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Apocalyptic Literature – A Never-Ending Story

Applying the definition of apocalyptic texts proposed by John Collins, this article analyses the thirty-ninth festal letter of Athanasius of Alexandria (328–373) with its famous list of biblical canonical writings. In the letter, Athanasius dismisses certain apocalyptic texts associated with Enoch, Isaiah and Moses as dispensable and even heretical. In contrast, the canonical apostolic writings were held to contain sufficient instruction from Christ, the true teacher. This position did not prevent the subsequent composition of further apocalyptic texts, one example of which, the Didaskalia of Christ, is presented in this article. Obviously, new themes and debates stimulated the continued production of apocryphal writings even after agreement had been reached on the canon of biblical texts.

1 What is an Apocalyptic Text?

Apocalyptic literature deals with the end, either the end of the world or the end of an individual human being in paradise or hell. However, the production of Christian apocryphal apocalyptic literature is without end – it is a never-ending story, arising out of numerous apocalyptic texts originating at different times and in different cultural contexts. Therefore, there is no final, definitive text about the end, although each text seeks to give exactly this impression. But what kind of text really describes an apocalypse? What makes a text apocalyptic?

The question of defining the genre of apocalyptic texts has been debated for a long time. Apocalyptic literature was intensely studied especially in the 1970s, and a number of definitions were suggested by various scholars. The most famous one was proposed in 1979 by John Collins, now professor for Old Testament Studies at Yale Divinity School. At that time, he was chairing a committee of the Society of Biblical Literature on the “apocalypse” genre. According to him, apocalyptic texts form

a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹

¹ The results of the committee’s work were published in a special issue of the journal *Semeia* 14. It was based on a comprehensive survey of all Jewish and Christian apocalyptic texts from the period 250 BCE to 250 CE; it represents the efforts of five members of the Apocalypse Group of the SBL Forms and Genres project. Cf. also Hartmann, “Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre.” Cf. now Collins, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, especially his introduction: “What

Collins thus identified four defining features that describe the form and content of apocalypses. They are

- Revelatory literature

that has

- a narrative framework

and presents

- a revelation mediated by an otherworldly being

thus

- disclosing a transcendent reality, which is a) temporal – eschatological, and b) spatial – supernatural.

This definition found much support² but also met with criticism, for example regarding its disregard of the text's intended functions.³ However, alternative definitions, which include their functions, turned out to be either too specific or too complex. Nevertheless, two purposes of apocalyptic texts are worth discussing, namely their exhortative and consolatory intentions. The search for a definition that encompasses the function of apocalyptic literature reflects the assumption that this kind of literature is primarily the result of a crisis.

Also in 1979, a conference on apocalypticism in Uppsala argued for an end to the fruitless search for a general definition. The participants agreed to the proposal of Jan Assmann: *contra definitionem, pro descriptione*.⁴ The discovery of parallel literary phenomena in different regions and cultural contexts in ancient Greece, Rome, and the Near East made a definition more complicated. Therefore, the participants of the Uppsala conference preferred to use “apocalyptic” as an adjective describing textual phrases, passages, and motives, but not as a name of a literary genre. However, according to Collins, this decision was “simply a diplomatic evasion of the issue at the end of a stimulating but exhausting conference.”⁵

is Apocalyptic Literature?” 1–16; and Yarbro Collins, “Apocalypse Now.” Cf. also Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*.

² Collins, “What is Apocalyptic Literature?” 2, with reference to DiTommaso, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity,” and Reynolds, *Between Symbolism and Realism*, and Murphy, *Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World*. It is a successful definition suitable to describing apocalyptic literature. The alternative, to take one text as a paradigm or prototype, e.g. the biblical Apocalypse of John, is more of a hindrance than helpful.

³ See Collins, “What is Apocalyptic Literature?” 5–6, himself on this point. Adler, “Introduction,” 17, stresses esotericism as an essential motif and sectarian Christian movements as social background. See below notes 53 and 54.

⁴ Hellholm, “Introduction,” 2: “In spite of several attempts at a definition, there seemed to be a consensus that for the time being *contra definitionem, pro descriptione* (Assmann) would be the appropriate way to pursue investigations in the field of Apocalypticism.” Cf. also Collins and Charlesworth, eds., *Mysteries and Revelations*.

⁵ Collins, “What is Apocalyptic Literature?” 3.

In subsequent decades, the SBL definition as formulated by Collins has become the most widely-used because it opened up constructive avenues of research.⁶ Recently it has been discussed again, and in the end most collaborators confirmed it at a conference in Berlin held in November 2014 organised by the two editors of the “New Schneemelcher”, entitled *Antike Christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, Christoph Marksches and Jens Schröter.⁷ After the publication of two volumes on Christian apocryphal gospels,⁸ a further volume on Christian apocalyptic literature in Antiquity is in preparation. The preliminary list entails 55 Christian apocalyptic texts, which include Jewish apocalyptic literature in Christian use, as well as Christian texts up to the rise of Islam.⁹ In his paper, Collins again takes up the question of definition and defends his previous results that now form the basis for the “New Schneemelcher”. His approach is an etic one, based on a list of features or a “master-paradigm”.¹⁰ Though his definition may be criticised as a circular argument, as selective and simplistic, as being more of a description than a definition, or as overlooking historical developments,¹¹ Collins defends both his approach and the idea of defining a genre at all.¹² He again problematises the question of “func-

6 Tilly, *Apokalyptik*, 49–52, also bases his description on it. This definition is more abstract compared to the suggestions of Vielhauer and Strecker, “Einleitung,” 506, who also link their description to an apocalyptic movement: “Mit aller gebotenen Zurückhaltung und gebührenden Revisionsbereitschaft wird man als Heimat der Apokalyptik jene eschatologisch bewegten und erregten Kreise annehmen dürfen, die von der Theokratie immer mehr in ein Konventikeldasein gedrängt wurden (O. Plöger), die durch eschatologisch Naherwartung, dualistische Vorstellungen und Esoterik eine gewisse Verwandtschaft mit der Gemeinde von Qumran [...] besitzen. Die Apokalypsen stellen die Literatur dieser Konventikel dar; sie sind oft genug aus aktuellen Nöten und zur Stärkung der Gemeinschaft in diesen geschrieben worden.”

7 Some papers from this conference were published in the *Journal of Ancient Christianity* in 2016.

8 *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, vol. 1, eds. Marksches and Schröter.

