had varying success in Spain: According to Orosius, people were more willing to conceive of the

universal posthumous salvation of their fellow human beings in contrast to the salvation of the devil. Augustine here rejects the position of the two Aviti as one based solely on mercy. He replies to Orosius by invoking Matt. 25:46, "And so [the wicked] will go into eternal burning, and the just into eternal life" (*Ad Orosium* 5, 7). In addition to this scriptural warrant, Augustine sees another danger in allowing for universal posthumous salvation, "If mercy leads us to believe that the punishment of the wicked will come to an end, what are we to believe concerning the reward of the just, when in each case eternity is mentioned in the same passage. . . ? Are we to say that even the just will fall back from that holiness and eternal life into the uncleanness of sin and death?" The mere mention of such a possibility is anathema to Augustine, since for him any beatitude that is not eternal is no beatitude at all. Augustine wanted none of the precosmic fall of souls, the reincarnation of souls, endless cycles of the universe, and endless chances at salvation that had come to be associated with Origen by the early fifth century.

### Interpreting Jesus' Descent to Hell

Soon after making his views clear on the universalism associated with Origen, Augustine received a letter from another friend, in this case an inquisitive friend of long standing, Bishop Evodius of Uzalis.<sup>10</sup> Evodius's question about the interpretation of two passages in 1 Peter disturbed Augustine greatly (*vehementissime commovere*; *Ep.* 164.1.1). The first issue revolved around 1 Pet. 3:19–20, discussed extensively in chapters 2 and 5, which states, "[Christ] made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water." Augustine, like almost everyone else, was puzzled by this passage.<sup>11</sup> He accepts as firm church doctrine the idea of Christ's descent *ad inferos* (Acts 2:24–31 proves that), but he is uncertain about what happened there. Why would Christ only make a proclamation to the unbelievers of Noah's day? What about all the other dead? Augustine is willing to admit that some of the dead in hell were set free during that past event, but he says "it would be rash (*temerarium*) to define exactly who they are" (*Ep.* 164.2.4). In one very telling statement to Evodius, Augustine reveals his true desire: "If holy scripture had said that Christ after death came into the bosom of Abraham, without naming hell and its sorrows, I wonder if anyone would dare to affirm that he descended into hell?" (*Ep.* 164.3.7). For Augustine, it would be fine to speak of a liberation from the bosom of Abraham, because that is where the righteous dead like Lazarus go, but hell is another matter. Unfortunately, scripture does not always say what Augustine would like. He admits that Christ at his descent rescued some in hell from their sorrows, those deemed worthy by

his mysterious justice (cf. the same idea in the roughly contemporary *De Gen. ad Litt.* 12.33.63), but next he must grapple with whether such a posthumous salvation could be possible now.

On this issue, Evodius presents Augustine with an even more difficult passage, 1 Pet. 4:6, which reads, “For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed to the dead.” Augustine rejects the interpretation that Christ preached in hell, and the reasons he gives are very much concerned with the role of the church now, in this life. First of all, if Christ preached in hell to save those who lived before the incarnation, what about all those who have died and are dying still since Christ’s resurrection who have not heard the gospel? Since the latter are not excused for lack of hearing the gospel, neither were the former (*Ep.* 164.4.12). Second, some say that the remembrance of Christ’s preaching remains in hell, so that people who go there now might hear it and repent. To this Augustine objects: “Then the gospel ought not to be preached here, since all will certainly die, and they ought to reach hell without the guilt of despising the gospel, so that they may have the advantage of believing there!” He says this is an absurd but logical conclusion, if one allows for posthumous salvation (*Ep.* 164.4.13).

After this very forthright wrangling, Augustine resorts to the possibility that the 1 Peter passages do not refer to hell or Christ’s descent at all (*Ep.* 164.5.15). Maybe the “spirits shut up in prison” are people living now, and the “dead” are unbelievers, as in Christ’s saying, “let the dead bury their own dead” (Matt. 8:22). These interpretations would solve Augustine’s problems, and he ends the letter by inviting others to propose another solution, but only to supplement his, “for my opinion cannot be accused of any fallacy.” The tone of this epistle to Evodius is one of friendly inquiry, and a number of interpretive possibilities are allowed. On one point, however, Augustine stands firm: posthumous salvation from hell cannot be possible now. It may be that some in the past were “saved” posthumously at Christ’s descent, although Augustine would prefer not to have to hold such a view, but hell was not emptied then, and no salvific memory of Christ’s preaching remains there. The roughly equal social relationship between the two correspondents allows Augustine to leave key points unresolved, and Augustine is confident that with Evodius he is dealing with a somewhat mature mind, one that can tolerate ambiguity without lapsing into heresy. Indeed, Augustine worries aloud to Evodius that his letters on various topics might fall into the hands of those with “less keen and trained minds” (*Ep.* 162.1). This fear is realized just a few years later, when Augustine must again consider posthumous salvation in light of Perpetua’s prayer for Dinocrates. This time, the social and ecclesiastical relationships are completely different, and the challenge to Augustine’s authority is much more acute.

Before turning to that episode, we should trace the subsequent history of Augustine’s musings about Christ’s descent. In *Ep.* 187, written in the year

417, Augustine addresses the question of whether the bosom of Abraham where Lazarus was could be located in hell where the rich man was (Luke 16:19–31). In *De Gen. ad Litt.* 12.33.63, Augustine had said no, they were not in the same place, and he had restated this opinion in *Ep.* 164 to Evodius, but now he changes his mind, and this has an implication for his interpretation of the descent story. By positing the presence of righteous persons (Abraham and Lazarus) in hell, Augustine can infer that the dead *in hell* were already differentiated by virtue before Christ's descent. Thus, Christ descended to rescue "those who were to be rescued" (*Ep.* 187.6); Christ only went to the "souls at rest," like Lazarus and Abraham, and not to the wicked. Chapter 34 of this letter makes clear that, according to Augustine, circumcision was the equivalent of baptism in the old dispensation before the coming of Christ, and the ancient worthies of the Old Testament truly believed in Christ during their lifetimes and are saved for that reason. These two themes will become important in Augustine's dispute with Vincentius Victor just a few years later.

In the *City of God* 17.11, Augustine repeats his conviction about the descent: "Christ descended in order to undo the bonds of hell from some of the dead." The immediate context is a discussion of the two cities and how God justly created some human beings for eternal damnation in order to highlight the unmerited grace offered to the saved. Finally, in the last work of his life, the treatise *De Haeresibus*, unfinished at the time of his death, Augustine returns to the Descensus issue with a much clearer statement, without the hesitancy and equivocation of *Ep.* 164. In this last work he takes his cues from the list of heresies compiled by Philaster of Brescia, discussed in chapter 5. Augustine writes, "Another heresy believes that upon Christ's descent into hell the unbelievers believed and all were liberated from hell. . . . These heresies I decided to transfer from Philaster's work to my own. Indeed, he also mentions others, but in my opinion it does not seem right to consider them heresies" (*De Haer.* 79–80).<sup>12</sup> Augustine's position is now clear and agrees with Philaster, in spite of his earlier hesitations about Philaster's abilities as a scholar (*Ep.* 222.2). No one at the descent repented or changed his or her orientation toward God. The actions in this life are the decisive ones, and this is equally true in both dispensations, both before Christ's advent and afterward.

### The Debate with Vincentius Victor over Perpetua and Dinocrates

In 419, a young convert to Catholicism from the Rogatist sect of the Donatists came across Augustine's Letter 190 to Optatus, bishop of Mauretania Tingitane.<sup>13</sup> The young man's name was Vincentius Victor, and he read a copy of the letter that belonged to the presbyter Peter in Mauretania Caesariensis (*Retract.* II.56). He found a number of objectionable things in Augustine's

work, chief among them the fact that Augustine would not give a firm opinion on the origin of the soul. Augustine had long refused to take a position on this subject, since either of the two main options led to grave logical problems in his fight with the Pelagians.<sup>14</sup> Traducianism, the idea that each new soul derives from its parents all the way back to Adam, smacks of a corporeal soul, while Creationism, the idea that God creates each new soul out of nothing, raises the problem of God's justice in condemning a newly created soul that has never sinned. As is well known, Augustine never came down on one side or the other throughout his life. Augustine was content only to affirm a few key things: God creates the soul out of nothing, not out of God's own essence, and God indeed justly condemns each soul because of Adam's sin. And, contra Origen, the soul does not enter the body because of some sin it committed before becoming incarnate (*Ep.* 190.1). To say more than that for Augustine goes beyond the clear testimony of the scriptures and gets one into deep trouble.

Reading these musings of Augustine on the origin of the soul, Vincentius Victor composed a treatise for the presbyter Peter in which he upbraided the famous bishop of Hippo for remaining noncommittal on so important an issue. Victor did begin his work with a caveat, allowing that he would be open to correction (*De natura et origine animae* II.24), but he went on to make pronouncements on the origin of the soul and on our topic, posthumous salvation. Victor did not simply write for Peter, but he also spoke publicly against Augustine (IV.4), and Peter was evidently "overjoyed" with Victor's work (II.1). Albert de Veer argues that Peter's joy was based on Victor's solution concerning the fate of unbaptized infants. I am inclined to agree and to see this as evidence of the resistance Augustine met as he pursued his harsh anti-Pelagian agenda.<sup>15</sup> Augustine found out about all of this when the monk Renatus forwarded him a copy of Victor's books, and Augustine sat down to reply to Renatus, Peter, and Victor in order "to check the dire contagion before it quietly spreads through the heedless masses" (III.2). No doubt he wanted to prevent a replay of the events attending the Pelagian controversy. The result is the text known as *De natura et origine animae* (DNOA), "On the Nature and Origin of the Soul," written in 419 or 420 and actually comprised of four letters: one to Renatus, one to Peter, and two to Victor.<sup>16</sup> The tone in each letter is quite different: for Renatus there is much praise for alerting Augustine about the situation, for Peter there is stern warning against following the layman Victor in his erroneous opinions, and in the letters to Victor himself, Augustine swings back and forth between sarcasm and ridicule on one hand, and on the other, genuine pastoral concern that the young newly converted Catholic layman correct his errors.

Victor's remarks on posthumous salvation can be distilled to three basic points. (1) Infants who die before they are baptized may yet attain forgiveness of their original sin—notice that Victor is no Pelagian; he believes in original

sin. (2) The Christian Eucharist ought to be offered on behalf of all those who have left the body without having been baptized. (3) Some of those people who depart this life without baptism do not in the meantime go into the kingdom of heaven, but rather into “paradise,” yet afterward in the resurrection of the dead they also may attain the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven.

Important for our purposes are the authorities Victor invokes for these opinions. The main one is a dead Rogatist bishop named Vincentius, whose name Victor had prefixed to his own. This Vincentius appeared to Victor in a vision and helped him compose the books that Augustine attacks (*DNOA* III.2). Augustine claims that the devil has tricked Victor in this way, and he tells him that as a new convert to Catholicism, he should no longer listen to dead Rogatist bishops. In addition, Victor invokes the example of the holy martyr Perpetua, whose story was well known in Africa as it was repeated annually on her feast day (Augustine, *Sermons* 240–242). As we saw in chapter 4, Perpetua, right before her martyrdom in 202 or 203 C.E., prayed for her little brother Dinocrates, who had died several years earlier of a tumor at age seven. She had seen him happy in the afterlife as a result of her prayer. Victor assumes, certainly correctly, that Dinocrates was unbaptized, and therefore he claims that Christian prayers for the unbaptized dead can be efficacious. Victor also invokes the example of the repentant thief on the cross in Luke 23:43: He was not baptized, yet he was able to be with Christ in “paradise” after death. Finally, Victor claims that Judah the Maccabee’s prayer for the posthumous forgiveness of his sinful dead soldiers (2 Macc. 12:39–45) is another authority bolstering his views (see the discussion of this passage in chapter 1, “Rescue for the Dead in a ‘Salvation’ Context”).

Augustine can easily dismiss the authority of a dead Rogatist bishop, but Victor’s other three pillars require more careful refutation. Augustine deals with Dinocrates and the repentant thief in a similar manner: He surmises that they *had* been baptized, the thief perhaps by the water that flowed from Jesus’ side. In earlier texts when discussing this thief, Augustine had always considered him saved even though he was unbaptized (see 83 *Different Questions* 62 and *De Bap.* 4.22, 29). Indeed, he offers that interpretation again in our text, but now introduces and argues for the possibility that the thief had been baptized. Like that of many of the apostles, the thief’s baptism went unrecorded. Similarly, Augustine asserts that Dinocrates might have been baptized as an infant and then later renounced his baptism before his death at age seven. Only this scenario can account for his torment in the afterlife and the efficacy of his sister’s prayer (*DNOA* I.10; III.12). The mere possibility of Dinocrates’ baptism is enough to remove this episode from Victor’s arsenal, because Victor cannot know for certain that Dinocrates was unbaptized. Finally, in the case of the Maccabean soldiers, Augustine points out to Victor that they had been circumcised, the old dispensation’s equivalent of baptism (*DNOA* III.12). Therefore, prayers for their posthumous forgiveness and sal-

vation might be effective, just as prayers for the baptized Christian dead might have some effect. Thus, Augustine reiterates his point made during the Pelagian controversy that no one has achieved salvation outside the proper confines of the rituals of the established community. Circumcision in the old dispensation, and now baptism by water or martyrdom, are absolute minimal requirements for any possibility of posthumous bliss, and nothing can be done for the dead person lacking them. John 3:5 is the principal authority in scripture used by Augustine to make his case, "Unless one is born of water and the spirit, one cannot enter the Kingdom of God."

Augustine's interpretations of the Maccabean soldiers and the Dinocrates episode mark an important moment in the development of what will become purgatory.<sup>17</sup> By suggesting that Dinocrates was baptized, Augustine takes that little boy out of the category of those saved posthumously and places him instead in a category of deceased sinful Christians receiving aid from living Christians who pray for them. By insisting that the Maccabean soldiers were eligible for posthumous forgiveness only by virtue of their circumcision, Augustine reinforces a restricted and exclusive definition of who can be helped in the afterlife. In both cases the decisive factor is an event that occurred within this life (baptism or circumcision). Interestingly, nowhere in his surviving works does Augustine comment on Thecla's prayer for Falconilla, nor does he report Vincentius Victor's having done so. Augustine does know of the Thecla story (*Contra Faust.* 30.4; *Sancta virg.* 1.44), but it is easy to see why he might avoid the Falconilla episode. There was no possibility that she had been baptized, and it is clear that she first expresses a desire for salvation only from beyond the grave.

In this context of reinterpreting Dinocrates and the Maccabees, Augustine makes some theoretical points about the kinds of authority appropriate to settle competing claims. Augustine chastises Victor for trying to prove a point from the Perpetua text, because it lies outside the canon of scripture (*DNOA* III.12). This does not prevent Augustine, however, from later invoking another of Perpetua's visions to prove that the soul is not corporeal (*DNOA* IV.26). Augustine's consternation with Victor's impudence is driven home most forcefully in his letter to the presbyter Peter (*DNOA* II), rejecting Victor's proposal that priests should say masses for the unbaptized dead. Augustine says that if Peter fails in his duties to educate Victor, he is worse than Victor, because Peter holds a position within the hierarchy of the church (II.22). Victor has usurped too much authority for himself when he states, "I most certainly decide that constant oblations and incessant sacrifices must be offered up [for the unbaptized dead] by holy priests" (II.15). Augustine cannot believe that a layman would dare to speak in this way, and it is up to Peter to admonish him. Of course, Augustine had no direct ecclesiastical jurisdiction over either Peter or Victor, but in an effort to prevent another Pelagian-type controversy, Augustine does not hesitate to act as if they were under his

jurisdiction. Gone is the tone of friendly inquiry we saw in *Ep.* 164 to Evodius; in its place is the bishop firmly directing a distant flock.

Augustine reports in his *Retractions* that “I accepted the account of his conduct which Victor wrote back to me” (*Retract.* II.56). Unfortunately, this account is not extant, but we can infer that the letters to Peter and Victor had their intended effect. Augustine, too, emerged changed from this encounter. From this point on he would write with greater clarity and precision, rejecting posthumous salvation in the *Enchiridion* and Book 21 of the *City of God*.

## The Mature Augustine

The *Enchiridion* is a handbook of theology produced for a man named Lawrence around 421. Writing it gave Augustine an opportunity to encapsulate his teachings in a small volume for ready reference, and it had great influence in the high middle ages because it was so concise and convenient.<sup>18</sup> One can see the mature Augustine here covering carefully the topic of posthumous salvation in light of the experiences he has had over the previous decade:

Now in the time intervening between a man's death and the final resurrection, the soul is held in a hidden retreat, enjoying rest or suffering hardship in accordance with what it merited during its life in the body. There is no gainsaying that the souls of the dead find solace from the piety of their friends who are alive, when the sacrifice of the Mediator is offered for the dead or alms are given in the Church. But these means are of profit for those who, when they lived, earned merit whereby such things could be of profit to them. . . . It is here, then, that is won all merit or demerit whereby a man's state after this life can either be improved or worsened. But let no one hope to obtain, when he is dead, merit with God which he earlier neglected to acquire. (*Ench.* 29)<sup>19</sup>

The scriptural warrant invoked by Augustine is 2 Cor. 5:10, “For all of us must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.” He then proceeds to differentiate three types of baptized dead: those who were very good after baptism (they have no need of prayers and sacrifices from the living), those who were very bad (no amount of prayers and sacrifices can help them), and those in the middle, who may benefit from prayers and sacrifices, “their benefit consists either in bringing a full remission of sin or at least in making the condemnation more tolerable.” Earlier in the same treatise Augustine had raised the possibility of a purgatorial cleansing after death for baptized Christians with light sins: “it may be inquired into and either ascertained or left doubtful whether some believers may be saved by a sort of purging fire, more slowly or more swiftly in proportion as they have loved with more or less de-

votion the goods that perish" (*Ench.* 18). Thus, in this small handbook the broad outlines of the doctrine of purgatory are in place, although Augustine is much more tentative and circumspect about it than later generations will be. The desire of many Christians to give comfort to, aid, and even rescue the dead has been channeled by Augustine into the more narrow confines of posthumous aid for baptized Christians with light sins only. There can be no doubt for Augustine about the eternity of punishment for the wicked and the unbaptized: "The perpetual death of the damned, that is, their alienation from the life of God, will abide without end, and it will be the common punishment of them all, whatever conjectures rising from human emotions men may make about the variety of punishments and the relief or intermission of their woes" (*Ench.* 29).

