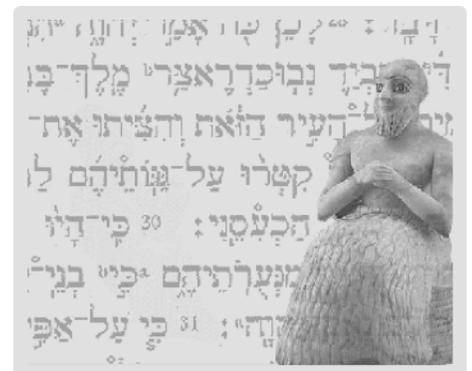


## "It Is Not Right For a Man Who Worships God to Repay His Neighbor Evil For Evil": Christian Ethics in *Joseph and Aseneth* (Chapters 22–29)

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# “IT IS NOT RIGHT FOR A MAN WHO WORSHIPS GOD TO REPAY HIS NEIGHBOR EVIL FOR EVIL”: CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN *JOSEPH AND ASENETH* (CHAPTERS 22–29)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The pseudepigraphic work *Joseph and Aseneth* consists of two main stories. The first part of the work, which is also the longest (chs. 1–21), relates the love story between the two protagonists, Aseneth’s conversion, and her marriage with Joseph. It is followed by a shorter story (chs. 22–29) narrating the unsuccessful attempt by Pharaoh’s son—who is assisted by some of Joseph’s brothers—to abduct Aseneth and make her his wife.<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the se-

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<sup>1</sup> It is agreed that the story was originally composed in Greek. There are 16 Greek manuscripts, dating from the 10th to the 19th centuries, which can be divided into two groups: a shorter text, published by M. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aseneth: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (StPB, 13; Leiden: Brill, 1968), on which D. Cook based the English translation “Joseph and Aseneth,” in H. F. D. Sparks (ed.), *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 473–503; and a longer text published by C. Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth: Überlieferung – Ortsbestimmung* (WUNT, 8; Tübingen: Mohr, 1965), and idem, *Joseph und Aseneth* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). The English citations in the present article are adapted from Cook, “Joseph and Aseneth,” based on the group of short texts, and C. Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 2:202–47, here 211–2, based on the group of long texts. Scholars have debated whether the earliest text is represented by the long text (b), as argued by Burchard (C. Burchard, “The Text of Joseph and Aseneth Reconsidered,” *JSP* 14 (2005), 83–96, or by the short text (d), as held by Philonenko. I do not deny that there are differences between the two versions which affect the question of *Joseph and Aseneth*’s theological identity. Yet despite these differences, both texts reflect in my view a Christian outlook and theology. The following article resorts first and foremost to the short text, which, following the detailed demonstration by Kraemer, I regard as the oldest version; see R. S. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6–9.

cond account coincides with the transition from the seven years of plenty to the seven years of famine, as well as with Jacob's arrival in Egypt and his settlement in the land of Goshen. Aseneth determines to accompany Joseph in order to meet Jacob. On their way home from the encounter, they are seen by Pharaoh's eldest son. Captivated by Aseneth's beauty, the latter summons Simeon and Levi to secure their help in killing Joseph, so that he can marry her. He offers them gold and silver, menservants and maidservants, houses and estates, and threatens to kill them if they decline. Furthermore, Pharaoh's son sends for the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah—the maidservants of Jacob's wives, Leah and Rachel—after learning that the latter dislike and envy Joseph and Aseneth, and that they will do what he wants. Jacob's sons come by night and promise to collaborate in the plan to ambush Aseneth and her escorts, abduct her and then kill Joseph and his children, before Pharaoh's son would marry her. Their plot almost comes through. Aseneth's escorts are killed, she flees in her chariot and is about to fall into the hands of Pharaoh's son when Levi comes with his brothers to her rescue. Benjamin takes a stone and hurls it at Pharaoh's son, wounding him severely. The sons of Bilhah and Zilpah are still determined to kill Aseneth, but their swords turn to ashes, following which it dawns upon them that God stands by Aseneth. Consequently, they plead for her mercy and ask her to be spared from their brothers' vengeance. Aseneth comforts them and gives them the assurance that they would be saved, and her promise is indeed fulfilled. Thanks to Levi's intervention, even Pharaoh's son is treated with compassion; he is brought to his father's house and dies there. Upon Pharaoh's death, Joseph becomes king of Egypt and then passes on the crown to Pharaoh's grandson.

What is the meaning of this story, to whom was it addressed, and why was it written? In this article I will argue that the story in chs. 22–29 was composed by a Christian author, and with a Christian audience in view. At the center of the story is a call for Christians to adopt an ethics characterized by non-retaliation and the love of enemies as a means to obtain salvation in the Church, itself personified by Aseneth.

I am not the first scholar to advance such a claim. In particular, W. Klassen and G. M. Zerbe already remarked how the story promotes values such as non-retaliation, the respect of enemies and the importance of showing kindness to them, as well as the need to pacify relations between brothers and avoid inner-brotherly vengeance.<sup>2</sup> Yet, still accepting the common opinion about the Jewish

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<sup>2</sup> G. M. Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 72–93, here 75; W. Klassen, *Love of Enemies: The Way to Peace* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 53–57. For other interpretations, see Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” 182, 190; R. D. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth* (JSPSup, 16; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 106–9; J. J. Col-

origin of *Joseph and Aseneth*, these scholars explain the ethical message in the second story (chs. 22–29) as an expression of Jewish ethics. Despite plain parallels in the New Testament, they reject the possibility that it was composed by a Christian and/or that it reflects a distinctively Christian ethics. Accordingly, Klassen dismisses possible Christian interpolations, “for nothing is found in this story which is unique to Christian sources; indeed it would be hard to find anything here which is clearly stated in the New Testament.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Zerbe concludes that, “the ethic of non-retaliation in *Joseph and Aseneth* then, is inspired primarily by biblical texts and traditions.”<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to Zerbe, Klassen and the majority view, I maintain that the first part of *Joseph and Aseneth* (chs. 1–21) is a Christian work, composed by Christians in order to advance Christian views. Accordingly, Aseneth and Joseph may be viewed as symbolical and typological images: Aseneth symbolizes the Church, whereas Joseph is a prototype of Christ; their marriage represents the marriage of Christ and his Church. Besides being typological figures, Aseneth and Joseph also stand as models for the ideal Christian way of life, to be followed and imitated by other Christians.<sup>5</sup> As I will show, the second story of *Joseph and Aseneth* fits well within this Christian setting.

Scholars are divided over the relationship between the two stories preserved in *Joseph and Aseneth*. At issue is whether they were written by two different authors and joined together at a later stage,

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lins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 109–10. For an overview of the socio-political settings that have been advanced by scholars for *Joseph and Aseneth*, see especially Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 93–97.

<sup>3</sup> Klassen, *Love of Enemies*, 56

<sup>4</sup> Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 93.

<sup>5</sup> R. Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth: A Christian Book* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2012); R. Nir, “Aseneth as the ‘Type of the Church of the Gentiles,’” in C. A. Evans and D. Zacharias (eds.), *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality* (2 vols.; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 1:109–37. My thesis follows P. Batiffol (“Le livre de la Prière d’Aseneth,” in idem, *Studia patristica. Études d’ancienne littérature chrétienne* [Paris: E. Leroux, 1889–1990], 1–87, here 23–25, 29, 36–37), who published the first critical edition of *Joseph and Aseneth* toward the end of the 19th century; see in his wake E. W. Brooks, *Joseph and Asenath: The Confession and Prayer of Asenath Daughter of Pentephres the Priest* (London/New York: The Macmillan Co., 1918), xi, xv, and many others in the late 19th and early to mid-20th century. For modern scholars who proposed Christian authorship or Christian interpolation see Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 5–6, 237–9, 253–74; T. Holtz, “Christliche Interpolationen in ‘Joseph und Aseneth,’” *NTS* 14 (1967–1968), 482–97; Cook, “Joseph and Aseneth,” 469; M. Penn, “Identity Transformation and Authorial Identification in Joseph and Aseneth,” *JSP* 13 (2002), 171–83, here 182; J. R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* (JSJSup, 105; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 195; M. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 46.

or whether the second story constitutes an integral part of the first story, both stories being composed by the same author. The main observations that militate against the assumption of single authorship are the obvious dissimilarities between the style, the ambiance and the internal rhythm of the two stories. Whereas the first account is a tale of romance, marked by lengthy sentimental prayers and symbolic gestures, the plot of the second story revolves around war, darkish schemes and military victories. The obvious link between these distinct stories is the figure of Aseneth, who stands at the center of both accounts. Yet whereas the first story centers on Aseneth's relationship with Joseph and her conversion, chs. 22–29 focus on Joseph's brothers and the attempt of Pharaoh's son to abduct and marry her. Joseph, previously at center-stage, is pushed aside, as his place is taken over by Levi, the chief protagonist alongside Aseneth. And in place of the earlier rhetoric, abounding in symbols and images such as the "city of refuge," or the honeycomb and the bees, what we have is a seemingly simplistic and prosaic narrative.<sup>6</sup> That the first plot stands on its own, culminating in the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth and the birth of their sons, further sustains the assumption that it represents a separate story. In my view, therefore, these and other observations support the scholarly claim for distinct authorship of the two accounts.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, as I will show, scholars were nonetheless right to assume that the two stories are complementary, conjoining to produce a cohesive theological and conceptual whole. It may legitimately be presumed that whoever brought these stories together was aware of the affinity between them, and that such affinity also accounts for the fact that, once joined, they were consistently transmitted together.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. "IT IS NOT RIGHT FOR A MAN WHO WORSHIPS GOD TO REPAY HIS NEIGHBOR EVIL FOR EVIL" AS A CHRISTIAN ETHICAL COMMAND

The key question in chs. 22–29 is how the God-fearing believer should deal with his malefactor—whether he should exercise revenge on the person who sought to harm him and reciprocate whatever evil was done to him, following the ancient principle of

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<sup>6</sup> This is apparently the reason that significantly less attention was devoted to the second account than to the first one in chs. 1–21; note its absence, for example, in Davila, *Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, 190–5.

