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Reading Sex and Gender in the *Secret Revelation of John*

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Abstract

The Secret Revelation of John is replete with imagery of the divine Mother alongside the Father God and his Son Christ. It boasts of powerful female saviors—and even identifies Christ among them. Eve is not the cause of humankind’s fall, but of its redemption. The sexual intercourse of Adam and Eve marks not original sin, but a step toward salvation. Yet readers find, too, an idealized divine world in the pattern of the ancient patriarchal household, and a portrait of another female figure, Sophia, whose bold and independent action leads to a fatherless world headed by a sexually violent and deviant bastard. The complexity of this imagery, nestled in a story that operates with oppositional strategies and parody, ensures that no single monolithic perspective on sex/gender will rule—and indeed it opens up a crack where it is possible that the wise-fool Sophia is more completely the hero of the story than one might think. This essay aims to explore the complexities of *SRJ*’s representation of gender and the implications of their strategic deployments.

Long-excluded voices from texts rediscovered in Egypt over the last century often surprise expectations that were formed by reading Gnosticism’s ancient detractors, like Irenaeus or Tertullian, for they speak of other desires, other goals, and other perspectives than those tersely summarized in the standard definitions.¹ *The Secret Revelation of John* (*SRJ*) is one of those stories that challenges many standard characterizations of Gnostic thought, whether as nihilistic and antinomian or (proto)-feminist and liberative.² Instead, it offers a complex and tangled narrative that simultaneously reinscribes, negotiates, and critiques aspects of ancient Mediterranean society, including imperial and patriarchal social structures, as well as notions of sex and gender.

Composed in the second century C.E. in Greek, quite possibly in Alexandria in Egypt, the *Secret Revelation of John* survives in four fourth-fifth century C.E. manuscripts, which represent three Coptic versions replete with notable variants.³ It has

the distinction of being the first work known to us to formulate a comprehensive narrative of Christian theology, cosmology, and salvation. Presented as a revelation from Christ to his disciple John, it tells of the true God and the divine world, the origins of the universe and humanity, the nature of evil and suffering, the body and sexuality, the path to salvation, and the final end of all things. At the heart of this deeply spiritual story lies a powerful social critique of injustice and a radical affirmation of God's compassion for suffering humanity. In contrast to Roman rulers who declared themselves the authors and enforcers of universal justice and peace, the story describes the world as a shadowed place ruled by ignorant and malevolent beings. It exposes their lies and violence as violations of the true God's purpose, and offers sure knowledge of one's true spiritual identity and destiny. Divine emissaries frequent this dark world, bringing revelations and working in secret to lift humanity out of ignorance and degradation, and restore them to their rightful place in the world of light under the rule of the true Father.

The *Secret Revelation of John* is broadly structured as an intertextual reading of the first chapters of Genesis with Platonizing cosmology, especially that of the *Timaeus*.⁴ In contrast to other intertextual readings of Genesis⁵ and the *Timaeus* in antiquity, such as that of Philo of Alexandria, the *Secret Revelation of John* does not read the two creation accounts in Gen 1.1-2.4a and 2.4b-3:24 as describing the realms of Being and becoming, respectively. Rather it reads the initial chapters of Genesis twice, first with regard to the origin of the transcendent divine realm, and again to recount the demiurgic fabrication of the material world below.⁶ The use of Genesis to expound the creation of the lower world is widely recognized, speaking as it does of the creation of Adam and Eve, the stories of the snake and the Tree of Knowledge, the birth of Cain, Abel, and Seth, as well

as the flood. Less obvious is the *Secret Revelation of John*'s use of Genesis to describe the generation of multiplicity in the realm above. This somewhat elusive retelling begins when the One (the Father) gazes upon his own reflection in the light-water, producing the perfect Human (also called Barbelo, Pronoia, the Mother), a move which elaborates upon the Greek version of Gen 1.3.⁷ With the permission of the Father, the Mother produces the Son (Christ-Autogenes, a kind of heavenly Adam figure), and from them proceeds the fullness of the divine world. The last of its aeonic beings to appear is Sophia (Wisdom), an Eve figure whose foolish disobedience ruptures the harmony of the divine (patriarchal) household and ultimately results in human mortality.

It is at this point that the more obvious second retelling of Genesis begins, since the (fatherless) product of Sophia's disobedience is styled as the creator God of the lower world, an arrogant and ignorant being named Yaldabaoth. He creates a number of minions to aid as rulers of the lower world, and proceeds to lord it over them. The rest of the Genesis retelling has been structured into a sequence of attempts by the world creator forcibly and illegitimately to dominate humanity, each met with reciprocal acts on the part of the divine world to save them: To counteract the creator god's ignorant claim to be the only God, the image of the perfect Human appears as light on the water below. To capture this divine power, the creator god and his minions create a being (Adam) in the image of perfect Human above and in their own likeness (*SRJ* 15.1-19). But when he doesn't move, Christ persuades Yaldabaoth to breathe Sophia's spirit into Adam. The Mother-Pronoia also sends down the female savior Epinoia to hide in Adam and instruct him. The rulers then try to tempt Adam and deceive him with food, beauty, false life, and later on with wealth and sexual desire, but Epinoia leads Adam to eat of the Tree of

Knowledge so that he escapes these traps. Dimly perceiving the presence of Epinoia within Adam, the rulers want to possess her. They bring a trance over Adam, surgically remove a part of the Mother-Sophia's power from Adam, and place it in another form in the shape of a woman (Eve) according to the likeness of Epinoia. Yaldabaoth proceeds to rape Eve, producing Cain and Abel, whom he hopes at last to be able to dominate. But the violent assault on Eve backfires when Adam continues to recognize the likeness of his own divine essence in Eve even after her violation, and from their sexual union is born a child, Seth, in the likeness of the true Son of Man. Seth becomes the model and progenitor of an indomitable, spiritual humanity. The story goes on to recount the rulers' failed attempts to destroy humanity with a flood and pollute them with their own counterfeit spirit. Humanity flourishes, however, when the Mother-Pronoia sends her Spirit to aid them. As the story ends, the Savior confirms that the teaching is complete, and he instructs John to write it all down and pass it on in secret to his fellow spirits, for "This mystery belongs to the immovable generation."⁸

Stereotypes of Gnosticism suggest that the text's strong distinction between the transcendent Deity above and the lower world's creator god represents an anti-cosmic dualism that devalues all material existence as evil and degraded, a body-hating existential alienation that reduces moral life to a self-loathing asceticism.⁹ There is, however, little if any attention paid to these themes in the story itself. Rather the *Secret Revelation of John* offers an insistent utopian sensibility in which dualism functions primarily in the service of a broad-ranging social critique. Its oppositional logic takes on full narrative force in figuring the transcendent realm above as the ideal; the lower world, as a parodic imitation. The ideal of justice is represented by the transcendent Deity's rule

of the Divine Realm; the measure of injustice, by the inferior gods' attempts to exert illegitimate domination over a spiritually superior humanity.