Also in 421 Augustine wrote *On the Care to be Taken for the Dead* (*OCTD*) in response to a query from Paulinus, bishop of Nola, about whether it was beneficial for the dead to be buried near a martyr's shrine. Flora, a wealthy widow of Nola, had her son Cynegius buried near the tomb of St. Felix the Confessor. Paulinus had assured her that this would be of some benefit to her dead son, but then he wrote to Augustine to get a clearer opinion on the matter. Augustine takes this opportunity to reiterate his principle that it is the actions of a person in life that matter to God; the disposal of the body and other factors that occur after death have no bearing (*OCTD* 1). He explicitly rejects the ideas of Virgil and other ancient pagans that leaving a corpse unburied affects the status of the soul (*OCTD* 2), but nonetheless he commends a pious concern for the bodies of deceased Christians (*OCTD* 4). The important thing is the love and devotion shown by the living; Christian prayers and piety toward the dead *can* have a salutary effect on the deceased, but only if that person lived properly in life. Augustine had long opposed feasting and drinking at tombs; now with sober reflection he carefully attempts to limit Christian activity on behalf of the dead even further.<sup>20</sup> Not all the friends and family of the dead will be eligible to benefit from the piety of the living, and thus, the ancient solidarity between living and dead has been ruptured in Augustine's thought and practice. Vincentius Victor's view, had it prevailed, would have allowed such solidarity of piety to remain between living Christians and the unbaptized dead. Augustine wishes to replace the age-old communion between living and dead family members, a communion not based on an exclusive religious confession, with the communion of church members, living and dead.

In this same response to Paulinus, Augustine proceeds to discuss the status and validity of figures who appear from the dead in dreams or waking visions.<sup>21</sup> He does it in such a way as to diminish their potential authority, similar to the way he dismissed the authority of the dead Rogatist bishop who had appeared to Vincentius Victor. Since the images of both living and dead persons can appear equally in such visions, and since the living have

no knowledge of the event when they appear to others, Augustine reasons that neither do the dead (*OCTD* 11–13). If the dead themselves are unaware that they are appearing to the living, then what exactly does the visionary see? “Why do we not believe that these are the workings of angels through a dispensation of the providence of God, who puts to good use both good and evil according to the incomprehensible depth of his judgment?” (*OCTD* 13). The immediate context of this argument is to dissuade those who would give credence to visions of the dead asking for a certain type of burial (10). Augustine believes this has more to do with the desires of the dreamer than with what the dead person actually needs. Though he does not make the connection, he could also have used this type of argument against those who would give credence to the Falconilla story, or any other “evidence” from the beyond that someone has been saved posthumously. The dead have no direct contact with or knowledge of events on earth, except through what they learn from recent arrivals; only occasionally is there a true appearance of a dead person in the world of the living (*OCTD* 15, adducing Samuel in 1 Sam. 28 and Moses in Matt. 17:3). Augustine is striving mightily to overturn centuries of Mediterranean beliefs and practices in which the realms of the living and the dead were intimately related, replacing them with authorized prayers and masses for the baptized dead with light sins only.

Augustine synthesizes a lifetime of teachings about the afterlife in the *City of God*, book 21, written in the mid 420s. It recapitulates many of the points made in earlier works, bringing them together in a systematic fashion. He takes care to reject universal salvation (*City of God* 21.17), and to do so he must interpret Rom. 11:32 in such a way that it precludes this doctrine. Paul’s phrase, “that God may have mercy on all” means simply all the Gentiles and Jews whom God predestined for mercy (*City of God* 21. 21, 24).<sup>22</sup> Echoing the debate with Vincentius Victor, Augustine explicitly rejects the idea that the righteous might pray for the damned now or at the final judgment (21.24). Though Augustine makes no explicit mention of the *Apocalypse of Peter* or the eighth (Christian) *Sibylline Oracle*, he is here rejecting their view that intercession at the last judgment would be granted by God.<sup>23</sup> The directive to pray for one’s enemies (Matt. 5:44) applies only while the enemies are still alive, says Augustine. Once they are dead the church no longer prays for the impenitent (21.24). The everlasting fire is prepared for the wicked, the devil, and his angels (Matt. 25:41; *City of God* 21.23). On many issues Augustine allows for uncertainty or ambiguity, but not here. He is certain of what God will do with regard to salvation because God has revealed it in the scriptures, most prominently John 3:5 and 2 Cor. 5:10.

Persons like Vincentius Victor, the two universalists named Avitus from Spain, and others whom Augustine termed “the merciful,” wanted the church’s salvation extended to non-members after their deaths. This makes perfect sense in a historical context of the transition from a largely pagan culture to

a largely Christian one. Divided families, like Augustine's own, and religious ruptures between the generations were the norm. In advocating their merciful position, however, in Augustine's view these people diminished the role and authority of the church on earth. They represented a blurring of the distinction between pagan and Christian, both in heaven and on earth, and Augustine the bishop could not allow this. In addition, they violated the sense of scripture as Augustine understood it, in which a universal or even widely disseminated salvation played no role. Though medieval theologians may have softened some of Augustine's harshest predestinarian formulations, and in doing so they even had a spurious work, the *Hypomnesticon*, attributed to Augustine for that purpose,<sup>24</sup> the basic principle rejecting posthumous salvation held sway and became universally accepted in the West. That principle is the one with which this study began: If one does not join up with the community of the saved or at least the potentially saved in this life, joining it after death will be impossible.

One story from near the end of Augustine's life shows how successful he was in convincing members of the church that there could be no chance for posthumous salvation. In Sermons 323 and 324, preached during Easter week in 426, Augustine praises a woman who had prayed to St. Stephen that her dead baby be resuscitated for baptism. She knew that since her baby died unbaptized he was eternally doomed, and Augustine praises her selflessness in not wanting him back for a normal life span, but only for the sake of baptism. Her wish was granted, the baby revived, and then died again promptly after his baptism. Augustine had specifically rejected any place other than eternal hell for unbaptized babies (*DNOA* I.11; Sermon 294.3.4); medieval scholastic theories about limbo, as well as post-Vatican II optimism about the fate of unbaptized babies lay in the distant future.<sup>25</sup> For Augustine and for this woman with a dead child in her arms, it was now or never. As Gregory the Great repeated Augustine's formulations about the impossibility of posthumous salvation for the unbaptized (*Dial.* 4.46, 59), and as subsequent Western theologians took their cues from these two, death truly became a firm and universally recognized boundary of salvation in the West.

## 8

### GREGORY THE GREAT'S PRAYER FOR TRAJAN

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The reader should be cautioned that Augustine marks the close of the periods of study with which I am most familiar, namely, biblical studies and early Christianity. This book could have ended with chapter 7, but of course, there is much more to tell. In no way can this final chapter be an exhaustive survey of all the beliefs and practices concerning the salvation of the non-Christian dead in Eastern and Western Christendom. Tracing that story fully through the medieval, Reformation, and modern periods would require at least one, and perhaps several more volumes. In this chapter, I can only provide a glimpse of the subsequent trajectories, as well as suggestions for further research for those who are experts in the later periods.

The next Western figure with salience for this study is Pope Gregory the Great, often credited as the founder of the medieval papacy, who ruled the see of Peter at the end of the sixth century, 590–604. Much had happened in the Western world in the interval between Augustine and Gregory: the western half of the empire had been conquered by Germanic kings in the fifth century; the eastern emperor Justinian had attempted to extend his rule over the West in fact rather than in name only; the Lombards had invaded Italy from the north; and right before Gregory's accession to the papacy the city of Rome had endured a flood and severe outbreaks of plague.<sup>1</sup> Rome's population in 590 was dramatically less than what it had been in 400.<sup>2</sup> As many commentators have noted, the spirit of Gregory's age was quite different from that of Augustine: The sense of separation between this world and the unseen world of demons and spirits had largely vanished, as had Augustine's judicious evaluation of the miraculous.<sup>3</sup>

## Gregory's *Dialogues*

This new spirit is seen most clearly in Gregory's *Dialogues*, composed in 593–594, a work of enormous importance for the art and theology of the later middle ages. During the Reformation and again in the twentieth century, there has been some debate over the authenticity of this work, but this has mostly been due to various scholars' discomfort with the fact that Gregory, so learned and clear-headed in his other works, could put so much stock in the fantastic stories of the *Dialogues*.<sup>4</sup>

In the *Dialogues* there are a number of episodes in which dead people have their postmortem existence improved due to the efforts of the living. All of the stories, however, involve dead Christians who sinned in some way after baptism. In this sense, Gregory remains true to the formulations of Augustine, and in several places he repeats Augustine's view that prayers for the dead are only efficacious for those who merited such help during their lifetimes. It is worth quoting *Dial.* 4.46 at length:

How shall one pray for one's enemies when these can no longer repent of their evil ways and turn to works of righteousness? The saints in heaven, therefore, do not offer prayers for the damned in hell for the same reason that we do not pray for the Devil and his angels. Nor do saintly people on earth pray for deceased infidels and godless people. And why? Because they do not wish to waste their prayers in the sight of a just God by offering them for souls that are known to be condemned.<sup>5</sup>

Gregory expresses similar thoughts in his *Moralia in Job* 16.82: "For sin is brought even to hell which, before the end of the present life, is not reformed unto repentance by chastening. . . . Whoever does not fear God now as just can never find him merciful afterward." Book 26, chapter 50, of the same work speaks of unbelievers who rise again, but only for the purpose of eternal torment. They will not appear before the seat of judgment because they are condemned already by their unbelief.

Alongside these theoretical statements about the irrevocable nature of consignment to hell, a number of stories in Book Four of the *Dialogues* show the depth of Gregory's faith in posthumous salvation for Christian sinners. There is the story of the priest of Tauriana who was attended by a spirit disguised as a man in the hot springs there. The spirit said that during his lifetime he had once owned these baths, but because of his sins was sent back after death to work in them as a servant. He begged the priest to say masses for him, which the priest did, along with prayer and tearful supplications. When the priest returned to the baths, the spirit was no longer there, indicating the efficacy of the masses and prayers (*Dial.* 4.57).

The next story Gregory experienced himself, and it concerns Justus, a physician/monk who, on his deathbed, confessed that he had kept hidden three gold coins of his own, failing to turn them over to the community. Gregory, on hearing of this, wished “to free the dying man of his guilt and give the living a salutary lesson” (*Dial.* 4.57). Gregory forbade the other monks to have anything to do with him, and poor Justus died weeping in contrition with no one to comfort him. He was placed on a manure pile while the other monks threw the three coins onto his dead body. This had the effect of causing all the other monks to surrender to the community any tiny bit of personal property they had, and Gregory relates that his efforts eventually led to the posthumous salvation of Justus. Thirty days after his death, Gregory commanded that a daily mass be said for the release of Justus’ soul “from the fire,” clearly not the eternal hell, but some sort of purgatorial fire.<sup>6</sup> After thirty days of such masses, Justus appeared in a night vision to his brother Copiosus, announcing that his misery was ended and he had been “admitted to communion.” The *Dialogues* do not contain any tales of Gregory’s praying for the non-Christian dead, and he tells his interlocutor Peter, “remember, the benefits of the holy sacrifice are only for those who by their good lives have merited the grace of receiving help from the good deeds others perform in their behalf” (*Dial.* 4.59).

### The Gregory/Trajan Story in East and West

Given the awesome intercessory power displayed in Gregory’s *Dialogues*, perhaps it is not surprising that there is evidence, beginning about one hundred years after Gregory’s death, of a story where he *did* pray for a non-Christian: Gregory’s rescue of the Emperor Trajan, who had ruled Rome in the second century, 98–117 C.E. Someone during the seventh century evidently thought that Gregory’s fame needed enhancement in the direction of an ability to intercede even for the pagan dead, which is significant since the historical Gregory had declared such a feat to be impossible and against the teachings of the church. The storyteller(s) clearly wished to invoke the authority and power of Gregory for an opinion contrary to Gregory’s own.

The tale appears in both East and West, in both Greek and Latin. The earliest Latin witness is the *Life of Gregory*, written by an anonymous monk of Whitby in England and dated by Bertram Colgrave to the early eighth century (between 704–714).<sup>7</sup> In the East, a different version of the story appears in a text attributed to John Damascene (d. 749) titled Περὶ τῶν ἐν πίστει κεκοιμημένων, “Concerning those who have fallen asleep (died) in the faith.” This text has been introduced already in chapter 3 in connection with the Thecla traditions, since it also recounts her prayer for Falconilla. It is prob-

ably spurious, although F. Diekamp has argued that it is authentic.<sup>8</sup> If it is authentic, then the story of Gregory's prayer for Trajan is attested at opposite ends of the Roman world at about the same time. Even if somewhat later, however, the work still exerted a strong influence over the subsequent thought and practice of Eastern Christendom (and in the West in the twelfth century) because John of Damascus was thought to be its author.

The trajectories of interpretation of Gregory's prayer for Trajan differ in East and West. In addition, the various Latin versions change significantly over time, a development that has been traced by Gordon Whatley.<sup>9</sup> It will be useful here to provide translations of the two earliest witnesses for comparative purposes, beginning with the Latin by an anonymous monk of Whitby, chapter 29:

Some of our people also tell a story related by the Romans of how the soul of the Emperor Trajan was refreshed and even baptized by St. Gregory's tears, a story marvelous to tell and marvelous to hear. Let no one be surprised that we say baptized, for without baptism none will ever see God; and a third kind of baptism is by tears. One day as he was crossing the Forum, a magnificent piece of work for which Trajan is said to have been responsible, he found on examining it carefully that Trajan, though a pagan, had done a deed so charitable that it seemed more likely to have been the deed of a Christian than of a pagan. For it is related that, as he was leading his army in great haste against the enemy, he was moved to pity by the words of a widow, and the emperor of the whole world came to a halt. She said, "Lord Trajan, here are the men who killed my son and are unwilling to pay me recompense." He answered, "Tell me about it when I return and I will make recompense to you." But she replied, "Lord, if you never return, there will be no one to help me." Then, armed as he was, he made the defendants pay forthwith the compensation they owed her, in his presence. When Gregory discovered the story, he recognized that this was just what we read about in the bible, "Judge the fatherless and the widow. Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord" (Isa. 1:16-17). Since Gregory did not know what to do to comfort the soul of this man who brought the words of Christ to mind, he went to St. Peter's church and wept floods of tears, as was his custom, until he gained at last by divine revelation the assurance that his prayers were answered, seeing that he had never presumed to ask this of any other pagan.<sup>10</sup>

Compare the Greek text of (pseudo?) John Damascene, *Περὶ τῶν ἐν πίστει κεκοιμημένων* 9 and 16:

(9) Did not the first female martyr (Thecla) save Falconilla after death? But you will say that she was worthy to do so, since she was the first female martyr, and it was fitting that her prayer be heard. But I say to you, yes she was the first female martyr, but look at the sort of person for whom she made the request: a pagan idol worshipper, an altogether unholy servant of another lord!

(16) Gregory the Dialogist, the senior bishop of Rome, as everybody knows, was a man well known for his righteousness and knowledge. They even say that the divine angel assisted him when he was conducting the liturgy. One day this Gregory, while taking a walk among the stones, stood carefully still and uttered a mighty prayer directed toward the soul-loving Lord for the forgiveness of the sins of Trajan the king. Immediately after saying these things he heard a voice borne to him from God: "I have heard your prayer, and I grant forgiveness to Trajan. But you (singular) should not again put forward prayers addressed to me on behalf of pagans (ἄσεβῶν)." And that this story is true and blameless, the whole of East and West is witness. Look, this even surpasses what happened to Falconilla. For she was a party to no other evil (beyond idolatry), but Trajan brought about the deaths of many martyrs. You are marvelous, Lord, and marvelous are your works. We praise your incredible goodness of heart, because you always incline toward the love of human beings.<sup>11</sup>

Both the Latin and the Greek texts presuppose that the story has been around for some time, and neither questions the historical validity of the tale. Both are confident that Gregory prayed and Trajan was indeed saved. The context of each version is different, however: In the Latin, the aim is to show the wondrous powers of Pope Gregory, as the narrator says in chapter 28, "Who will not be amazed at the apostolic grace he possessed of binding and loosing not only the living but also the dying and those who by divine permission were consigned to the hosts of hell?" In the background here is Matt. 16:18: "the gates of Hades" will not prevail against Peter and the church. As Peter's successor, Gregory extends his power to bind and loose even to opening the gates of hell when he prays for Trajan. By contrast, in the Greek text, the goal is to defend belief in prayer for the dead generally, and this story, along with that of Falconilla, is invoked as the most extreme example of a merciful God willing to forgive even a notorious persecutor of the church at the behest of a saint. The praise heaped on Gregory in the Greek text serves this overall goal. The Pseudo-Damascene text is careful not to overgeneralize these examples, as it elsewhere cites Pseudo-Dionysius and John Chrysostom as authorities who limit the efficacy of prayer to the pious and baptized dead.<sup>12</sup> The main aim of the Pseudo-Damascene text is to justify prayer for those who have died in the faith, and the fact that the tradition contains stories of the salvation of two dead pagans only serves to highlight the occasionally far-reaching mercy of God.