9 A preliminary list of apocalyptic texts: Discourse of Abbaton, Apocalypse of Abraham, Apocalypse of Adam (NHC); Ascension of Isaia, Ascension of Mose, Second and Third Baruch, Apocalypse of Daniel (syr.), Seventh Vision of Daniel, Didaskalia of Jesus Christ, Daniel-Diegesis, Apocalypse of Elija, First and Second Enoch, Armenian Henoch, Greek Ephraem, Latin Ephraem, Syriac Ephraem, Gospel of the 12 Apostles (syr.), Apocryphon of Ezechiel, Ever-New-Tongue, Fourth to Sixth Ezra, Greek Ezra, Questions of Ezra, Vision of Ezra, Appointment of Michael and Gabriel, The Glory of the Predecessor, Jacob’s Ladder, Apocalypse of John (Greek), Apocalypse of John (Slav.), Apocalypse of Mary, Apocalypse of Makarius (syr.), Apocalypse of Mark (syr.), Ps.-Methodius, Monastic Oracles, Diegesis of Mose, Mysteries of John, Apocalypse of Paul (greek), Apocalypse of Paul (copt.), Apocalypse of Paul (ethiop.), Apocalypse of Paul (NHC), Apocalypse of Peter, Apocalypse of Peter (NHC), Prayer and Apocalypse of Paul, Apocalypse of 24 Prespyters, Apocryphon of the Seven Heavens, Apocalypse of Stephanus, Apocalypse of Sedrach, Testament of the Lord (arab.), Testament of the Lord (syr.), Apocalypse of Thomas, Apocalypse of Zephania.

10 Collins, “The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered,” 24.

11 Collins, “The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered,” 26–27, 35.

12 Collins, “The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered,” 29–32.

tion”: “Our conviction was that function was best discussed at the level of individual texts, in their specific contexts; and the commonly accepted idea that apocalypses were intended to comfort and exhort a group in crisis did not necessarily hold true in all cases.”¹³

The following observations confirm this argument, because the *Didaskalia of Jesus Christ* (see section 3) demonstrates an ongoing production of apocalyptic texts in new non-crisis contexts.

2 Apocryphal and Biblical Teachings: Athanasius’s Thirty-Ninth *Festal Letter*

The previously mentioned variety of Christian apocryphal apocalyptic texts up until the seventh century – “the death of the genre [...] can be placed no earlier than the Middle Ages”¹⁴ – leads to another question: Which strategies do the anonymous authors of these texts use to establish authority and reliability? Why should one read these texts and take them seriously?

All the texts relate to famous biblical figures, particularly those for whom the biblical narrative allows for further revelations, as they had received already divine revelations, including Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament, the disciples of Jesus, or the apostle Paul, whose report of his ascent to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2) is an important link. Thus these biblical texts evoke the possibility and ability to conceive of further revelations. In addition, the biblical figures provide and support the authority of these texts. This is important insofar as apocryphal literature is anonymous. No famous author guarantees the authority and importance of the text; it is the biblical figure himself who authorises the story.

Of course, it is impossible to study each of these Christian apocryphal apocalyptic texts in detail here; therefore, it may be of interest to look at them from a different perspective, namely that of Athanasius of Alexandria, who deals with these questions in his thirty-ninth *Festal Letter* from the year 367. This is the famous letter in which he not only announces the date of Easter to the church communities in Egypt, but also presents a list of canonical writings of the Old and New Testament.¹⁵ The latter are divine texts of apostolic age and “sufficient to instruct us perfectly”

¹³ Collins, “The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered,” 33.

¹⁴ Collins, “The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered,” 35.

¹⁵ Brakke, “Canon formation and social conflict;” Brakke, “Athanasius’s Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter;” *Atanasio di Alexandria. Lettre festali*, ed. Camplani, 498–518; Lucchesi, “Un nouveau complément aux Lettres festales d’Athanasie;” Pedersen, “The New Testament canon and Athanasius of Alexandria’s 39th Festal Letter.”

(*ep. fest.*, 39.15),¹⁶ as he claims. This festal letter is highly important for the history of the formation of the biblical canon, but its characterisation of apocryphal writings is also interesting.

At the time Athanasius wrote this text, he was already of advanced age and had been bishop of Alexandria for nearly forty years (since 328).¹⁷ As the bishop with responsibility over Egypt, Pentapolis, and Libya, he continued the Egyptian tradition of writing festal letters established by his predecessors.¹⁸ He had endured being deposed five times, followed by five periods of exile or flight.¹⁹ But even during these periods, he sought to maintain the tradition of festal letters, with the secondary goal of demonstrating that he was nevertheless the rightful bishop. He thus reinforced his reputation as the strong and unbending bishop fighting for Nicene orthodoxy against diverse heretics.

Throughout many of his writings, Athanasius criticised his opponents' inability to read and interpret biblical texts correctly. However, his thirty-ninth *Festal Letter* is the first and only instance in which he presents a concrete list of the biblical writings he considers orthodox. His aim is, of course, to exclude other, non-apostolic texts and to eliminate the category of "disputed writings".²⁰ His list presents only those writings which "are canonized, transmitted, and believed to be divine" (*ep. fest.*, 39.16); therefore "let no one add to or subtract from them" (*ep. fest.*, 39.19).²¹

In this letter, Athanasius strongly rejects the reading of apocryphal books, which, he says, are used only among heretics:

16 Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 59.

17 On Athanasius cf. Gemeinhardt, ed., *Athanasius Handbuch*; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*; Gwynn, *The Eusebians*; Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*; Martin, *Athanasie d'Alexandrie et l'Église d'Égypte au IV^e siècle*; Schwartz, *Zur Geschichte des Athanasius*.

18 The tradition of writing festal letters is known from the third century onwards. The first bishop of whom we have more information is Dionysius of Alexandria (cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 7.20); cf. Camplani, "Osterfestbriefe."

19 The first and second periods of exile (335–337 in Trier and 339–345 mainly in Rome) were the result of the Egyptian (so-called Melitian) opposition against him and a mixture of political, ecclesiastical, and theological conflicts. During the third exile (356–361), again the outcome of both the theological conflicts and political circumstances, Athanasius hid in Egypt. The fourth and fifth periods of exile were shorter, and again Athanasius escaped arrest. Cf. on his biography Gemeinhardt, *Athanasius Handbuch*, 73–93, and the literature in n. 17. Of interest in this respect was his defense of fleeing from persecution in *De fuga in persecutione*.