Lodged within this narrative is a deployment of gender imagery that at first glance appears to present a thoroughgoing (“proto-feminist”?) critique of androcentric theology and patriarchal social structures. God is described in feminine as well as masculine imagery; alongside the Son-Christ, the divine female saviors Pronoia and Epinoia play central roles in salvation; Eve is not the source of sin and death, but the illuminator of Adam; and the Berlin Codex version of the text explicitly states that the subordination of woman to man was contrary to the will of the true God. Such elements stand out sharply in a Christian literary landscape noted for exclusively male imagery for God, as well as calls to silence and subordinate women, to blame them for the “fall” of humanity, and to exclude them from positions of leadership. A closer analysis, however, offers as much to challenge this reading as to confirm it.

By reading the gendered imagery within the *Secret Revelation of John*'s overall narrative structure, it becomes clear that sex/gender is deeply implicated in the story's oppositional logic. Contrast and parody characterize the gendered representations of patriarchal social order, reproduction, sex/gender identity, and roles in salvation. Yet, perhaps because gender imagery is used in so many different fields, the *Secret Revelation of John* does not offer a single, logically consistent or monolithic perspective on sex/gender. Rather, it is possible to map a number of strategies that complexify—and perhaps even contradict or undermine—the oppositions set up in other parts of the story. Let's take a closer look.

The ideal order of the divine realm is portrayed as a patriarchal household: Father, Mother, and Son, with numerous generations following from them in harmonious, hierarchical order.¹⁰ So, too, in the lower world, the mimesis of this ideal is represented by Adam, Eve, and Seth, presumably the progenitor of “the immovable generations,” the “fellow spirits” of John to whom the secret revelation is addressed.¹¹ In contrast, the perverted parody of this proper order is portrayed by the dominion of Yaldabaoth, himself a fatherless bastard of a “fallen” mother.¹² While he, too, produces numerous beings under his rule, modeled according to the likeness of the divine realm above,¹³ the result is a far cry from the harmonious order of the divine realm, for they are produced out of ignorance and arrogance.¹⁴ The contrast serves to affirm patriarchal order, not critique it.¹⁵

Likewise, reproduction in the divine realm is sharply contrasted with that in the lower world. The Father (the Invisible Spirit) initially produces the Mother (Barbelo, Pronoia) through self-reflective knowledge: When he perceives himself in the light which surrounds him, his thinking came into being as Pronoia (“Forethought”).¹⁶ Similarly, the Mother gives birth to the Son by gazing intently into the Invisible Spirit and turning toward him.¹⁷ In contrast, Yaldabaoth is said to copulate with Aponoia (“Madness”) to beget the angelic authorities under him.¹⁸ These lower rulers are able to produce children for themselves only through violence and deception. In one scene, Yaldabaoth rapes Eve, while in another plot, the angelic authorities deceptively alter their appearances to look like the husbands of the women whom they then molest.¹⁹ In these images, reproduction in the divine realm is characterized by acts of mental will and

spiritual self-recognition in contrast to the violent acts of lustful desire and deceit by the lower world's rulers.

The contrast, however, extends not only to the patriarchal household in the divine realm, but is played out in the Chief Ruler's attempts to dominate humanity through sexual desire. Two passages clearly state that sexual desire come from the lower rulers (*SRJ* 20:24-25 and 22.2),²⁰ but they have to be read in the context of *SRJ*'s oppositional strategy as yet another unsuccessful ploy of the lower rulers to dominate humanity. At *SRJ* 20.24-25, the Savior tells John that it was the serpent who taught Adam and Eve about "sexual desire," which is clearly meant to be negatively valued given the three versions variously describe this desire as "wickedness," "pollution," and "destruction." But all three versions also note that the teaching fails because the humans are wiser than the Chief Ruler and disobey him (*SRJ* 20.26-27).²¹

SRJ 22.2 also affirms clearly that "up to the present day, marital intercourse came about from the Chief Ruler."²² His strategy was to plant procreative desire in Adam (BG, III, and IV) or in "she who belongs to Adam" (II) in order to produce likenesses from the counterfeit spirit, but his plan again fails. Rather than act from polluting desire, Adam begot Seth when he recognized his spiritual essence in Eve, so that Seth was born through sexual intercourse²³ but according to the pattern of divine reproduction: "just as it is in the generation which is above in the aeons."²⁴ Notably, this position is comparable to that of other Christians, like Clement of Alexandria who also held that only Gnostic Christians were capable of sexual intercourse without polluting desire.²⁵ Clement conceived of reproductive sex without desire as a participation in God's creative activity, and so, too, it would seem for *SRJ*, since the seed of Seth continues the lineage

established in the world above, affirming that this essence “follows the model of the perfection.”²⁶ The longer version adds two lines (II 22.26-27) emphasizing that Seth was born in the likeness of the heavenly son of man, even as Gen 5.3 says, with the birth of Seth, Adam produced a child in his own image and likeness—a claim not made for Cain or Abel. The failure of the world ruler should come as no surprise to readers since they had already been told in a previous episode that when Adam first saw Eve, he had immediately recognized in her his spiritual “essence”²⁷ and had affirmed that they would become “a single flesh” (ΟΥΝΑΡΞ ΝΟΥΩΤ).²⁸ The Savior had explained to John that thus the deficiency of Sophia would thus be rectified,²⁹ and again at 22.36-37, the gift of the Spirit to this generation is said to heal its deficiency. It would seem that the Savior is telling John that sexual reproduction, when it follows the pattern of divine production, is part of the divine plan and contributes to salvation.