In another sharp difference between the Latin and the Greek, one can see that the Latin version takes care to praise the virtuous Trajan, and it is also sensitive to the notion that without baptism, one cannot be saved. These details echo Augustine's views, by now absorbed throughout the West, that John 3:5 is to be understood in an exclusive sense and that only those who were baptized and subsequently virtuous in life can be helped after death. The Latin

adds a third category, “baptism of tears” (in this case someone else’s tears), to the well-attested “baptism of water” and “baptism of blood” to account for Trajan’s salvation. The Greek version has none of this; far from emphasizing Trajan’s virtue, the Greek version highlights the fact that he persecuted Christians, making him a much worse sinner than Falconilla had been. Neither is the Greek author concerned with Trajan’s lack of baptism. The Greek does have God admonish Gregory not to pray for another pagan; one might extrapolate from this that Trajan and Falconilla were isolated cases and the door is now closed. The Whitby Latin version does not contain this admonition, only a remark that Gregory had never before presumed to ask this for any other pagan (atque ut numquam de altero illud presumpsisset pagano).

In general terms, the Gregory/Trajan story differs from the others in this study in a number of ways. Unlike the prayers of Perpetua and Thecla, Gregory’s prayer does not involve the posthumous salvation of a friend or relative. In the eighth-century Christian West, when most of one’s friends and relatives would have been Christian, the posthumous fate of unbaptized persons in one’s inner circle was not as vital an issue as it had been in the second through the fifth centuries. Trajan was a figure from the distant past, so in that sense he was like the ancient worthies saved by Christ in his descent to hell, or by the apostles in their baptismal trip to Hades in the *Shepherd of Hermas*. In the Latin version, Trajan’s fulfillment of the virtues of an Old Testament king highlight this connection. Trajan was different from these older worthies, however, because he lived after and knew about Christ. The story in these two earliest versions raises, but does not resolve, the problem of the place in the economy of salvation for a righteous person who knew about Christ but was no Christian.

### Trajan, Falconilla, and Posthumous Salvation in West and East

The subsequent history of the stories about Trajan in the West and Falconilla in the East has been documented in two seminal articles, one by Gordon Whatley and one by M. Jugie.<sup>13</sup> Much of what follows is dependent on them. In the West, another biographer of Gregory repeats the story of Trajan’s salvation about 150 years later and adds his own particular twists to it. This biographer is John the Deacon, who wrote his *Vita Sancti Gregorii* at the behest of Pope John VIII in the late ninth century.<sup>14</sup> John the Deacon says that the Gregory/Trajan story is known among the Saxons (a clear indication that John knew the Whitby *Life*), but that the Romans are skeptical about it, and he cites Gregory’s own writings in which prayer for the non-Christian dead is specifically forbidden. Having said this, however, he goes on to repeat the story, but with significant changes. He relates that Gregory did not actually pray

for Trajan, he only wept, and the tears merely ameliorated Trajan's suffering in hell; they did not baptize or ultimately save him (PL 75.105–06). In addition, John the Deacon changes the Whitby *Life's* remark, “[Gregory] had never presumed to ask this of any other pagan,” to a directive, strikingly similar to the Greek, that he should not pray for a pagan of the other world (tantum pro nullo ulterius pagano preces effunderet). In all these ways, John the Deacon brings the story into line with his understanding of Roman Catholic orthodoxy, in a process similar to the way in which Augustine reinterprets Perpetua's prayer for Dinocrates. In both cases, the idea that a pagan has been saved posthumously, strongly indicated in the original, is interpreted out of the story.

A short time later, a late ninth- or early tenth-century writer who interpolates an earlier *Life of Gregory* by Paul the Deacon repeats the episode, but he tentatively asserts that Trajan was indeed saved, and he adds that for presuming to intercede for a pagan, Gregory deserved to be chastised (promuerit castigari)!<sup>15</sup> In *The Golden Legend*, a thirteenth-century work attributed to Jacobus de Voraigne, an angel is said to have given Gregory the option of two days of torment in purgatory or physical sickness throughout the rest of his life. He chooses the sickness, and this is used to explain the complaints of gout and fevers in his genuine letters.<sup>16</sup> The versions of the Gregory/Trajan episode supplied by John the Deacon and the interpolated Paul the Deacon became the standard ones during the rest of the middle ages; the only known copy of the Whitby *Life* languished at the monastic library of St. Gall in Switzerland until 1866.<sup>17</sup>

Whatley details how the interpretation of this tale becomes so important in the struggles over humanism, scholasticism, and ecclesiastical power right up to the Reformation. For instance, Abelard and other humanists of the twelfth century use it to extol Trajan's virtue and justice, such that “Gregory's tearful intercession on Trajan's behalf [is] an expression of a great Christian Father's compassion and admiration for what was best and noblest in his country's pagan past.”<sup>18</sup> The thirteenth-century scholastics mine the story for their theological discussions about the possibility of salvation for various categories of pagans. They had access to a Latin translation of the Greek version attributed to John Damascene, and they all assume Trajan had been saved, but in scholastic logic the only way this could have been accomplished was if Trajan's body had been restored to life so that he might repent and become an actual living Christian. William of Auvergne, William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure all put forward this view.<sup>19</sup> One is immediately reminded of Augustine's Sermon 324, discussed at the end of the previous chapter, where the dead baby is brought back to life just so he could be baptized. In his final word on the subject, Thomas Aquinas casts doubt on the resuscitation theory with respect to Trajan and reverts to John the Deacon's view that Trajan's pains in hell were only less-

ened for a time. God's justice would eventually catch up with him and he would be punished even more severely in hell after the final judgment.<sup>20</sup> Whatley attributes this change to the notion that "Aquinas himself perhaps may have had an inkling of the way the idea of Trajan's salvation might be turned against the traditional religious establishment,"<sup>21</sup> and he goes on to show how several fourteenth-century figures indeed use the story to undermine the authority of the church. Dante uses it to express hope that just pagans who lived even after Christ might still be saved. John Wyclif (1330–1384) asserts that Trajan had been predestined for heaven all along, was a member of the hidden, invisible Church, and had been sent to purgatory, not hell, upon his death. These interpretations of the story had the effect of casting doubt on the necessity of baptism and Eucharist for salvation.<sup>22</sup>

Slightly before and then alongside these fourteenth-century challenges to church authority, a number of female theologians and mystics were also questioning the Western church's rejection of posthumous salvation for the damned. They based their views not on Pope Gregory's supposed action in the past, but rather on their own religious experience of God's mercy and their own mystical sufferings for others. Barbara Newman analyzes numerous examples: Hadewijch of Brabant (fl. ca. 1220–1240) in her fifth vision may have claimed that she actually saved four souls from hell; Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) wishes she herself might be condemned to hell if it meant all the sinners there might be saved (cf. Rom. 9:3); Marguerite Porete (d. 1310) and Julian of Norwich (1343–ca.1416) each develop a theology that leads at times to an implicit universal salvation.<sup>23</sup> In all of these cases there is an expression of the desire, hope, and occasionally the conviction that hell is not eternal. Each of these women also knows that her views are dangerous and that she is courting heresy.

Two stories from the early period of the Christianization of Europe serve to demonstrate how the dogmatic formulations of Augustine and Gregory the Great helped to shape and mold the subsequent religious imagination of the West. The first story comes from the conquest of Friesland by Charles the Hammer in 692 C.E. As told by J. L. Motley in his magisterial *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, the defeated Frisian chief Radbod was about to accept baptism into Christianity, when a thought struck him: "'Where are my dead forefathers at present?' he said, turning suddenly upon Bishop Wolfran. 'In Hell, with all other unbelievers,' was the imprudent answer. 'Mighty well,' replied Radbod, removing his leg [from the baptismal font], 'then will I rather feast with my ancestors in the halls of Woden, than dwell with your little starvling band of Christians in Heaven.'"<sup>24</sup>

No amount of pleading could sway the chief, and he remained a pagan until his death. This episode shows how the concern about the dead can arise at any time there is conversion to a religion where salvation depends on a confessional stance taken in this life. In the West after Augustine, the earlier

flexibility that might have been able to assuage Radbod's concern had been lost. Radbod prefers a national religious solidarity with the dead to one based solely on a confession of faith.

The second story concerns St. Patrick (ca. 373–463) and comes from the ninth- to tenth-century *Tripartite Life of Patrick*, a series of three sermons on the saint's life written in Gaelic. The text reflects the Western notions of posthumous salvation in two ways. First, Patrick demands that God show mercy on certain sinners that Patrick will choose at the final judgment. While the text is ambiguous, the author probably intends baptized Christians here. Second, Patrick indeed saves a dead pagan, but only by resurrecting him and baptizing him:

Once, as Patrick was travelling in the plains of the son of Erc, namely in Dichuil and Erchuil, he beheld therein a huge grave. . . . Patrick then brought to life the dead man who was biding in the grave, and asked tidings of him, namely, when and how [he got there], and of what race and of what name he was. He answered Patrick saying, "I am Cass, son of Glass; and I was the swineherd of Lugar, king of Irauta; and Macc Con's soldiery slew me in the reign of Coirpre Niafer. A hundred years have I been here today." Patrick baptized him, and he went again to his grave.<sup>25</sup>

This motif of raising a corpse and baptizing it becomes, in the Western popular imagination, the way to save a dead pagan. This is reflected later in the scholastics' insistence that Trajan had first been raised and then baptized. Bodily existence on this earth is the only sphere in which salvation can be procured.

In the East, the history of interpretation of the Trajan and Falconilla episodes, and of posthumous salvation for the damned generally, unfolds in a very different manner. There is no equivalent to Augustine in the East, and no centralized teaching authority to try to impose uniform practice and belief. A number of key Eastern figures explicitly reject posthumous salvation, most notably John Chrysostom in connection with Christ's descent to hell (see chapter 5, "Varying Opinions"), and the fifth- or sixth-century pseudo-Dionysius, in *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 7.1, which reads: "[The hierarch] does not offer this prayer for those who have died in a state of unholiness. To do so would be to depart from his function as interpreter. . . . Besides, his unrighteous prayer would be rejected and God would answer in the just words of scripture; 'You ask and you do not receive because you ask wrongly'" (James 4:3).<sup>26</sup> This pseudo-Dionysius text later held great authority since it was thought to be from a first-century Christian, Dionysius the Aeropagite from Acts 17:34.

There were and are other voices in Eastern theology, however. As discussed in chapter 6, the universal salvation advocated by Gregory of Nyssa has not

usually resulted in a diminution of the reverence in which he is held in Greek-speaking Christianity. The fifth-century author of *The Life and Miracles of St. Thecla* combined Nicene and Chalcedonian orthodoxy with a strong view of salvation for the pagan Falconilla (see chapter 3, “Later Interpretations”). John Damascene, supposed author of *Concerning Those Who Have Fallen Asleep in the Faith*, can be invoked for several opinions, since that text cites Dionysius’s cautions in one chapter, but then proceeds to evaluate positively the actions of Thecla and Gregory. Thus, authoritative views in the East are much more varied than they are in the West after Augustine. After Augustine, and until very recently, the Western tradition has been more certain that it knows what God will do at the final judgment; Eastern theologians tend to be more circumspect, avoiding such pronouncements. This difference in sensibility could be related to the different political and social structures in East and West. As Peter Brown points out, the eastern Roman Empire centered at Constantinople retained the “triumphal narrative” of Christianity’s success in the world, and thus paganism was a more remote threat, a “bankrupt dispensation that lay outside the church.” By contrast, in the Latin west “paganism lay close to the heart of all baptized Christians, always ready to re-emerge in the form of ‘pagan survivals.’ The master narrative of Christianization as it was explicitly propounded in many circles of the Latin west was not one of definitive triumph. It was one in which an untranscended past perpetually shadowed the advancing footsteps of the Christian present.”<sup>27</sup> Applied to this study, this insight means that a stronger wall between paganism and Christianity needed to be erected in the ideology of the West, and Augustine’s clear rejections of posthumous salvation were well suited to this purpose.

In the Byzantine world, the practice of attempting to rescue grievous sinners from hell did not end with the efforts of Thecla and Gregory. M. Jugie recounts the story of the ninth-century empress Theodora who had all the clergy, monks, and faithful pray for her dead husband, Emperor Theophilus, because he had died an unrepentant adversary of the icons. They all learn from a revelation that God has pardoned him.<sup>28</sup> True, the Emperor Theophilus was at least a baptized Christian, but from the point of view of the victors in the iconoclast controversy, an enemy of the icons is perhaps even worse than a pagan. By means of this very public prayer and revelation, the dead emperor is co-opted by the living for a position contrary to his own. Later theologians, like Theophylact of Bulgaria in the eleventh century, make explicit that prayers for the dead are effective “even for those who die with grave sins (ἀμαρτίαις βαρείαις).”<sup>29</sup>

In the twelfth century, the Metropolitan Nicholas of Athens introduces a new death ritual to accompany extreme unction. As Jugie describes it, “it was performed by seven priests, who burned in rotation a papyrus soaked in oil over the tomb of the dead person, while reciting prayers demanding deliverance from hell and recounting the legends of Falconilla, Trajan, and

Theophilus.”<sup>30</sup> This ritual is found in several Greek liturgical manuscripts of the fifteenth century and in numerous printed versions from the sixteenth, after which it fell out favor.<sup>31</sup> As a final example, we may cite Nicephorus Callistus of Xanthopolous, who in the fourteenth century introduces the legends of Falconilla and Trajan into the liturgy for Sexagesima. They are invoked as certain proof of the efficacy of prayers for the dead—all kinds of dead.<sup>32</sup>

### Trajan and Falconilla at the Council of Ferrare/Florence through the Present Day

East and West came to intersect on this issue at the Council of Ferrare, which later shifted to Florence, 1438. This council was called to try to reestablish unity between the Latin and Greek churches. In the context of a discussion of purgatory, one of the main issues on which the two churches disagreed, Mark of Ephesus presents the Eastern view that prayer for the dead is not limited to believers with venial sins, which had been the Western position since Augustine. “Certain people were heard not only when they prayed for the faithful, but also for the unfaithful (ἄσεβων). For example, the blessed Thecla, by means of her prayers, transferred Falconilla from the place of the unjust, and the great Gregory the Dialogist, as it is said, rescued the emperor Trajan.”<sup>33</sup> Mark goes on to say that the church of God does not pray for such sorts of people (Trajan and Falconilla), but it does pray for all those in the faith who have died, even if they are notorious sinners. Rejecting the Western innovation of purgatory, Mark stresses that prayer for the dead is the vehicle by which dead sinners might be helped by the living. It will only be revealed at the last judgment whether such prayers have been effective. Like the pseudo-Damascene text, Mark does not use the stories of Falconilla and Trajan to justify prayer for pagans per se, but they do reinforce the notion of the efficacy of prayer for Christian sinners. There is no record of a Western response to Mark’s use of Thecla and Gregory, since the discussion proceeds to focus on the differences respecting purgatory, but Willy Rordorf points out that three Latin manuscripts of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* produced after this council leave out or change significantly Thecla’s prayer for Falconilla. In his view, that was one way to respond!<sup>34</sup>

To this day, some Eastern Orthodox theologians maintain an openness to prayer for the dead in hell. Kallistos Ware reports that at the “Vespers of Kneeling” on the evening of the Sunday of Pentecost, the following prayer is said: “O Christ our God. . . who has descended into Hell and shattered the eternal bars, revealing the way of ascent for those who dwell in that lower world . . . on this final and saving festival, thou art pleased to accept intercessory propitiation on behalf of those held fast in Hell, and thou dost grant to us great

hopes that thou wilt send down on them relaxation of their torments and consolation.”<sup>35</sup>

Ware goes on to point out that even though this prayer does not specifically request a release from hell, in the opinion of many Orthodox Christians such a release is possible because “in the period between Christ’s resurrection and his second coming the gates of hell stand open, and until the last judgment no one is as yet irrevocably condemned to remain there for eternity.”<sup>36</sup> It is significant that here in this prayer, Christ’s harrowing of hell is seen as an incomplete, open-ended process, precisely the point of view Augustine wished to quash in his *Ep.* 164 to Evodius.

