TRANSFIGURATIONS OF METAMORPHOSIS TRADITIONS IN THE ACTS OF JOHN, THOMAS, AND PETER

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Abstract

The apocryphal Acts of John, Peter, and Thomas employ traditions of Jesus transfigured at crucial points in their narratives. Each of the Acts presents the metamorphosis stories in the context of a pattern which likely precedes the earliest literary accounts of Jesus' transfiguration (i.e., Mk 9:2–8 and parallels). However, the Acts present these stories and the polymorphic christology which accompanaeis them with significant theological diversity. We have, then, examples of the theological differences among the Acts in their diverse use of cognate traditions and of the Acts' employment of them.

0. Three of the AAA, namely, the *AJn*, the *APt*, and the *ATh*, contain scenes in which Jesus assumes diverse shapes when he appears to the faithful. These scenes are formally and conceptually analogous to the so-called transfiguration story in the synoptic gospels (Mk 9:2–8 and parallels).

1. The *Acts of John*

In chs. 87–105 of the AJn are several examples of the metamorphosis motif. Study of the section is hindered by the corrupt state of the text. Further, AJn 87–105 appears in only one manuscript (*Codex Vindobensis*), which contains only this section. (A few fragments also appear in the Acts of the Council of 787 [Lipsius and Bonnet: 2.1. xxxi, Hennecke and Schneemelcher: 194–196].) To find the proper literary setting for 87–105 in the whole of the AJn is akin to installing a gear in an unfamiliar machine without an instruction manual and without several essential parts.

The narrative of 87–105 begins with Drusiana's report that the Lord appeared to her "in the form *(morphē)* of John and in that of a youth" (87). The implied polymorphism of Jesus in this tale—*morphē* denotes both a change of shape and of essence (cf 82, 88, 89, 98, and 100)—has created a crisis of faith in the community. To calm this disturbance John sets about to "firm up" *(bebaios)* their faith (97).

At the outset of this "firming-up" speech, John rejects the customary written and oral tradition about Jesus (88). Further, John says, he will explain to the congregation the correct doctrine in a way that will insure that those who are not yet ready for the deepest meanings of the faith can understand (88), that is, so that they "may understand the *doksa* around Jesus" (88). *Doksa* here seems to denote a glory which hides the essence of the savior. The tales of Jesus' shape-changing are *doksai* in the AJn (93).

John's sermon is an extended prose narrative of the redeemer's earthly ministry. To the reader familiar with the literary style of the canonical gospels the narrative resembles an *evangelium in nuce*. John's speech begins with the call of the disciples, recalls several events in the "ministry" of Jesus, and ends with a "crucifixion" and a metamorphosis-epiphany. There is an historic placename in this recital, just as there are in the narratives of the canonical gospels, i.e., Gennessaret (92; cf Mark 6:53 and parallels). John's speech so resembles the narrative-gospel style that Sturhahn believes the AJn's source for 87–105 to be a "gnostic gospel" (1951, in Kaestli, 1981: 56–57).

The rhetorical and theological thrust of this "mini-gospel" is controlled by three Jesus-metamorphosis tales. These stories of Jesus tranfigured are analogous to the metamorphosis tradition in Mk 9:2–8 and parallels and to the ascension story in the canonical Acts. However, with the exception of formal elements and the names of the disciples involved, the parallels between the metamorphoses in the AJn and those in the synoptic gospels are general descriptions common to most epiphanic tales (Smith: 243–244). Attempts to show a literary relationship between the synoptics' transfiguration stories and those in the apocryphal Acts have not been convincing" (see Blinzler: 2–63; Boobyer: 13 and 30–46; Baltensweiler: 21–29; and Bultmann: 259–260).