Gender identities, however, are far from stable in either realm. Whether it is preferable to characterize the highest Deity as “It” or as “He” shifts depending upon whether God is characterized as the One (the Invisible Spirit, prior to explicit sex/gender differentiation) or as Father. Barbelo is described with both male and female pronouns and descriptors, such as the first Human (m.), the Mother, the Mother-Father, and Pronoia (f.). In both the longer and shorter version of *Secret Revelation of John*, the Savior appears to John in a polymorphic vision of light, as an old man, a youth, and (in the shorter version of BG perhaps) a woman.³⁰ He goes on to disclose his identity with the words: “I am the Father, I am the Mother, I am the Son.”³¹ His appearance thus reveals both the unity and the (gender-fluid) nature of the Divine. Through his revelation, the Savior urges human beings to seek and cultivate their true spiritual natures, created in the

Image of the First Human and filled with the Spirit of the Mother. By linking the nature of God and humanity, the Savior's polymorphy signals both the presence of the divine in human bodies—old and young, male and female—as well as simultaneously their potential for spiritual transformation and transcendence. In the longer version in NHC II and IV, Christ (the Son) later also declares “I am the perfect Pronoia” (f.),³² and elsewhere he may be identified with Epinoia (f.), two female figures. These instabilities seem to have resulted from using gender imagery to do different kinds of work. On the one hand, philosophical imagery suggests that the highest being, the One, transcends categories of male/female, while the Dyad signals a move to sexual difference and is especially marked by feminine imagery (and therefore the second figure of the divine triad, Barbelo/Pronoia, can be characterized both as female and as male-female). The identification of Christ with Pronoia and Epinoia arises from an intensified intertextual reading with the Gospel of John, where the Christ-Logos is both co-creator with God and savior.³³ The discourse of the patriarchal household, however, marks these same figures in more clearly gendered roles of father, mother, and son. The conflation of these distinct deployments of gender imagery results in a certain instability, while simultaneously reproducing dominant patriarchal modes of styling sex/gender difference.

Gender is more consistently and strategically “bent” in characterizing Yaldabaoth and his minions. They act like uncivilized *males*, copulating and raping, but are also caricatured as *androgynous*, bestial (animal-faced, theriomorphic) demigods,³⁴ and *feminized* as weak and ignorant. Here all the markers of “deviant” and “degenerate” sex/gender identity—whether as barbarian males, inferior females, or androgynous beasts—are purposefully deployed to characterize the rulers of the lower world. The

twisted, bestial sexuality of the lower world's bastard and his offspring starkly highlights the predominantly heterosexual and patriarchal ideals of the divine world.

Gender imagery also pervades *Secret Revelation of John*'s narrative of the rupture and restoration of the divine world. Here the storytellers embed a powerful intertextual reading of Jewish Wisdom literature³⁵ within its double reading of Genesis with Platonizing dualism, a reading that again significantly complexifies the text's use of gendered imagery.³⁶ While Jewish literature characterizes the figure of divine Wisdom in multiple ways—including as co-creator with God, the bringer of life and salvation, and teacher—the *Secret Revelation of John* divides these characteristics among several different figures. In particular, Wisdom's roles as revealer and teacher in giving (revealed) knowledge and (spiritual) life are ascribed to the savior figures in the story, predominately Pronoia, Epinoia, and Christ; Pronoia repeatedly sends help to humans in the world below, while Epinoia and Christ both function as descending and ascending Wisdom figures who offer revealed, saving knowledge. The association of Wisdom with creation, however, is divided between Pronoia, who is featured positively as co-creator with God of the divine realm, and Sophia-Yaldabaoth, to whom is ascribed the creation of the (lower) world—activity that is valued negatively in the text's oppositional logic.

Moreover, Genesis intersects with Jewish Wisdom literature in a novel portrait of Sophia (Wisdom) as a kind of Eve. Whereas in (certain Christian readings of) Genesis it is Eve who is the source of evil and human suffering, in the *Secret Revelation of John*, it is the divine Sophia who plays the role of the female out of male control. When she desires to make a likeness out of herself, without the consent of the Spirit or the participation of her male counterpart, she disrupts the harmony of the patriarchal

household in which reproduction proceeds by male-female pairs acting in obedience to the rule of the Father.³⁷ Her exercise of independent thought breaks the ideal pattern of obedience and subordination, and with it the order of attenuated sameness³⁸ that had characterized the hierarchy of the divine world. In short, the result of Sophia's brazen conduct leads to the production of *difference*, for the text repeatedly stresses that her offspring is not like her.³⁹ This malformed product of female deviance is reified as the arrogant and ignorant world creator and ruler, Yaldabaoth. He functions as kind of fallen Eve-Sophia, disobeying the authority of the transcendent God and, not merely aspiring to be like God, he declares himself to be the only God. Indeed he appears more like Folly, a parodic antithesis to Wisdom.⁴⁰ All alienation from God, which leads to suffering and death, ultimately arises from the acts of this audacious mother and her deeply flawed offspring.

The figure of Eve, however, is a savior figure, created in the image of the divine Epinoia, who speaks and acts through her. Eve possesses the powerful Spirit of the Mother-Sophia stolen by Yaldabaoth. As we discussed above, when Adam sees her, he is immediately enlightened and recognizes in her his own essence and likeness.⁴¹ From Adam and Eve, Seth is born in the true likeness of the divine Human "just as it is in generation which is above in the aeons."⁴² Eve here "recapitulates" Sophia, in that her birthing of Seth in union with Adam rectifies Sophia's error.⁴³ When Sophia acted without her male partner alone and produced Yaldabaoth, she broke the continuity of divine being; Eve's birthing of Seth restores the divine lineage, which continues in "the immovable generation." As the Savior explains, Adam calls Eve "the mother of the living" because Sophia's deficiency will be rectified through her.⁴⁴

Moreover, even as the Father produced Autogenes-Christ through self-reflective knowledge in Pronoia, so, too, Seth is born of Adam's self-recognition of his spiritual likeness in Eve—a likeness Adam fully recognizes even after her rape by Yaldabaoth, itself an astonishing affirmation that the powers of evil are impotent to violate a woman's true spiritual nature. By placing these two scenes of sex side-by-side, the oppositional logic of the narrative sharply contrasts the lust and violence of rape with the sexual intercourse of Adam and Eve. It may not be too much to suggest that insofar as Adam and Eve's union corrects the untimely birthing of Yaldabaoth, gnostic sex—void of lustful desire—was conceived as an act of salvation. Here again, the rulers are shown to be impotent: the Chief Ruler had instituted sexual intercourse in order to produce likenesses of the counterfeit spirit over which he and his powers could rule, but this ploy fails when intercourse between Adam and Eve instead produces Seth in the likeness of the true Human above.