In contrast to the Augustinian certainty that God would never posthumously save an unbaptized person or a grievous sinner, many Eastern theologians are inclined to leave the matter up to God. If he wishes to be merciful, as in the cases of Falconilla and Trajan, so be it. As John Meyendorff puts it in his survey of Byzantine theology: “For Mark of Ephesus, salvation is communion and ‘deification.’ . . . [The Eastern Orthodox] understanding of salvation through communion excludes any legalistic view of the Church’s pastoral and sacramental powers over either the living or the dead (the east will never have a doctrine of “indulgences”), or any precise description of the state of the departed souls before the general resurrection.”<sup>37</sup>

Of course, an Ecumenical Council, authoritative in Eastern Orthodoxy, has condemned universal salvation (see chapter 6, “Universalism in the East”), but in Meyendorff’s view and in the view of many Eastern Orthodox theologians, this has *not* precluded other types of posthumous salvation: “At the ultimate confrontation with the Logos, on the last day, man will still have the option of rejecting Him and thus will go to ‘hell.’ Man’s freedom is not destroyed by physical death; thus, there is the possibility of continual change and mutual intercession.”<sup>38</sup> The human personality continues to grow and develop after death as it had done in life, up to the point of the final judgment, when the irrevocable decision is made.

In a similar vein, post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism has moved away from some of the formulations characteristic of Augustine’s *City of God*, Book 21. Article 1257 of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.” Article 1261 further states:

As regards children who have died without Baptism, the church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus’ tenderness toward children which caused him to say: “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them” (Mark 10:14; cf. 1 Tim. 2:4), allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church’s call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, while not denying the necessity of baptism, and while not specifically allowing intercessory prayer for non-Christians, post-Vatican II Catholicism has taken a stride in the direction of the “merciful” opponents of Augustine, like Vincentius Victor. There is precedent for this in the medieval conceptions of limbo as a neutral place for unbaptized infants, but the new catechism speaks of hope even for the “*salvation* of children who have died without Baptism” [emphasis added], a step beyond any conception of limbo.

Related to this is the openness at Vatican II to God’s salvific purposes among those who have never heard the gospel:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. . . . Hence, they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it. . . . Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.<sup>40</sup>

The stress in this Vatican II document is still on actions within this life: baptism or seeking God with a sincere heart. Thus, it does not advocate “posthumous salvation,” defined as a turn toward God after death or a posthumous offer of God’s grace. It does, however, go a long way to resolve many of the troubling issues of theodicy raised by Augustine’s formulations. Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism seem to have moved much closer on these issues than they were at the Council of Ferrare/Florence in 1438.

## CONCLUSIONS

This book has examined a number of Christians from the first several centuries who believed that non-Christians could be saved posthumously, in various ways: Paul (in his most universalistic moment), perhaps the author of 1 Peter, the authors of the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the second *Sibylline Oracle*, the author of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Clement of Alexandria, Perpetua and the editor of Perpetua's diary, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius Ponticus, the early Jerome, the two Aviti from Spain, Vincentius Victor, the author of *The Life and Miracles of St. Thecla*, pseudo-John Damascene, and the originators of the Gregory the Great/Trajan legend. In addition, many more people believed that posthumous salvation had occurred in at least one moment of history: the descent of Christ to the dead. This list does not include other "merciful" Christians who might have prayed for and expected the salvation of their dead non-Christian friends and relatives, but who left no written record of their efforts. The practices and beliefs of these people were a continuation of long-standing traditions within the Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures of antiquity, in which providing succor for the dead held a valued place in the piety expected of the living. The motivations for rescuing the dead were varied. Some wished to create an alternative "family" of supporters among the dead. Others were interested in making sure that Christianity had an ancient pedigree by rescuing long-dead culture heroes. Others were primarily concerned about theological and philosophical issues surrounding the justice and mercy of God. Others looked back to authoritative examples from the scripture and tradition, like Paul, Thecla, and Peter, who in one way or another by word or example were thought to have authorized posthumous salvation.

Standing on the other side were a host of important Christian authors and theologians: the author of the Gospel of Luke, 2 Clement, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Cyprian, John Chrysostom, Philaster of Brescia, Epiphanius, the later Jerome, Augustine, pseudo-Dionysius, and Gregory the Great, among others. Each of them had various reasons for opposing posthumous salvation, but one common thread was their conviction that if God were to show mercy to non-Christians after death, or if a non-Christian were able to repent after death, then there would be no urgent need to set things right in this life. The church on earth would not be the sole locus of salvation, and moral seriousness might go into decline. They also had numerous passages from scripture on their side, particularly passages describing the eternal punishment of the wicked, or baptism as a requirement for salvation. The relevance, power, and authority of the church on earth were at stake.

Posthumous salvation for sinful *Christians* did develop in different ways in West and East: purgatory in the West, prayers now for mercy at the final judgment in the East. These beliefs and their attendant practices enabled Christian civilization to continue the ancient piety of helping the dead, but with restrictions on who could be helped. In the era of Augustine and Vincentius Victor, the transition period from a largely pagan Mediterranean culture to a largely Christian one, the issue of what to do about the non-Christian dead became most acute. Afterward, the interest focused more on the salvation of pagans who had lived long ago, like Trajan or the dead pagan saved by St. Patrick.

Latter-day Saints and Shakers of the nineteenth century revived certain types of posthumous salvation, without necessarily being aware of the earlier history, save the one Pauline passage about baptism on behalf of the dead, 1 Cor. 15:29. This shows that the religious impulse to rescue the dead can arise any time there is enthusiasm for the new activity of God in the world. If the living can share in the new blessings bestowed by God, why should the dead be excluded? If the living can reorient themselves, repent, and/or benefit from the prayers of the living, why not the dead? For the Shakers, Mormons, and Universalists of the nineteenth century, reinterpreting traditional Christianity also meant throwing off traditional Christian restrictions on salvation for the dead. Those Christians, like Augustine, who reject posthumous salvation find themselves in the paradoxical position of affirming the continued existence of the personality after death, but rejecting the idea that the personalities of the unbaptized and grievous sinners might grow or change as they did throughout life. Although I have much sympathy for those in every age who have wished to rescue the dead, it is not the goal of this volume to take sides or to chart a course for Christian theology. Those who take on such a task, however, should be informed of the early history of the question in all its facets, and if this book has shed some light on that history, then it will have achieved its goals.

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## NOTES

### *Introduction*

1. Daniel W. Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, p. 321.
2. Ibid.
3. Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, pp. 62, 477n.129.
4. Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, pp. 354–55.
5. Gustav Niebuhr, “Mormons will end baptism of victims of the Holocaust,” p. 10.
  6. The vision occurred in the Temple at Kirtland, Ohio, January 21, 1836, and the account of it is now found as an appendix to the *Pearl of Great Price*, revealed to Smith in 1830 and copyrighted in Salt Lake City in 1921.
  7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, pp. 115–25.
  8. M. Guy Bishop, “‘What Has Become of Our Fathers?’” pp. 85–97.
  9. Ibid., p. 90.
  10. “Temples and Genealogy,” in “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Global Media Guide.” Available: <http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,55-1-168-5,FF.html>. Accessed: July 17, 2000.
  11. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines*, pp. 182–85.
  12. Grant Underwood, “Baptism for the Dead,” pp. 99–105. See also Jan Shipps, *Mormonism*, p. 84.
  13. Times Wire Services, “Pact Ends Mormon Baptism of Dead Jews,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1995, part B, p. 4.
  14. Ibid.
  15. Ibid.
  16. Greek text in R. A. Lipsius, ed., *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*; English translation in “Acts of Paul,” *NTA*, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., vol. 2, pp. 210–70.
  17. *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 7–8. Latin text in Jacqueline Amat, *Passion de Perpétue et de Felicité suivie des Actes*; English translation in H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. 106–31.

18. Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, p. 352.  
 19. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, pp. 186–87; see also Flo Morse, *The Story of the Shakers*, p. 43.

### Chapter One

1. *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 1–3.
2. For biographical information on Perpetua, see Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*.
3. Salomon Reinach, "De l'origine des prières pour les morts," p. 164; cited in Jacques LeGoff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 45.
4. For example, Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*; Jocelyn C. M. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*; Simcha Paull Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*; Sarah Iles Johnston, *The Restless Dead*; Jon Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*.
5. On funerals as a "rite of passage," see A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, pp. 146–67.
6. Johnston, *Restless Dead*, p. 38.
7. Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual*, p. 1.
8. Lucian, *On Mourning* 18.
9. Morris, *Death-Ritual*, pp. 67–68.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 53, n. 28.
11. R. E. M. Wheeler, "A Roman Pipe-Burial," p. 5.
12. Jocelyn C. M. Toynbee and John Ward Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter*, pp. 61, 118–19, 145–46; Keith Hopkins and Melinda Letts, "Death in Rome," pp. 233–34.
13. James Frazer, *Pausanias's Description of Greece*, p. 227.
14. Richmond Lattimore, *Themes*, p. 141.
15. Johnston, *Restless Dead*, p. 51.
16. Morris, *Death-Ritual*, pp. 107–108.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
18. Françoise Dunand and Roger Lichtenberg, "Pratiques," pp. 3294–99.
19. Barbara Borg, "The Dead as a Guest at Table?" pp. 26–32.
20. In 1942, Lattimore estimated the number of published epitaphs at upward of 150,000. I agree with his assessment that "a more nearly exact estimate would not have the value proportionate to its difficulty." Lattimore, *Themes* p. 14n.3.
21. Hopkins and Letts, "Death in Rome," pp. 209–10.
22. Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.25; Hopkins and Letts, "Death in Rome," p. 208.
23. G. Kaibel, *Epigrammatica Graeca*, no. 595, Rome, second century C.E.
24. Otto Hirschfeld, *Inscriptiones*, vol. 13, no. 530.
25. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, LCL, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). For a description of various speculative options on continued existence after death in the first century B.C.E., see Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Book I.

26. *Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes*, vol. 3, no. 1444, pp. 3–4; trans. Lattimore, *Themes*, p. 107.
27. Lattimore, *Themes*, p. 106.
28. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, vol. 8, no. 799, lines 5–6; Lattimore, *Themes*, p. 96.
29. *Carmina Latina Epigrapha*, no. 1223, lines 9–14, translation mine, with the help of Ronald Begley.
30. Lattimore, *Themes*, p. 55.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–71.
32. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, p. 62.
33. Hopkins and Letts, “Death in Rome,” p. 233.
34. Johannes Geffcken, *Griechische Epigramme*, p. 209; translation Lattimore, *Themes*, p. 129.
35. Lattimore, *Themes*, p. 129.
36. Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans*, p. 54; see also Garland, *Greek Way of Death*, p. 36.
37. Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. James G. Frazer, LCL, 2nd ed. rev. by G. P. Goold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).
38. *Lucian IV*, trans. A. M. Harmon, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).
39. See Akio Tsukimoto, *Untersuchungen*; summarized by Jerrold S. Cooper, “The Fate of Mankind,” pp. 19–33.
40. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, “The Cult of the Dead in Judah,” p. 220.
41. Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 231–33, 249.
42. Charles A. Kennedy, “Dead, Cult of the,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 107.
43. Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, pp. 103–08.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
45. Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs*, p. 216.
46. The Hebrew text from Qumran reads “one who cannot eat.”
47. Carey A. Moore, *Tobit*, p. 173; see also Jonas C. Greenfield, “Two Proverbs of Ahiqar,” pp. 195–201.
48. Moore, *Tobit*, p. 173.
49. Greenfield, “Two Proverbs,” pp. 195–201.
50. Lattimore, *Themes*, pp. 220 ff.
51. Diogenes Laertius, 6.79. Cf. Seneca (first century c.e.) and his opposition to the widespread belief in the terrible fate of the unburied (*Ben.* 5.20.4; *Ep.* 92.34–35; *De Remed. Fort.* 5).
52. Alfred Heubeck and Arie Hoekstra, *Homer’s Odyssey*, pp. 80–81.
53. For more on these issues of dishonor in the underworld in Greek tragedy, see Lucia C. Graeme Grieve, *Death and Burial*, pp. 33–52.
54. See the note provided by David Kovacs, trans., Euripides *Hecuba*, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 403n.a.
55. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1101a–b, where Aristotle speculates on the extent to which the dead are affected by the actions of the living. He admits that there must be some effect, but it is weak and cannot change an unhappy man into a happy one.

56. *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).
57. Rheinhold Merkelbach, "Diodor," pp. 71–84, cited in Barbara Borg, "Dead as a Guest," p. 26.
58. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
59. Albrecht Dieterich, *Kleine Schriften*, pp. 478–80; Eduard Norden, *Vergilius Aeneis Buch VI*, p. 7n.3.
60. W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, pp. 214–15.
61. For bibliography and discussion of these texts, see Fritz Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology," pp. 238–59.
62. Text and trans. Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology," pp. 241–42.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 242–43.
64. This is not Graf's interpretation; he lays out two options—either the τέλεα are prizes or are rituals actually performed in the underworld (cf. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 847 and 889).
65. Johnston, *Restless Dead*, pp. 53–54.
66. Guthrie, *Orpheus*, p. 214, reads *Orphicorum Fragmenta* 232 as referring not to the salvation of the dead but rather the wish of the living "to be set free from their lawless ancestry," i.e., the Titans. Otto Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta. Republic* 364B, Guthrie says, only refers to wiping away the sins of the ancestors that impinge on the living, unrelated to the actual salvation of those ancestors. Both of these readings are thoroughly sensible.
67. For a general overview, see Marcel Detienne, "Orpheus," pp. 111–14.
68. E.-M. Abel and Jean Starcky, *Les livres des Maccabées*, pp. 22–23.
69. Jonathan A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, p. 449.
70. For a discussion of various arguments about the date of the epitomizer, see Robert Doran, *Temple Propaganda*, pp. 111–13.
71. Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, p. 450.
72. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 173.
73. For an introduction to the topic of intercession in Second Temple Judaism generally, see R. Le Déault, "Aspects de l'intercession," pp. 35–57.
74. Discussed at length in Abel and Starcky, *Les livres des Maccabées*, p. 23.
75. E. P. Sanders, "The Testament of Abraham," in *OTP*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, vol. 1, pp. 874–75.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 891n.14b.
77. Related here is the long-standing tradition of the merits of the patriarchs (*zekut abot*), which reaches back into the Bible (Exod. 32:13) and receives explicit formulation among the rabbis (*m. Abot* 2.2; *Midrash Tehillim* Ps. 106:44).
78. In the book, the character Ezra laments the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians, but the author is transparently dealing with the situation at the end of the first century c.e.; for an introduction to the key issues, see Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, pp. 1–47. English translations from the text of 4 Ezra are those of Stone.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 251n.10.
80. Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, pp. 144–45.

81. A. Cohen, "Introduction," p. vii.
82. John T. Townsend, *Midrash Tanhuma*, pp. xi–xii.
83. English translation and critical discussion in C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, pp. 675–76.
84. Alfons Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, p. 286.

### Chapter Two

1. Most Patristic exegetes think that the man in 1 Cor. 5:5 and the man who is "pardoned" by Paul and received back into the church in 2 Cor. 2:6–11 are one and the same, but this identification has been questioned in more recent times. See the discussion in Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, p. 231.

2. Proponents of these various positions are detailed in Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 97–98.

3. The options for interpretation are explored by Abraham Malherbe, "The Beasts at Ephesus," pp. 71–80. Malherbe prefers a figurative interpretation.

4. Mathis Rissi, *Die Taufe für die Toten*, pp. 6–57.

5. Rissi, *Die Taufe*, pp. 89–92; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 275–77; for Joseph Smith, see the introduction, this volume.

6. Richard E. DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion," p. 677.

7. Rissi, *Die Taufe*, p. 91. He speculates that perhaps some calamity had occurred in Corinth resulting in the death of a number of catechumens, giving rise to a ritual that was limited to the Christians of this city. I disagree with Rissi's avoidance of a sacramentalistic interpretation (p. 89); the participants probably thought the vicarious baptism effected a real change in the fate of the dead person, or else why carry it out?

8. The best treatment is still the 1924 work by A. von Harnack, *Marcion*.

9. English translation by K. C. Thompson, "1 Corinthians," p. 656. I agree with Conzelmann's refutation of Thompson's arguments regarding an alternative punctuation of the text of 1 Cor. 15:29 (Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 276n.120).

10. Trans. Thompson, "1 Corinthians," p. 657.

11. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 276; see Karl Staab, "1 Kor 15, 29," pp. 443–50.

12. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 28.6.4; English translation in Philip R. Amidon, *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius*, p. 88.

13. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 28.6.5.

14. C. Munier, *Concilia Africae*, pp. 33–34.

15. Richard Batey, "So All Israel Will Be Saved," pp. 218–28.

16. M. Eugene Boring, "Universal Salvation," p. 282.

17. See the arguments collected in W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 264–69.

18. Richard Bauckham, "The Rich Man and Lazarus," pp. 225–46. The Egyptian story of Setme and his son Si-Osiris, along with the Palestinian Talmud, *y. Sanh.* 23c and *y. Hag.* 77d, provide the closest parallels.

