

The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins

Essays on the Fifth Gospel

By
Stephen J. Patterson

BRILL

The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins

Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies

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For John and Sophia

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Chapter Eleven was originally published as “The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Beginnings.” In *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 1–18. NHMS 59. Edited by Jon Asgierrsson, et al. Brill: Leiden, 2006.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung.</i> Edited by H. Temporini and W. Hase. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
EPRO	Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios bíblicos</i>
<i>ETR</i>	<i>Etudes théologiques et religieuses</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und neuen Testaments
GCS	Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religions</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NHS (NHMS)	Nag Hammadi Studies (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies)
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements

NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> . Edited by T. Klauser et al. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–
RTL	<i>Revue théologique de Louvain</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SecCen	<i>Second Century</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SuppVC	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
ThR	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
VC	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

A POLARIZING ARTIFACT

From the day it was unearthed by a farmer in the Nile Valley in 1945, the Gospel of Thomas has been a polarizing artifact. The peasants of Nag Ham-madi fought over the ancient library that contained it. Egyptian officials had to wrestle it from the hands of thieves and smugglers. Scholars squabbled over the glory that would come with its translation and publication. And when it finally made its way to the light of day, interpreters could not agree on its significance. Was it the discovery of lifetime that would change everything we know and think about Jesus and the origins of Christianity? Or was it just another obscure heretical writing destined to become a small footnote in a monograph on Egyptian Christianity and its quirky past?

Most scholars got their first look at the Gospel of Thomas in 1959, when Antoine Guillaumont, Henri-Charles Puech, Gilles Quispel, Walter Till, and Yassah 'Abed al Masih published it in a remarkable *editio princeps* that appeared simultaneously in English, French, German, and Dutch—the languages of twentieth century Europe (notably, not Arabic, the language of twentieth century Egypt.)¹ Christian Europe was then on the cusp of theological revolution, a revolution from which it has never recovered. Could believers still believe? Could they believe in miracles? Could they believe in the resurrection of the dead? Could they believe in the divinity of a human being? Modernity's war against traditional religious beliefs was reaching a climax in the 1950s and the European churches were in the front lines of the fighting. In 1952 a general synod of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church

¹ The *editio princeps* was published in 1959 by A. Guillaumont, H.-Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, W.C. Till, and 'Abed al Masih as *The Gospel According to Thomas: Coptic Text Established and Translated* (Leiden: Brill/New York: Harper, 1959); *idem*, *Het Evangelie naar de beschrijving van Thomas* (Leiden: Brill, 1959); *idem*, *L'Évangile selon Thomas* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1959); *idem*, *Evangelium nach Thomas* (Leiden: Brill, 1959). An earlier glimpse of the new gospel was afforded by photographs published in 1956 by Pahor Labib, then the director of the Coptic Museum in Cairo (*Coptic Gnostic Papyri in the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo* [Cairo: Government Press—Antiquities Department, 1956]). In 1958 the German scholar, Johannes Leipoldt, used Labib's photographs to produce and publish an unauthorized translation of the text ("Ein neues Evangelium: Das Koptisch Thomasevangelium übersetzt und besprochen," *TLZ* 83 [1958]: cols. 481–496).

of West Germany condemned as dangerous Rudolf Bultmann's attempt to save the church's traditional mythology by "demythologizing" it.² In 1961 Gabriel Vahanian published *The Death of God*³ and launched a debate that rocked the ecclesial world and drew North America into the fray. Meanwhile, in South America Catholic liberation theologians were challenging traditional Catholicism with such vigor that actual war would soon break out pitting rural *campesinos* against elites with deep ties to both the military and the church. Enter now the Gospel of Thomas, a gospel of radical, counter-cultural sayings, without miracles and lacking the resurrection, in which Jesus was not the Christ, the Son of God, or the Son of Man. He was just Jesus, the Living Jesus.