20 Cf. the reflections on disputed writings by Origen in the third century (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 6.25.3–14) and the list of Eusebius of Caesarea in *Historia ecclesiastica*, 3.25.1–3 with Eusebius' own reflections on them in *Historia ecclesiastica*, 3.24.17–18 and 2.23.25, ed. Schwartz. Cf. Von Campenhausen, *Entstehung der christlichen Bibel*; Metzger, *Der Kanon des Neuen Testaments*; Marksches, "Neue Forschungen zur Kanonisierung des Neuen Testaments;" Marksches, *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen*, 215–335; von Lips, *Der neutestamentliche Kanon*; Greschat, "Die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons;" Thomassen, ed., *Canon and Canonicity* and, as an overview, Ebner, "Der christliche Kanon." Even still Augustine mentions the different canons of Scripture (*De doctrina christiana* 2.8.13).

21 Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 60–61.

We are afraid that, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, a few of the simple folk might be led astray from sincerity and purity through human deceit and might then begin to read other books, the so-called apocrypha, deceived by their having the same name as the genuine books. I exhort you to bear with me if I remind you about things that you already know, on account of the Church's need and advantage (*ep. fest.*, 39.15).²²

Accepting an additional body of apocryphal books is, as Athanasius claims, “an invention of heretics” (*ep. fest.*, 39.21). According to him, the authors write these texts whenever they please; then they “add time to them” and publish them as if they were ancient (*ep. fest.*, 39.21). Furthermore, they “deceive by their having the same name as the genuine books” (*ep. fest.*, 39.15).²³ He gives the examples of books bearing the names Enoch, Isaiah, and Moses:

Who has made the simple folk believe that those books belong to Enoch, even though no Scripture existed before Moses? On what basis will they say that there is an apocryphal book of Isaiah? He preaches openly on the high mountain and says, ‘I did not speak in secret or in a dark land!’ How could Moses have an apocryphal book? He is the one who published Deuteronomy with heaven and earth as witnesses. No, this can be nothing except itchy ears, trading in piety, and pleasing of women (*ep. fest.*, 39.21–22).²⁴

Obviously, he primarily has apocalyptic writings in mind. Athanasius does not go into detail, but he mentions “books belonging to Enoch, Moses, and Isaiah”, likely referring to the story of the martyrdom and ascension of Isaiah (*Ascensio Jesaiae*²⁵), perhaps the *Testament* or *Assumption of Moses*,²⁶ and the contents of the Enoch-Literature.^{27, 28} Their authors only want to be considered as great people (*ep. fest.*, 39.22). But, according to Athanasius, there is no need for further revelations: “The apocryphal books are filled with myths, and it is vain to pay attention to them because they are empty and polluted voices.” (*ep. fest.*, 39.22)²⁹ In contrast, each element of the Christian faith – for example, Christ's humanity, His resurrection, and

²² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 60.

²³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 60–61.

²⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 61.

²⁵ Cf. Müller, “Die Himmelfahrt des Jesaja;” Hammershaimb, ed., *Das Martyrium Jesajas*; Schwemer, ed., *Studien zu den frühjüdischen Prophetenlegenden*; Knight, “The Ascension of Isaiah.”

²⁶ Tromp, ed., *The Assumption of Moses*; Oegema, ed., “Himmelfahrt Moses;” Graupner and Wolter, eds., *Moses in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Traditions*; Hofmann, *Die Assumptio Mosis*.

²⁷ We know of three Books of Enoch (1 Enoch [ethiop.], 2 Enoch [slav.], 3 Enoch [hebr.]), cf. Ego, “Henoch / Henochliteratur,” of which 1 Enoch may be the most likely. On 1 Enoch and its use and rejection among Christians in Late Antiquity, see VanderKam, “1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch in Early Christianity.” Jerome also rejects 1 Enoch and hints at the prominence of this book among the Manichees (*Tractatus* 45 in Psalm 132:3 [Hieronimus, *Tractatus sive homiliae in psalmos*, l. 141, ed. Morin, 280]). Cf. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony*.

²⁸ Brakke, “Canon Formation and Social Conflict,” 412 with note 70; Camplani, *Lettere festali*, 277.

²⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 61.

the coming judgment – can be found in the canonical writings, which he includes in his list (*ep. fest.*, 39.24).³⁰

Therefore, even when these apocalyptic writings refer to the apostle Paul, who quotes a verse of the prophet Isaiah in his first letter to the Corinthians – “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, things that have not arisen upon the human heart” (Isa. 64:3 in 1 Cor. 2:9) – they are wrong. As Athanasius states, Paul’s quotation does not indicate that the apostle himself had further apocryphal books at his disposal or that he strives to support his words through other words [...] Rather, the words referred to are things written in the Scriptures! (*ep. fest.*, new Coptic fragment).³¹

Furthermore, Athanasius discredits apocryphal writings by connecting them with heresy in two ways: on the one hand, the heretics are wrongdoers who write and distribute these apocryphal texts; on the other, the false teachings of the heretics are sufficiently refuted by the canonical writings. He does not assert directly that heretical statements can be found in these apocryphal writings, and even concedes that sometimes one may find a useful word in them. Nevertheless, his comments are a polemical strategy to create the impression of the presence of heretical material. His insistence on the sufficiency of the canonical writings to refute heretics suggests that the rise of heresies and various sorts of misconduct was sometimes used to justify the need for further revelatory literature, which Athanasius of course rejects.

In summary, Athanasius criticises the following deceptive strategies:

- Titles of apocryphal apocalyptic books identical to those of genuine books, with the intention to deceive the readers
- Pretence of ancient provenance
- Misuse of biblical figures like Moses, Enoch, and Isaiah
- Misuse of 1 Corinthians 2:9 as a reference to apocryphal books
- Alleged reference to hidden wisdom in Scripture
- Assertion of a need for further revelations
- Boasting of being an elite Christian with more knowledge than other Christians (*ep. fest.*, 39.32)³²

In contrast to those deceiving strategies, Athanasius depicts Jesus Christ as the only true teacher par excellence, the *Logos* and wisdom of God; the word *didaskalos* is repeated frequently in his letter. Christ, the Word of God, is the teacher, not Moses, Enoch, or Isaiah, and of course no other human teacher. Christ taught his disciples and turned them into “second-generation” teachers. They, the apostles, wrote down

³⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 62.

³¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 64. The *Ascensio Jesaiae*, which is the text that Athanasius probably had in mind (see above note 25), uses this verse of Paul (11.34–35).

³² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 65.

exactly what they had been taught. Therefore, they produced the apostolic writings, which can be found among the canonised Scriptures.³³

Of course, Athanasius is also teaching his community through his letter, but he depicts himself not as a teacher but as a disciple who has learned everything through divine Scriptures and through the teaching of his “father”, his predecessor Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria:

I have not written these things as if I were teaching, for I have not attained such a rank – rather, because I heard that the heretics, especially the wretched Melitians, were boasting about the books that they call ‘apocryphal’, I thus have informed you of everything that I heard from my father, as if I were with you and you with me in a single house, that is ‘the Church of God, the pillar and strength of truth’ (*ep. fest.*, 39.32).³⁴

For Athanasius, the teaching of Christ is mediated through the collected (or collective) apostolic writings and guaranteed by the Church’s teaching tradition, thereby securing the correct distinction between authentic and inauthentic writings.

It should be noted, however, that Athanasius’s insistence on Christ being the true teacher was also frequently expressed in Christian apocryphal literature. Christ appears as a teacher or is even named “teacher”. For example, the *Apocalypse of Peter* purports to be a speech by the teacher Jesus about the end of the world. In particular many of the apocalyptic dialogues are written as questions addressed to Christ and answered directly by him, such as the so-called *Questions of Bartholomy*. Another example is the *Apocalypse of Thomas*, a letter from Christ to Thomas regarding the signs of the beginning of the end of the world. In addition, the so-called *First Apocryphon of John* is a dialogue between Christ and John. This demonstrates the common conviction in Late Antiquity that Christ as Word and Wisdom of God is the divine teacher par excellence, but Athanasius constricts Christ’s teaching to the canonical writings only. However, it is interesting to observe that the production of apocryphal writings did not stop, although the formation of the canon of biblical writings came to an end in the fourth century.

3 A Later Example: The *Didaskalia of Jesus Christ*

The following considerations present an apocalyptic text that specifically calls Christ a teacher, namely the so-called *Didaskalia of Jesus Christ*. Teacher – *didaskalos* – is not only mentioned in the title in some of the manuscripts,³⁵ but also ap-

³³ Heil, “Athanasius of Alexandria,” 177–196.

³⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*, trans. Brakke, 65.

³⁵ The title varies in the different manuscripts: While the Slavonic tradition presents “Revelation of the Apostles,” one part of the Greek manuscripts writes “Teaching of the Apostles,” the other part “Ordering of the Apostles.” The first edition of the texts was published by Nau, “Une didascalie de

pears in the text itself. The text purports to be a dialogue between the disciples and an angel, who is later revealed as Jesus Christ himself. The narrative of the *Didaskalia* is located in the Valley of Josaphat after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The disciples had been fasting for forty days and then were caught up in an ecstatic experience. In this ecstatic state, the apostles Peter, Paul, Andrew, James, Bartholomy, Thomas, John, Philipp, Luke, Matthew, Mark, and Thaddaeus ask questions to a person they assume to be an angel.

Peter opens the conversation with a question about the reward for fasting for forty days before Passover, as the apostles have just done. Then Paul asks about the penalty for fornicators and Sodomites. The angel, i.e. Christ, describes the penalties as being the river of fire for fornicators and the sleepless worm for Sodomites. Again, fasting is the answer, but now as a means of penance, namely fasting for eight years.

After this, Andrew asks about the special powers of the days of the week, and Christ explains the superiority of Sunday, the Day of the Lord, over the other days of the week. Christ reveals that each day has a special significance according to the story of creation in Genesis 1: Sunday, the first day, is mentioned as the day of the creation of heaven and earth; then the fourth day, Wednesday, as the day for "works of justice and fasting"; the sixth day, Friday, as the day of the creation of Adam; and Saturday as the day of rest. But at the peak of all days is Sunday.³⁶

Next, the apostle James asks inquires about the reward for fasting on Wednesday and Friday. The answer again stresses the importance of fasting on these two days in preparation for Sunday. These days even appear in person, praising the one who keeps their fast on these days and venerates Sunday with worship and by ceasing from work.³⁷

notre-seigneur Jésus-Christ," but he only used two Greek manuscripts (A: *Codex Parisinus graecus* 929, fol. 480–501, fifteenth century; B: *Codex Vaticanus graecus* 2072, fol. 179–182, ninth century) while there are at least eight other known Greek and five Slavonic manuscripts (de Santos Otero, ed., *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der altslavischen Apokryphen*, 233–236). The problem of Nau's edition is his attempt to merge the two versions of the two manuscripts he used into one text, as a kind of original version, but they present two different traditions that cannot be united in this way.

36 Greek text after own collations of the two manuscripts, *Codex Parisinus graecus* 929 (480–501) and *Codex Parisinus graecus* 390 (37–46): ὡσπερ ἀστήρ ἀστέρων διαφέρει ἐν δόξῃ· πρῶτον ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν· καὶ, ὁμοίως, πάντων μειζωτέρα ἠῤῥέθη ἡ ἀγία κυριακή· διὰ τί κυριακὴν ἐκάλεσεν λοιπῶν; ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τοὺς δύο φωστῆρας τοὺς μεγάλους· εἰς διακόσμησιν τῆς ἡμέρας καὶ τῆς νυκτός· τὸν μέγαν ἐκάλεσεν ἥλιον· καὶ ποικίλως κεκοσμημένος ἀερικοῖς δρόμοις ἐλαυνόμενος· ὑπὸ ἄρματος πυρὸς ἀκτίνας ἐκπέμπων· τὴν ἡμέραν τελείως εἰσαπατίζεται· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ σελήνη τὴν νύκταν ἐκτελεῖ· τὴν δὲ τετάρτην ἡμέραν εἰς ἔργα δικαιοσύνης καὶ νηστείας· τὴν δὲ πέμπτην εἰς διαχώρησιν γῆς καὶ ὕδατος· τὴν ἕκτην δὲ κτίσιν ἀνθρώπων καὶ κτηνῶν καὶ ἐρπετῶν· τὴν δὲ ἑβδόμην κατέπαυσεν ὁ Θεὸς ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἔθηκεν εἰς κεφαλὴν τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡμερῶν ἁγίαν κυριακὴν.