The first two metamorphoses in the AJn appear back to back in the text, and are joined together by an unsophisticated rhetorical device: "again." They are not a doublet inasmuch as they have too little in common. The first tale is brief:

> Once, when he took me, James and Peter to the mountain where it was his custom to pray, we saw on him a light such as a man who uses mortal speech cannot describe. (90)

The second transfiguration is more detailed:

> Again he took us three up the mountain, saying, "Come with me." And again we saw him at a distance praying. Then I, since he loved me, went quietly up to him, as if he could not see and stood looking at his hinder parts. (90)

Now John sees Jesus naked "and not like a man at all" (90). Jesus stretches from the earth to the heavens. John is justly afraid, and Jesus—suddenly in the form of a little man—turns around and pulls John's beard so that it hurts him for thirty days: "Lord, if your playful tug has caused such pain, what if you had struck me?" (90). In addition to the beard-pull, Jesus rebukes him by saying: "John do not be faithless, but believing, and not inquisitive. . . . Let it be your concern not to tempt him that cannot be tempted" (90).

The text of this scene is corrupt. Immediately preceding the two metamorphosis tales, there is a "little gap" (Lipsius and Bonnet: 2.1. 195), which follows a scene and suggests that Jesus' polymorphism extends to his sexuality: when Jesus held John to his breast, it was ". . . sometimes . . . smooth and soft, but sometimes hard like a rock . . ." (89; cf the *Apocryphon of John* [CG II.1]: "I am the Father; I am the Mother").

By the end of ch. 90, Jesus has rebuked John for sneaking a look at Jesus' transfigured form. But in spite of the rebuke, John has been "on high" (*epi tou hypsous;* "on the mountain top") with Jesus (91), and has "considered his abundant grace and his unity in many faces *(poly-prosōpon henotēta)* and unceasing wisdom" *(sophia)*. As we shall see, the final revelation for John on the Mount of Olives is Jesus' "one form" or "one essence" *(mia morphē)*.

Now Peter and James are "vexed" that John has been given a privileged position among the disciples; John has insight that they lack:

> "Who was it who spoke with the Lord when he was on (the mountain) top? For we heard them both speaking." And when I considered his abundant grace and his unity within many faces and his unceasing wisdom that looks after us, I said, "You shall learn from him if you ask him". (91)

The scene of the metamorphosis presents the main themes of John's entire homily. First, John assumes priority over the other apostles. Second, the polymorphic nature of Jesus becomes the chief interpretation of the metamorphoses, an interpretation which is repeatedly proclaimed later. Third, the docetic theology of the AJn is strengthened. Attending this docetism is a polemic against those who would rather have a Jesus of flesh and blood as an object of faith:

> And I often wished, as I walked with him, to see his footprint in the earth, whether it appeared—for I saw him raising himself from the earth—and I never saw it. And I tell you this much, my brethren, so as to encourage your faith in him: for his miracles and wonderful works must not be told for the moment, for they are unspeakable and, perhaps, can neither be uttered nor heard. (93)

This speech summarizes the themes in the first section of John's sermon, and represents the dramatic structure of the homily. John has now exhibited to his hearers that he too had great difficulty understanding the mystery of Jesus' polymorphism; he, like his hearers, had not yet been "firmed up" in the faith. During his discipleship, John himself was confused by Jesus' protean nature:

> I will tell you another *doksa* . . . sometimes when I meant to touch him I encountered a material, solid body; but at other times again when I felt him, his substance was immaterial and incorporeal, and as if it did not exist at all. (93)

Fourth, the passage erects a hierarchy of revelation. In the first section of the narrative, John's hearers are denied insight into Jesus' true nature, although the reader knows that John has seen more in the second transfiguration story than he did in the first. Peter and James are left behind in understanding, even though John's sneaking a look into that for which he is not ready was painful to him. Now the scene is set for the climactic event: the dance and hymn in chs. 93–96 and the final revelation to John on the Mount of Olives.

