

## **DIALOGUE OF THE SAVIOR**

A [Gnostic](#) Christian dialogue known only from the Coptic (Sahidic) text found at Nag Hammadi in 1945. The title is indicated both at the beginning and at the end of the text. The fifth tractate in Codex 3 of the NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY, the *Dialogue of the Savior* survives in fragmentary condition. Most of its pages are filled with lacunae; some are missing altogether.

Despite the gaps in the text, the genre and structure of the treatise are fairly clear. *Dialogue of the Savior* consists of a conversation in which the twelve disciples and Mary Magdalene interrogate the Savior (also called Lord, but never Jesus) about spiritual matters. Unlike similar [Gnostic](#) Christian dialogues (*The [Letter of Peter](#) to Philip*, *The [Sophia of Jesus Christ](#)*, *The Gospel of Mary*, *The Gospel of Thomas*, and *The [Book of Thomas the Contender](#)*), *Dialogue of the Savior* has no literary framework but begins abruptly with questions and answers. Interspersed between dialogue, however, dramatic episodes occur throughout the writing. At one point, Judas throws himself down in reverence before the Lord; later, the disciples as a group give expression to their feelings of amazement evoked by the teachings of the Savior. There are also visions.

Although *Dialogue of the Savior* acknowledges the twelve disciples, most of the questions are put forth by Matthew, Judas, and Mary Magdalene. These three followers of Christ figure prominently in numerous [Gnostic](#) Christian writings. Matthew is known from *Pistis Sophia*, *The First Book of Jeu*, *The [Sophia of Jesus Christ](#)*, *The Gospel of Thomas*, and *The [Book of Thomas the Contender](#)*. Judas is usually called Judas Thomas (*The Gospel of Thomas* and *The [Book of Thomas the Contender](#)*) or simply Thomas (*The [Sophia of Jesus Christ](#)* and *Pistis Sophia*). Mary Magdalene, also known as both Maria or Mariham, plays a central role in *The Gospel of Mary*, *The [Sophia of Jesus Christ](#)*, *The Gospel of Thomas*, and *The Gospel of Philip*—where she is referred to as the *koinonos*, or consort of Jesus (59.20).

E. Pagels and H. Koester (1978) have suggested that the document may have been used as a teaching tool for initiation into [Gnostic](#) mysteries. Perhaps it was a catechetical handbook for baptism, in which were explained the sayings of the Savior, sayings such as those set forth, for example, in *The Gospel of Thomas*. In addition, Pagels and Koester have drawn attention to a twofold [eschatology](#) that runs through the text. According to the Savior's teaching, a limited form of [salvation](#) is attained in baptism, to be followed at some later time by a fully realized salvation through spiritualization.

M. Krause (1977) points to the mention of two sacraments in [Dialogue of the Savior](#): baptism (134.6-7) and the bridal chamber (138.19-20). Perhaps each [sacrament](#) corresponds to one eschatological stage. According to *Exegesis on the Soul*, a related [Gnostic](#) Christian homily, in baptism the Father (i.e., God) prepares the soul for eventual liberation from the earthly realm; and the bridal chamber is the setting in which that liberation is finally realized. It is in this second [sacrament](#) that the union of the soul and the spirit takes place, after which the spiritualized soul returns to its heavenly home.

The knowledge gained in baptism will serve to guide and protect the soul on its final journey. The powers that oppose the soul rule by means of fear (122.14). True knowledge about the nature of the cosmos and the destiny of the soul—especially its origins in a transcendent and undying reality (133.15)—dispels fear and serves thus to empower the soul in its confrontation with the powers of darkness and death.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Attridge, H. W., trans. The Dialogue of the Savior (III,5). In *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, Vol. 5, pp. 230-38. San Francisco, 1977.
- "The Dialogue of the Savior," In *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts*, ed. Ron Cameron, pp. 38-48. Philadelphia, 1982.
- *Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, 10 vols. Leiden,

1972-1977.

- Krause, M. "Der *Dialog des Soter* in Codex III von Nag Hammadi," In *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, ed. M. Krause, pp. 13-34. Leiden, 1977.
- Pagels, E., and H. Koester. "Report on the *Dialogue of the Savior* (CG III,5)," In *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis*, ed. R. McL. Wilson, pp. 66-74. Leiden, 1978.

**BEVERLY MOON**

Tags: [Books](#)