37 λέγει ὁ Σωτήρ· μακάριος ἐστὶν ὁ ἐν τῇ πίστει φυλάττων αὐτάς· ὅτι αὐτὸν μετὰ τὸ βληθῆναι ἐκ τοῦ σκολιοῦ βίου· καὶ ἀπελθῶν εἰς προσκύνησιν τοῦ ἀχράντου θρόνου· ὑπὸ ἀγγέλων· καὶ ἐν τῷ εἰσιέναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ· ὑπαντοῦσιν αὐτὸν αἱ ἡμέραι τετράδῃ καὶ παρασκευῇ·

The following two questions deal with clerics living at a great distance from their church, whether physically or spiritually, and striving for dishonourable profits on Sundays: on Sunday, clerics are not allowed to leave church for business dealings, nor to give the Eucharist to ignorant people; they are, furthermore, not allowed to marry a second time.

One version of the *Didaskalia* now continues with further questions, but with a change of theme.³⁸ Bartholomew, who poses a question for the second time here, asks about the mystery of the Father, and Christ reveals details about the seven heavens. John asks regarding the mystery of the demons. Christ answers with the story of the fall of the archangel Samael and his followers. Further questions focus on the Last Judgment and relate revelations on Hades and Tartarus and the destiny of sinners. The apostles inquire about the burning of sinners and other punishments after death. The text ends with an appeal for vigilance: the apostles should be careful to avoid sin.

The last part of the *Didaskalia* includes therefore an interesting story of an archangel who refuses to worship the newly created man, Adam, a being made from dust and mud. Therefore, the archangel is thrown out of the heavens. He became the devil, and his companions turn into demons:

These things took place concerning the newly formed Adam. When the demiurge had readied all things, God the Ruler spoke to His Spirit: ‘Let us make man after our image and likeness’ (Gen. 1:26). And He sent angels to the earth, in order to bring Him some dust. And the angels went down; finding the earth dormant, they took some of the dust and returned with joy and exultation. The Earth did not at first notice, but as she awoke and sensed the power that had been taken from her (cf. Mk. 5:30), she looked up at the angels, as they went up with joy, and said, ‘With joy they take the dust from me, but with sighing and lament will it return to me’ (cf. Eccl. 3:20).

And after they returned on high, they laid the dust at the base of the awesome throne. God, after He had created everything, took the dust and formed man after his image and likeness, and He said to the angelic hosts, ‘Come, adore the work of my hands!’ And Gabriel brought his whole company and paid homage, as did Michael and all the hosts of heaven.

μετὰ χαρᾶς λέγουσαι· χαίρου φίλε ἡμῶν· ὁ καὶ πολλὰ κοπιάσας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· νηστείας καὶ ἀγρυπνίας δεῶμενος τῷ Θεῷ· καὶ ὄλον σου τὸν οἶκον κωλύων ἀπὸ πάσης σχολῆς τῶν γηίνων· νῦν δὲ χαίρου καὶ εὐφραίνου ἐν παραδείσῳ· καὶ λαλούντων αὐτῶν· ἔρχεται καὶ ἡ ἀγία κυριακὴ μετὰ ὀκτώ ἀγγέλων λαμπροφώρων· καὶ αὐτὴ μέσων κεκοσμημένη ὡς θυγάτηρ Σιών· μαρτυροῦσα τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ἀσπαζομένη καὶ λέγουσα τοῖς ὀκτώ ἀγγέλοις τοῖς ἐν αὐτῇ· δεῦτε ἴδετε ψυχὴν δικαίαν ἣτις μάλωπας οὐκ ἔχει· ἥτις καλῶς ἀγωνησαμένη ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· καὶ ἐφύλαξεν ἑαυτὴν ἀπὸ πάσης ἐνεργίας τοῦ διαβόλου· τότε χαίρουσιν αὐτὴν οἱ ἄγγελοι· καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν· τότε διασπαζόμενοι τὴν ψυχὴν τὴν καλῶς πολιτευσάμενην· τοῦτος δὲ ἐστὶν ὁ μισθὸς τῶν τὴν ἀγίαν κυριακὴν φυλαξάντων· καὶ τὴν τετραδοπαρασκευὴν νηστευσάντων.

38 This last part of the *Didaskalia* is transmitted only in one version of the text (in *Codex A* in Nau, “*Didascalie*”, and in *Codex Parisinus* gr. 390, sixteenth century, fol. 37v–46r); the Slavonic version omits it, and the other Greek manuscripts present instead a longer list of woes. The following quotation is taken from a preliminary translation of a new edition of the text made by Jannis Grossmann and myself.

Samuel,³⁹ however, turned away and said, ‘I am a blazing fire and cannot adore ordinary mud!’ But Gabriel came and said, ‘Angel Samuel, come and honour the work of Him who formed you, lest God the Lord be angry!’ Samuel said, ‘I have a throne just like Him; if He is angry with me, I will establish my throne and take my company of angels and be like God’ (Isa. 14:13).

And then the anger of God the Lord was kindled, and He said to Gabriel, ‘Take him by his wings, and he shall be thrown down to the Underworld!’ Then Gabriel, taking hold of the power of the invisible God, struck Samuel with his wings and said, ‘Descend to the Underworld, as God has declared!’ And the gates of heaven opened, and Satanael⁴⁰ was catapulted below, and he took his hosts of angels with him. In their acceptance of the order to go, the angels descended with him and became evil spirits.⁴¹

However, as he saw how the heavens quaked and the powers strove, Michael said, ‘Let us now take note; let us stand upright, and let us stand in reverence’. And the invisible God gave peace, and the gates of heaven were shut.⁴²

In many respects, the *Didaskalia*, probably written during the sixth century, is a strange text. On the one hand, it shows the ongoing production of apocalyptic texts

39 This is Samael: Scholem, “Samael;” Michl, “Engel V (Engelnamen),” 231.

40 The change of the name marks the change of the archangel into a fallen angel.

41 Cf. *Vita Adae et Evae* [lat. Version], 12–16; *Apocalypsis Sedrach*, 5.2–3; *Quaestiones Bartholomae*, 4.52–56; *Caverna thesaurorum*, 3; *Iesu Contentio cum diabolo*, 3 in griech. A; 4 in slav. R1 und R2 (Casey and Thomson, “A Dialogue between Christ and the Devil,” 49–51, 56, 59). The tenth question of Ps. Athanasius (*Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*, PG 28, 604) rejects this story, as well as Anastasius Sinaita, *Questiones et responsiones*, 80. Cf. *Die Apokalypse des Mose*, 52, ed. Doehrn, with note 39.