Gilles Quispel held up the sayings of the new gospel and waved them in the face of modern biblical criticism. Noticing just how similar they were to the sayings of Jesus in the synoptic gospels, he proclaimed that the Gospel of Thomas provided all the evidence needed to undo the historical skepticism created by Bultmann and the German Form Critics.⁴ The synoptic account of the teachings of Jesus was accurate and trustworthy after all—Thomas confirmed it! Others said 'Bah!' to this sort of enthusiasm. Thomas was nothing of the sort. It was late, probably derived from the synoptic gospels themselves. It confirmed nothing, except the creativity of a second century heretic.⁵ Still others saw in Thomas an early witness to a very different kind of nascent Christianity. Jesus in this gospel was a sage, not a savior; a teacher, not a sacrifice for sin. Could there have been followers of Jesus who took so little interest in his death and favored instead his wise teachings?⁶ Just so was the discussion of Thomas' importance bound up with the larger battles that raged across the theological landscape. Was Thomas the answer to the radicals' prayers? Did it confirm the New Testament in the face of radical criticism? Was it just another late, heretical, idiosyncratic gospel of little or no relevance to Christian theology in the first century or the twentieth?

² For an account of the controversy see Werner Harenberg, *Der Spiegel on the New Testament*, trans. James Burtneiss (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 1–24.

³ *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1961).

⁴ "The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament," *VC* 11 (1957): 16.

⁵ Thus, Ernst Haenchen's largely negative response to Quispel in "Literatur zum Thomas-evangelium," *TR* n.F. 27 (1961–1962): 147–178, 306–338; similarly Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City: Doubleday/London: Collins, 1960).

⁶ This was the approach of James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester in their collection of essays entitled *Trajectories Through Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

Now after more than 50 years, biblical scholarship is in a much different place, but Thomas is no less a polarizing subject. Now the problems of Christian origins and the historical Jesus are pursued by scores of secular scholars working in colleges and universities where matters of faith play little or no role. At the same time, especially in North America, a new generation of evangelical scholars has taken up critical biblical scholarship like never before. These new evangelicals have studied in the finest European programs, acquired the tools of scholarship, and know the literature as well as their secular colleagues. But they bring a strong religious commitment to the discipline and favor the canonical, biblical witness as a matter of faith. Thus, it should not be surprising to see that in recent years a wide gap has opened up between evangelicals, who tend to view Thomas as late, dependent on the synoptic gospels, Gnostic, and ultimately irrelevant to the question of the historical Jesus and Christian origins, and secular scholars, who are more inclined to integrate Thomas into a revised view of how Christianity began.

THOMAS AND THE RANKLING OF BELIEF

Why should an ancient text turn out to be such a polarizing document? What is so challenging about this particular text? Traditional Protestant Christian faith revolves around two fundamental commitments: Jesus' death on the cross as that which saves us from our sins and the Bible as the Word of God. These two commitments are intertwined in this version of Christian faith: Jesus is our savior because the Bible declares him to be so. The Gospel of Thomas troubles this view in multiple ways.

First, it is a gospel, but it is not in the Bible. Can a book that is not in the Bible really tell us anything true about Jesus? This is an important question in the history of Christian faith. In fact, this is the question that lay behind the very first impulse to create for Christianity a new set of sacred scriptures, a new Bible: Irenaeus' four-fold gospel canon. The issue for Irenaeus as he assessed the new faith at the close of the second century was the proliferation of new voices, prophecy, and gospels, like Valentinus' Gospel of Truth, which claimed to reveal things secretly conveyed from Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection from the dead. Irenaeus responded by arguing that the true, authentic, apostolic witness to Jesus is contained in just four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.⁷ He reasoned, just as there

⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv Haer* 3.11.8.

are four regions of the world, four winds, four directions, there can be only four gospels, no more, no less. For the better part of two millennia Christian believers have agreed with Irenaeus, in spite of his quaintly antique logic. As the Christian Bible gradually took shape over the coming centuries, these four, no more, no less, comprised the true Christian witness to Jesus. Today, even among critical scholars, the discussion of who Jesus was and how Christianity began is confined for the most part to these gospels and other *biblical* books. The Gospel of Thomas is not in the Bible. It is a fifth gospel. It is an outlier. To trust this outsider to speak about Jesus goes against the deepest instincts of scholars embedded in the history and practice of traditional Christian faith.