19. Christopher F. Evans, "Uncomfortable Words–V," p. 229.

20. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

21. Text and translation in Charlesworth, *OTP*, vol. 2, p. 440.
22. Compare the laments of the damned in *Apoc. Pet.* 13. They have realized their errors only too late.
23. For a survey of the introductory questions, see Ernst Baasland, "Der 2. Klemensbrief," pp. 86–93.
24. Karl P. Donfried, *Setting of Second Clement*, pp. 129–33.
25. Trans. Robert M. Grant and Holt H. Graham, *Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 119–20.
26. A number of other important questions, particularly the role of 3:19–20 and 4:6 in the context of 1 Peter as a whole, must be left aside here. Such examination of the wider context has correctly limited the range of possible interpretations but still has not produced a consensus on the original meaning of the verses in question.
27. William J. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits*, pp. 25–66.
28. For a readable introduction to all these issues, see Ernest Best, *1 Peter*, pp. 13–66.
29. Bo Reicke, *Disobedient Spirits*, p. 90.
30. The use of the word  $\piνεῦμα$  for the element in a person that survives death is rare in early Christian literature but not unattested (Wis. 15:16; Heb. 12:23); see Best, *1 Peter*, p. 142.
31. Reicke, *Disobedient Spirits*, p. 121.
32. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.6.38–53 (GCS 15:453–55). For more on the descent motif generally, see now the magisterial study by Markwart Herzog, *Descensus ad Inferos*, as well as chapter 5, this volume.
33. For the *status questionis* on Eph. 4:8–10, see W. Hall Harris III, *Descent of Christ*.
34. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation*, pp. 47–49, 162–63.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.
36. Cf. the Jeremiah apocryphon quoted in Justin, *Dial.* 72.4, and the "saints" who rise at Christ's death in Matt. 27:52. On these texts, see chapter 5, "Posthumous Rescue."
37. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation*, pp. 59–60. Another useful categorization of opinions on the 1 Peter passages may be found in John S. Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18–20," pp. 303–36. One problematic aspect of the exegesis of both Feinberg and Dalton is their tendency to interpret the 1 Peter passages in conformity with the whole New Testament or the whole Bible. Why should 1 Peter be bound to such canonical norms? Biblical authors quite commonly disagree with one another.
38. See the arguments collected in Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *Muratorian Fragment*. Hahneman argues for the later date.
39. For an introduction to these issues and others regarding the Shepherd, see Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, pp. 1–38; also see her earlier works, *Rich and Poor in the Shepherd of Hermas*, p. 10n.41; "The Shepherd of Hermas," pp. 48–54.
40. For more on the ninth similitude and the metaphors for the church in the *Shepherd*, see Lage Pernveden, *Shepherd of Hermas*.
41. In *Epist. Apost.* 27, Ethiopic version, Christ does the baptizing in the underworld; cf. Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 4.27.2.

42. Jacques-Noël Pérès, "Le Baptême," pp. 341–46.
43. So the Ethiopic version; the Coptic version says Jesus descended to the "place of Lazarus" (cf. Luke 16:23).
44. So the Ethiopic version; Coptic reads "forgiveness and deliverance from all evil."
45. For a concise introduction to these pagan attacks on Christianity, see Robert Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*.
46. See Arthur J. Droge, *Homer or Moses?*
47. Much of the discussion in this section stems from a paper I delivered at the XIII International Conference on Patristics, Oxford, England, August 1999. That paper, titled "Apocalypse of Peter 14:1–4 and Its Relation to Confessors' Prayers for the Non-Christian Dead," will be published in *Studia Patristica XXXVI*. The material is reprinted here as authorized by Peeters Publishing.
48. Dennis D. Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will be Opened*.
49. C. D. G. Müller, "The Apocalypse of Peter," in *NTA*, W. Schneemelcher, ed., vol. 2, pp. 620–38.
50. M. R. James, "Rainer Fragment" pp. 270–79; see the clear and concise discussion in Buchholz, *Your Eyes*, pp. 344–51.
51. James, "Rainer Fragment," emends the text here, and Buchholz, *Your Eyes*, concurs that the emendation is correct. The Rainer papyrus reads θεον στεσωνται; according to James, the copyist saw ὄν and mistakenly wrote Θῶν, and he saw ετησωνται but wrote στεσωνται. The emendation is supported by *Sib. Or.* 2:330–34, which paraphrases the *Apocalypse of Peter* at this point.
52. For a discussion of this term, see Erik Peterson, "Die Taufe," pp. 1–20.
53. Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, pp. 10–11, observes that many Christian Ethiopic texts were translated from Arabic, not directly from the original Greek, and she posits that the same may be true for the *Apocalypse of Peter*.
54. Buchholz, *Your Eyes*, p. 351.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 348.
56. Richard Bauckham, "The Two Fig-Tree Parables," pp. 269–87. See also *idem*, "Jews and Jewish-Christians," pp. 228–38.
57. M. R. James, "New Text of the Apocalypse," pp. 36–54; conclusions on p. 53.
58. James, "Rainer fragment," p. 272.
59. John J. Collins, "Sibylline Tradition," pp. 421–59; especially section V, "The Jewish Stratum in *Sib. Or.* 1/2," pp. 441–44.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 442. See also John J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," in *OTP*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 1, pp. 317–472. Richard Bauckham faults Collins for failing to discuss James's proposals regarding the connections between the *Apocalypse of Peter* and *Sib. Or.* 2:194–338; Richard Bauckham, "A Quotation," pp. 437–45.
61. Trans. Collins, *OTP*, vol. 1, p. 353n.c3.
62. Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, p. 286.
63. Trans. J. K. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 581–82.
64. In place of this question, the Coptic reads "O Lord, now why is no one afraid of you?"

65. Manfred Hornschuh, *Studien zur Epistula Apostolorum*, p. 124.
66. For critical text and translation, see Albert Pietersma and Susan Turner Comstock, *Apocalypse of Elijah*.
67. David Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 326n.111.
69. Trans. Frankfurter, *Elijah*, p. 327.
70. John R. Hinnells, "The Zoroastrian Doctrine," p. 129.
71. Israel Lévi, "Le repos sabbatique," pp. 1–13.
72. Hugo Duensing and Aurelio de Santos Otero, "Apocalypse of Paul," in *NTA*, W. Schneemelcher, ed., vol. 2, pp. 712–13. See also Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, pp. 16–19.
73. Trans. Duensing and Santos Otero, *NTA*, W. Schneemelcher, ed., vol. 2, p. 736.
74. Duensing and Santos Otero express certainty ("Apocalypse of Paul," p. 714); Himmelfarb is more cautious (*Tours of Hell*, pp. 142–44).
75. For a thorough discussion of intercession for the damned in various apocalypses, see Richard Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, pp. 132–48.
76. Himmelfarb (*Tours of Hell*, p. 73) provides an excellent discussion of the pitfalls encountered when one tries to derive social history from apocalypses.

### Chapter Three

1. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, "Acts of Paul," in *NTA*, vol. 2, pp. 219–20.
2. Willy Rordorf, "Tradition and Composition in the *Acts of Thecla*," pp. 43–52.
3. Critical Greek texts are in R. A. Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, and L. Vouaux, *Les Actes de Paul et ses Lettres Apocryphes*. For Latin texts, see O. von Gebhardt, *Passio S. Theclae Virginis*; for the Coptic papyrus see C. Schmidt, *Acta Pauli*.
4. Schneemelcher, "Acts of Paul," *NTA*, pp. 216–17.
5. See Loveday Alexander, "Fact, Fiction, and the Genre of Acts," p. 399.
6. For more on the genre of the apocryphal acts, see Richard I. Pervo, "Early Christian Fiction," pp. 239–54.
7. Schneemelcher, *NTA*, vol. 2, p. 83.
8. One manuscript, discovered in 1916, reads "Acta Pauli" here, while two other witnesses leave out the word "Acta." Regardless, it is still most likely that the original reference was to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* known to us. See A. Hilhorst, "Tertullian," pp. 150–53.
9. Trans. E. Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, p. 36; cited in Hilhorst, "Tertullian," p. 153.
10. Stevan Davies, "Women, Tertullian and the *Acts of Paul*," pp. 139–43.
11. Thomas MacKay, "Response to Stevan Davies," pp. 145–49; Willy Rordorf, "Tertullien et les Actes de Paul," pp. 475–84; Hilhorst, "Tertullian," p. 157.
12. Hilhorst, "Tertullian," p. 157.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–61.
14. The earliest clear evidence of persecution by the Roman state simply on the basis of Christianity, with no other attendant charges, comes from the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan, ca. 110 C.E. (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96). Subsequent

second-century sources often presuppose this fact, while in earlier first-century sources the issue is not so clear.

15. See the discussion in Schneemelcher, *NTA*, vol. 2, pp. 218–20.

16. Her description is probably based on that in the *Apocalypse of Peter*; see Dennis D. Buchholz, *Your Eyes*, pp. 53–54.

17. Richard Bauckham, “The Acts of Paul,” pp. 116–30.

18. Jan Bremmer, “Magic, Martyrdom, and Women’s Liberation,” pp. 41–42.

19. English translation in B. P. Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, pp. 151–54.

20. Virginia Burrus, “Chastity as Autonomy,” p. 115.

21. See n. 14, this chapter.

22. A. Jensen, “*Gottes selbstbewusste Töchter*,” pp. 185–95.

23. R. Hanslik, “A. Tryphaena,” col. 415.

24. Translation first published in Mark Kiley, ed., *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine*, pp. 281–82. Reprinted here by permission.

25. Magda Misset van de Weg, “A Wealthy Woman Named Tryphaena,” pp. 16–35.

26. Jesus and his disciples (Luke 8:3), the apostle Paul (Rom. 16:2), and Origen (Eusebius *H.E.* 6.2) are among those who benefited from the largesse of wealthy women.

27. Cf. Xenophon, *Ephesiaca* 5.1.4–8; cited in Bauckham, “The Acts of Paul,” p. 136. See also *Gosp. Thom.* 112, “every woman who makes herself a man shall enter the kingdom of heaven.”

28. Schneemelcher, *NTA*, vol. 2, pp. 216–17.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 263–65.

30. The Androcles story is preserved by Aelian, *De natura animalium*, and by Aulus Gellius, both second-century authors recounting a story that takes place in the first century, just as in the *Acts of Paul*.

31. See Christopher R. Matthews, “Articulate Animals,” pp. 205–32.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 228–29.

33. For example, Artemilla is sent back to her husband by Paul after her baptism (*Acts of Paul*, PHeid p. 4); Onesiphorus remains with “all his family” (*APT* 26). See Peter W. Dunn, “Women’s Liberation,” pp. 254–55.

34. Unpublished Coptic papyrus, Schneemelcher, ed., *NTA*, vol. 2, p. 265.

35. Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Mothers of the Church,” p. 72.

36. Stevan Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows*.

37. Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*.

38. Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*.

39. Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, p. 55.

40. Jean-Daniel Kaestli, “Response to Virginia Burrus,” pp. 119–31; Schneemelcher, “Second and Third Century Acts,” *NTA*, vol. 2, pp. 81–83; Lynn C. Boughton, “From Pious Legend to Feminist Fantasy,” pp. 362–83; Dunn, “Women’s Liberation,” pp. 245–61.

41. Schneemelcher, *NTA*, vol. 2, p. 81.

42. Dunn, “Women’s Liberation,” p. 253.

43. Frederic Klawiter, “The Role of Martyrdom,” p. 254.

44. See especially Cyprian, *Ep.* 15 and 27.
45. Cyprian, *Ep.* 6.2.1; 15.3.1.
46. See W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, p. 310.
47. Cyprian, *Ep.* 18.
48. Peter Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 5–6.
49. Luther Martin, “Artemidorus,” p. 99.
50. Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 1.2; English translation found in Robert J. White, *Interpretation of Dreams*.
51. White, *Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 100–101.
52. Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, pp. 44–46.
53. *Oneir.* 2.69; trans. White, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 134.
54. The collection of spurious declamations was in existence at least by Jerome’s day, as he refers to them in *Ad Praesidium de cereo paschali* 11.2 and *Praef. in libr. Quest. Hebr. in Gen.* 3.1. See Lewis A. Sussman, “Major Declamations Ascribed to Qunitilian,” pp. i–xiii for introductory questions and pp. 125–36 for the tenth declamation. Critical Latin text found in Lennart Håkanson, *Declamationes XIX*, pp. 199–219.
55. Lacy Collison Morey, *Greek and Roman Ghost Stories*, pp. 45–48.
56. Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, p. 46.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
58. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2, pp. 1–2, 49–55.
59. D. J. Harrington, “Pseudo-Philo,” in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *OTP*, vol. 2, p. 299.
60. G. W. Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian*, p. 86; dating of the letter provided on pp. 248–49.
61. Monique Alexandre, “Early Christian Women,” p. 437.
62. See L. G. Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus*.
63. Elizabeth A. Clark, “Holy Women, Holy Words,” pp. 423–30. Clark notes that Macrina’s virtues are presented through literary tropes employed by Gregory, so we must use caution when positing anything about the historical Macrina. This said, the Thecla example is one of the tropes and her intellectual reputation is certainly in view.
64. George E. Gingras, trans., *Egeria*, p. 87.
65. Léonie Hayne, “Thecla and the Church Fathers,” pp. 210–12.
66. Gilbert Dagon, *Vie et Miracles de Sainte Thècle*, pp. 13–19.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
68. Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, p. 117.
69. Trans. Monika Pesthy, “Thecla Among the Fathers,” p. 170.
70. Hayne, “Thecla and the Church Fathers,” pp. 213–14.
71. F. Diekamp, “Johannes von Damaskus,” pp. 371–82.
72. Trans. mine.

#### Chapter Four

1. J. A. Robinson, *Passion of Perpetua*, pp. 1, 10–15.
2. For a good introduction to the issues of date and authorship, see T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 263–66.

3. Robinson, *Passion*, p. 1. Johannes Quasten thinks the Greek translation was made very early and influenced the *Martyrdom of St. Theodore*, “A Coptic Counterpart of a Vision,” pp. 1–9.

4. Some, including Barnes (*Tertullian*, p. 80), have charged Tertullian with an error here, believing he mistakenly attributed Saturus’s vision to Perpetua; see the following discussion. Regardless, Tertullian’s passage shows at least that he clearly knew who Perpetua was and knew some aspects of her story.

5. Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 79.

6. J. W. Halporn, “Literary History and Generic Expectations,” pp. 223–41. Halporn has a point when he criticizes scholars who assume that the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is “authentic” and the *Acta* merely derivative. Both texts performed specific functions for their authors and audiences, and these functions have influenced the shaping of the texts. I would still follow the majority opinion, however, and assign relatively more historical value to the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, since the embedded first-person section attributed to Perpetua sometimes conflicts with the surrounding tendentious framework and has a good claim to derive from the martyr herself.

7. H. Schlunk, “Zu den frühchristlichen Sarkophen aus der Bureba (Prov. Burgos),” pp. 139–66 + plates.

8. Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l’art Chrétien*, vol. 3, p. 1061.

9. E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, pp. 47–53; Jacqueline Amat, “L’authenticité des songes de la Passio de Perpétue,” pp. 177–91; Brent D. Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua,” pp. 19–22, 31.

10. See Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, p. 49n.2, and Shaw, “Passion,” p. 32; contrast Amat, “L’authenticité,” pp. 187–90.

11. The Latin indicates she was near her twenty-second birthday, meaning she was about to turn twenty-one in our reckoning.

12. Shaw, “Passion,” p. 25.

13. See the discussions in Robinson, *Passion*, pp. 22–26, and Shaw, “Passion,” p. 3n.3.

14. Barnes, *Tertullian*, thinks that her family may have been of the senatorial rank (p. 70); Shaw, “Passion,” prefers the decurial (p. 11).

15. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, p. 50n.1.

16. Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 71, 263–67.

17. See Arthur J. Droge and James Tabor, *A Noble Death*, pp. 1–2. Droge and Tabor’s very cogent arguments would have been strengthened had they noted here that Saturus is a true “voluntary martyr,” since he was not arrested with the others, but turned himself in.

18. For a decisive refutation of the tendentious ancient and modern claim that only “heretics” volunteered for martyrdom, see G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, “Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?” pp. 21–24.

19. I am grateful to David Brakke for this suggestion.

20. For more on Perpetua’s relationship with her father, see Joyce E. Salisbury, *Passion*, pp. 5–8. See also Mary R. Lefkowitz, “The Motivations for St. Perpetua’s Martyrdom,” pp. 417–21.

21. Jan den Boeft and Jan Bremmer, “Notiunculae,” pp. 383–402.

22. Translation, H. Musurillo, pp. 115–17. I have changed one word of Musurillo’s translation. He translates the *poena* of 8.4 as “suffering,” whereas I think it more important to stress that, in Perpetua’s mind, Dinocrates was paying a penalty.

23. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *Prophecy in Carthage*, pp. 107–27, has argued persuasively that Tertullian, even as a Montanist, uses visions only as a support to scripture and often tests their validity against the norm of scripture.

24. Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 80; Robeck, *Prophecy*, pp. 107–08.

25. Emphasized by Antoon Bastiaensen, “Tertullian’s Reference,” pp. 790–95.

26. Robeck, *Prophecy in Carthage*, p. 267n.5.

27. J. H. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani*, pp. 586–93.

28. The text is found in PGM 10.796–801 and is translated by A. Cleveland Coxe, *ANF* 5, pp. 221–22. An additional manuscript is discussed by H. Cherniss, “The So-Called Fragment,” pp. 346–50. See Brian Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, pp. 39–40.

29. On this issue, Waszink has got it right, *Quinti Septimi*, pp. 592–93.

30. LeGoff, *Birth of Purgatory*, p. 47.

31. Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, pp. 36–37.

32. LeGoff, *Birth of Purgatory*, p. 50.

33. Franz Joseph Dölger, “Antike Parallelen,” pp. 31–37.

34. For example, Oedipus blinds himself so he won’t have to see his father in Hades (*Oedipus Rex* 1371–1374).

35. Cf. Lefkowitz, “Motivations,” p. 418, citing the example of Arria in Pliny, *Ep.*, 3.16.3.

36. Robeck, *Prophecy in Carthage*, p. 49; Amat, “L’authenticité,” pp. 180–81; H. B. Swete, “Prayer for the Departed,” p. 513; A. de Waal, “Der leidende Dinocrates,” p. 342.