<sup>7</sup> Philonenko, *Joseph et Aseneth*, 27; see also R. I. Pervo, "Joseph and Aseneth and the Greek Novel," in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1976* (SBLSP, 10; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 171–81, here 177–8; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 40; S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Hellenistic Culture and Society; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 92; Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," 182.

“an eye for an eye” (*ius talionis*—the law of equal retribution).<sup>9</sup> The story’s stance is decisive: “It is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil” (οὐ προσήκει ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ ἀποδοῦναι κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ τῷ πλησίον αὐτοῦ);<sup>10</sup> rather, this man should extend love and forgiveness to his enemies and to all ill-intended schemers. Accordingly, evil should be countered with good deeds rather than with vengeance; passing judgment on men’s evil doings is strictly God’s liability. This theme is expressly developed on four occasions in this otherwise brief story, a clear indication of its centrality:

1. When Simeon, upon hearing the proposal of Pharaoh’s son, reacts in anger and intends to kill him, his brother Levi replies with the following words: “Why are you so angry with him? For we are the children of a man who worships God, and it is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil” (23:9).
2. Aseneth reassures the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah who, on recognizing that God is on her side in the embattled confrontation, plead for her mercy and deliverance: “Take heart and do not be afraid, for your brothers are men who worship God (ἄνδρες θεοσεβεῖς); and do not repay evil for evil to any man” (28:4).
3. Following Aseneth’s plea that Joseph’s brothers, who are coming to her rescue, should not harm their own brothers, Simeon asks, “Why should our mistress plead for her enemies? No! We will cut them down with our swords, because they have plotted evil against our father Israel and against our brother Joseph now on two occasions and they have plotted against you today.” Aseneth, however, replies in the following way: “No, brother, you must not repay evil for evil to your neighbor, for the Lord will avenge this outrage” (28:14).
4. Benjamin is about to strike Pharaoh’s wounded son as he lifted himself from the ground and sat up, when Levi rushes to him and, seizing him by the

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<sup>9</sup> For more on *ius talionis*, see, e.g., H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 275–6.

<sup>10</sup> The term *πλησίον* means here “any other person”: J. H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Backer Book House, 1987), 518. See in Rom 13:8–10 ὁ πλησίον in alternation with ὁ ἕτερος. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are from the short version.

hand, says: “No, brother, you must not do this, for we are men who worship God (ἄνδρες θεοσεβεῖς ἐσμεν), and it is not right for a man who worships God (ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ) to repay evil for evil, or to trample upon a man who has already fallen, or to harry his enemy to death. But come: let us bind up his wound; and if he lives, he will be our friend, and his father Pharaoh will be our father” (29:3–4).

Representative of the enemy and evildoer are Pharaoh’s son and the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, headed by Gad and Dan. They are, in all their actions, driven by hostility and vengeance. In avenging the enemy, they pursue what they conceive to be the masculine ideal governing proper conduct, evidenced by the words of Pharaoh’s son to Gad and Dan: “I know that you are good soldiers, and that you will not die as women die; but act like men and take vengeance on your enemies” (24:7). Their treatment of Joseph owes its impetus to enmity and envy (22:12), and in return for their outrageous conduct, they expect their brothers to reciprocate vengeance (28:4). Moreover, they do not heed to Naphtali and Asher, their close brothers, who try to dissuade them from their ill intentions towards their father and brothers (25:5–7).<sup>11</sup> The sons of Leah and Rachel thereby demonstrate two antithetical positions with regard to enemies and malefactors. Simeon and Benjamin are determined to repay evil for evil, an eye for an eye (28:14). Aseneth and Levi, in contrast, represent the exemplary conduct that is promoted by the narrative: one should not reciprocate evil with evil, but rather consign judgment and vengeance to God.

Where are the theological roots for the conception developed in this story?

Both Jewish sources and Greco-Roman philosophy attest that the issues of retaliation and non-retaliation, and more generally the question of what is the appropriate response to the enemy and evildoer, were matters extensively discussed in Antiquity. In the Greco-Roman literature, the most famous and influential standpoint was Socrates’ assertion that “it is never right to do wrong or to requite wrong with wrong, or when we suffer evil to defend ourselves by doing evil in return” (Plato, *Crito* 49d).<sup>12</sup> This idea appears in the philosophical texts of Stoics and Cynics in particular. Thus, Epictetus (55–135 C.E.) writes: “For this too is a very pleasant strand woven into the Cynic’s pattern of life: he must be flogged like an ass, and while he is being flogged, he must love (φιλεῖν) the men who flog him, as though he were the father or brother of them all” (Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.22.54).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The figures of Dan and Gad are based on Jacob’s blessing in Gen 49:17, 19, and also on *T. Dan* 1:4–8; *T. Gad* 1:4–2:4.

<sup>12</sup> See also Plato, *Republic* 331e–336a; idem, *Apology* 30d.

<sup>13</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 306–8; J. Piper, “Love Your Enemies”: Jesus’

In the Hebrew Bible, scholars have pointed to the following parallels from the book of Proverbs: “Evil will not depart from the house of one who returns evil for good” (Prov 17:13); “If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire upon their head, and the Lord will reward you” (Prov 25:21–22); “Do not rejoice not when your enemies fall, and do not let not your heart be glad when they stumble” (Prov 24:17). David’s decision to spare Saul (1 Sam 24:7–19) may presumably be viewed as another illustration of this general theme.<sup>14</sup>

This idea finds a somewhat similar expression in post-biblical Jewish sources. For example, the *Letter of Aristeas* reads: “To whom must a man be generous? All people believe that it is one’s duty (to be generous) towards those who are friendly to us. But I hold that we must (also) show gracious generosity to our opponents so that in this manner we may convert them to what is proper and fitting to them. But you must pray to God that these things be brought to pass, for he rules the minds of all” (v. 227).<sup>15</sup> In this passage, as we see, the author argues that friend and foe alike are to be treated with “gracious generosity.”<sup>16</sup>

The way in which the notion of non-retaliation is presented in *Joseph and Aseneth* shows conceptual and theological affinities, and even exact verbal parallels, with Christian texts. In Christianity, extensive space was devoted to the ethics of retribution and proper conduct of Christians toward other human beings in general, and toward evildoers in particular. On two occasions, Paul provides verbal parallels for *Joseph and Aseneth*. Quite significantly, these parallels occur in the context where Paul lays out the rules of conduct for Christians in the Roman and Thessalonian churches.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes:

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*Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Early Christian Paraenesis* (SNTSMS, 38; Cambridge: University Press, 1979), 20–27; W. Klassen, *Love of Enemies*, 12–26; A. J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB; New Haven/London: Doubleday, 2000), 321–2; J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew. Vol. 4: Law and Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 544–8; L. Schottroff, “Non-Violence and the Love of One’s Enemies,” *Essays on the Love Commandment* (trans. R. H. Fuller and I. Fuller; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 9–39, here 15–22.

<sup>14</sup> Philonenko, *Joseph et Aseneth*, 203; Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 310; G. Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount* (trans. O. C. Dean; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 88–89; Schottroff, “Non-Violence and the Love of One’s Enemies,” 15; Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 30, 50–3.

<sup>15</sup> For the translation of this passage from the Letter of Aristeas, see Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> Note, however, that if Zerbe is right in identifying the foes (ἀντιδοξοῦντες) as a reference to those who are of a different opinion (*Non-Retaliation*, 52–53), this example would not fit in with the way in which this notion is developed in *Joseph and Aseneth*.

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor . . . Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep . . . *Do not repay anyone evil for evil* (μηδενὶ κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἀποδίδόντες) but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Rom 12:9–21).<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians we find the following statement: “See that none of you repays evil for evil (ὁρᾶτε μὴ τις κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ τιμὴ ἀποδῶ); but always seek to do good to one another and to all” (5:15). 1 Peter provides another parallel: “Do not repay evil for evil (μὴ ἀποδιδόντες κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ), or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing” (3:9).<sup>18</sup> All these parallels strongly suggest that the saying μὴ ἀποδιδόνται κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ was part of a parenetic tradition in early Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

Yet another parallel can be found in the sixth antithesis of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor (πλησίον) and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:43–48).”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Unless otherwise specified, quotations of the New Testament follow the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>18</sup> In order to highlight the verbal similarities between *Joseph and Aseneth* and the passages from the NT letters, R. Jewett (*Romans* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007], 771) juxtaposed these verses, showing they parallel exactly in use of the verb: “pay back,” in the phrase “evil for evil,” and in the pronouns which are translated by “anyone” or “no one.”