These scenes appear to reverse more usual readings of Genesis and Wisdom literature insofar as Sophia most fully plays the role of the bold and disobedient female responsible for all evil and suffering (the role usually reserved for Eve), while Eve acts as the wise instructor whose teaching illuminates humanity (Sophia's usual task). The striking result is to make the supposed cause of humanity's fall into a savior, while representing wisdom as foolish and ignorant.

In summary, the contours of the *Secret Revelation of John's* oppositional strategy works to mark ideal representations from their flawed imitations by the use of parody and caricature. In this framework, the patriarchal household is contrasted with the domain of the fatherless bastard; mental acts of pure will, with lust and violence; sexual

reproduction through recognition of a shared divine essence in the other, with degenerate reproduction through arrogant and ignorant desire/lust; true imitation, with counterfeiting and malicious parody; self-knowledge, with ignorance; obedience, harmony, and likeness, with disobedience, deficiency, and difference; heterosexual gender identity, with androgyny, lack of maleness (fatherless), and bestiality. All these contrasts mark what it means to be truly and fully human—socially, politically, sexually, ethically—in distinction from the kinds of vulnerability, inadequacy, and lack characterized most strongly as ignorance, anguish, death, and sexual deviance.

The human reality readers are to discover in the *Secret Revelation of John* is ultimately not alienated, but indomitable. The situation of humanity in the world appears contradictory only because human beings are inscribed fully within the oppositional logic of the text. Seemingly subject to the unjust dominion of these bestial rulers, in fact humanity is superior to them and destined for the compassionate rule of the true Deity. Seemingly subject to the passions and mortal death, in fact human nature is essentially spiritual and divine, transcending all the constraints of time and matter.

Yet this oppositional logic has clear limits. Salvation requires not merely rupture but connection. As Sophia's untimely birthing crosses a boundary from light into darkness, so too do saviors from the realm above repeatedly cross over, bringing spiritual enlightenment to empower humanity. The paths of loss and restoration are marked by these comings and goings. At the end of the longer version, Pronoia-Christ descends three times into the lower world, offering hope, honor, and protection:

“And I said, ‘Whoever hears, arise from lethargic sleep!’

And he wept, shedding tears, heavy tears he wiped from himself. And he said, ‘Who is it who calls my name and from where does this hope come to me who am dwelling in the fetters of the prison?’

And I said, ‘I am the Pronoia of the pure light; I am the thought of the virginal Spirit, the one who raises you to the place of honor. Arise and remember that you are the one who has heard and follow your root, which is I, the compassionate. Fortify yourself against the angels of poverty and the demons of chaos and all those who ensnare you, and be watchful of the lethargic sleep and the garment of the inside of Hades.’

And I raised him up and sealed him with the light of the water with five seals so that death would not have power over him from this day on.”⁴⁵

This view of salvation requires that the oppositional logic give way as the divine pervades the lower world, in spirit and truth, in likeness and substance. Christ tells John explicitly that the physical body is not an impediment to living the ethical life of the Spirit in the world.⁴⁶ Nor are the body and materiality—or even sex—in themselves the problem. We have already seen that *SRJ* condemns only violence and lust, not heterosexual reproduction—which is to be regarded as salvific insofar as it follows the model of divine creation in the world above. Indeed when the Spirit enters into Adam, his body became luminous.⁴⁷ And in the longer version, Christ supplies a long list of the names of the demons who rule over each part of the body—not to vilify the flesh but to heal people by freeing them from demonic control.⁴⁸ As a result, limiting the story’s message to its oppositional logic fails to grasp its redemptive message: that moral

goodness, knowledge of the truth, and safety from the forces of evil are possible in this life in the world. With the aid of Christ's revelation human beings are able to receive the Spirit and direct themselves toward the true God through instruction, moral living, healing, and baptismal rites.

But more than this, the oppositional strategies deployed in the story are also subject to excesses, to possibilities for opening up associations and contradictions that escape any intentionality or control by the tellers of the tale. The very strategy of oppositional logic imposes its own limits, since antinomies always imply the possibility of reversal. Depending on one's reader position, it is entirely possible to imagine that *SRJ*'s gender-bent bastards model a kind of critique of the Father's imposition of a rigid rule in which divine harmony is figured as unity and uniformity. What if it is not Sophia's independent action but the Father's authoritarian exclusion of "deviants" that leads to cosmic rupture? What if it is not Sophia's boldness, but the Father's arrogant and violent response to Sophia's desire to create (or "individuate") that models the lower gods' arrogance and violence? Such a reading would disturb the "utopian" vision of harmony as patriarchal hierarchy, exposing its own arrogance and violence.

Another notable example of this kind of hermeneutical excess appears in the Berlin Codex version. There Eve not only reverses Sophia's disobedience to the true Father (by following the model of divine reproduction as Sophia had not), but she also reenacts Sophia's boldness against her supposed father, Yaldabaoth, by disobeying him. Christ gives his approval to her disobedience, explaining that Eve would not obey Yaldabaoth "because she is wiser than he." Even more striking, Christ tells John that the world creator's attempt to punish Eve by subordinating her to Adam was contrary to the

decree of the holy height—that is, it was contrary to God’s plan.⁴⁹ To my knowledge, this is the strongest condemnation of women’s subordination to men to be found in all of the surviving ancient literature.