42 ταῦτα γέγονεν διὰ τὸν πρωτόπλαστον Ἀδάμ· κατασκευάσαντος τοῦ δημιουργοῦ τὰ πάντα· λέγει ὁ δεσπότης Θεὸς τῷ ἰδίῳ πνεύματι· ποιήσομεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν τὴν ἡμετέραν· καὶ ἀπέστειλεν ἀγγέλους ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν τοῦ ἀνεγκεῖν χοῦν ἐξ αὐτῆς· καὶ προσελθόντες εὗρον αὐτὴν καθεύδουσαν καὶ ἦσαν τὸν χοῦν ἐξ αὐτῆς καὶ ἀνέβησαν χαίροντες καὶ ἀγαλλιώμενοι· μὴ γνοῦσα δὲ ἡ γῆ καὶ διυπνισθεῖσα καὶ νοήσασα δύναμιν ἐξελοῦσαν ἐξ αὐτῆς, καὶ θεωρεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους ὅτι ἀνέβαινον χαίροντες, λέγει· χαίροντες ἐπαίροντες τὸν χοῦν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ· μετὰ στεναγμοῦ καὶ κλαυθμοῦ πάλιν εἰς ἐμὲ εἰσελεύσεται· καὶ ἀνελθόντες, ἔθηκαν τὸν χοῦν ἐπὶ τοῦ φοβεροῦ βήματος· ὁ δὲ τὰ πάντα δημιουργήσας Θεὸς, λαβὼν τὸν χοῦν, ἔπλασεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἰδιαν καὶ ὁμοίωσιν, καὶ εἶπεν ταῖς στρατιαῖς τῶν ἀγγέλων· δεῦτε προσκυνήσατε τὸ ἔργον τῶν χειρῶν μου. καὶ λαβὼν ὁ Γαβριὴλ πᾶσαν τὴν στρατιάν αὐτοῦ, προσεκύνησεν· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Μιχαὴλ καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ στρατιαὶ τῶν οὐρανῶν. Σαμουὴλ δὲ ἠθέτησεν λέγων· πῦρ φλογὸς γέγονα ἡμῖν καὶ οὐ δύναμις προσκυνῆσαι πηλὸν κοινόν. προσελθὼν δὲ Γαβριὴλ λέγει· ἄγγελε Σαμουὴλ, πρόσελθε προσκυνήσον τὸ ἔργον τοῦ πλάσαντός σε, μήπως ὀργισθῆ σοι κύριος ὁ Θεός. λέγει Σαμουὴλ· θρόνον ἔχω καθότι καὶ αὐτός· ὀργισθῆ μοι, κτίζω τὸν θρόνον μου καὶ ἄρῶ τὴν στρατιάν μου, καὶ ἔσομαι ὁμοιος τοῦ Θεοῦ. καὶ τότε ὀργισθῆ κύριος ὁ Θεός, καὶ λέγει τῷ Γαβριὴλ· ἄψαι αὐτοῦ τῶν πτερυγίων του καὶ κατενεχθήτω εἰς τὰ καταχθόνια. λαβὼν δὲ Γαβριὴλ δύναμιν παρὰ τοῦ ἀοράτου Θεοῦ, ἐπάταξεν αὐτὸν τῶν πτερυγίων αὐτοῦ λέγων· κάτελθε εἰς τὰ καταχθόνια ἃ εἶπεν ὁ Θεός. καὶ ἠνοιχθήσαν οἱ καταράκται τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ ἐκρέμασθ ὁ Σαταναὴλ καὶ κατέφερεν τὰς στρατίας τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ· δοκοῦντες ὅτι ἐν ἀποκρίσειν πορεύονται, συγκατέβησαν αὐτῷ ἄγγελοι, καὶ ἐγένοντο πνεύματα πονηρὰ. Ἰδὼν δὲ ὅτι ἐκινούντο οὐ οὐρανοὶ καὶ κατεσπούδαζον αἱ δυνάμεις σὺν αὐτῷ, λέγει οὖν ὁ Μιχαὴλ· πρόσχωμεν λουτὸν, στώμεν καλῶς, στώμεν μετὰ φόβου. ὁ δὲ ἀόρατος Θεὸς διδοὺς εἰρήνην ἐκλείσθησαν οἱ καταράκται τῶν οὐρανῶν. καὶ οἱ συγκαταβαίνοντες τῷ Σαταναὴλ ἦσαν κατοικούντες εἰς τὰ ξόανα καὶ εἴδωλα τῆς γῆς, καὶ ἐκλήθησαν δαιμόνια.

outside the biblical canon, which by the sixth century had already been established. It shows the fascination with, and widespread distribution of, apocalyptic features – although the biblical Apocalypse of John, for example, was a highly contested text from the beginning and was accepted into the New Testament canon only by accident.⁴³ Interestingly, the *Didaskalia* itself refers to “the divine writings” and includes some warnings in form of short woes like “Woe on him who does not believe the divine writings!” and “Woe on him who does not hear of (“listen to”?) the divine writings!”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it promotes itself as an important text: “Listen, those whom I have chosen for my testament. And the mysteries I tell you, write them down in books and transfer them to the next generation, that they may heed the commandments of my father!” This suggests that the author wants to present these commandments as a kind of additional, secret instruction to the apostles that is therefore relevant also to the successors of the apostles, namely the clerics of the Church. It accordingly includes additional commandments for clerics, deacons, and priests to whose care the community is entrusted.

Furthermore, the *Didaskalia* demonstrates the recycling of apocalyptic material in new contexts. The appearance of Bartholomew as a questioner on two occasions and other incongruities⁴⁵ show that the anonymous author probably included material from other sources. For example, many similarities with the so-called *Questions of Bartholomy* in the second part of the *Didaskalia* suggest that either the *Questions* were one of its source texts, or that both relied on the same older source(s).

Furthermore, the *Didaskalia* provides an interesting case study for the debate regarding apocalyptic texts as a genre mentioned above, particularly regarding the question as to whether the genre’s “function” is a necessary element of the definition. The function of the *Didaskalia* is not, in the first place, exhortation or consolation, which are often suggested to have been apocalyptic texts’ main functions. Nor was the text apparently produced as a result of a crisis; instead, it aims to promote a special aspect of piety. The *Didaskalia* thus supports the claim that function should not be part of the genre’s definition: not only can apocalyptic texts serve many different functions, but these, in turn, are also served by other genres and not confined to apocalyptic texts.