A second reason lies in the content of the Gospel of Thomas itself. The four biblical gospels all agree on a certain structure to the Christian witness to Jesus. It begins with his life, but more importantly, it ends with his death and resurrection. Paul agreed with and rarefied this form: the Christian *kerygma*—preaching, message—was about Jesus' death and resurrection as transformative events in the history of salvation. By his death on the cross we are saved; by his resurrection death is conquered and all who have faith will also be raised on the last day. In fact, Paul's ideas are considerably more complicated than this, but in the history of Christian doctrine, this is the central idea to Paul and the gospels. For most Christians, historically, the notion that Christian faith centers on this single, unifying idea has been fairly important. Christianity, perhaps more than other religions, values unity, agreement, the singularity of Truth. Variety, deviation, and difference have been the occasion for argument, schism, even war. This peculiar feature of Christianity was what led Western democracies finally to the conclusion that religion and political power ought to be separated. Christian sectarians, armed with the power of the state, were simply too dangerous to their foes. But the fact that Christians in the modern world generally no longer kill one another over doctrinal disputes does not mean that their instinctual preference for unity over diversity has diminished. The Gospel of Thomas, which seems to know nothing of the Pauline *kerygma*, is a problem in this theological world. To think that Christian faith began not as a singular claim about a singular man, but as a variety of attempts to interpret a complex person, simply runs counter to the DNA that still lies beneath the skin of many Christian believers.

Thirdly, the Gospel of Thomas offers a way of thinking about Jesus that is different in a way that is particularly inimical to Western Christian sensibilities. The life-death-resurrection form of the Christian *kerygma* is fundamentally martyrological. This may have been what appealed so strongly

to Irenaeus in the four gospels that would, eventually, become the biblical gospels. Irenaeus lived in a period of intense suffering for Christians. Though the Roman Empire would not engage in empire-wide and systematic persecution of Christians until a century later, from the very beginning, Christians were dissidents in an empire that did not easily accept dissent. Among their offenses was the fact that they tended not to participate in local religious ceremonies and sacrifices. They were therefore branded as atheists and as such, a threat to the *Pax Deorum*—the peace of the gods. While still a young man, Irenaeus would have learned of the violent death of his mentor, Polycarp of Smyrna, at the hands of Roman officials, who accused him of impiety for refusing to venerate the local gods.⁸ Later Irenaeus' own community in central Gaul was devastated by similar attacks in which dozens, including Pothinus, the bishop of Lyons, were stoned by mobs, thrown to the beasts, or beheaded by Roman officials.⁹ For these early martyrs, the story of Jesus' own death and resurrection offered a pattern by which they might understand their own lives and fate. In those years the Christian religion became an exercise in faithfulness (πίστις) in the face of torture and death. This is how Christian faith became Christian *faith* (πίστις). This period of persecution would one day pass, but the ideas of faithfulness, self-sacrifice, and redemption through suffering would endure as defining themes in Western Christianity unto the present. By contrast, Thomas offers a completely different set of themes: self-discovery, immortality through enlightenment, and living wisely. To many modern believers this just seems wrong. Could Jesus—always portrayed biblically as involved in the high drama of martyrdom—have cared about something so frivolous as self-discovery?