This rather radical statement should be read, however, in terms of the story’s narrative logic, which aims to lampoon the lower world rulers by humiliating them at the hands of disobedient and disruptive females like Epinoia and Eve. Indeed, every attempt of the world rulers to dominate humanity is thwarted by Pronoia and her agents (Epinoia, Christ, and Eve). The whole point of the Genesis retelling is to underscore the impotence of these unholy demigods.⁵⁰ It is true that the impact of this humiliation only works based on an assumption that being bested by women is emasculating—that is, the social logic relies on a normative gendered reading of honor and shame, in which honor is stratified by gender as well as by status (slave or free, ruler or subject, and so on).⁵¹ Yet this norm is cited precisely in order to critique the violence of “masculinized” domination.⁵² The hermeneutical excess may extend further than any “authorial intent.” Such a move potentially does more than perform a destabilizing citation of gender norms⁵³—it enables a thorough critique of *SRJ*’s own implicitly positive citation of gender hierarchy in its representation of the restoration of the patriarchal household as the goal of salvation. Given the oppositional logic of the work, this critique could potentially be extended into a reconsideration of Sophia’s act of insubordination to the Father above. It may be that the Sophia story was told as a cautionary tale designed to put limits on human will and action outside of or apart from patriarchal structures of authority, but any such telling is undone—or at least unsettled—by heroizing Eve’s disobedience as an act of superior wisdom. Might readers not ask: If Eve’s disobedience to Yaldabaoth is a

good thing, why is Sophia's boldness toward the Father wrong? If the subordination of Eve to Adam was against God's design, how can the subordination of Sophia to Him be recommended? If the creator god acted in such a way out of malice, what does that say about the all-too-similar acts of the Father above?

Some readers appear to have been aware of these interpretive possibilities and attempted to eliminate them by changing the story.⁵⁴ Evidence of such attempts are apparent in two variant passages. The first concerns disobedience to the lower god:

Berlin Codex 20.25-27: "The serpent is the one who instructed her (Eve) about the sowing of desire, pollution, and destruction because these are useful to him (the serpent/Yaldabaoth). Yet he knew that she would not obey him because she is wiser than he."⁵⁵

Nag Hammadi Codex II 20.25-27: "The snake taught them (Adam and Eve) to eat from a wicked desire to sow which belongs to destruction, in order that he (Adam) would become useful to him (Yaldabaoth). And he knew that he was disobedient to him, because the light of Epinoia dwelled in him, making him more correct in his thinking than the Chief Ruler (Yaldabaoth)."⁵⁶

In both versions, the snake is associated with sexual desire, pollution, and death.⁵⁷ Both versions also regard Adam and Eve's disobedience to Yaldabaoth (in subsequently eating from the Tree of Knowledge) as an act of enlightenment, proving they are wiser than he is. The Berlin Codex version, however, focuses on Eve as the one who is disobedient and

wise, while Codex II focuses on Adam. As a consequence, Codex II disrupts the potential reading of Eve's disobedience as an imitation of Sophia—and with it the potential positive reevaluation of Sophia's boldness and independence.

The second passage concerns the subordination of Eve to Adam after they have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge:

Berlin Codex 22.1-5: "Yaldabaoth knew that they had withdrawn from him. He cursed them. Moreover, he adds concerning the female that the male should rule over her for he does not understand the mystery which came to pass from the design of the holy height."⁵⁸

Nag Hammadi Codex II 22.1-5: "But when Yaldabaoth knew that they had withdrawn from him, he cursed his earth. He found the female preparing herself for her male. He was lord over her, for he did not understand the mystery which had come to pass from the holy design."⁵⁹

The point of the Berlin Codex is clear: the rule of male over female is contrary to the divine plan. Codex II, however, muddles this point, making it seem that Adam (or Yaldabaoth?) didn't understand the divine plan, and so lorded over Eve. At best in Codex II, Adam's domination of Eve is a mistake; at worst, the passage just reiterates the inappropriate rule of Yaldabaoth over humanity—avoiding entirely the issue of female subordination to males. Either way, Codex II guards against any critique of the Father by

portraying the appropriate role of the female as preparation for the male,⁶⁰ and eliminating any possible correspondence of the subordination of Eve with that of Sophia.

Such is not the case with the Berlin Codex version. Its variants indicate that some ancient tellers of the tale recognized that the strident critique of gender subordination could be applied reciprocally to the transcendent Deity's condemnation of Sophia's independent action. In that case, perhaps the wise-fool Sophia is more completely the hero of the story than one might think. Perhaps her desire to act apart from the strictures of divine domination, which placed her at the bottom of the hierarchical chain of authentic being, was read not as an act of ignorance but of resistance, the same kind of resistance that the work affirms in its withering portrayal of the lower gods' violent but impotent attempts at domination. Or perhaps when readers heard that the source of error was named "wisdom," they responded with a wistful grin, seeing her creative power as an act of defiance, not a warning. As I see it, the fact that some storyteller worked to cut off this hermeneutic possibility in at least one manuscript tradition (II/IV) indicates that at least some readers did not intend the critique to go so far. But any attempt to ameliorate the critical effect that the parody of domination has on the reader's perception of divine rule, short of eliminating the parody altogether, will ultimately fail—precisely because it is a constitutive characteristic of parody to extend critique, not limit it. Parody, satire, travesty, ridicule, mimicry—all these and their ilk aim to show the Emperor without his clothes. It will not do to add a hat or gloves. In readerly reception, all depends upon whether one is predisposed to see the Emperor with or without his clothes, but parody will never relinquish the naked possibility. The oppositional logic of this parody supplies

the peep holes through the cracks of its (impossible) efforts at totalizing narrative.

Whether one is shocked, amused and heartened, or warned depends much on the reader.