The hymn itself emphasizes the themes already established (see Kaestli, 1981: 56–57). One might even argue that the hymn contributes to the structuring of the sermon's "gospel-type" narrative just as Bornkamm argued in the case of the hymns in the ATh (*passim;* cf Klijn, 1962: 34–37). In particular, v. 28–50 of the hymn emphasizes that "being moved toward wisdom/ you have in me a support,/ rest in me./ Who I am, you shall know/ when I go forth" (96). It is precisely when Jesus goes forth (97–102) that John "knows" who Jesus truly is. The dance and hymn section is a narrative of cultic initiation into a deep understanding of Jesus' own christology. But it is a difficult theology; the disciples flee from the insight which they gained in the initiation (cf Mk 14:50–52).

John's flight takes him to the Mount of Olives. There he is witness to a sham crucifixion and is led by the real Jesus in still a third experience which is a metamorphosis and an ascension all in one. The event is a highly occult experience erupting in mystical revelation. Thus, it is on the Mount of Olives that John knows the ultimate truth about the essence of the savior. Unfortunately, this revelation has come down to us in a text notoriously corrupt. We can, however, discern the following: First, John

is the only apostle with true insight into the nature of tradition and of the savior: "John, there must be *one man* to hear these things from me; for I need one who is ready to hear" (98; emphasis mine).

Second, the rhetoric of this scene is cleverly wrought. Jesus and John stand on the Mount of Olives and observe "Jesus'" being crucified below them. This "split-screen" effect strongly reinforces the theological point, namely, that the redeemer and his apostle have "ascended" beyond the point at which other Christian theological traditions stand. The rest of the faithful are left behind, still gathered around the cross with the multitude. To them the cross (and Jesus) have no single form *(mia morphē)* (98). John, however, sees the Lord above the cross, "Having no *schēma* but having only a certain voice which we knew, but one that was sweet and gentle and truly that of God" (98). Jesus reveals that

> "The Cross of Light is called Logos by me for your sakes, sometimes Jesus, sometimes Christ, sometimes a door, sometimes a way, sometimes bread, sometimes seed, sometimes resurrection, sometimes Father, sometimes Spirit, sometimes Life, sometimes truth, sometimes faith, sometimes grace; and so these things are for men's sake. . . ." (98)
>
> The multitude around the cross that is not of one form is the transitory nature *(physis hyparchē)*. . . . But when human nature is taken up, and the race that comes to me and obeys my voice, then he who now hears me shall be united with them and shall no longer be what he is now, but shall be above them as I am now. . . . Therefore ignore the many and despise those who are outside the *mystērion;* for you must know that I am wholly with the Father, and the Father with me". (100)

Chs. 87–105 end with a docetic exhortation to the audience: "You therefore beloved (must) also be persuaded, that it is not a man that I exhort you to worship, but God unchangeable, God invincible" (104).

2. The *Acts of Thomas*

ATh 143 sets its version of Jesus' metamorphosis in a prayer-cum-sermon delivered by the apostle while in prison. Judas Thomas has been arrested at the order of Misdaeus, the King. While in prison, Judas is visited by Vazan, the king's son. Vazan is the audience for Thomas' speech, which begins as a prayer but soon loses its invocative flavor and becomes a sermon and last testament of the apostle.

Thomas' speech contains a creed which begins with highly esoteric pronouncements, e.g., "Most high, he is become from the greatest the only son of Bathos." The creed soon becomes a narrative-credo form, but with a clearly docetic shift:

> "and he *was called* son of Mary a virgin, and *was termed* son of Joseph a carpenter. He whose lowliness we beheld with the eyes of the body, but his greatness *(megaleiotēta)* we received by faith, and we saw his works *ergois;* whose human body we handled with our hands, and his appearance *(thean)* we saw transfigured *(enēlloiōmenēn)* with our eyes, but his heavenly *typos* we could not see on the mountain. . . ." (143; emphasis mine)

This "creed" bears elements which strongly suggest that it represents received tradition, e.g., the antithetic parallelism. The ATh or its tradition have either adapted a *credo* to emphasize the importance of Judas Thomas' witness or, what is more likely, does not know the customary trio of apostles whom other traditions hold as witnesses to the transfiguration. In either case, Judas Thomas is the principle bearer of the true tradition.