37. *Ad Martyras* 1.6; cf. his later argument that the power to forgive rests in inspired prophets and apostles within the church, *De pudic.* 21, based on Matt. 18:15–20. All of this is discussed in Christine Trevett, *Montanism*, pp. 192–93.

38. Jan N. Bremmer argues for this in “Magic,” p. 44.

39. See chapter 2, “Apocalypse of Peter.”

40. J. A. Robinson and M. R. James, *Gospel According to Peter*, pp. 60–61.

41. See C. D. G. Mueller, “Apocalypse of Peter,” in *NTA*, vol. 2, pp. 623–25; also Richard Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, p. 164.

42. Buchholz, *Your Eyes*, p. 55.

43. See Paul Habermehl, *Perpetua*.

44. Shaw, *Passion*, pp. 32–33.

45. See the thorough review of the issue in Trevett, *Montanism*, pp. 26–45.

46. For the date of the “Anonymous,” see *ibid.*, p. 30.

47. David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, pp. 47–48.

48. René Braun, “Nouvelles observations,” pp. 105–17.

49. Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 77–78.

50. Klawiter, “The Role of Martyrdom,” pp. 257–58; Cox-Miller, *Dreams*, p. 174.

51. Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 83.

52. Trevett, *Montanism*, p. 73.

## Chapter Five

1. Richard Bauckham, "Descent to the Underworld," p. 157.
2. J. A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell*, pp. 13–20, adduces not only these myths, but also scours the globe for similar myths from a variety of cultures.
3. Bauckham, "Descent," pp. 156–57, thinks they are not so relevant as a source; Harold Attridge thinks the Heracles myth may indeed be a source, "Liberating Death's Captives," pp. 112–13.
4. MacCulloch, pp. 13–20; Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp. 233–48.
5. Josef Kroll, *Gott und Hölle*; Heinz-Juergen Vogels, *Christi Abstieg*, Wilhelm Maas, *Gott und Hölle*; Markwart Herzog, *Descensus ad Inferos*.
6. Trans. MacCulloch, *Harrowing*, pp. 86–87.
7. So the Ethiopic version; the Coptic version says Jesus descended to the "place of Lazarus" (cf. Luke 16:23).
8. So the Ethiopic version; Coptic reads "forgiveness and deliverance from all evil."
9. Trans. Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, p. 158.
10. Trans. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi*, p. 529.
11. For more on these texts see Vogels, *Christi Abstieg*, pp. 199–204, 218.
12. For a discussion of the date of this very important and often ignored work, see Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, pp. 381–90.
13. Attridge, "Liberating Death's Captives," pp. 105–106.
14. Bauckham, "Descent," p. 157. See also Malcolm L. Peel, "The 'Decensus ad Inferos,'" pp. 23–49.
15. Eusebius quotes Serapion of Antioch (late second century) as having approved of its contents at first, but later he considered it docetic (*H. E.* 6.12.3–6). P.Oxy. 2949, also datable to the turn of the third century, contains fragments of this gospel. See Schneemelcher, *NTA*, vol. 1, pp. 217–18.
16. John Dominic Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, champions the notion that the *Gospel of Peter* preserves an early source that was the basis for the passion narratives in the canonical gospels. Raymond Brown is not convinced and has summarized the state of the question in his book, *Death of the Messiah*, vol. 2, pp. 1317–49. I am grateful to my student Seth Bennett for cataloguing various opinions on this subject.
17. Trans. mine.
18. For parallels to these motifs in early Christian literature, see M. G. Mara, *Évangile de Pierre*, pp. 182–90.
19. Trans. mine.
20. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp. 235–36.
21. For more on Justin's project of securing an ancient foundation for Christianity, see Droge, *Homer or Moses?*, pp. 49–72.
22. Trans. Grant, *Irenaeus*, p. 158.
23. James H. Charlesworth, "Odes of Solomon," in *OTP*, vol. 2, pp. 729–30. For more on the realized eschatology of John, see my study *Born from Above*, pp. 64–65.
24. Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, pp. 15–16.

25. Trans. Charlesworth.
26. For more on this struggle motif in the Odes, see Kroll, *Gott und Hölle*, pp. 41–44.
27. For Aphrahat, see Maas, *Gott und die Hölle*, pp. 156–57; for Ephrem, see Javier Teixidor, “Le thème de la descente,” p. 36n.35.
28. Trans. Han J. W. Drijvers, “The Acts of Thomas,” in *NTA*, vol. 2, p. 400.
29. For more on the descensus in the *Acts of Thomas* and the Syriac tradition, see Maas, *Gott und Hölle*, pp. 155–62.
30. Interestingly, Clement does not use 1 Pet. 4:6 in his argument; he interprets the “dead” in that verse as the living who are spiritually dead (Fragment I, preserved by Cassiodorus, *PGM* 9.732A); see Dalton, “Christ’s Proclamation,” pp. 55–56.
31. To cite the most famous examples, Eusebius reports that a wealthy lady at Alexandria gave financial support both to Origen and to Paul the gnostic; apparently she saw no conflict or problem with this sort of mixing (*H.E.* 6.2.13–14). Also, Origen is said to have studied with the Platonist teacher Ammonius (*H.E.* 6.19.5–7).
32. Origen, *Hom. in Luc.* 4.27.19–28.4; *Comm. Jn.* 2.24; see Daniel Sheerin, “St. John the Baptist,” pp. 1–22.
33. Trans. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, p. 99.
34. Contra Daniel A. du Toit, “Descensus and Universalism,” p. 84. du Toit simply assumes that Origen’s supposed universalistic logic would carry over into the descensus traditions, but he does not cite any texts from Origen to prove his case.
35. *Hom. 1 Sam.* 28; *Hom. in Luc.* 4.27.20; see other texts collected in Henri Crouzel, “L’Hadès et la Géhenne selon Origène,” *Gregorianum* 59 (1978), p. 295n.33.
36. *Hom. 1 Sam.* 28.9.
37. Henri Crouzel, “L’Hadès,” p. 299.
38. See Henri Crouzel, “L’exégèse origénienne,” pp. 273–83.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 315.
40. Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, pp. 244–45.
41. Maas, *Gott und Hölle*, pp. 152–53.
42. Hubertus Drobner, trans., *Gregor von Nyssa*.
43. Gregory writes, “If (Christ) descends into hell, descend with him. Learn to know the mysteries of Christ there also, what is the providential purpose of the twofold descent, to save all men absolutely by his manifestation, or there too only them that believe” (*Oratorio* 45.24, trans. C. G. Browne and J. E. Swallow, *NPNF* 2nd Series, vol. 7, p. 432). In either case Gregory is allowing for posthumous salvation at the descent since the “belief” takes place after death.
44. Gerog Langgärtner, “Der Descensus ad Inferos,” pp. 95–100.
45. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, p. 437. See the discussion of this text in Louis Capéran, *Le problème du salut des infidèles*, pp. 84–89.
46. Trans. George Prevost, *NPNF* 1st Series, vol. 10, with minor alterations for clarity.
47. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 4, pp. 36–38.

48. Capéran, *Problème du salut*, p. 94.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
50. Trans. MacCulloch, *Harrowing*, p. 121. MacCulloch mistakenly attributes this passage to Ambrose rather than Ambrosiaster.
51. Trans. mine, with the help of Ronald Begley.
52. Kroll, *Gott und Hölle*, p. 83.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.
54. Felix Scheidweiler, “The Gospel of Nicodemus,” *NTA*, vol. 2, p. 533n.3.
55. Critical editions of the Greek and Latin are found in C. von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*.
56. Trans. Scheidweiler, “Gospel of Nicodemus,” *NTA*, vol. 2, p. 522.
57. Kroll, *Gott und Hölle*, p. 88n.1.
58. Scheidweiler, “Gospel of Nicodemus,” *NTA*, vol. 2, p. 526; Latin texts in Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, pp. 392–93, 425.

### Chapter Six

1. For the alternative usage, see the article by Alan F. Segal, “Conversion and Universalism,” pp. 162–89.
2. See the discussion in Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, p. 112.
3. W. E. G. Floyd, *Clement*, p. 40n.9.
4. See the magisterial work by Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*.
5. Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, summary on pp. 59–60.
6. Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* p. 265.
7. Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, pp. 5–12. See also *idem*, “Prolegomena,” pp. 334–50.
8. Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 23. For a synoptic edition of all four versions of the text, see Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John*.
9. Trans. Frederik Wisse in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, p. 120.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 48n.27c; Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* p. 197.
12. Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, p. 154.
13. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism,”* p. 168.
14. P. Nautin claims that Clement was mistaken in assigning the doctrine of reincarnation to Basilides. P. Nautin, “Les Fragments de Basilides,” pp. 393–404. In my view Ugo Bianchi has decisively refuted Nautin’s conclusion in his article, “Origen’s Treatment of the Soul,” pp. 270–81. For a thorough exposition on the Basilides reincarnation fragments, see Winrich A. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, pp. 206–18.
15. For a general introduction to the subject, see J. Bruce Long, “Reincarnation,” pp. 265–69.
16. Gerald Bostock, “Sources of Origen’s Doctrine,” pp. 259–64.

17. Walter Stettner, *Die Seelenwanderung*, pp. 56–63.
18. See the discussion in Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, pp. 314–17.
19. Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism*, p. 29.
20. Book Six of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* is a biography of Origen and is our major source of information about his life.
21. Frederick W. Norris, "Universal Salvation in Origen and Maximus," p. 57.
22. Clark, *Origenist Controversy*, pp. 163–65.
23. Norris, "Universal Salvation," pp. 41–42.
24. Crouzel, *Origen*, pp. 163–79 and 264–66. See also Norris, "Universal Salvation," pp. 56–60.
25. Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth. This translation of the *De Principiis* must be used with great care, because Koetschau always gave credence to Origen's later opponents Jerome and Justinian when they reported on the text. See Norris, "Universal Salvation," pp. 44–46.
26. See Origen's *Comm. Jn.* 19.20.137, and Jeffrey A. Trumbower, "Origen's Exegesis of John 8:19–53," pp. 138–54. See also Trumbower, *Born From Above*, pp. 4–9.
27. See the summary by Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen*, pp. 108–20. Trigg often neglects, however, passages that might indicate Origen's hesitations on the apocatastasis; see Norris, "Universal Salvation," pp. 40–41.
28. Gilles Dorival, "Origène a-t-il enseigné la transmigration des âmes dans les corps d'animaux?" pp. 11–32.
29. Trans. John Patrick, in *ANF*, vol. 9, pp. 474–75.
30. Trigg, *Origen*, p. 209.
31. Celia Rabinowitz, "Personal and Cosmic Salvation," pp. 319–29.
32. Henri Crouzel, "Le thème platonicien du 'véhicule de l'âme' chez Origène," pp. 225–238.
33. Lawrence R. Hennessey, "The Place of the Saints and Sinners after Death," pp. 295–312.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
35. Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 254–55.
36. For a discussion of these passages, see Crouzel, *Origen*, pp. 244–45.
37. Trans. Crouzel, *Origen*, p. 244.
38. Trans. Butterworth, in Origen, *On First Principles*, pp. 250–51. Both Butterworth and Crouzel agree that Origen was speaking of the devil here and not just an impersonalized entity "death."
39. Crouzel, *Origen*, p. 262. The fragments of the letter are translated in Henri Crouzel, "A Letter from Origen 'To Friends in Alexandria,'" pp. 135–50.
40. Crouzel, *Origen*, pp. 264–65.
41. Michael Frede, "Origen's Treatise *Against Celsus*," pp. 152–53.
42. Trans. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, p. 507.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 508.
44. Trans. Rowan A. Greer, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom*, p. 146.
45. Bigg, *Christian Platonists*, pp. 233–34n.1.
46. A. Mouhanna, "La Conception du Salut Universel selon Saint Grégoire de Nysse," pp. 136–37.
47. Crouzel, *Origen*, p. 263.

48. Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, pp. 1–2.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
50. Bigg, *Christian Platonists*, p. 293n.3.
51. Mouhanna, “La Conception,” pp. 136–37.
52. C. N. Tsirpanlis, “The Concept of Universal Salvation,” pp. 1131–41.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 1138; *NPNF*, 2nd series, vol. 5, p. 468.
54. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, p. 23.
55. For a concise summary of Gregory’s views on slavery, see Trevor Dennis, “Man Beyond Price,” pp. 129–45.
56. For more on Gregory’s interpretation of this passage throughout his writings, see Monique Alexandre, “L’interprétation de Luc 16, 19–31,” pp. 425–41.
57. *PGM* 46.84; *NPNF*, 2nd series, vol. 5, p. 447.
58. *PGM* 46.86–88; *NPNF*, 2nd series, vol. 5, pp. 448–49.
59. Harold F. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, p. 90n.59.
60. *PGM* 46.100; *NPNF*, 2nd series, vol. 5, p. 451.
61. J. Daniélou, “L’apocatastase chez saint Grégoire de Nysse,” pp. 346–7.
62. Trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, *NPNF*, 2nd series, vol. 5, p. 496.
63. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, pp. 279–80.
64. Methodius of Olympus, *On the Resurrection*, surviving in Slavonic translation and in the fragments quoted by Epiphanius; see Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2, pp. 134–36.
65. English translation in Philip R. Amidon, *Panarion of St. Epiphanius*, pp. 213–17.
66. Clark, *Origenist Controversy*, pp. 22, 60–62.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 99 and 125. See also Elizabeth A. Clark, “The Place of Jerome’s Commentary,” pp. 154–71.
69. Clark, *Origenist Controversy*, pp. 99–100.
70. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–42.
71. C. Munier, *Concilia Africae*, pp. 33–34.
72. Trans. Philip Schaff, *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 14, p. 89.
73. Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 125–29.
74. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, p. 22. See also Otto Bardenhewer, *Patrology*, pp. 302–304.
75. For an overview of the subject, see Richard J. Bauckham, “Universalism,” pp. 22–35.

### Chapter Seven

1. Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, pp. 20–24.
2. My rendering of the French translation by Maurice Lefèvre, *Hippolyte*, p. 183.
3. Hippolytus frag., *Against the Greeks, on the Cause of the Universe*, *PGM* 10.796–801; trans. by A. Cleveland Coxe, *ANF* 5, pp. 221–22.
4. Waszink, *De anima*, pp. 592–93; see chapter 4, “The Dinocrates Vision.”
5. Trans. G. W. Clarke, *The Letters of Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. 3, p. 43.

6. Trans. Ernest Wallis, *ANF*, vol. 5, p. 465.
7. Trans. Denis J. Kavanagh, *Fathers of the Church*, pp. 47–48.
8. For a classic analysis of Augustine and the Pelagian controversy, see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 340–407.
9. Here I agree with the thesis of Anne-Marie LaBonnardière, followed by Robert O’Connell, that Augustine did not fully grasp what the Origenist controversy was about until Orosius informed him. Robert O’Connell, *The Origin of the Soul*, pp. 141–43.
10. For more on the correspondence between these two friends, see Anne-Marie LaBonnardière, *Saint Augustin et la Bible*, pp. 213–27; Basil Studer, “Der Abstieg Christi in die Unterwelt bei Augustinus von Hippo,” pp. 267–74.
11. See Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation*, for a history of interpretation of these 1 Peter passages.
12. Text and translation in Liguori G. Mueller, *The De Haeresibus of Saint Augustine*, pp. 115–16.
13. For convincing arguments that it was indeed Augustine’s *Epistle* 190 that provoked Victor’s work, see Albert de Veer, “Aux origines,” pp. 121–57.
14. See *Ep.* 166, written to Jerome in 415, where Augustine clearly lays out the options and the problems with each resolution.
15. de Veer, “Aux origines,” p. 130.
16. An English translation of this work may be found in Roland J. Teske, *Answer to the Pelagians*, pp. 465–561. For a study of Augustine’s rhetorical strategies in this text, see Mary Preus, *Eloquence and Ignorance*.
17. See Joseph Ntedika, *L’evolution*, pp. 31–33.
18. Bernard M. Peebles, “Introduction,” pp. 359–60.
19. Trans. Peebles, *ibid.*, pp. 461–62.
20. For Augustine’s early views, see *On the Morals of the Catholic Church and the Morals of the Manichees* 34, written in 388; also *Confessions* 6.2.
21. For more on St. Augustine and dreams, see Martine Dulaey, *Le rêve dans la pensée de Saint Augustin*.
22. See Peter Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis*, pp. 167–187.
23. See chapter 2, “Apocalypse of Peter.”
24. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, pp. 80–105.
25. On Limbo, see Christopher Beiting, “The Third Place,” pp. 5–30; also, George J. Dyer, *Limbo: Unsettled Question*. For current Catholic teaching, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sections 1257–1261, p. 321.

### Chapter Eight

1. Gregory himself describes the depredations of his era: *Hom. Ezek.* 2.6.22; *Hom. Evan.* 1.1; see G. R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great*, p. 19.
2. On the population of Rome, see Michel Route, “GREGOIRE LE GRAND FACE À LA SITUATION ECONOMIQUE DE SON TEMPS.”
3. Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great*, pp. 8–12.
4. Challenging the work’s authenticity is Francis Clark, *Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues*. His thesis is decisively refuted by Paul Mavaert, “The Enigma of Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*,” pp. 335–81.

