PART TWO

CONCEPTUAL BLENDING IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY
CONCEPTUAL BLENDING IN THE EXEGESIS ON THE SOUL

Hugo Lundhaug

1. **Introduction**

The Nag Hammadi tractate the *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,6) sets the stage for its ten manuscript pages of scriptural exegesis with the following statement: “The wise of old gave the soul a feminine name. Indeed, in her nature she is a woman. She even has her womb” (*Exeg. Soul* 127.19–22).¹ In this essay, I will focus on what Frederik Wisse has called “a difficult and perhaps not entirely successful metaphor” (Wisse 1975: 73) in this text, that of the womb of the soul. I will try to show its rhetorical function and its relation to other related conceptual metaphors in the tractate, especially that of the soul as a woman. In doing so, I will outline the way in which *the Exegesis on the Soul* sets in motion a number of complex and intertwined conceptual blends.

The *Exegesis on the Soul* takes the form of a mythical narrative interspersed with commentaries, more or less oblique allusions, and, uniquely among the Nag Hammadi texts, quite a few direct and lengthy scriptural quotations. The storyline describes the soul, personified as a woman, and her life of prostitution/fornication (*porneia*) after her fall from heaven into a material body, and her subsequent repentance once she realizes her predicament. Upon hearing the soul’s weeping and pleas for forgiveness, her Father, with whom she lived in her original existence in heaven, takes pity on her and provides her with salvation in the form of a husband. The soul’s original heavenly existence was “male-female,” and the (re)union between the soul and her savior-husband re-establishes this original pair and leads to the soul’s ascent back into heaven.

Although the narrative itself, of fall, repentance, and salvation, is rather simple, it is not presented in a simple manner. It is especially the text’s intricate and often implicit construction of conceptual blends.

¹ I use the Coptic text established by Layton (1989). All translations from the Coptic are my own.