Thomas' sermon is accompanied by a series of miraculous events. Tertia, Mygdonia, and Marcia have been locked in their rooms by their men, who believe that Judas is a seducer and sorcerer and that the women are his "groupies." Jesus, in the form of Thomas, appears to the women and releases them from their connubial confinement (151–153). The women are then understandably astonished when, after they have hastened to the prison, they find Thomas incarcerated: "When the apostle heard [the story of their release], he said, 'Glory to you polymorphic Jesus, glory to you who dost appear in the guise of our poor manhood'" (153).

The little band of the faithful miraculously escapes from the prison, after a "bright light" fills the jail (153–154). Vazan is sent ahead to prepare for the initiation ceremony; on the way he meets his wife, Mnesara, who has been miraculously raised from a sick-bed and led to Vazan by a "young man," i.e., Jesus (154). There is an unction ceremony (157) and an ascetic eucharist (158). Judas then goes to martyrdom.

The metamorphosis story supports the Acts' contention that Jesus and Judas Thomas are truly "twins" *(thōmas; didymos).* As is the case with the first two metamorphoses in the AJn (90–91), the transfiguration account in the ATh does not give the witnesses insight into the highest nature of the redeemer: "We did not see his heavenly *typos* on the mountain . . ." (143). The greatest insight comes to Christians when the polymorphic Jesus, usually in the *morphē* of Thomas, leads them into a sacred marriage (14–15; 146), into the *"koinonia"* of the male" (50).

3. The *Acts of Peter*

APt 20–21 places the Jesus-metamorphosis story in the context of a sermon preached by the apostle, just as do the AJn and the ATh. Peter preaches and performs miracles in the house of Marcellus just before the apostle engages in his miracle-working "shoot-out" with his arch-enemy,

Simon Magos. As Peter enters the *triclinium* of Marcellus' house, he finds a worship service in progress; someone is reading a portion of a gospel. Peter "rolls up the book" and preaches a sermon. From the context we learn that the gospel reading of the day was a transfiguration story.

The apostle starts by making a disclaimer for the written word. Although he and the other apostles tried as much as flesh could, they could not begin to record what actually occurred, for

> the Lord in his mercy was moved to show himself in another shape and to be seen in the form of a man, on whom neither the Jews nor we were worthy to be enlightened. And now I will explain to you what has just been read to you. Our Lord wished me to see his majesty on the holy mountain; but when I with the sons of Zebedee saw the brilliance of his light, I fell as one dead, and closed my eyes and head his voice, such as I cannot describe, and thought that I have been blinded by his radiance. And recovering my breath a little I said to myself, "Perhaps my Lord willed to bring me here to deprive me of my sight." And I said, "If this be your will, Lord, I do not constrain it." And he gave me his hand and lifted me up. And when I stood up I saw him in such a form as I was able to take in". (20)

The sermon concludes with a paean of praise for Jesus' polymorphism; the protean character of Jesus is a grace to the church in that everyone can see Jesus as he or she is able to understand (21).

The symbols of light/enlightenment and blindness/giving of sight are crucial tropes in Peter's sermon and in the events which surround it. These symbols combine with that of the polymorphic Jesus to become the metaphor for the entire scene in Marcellus' house. Before he preaches, Peter restores sight to an blind widow. After the sermon, several other widows wish to recover sight. They are healed when a brilliant light, "like lightning," fills the room. Each widow reports a vision in which she has seen Jesus in a form different from those seen by the others: "an old man," "a growing lad," "a boy who gently touched our eyes, and so our eyes were opened" (21). Peter then praises God who "is greater than our thoughts as we have learned from the aged widows, how they have seen the Lord in a variety of forms" (21). The scene reaches its denouement in a vision which comes to Marcellus, a vision which foresees the victory of Peter over Simon Magos (22).

4. The "Aretalogical" Pattern

In spite of the significant differences in these various metamorphosis accounts there is a rather consistent pattern of presentation.