5. Odo John Zimmerman, trans., *St. Gregory the Great: Dialogues*, p. 257.
6. LeGoff, *Birth of Purgatory*, pp. 92–95.
7. Bertram Colgrave, *The Earliest Life*, p. 48.
8. Diekamp, “Johannes von Damaskus,” pp. 371–82.
9. Gordon Whatley, “The Uses of Hagiography,” pp. 25–64.
10. Trans. Colgrave, *Earliest Life*, pp. 127–29.
11. *De his qui in fide dormierunt* 16–17, PGM 95. 261–64, trans. mine.
12. Chapters 4 and 6, citing pseudo-Dionysius, *De Eccl. Hier.* 7 and John Chrysostom, *Hom. 32 in Matt.* and *Hom. in Epist. ad Philipp.*
13. For the history of interpretation in the West, see Whatley, “Uses of Hagiography.” For the East, see M. Jugie, “La doctrine des fins dernières dans l’église gréco-russe,” pp. 5–22.
14. *PL* 75.59–242; Colgrave, *Earliest Life*, pp. 59–60.
15. *PL* 75.57; Whatley “Uses of Hagiography,” p. 30.
16. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol. 1, p. 179.
17. Colgrave, *Earliest Life*, p. 63.
18. Whatley, “Uses of Hagiography,” p. 32.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.
20. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3, suppl., qu. 71, a. 5, obj. 5 and ad 5; Whatley, “Uses of Hagiography,” pp. 39–40.
21. Whatley, “Uses of Hagiography,” p. 39.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–50 and 56–59.
23. Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, pp. 123–36.
24. J. L. Motley, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, vol. 1, p. 20.
25. Trans. Whitley Stokes, *The Tripartite Life of Patrick*, p. 123. I am grateful to my colleague Ray Patterson for alerting me to this story.
26. Trans. Colm Luibheid in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, pp. 249–50.
27. Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 99.
28. Jugie, “Doctrine des fins dernières,” p. 7.
29. *Enarratio in Evangelium Lucae* 12.5; PGM 123. 880.
30. Jugie, “Doctrine des fins dernières,” p. 9, my translation from the French.
31. For specifics on these texts and the history of this ritual, see Jugie, “Doctrine des fins dernières,” p. 10.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
33. Greek text in Ludovico Petit and Gregory Hoffmann, *De Purgatorio*, p. 71. Trans. mine.
34. Willy Rordorf, “La prière de sainte Thècle,” p. 250; repr. in Willy Rordorf, *Liturgie*, p. 446.
35. The Greek text and English translation of this prayer are found in *The Service of the Blessing of the Waters*, pp. 75–76, 79.
36. Kallistos Ware, “One Body in Christ,” p. 190.
37. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 221.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
39. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp. 320–21.
40. *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 224.

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## INDEX OF ANCIENT SOURCES

- GREEK AND LATIN  
AUTHORS
- Aelian, *De natura animalium*  
62, 165
- Aeschylus, *Eumenides*  
94 20
- Aristophanes, *Frogs*  
140 13  
847 160  
889 160
- Aristotle  
*Nicomachean Ethics*  
1101a-b 159  
*Politics*  
1255a 121
- Artemidorus,  
*Oneirocritica*  
1.2 79, 166  
2.69 67-68, 166
- Cicero,  
*De Divinatione* 67
- Diodorus of Sicily,  
*Bibliotheca historica*  
1.91.1-93.4 13-14  
1.92.4-5 23
- Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*  
6.79 19, 159
- Euripides, *Hecuba*  
28-34 20
- Herodotus, *Histories*  
2.85-91 13
- Homer  
*Iliad*  
9.497 24  
23.218-20 16  
23.62-107 19  
*Odyssey*  
11.51-80 19  
11.582-91 81  
12.8-15 20
- Juvenal, *Satires*  
3.267 13
- Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*  
2.7 59
- Lucian  
*Lover of Lies*  
30 21  
*On Mourning*  
10 13  
21 12, 14  
9-10 17
- Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*  
3.830 15
- Ovid  
*Fasti*  
2.535-42 16  
2.547 17  
5.443 17  
*Metamorphoses*  
11.400-750 68
- Pausanias, *Description of Greece*  
2.1.3 21  
8.4.10 12  
9.38.5 21  
10.5.4 21
- Philo of Alexandria, *De Somnis*  
1.138-39 113
- Plato  
*Laws*  
870E-872E 121  
884A-910D 112  
885D 25  
907E 25  
*Phaedo*  
82E 121  
114B 121  
*Phaedrus*  
248D-249D 112

GREEK AND LATIN	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i>	I Kings
AUTHORS	6.325-30 20	I:II 94
Plato ( <i>continued</i> )	6.365 2I	8:46-53 104
<i>Republic</i>	6.377-84 2I	17:17-24 58
362E-367E 23-	Xenophon of Ephesus,	21:19-23 2I
26, 36	<i>An Ephesian Tale</i>	
364B 160	3.6-11 59	2 Kings
390E 24	5.1.4-8 165	2:1-12 113
613E-621D 59,		4:18-37 58
112	HEBREW BIBLE	9:30-37 21-22
614C-E 24-25	Genesis	
<i>Timaeus</i>	I:26-30 121	Psalms
42 B-C 113	3:15 79	2:4-9 120
91A 113	3:16 63	6:6 102, 104-105
Pliny the Younger,	6:1-4 45	106:28 17-19
<i>Epistles</i>	28:12 79	106:44 160
7.27 21	Exodus	107:16 102
10.96 79, 164-65	22:18 18	110:1 129
Pseudo-Quintillian,	32:11-14 65	Ecclesiastes
<i>Declamationes</i>	32:13 160	3:21 23
10 67-68	Leviticus	
Seneca	4:13-21 27	Isaiah
<i>Ben.</i>	19:31 18	I:16-17 144
5.20.4 159	20:27 18	8:19-20 18
<i>De Remed. Fort.</i>	20:6 18	19:3 18
5 159	Numbers	22:13 35
<i>Epistles</i>	22:28-30 62	26:19 92-93
92.34-35 159	25:1-13 17	27:9 39-40
Silius Italicus, <i>Punica</i>	Deuteronomy	29:4 18
13.475 14, 21	9:20 65	59:20 39-40
Sophocles	12:27 17	Jeremiah
<i>Antigone</i>	18:11 18	8:1-3 22
194-210 20	26:13-14 17-19	22:19 22
27-29 20	28:26 22	28 29
521 20	Joshua	Ezekiel
<i>Oedipus Rex</i>	7:6-9 65	37:12 93
1371-1374 83,	I Samuel	Daniel
168	7:8-9 65	12:1-4 27-28, 92
Strabo, <i>Geography</i>	28:13 18, 139	12:10 29
8.6.12 13	2 Samuel	14:1-22 (LXX) 18
Varro, <i>On the Latin</i>	12:1 94	Zephaniah
<i>Language</i>	24:17 65	3:7-13 118
5.25 14, 158	24:24-25 27	Zechariah
		10:9 31

- Malachi  
 1:2-3 39  
 4:6 4
- APOCRYPHA AND  
 PSEUDEPIGRAPHA
- Apocalypse of Elijah*  
 5:27-29 49, 53-54
- Ascension of Isaiah*  
 9:6-18 95
- 2 Baruch  
 21:23 91  
 30:1-5 92  
 42:7-8 91-92  
 85:11-15 29, 50
- 1 Enoch  
 5:5 29  
 6-11 45  
 22:8-11 29, 69, 91  
 62:11 54  
 108:14-15 54
- 2 Enoch  
 7:1-3 46  
 42:3-5 92
- 4 Ezra  
 3:1-3 30  
 7:80 107  
 7:82 30-31  
 7:93 107  
 7:102-126 30-31,  
 49, 51-53  
 8:3 31
- Joseph and Asenath* 29
- Jubilees  
 15:26-27 29  
 23:30 54
- 2 Maccabees  
 2:23-32 27  
 6:16 29  
 7:11 28  
 12:39-45 26-29,  
 31, 33, 70, 135
- 14:46 28  
 15:11-16 29
- 4 Maccabees  
 12:17 65
- Odes of Solomon*  
 5:4 98  
 6:3-5 98  
 10:2 97  
 15:10 97  
 17:9-12 95  
 22:4 95  
 23:30 98  
 42:10-20 98-99
- Pseudo-Philo, *Liber  
 Antiquitatum  
 Biblicarum*  
 3:10 92  
 16:3 91  
 22:13 91  
 23:13 69  
 32:13 91  
 33:2-3 29, 43  
 44:10 69
- Sibylline Oracles*  
 2:330-38 34, 49,  
 52, 163  
 8.310 94-95
- Sirach  
 7:33 18  
 30:18 18
- Testament of Abraham*  
 14:1-15 29-30
- Testament of Dan*  
 5.11 95
- Testament of Levi*  
 3:2 46
- Tobit  
 1:17 22  
 4:17 18-19, 22  
 12:12 22  
 14:11 22
- Wisdom of Solomon  
 15:16 162
- RABBINIC  
 LITERATURE
- m. Yoma*  
 8:8 28
- m. Eduyyot*  
 2:10 30, 53
- m. Abot*  
 2.2 160
- t. Shabbat*  
 33b 30
- t. Rosh Hashanah*  
 17a 30-31
- t. Baba Metzia*  
 58b 31
- b. Sukka*  
 14a 30, 53
- b. Sanhedrin*  
 65b 54
- b. Zebahim*  
 9b 28
- y. Hagigah*  
 77d 161
- y. Sanhedrin*  
 23c 161
- Genesis Rabbah*  
 11 54  
 33:3 30, 53
- Exodus Rabbah*  
 42:1 30
- Deuteronomy Rabbah*  
 3:15 30
- Sifre Numbers*  
 131 18
- Midrash Rabbah*  
*Ecclesiastes*  
 4.1 31
- Midrash Tanhuma*  
*Ha'azinu*  
 I, f. 339b 31



Ephesians	Revelation	Ambrose
2:7 118	4:4 82	<i>De fide</i>
4:5 38	6:9 81	3.14.111 103
4:8-10 46, 91, 162	6:11 82	3.4.27-28 103
4:16 123	7:9-14 82	<i>De virginibus</i>
Philippians	15:6 82	2.19 71
1:12-26 35	17-18 64	<i>On Valentinian</i>
1:13 77	19:14 82	51 104, 124
1:23 40	20:4 34	Ambrosiaster
2:10 103, 120	OTHER CHRISTIAN	<i>In Eph.</i>
Colossians	LITERATURE	4.8-9 103
1:24 37	<i>Acta Perpetuae</i>	<i>In Epist. ad Rom.</i>
1 Thessalonians	6.2 78	10 103
4:13-18 40, 46	<i>Acts of John</i>	Anonymous, <i>Life of</i>
2 Thessalonians	73-78 59	<i>Gregory the Great</i>
1:6-9 33, 40-41,	90 96	(Whitby Latin)
69	<i>Acts of Paul</i>	28-29 143-147
1 Timothy	4 58	Anonymous, <i>Tripartite</i>
2:4 152	5-7 62	<i>Life of Patrick</i> 147
2:12-15 63	8 58	Aphrahat, <i>Homily</i>
2 Timothy	9 63	22 99
1:15-16 59	11 58-59	<i>Apocalypse of Paul</i>
4:10 59	26 56	31-44 54
4:19 59	<i>Acts of Paul and</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Peter</i>
Philemon	<i>Thecla</i>	2:8-13 51
1 77	1-3 158	6:5-6 50-51
Hebrews	16 60	13:1-4 50-51,
2:14-15 95	20 60	162
11:39-40 93	22 60	14.1-4 34, 49-
12:23 162	28-31 6-7, 60-70,	53, 69-70, 85,
James	72-75, 151	163
4:3 149	33 62	16 84-85
1 Peter	34 58, 70	Akhmim fragment
3:18 105	37 59, 69-70	21 85
3:19-20 44-47, 91,	38 70	<i>Apocryphon of John</i>
96, 99-100, 131-	39 61	NHC II.25.16-
132	40 56	27.30 III-112
4:6 33, 44-47, 91,	41 58, 62-63	Augustine
96, 103, 132	<i>Acts of Thomas</i>	<i>Ad Orosium</i>
2 Peter	10 95	5, 7 131
3:9 41, 109	51-58 59, 69	<i>City of God</i>
	156 99	17.11 133
		21 139-140

OTHER CHRISTIAN  
LITERATURE

- Augustine (*continued*)  
*Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*  
I.II.30 128  
*Confessions*  
4.8 130  
5.16 130  
6.2 174  
9.36 129  
*Contra Faust.*  
30.4 71, 136  
*De Bap.*  
4.22-29 135  
*De Fide et Operibus* 129  
*De Gen. ad Litt.*  
12.33.63 132-133  
*De Haer.*  
79-80 133  
*De natura et origine animae*  
I.10 135  
I.11 140  
I.12 83  
II.15-22 136  
II.24 134  
III.2 134-135  
III.12 83, 135-136  
IV.4 134  
IV.26 136  
*De Pecc. Mer.*  
1.21 129  
1.60 129  
*Eighty-three different questions*  
44 128  
62 135  
*Enchiridion*  
18 137  
29 137  
112-13 54
- Epistles*  
162 132  
164 90, 104, 131-132, 152  
187 132-133  
190 133  
222 105, 133  
*In Ioh. tract.*  
98.9 54  
*On the Care to be Taken for the Dead* 138-139  
*On the Morals of the Catholic Church*  
34 174  
*Quaestiones Evangeliorum*  
II.38 129  
*Retract.*  
II.56 133, 137  
*Sancta virg.*  
I.44 71, 136  
*Sermons*  
113B 129  
240-242 135  
294 140  
323-324 140, 147
- 2 Clement  
1:7 44  
6:7 33  
8:1-3 33, 43-44
- Clement of Alexandria  
*Eclogae Propheticae*  
1.41-49 50  
25.4 110  
*Paedagogus*  
3.44 110  
*Protrepticus*  
53 110  
*Stromateis*  
2.9.43.5-44.4 99  
4.24.154 109  
4.83.2 112  
5.14.90 109
- 6.6.38-53 46,  
48, 99-100,  
109, 162  
6.14.109 109  
7.16.102 109  
7.34 110  
7.56 110
- 3 Corinthians 63
- Cyprian  
*Ad Dem.*  
25 127  
*Epistles*  
6.2.1 166  
15 166  
18 166  
27 166  
28.2.1 77  
55 127  
57.1.1 127-128  
75.11.1 70
- Cyril of Alexandria,  
*Hom. Pasch.*  
7.2.185-189 102
- Egeria, *Iten. Egeriae*  
23 71
- Ephrem, *Carmina Nisibena*  
36.208-209 99
- Epiphanius, *Panarion*  
I.28.6.4-5 38,  
161  
I.64 123
- Epistula Apostolorum*  
27 46-48, 94,  
162  
40 53  
47-48 53
- Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*  
5.2 65

- 5.16.10 88  
6.2 110, 165,  
169, 170  
6.12 169  
6.19 170
- Evagrius Ponticus  
*Kephalaia Gnostica*  
3.40–51 123  
6.15–27 123  
*Scholia ad Proverbia*  
95 123  
143 123
- Gospel of Nicodemus*  
18 106  
23–26 106–108  
27 106
- Gospel of Peter*  
41–42 46
- Gospel of Thomas*  
112 165
- Gregory of Nazianzus  
*Hom. 15 in Canticum  
Canticorum*  
6 71  
*Oratio*  
40.36 120  
45.24 102, 170
- Gregory of Nyssa  
*Hom in Eccl.*  
4 121  
*Life of St. Macrina*  
2.24–31 70  
6.8–10 70–71  
7 121  
12.13 71  
*On the Soul and  
Reurrection*  
PGM 46.68 101  
PGM 46.83–  
100 101, 120–  
122, 173
- Or. Cat.*  
26 122  
40 122
- Gregory the Great  
*Dialogues*  
4.46 142  
4.57–59 142–143  
*Hom. Ezek*  
2.6.22 174  
*Moralia in Job*  
16.82 142  
26.50 142
- Hilary of Poitiers  
*Comm. Ps. 2*  
49 103  
*Comm. Ps. 51*  
23 103  
*Comm. Ps. 118*  
11.3 103
- Hippolytus  
*Against Plato, on the  
Cause of the  
Universe* 82  
*Apostolic Tradition*  
10 65  
*Commentary on Daniel*  
4.18 127  
*De Antichristo*  
26 94  
*Refutatio*  
9.13.3 96
- Ignatius of Antioch,  
*Magnesians*  
9:2 93
- Irenaeus, *Adversus  
Haereses*  
1.25.4–5 112  
1.27.3 93  
3.11.9 88  
3.20.4 96  
4.22.1 96  
4.27.2 94, 97, 162  
4.33.1–12 96  
5.31.1 96
- Jacobus de Voraigne,  
*The Golden  
Legend* 147
- Jerome  
*Ad Praesidium de cereo  
paschali* 169  
*Comm. Eph. II* 123  
*Comm. Ps.*  
145:9 123  
*Ep. ad Avitum* 115  
*Praef. in libr. Quest.*  
*Hebr. in Gen.*  
3.1 169
- John Chrysostom  
*Hom in Act. Ap.*  
21.3 54  
25.4 71  
*Hom. in Epist. ad 1  
Cor* 36, 94  
*Hom. in Epist. ad  
Philipp.* 175  
*Hom. in Jn.*  
25.3 124  
*Hom. 32 in  
Matt.* 175  
*Hom. 36 in  
Matt.* 102, 105
- John the Deacon, *Life of  
St. Gregory* 146–147
- Justin Martyr  
*1 Apology*  
31.6 51  
44–46 49, 97  
*Dialogue with Trypho*  
45 96  
72.4 96, 162
- Justinian, *Ep. ad  
Mennam* 115
- Lactantius, *Divine  
Institutes*  
7.18 54