<sup>19</sup> Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 235.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Luke’s sermon in 6:27–36; and compare also Rom 13:10; Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 3:12; *Pseudo-Clementines Homilies* 15.5–9. The apologists similarly instruct love of enemy, compare, e.g., Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 3.14;

Although this passage, contrary to the above-mentioned epistles, do not provide verbal parallels with the statements found in *Joseph and Aseneth*, the idea is nonetheless the same.<sup>21</sup> Several scholars have emphasized the centrality of Jesus' saying in early Christian traditions; in effect, Jesus' appeal to love one's enemies is the most quoted and influential saying in early Christian literature.<sup>22</sup> The fact that the author of the Gospel of Matthews chose to place this saying at the end of the antitheses clearly corresponds to its function as the Sermon's climax, and emphasizes its significance as the most important and the most severe command.

On the primacy of this notion, Hendrickx states: "The demand to love one's enemy constitutes the most radical demand of Jesus' ethics, and all his other demands should be explained on the basis of this one."<sup>23</sup> Thus, in its distilled form, Jesus' saying provides the most radical and clear-cut parallel within the Jewish and Greco-Roman world.<sup>24</sup> It postulates unconditional love. The saying does not only call to abstain from vengeance against the evildoer, but goes further in its demand for positive action (namely, one should also do good to one's enemy), thereby expanding and deepening the significance of the command to "love your neighbor" (Lev 19:18) by including the enemy and persecutor. As such, the saying appears to reject any distinction between neighbors and enemies, Jews and Gentiles, and to formulate an imperative which is absolute and uncompromising, whatever the circumstances may be. As commentators have rightly noted, this conception needs to be understood against the background of the Sermon's eschatological perspective: any antagonist must encounter love, because all people, friends and enemies alike, await the imminent inauguration

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Athenagoras, *Supplication for the Christians* 11.1, under the exact same phrase: "love your enemies"; and see Justin, *First Apology* 15.9: "love those who hate you." See likewise *Didache* 1.3: "This is the teaching relating to these matters: Bless those who curse you, pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For why is it so great to love those who love you? Do the Gentiles not do this as well? But you should love those who hate you—then you will have no enemy" (for the translation, see B. D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers* [2 vols.; LCL, 24–25; Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard University Press, 2003], 417). On the conceptual affinity between this notion and Christian ethics in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:44), see Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 311; and further M. de Jonge, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as Part of Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 62; Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 247c.

<sup>21</sup> Note, also, that this is the only parallel using the word *πλησίον* (neighbor), as in *Joseph and Aseneth*.

<sup>22</sup> W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 1:551–3.

<sup>23</sup> H. Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979), 91; Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:54. It is the first teaching in the *Didache*, a point that already emphasizes its importance.

<sup>24</sup> Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, 88.

of the heavenly kingdom and the divine judgment under God as supreme judge.<sup>25</sup>

In my opinion, the statements in chs. 22–29 of *Joseph and Aseneth* concerning the behavior vis-à-vis the “enemy,” as well as the theological and ethical tendencies that these statements reflect, should be interpreted in light of the parallels drawn from Christian literature.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Aseneth and Levi typically exemplify the kind of behavior toward enemies and evildoers that is required of God-worshipping Christians: the latter should not allow evil to subdue them, but should instead overcome evil with good; they should bless their persecutors, rather than curse them; and they should manifest empathy and love for all their enemies and persecutors, be they the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah or even Gentiles, like Pharaoh’s son. Furthermore, the story emphasizes that they must renounce vengeance and wrath, because judgment lies strictly with God and because he alone can avenge (28:14). Aseneth demonstrates this code of behavior by defending the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah against their brothers, who seek vengeance; and so does Levi, in his handling of Pharaoh’s son. Whereas the latter threatens to kill Simeon and Levi if they do not cooperate, Levi, in contrast, addresses him as “neighbor,” and, after he is wounded, tells Benjamin, “respectfully and in good humor” (23:10), that they are not in the habit of trampling on a neighbor that has already fallen, nor of killing an enemy.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, Levi helps him up, washes the blood off his face, dresses his wound, mounts him on a horse and brings him to his father’s house. Thus, Levi and Aseneth personify

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<sup>25</sup> Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, 88–89; Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:54. See D. Lührmann, “Liebet eure Feinde,” *ZThK* 69 (1972), 412–38, here 427, who relied on this sentence in *Joseph and Aseneth* as proof that Christianity’s rejection of *lex talionis*, in the fifth antithesis of the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5:38, was already adopted by Jewish tradition.

<sup>26</sup> This possibility was already raised by M. de Jonge and J. Tromp (“Jacob’s Son Levi in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and Related Literature,” in M. E. Stone and T. Bergen [eds.], *Biblical Figures outside the Bible* [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998], 203–36, here 227), who argue that “the possibility of Christian additions and embellishments here cannot be excluded . . . Certainly passages like these provided an additional reason for reading and copying *Joseph and Aseneth* in Christian circles.” Other scholars, while noticing these similarities, deny the possibility of Christian influence on *Joseph and Aseneth* because they date it earlier than the Christian tradition: Piper, “*Love Your Enemies*,” 38–39; Burckhard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” 240, n. s.; J. P. Meier (*Law and Love*, 541–2), indeed dates *Joseph and Aseneth* to the 1st or early 2d century C.E. but does not raise the possibility of Christian influence. Rather, he argues that we are dealing here with a widespread and long-lived tradition which had influenced both.

<sup>27</sup> Levi’s command to Benjamin in 29:4, “put your sword back into its place,” has a parallel in Matt 26:52; John 18:11.

Christians who do not give in revenge from evil, but rather subdue evil by means of their good deeds.

Why did the author of chs 22–29 choose Aseneth and Levi as representatives of proper Christian ethics? Such a choice, in my view, sheds further light on the significance attached to this theme in the present story, as well as on the story’s Christian setting.

### **3. ASENETH AS A SYMBOL OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH: ON THE AFFINITY BETWEEN THE TWO STORIES OF *JOSEPH AND ASENETH***

Aseneth’s role as “city of refuge” provides one of the few overt links between the story in chs. 22–29 and the conversion account in chs. 1–21. According to the short text, Levi “saw the place of her rest in the highest heaven” (22:10), whereas in the long text he sees “her place of rest in the highest, and her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations founded upon a rock of the seventh heaven” (22:13). Levi’s visualization is an almost verbatim reiteration of previous depictions of Aseneth in the first story. In the long text, Joseph tells Aseneth that she is blessed, “because the Lord God founded your walls in the highest, and your walls (are) adamantine walls of life (τὰ τείχη σου ἀδαμάντινα τείχη ζωῆς), because the sons of the living God will dwell in your City of Refuge, and the Lord God will reign as king over them for ever and ever” (19:8). In the short text, Joseph prays for Aseneth that she may “enter into your rest, which you have prepared for your elect” (8:10).<sup>28</sup> Such descriptions draw on the general image of Aseneth as “city of refuge,” which is paramount in her conversion account. Although Levi does not actually use the specific expression, the various idioms he employs—such as describing Aseneth as a “place of rest in the highest,” with “her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations founded upon a rock of the seventh heaven”—are precisely those which are used elsewhere in the story to picture Aseneth as “city of refuge.” The importance of that notion in the former story goes to explain why the author chose to repeat this imagery in the latter, and may shed light on the prominence and significance of the central instruction, “It is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil.”

On eating the “bread of life,” drinking the “cup of immortality” and anointing herself with the “unction of incorruption,” Aseneth became the personification of paradise: her flesh is compared to the paradisiacal flowers of life and her bones to the paradisiacal cedars; she will never age, nor will her beauty fade (16:16, in the long text). Furthermore, she became a city of refuge—“a walled metropolis of all who take refuge with the name of the Lord God, the king of the ages” (16:16, in the long text)—in fulfillment of the promise given by the man of God that after she eats the bread of

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<sup>28</sup> See 17:6; 15:7 (in the long text); 8:11 (in both texts).

life, drinks the cup of immortality and is anointed with the unction of incorruption, she shall no longer be called Aseneth but “city of refuge,” for in her many nations (ἔθνη πολλά) will take refuge, under her wings many people will be sheltered, and within her walls “those who give their allegiance to God in penitence (μετάνοια) will find security” (15:6, in the short text).<sup>29</sup>

What is this “metropolis,” and to whom would it offer refuge? Based on the biblical idea of cities designated to serve as refuge for “a manslayer that has killed a person unintentionally,”<sup>30</sup> Aseneth becomes a city for fugitives looking for shelter, safety, and salvation. In the story, that city is identified with Zion or Jerusalem.<sup>31</sup> However, in light of the city’s descriptions in other passages, there are clear indications that the reference is not to the historical, earthly Jerusalem but rather to the *heavenly* Jerusalem as represented in the Christian tradition.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, when rendering the heavenly Jerusalem, Christian sources portray it in terms quite similar to the description found in *Joseph and Aseneth*. The city is situated in heaven, “in the highest”; it is the handiwork of God, not of man; accordingly, it is a walled city, whose heavenly walls were founded by God and are made of live stones bestowing heavenly life on all who dwell within them.<sup>33</sup> The term used to describe these walls in *Joseph and Aseneth* is ἀδαμάντινα, which may also involve diamond-like properties. Drawing on descriptions of the future Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>34</sup> the book of Revelation features the celestial

<sup>29</sup> For Aseneth as “city of refuge,” see Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 67–90; idem, “Aseneth as the ‘Type of the Church of the Gentiles,’” 119–27.