These variants show that already in antiquity the *Secret Revelation of John* was read in different ways. Some early Christians presumably found its teaching to be a source of enlightenment and inspiration, revealing the true God and exposing the world rulers as promulgators of violence, injustice, and death. Yet another set of readers is perhaps typified by the second century Irenaeus, who apparently knew at least a portion of one version of the *Secret Revelation of John*.⁶¹ He recoils in horror at what he sees as a warped reading of scripture, leading to an impious portrait of the divine creator and denigration of the cosmos and the human body. Such a view, he insists, not only slanders the one true God, its ethics can result only in immoral libertinism or hate-filled asceticism. Both Irenaeus's writings and the *Secret Revelation of John* were produced in a time when Christians were persecuted for refusing to worship the gods who supported the Roman Empire. At stake is how to understand that situation theologically. For Irenaeus, God is both the judge who mercifully saves and who justly condemns. He cannot accept *Secret Revelation of John's* unremitting distinction between the gracious Father above and the unjust power of violence and domination below, in part because it seems to compromise the power of God (Irenaeus insisted that God appoints all earthly authority) and in part because it offended his sense of justice (suffering in the flesh, he argued, must be rewarded by recompense in the flesh).⁶² I am sure that if Irenaeus had had the tools for a gender-critical reading of *SRJ*, he would only have been even more appalled at *SRJ's* potential to critique patriarchal hierarchy in relation to the rule of God the Father.

It is on the basis of characterizations like that of Irenaeus that modern church historians have tried to answer a different question: Why did “orthodoxy” (one version of Christianity) triumph over “Gnosticism” (a different version)? Eschewing the theological language of divine providence, they have suggested social rationales, notably four: that by devaluing the world and the body, Gnosticism 1) was incapable of offering a personal or social ethic that could sustain individuals and communities, 2) was unable to offer familial continuation since it required total abstinence from sex, 3) could not meet the challenges of persecution, since it rejected martyrdom, and 4) by rejecting the incarnation, death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus, it could make no sense of central Christian rituals, especially eucharist. Analysis of the Nag Hammadi literature, however, shows this reasoning to be based on problematic assumptions about the content of Gnostic literature. The *Secret Revelation of John* evinces a sexual and moral ethic not significantly different from types that eventually gained normative status within Christianity: It idealizes sex for reproduction without disruptive passion, and it emphasizes the moral life, instruction, and baptism, which offer indications of ethical, social, and ritual elements of sustainable communal life. While the *Secret Revelation of John* does not deal with persecution directly, other works from Nag Hammadi and the Tchacos Codex do, notably the *Letter of Peter to Philip* and the *First Apocalypse of James*.⁶³ A few, like the *Valentinian Gospel of Philip*, give eucharist a central importance in salvation.⁶⁴ The *Secret Revelation of John* does, however, point to one difference that may have been decisive: Its entirely negative portrait of social power structures in the lower world left no room to validate imperial authority after the conversion of Constantine.⁶⁵ While other early Christians, including those who were

included later in orthodoxy's embrace, did clearly criticize Roman or other authorities, such works could nonetheless affirm that God was the source of all earthly authority and Christians should obey these rulers, whether just or unjust.⁶⁶ This difference in approach toward mundane authorities may have been a crucial factor in the battle to define Christianity.

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¹ For a more comprehensive discussion of the inadequacy of typological definitions of Gnosticism, see especially Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

² The reading here builds on my previous analysis in Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) in treating the implications of the complex gender imagery and pursuing the point made there only briefly, that *SRJ* does not reject sexual intercourse *as such*. It also updates and corrects my earlier reading in “Sophia and Christ in the *Apocryphon of John*,” in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 158-76. In particular, I would like to acknowledge gratitude for the persuasive criticism of John D. Turner (“A Response to Sophia and Christ” in *Images of the Feminine*, 117-86), especially that *SRJ* shows no consistent pattern in which the male initiates a salvation which is then executed by a female figure (179-81).

³ Four ancient copies of *SRJ* have survived to the modern period: Berlin Codex (19.6-77.7), Nag Hammadi Codex II (1.1-32.10); NHC III (1.1-40.11); and NHC IV (1.1-49.28); critical edition in Michael M. Waldstein and Frederik Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John. Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 33* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995). Citations here are from the English translation of King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 26-81. (*SRJ* BG refers to the Berlin Codex version; *SRJ* II refers to the Nag Hammadi Codex II version; *SRJ* without reference to a particular version asks the reader to consult/compare all

versions.) For more on the tendential interests of the different versions, see Bernhard Barc and Louis Painchaud, “La réécriture de l’Apocryphon de Jean à la lumière de l’hymne final de la version longue,” *Le Muséon* 112 (1999): 317-33; King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 244-57.

⁴ See King, *Secret Revelation of John*, esp. 177-238; and Zlatko Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe: Narrative and Cosmology in the Apocryphon of John*, Nag Hammadi & Manichaean Studies 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2006). *SRJ*’s intertextuality includes many other materials as well, including Jewish wisdom literature, the Gospel of John, and certain astrological materials (including a reference to an otherwise unknown “Book of Zoroaster” at *SRJ* II 17.63).

⁵ Following the style sheet of *JECS*, all titles of Biblical books are given here without italics, although my own preference is to present Biblical literature with the same conventions as all other literature, i.e., to place titles of (ancient) literature in italics. Might it be worthwhile for authors and publishers in the field of Biblical studies to reconsider whether it is appropriate to treat the Bible in this distinctive fashion?

⁶ This doubling complicates, but doesn’t eliminate the anti-Jewish representation of the lower God (of Genesis) as ignorant and arrogant, since it also represents the Genesis God as the highest Deity. The critique would be aimed at any Jews or Christians who mistook the lower God for the transcendent Deity. See King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 259.

⁷ This reading depends upon a Greek translation of Gen 1.3, in which the term *phōs* can mean either “light” or “man”; *SRJ* understands *phōs* to mean “man of light”; see Hans-Martin Schenke, *Der Gott “Mensch” in der Gnosis. Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Diskussion über die paulinische Anschauung von der Kirche als Leib Christi*

(Göttigen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 95-156; King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 98, 102, 222.

⁸ *SRJ* (BG) 27.5 (trans. King 80).

⁹ Or (less frequently), it is said that this hatred of the body can produce an equally degenerate libertinism, but there is no evidence of such a position in *SRJ*.

¹⁰ See the important discussion of Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism." An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 154-60, who notes that the transcendent realm in *SRJ* is portrayed as a patriarchal family, including members of the divine realm as "other members of the divine *familia*, such as relatives, slaves, or associates. It is a portrait of a complete and perfectly ordered household, with total harmony and properly oriented respect" (155). He also understands Sophia's actions as a "violation of household protocol" (155).