43 Böcher, “Johannes-Apokalypse.” Eusebius relates e.g. the critical remarks of Dionysius of Alexandria on the Apocalypse of John in *Historia ecclesiastica*, 7.25.

44 Cf. on this genre Balz “ὀδοί;” Hagner, “Weherufe;” Müller, *Studien zur frühjüdischen Apokalyp-tik*, 90; Uhlig, “Bemerkungen zu den Weherufen in der jüdischen Apokalyp-tik.”

45 The first apostle Peter talks to the angel as if he already knows him to be Christ, although the angel’s revelation occurs later on, when Andrew asks a question. The three insertions of a short list of woes after the third, fourth, and sixth questions are noteworthy, as is the Bartholomew’s asking two questions. The last question is presented by four apostles together. The description of Hades at the end of the text is incongruent with the description of the penalty for sodomy and impurity at the beginning. The description of heaven at the beginning (a reward for fasting) is not taken up again in the last vision about the seven heavens. The last part is suddenly presented in the first person plural.

The main theme of the *Didaskalia*, besides fasting, is proper veneration of the Sunday⁴⁶: The third apostle, Andrew, asks about the power of the days of the week, and the Lord answers that the most venerable day is Sunday, the day of the Lord. It is the day on which “God created heaven and earth” (Gen. 1:1); therefore, he places it ahead of all other days. Correspondingly, the anonymous author presents woes about Sunday: “Woe on him who works on Sunday!” “Woe on him who did not abstain from all work on Sunday!” “Woe on him who did not abstain from all concupiscence the night before Sunday!” Interestingly, this concern is stressed with a vision of heaven in which the pious soul is welcomed by the days of the week personified – Wednesday, Friday, and especially Sunday, who appear together with eight angels, decorated as the daughter Zion.⁴⁷

46 Cf. Bergholz, “Sonntag;” Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Origins of Feast, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*; Brattston, *Sabbath and Sunday among the Earliest Christians*; Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*; Doering, *Schabbat*; Dölger, “Die Planetenwoche der griechisch-römischen Antike und der christliche Sonntag;” Girardet, “Vom Sonnen-Tag zum Sonntag;” Haag, *Vom Sabbat zum Sonntag*; Huber, *Geist und Buchstabe der Sonntagsruhe*; Mayer-Haas, “Geschenk aus Gottes Schatzkammer,” (*bSchab 10b*); Rordorf, *Der Sonntag*; Rordorf, *Sabbat und Sonntag in der Alten Kirche*; Rüpke, *Kalender und Öffentlichkeit*; Schiepek, *Der Sonntag und kirchlich gebotene Feiertage nach kirchlichem und weltlichem Recht*; Staats, “Die Sonntagnachtgottesdienste der christlichen Frühzeit;” Thomas, *Der Sonntag im frühen Mittelalter*; Weiler, ed., *Der Tag des Herrn*; Bergholz, “Sonntag,” 453: “Keines der zeitgenössischen Konzilien geht auf die staatliche Sonntagsgesetzgebung ein, und keiner der Kirchenväter stützt seine Argumentation auf eines der staatlichen Gesetze.”

47 A Christian assembly on the day of the Lord is mentioned in Acta 20.7 (cf. also Apoc. 1:10; *Didache* 14.1; Ignatius of Antioch, *Magn.* 9.1). Sunday as the day of both the resurrection and the creation appears in the second century in Justin (*1 apol.* 67.3–7). A regular Christian meeting in the evening is mentioned by Pliny (*ep.*, 10.96.7 to Trajan). The law of Constantine of 321 on Sunday rest for judges, urban peoples and artisans was important (*Codex Iustinianus*, 3.12.2): “All judges (*iudices*) and urban peoples (*urbanaeque plebes*) and artisans of all crafts (*atrium officia cunctarum*) should rest on the venerable day of the Sun. However, persons situated in the country may attend freely and unhindered to the cultivation of the fields, since it frequently happens that there is not another day more suitable to entrusting seeds of grain to furrows or vines to ditches, lest the opportunity granted by heavenly provision be lost by the favourable moment of a short season.” Not long afterwards, an exception concerning certain juridical activities on manumission was established by Constantine (*Codex Theodosianus*, 2.8.1): “Just as it seemed most unfitting that the day of the Sun, celebrated by its own veneration, should be occupied with wrangling lawsuits and noxious contention of litigants, so it is pleasant and agreeable that acts which are especially desirable should be accomplished on that day. And, therefore, all should have permission of emancipating and of manumitting on the festal day, and transactions concerning these matters should not be prohibited.” (cf. also Eusebius of Caesarea, *De vita Constantini*, 4.18–20). Since Theodosius, there were more laws concerning Sunday: in 386 prohibition of lawsuits and collecting debts, prohibition of visiting the theatre and spectacles; in 392: prohibition of circus; in 395: all pagan festival days are prohibited, in 409: no *voluptas* / amusements on Sunday; in 454–474 under Emperor Leo: prohibition of playing the lyre and flute or other musical instruments on Sunday (probably against pantomime), cf. Puk, *Das römische Spielewesen in der Spätantike*, 62–63. But it was only from the sixth century onwards that there are ecclesiastical canons on Sunday veneration comparable to the

Interestingly, there is another extant apocryphal text with the same theme, which, furthermore, also depicts Christ as a teacher. It is the so-called *Letter from Heaven* that Christ is said to have thrown down to Earth to demand Sunday veneration. This letter was read widely not only in the Latin West,⁴⁸ but also in the East, with Greek, Syrian, Coptic, Arabic, Aramaic, and Ethiopic versions as well as many others.⁴⁹ While the Latin text deals only with Sunday, the oriental versions also demand fasting on Wednesday and Friday. Even some woes have verbatim parallels in the *Didaskalia*.⁵⁰ I cannot here delve into the question of the Letter's Greek or Latin origin,⁵¹ but it is probable that the Greek version originated around the same time and in the same context as the *Didaskalia*.

Obviously, an important issue of church practice and church law provoked certain Christian circles to produce some very imaginative apocalyptic texts. Constan-

Didaskalia (cf. Orléans 538 *can.* 31; Macôn 585, *can.* 1; Narbonne 589, *can.* 4; cf. also Gregory of Tours, *Histories*, 10.30; Gregor the Great, *ep.*, 13.3; *Admonitio generalis* a. 789, 81).