<sup>30</sup> Num 35:6, 11–34.

<sup>31</sup> It is generally agreed that the promise the man of God makes to Aseneth—that many people will find refuge in her—is based on the Septuagint translation of Zech 2:15. The parallelism in the passage implies that the city of refuge, in which the “many nations will find refuge,” is Zion. The term used in *Joseph and Aseneth* for the city, “metropolis,” also points to Jerusalem, compare LXX Isa 26:1 μητρόπολις πιστή Σιών, and cf. Philo, *Against Flaccus* 45–46; *On the Embassy to Gaius* 36.281; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 11.161; *Jewish War* 7.375. On this issue, see especially Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 55; Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” 189; G. Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1996), 76; J. C. O’Neill, “What is Joseph and Aseneth About?,” *Henoch* 16 (1994), 189–98, here 194. See also Jer 50:4–5; Isa 54:15.

<sup>32</sup> C. Burchard, *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha, 13; Brill: Leiden, 1996), 118–20; Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 183. Many scholars recognized that the phrase “city of refuge” indicates Jerusalem or Zion, but they did not connect it to the heavenly Jerusalem in the Christian tradition. See: E. M. Humphrey, *The Ladies and Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, The Apocalypse, and “The Shepherd”* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995), 21.

<sup>33</sup> Heb 11:10; 12:22; Phil 3:20.

<sup>34</sup> Isa 54:11; 60:10; Ezek 28:13. However, references to the heavenly

Jerusalem as a heavenly city, next to God in heaven, much like the portrayal of the city of refuge in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Its radiance is comparable to a most precious jewel, “like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.” Its wall is built of jasper and its foundations are embellished with precious stones, while the city itself is made of pure gold, clear as glass (Rev 21:2, 9–27).

Furthermore, and again like the city of refuge in *Joseph and Aseneth*, the Christian heavenly Jerusalem is described as a “resting place.” Behind this image stands the biblical notion that the “resting place” for the people of Israel lies in the land of Canaan, more specifically in Jerusalem,<sup>35</sup> and that God’s resting place is also in Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup> Although Isaiah speaks of Israel’s “resting” in an eschatological context,<sup>37</sup> the Hebrew Bible does not associate eschatological rest (Gr. *κατάπαυσις*) with a heavenly Jerusalem, nor for that matter with a return to the Garden of Eden.

The description of the heavenly Jerusalem, identified with paradise, first emerged in pseudepigraphic literature: “Because it is for you that paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, rest is appointed” (*4 Ezra* 8:52); “And the saints shall rest in Eden, and the righteous shall rejoice in the new Jerusalem, which shall be unto the glory of God for ever and ever” (*T. Dan* 5:12).<sup>38</sup> Transpiring from such sources is the notion that the new, heavenly Jerusalem is synonymous with paradise—the resting place for the souls of saints, the righteous at the end of days, being the time of redemption.<sup>39</sup>

A similar interpretation of the phrase “resting place” is found in Heb 3:7–4:13. It is there that the statement in Psalm 95:11, “Therefore in my anger I swore, ‘They shall not enter my rest’ ” is

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Jerusalem occur neither in the Hebrew Bible nor in sources reflecting the Pharisaic tradition in the Second Temple period. This idea was widely held among circles on the margins of Judaism, like the Qumran sect (compare, e.g., the Temple Scroll; the New Jerusalem), and apocalyptic literature. See R. Nir, *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 19–41. See *contra* L. DiTommaso (*The Dead Sea New Jerusalem Text* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005]), who makes no theological distinction between the heavenly and earthly Jerusalem. He prefers to use the generic label “New Jerusalem” for all the descriptions of the “expected, future-time Jerusalem . . . as it appears in Jewish and Christian literature of the biblical and extra biblical literature of antiquity” (127).

<sup>35</sup> Deut 12:9–11; Ps 95:11.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Chr 28:2; Ps 132:14; Isa 66:1.

<sup>37</sup> Isa 11:10 and 32:18.

<sup>38</sup> On the Christian character of these passages, see M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Study of Their Text, Composition and Origin* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1975), 92.

<sup>39</sup> 2 Bar. 78–86; 1 En. 45:3–6; 2 En. 42:3; 8:1; 9:1; T. Levi 18:9; 4QFlor I, 7–8; and compare, e.g., U. Fischer, *Eschatologie und Jenseitserwartung im hellenistischen Diasporajudentum* (BZAW, 44; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1978), 120–1.

construed in reference to entry into the eschatological temple, or into the heavenly, spiritual world.<sup>40</sup> The resting place is a heavenly existence identical to the eschatological Sabbath, the seventh millennium. In turn, Christian literature identifies this with the kingdom of the messiah, who will bring to an end the present six-thousand-year world and establish a new world, inaugurating the anticipated redemption for Christian believers (Heb 4:8–11).<sup>41</sup> The resting place of Hebrews, much like its counterpart in *Joseph and Aseneth*, no longer lies in Canaan and in the terrestrial Jerusalem, but in heaven.

Seen in this light, the description of Aseneth as a city of refuge, as the heavenly Jerusalem and paradise, establishes her as a symbol for the Christian Church. The identification of the “city of refuge” with the Church finds its clearest expression in the tradition of the Syrian Fathers. Ephrem calls the Church a city of refuge whose tower is Jesus: “The architect, [*sic*. Jesus Christ] who became the tower for our house of refuge.”<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, although the expression “city of refuge” is never explicitly identified with Aseneth in this literature, the Syrian Church Fathers did see nevertheless Aseneth as a symbol for the “Church of the Gentiles.” Aphrahat, comparing Jesus to Joseph, writes: “Joseph married the daughter of an unclean (i.e., Gentile) priest, and Jesus brought to himself the Church from the unclean Gentiles.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Ephrem, writing about Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph and Aseneth, states: “You are the son of Aseneth, daughter of a priest, who was a type of the Church of the Gentiles. She loved Joseph, and the Son of Joseph has holy Church loved in truth.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> H. W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 128; C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1953), 87–88; B. Lindars, “‘Joseph and Aseneth’ and the Eucharist,” in B. P. Thompson (ed.), *Scripture: Meaning and Method. Essays Presented to Anthony Tyrrell Hanson* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1987), 181–99, here 190; Nir, *Destruction of Jerusalem*, 149–50.

<sup>41</sup> On Jerusalem as resting place, see R. L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 52–55.

<sup>42</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity* 3.15 (CSCO, 186; Scr. Syr., 82:23); *Hymns on the Church* 34.4 (CSCO, 198; Scr. Syr., 84:85); *Hymns on Paradise* 2.10–13 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syr., 78:8). In the Syriac *Acts of Thomas*, the expression *bet gamsa* (house of refuge) signifies Christ and the Church: see *Acts of Thomas* 10, in W. Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871), 179–80; A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 189–91; R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 160, 167, 222. In the Peshitta the term *bet gamsa* stands for “city of refuge.”

<sup>43</sup> Aphrahat, *The Demonstrations* 21.9.3–5 (PS, 1:957).

<sup>44</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Virginity* 21.9 (CSCO, 223; Scr. Syr., 94:73). See on this Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 135–6; A. W. Argyle, “Joseph the Patriarch in Patristic Teaching,” *ExpTim* 67 (1955–1956), 199–201, here 200; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 254. Jesus,

The Church, in Christian perspective, is also the embodiment of paradise, as laid out, e.g., in the Syriac *Cave of the Treasures*;<sup>45</sup> and those who find refuge there will become its citizens (Eph 2:19). Aseneth as a city of refuge is therefore a distinctly Christian image; this image presents her as a symbol for the Church, which, in turn, is identical with the heavenly Jerusalem and the paradise.

How does Aseneth's role as "city of refuge" and "place of rest in the highest" relate to the ethical command that "it is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil"? This point may be apprehended when we understand that the story in chs. 22–29 intends to demonstrate Aseneth's role as city of refuge, that is, as the Church; in exemplifying the Church, Aseneth stands for the moral values that it embodies, including one of the most potent ethical rules imposed on its Christian citizens, namely, the injunction against rendering evil for evil, and the corresponding command to show instead love and forgiveness to the enemy. Evil must be confronted by good, rather than by vengeance, because God alone is entitled to judge humans for their evil deeds.<sup>46</sup> The primacy of this notion in Jesus' teaching, as represented in the Sermon on the Mount, and more generally in the discourse of early Christian groups as recalled above, explains the authorial choice of placing this notion at the heart of the second part of the story developed in *Joseph and Aseneth*, chs. 22–29. Scholars have long noted the connection between Jesus' announcement of the coming kingdom (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15) and his command to love one's enemies in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, showing that observance of this command conditions entry into God's kingdom, and determines the status of those entering as God's "children" (see Matt 5:45 // Luke 6:35: "That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven").<sup>47</sup> As is apparent in Jesus' rhetorical

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too, is called a "house of refuge" or "place of refuge" in Syrian Christian literature, especially in the *Acts of Thomas*. See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 297, 360. The portrayal of Aseneth as symbol for the gentile church and the ascription of the expression "city of refuge" to the Syrian gentile church are the main grounds that already led Kraemer to advance the possibility that *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Christian composition; see Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 269–70.