¹¹ *SRJ* 27.3-5 (trans. King 80-81).

¹² For discussion of this incomplete birthing in the terms of ancient medical discourse, see Richard Smith, "Sex Education in Gnostic Schools," *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*. ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 345-60; Elizabeth Castelli, "Response" in *Images of the Feminine*, 361-66.

¹³ *SRJ* 13.21-22 (trans. King 48-49).

¹⁴ *SRJ* 14.15-19 (trans. King 50-51).

¹⁵ Williams also sees "in the mythic activity of Barbelo a reflection of the social gender role of the ideal wife and mother. With Barbelo, female productivity is carefully circumscribed by male boundaries," but he argues that *SRJ* "advocates the renunciation of sexual intercourse" and hence "this gender role of the female as husband-oriented wife

and producer of a son cannot as such have been a part of the author's own perspective on social gender" (Michael A. Williams, "Varieties in Gnostic Perspectives on Gender," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988], 17). He attempts to reconcile this "ironic relationship" by suggesting that "the authors of such texts were not always dismissing wholesale the validity of social family structures but rather were interested in restoring the purity of an *ideal* family. Though the mere reordering of social relationships in the material world could never achieve the true perfection of the divine model, such efforts could render the social family in greater *likeness* to the divine" (*Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 157).

¹⁶ *SRJ* 5.8-20 (trans. King 32-33).

¹⁷ *SRJ* BG 7.1-6 (trans. King 36); or alternatively in *SRJ* II 7.1-6 (trans. King 37), it is the Invisible Spirit who gazes into Barbelo (Pronoia, the Mother-Father) and she conceived the only-begotten offspring from him. This variant fits the greater attentiveness of the longer version (NHC II and IV) to subordinating the female to the male, here as passive to active principles.

¹⁸ *SRJ* 7.1-13; 11.5-6 (trans. King 36-37, 44-45).

¹⁹ *SRJ* 22.10-21; 25.9-10 (trans. King 66-67, 76-77).

²⁰ It is on the basis of these two passages that most interpreters read *SRJ* as rejecting sexual intercourse (see, for example, Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 155).

²¹ The BG version says that the serpent taught only Eve (*SRJ* BG 20:25; trans. King 62). Similarly, in BG, it is Eve who disobeys; in II and III, it is Adam who disobeys. In any case, the humans do not follow the instruction of the serpent.

²² BG 22.2; trans. King 66. *SRJ* II 22.24 describes this intercourse as “birth in the likeness of bodies” (trans. King 67). It also adds an explanation that “the Mother” (Sophia? Pronoia?) had sent down a female likeness in order to “prepare a dwelling place for the aeons that were going to descend” (II 22.29-30; trans. King 69), which I take to be a way to explain that those who are born in the bodies below also carry the likeness of the divine Mother.

²³ That Adam’s knowledge of Eve involved fleshly sexual intercourse is clear from *SRJ* 21.20; so also Schenke in Walter C. Till and Hans-Martin Schenke, *Die gnostischen Schriften des Koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972), 167.

²⁴ *SRJ* BG 22:28 (trans. King 68) and similar point in II and III.

²⁵ *Stromateis* 3.7 (57-58); see also the discussion of Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication. Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), esp. 247-72. Gaca summarizes Clement’s position, “Through Christ’s saving grace, married Christian procreationists experience a prophylactic remission from the sexual appetite and its inherent servitude to Aphrodite. They alone practice sex that is safe from the demon-driven sexual appetite, but only so long as they remain resolutely set on reproducing whenever they copulate” (248). Both Clement and *SRJ* assume sexual intercourse in terms of heterosexual reproduction.

²⁶ *SRJ* BG 22.29; trans. King 68.

²⁷ *SRJ* 21.19 (trans. King 64-65). The variants here (*SRJ* 21.19) are “essence” (BG: ΟΥCΙΑ), “likeness” (II: ΕΙΝΕ), or “fellow essence which is like him” (III:

ΣΥΝΟΥΣΙΑ ΕΤΗΕ ΠΗΟΙ); for Coptic text, see Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 132-33.

²⁸ *SRJ* 21.20 (trans. King, 64-65; Coptic text, Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 132-33).

²⁹ See *SRJ* 21.21-23.

³⁰ Significant lacunae mar the Berlin Codex (BG) version of *SRJ* at 3.3-8. In the restoration of Till and Schenke (*Die gnostischen Schriften*, 82), Christ appears as a young man, an old man, and a *woman*. The corresponding passage in *SRJ* II 3.7 has a lacuna where one expects “young man,” but clearly reads “old man” and “*servant*” for the other two forms. Waldstein and Wisse restored *SRJ* BG 3.8 as “likeness” rather than “woman” (*Apocryphon of John*, 16), and I translated this version in King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 26. I am, however, now persuaded by the argument of Zlatko Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe. Narrative and Cosmology in the Apocryphon of John*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 52 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 28-40. He suggests that the lacuna be filled by ΕΩΧΕ ΟΥΣΖΙΜΕ ΤΕ instead of Schenke’s ΕΩΧΕ ΟΥΝ ΟΥΣΖΙΜΕ, and notes that Schenke’s restoration of the lacuna as “woman” is supported internally on two grounds: 1) the lacuna requires a feminine noun, and 2) the three forms (old man, woman, and child) correspond well to Christ’s own proclamation that he is “the Father, the Mother, and the Son,” that is, the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo-Pronoia, and Allogenes-Christ. In addition, Pleše brings to bear a “history-of-religions” parallel from a new fragment of the *Acts of Philip* 14.4 published by François Bovon in which a man named Stachys has a vision of a handsome young man with three forms or faces, including one that is a woman (*Poetics of the Gnostic Universe*, 38-39).

³¹ *SRJ* 3.12 (trans. King 28-29).

³² At another difficult variant in the work, the Savior also seems to be identified with Epinoia (see *SRJ* 20.22-27; 21.18; trans. King 62-63, 64-65).

³³ See further discussion in King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 237-38.

³⁴ *SRJ* 12.16-27 (trans. King 46-47).

³⁵ The importance of Jewish wisdom literature for the “Gnostic Sophia myth” was established in an insightful essay by George W. MacRae, “The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth.” *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970): 86-101.