4.1. In each the metamorphosis account appears in an apostolic speech or sermon.

4.2. The apostolic recitals establish each particular Acts' primary apostle as the true interpreter of the tradition and rejects others' versions of the tradition.

4.3. In each of the Acts metamorphosis stories proclaim a christology of the polymorphic Jesus. They are deliberately ambiguous epiphanies. Those who see Jesus in these many forms cannot perceive the savior's true *morphē*.

4.4. Each metamorphosis story is the focal point of a recital of dominical and apostolic wonder-working. In the ATh the form of the recital is a brief, liturgical *credo*: "His greatness we received by faith, and saw it in his works *(ergois)*" (143). In the AJn the metamorphsis appears in a recital of Jesus' acts in which the main theme is to show how the redeemer's shape-changing confuses the disciples. The APt's tale appears in a narration of Jesus' healings. Peter concludes with a credal statement of Jesus' polymorphism and docetic nature. Through his many-guised appearances Jesus becomes all things to everyone in the APt. The recital's antithetic form expresses the universality of Christly polymorphism.

> . . . whom no flesh has seen,
> yet now he is seen;
> whom no hearing has found
> yet now he is known as the word that is heard . . .
> who is before the world,
> yet now is comprehended in time . . .
> this Jesus you have brethren,
> the door, the light, the way, the bread, the life,
> the resurrection, the refreshment, the pearl,
> the treasure, the seen, the abundance,
> the mustard seed. . . .
> He is all things, and there is no greater than he
> .(20; cf 98 and AJn 100).

Actus Vercellenses and the Greek differ considerably in this speech, but each emphasizes that Jesus is capable of being understood at some level by each of the faithful, no matter how lowly.

4.5. The metamorphosis tales in these three Acts appear in scenes presenting the apostle in a contest of power with his most formidable adversary. Apostolic power appears as an extension of the polymorphic Jesus' strength. In the APt the apostle heals and enlightens the little band gathered in Marcellus' house, and he is prepared for the great battle with the Magos. In the ATh the apostle and his evangelism prevail over

the king and his minions; Judas' triumph is the conversion of the king's household. In the AJn the metamorphosis of Jesus grounds the theology of the document's sect over against the world and against other theologies.

4.6. The sermon of the apostle in each of these three Acts either describes an initiation into the community or leads to such an initiation. The initiation is the cultic climax of the apostle's recital. Only after initiation does one learn the mystery of Jesus, a mystery hidden by the redeemer's polymorphic glory.

This pattern connected to the apocryphal Acts' telling of Jesus-metamorphosis traditions corresponds to cognate developments in the early church. Several critics have pointed to Mark's and John's employment of collections of tales in which miraculous deeds are attributed to Jesus (Achtemeier, 1968; Koester: 187–193; Smith: 166 and 225–226; Talbert: 116, and Georgi: 282–292.) These collections have their pagan counterparts as well. Several of these authors, including Smith (173–177), have shown how initiations often become part of miracle story collections. Further, such miracle collections were capped by a super-miracle (e.g., the metamorphosis of Jesus). The catenae of miracles likely served as foundation myths of their particular cultus (Achtemeier: 416–417, and especially Talbert: 101).

That the AJn, APt, and ATh carry on this combination of miracle story, metamorphosis tale and initiation in crucial parts of their narratives lends credence, therefore, to Helmut Koester's claim that the apocryphal Acts are the literary extensions of the miracle-story 'gospels,' rather than new gospels (192). Not only do the Acts celebrate the divine power of miracle-working; their heroes are a continuation of the wandering, ascetic, ecstatic, and wonder-working prophets of the early church (ibid., and Theissen, 1970: 7–23; 1973: 259–271). It was among these prophets and their support groups in towns and cities that the 'gospel' genre of miracle-story collections served and grew.

There is a reference to the transfiguration of Jesus in the canonical literature, namely, 2 Pet 1:16–18, which seems to be aware of and opposed to the employment of the transfiguration to ground a "miracle-story" christology:

> For we did not follow subtly fashioned myths when we made known to you the *dynamis* and *parousia*, but we saw for ourselves his grandeur. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the sublime glory, "This is my son, my beloved, he is the one in whom I am pleased," we ourselves heard this voice borne upon him on "the holy mountain". (2 Pet 1:16–18).