48 The first mention of this text is in the letter of Licinianus of Cartagena, Spain, in A.D. 584 (PL 72, 699–70), who condemned it in his response to Vincentius of Ibiza, who had originally informed him about this supposed “Letter from Heaven.” Already in 538, the council in Orléans condemned Jewish sabbatical practice for Christians. Later condemnations of the Letter from Heaven followed: Papat Zacharias in 745 (Lateran council) and Charlemagne in the *Admonitio generalis* in 789. The oldest Latin version relates that the letter was found in Jerusalem at the Effrem gate and finally arrived in Rome. The destruction of humankind is announced for the following November, if Christians do not keep Sunday as a day of rest. By contrast, a Greek version relates the descent of the letter in Rome, but others locate it in Bethlehem (in a heavy stone that fell from heaven) or Constantinople (cf. the following note).

49 Backus, “Lettre du Jésus-Christ sur le Dimanche;” *Der vom Himmel gefallene Brief Christi in seinen morgenländischen Versionen und Rezensionen*, ed. Bittner; Delehay, “Note sur la légende de la lettre du Christ tombée du ciel (1899);” van Esbroeck, “La lettre sur le Dimanche, descendue du ciel;” Graf, “Der vom Himmel gefallene Brief Christi (nach Cod. Monac. Arab. 1067);” Priebsch, *Letter from Heaven on the Observance of the Lord's Day*. Cf. on this text also Haines, *Sunday Observance and the Sunday Letter in Anglo-Saxon England*; Palmer, “Der Himmelsbrief;” Röhrich, “Ein ‘Brief Christi’;” *Los Evangelios Apócrifos*, ed. de Santos Otero, 665–676; Speyer, *Bücherfunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike*, 27–28; Stübe, *Der Himmelsbrief. Ein Beitrag zur allgemeinen Religionsgeschichte*.

50 Cf. *Letter from Heaven*, 2.17, ed. Priebsch (*Der vom Himmel gefallene Brief Christi in seinen morgenländischen Versionen und Rezensionen*, 19.2–4, ed. Bittner) from the Greek version a1. One should also take into consideration another group of texts, namely the sermons of a certain “Eusebius of Alexandria”, a fictitious individual in whose name we have 25 sermons (Mai, Introduction: *Spicilegium Romanum*, VIII–X, with a list of these sermons). The first sermon deals with fasting and the nineteenth with Sunday (in PG 86,413–421); cf. Nau, “Notes sur diverses homélies pseudépigraphiques.” Other apocalyptic texts which deal with ecclesiastical rules or canon law are the so-called *Testamentum Domini* (cf. *Testamentum Domini nostri Jesu Christi / The Testamentum Domini*, ed. Sperry White) and the *Apocalypse of Paul* or *Visio Pauli* (*Apokalypse des Paulus*, ed. and trans. Duensing and de Santos Otero; and *Die Visio Pauli*, ed. and trans. Jiroušková).

51 Van Esbroeck, “La lettre sur le Dimanche, descendue du ciel,” argues for a Greek origin already in the fifth century in the context of the different denotations of the days of the week, Delehay, “Note sur la légende de la lettre du Christ tombée du ciel (1899),” pleads for Latin origin.

tine enacted a law decreeing rest on Sunday, which was also intended to facilitate Christian worship. Nevertheless, Christians did not support the veneration of a day in and of itself for some time, but instead restricted their attention to the attendance of Sunday services alone. The reason was likely an intentional distancing from Jewish Sabbath observation and from common practice observing the special character of a day of the planetary week (“Tagwählerei”) and comparable astrological practices. Later on, when this anti-pagan issue diminished, Sunday observance grew in importance, leading to the production of new apocryphal apocalyptic and pseudoepigraphic texts. Nevertheless, the relation to and distance from Judaism remained a problem and dominated later discussions, as can be seen in texts up to Carolingian times.⁵²

4 Final Observations

As already stated above, the function of the *Didaskalia* seems to be to support a special veneration of Sunday and to stress the importance of fasting. Its other, exhortatory elements play only a supporting role; as already discussed, apocalyptic literature could serve many different functions.⁵³ The *Didaskalia* probably dates to the sixth century, a period in which discussions of Sunday veneration appear in other texts as well. It is therefore not a response to a crisis, as it is often claimed regarding apocalyptic literature, but the outcome of the ongoing Christianisation of all aspects of life, a process occurring during and after the era of Emperor Justinian.

The *Didaskalia* may be an exception, but the overemphasis of crisis as the usual, even necessary context of the creation of apocalyptic texts has already been criticised by others.⁵⁴ The aforementioned *Letter from Heaven* is another example of imaginative creativity which incorporates apocalyptic features. Therefore, apocalypticism as a religious or cultural phenomenon or movement – or “the apocalyptic” in

⁵² Cf. Heil, “Ein Sonntag in Cividale,” 91–109.

⁵³ Therefore, this text supports Collins’ conclusions (Collins, “What is Apocalyptic Literature?” 5): “Our conviction was that function was best discussed at the level of individual texts, in their specific contexts, and that the commonly accepted idea that apocalypses were intended to comfort and exhort a group in crisis (so Hellholm 1986, 27) did not necessarily hold true in all cases.” The “function” of a text is nowadays discussed under the question of the “pragmatic” of a text.

⁵⁴ Cf. Frey, “Die Apokalypitik als Herausforderung der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft,” who claims that it was not acute crisis that stimulated production, but rather something like an ongoing one, which was provoked by the eternal question of why the world is as it is (*theodizee*). Nevertheless, describing apocalyptic literature as a phenomenon of a crisis is widespread, cf. above page 48–50, and Rudolf, “Apokalypse in der Diskussion,” 776; also Vielhauer and Strecker, “Einleitung,” who argue that apocalyptic literature is resistance literature, caused by real crisis. The main exponent of explaining apocalypticism as crisis literature is Müller, *Studien zur frühjüdischen Apokalypitik*.

every-day language – is something different from apocalyptic as a literary phenomenon.

As stated at the beginning, apocalyptic literature deals with the end, either the end of the world or the end of an individual human being. The *Didaskalia* does not mention or describe the end of the world, not even the *near* end. Rather, it postulates an individual resurrection after death and an everlasting punishment in hell. These radical measures are described in a graphic manner.

The production of apocalyptic literature continued even after the formation of the biblical canon. Though Athanasius strongly rejects this literature in his festal letter, the author of the *Didaskalia* constructs his text around the central figure of Christ as teacher, like Athanasius. This evokes the impression that the apostles wrote works in addition to the known canonical ones. Indeed, the literature about the end makes for a disputed – but never-ending – story.⁵⁵

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