<sup>45</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1927), 62–63; see Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* 6.7–12 (CSCO, 174; Scr. Syr., 78:21): "He planted the garden most fair, he built the church most pure," and compare further Cyprian, *Epistle* 73, 10; *Epistle* 75, 15. On this, see also Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 261; J. Daniélou, "Terre et Paradis chez les Pères de l'Église," *Eranos Jabrbuch* 22 (1954), 433–72, here 461, 466.

<sup>46</sup> See also R. I. Pervo, "Aseneth and her Sisters: Women in Jewish Narrative and in Greek Novels," in A. J. Levine (ed.), *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (SBLJL, 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 145–60, here 154.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Piper, "Love Your Enemies," 69–88, with further references to various scholars in the context of this discussion.

questions (Matt 5:46–47), entry into God’s kingdom is the corollary reward for observance of this command. Furthermore, allegiance to the command of loving one’s enemy requires transformation, specifically, repentance. Once we understand that the city of refuge embodied by Aseneth is identical to the kingdom of heaven announced by Jesus, it follows that the attitude to one’s enemies similarly conditions and obtains entry into it. As such, Aseneth’s personification of the Church implements Christianity’s most important ethical instruction—the love of enemies.

As suggested above, the story in chs. 22–29, much like its predecessor in chs. 1–21, is geared to exemplify Aseneth in her role as city of refuge, providing “shelter,” a “stronghold,” “refuge,” rescue and redemption to all “those who give their allegiance to God in penitence” (15:6 in the short text). From the perspective of the narrative’s logic, the descriptions of the attempts carried by the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah to harm Joseph and Aseneth and their children, and especially the details of their odious schemes to abduct Aseneth that demonstrate their envy and enmity for Joseph, are all directed in effect toward the demonstration of God’s power. When they finally realize that God had sided with Aseneth against them, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah fall to the ground, pleading for Aseneth’s mercy. As a city of refuge, she assuages their fears, speaks out for her enemies and prevents them from being subject to the vengeance of their own brothers. As such, Aseneth can be seen as personifying the Church, opening its gates to penitents and extending forgiveness to sinners. Correspondingly, the twelve sons of Jacob represent the twelve tribes of Israel, which in turn constitute the Christian Church. As a symbol of the Church, Aseneth is thus presented as providing refuge for all, including idol worshippers like Pharaoh, who acknowledges Levi’s eminence and bows before him, and presumably even Pharaoh’s son; in effect, the latter is instructed on Christian ethics by Levi (23:10–16), and Levi later declares to Benjamin that Pharaoh’s son, “will be our friend and his father Pharaoh will be our father” (29:4). These two Egyptians thus exemplify “the many nations (ἔθνη πολλὰ) which shall take refuge in her and will find shelter under her wings because they gave their allegiance to God in penitence (μετάνοια)” (15:6).

There is yet another connection between the notion of love for the enemy in that story and in the first account of chs. 1–21. The very core of the story of Aseneth’s conversion revolves around the motif of the love of God. The story emphasizes several times that Joseph is “a man who worships God (ἄνθρωπος θεοσεβῆς), who fears the Lord (φοβούμενος τὸν κύριον), who with his mouth blesses the living God.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Aseneth is the exemplary model for loving God, propelling her to discard her idols and confess her faith. The second story attributes the characteristic of God-fearing to Joseph’s family as a whole, or at least to its most prominent

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<sup>48</sup> See *Joseph and Aseneth* 4:9; 8:5, 6, 7; 20:8; 8:9.

members: Jacob is a man who worships God (23:9) as well as the servant of God (23:10); Levi is a man who feared God (22:8), and so are his brothers (28:4; 29:3); etc. Both stories, in fact, exemplify the two most important commandments of Christianity, namely, the love of one's neighbor and the love of God.<sup>49</sup> Combined together, they contribute one of the messages uniting the two stories into a conceptual and theological whole, with the latter highlighting love of neighbor and enemy, whereas the former emphasizes the love of God.

#### 4. "IT IS NOT RIGHT FOR A MAN WHO WORSHIPS GOD TO . . ." AS AN EXPRESSION FOR PROPER CHRISTIAN ETHIC

Within the narrative and conceptual structure of *Joseph and Aseneth*, another key aspect of the command to love one's enemy and to abstain from returning evil for evil that has an affinity with Christian traditions is the recurrent phrase "it is not right for a man who worships God to . . ." In this case also, this phrase points to a pattern which conjoins the two stories into one literary and ideological unit, and which underlines some of the most important principles of Christian ethics.

I have already recalled above that this formula occurs on four occasions in the second story; however, it already appears twice in the preceding section of the work. The first mention is placed in Joseph's mouth, and occurs in the context of the kiss that he withholds from Aseneth:

"It is not right for a man who worships God (οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ), who with his mouth blesses the living God, and eats the blessed bread of life, and drinks the blessed cup of immortality and is anointed with the blessed unction of incorruption, to kiss a strange woman, who with her mouth blesses dead and dumb idols and eats of their table the bread of anguish, and drinks of the libations the cup of treachery and is anointed with the unction of destruction. A man who worships God will kiss his mother and his sister that is of his own tribe and kin and the wife that shares his couch, who with their mouths bless the living God. So too is not right for a woman (γυναικὶ θεοσεβεῖ οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον) who wor-

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<sup>49</sup> Mark 12:28–30; Matt 22:34–40; Luke 10:25–28. The two commandments—love of God and love of one's neighbor and enemy—, occur frequently in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and are among its principle ideas, see on this H. W. Hollander and M. de Jonge, *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 418, as well as M. de Jonge, "The Two Great Commandments in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*," in M. de Jonge (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 141–59; and compare in particular *T. Jos.* 18:2; *T. Benj.* 4:2–3; 5:1–5, and see also *Jub.* 7:20; 36:4, 8.

ships God to kiss a strange man because this is an abomination in God's eyes" (8:5–7).

The same expression occurs a second time in the first part of the narrative when Joseph refuses to sleep with Aseneth after the betrothal ceremony, on the grounds that "It is not right for a man (οὐ προσήκει ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ) who worships God to have intercourse with his wife before their marriage" (20:8).

Chesnutt, a proponent of the theory of the Jewish origin of *Joseph and Aseneth*, interprets this expression against the social context of Jews in a pagan environment.<sup>50</sup> Arguing that the sentences spoken by Joseph, as well as their parallels in chs. 22–29, come to prescribe proper Jewish behavior towards Gentiles, he writes: "The repeated use of these stereotyped expressions to define the proper ethic for the people of God in their dealings with Gentiles suggests both the importance of this concern in the shaping of the narrative and the existence of uneasy relations with Gentiles in the real social world of Joseph and Aseneth."<sup>51</sup>

It is, however, precisely this "stereotyped expression" that highlights the work's Christian tendencies, as well as its intention to prescribe the proper behavior of Christians, rather than of Jews. In order to understand this point, we need to analyze more closely the motif of the kiss, with which the first occurrence of this expression is related.

##### 5. "IT IS NOT RIGHT FOR A MAN WHO WORSHIPS GOD . . . TO KISS A STRANGE WOMAN" (8:5–7)

The kiss stands at the focus of Joseph and Aseneth's relationship as lovers in the first story. Joseph's refusal to kiss Aseneth is the motive for her conversion, and it is only after she has converted that he is willing to kiss her.

Michael Penn identifies this kiss with the Christian "sacred kiss" (φίλημα ἁγίου), the "kiss of love," "the kiss of peace" (*osculum pacis*).<sup>52</sup> In effect, the specificity of the Christian use of kisses in ritual, in distinction to similar practices common in the Greco-Roman world, is that the kiss served a key role in the establishment

<sup>50</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 106; idem, "From Text to Context: The Social Matrix of Joseph and Aseneth," *SBL Seminar Papers, 1996* (SBLSP, 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 285–302, here 293, 300.

<sup>51</sup> Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> M. Penn, "Identity Transformation," 178–83; idem, "Performing Family: Ritual Kissing and the Construction of Early Christian Kinship," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002), 155–74; idem, "Ritual Kissing, Heresy and the emergence of Early Christian Orthodoxy," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54 (2003), 625–39; idem, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 96–98; W. Klassen, "The Sacred Kiss in the New Testament: An Example of Social Boundary Lines," *NTS* 39 (1993), 122–135, here 128.

of group boundaries.<sup>53</sup> Joseph's refusal to kiss Aseneth is one such application of this particular strategy of demarcation. When Joseph refers to the notion that a God-fearing man exclusively kisses his mother, his sister and his wife, he makes the point that, in contrast to idolaters, these family members "bless the living God with their mouths." The underlying assumption is that one may not kiss idolaters even if they are family members. Pagan sources do, infrequently, mention the impropriety of kissing family members on the ground of immoral behavior, but never for reasons having to do with religious differences. Christian sources, however, do provide parallels for the priority of religious identity over family relationships.<sup>54</sup> Penn adduces an instance from the *Acts of Andrew*:<sup>55</sup> Aegeates, the husband of Maximilla, a Christian convert, returns home from a long journey. He enters his bedroom, where moments earlier the whole Christian community had gathered. The faithful make their departure, leaving Maximilla still in prayer. Aegeates hears Maximilla speak his name, and expects her to receive his kiss willingly, but that does not happen: "When he approached her mouth intending to kiss it, she pushed him back and said, 'Aegeates, it is not permitted to the mouth of a man to touch that of a woman after prayer' " (14). This statement corresponds precisely to what Joseph tells Aseneth. In Penn's view, Aegeates' kiss is refused on religious grounds; the kiss is considered impure because he is not a Christian. Maximilla refuses to kiss her husband because his kiss would pollute her mouth, which was purified by prayer.