The occasion of 2 Peter may or may not be precisely as Käsemann describes it, as a *defensus fidei* for apocalyptic Christology over against gnosticism (169–195), but 2 Peter surely emphasizes the role of the *parousia* in 1:16–18. The APt, on the other hand, has subordinated *parousia* to *dynamis*. It should be mentioned that the petrine material is the only literature which describes the mountain of transfiguration as "the holy mountain." The author of the epistle does appear to have been well acquainted with an interpretation of the transfiguration traditions which emphasized the miracle-working *(dynamis)* aspects of Jesus' *doksa*. The APt is a document which exhibits that very trend.

5. Theological Patterns

In spite of this shared pattern in the metamorphosis stories in these three Acts, they employ the pattern to confess their own distinctive theologies.

5.1. The *Acts of Peter.* In chs. 1–29 and in Peter's battle with Simon Magos the power of the divine is manifest through miracle-working. As Gérard Poupon puts it, "The Acts of Peter illustrate almost as a piece of theater the antagonism between thaumaturge and magician" (77). Peter's summary of the gospel message in ch. 7 speaks for the whole of this theme in the APt:

> For this is not only to convince you with words that it is the Christ that I am preaching, but indeed *(etiam)* by deeds *(tactis)* and marvellous powers *(virtutibus magnificiis)* I urge you through the faith in Jesus Christ, that none of you should expect another "savior" than him who was despised and mocked by Jews, this Nazarene who was crucified and died and rose again the third day.

The martyrdom of Peter (30–41) is included in the only "complete" manuscript we have of the APt, although the martyrdom circulated in the church separately from chs. 1–29. It has been noted that the character of the martyrdom, namely, its reliance upon speeches, differs from that of 1–29 (Schneemelcher in Hennecke and Schneemelcher: 272–275). However, the miracle-contest between Simon Peter and Simon Magos, which is the backbone of 1–29, extends into 30–41. There, rhetorical interests which accompany martyrology overcome the teratalogical thrust which begins the APt.

I suggest that one main source of the APt, whatever the Acts' precise literary history, was a collection of Peter's marvelous acts, held together by the plot of Peter's continuing battle with Simon Magos. If this suggestion be tenable, chs. 1–29 and the final contest in 30–41 emphasize the

proper theme for such a collection: Peter is considered *tamquam deum* (29; cf. John 5:18). Furthermore, if there were such an antecedent collection, it would fit well contemporary descriptions of such "primitive 'gospel' genres" (Koester: 192; Achtemeier: *passim*).

This hypothesized "petrine aretalogy" includes a sea-miracle (5), many healings and teratalogical acts, a resurrection, and an ascension contest. In this contest, the Magos fails comically—he does "fly around" Rome in a persiflage of an ascension, but Peter shoots down the Magos with prayer (30–31). Peter is crucified (37–9), buried, and appears to Marcellus after the apostle's death (40). Peter's crucifixion is an ascension to the Lord and to true understanding of the nature of the Christ (38).

Our suggestion that an aretalogy of Peter's "signs and wonders" underlies the APt is only a suggestion, a recognizably preliminary hypothesis. Its validity awaits philological and formal studies.

However, Peter's contest with the Magos is certainly an *imitatio Christi* throughout. Theologies which proclaim that the disciples of a miracle worker become extensions of the cultus' founding prophet through the disciples' teratalogical acts are not unusual in late antiquity. The APt has preserved this tradition in a manner which is virtually a paradigm of the traditions about Jesus which lay chief, if not exclusive weight upon Jesus as a "man who was attested to you by God by powers *(dynamesi)* and wonders *(terasi)* and signs *(sēmeiois)* . . ." (Acts 2:22).