*De baptismo*  
17 57, 64, 70, 84

*De corona*  
3.2-3 82

*De ieiunio*  
1.3 88  
11.1 88

*De pudicitia*  
12.1 88  
21 168

*De resurrectione*  
*carnis*  
44 95  
48.11 37

Theophilus of  
Antioch, *Ad*  
*Autolyicum*  
2.19 50

Theophylact of  
Bulgaria, *Enarratio*  
*in Evangelium*  
*Lucae* 150, 175

Thomas Aquinas,  
*Summa Theologica*  
3, suppl., qu. 71, a. 5,  
obj. 5 and ad  
5 148, 175

## INDEX OF MODERN AUTHORS

- Abel, F.-M., 160  
Alexander, Loveday, 164  
Alexandre, Monique, 166, 173  
Amat, Jacqueline, 77, 157, 167-168  
Amidon, Philip R., 161, 173  
Attridge, Harold, 95, 169
- Baasland, Ernst, 162  
Bardenhewer, Otto, 173  
Barnes, T. D., 88-89, 166-168  
Bastiaensen, Antoon, 168  
Batey, Richard, 39, 161  
Bauckham, Richard, 51-52, 59, 95,  
161, 163-165, 168-169, 173  
Bauer, Walter, 110, 171  
Begley, Ronald, 159, 171  
Beiting, Christopher, 174  
Best, Ernest, 162  
Bigg, Charles, 118, 171-172  
Bishop, M. Guy, 157  
Bloch-Smith, Elizabeth, 17, 159  
Borg, Barbara, 158  
Boring, M. Eugene, 40, 161  
Bostock, Gerald, 171  
Boughton, Lynn C., 64, 165  
Brakke, David, 167  
Braun, René, 168  
Bremmer, Jan, 165, 167-168
- Brown, Peter, 66, 126, 150, 166, 173-  
174  
Brown, Raymond, 169  
Buchholz, Dennis D., 50-51, 85, 163,  
165, 168  
Burkert, Walter, 16, 159  
Burrus, Virginia, 64, 165  
Butterworth, G. W., 172
- Capéran, Louis, 171  
Chadwick, Henry, 170, 172  
Charlesworth, J. H., 98, 169-170  
Cherniss, Harold, 121, 168, 173  
Chitty, Derwas, 173  
Clark, Elizabeth A., 123, 166, 171-  
173  
Clark, Francis, 174  
Clarke, G. W., 166, 173  
Cohen, A., 161  
Colgrave, Bertram, 143-144, 175  
Collins, John J., 52, 163  
Comstock, Susan Turner, 164  
Conzelmann, Hans, 35, 161  
Cooper, Jerrold S., 159  
Cooper, Kate, 64, 165  
Cox Miller, Patricia, 73, 89, 166, 168  
Crossan, John Dominic, 169  
Crouzel, Henri, 114, 117, 161, 170, 172

- Dagrón, Gilbert, 71, 166  
 Daley, Brian, 168–169  
 Dalton, William J., 45–46, 162, 170, 174  
 Daniélou, Jean, 92, 122, 169, 173  
 Davies, Stevan, 57, 63, 158, 164–165  
 de Veer, Albert, 134, 174  
 DeMaris, Richard, 36, 161  
 den Boeft, Jan, 167  
 Dennis, Trevor, 173  
 Detienne, Marcel, 160  
 Diekamp, F., 74, 143, 166, 175  
 Dieterich, Albrecht, 160  
 Dodds, E. R., 77, 167  
 Dölger, Franz-Joseph, 168  
 Donfried, Karl P., 43, 162  
 Doran, Robert, 160  
 Dorival, Gilles, 115, 172  
 Drobner, Hubertus, 170  
 Droge, Arthur J., 163, 167, 169  
 du Toit, Daniel A., 170  
 Duensing, Hugo, 164  
 Dulaey, Martine, 174  
 Dunand, Françoise, 158  
 Dunn, Peter W., 64, 165  
 Dyer, George J., 174  
  
 Elliot, J. K., 163  
 Evans, C. E., 42, 161  
 Evans, E., 164  
 Evans, G. R., 174  
  
 Feinberg, John S., 162  
 Floyd, W. E. G., 171  
 Frankfurter, David, 53, 164  
 Frazer, James, 12, 158  
 Frede, Michael, 117, 172  
 Friend, W. H. C., 166  
  
 Garland, Robert, 158  
 Gebhardt, O. von, 164  
 Geffcken, Johannes, 159  
 Gingras, George E., 166  
 Goldstein, Jonathan, 27, 160  
 Gorday, Peter, 174  
 Graeme Grieve, Lucia C., 159  
  
 Graf, Fritz, 25, 160  
 Graham, Holt H., 162  
 Grant, Robert M., 162, 169  
 Greenfield, Jonas, 19, 159  
 Greer, Rowan A. 172  
 Guthrie, W. K. C., 25, 160  
  
 Habermehl, Paul, 168  
 Hahneman, Geoffrey Mark, 162  
 Håkanson, Lennart, 166  
 Halporn, J. W., 167  
 Hanslik, R., 165  
 Harnack, A. von, 161  
 Harrington, D. J., 166  
 Harris, W. Hall III, 162  
 Hayne, Léonie, 71, 166  
 Hennessy, Lawrence, 116, 172  
 Herzog, Markwart, 92, 162  
 Hilhorst, A., 57, 164  
 Himmelfarb, Martha, 163–164  
 Hinnells, John R., 164  
 Hirschfeld, Otto, 158  
 Hoffmann, Gregory, 175  
 Hopkins, Keith, 14, 158–159  
 Hornschuh, Manfred, 164  
  
 James, M. R., 50–51, 84, 163, 168  
 Jensen, A., 165  
 Johnston, Sarah Iles, 11, 13, 26, 158, 160  
 Jugie, M., 146, 150, 175  
  
 Kaestli, Jean-Daniel, 64  
 Kaibel, G., 158  
 Kennedy, Charles, 159  
 Kern, Otto, 160  
 Kiley, Mark, 165  
 Klawiter, Frederic, 89, 165, 168  
 Koetschau, Paul, 172  
 Kroll, Josef, 92, 169–171  
 Kümmel, W. G., 161  
 Kurfess, Alfons, 31, 52–53, 161, 163  
  
 LaBonnardière, Anne-Marie, 174  
 Langgärtner, Georg, 170

- Lattimore, Richmond, 13, 15–16, 158–159
- Layton, Bentley, 111–112, 171
- Le Déault, R., 160
- Lefèvre, Maurice, 173
- Lefkowitz, Mary R., 167–168
- LeGoff, Jacques, 10, 158, 168, 175
- Letts, Melinda, 14, 158–159
- Lévi, Israel, 164
- Lichtenberg, Roger, 158
- Lieu, Samuel N. C., 172
- Lipsius, R. A., 157, 164
- Loewe, H., 161
- Löhr, Winrich A., 171
- Long, J. Bruce, 171
- Luibheid, Colm, 175
- Maas, Wilhelm, 92, 170
- MacCulloch, J. A., 92, 169, 171
- MacDonald, Dennis R., 64, 165
- MacKay, Thomas, 57, 164
- Malherbe, Abraham, 161
- Mara, M. G., 169
- Martin, Luther, 67, 166
- Matthews, Christopher R., 165
- Mavaert, Paul, 175
- Meredith, Anthony, 173
- Merkelbach, Rheinhold, 23, 160
- Meyendorff, John, 152, 175
- Misset van de Weg, Magda, 165
- Montefiore, C. G., 161
- Moore, Carey, 19, 159
- Morey, Lacey Collison, 166
- Morris, Ian, 11, 13, 158
- Motley, J. L., 148, 175
- Mouhana, A., 122, 172–173
- Mueller, C. D. G., 163, 168
- Mueller, Liguori G., 174
- Munier, C., 161, 173
- Musurillo, H., 157, 168
- Nautin, P., 171
- Newman, Barbara, 148, 175
- Niebuhr, Gustav, 157
- Norden, Eduard, 160
- Norris, Frederick W., 114, 172
- Ntedika, Joseph, 174
- O'Connell, Robert, 174
- Osiek, Carolyn, 162
- Patterson, Daniel W., 157–158
- Patterson, L. G., 166
- Patterson, Ray, 175
- Peebles, M., 174
- Peel, Malcolm L., 169
- Pelikan, Jaroslav, 174
- Pérès, Jacques-Noël, 163
- Perkins, J. Ward, 12, 158
- Pernveden, Lage, 162
- Pervo, Richard I., 164
- Pesthy, Monika, 166
- Peterson, Erik, 163
- Petit, Ludovico, 175
- Pietersma, Albert, 164
- Pope, Marvin, 18, 159
- Preus, Mary, 174
- Quasten, Johannes, 167, 170, 173
- Rabinowitz, Celia, 116, 172
- Rankin, David, 168
- Raphael, Simcha Paull, 158, 160, 172
- Reardon, B. P., 165
- Réau, Louis, 167
- Reicke, Bo, 45, 162
- Reinach, Salomon, 10, 158
- Rissi, Mathis, 35, 161
- Robeck, Cecil, 82, 168
- Robinson, J. A., 166–168
- Robinson, James M., 171
- Rordorf, Willy, 57, 151, 164, 175
- Route, Michel, 174
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford, 63, 165
- Salisbury, Joyce E., 158, 167
- Sanders, E. P., 29–30, 160
- Santos Otero, Aurelio de, 164
- Scheidweiler, Felix, 171
- Schlunk, H., 167
- Schmidt, C., 164

- Schneemelcher, Wilhelm, 64, 164–165
- Segal, Alan F., 171
- Shaw, Brent, 77, 167–168
- Sheerin, Daniel, 170
- Smith, Joseph Fielding, 157
- Spronk, Klaas, 159
- Staab, Karl, 161
- Starcky, Jean, 160
- Ste. Croix, G. E. M. de, 167
- Stein, Stephen J., 157–158
- Stettner, Walter, 172
- Stokes, Whitley, 175
- Stone, Michael E., 30, 160
- Straw, Carole, 174
- Studer, Basil, 174
- Sussman, Lewis A., 166
- Swete, H. B., 168
- Tabor, James, 167
- Teixidor, Javier, 170
- Teske, Roland J., 174
- Thompson, K. C., 161
- Tischendorf, C. von, 171
- Townsend, John T., 161
- Toynbee, J. C. M., 12, 16, 158–159
- Trevett, Christine, 89, 168
- Trigg, Joseph W., 172
- Trumbower, Jeffrey A., 163, 172
- Tsirpanlis, C. N., 120, 173
- Tsukimoto, Akio, 159
- Tylor, Edward B., 68, 166
- Underwood, Grant, 157
- Vogels, Heinz-Jurgen, 92, 169
- Waal, A. de, 168
- Waldstein, Michael, 171
- Ware, Kallistos, 151–152, 175
- Waszink, J. H., 168–169, 173
- Whatley, Gordon, 144, 146–147, 175
- Wheeler, R. E. M., 158
- White, Robert J., 166
- Wilken, Robert, 163
- Williams, Michael Allen, 111–112, 171
- Wisse, Frederik, 171
- Zimmerman, Odo John, 175

## GENERAL INDEX

- Adam, 106–107  
angels, 45, 114, 139  
animals, 23, 61–62, 115  
apocatastasis, 109–110, 115–120  
apologetics, 97  
apostates, 5–6, 112  
Asclepius, 73
- baptism  
  of blood (martyrdom), 130, 136, 146  
  for the dead (vicarious), 4–6, 35–39, 94, 104, 155  
  after death, 38, 47–48, 50, 83, 93–94, 106, 124, 140, 144–146  
  of desire, 104, 124  
  of tears, 144–147
- Bar-Kochba, 51–52  
Basileidians, 111–112  
bishops, 65–66, 86–88, 128, 136–137  
Buddhism, 112  
burial practices, 11–14, 19–23, 66, 138–139
- Carpocratians, 112  
catechumens, 36, 78, 84, 94, 124  
Cerinthians, 38  
circumcision, 28, 136  
conversion after death, 3–5, 45–47, 61, 70, 92–108
- Council of Carthage (397 C. E.), 38  
Council of Ferrare/Florence (1438 C. E.), 151
- Devil. *See* Satan  
Donatists, 133, 135  
dreams/waking visions, 61, 63, 65–68, 72–73, 80–81, 86, 135, 138–139
- Eastern Orthodoxy, 9, 70–75, 102–103, 119–124, 144–146, 149–153  
Epicureanism, 14  
eternal punishment, 5, 40–41, 50, 74, 102, 109–110, 116–117, 122–124, 128–129, 131, 138–139  
ethics, 23–25, 34, 42, 50, 87–88, 102–105, 108, 113, 123–124, 137, 143, 155
- Gehenna/Gehinnom. *See* Hades/hell  
ghosts, 13, 15–21, 60–62, 67–68, 80–81  
gnosticism, 100, 110–112
- Hades/hell, 13, 19–20, 25, 30–31, 42, 45, 47–49, 69, 80–83, 89, 91–109, 116, 127–129, 131–133, 145, 151–152

- heaven, 45, 79, 81–82, 84–85, 89,  
 91, 94–95, 107, 135  
 Hellenistic Judaism. *See* Second-  
 temple Judaism  
 hero-cults, 12, 66, 92  
 Hinduism, 112  
  
 Iconoclast controversy, 150  
 incubation, 73  
 infants, unbaptized, 9, 134–135, 140  
 intercession, 30–32, 49–55, 64–66,  
 72, 80–81, 83–85, 89, 139  
  
 Jeremiah apocryphon, 96–97  
 John the Baptist, 100, 106–107,  
 113  
 Judaism. *See* Second-temple Judaism;  
 rabbinic traditions  
 judgment after death, 23–24, 31, 33–  
 35, 41, 49–53, 62, 69–70, 74,  
 82–83, 85, 89, 91, 97, 128–129,  
 139, 150,  
  
 lapsed Christians, 65, 127–128  
 Latter-day Saints, 4–6, 28, 35–36, 49,  
 86, 112, 155  
 Lemuria ritual, 17  
 limbo, 140, 153, 174  
  
 Maccabees, 26–29  
 Manichees, 113  
 Marcionites, 36–38, 88, 93–94  
 marriage, 63–64, 77–78  
 martyrdom, 6–7, 28, 49, 64–66, 75–  
 80, 84, 86, 89, 114, 127–128  
 Mesopotamia, 17–18  
 messiah, 92  
 Montanists, 78, 87–89  
 Mormons. *See* Latter-day Saints  
 mummification, 13–14, 23  
 Muratorian canon, 47  
  
 necromancy, 18, 67–68, 139  
 Novatianists, 127  
  
 Origenist controversy, 110, 114, 122–  
 124  
  
 original sin, 129–130, 134–135  
 Orphism, 23–26, 36, 112  
  
 pagan opponents of Christianity, 49,  
 117–118, 145–146  
 Paraclete, 87–88  
 Parentales festival, 16–17, 37–39  
 Pelagian controversy, 129–130, 134–  
 136  
 persecution, 6–7, 28, 51, 54, 60, 76–  
 80, 86–88, 114, 127–128  
 Platonism, 113–114, 116, 120–122  
 possession, spirit, 3–4, 87–88  
 prayer for the dead, 6–7, 10, 29–31,  
 61, 80–81, 83, 89, 129, 135–137,  
 142–147, 150–155  
 purgatory/purgation, 9, 82–83, 94,  
 116, 120–122, 136–138, 143,  
 147–148, 155  
  
 rabbinic traditions, 18, 27, 30–31, 53  
 reincarnation, 110–113, 115–116  
 relics, 66  
 repentance, 29–30, 43–44, 46–47,  
 59–60, 94, 102–103, 106–107,  
 109, 132  
 resurrection, 27–28, 35, 37, 58–59,  
 62–63, 82, 93, 96, 106, 122,  
 140, 147–149, 152  
 Roman Catholicism, 9, 71, 89–90,  
 103–105, 107–108, 126–128,  
 135, 137, 140, 141–149, 151–  
 153  
  
 Satan/the devil, 86, 95, 98–99, 106,  
 117, 123, 130–131  
 Scholasticism, 147–148  
 Second-temple Judaism, 18–19, 22–  
 23, 26–32, 43, 52–53, 91–92,  
 113  
 Shakers, 3–4, 28, 155  
 Sheol. *See* Hades/hell  
 slavery, 121  
 Smith, Joseph, 4–5, 35  
 soul, origin of the, 114, 134  
 Stoics, 117–118  
 suicide, 78, 88

transvestitism, 62, 86, 165

Ugarit, 18

universal salvation, 6, 39-41, 51,  
106-107, 109-110, 117-125,  
130-131, 139, 148-150

Universalist denomination, 6, 124-125

Valentinians, 111, 114

Vatican II, 9, 140, 152-153

virginity, 59-60, 63-64, 73

visions. *See* dreams

women as Christian leaders, 57-58,  
63-64, 70, 74, 86-89, 119