The parallel between the kiss in *Joseph and Aseneth* and the Christian sacred kiss is corroborated by a series of further similarities between the two. First, we may note various references to Joseph and Aseneth as "brother" and "sister" (7:11; 8:1–3). It is generally recognized that early Christian writers employed the rhetoric and terminology of fictive family relationships (such as "brother and sister of Christ") to reinforce the cohesion of Chris-

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<sup>53</sup> Thus, e.g., in the third-century *Apostolic Tradition*, we find a ruling according to which, after the prayer, catechumens who have not yet been baptized are not allowed to give the kiss of peace to those who were already baptized because their kisses were still impure, whereas "the baptized shall embrace one another, men with men and women with women": cf. Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition* 18.3–4, in G. Dix, *The Treatise on The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr* (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), 29; and see on this P. F. Bradshaw, M. E. Johnson and L. E. Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1–17, 99–101.

<sup>54</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 18.10 (PG, 35:996).

<sup>55</sup> *Acts Andr.* 13–16, in J. K. Elliott (ed.), *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 248–50; Penn, "Performing Family," 168.

tian communities.<sup>56</sup> By appropriating the vocabulary of family relations for non-biological bonds, namely for bonds based on common faith, early Christians sought to redefine the family.

Second, we also have the association of the kiss with the “spirit.” After Aseneth undergoes the required transformation, so that Joseph can eventually kiss her, he stretches out his hands and embraces her. They kiss, or embrace (*ἡσπᾶσαντο*), each other at length, and receive new life (or are rekindled *ἀνεζωοπύρησαν*) “in their spirit” (19:3 in the short text). The longer version of *Joseph and Aseneth* further develops the association between kiss and spirit, as well as its implied significance: “And Joseph kissed Aseneth and gave her the spirit of life, and he kissed her a second time and gave here the spirit of wisdom, and he kissed her the third time and gave her the spirit of truth” (19:11). The Christian sacred kiss was from its beginning associated with the Holy Spirit, symbolizing the unity, love, peace, reconciliation and unanimity represented in the spirit of Christ. Hence it is called the “kiss of peace.” When two persons kiss they are united by the spirit they share; they are, so to speak, kissing the spirit.<sup>57</sup>

A third aspect concerns the narrative’s emphasis that Joseph kissed Aseneth on the mouth (21:6 in the short text; 21:7 in the long text). Again, this motif finds several significant parallels in early Christian traditions. In particular, the kiss that a baptized person shares with other believers is called “peace with the mouth.”<sup>58</sup> The notion underlying this expression is explained, among others, by Chrysostom, who writes that the mouth, “is the organ which most effectively declares the working of the soul.”<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere, Chrysostom similarly writes:

“But there can be another mystical meaning of this kiss. The Holy Spirit has made us temples of Christ. Therefore, when we kiss each other’s mouths, we are kissing the entrance of the temple. Let no one, therefore, do this with a wicked con-

<sup>56</sup> Penn, “Performing Family,” 152.

<sup>57</sup> L. E. Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1996), 7–12, 15; E. Kreider, “Let the Faithful Greet Each Other: The Kiss Of Peace,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 5 (1987), 29–49, here 31; S. Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 82. The expressions “spirit of truth” and “spirit of life” appear in the Gospel of John as references to the Holy Spirit; see John 14:17, and see further John 6:63; 16:13; 2 Cor 3:6; as well as Shepherd of Hermas, *Mandate* 3.4, in K. Lake, *Apostolic Fathers* (2 vols.; LCL, 25; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 2:242. For similar expressions, compare also, e.g., 1QS III, 6; *Odes Sol.* 28:6–7; and see on this Lindars, “Joseph and Aseneth and the Eucharist,” 189–90.

<sup>58</sup> Phillips, *Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship*, 17.

<sup>59</sup> N. J. Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 27.

science, with a mind that festers beneath the surface. For the kiss is a holy thing.”<sup>60</sup>

## 6. “IT IS NOT RIGHT FOR A MAN WHO WORSHIPS GOD TO HAVE INTERCOURSE WITH HIS WIFE BEFORE THEIR MARRIAGE” (20:8)

Yet another motif that similarly aligns with a distinctively Christian instruction is Joseph’s refusal to have sexual relations with Aseneth before their marriage.

The scene under consideration deals with the sexual relations of a betrothed couple. The wedding of Joseph and Aseneth, led by Pharaoh himself (ch. 21), is preceded in ch. 20 by a description of the previous betrothal ceremony held at Aseneth’s house. At the center of this ceremony stands a sequence involving three actions: first, the groom’s feet are washed by the bride; then the bride takes the groom’s right hand while the groom takes the bride’s right hand; finally, they both exchange kisses: Joseph kisses Aseneth’s right hand, and she kisses his head (20:5). All the actions reported here are, to my mind, easily associated with Christian betrothals during the first centuries C.E., which are similarly centered on the joining of hands and the exchange of kisses by the betrothed.

The main evidence for this procedure is found in a passage from Tertullian’s treatise on the veiling of virgins:

“If it is sexual intercourse with a man which makes them women, they would not be veiled, except after they have undergone marriage. But even among the pagans women are led to their husbands veiled [scil. at the wedding]. But if they are veiled for their betrothal, because they are mingled with the male body and spirit through a kiss and their right hands (*per osculum et dexteras*), through which for the first time they give up the modesty of their spirit, through the shared pledge of their awareness, by which they contracted their complete fusion, how much more will time veil them, without which they cannot be engaged and under pressure of which they cease to be virgins even without betrothal.”<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 11.34, in P. W. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions* (ACW, 31; New York: Newman Press, 1963), 172; cf. also Augustine, *Sermon 227*, in S. Poque, *Augustin d’Hippone. Sermons pour la Pâque: Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index* (SC, 116; Paris: Cerf, 2003), 240–1; and compare Perella, *Kiss Sacred and Profane*, 23–27.

<sup>61</sup> Tertullian, *The Veiling of Virgins* 11.4–5 (for the translation, see S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: “Iusti Coniuges” from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991], 149–50); idem, *Prayer* 22.10. See on this L. Anné, *Les rites de fiançailles et la donation pour cause de mariage sous le bas-empire* (Ph.D. diss., University of Louvain, 1941), 64–69; J. E. Grubbs, “‘Pagan’ and ‘Christian’ Marriage: The State of the Question,” *Journal of*

Accordingly, at the *desponsatio*, which, according to Tertullian's testimony, rendered the girl *sponsa*, she and her *sponsus* joined hands and exchanged a kiss. Interpreting this as the couple's intent to consummate a physical union in marriage, Tertullian adds that both the awareness of this intent and the promise made correspond, for the girl, to a resignation of her maidenly "modesty." Significantly, then, physical contact with a male body and mental awareness made her, for all intents and purposes, a married woman already. The account of *Joseph and Aseneth*, similarly emphasizes the significance of such physical contact as a promise of perfect union; when Joseph suggests that one of the virgins may take over the task of washing his feet, Aseneth replies with the following words: "No, my lord, for my hands are your hands, and your feet my feet and no one else shall wash your feet" (20:3).<sup>62</sup>

The issue, then, is decidedly the prohibition of sexual intercourse for a betrothed couple prior to their marriage. Admittedly, similar perceptions were also common in Judaism of the early centuries. Thus, for example, Talmudic sources reveal diverging attitudes with regard to premarital sex in the interim between betrothal and wedding. The documentation suggests significant regional divisions on this matter; the custom in Judea apparently sanctioned such a practice, while any sexual contact until after the wedding was forbidden in Galilea.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the Galilean practice probably became the norm in the Diaspora throughout the Amoraic period.<sup>64</sup> But these Talmudic sources also maintain that sexual intercourse after the betrothal and before the wedding was an existent practice, at least in some parts of Israel, and according to M. Satlow, there is no compelling reason for not accepting—at least to a degree—the testimony of these sources.<sup>65</sup>

In this respect, Judea was no exception. Pre-marital sex with a *sponsus* was common practice in Imperial Rome of the first centuries, and the situation only changed with the Christianization of the Roman empire. "The virgin certainly needed to be protected from

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*Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994), 361–412, here 388.

<sup>62</sup> For more on betrothal kiss, see Ambrose, *Epistle 41*, 18 (PL, 16:3): "So, then, the Church alone has kisses as a bride (*sponsa*), for a kiss is as it were a pledge of espousals and the prerogative of wedlock"; and compare also John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Arrest of Eutropios* 13 (PG, 52:408): ὡς δὲ ἀρμόζω, ὡς δὲ με φίλει.

<sup>63</sup> *m. Ketub.* 1.5; *m. Yebam.* 4.1; *b. Ketub.* 7b; *t. Ketub.* 1.4; *b. Ketub.* 12a.