³⁶ For a more extensive discussion, see King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 225-38.

³⁷ *SRJ* 10.1-6 (trans. King 40-43).

³⁸ See, for example, *SRJ* 7.3-4 (trans. King 36-37).

³⁹ See, for example, *SRJ* 10.7-10 (trans. King 42-43).

⁴⁰ See E. Aydeet Fischer-Mueller, “Yaldabaoth: The Gnostic female Principle in Its Fallenness.” *Novum Testamentum* 32 (1990): 79-95.

⁴¹ *SRJ* 21.18-19 (trans. King 64-65).

⁴² *SRJ* BG 22.26-28 (trans. King 68).

⁴³ Interestingly, this role is similar to that played in Irenaeus’s theology by Mary the mother of Jesus, whose obedience to God rectifies the disobedience of Eve (see *Against Heresies* V.19.1).

⁴⁴ *SRJ* 21.23-24 (trans. King 64-67).

⁴⁵ *SRJ* II 26.23-33 (trans. King 79).

⁴⁶ See *SRJ* 23.9 (trans. King 71).

⁴⁷ *SRJ* II 18.11 (trans. King 59).

⁴⁸ See *SRJ* II.16.1-17.63 (trans. King 55, 57, 59); King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 152-53.

⁴⁹ *SRJ* BG.22.4-5 (trans. King 66).

⁵⁰ At *SRJ* 22.22-28 (trans. King 66-69), for example, the Chief Ruler institutes sexual intercourse in order to produce likenesses of the counterfeit spirit over which he and his powers could rule, but this ploy fails when intercourse between Adam and Eve instead produces Seth in the likeness of the true Human above.

⁵¹ Virginia Burrus offers an extended and insightful discussion of shame in the *Secret Revelation of John*, arguing, among other points, that not only are the “shamers shamed” by humiliating Yaldabaoth and his henchmen, but “It is also, however, through shame that repentance is made possible and salvation is effected” as shown by the figure of Sophia (see *Saving Shame. Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects. Divinations: Rereading Late Antique Religion*. [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008], 57-64, esp. 58).

⁵² While gender no doubt works here in conjunction with other discursive construction of hierarchy, not least those in which subjects or especially “barbarians” are regularly portrayed as less than fully masculine or even human, bestialized and emasculated, the gender element is no less fully imbricated in the story’s logic.

⁵³ I draw here on Judith Butler’s notions of performative subversion, citation, and fantasy especially in *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 128-41; “The Question of Social Transformation” in *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 204-31.

⁵⁴ It is possible that the variants indicate changes meant to *enhance* this possible reading rather than eliminate it, given that we cannot know with certainty which reading might have had priority. In general, scholarship takes the longer version of *SRJ* (represented by NHC II and IV) to be a later reworking of the shorter version (represented by BG and NHC III); the difficulty here is that NHC III is closer to NHC II at *SRJ* 20.25-27 (trans. King 62-63), but closer to the reading of BG at *SRJ* 22.1-5 (trans. King 66-67). It is also necessary to take into consideration the fact that the Berlin Codex contains two other works which would support “undoing” women’s subordination: *The Gospel of Mary* (which represents Mary of Magdala as a teacher of male disciples) and *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* (which relates that Jesus Christ commissioned seven women in addition to twelve men to preach the gospel after his resurrection).

⁵⁵ Trans. King 62.

⁵⁶ Trans. King 63.

⁵⁷ For the Christian provenance of this notion, see Gary A. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 91-92.

⁵⁸ Trans. King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 66.

⁵⁹ Trans. King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 67.

⁶⁰ Barc and Painchaud (“La réécriture de l’Apocryphon de Jean,” 328-29) suggest that Eve’s preparation for Adam is meant to be read allegorically (e.g. as a “mystery”) : Epinoia is preparing for the Savior in order to correct the deficiency of Sophia, but Yaldabaoth doesn’t understand. The sentence could also mean that Eve is preparing for

Adam because she knows that their intercourse will be the “mystery” that will correct Sophia’s deficiency.

⁶¹ For the text, see Waldstein and Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 188-93; for a discussion, see Carl Schmidt, “Irenäus und seine Quelle in adv. haer. I,29,” in *Philotesia: Paul Kleinert zum LXX Geburtstag*, ed. Adolf Harnack (Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1907), 317-36; Werner Foerster, *Gnosis. A Selection of Gnostic Texts. I. Patristic Evidence*, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 100-103; King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 17.

⁶² For a more extended comparison of Irenaeus with *SRJ*, see Karen L. King, “Social and Theological Effects of Heresiological Discourse” in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, ed. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 28-49.

⁶³ See Karen L. King, “Toward a Discussion of the Category ‘Gnosis/Gnosticism’: The Case of the *Epistle of Peter to Philip*” in *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferungen. Beiträge zu außerkanonischen Jesusüberlieferungen aus verschiedenen Sprach- und Kulturtraditionen*, ed. Jörg Frey and Jens Schröter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 445-65; “Martyrdom and Its Discontents in the Tchacos Codex” in *The Codex Judas: Proceedings of the International Congress on Codex Tchacos held at Rice University, Houston, Texas, March 13-16, 2008*, ed. April DeConick, Nag Hammadi and Manichaeon Studies (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2009), 23-42.

⁶⁴ See Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the ‘Valentinians,’* Nag Hammadi and Manichaeon Studies 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 93-102, 341-50.

⁶⁵ It is important to emphasize that the works labeled “Gnostic” are enormously diverse, and not all of them take the same position on worldly authority as *SRJ*. For more on this issue with regard to *SRJ*, see King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 157-73, 239-43, 262.

⁶⁶ Notably, Jesus on paying taxes (Matt 22.21; Mark 12.17); Paul’s blanket statement on obedience to authorities in Rom 13.1-7; Irenaeus, who saw his church community devastated by Roman torture and execution, nonetheless affirmed that Christians should obey and God would punish unjust rulers later (*Against Heresies* 4.28.1; 5.24). The *Revelation of John (Apocalypse)* makes an interesting comparison point since its myth, too, is pervaded with a negative evaluation of worldly governance, and indeed that might have been a factor in its late and uneven acceptance into the New Testament canon.