The APt's ecclesiology assumes churches. This may be due to the author's dealing with the fact of an established congregation in Rome, as Schneemelcher suggests (Schneemelcher in Hennecke and Schneemelcher: 271). The AJn and the ATh, on the other hand, portray their apostles as charismatics who wander and collect devotees. The APt's interpretation of the metamorphosis and of the polymorphic Jesus fits well into its picture of the church as a group of particular congregations. The polymorphic Jesus of the APt works wonders; out of this polymorphism, the apostle(s) continue Jesus' wonder-working for the sake of the *ecclēsia*.

Jesus' many forms and appearances grace the entire church in that the faithful, no matter what their ability, "may love (the one) who is both great and little, beautiful and ugly, young and old, appearing in time and yet in eternity wholly invisible" (20). There is a sense of inclusiveness in the polymorphic Christology of the APt.

5.2. The *Acts of Thomas*. The many-guised Christ is the ATh's solution for the crisis of continuity which strikes a community as the time of the foundaton myth and of the founding prophet fades behind the community in the passage of time. The "twin brother" status of Thomas is a symbolic extension of the redeemer's salvific power into the time of the community. This aspect of the twin identities of Jesus and Judas Thomas

is not confined to the section of the Acts which contains the Jesus-metamorphosis account.

Perhaps the best known metamorphosis in the ATh is that in chs. 8–15. There, immediately after Judas Thomas sings the "Wedding Hymn" at a marriage feast (6–7), the father of the bride asks Judas to say a prayer for the bridal pair. The apostle complies. As the bride and groom enter the bridal chamber, "The Lord Jesus" appears to them "in the likeness of the apostle Judas Thomas" (11). Judas-Jesus preaches an ascetic sermon to the couple which converts the bridal pair to asceticism, and thus they give evidence that they are redeemed. The bride has become the bride of the redeemer (12); the groom has returned to the state of the primal man (15).

Word plays upon *koinōnein* and its cognates carry the theological and dramatic action in the ATh. Thus, as *koinōnein* may mean "to have fellowship," or "to share," as well as "to have sexual intercourse," the way is open for the ATh to condemn human eroticism and, by means of puns on *koinos* to extol the erotic in a transsexual union by means of puns on *koinōnos*. Sexual union between man and woman is a *koinōnos* which is filthy (12, 88). There is, on the other hand, "an incorruptible and true marriage" (12) in which one is in "the *koinōnia* of the male" (50) and "the true *koinōnia*" (88).

Most of the occurrences of *koinōnein* and its cognates in the ATh take place in the sacramental acts of the community. The *epiklēseis* are said during the unction (sealing) and the eucharist (27 and 50). Mygdonia enters the *hieros gamos* after receiving the "seal" (120). She explains to her husband, after she has partaken of the eucharist, "You know that marriage of corruption . . . but this marriage remains forever; that *koinōnia* was one that passes away, this is of life eternal" (124).

Christ's union with the believers in the sacraments and in their fight to maintain the cultic integrity of the community (i.e., to remain ascetically pure) is *koinōnos* (intercourse/fellowship) (49 and 50). The extension of salvific power from Christ through the apostle is therefore basically sacramental in the ATh. Teratalogical acts and saving knowledge play a strong role in the ATh—as in the APt and the AJn—but here the polymorphism of the savior appears in sacramental-liturgical contexts. The twins, Judas Thomas and Jesus, are established as such by aretalogical means, an aretalogy built around the climactic Jesus-metamorphosis. The central *aretē*, however, is sacramental. The faithful can only see through this polymorphic screen to the nature of the redeemer and of redemption when they have received the "seal upon the seal" (27).

5.3. The *Acts of John*. The theology of the AJn is difficult to summarize systematically if only because of the state of the text. Most studies

therefore tend to rely upon chs. 87–105 to establish that the AJn is related to Valentinian gnosticism (for example Schaeferdiek in Hennecke and Schneemelcher: 212–214, and Kaestli, 1981: 57). The episodes recorded outside 87–105 reveal at least a strong docetic and ascetic character; in addition, they dwell on miraculous events, especially upon the raising of the dead.