<sup>64</sup> L. M. Epstein, *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1948), 126; Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 167. Boaz Cohen, a proponent of *Joseph and Aseneth's* Jewish authorship, regards Joseph's words as further proof for general intolerance toward sexual contact during betrothal in Jewish groups of that time, Judea being the exception; see B. Cohen, *Jewish and Roman Law: A Comparative Study* (2 vols.; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), 1:322. He also based his arguments on Talmudic sources: *m. 'Ed.* 4.7; *y. Pesah.* 37b (*m. Git.* 8.9).

<sup>65</sup> Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 166–7.

seducers,” Treggiari writes, “but the phobia of pre-marital sex with a sponsus does not seem to occur until the empire becomes Christian.”<sup>66</sup>

This perception fits in with the picture obtained from the Mishnah, referring to the ways by which a wife is attained. The first Mishnah in Qiddushin states: “a woman is acquired in three ways and acquires herself in two ways. She is acquired by money, by contract, and by intercourse” (*m. Qidd.* 1.1). As Satlow has noted, the Mishnah says nothing about the betrothal *per se*, only about “acquisition,” i.e., marriage. This representation seems definitely at odds with what is pictured in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Joseph refuses to engage in premarital sex with Aseneth, and the story goes a long way to emphasize that intercourse only took place after the formal wedding ceremony, itself followed by a seven-day feast; such emphasis is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the Mishnah, for its part, acknowledges pre-marital intercourse as a legitimate pursuit towards instituting the act of marriage.

Although there have been attempts to explain Joseph’s refusal of having premarital sex with Aseneth by relating such refusal to practices prevailing within Jewish groups of that time, or even to regard this motif as positive evidence for the existence of such practices, such interpretations do raise a number of issues. That a work like *Joseph and Aseneth*, which does not bear the slightest commitment—even at the most superficial level—to the Law and Commandments, would preach strict observance of sexual purity in married life seems strikingly odd. It is all the more so, considering that Joseph and Aseneth display no reticence about intimate physical contact, as is evinced by their lingering embrace and mouth-to-mouth kiss immediately after their betrothal, and even by earlier indications in the narrative. Indeed, long before their betrothal and wedding, it is the kiss that Aseneth desires from Joseph that brings about her conversion (see 8:4).

It seems more compelling, therefore, to assume that Joseph owes his refusal to engage in sexual contact with Aseneth to early Christianity’s stand against pre- and extra-marital sexual relations. This understanding is already articulated by Paul in 1 Corinthians: “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” (1 Cor 7:8–9).<sup>67</sup> Equating extra-marital sex with prostitution (*πορνεία*), Paul regarded marriage as a defense against illicit desire.<sup>68</sup> Later on, in the first quarter of the fourth century, the

<sup>66</sup> Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 159.

<sup>67</sup> See further 1 Thess 4:3–7; 1 Cor 6:9–10.

<sup>68</sup> J. A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 58, 61, 66; J. Jensen, “Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina,” *NovT* 20:3 (1978), 161–84; E. Fuchs, *Sexual Desire and Love* (trans. M. Daigle;

negative attitude towards pre-marital sexual relations was inscribed into the canons of the church councils. As analyzed by J. E. Grubbs,<sup>69</sup> they communicate that premarital sex is, as a rule, a bad thing, which however is less harshly penalized as long as it ends in marriage. The canons adopted at the Council of Elvira, Spain (ca. 306), decreed that unmarried women, “who have not guarded their own virginity” but marry the man who “violated” them, would be subjected to a one-year abstention from communion without penance, “in that they have violated only the marriage rites.”<sup>70</sup> The fifty-fourth canon of Elvira states: “If parents break the faith of a betrothal agreement, they shall abstain [from communion] for three years. However, if either the *sponsus* or the *sponsa* has been caught in a serious offense (*crimen*), the parents will be excused. If it was a sin (*vitium*) between the couple and they have polluted themselves, the former decision shall stand.” Both *crimen* and *vitium* presume sexual relations. Accordingly, if either of the betrothed was unfaithful to the other, the parents were justified in breaking off the engagement. On the other hand, if the *sponsus* and *sponsa* had sexual relations with each other, they were committed to the match, making it wrong for the parents of either party to try and break it off. Clearly evident in these rulings is that premarital sex, unlike extra-marital sex, is pardoned if the lovers get married.<sup>71</sup>

It is precisely this attitude on sexual relations before marriage that comes through in Joseph’s words analyzed here (20:8). Simply stated, they say: Although not a grave sin, it is not right for a Christian to have intercourse with his wife before marriage, having in mind the notion that premarital sex with one’s future wife, though not recommended, can nonetheless be forgiven once the deed is done.

As it appears, therefore, the parallels that can be drawn between the ethical command—exemplified in chs. 22–29—to love one’s enemy and to abstain from repaying evil for evil and the early Christian tradition do not represent an isolated phenomenon within *Joseph and Aseneth*. Rather, they correspond to other themes, in that work, which are also strikingly reminiscent of distinctively Christian ethical teachings; prime among such themes are the image of Aseneth as “city of refuge” personifying the Church itself, or the usage

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New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 73–74; D. G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 89; P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 55; Satlow (*Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 167), rightly recognizes the issue, but is forced to suggest that Joseph’s declaration, “It is not right for a man who worships God to have intercourse with his wife before their marriage,” may be a later Christian emendation.

<sup>69</sup> Grubbs, “‘Pagan’ and ‘Christian’ Marriage,” 399–406.

<sup>70</sup> Council of Elvira, Canon 14; see Grubbs, “‘Pagan’ and ‘Christian’ Marriage,” 401.

<sup>71</sup> Grubbs, “‘Pagan’ and ‘Christian’ Marriage,” 402.

of the recurrent formula, “It is not right for a man who worships God to . . .”

### 7. LEVI AND THE “UNSPEAKABLE MYSTERIES”

We may add yet another element to the general picture emerging from this discussion. Of all of Joseph’s brothers, the present story singles out Levi as a model for the proper conduct of an ideal Christian believer. As such he is “a worshipper of God and a man who feared the Lord” (θεοσεβῆ καὶ φοβούμενον τὸν κύριον, 22:8)—the exact same terms with which the preceding story describes Joseph.<sup>72</sup> In Antiquity, the adjective φοβούμενος could apply to the “God-fearing” Jews among gentiles who observed certain Jewish precepts without becoming proselytes, that is, without submitting themselves to a full process of conversion to Judaism (*gijur*).<sup>73</sup> However, this adjective could equally be used to designate a Christian confessing the Lord, a usage that is already found in several passages of the New Testament.<sup>74</sup>

To a large extent, the depiction of Levi in the second story (chs. 22–29) represents the counterpart to Joseph’s depiction in the first story (chs. 1–21). In particular, they are the only persons to see Aseneth’s “place of rest” in heaven, and to understand her role as city of refuge, which they describe in identical terms. Both voice an instruction regarding how a God-fearing man should behave, using words that follow the same literary pattern (οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ, “It is not right for a man who worships God . . .”). Like Joseph, Levi occupies a special place in Aseneth’s heart: when he and Simeon escort Joseph and Aseneth after their encounter with Jacob, the narrative expressly states that “Aseneth took Levi’s hand because she loved him . . .” (22:8).<sup>75</sup> Also, like Joseph, Levi is honored by Pharaoh: on appearing with Pharaoh’s wounded son “Pharaoh got up from his throne and made obeisance to Levi upon the ground” (29:7).

The story, however, does ascribe some distinctive features to Levi: he is a prophet (ἄνδρα προφήτην) having insight into people’s hearts,<sup>76</sup> and “he used to see letters” in the heavens, written “by the

<sup>72</sup> See above note 48.

<sup>73</sup> Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 143.

<sup>74</sup> See Luke 1:50; Acts 10:2, 9:31; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 5:21 (ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ); 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 11:18.

<sup>75</sup> Although such parallels can be found in both versions, they are more obvious in the longer one. See, e.g., Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 79. In particular, Kraemer highlights the way in which the longer version takes up attributes and actions which, in the shorter version, are associated with Joseph, and reapplies them to the description of Levi as an angelic figure, in order to highlight the resemblance between the two figures.

<sup>76</sup> In *Joseph and Aseneth*, Levi’s prophetic insights are manifested on two instances: when he prevents Simon from harming Pharaoh’s son (23:10); and when he is informed about the dangers befalling Aseneth, thereby

finger of God,” which he would read and interpret to Aseneth secretly (22:8–9). The heavenly-written letters relate to the theme of the “tablets of heaven”—a familiar theme in apocalyptic literature—, inscribed with the entire history of the past and its foreseen course in the future.<sup>77</sup> These heavenly tablets, containing a cryptic and hidden law, replace the biblical tables that were similarly written with the finger of God (Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10). Levi, in the long version, knows the unspeakable mysteries (τὰ ἄρρητα) of the Most High God, revealing them to Aseneth in secret because he has seen “her place of rest in the highest and her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations founded upon a rock of the seventh heaven” (22:13). It seems clear, therefore, that the “unspeakable mysteries of the Most High God (τὰ ἄρρητα τοῦ ὑψίστου),” which Levi sees in heaven, are somehow connected to Aseneth’s role as a city of refuge. In effect, the expression τὰ ἄρρητα τοῦ ὑψίστου already comes up in the longer version of the first story, precisely at the point when Aseneth eats the honeycomb and turns into the city of refuge. After she has found the comb in the storeroom, the man of God tells her: “Happy are you Aseneth, because the ineffable mysteries of the Most High have been revealed to you (ἀπεκαλύφθη σοι τὰ ἀπόρρητα μυστήρια τοῦ ὑψίστου) and happy are all who attach themselves to the Lord God (προσκείμενοι τῷ θεῷ) in repentance, because they will eat from this comb” (16:14).<sup>78</sup>

In Greek religious texts, the term ἄρρητος occurs in reference to the mystery religions, fostering cults in which such “unutterable words” would comprise secret doctrines, formulae and descriptions of visions that were not to be communicated to the uninitiated.<sup>79</sup> The use of this term in *Joseph and Aseneth* points in a similar direction. By finding and eating the honeycomb, Aseneth is disclosed the “ineffable mysteries of the Most High” and thereby established in her role as “city of refuge,” which, as argued above, is an image for the Church. Furthermore, as a personification of the Church, Aseneth allows all others who “attach themselves to God” (προσκείμενοι τῷ θεῷ) in repentance to experience these “ineffable

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setting out with his brothers to rescue her (26:7).