The polymorphic Christology which is so important in 87–105 does play a significant role elsewhere in the AJn—especially in relationship to Drusiana. The metamorphosis of Jesus and the resultant polymorphic appearances of the Lord establish a strict hierarchy of salvation, i.e., of saving knowledge. Only those who have experienced the polymorphic Christ and his teratalogical power have true insight into the nature of Christ and of salvation. Thus, Drusiana knows the "polymorphic" nature of Christ; she has been raised by his power. When she reports her experience of Jesus' "many faces," the uninitiated simply cannot handle this strong theology.

To the uninitiated Jesus' polymorphism is a form of *deus absconditus totaliter.* Its purpose is to confuse and to conceal the true nature of the redeemer from those who are not in an inner circle of understanding. Those who are "outside the *mystērion*" cannot see the *mia morphē* of the savior.

Thus, behind the many-guised Jesus in the AJn lies the true picture of the redeemer and the redeemer's continued saving power. This salvific power is expressed in miraculous acts, especially in the raising of the dead. But beyond this symbol is the savior who is the divine revealer (a notion not unfamiliar elsewhere in Johannine literature), the one who brings saving understanding, who is "the distinction of things . . . and the harmony of wisdom, being wisdom in harmony" (98); he is the one who said: "For so long as you do not call yourself mine, I am not what I am; but if you hear me . . . you shall be as I am . . . for from me you are" (100; *caveat lector:* the text here is corrupt in the extreme).

The AJn's christology serves a strong dichotomy between those who can only wonder at Jesus' many forms and are confused by them and those who are initiated into true insight. The latter are undisputedly the apostle John and his followers; he is "the one man" who knows the true *morphē* of the Lord. We, the readers of the AJn, are therefore let into the inner circle as well. As the AJn puts it, "despise those who are outside the mystery" (100).

N.B. Another early church interpretation of the Jesus-metamorphosed tradition is Origen's in *Contra Celsum* II.64 (Chadwick: 115). Origen connects the tradition with a polymorphic christology. He interprets the polymorphism of Jesus as the path to a hierarchy of *gnōsis:* only Peter,

James, and John went to the mountain-top with Jesus because "they alone had the capacity to see his glory." But polymorphism is also a boon to the faithful, a grace: "he did not appear the same to those who were ill and needed his healing as he did to those who were able to ascend the mountain with him and were in good health." The transfiguration tradition becomes an allegory for the diversity of revelational experiences within the church.

6. Conclusion

The Acts of John, Peter, and Thomas employ and exegete traditions of Jesus-metamorphosed, each to its own theological purpose. Even so, there remain throughout the theologically diverse presentations of the metamorphosis traditions evidence of traditional patterns associated with the story of Jesus-transfigured, e.g., the rhetorical pattern in which the metamorphosis tales are presented to support the polymorphic christology. The rhetorical pattern—which is cognate with what many modern critics call "aretalogies"—appears in association with the metamorphosis accounts at least as early as the writing of Mark. The pattern may have been part of the miracle story collections which Mark used as sources.

We have the beginnings of an outline of the church's employment of an old and venerable piece of tradition. The outline begins with miracle-story gospels and continues to the apocryphal Acts' use of this tradition to buttress their theological purposes. The Acts' exegesis of the metamorphosis traditions connects metamorphosis and polymorphism. The APt sees Jesus' polymorphism as a gift to the church, inasmuch as "there is a Jesus for everyone." The continuation of this grace in the APt is demonstrated by the apostle's miracle-working.

The ATh links Jesus' polymorphism to his "twinship" with Judas Thomas. By so doing it establishes the continuation of Jesus' power in the community reinforced sacramentally. The community is linked to Jesus through cultically achieved *koinōnia*.The AJn employs a metamorphosis/polymorphosis theology to set up an esoteric and hierarchical ladder of saving knowledge. The community of the AJn claims strongly exclusive rights to the true knowledge of Jesus and the tradition.

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