<sup>77</sup> T. *Levi* 5:4; T. *Asher* 2:10; 7:5; 1 *En.* 106:19; *Jub.* 5:13; 32:21. See Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 201.

<sup>78</sup> See also 15:12: “all names written in the book of the Most High are unspeakable ἄρρητά ἐστι, and man is not allowed to pronounce nor hear them in the world, because those names are exceedingly great and wonderful and laudable.” The term τὰ ἄρρητα also occurs in 2 Cor 12:1–4 in the context of visions and secret revelations: Paul, recounting a vision in which he was taken to the third heaven, into paradise, “heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

<sup>79</sup> M. E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (2 vols.; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2000), 2:795–7; V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 527.

mysteries” by eating of the comb that she, Aseneth, preserves. When 22:13, in the longer version, is read against the background of this previous passage, the inference appears to be that Levi saw the mysteries (sacraments?) of the church, as they would be implemented in Aseneth’s place of rest, that is, the Christian church.

Along with his prophetic virtues, Levi’s ability to see “the place of rest in the highest heaven” and the ineffable mysteries of the city of refuge situate his image in *Joseph and Aseneth* within the Christian tradition of the *Testament of Levi*.<sup>80</sup> The first section of *T. Levi* describes a vision in which Levi is called by an angel of God to go up and enter the heavens until he reaches the seventh heaven, where “in the highest of all dwells the Great Glory in the holy of holies far beyond all holiness” (*T. Levi* 3:4; 5:1); there, Levi “will stand near the Lord and will be his minister and will declare his *mysteriēs* to men and will proclaim concerning him who will redeem Israel” (2:10). The description in *T. Levi* of Levi’s ascent in the seventh heaven, of his sojourn there in the presence of the deity and of the mysteries he subsequently proclaims, can provide the background against which to situate and interpret the theme of Levi seeing Aseneth’s “place of rest” and “city of refuge” located next to God in *Joseph and Aseneth*.<sup>81</sup> It also contributes to an under-

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<sup>80</sup> On affinities of *Joseph and Aseneth* with *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* see M. Delcor, “Un Roman d’amour d’origine thérapeute. Le livre de Joseph et Asénath,” *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 63 (1962), 3–27, here 18–21. On the portrayal of Joseph in the Testaments as a model for non-retaliation see Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation*, 158. On Levi as a prophet in *T. Levi* see *T. Levi* 2:10; 8:2, 15, and my remarks above. On the Christianity of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* in general and *T. Levi* in particular, see the studies of M. de Jonge on the *Testaments* quoted above, and recently V. Hillel, *Structure, Source and Composition of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 2008).

<sup>81</sup> A similar tradition in which Levi was taken up to heaven and stood in front of God occurs in the Aramaic Levi Document, presumably one of the sources for *T. Levi*; see 4QLevi<sup>a</sup> ar II, 15–16; 4:1–8, in J. C. Greenfield, M. E. Stone and E. Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 67. See M. de Jonge, “Levi in the Aramaic Levi Document and in the Testament of Levi,” in idem, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 124–40, here 129, 139; Hillel, *Structure, Source and Composition*, 113. The exceedingly fragmental condition of the source makes it impossible to say if the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* made any use of it. Anyhow, affinities with *T. Levi* are much broader than with the Aramaic Levi Document. Another tradition describing Levi’s ascension to heaven is found in Midrash *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, 37 (G. Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* [New York: Hermon Press, 1965], 284). This tradition is based, to all appearances, on *T. Levi*. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* is a late Midrash, written no earlier than the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E., whose author is known to have made use of Christian sources and of works from the Pseudepigrapha, such as *Jubilees*, the *Life of Adam and Eve* and similar books related to the Henoch traditions. On the dating and characteristics of the *Midrash*, see Y. L. Zunz (ed.), *Ha-derashot be-yisra’el* (trans. and enl.

standing of the “mysteries” Levi saw in heaven and communicated in secret to Aseneth, since *T. Levi*, in the above mentioned passage (2:10), connects these mysteries with “he who will redeem Israel.” This verse, according to M. de Jonge, refers to Jesus Christ.<sup>82</sup> In *Joseph and Aseneth*, the mysteries are connected to the city of refuge, which, in my reading, is identified with the Church. Is it possible that the mysteries Levi saw in heaven and told Aseneth in secret also involve “he who will redeem Israel”?

Admittedly, there are also dissimilarities between the two compositions: contrary to what is the case in the Testaments, Levi is not described as a prototype of Christ in *Joseph and Aseneth*.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, he does not appear in his traditional priestly role, as he typically does in *T. Levi* as (more generally) in the Pseudepigrapha, and in other Jewish traditions.<sup>84</sup> Yet in spite of these differences, the parallels between the two works in the depiction of Levi appear to be significant enough to support the assumption that the figure of Levi in *Joseph and Aseneth* corresponds to the distinctively Christian representation of that figure in *T. Levi*. In fact, one may even presume that the prominence of Levi in *T. Levi* accounts for his choice as a model of the proper behavior required from a Christian in chs. 22–29 of *Joseph and Aseneth*.

## 8. CONCLUSION

To sum up my discussion: I have tried to show that at the core of the second story in *Joseph and Aseneth* (chs. 22–29) is a call to Christians to behave in accordance with Christianity’s ethical instruction regarding the rightful attitude towards enemies. Rather than repaying evil for evil, this tradition instructs to overcome evil with love and forgiveness, and to consign judgment and vengeance to God alone; this Christian ethical doctrine is exemplified in and by the figures of Aseneth and Levi. Moreover, I have argued that it is this very notion which connects the two sections of *Joseph and Aseneth*, especially with regard to three key aspects of this work:

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H. Albeck; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1974 [first published in 1832]), 139; I. Lévi, “Éléments chrétiens dans le Pirké Rabbi Eliézer,” *REJ* 18 (1889), 83–89.

<sup>82</sup> De Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 50, 52.

<sup>83</sup> On Levi as prototype of Christ in the *Testaments*, see Hollander and de Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 78–79; Hillel, *Structure, Source and Composition*, 171.

<sup>84</sup> On this oddity, see de Jonge and Tromp, “Jacob’s Son Levi,” 226. The reason might be that both of these roles are applied to Joseph in *Joseph and Aseneth*; see Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 124–7. In view of Levi’s centrality in the second story, Bohak concludes that the author was himself a descendant of Levi, a Jewish priest, who was deeply interested in Levi, the primogenitor of the entire Jewish priesthood; this notion sustains Bohak’s hypothesis regarding the Oniad origin of the book. See Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 51–52; and cf. also H. Kee, “The Socio-Cultural Setting of *Joseph and Aseneth*,” *NTS* 29 (1983), 394–413, here 405.

1. This ethical command fits in with Aseneth's role as "city of refuge" and "place of rest" in heaven. This imagery, which lies at the center of Aseneth's conversion, is as adopted and adapted by the story in order to represent Aseneth as the personification of the Church. Thus, when Aseneth says, "It is not right for a man who worships God to repay his neighbor evil for evil," she embodies the moral values that characterize the Church and, correspondingly, the ethical code imposed on its Christian citizens. Likewise, in her personification of the Church, Aseneth extends shelter and deliverance to repenting evildoers.
2. This command is coupled with the command to love God, at the focus of the first story, thereby pressing home Christianity's two most important precepts: love of God and love of neighbor.
3. It is consistent with the formulaic repetition "it is not right for a man who worships God . . ." which, in both stories, designates the proper moral conduct of Christians with regard to their co-religionists and fellow-humans at large.

More generally, I have argued in this article that the similarities between the figure of Levi in *Joseph and Aseneth*, his role in this story, and his representation in *T. Levi* are indicative of the story's affinity with circles associated with the composition and transmission of Christian pseudepigraphic traditions. With regard to the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, de Jonge already observed that, "The author of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs was not primarily interested in the narrative passages of his work, but used them to illustrate his ethical teaching." In effect, this author wanted "to write a book which taught the Christian way of life, illustrated with the lives of the sons of Jacob. Certainly, the author did not intend to write a scholarly treatise on Christian ethics, but merely wished to reach the ordinary Christian believer and, therefore, used examples and illustrations which everybody could understand."<sup>85</sup> In light of the previous discussion and of the findings achieved here, these comments by de Jonge might as well be used in order to summarize the essence of the story in chs. 22–29 of *Joseph and Aseneth*.

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<sup>85</sup> De Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 119.