These differences have made it difficult for the Gospel of Thomas to crash the party and find a welcome place in the scholarship of Christian origins. But one should not assume that theology and ideology are the only problems that plague the critical discussion of this text. For even though the stance of religiously conservative and evangelical scholars on new texts like Thomas has become all too predictable, critical scholars too remain divided over the real significance of this text in particular. The reason for this lies in the critical challenges posed by the text itself, aspects of which have made it difficult for scholars to arrive at a consensus on several critical issues.

⁸ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 6–15.

⁹ Eusebius, *Hist eccles* 5.1.1–61.

POLARIZING AMBIGUITIES

The first critical challenge posed by the Gospel of Thomas is the very obvious fact that it is a simple list of sayings.¹⁰ Listing things is a basic form of writing. In its simplicity it is also the most malleable form of writing. If a scribe wishes to add something to a list, he or she just adds it. There is no narrative flow to worry about, no plot, no real themes. Likewise, if a scribe wishes to cut something out, he or she just leaves it out and it disappears without a trace. There are no literary *aporia* left behind, no redactional seams for scholars to sniff out thousands of years later, no data by which to trace the literary developments that might explain the variegated theological landscape of this mysterious and often confusing text. This being the case, how does one date Thomas? Can one really date a list? How does one describe its theology? How does one assess its potential use of sources? In all of these critical matters, what is true for one saying in the collection might not be true for another. Like the proverbial elephant of South Asian wisdom, one scholar grasps this gospel's tail and pronounces it broom-like, while another grasps its leg and pronounces it tree-like.

A second factor is that Thomas is not really a list of sayings so much as a list of *riddles*. Saying 1 of the collection invites people to search for the hidden meaning of the sayings—implying that this will not be easy. Indeed it is not. Many of Thomas' sayings are opaque to say the least, and certainly as a consequence of this, polyvalent. How can scholars reach a consensus about the theology of a text when it, by design, engenders such polyvalency? There was once a time when scholars could get away with labeling the whole thing as "Gnostic."¹¹ But that will no longer do. Thomas could perhaps be the poster child for all who would like to banish the term "Gnostic" from our vocabulary, for Thomas is "Gnostic" only in that loose sense that has made the word so troublingly vague. So what shall we call it now? Polyvalence allows for a wide variety of readings. Any hope for a broad consensus about its theology is in the near-term clearly misplaced.

Finally, there is the little-appreciated problem that for most of the Gospel of Thomas we have but one exemplar, the Coptic version from Nag Ham-

¹⁰ A common observation, but noticed for its significance early on by John Dominic Crossan, "Lists in Early Christianity: A Response to *Early Christianity, Q, and Jesus*," in *Semeia* 55: *Early Christianity, Q, and Jesus*, ed. J. Kloppenborg and L. Vaage (Atlanta, GA, Scholars, 1992), p. 237.

¹¹ As I once did: see *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Foundations and Facets (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1993), pp. 196–214.

madi Codex 2. We have no idea about the quality of this manuscript. Is it a fairly good exemplar of the text or is it filled with errors? All ancient manuscripts have some errors, which can be identified and culled out if one has another copy of the text—preferably many others. This is the case with all the texts of the New Testament. Our critical editions are the result of hundreds of collations made between different manuscripts to yield a final critical edition of the text that one may trust as pretty close to the original. With Thomas this is impossible. There are Greek fragments for only the first 36 sayings, and never do we have more than two extant witnesses for a single saying. This is a problem, say, for the question of dependence on the synoptic gospels. When Thomas seems to pick up a tiny snippet of Matthean or Lukan redaction, does this mean that Thomas' author knew these gospels, or does it mean that somewhere along the line a scribe was influenced by his or her memory of a synoptic manuscript?

All of this adds up to an almost intractable problem: Thomas is a veritable Rorschach test for the scholar of Christian origins. Is it any wonder, then, that recent scholarship on the date of Thomas has placed it as late as 200 CE¹² and as early as 50 CE?¹³ Is it inexplicable that some could see Thomas as a Gnostic gospel¹⁴ and others as a blueprint for mysticism?¹⁵ Some see in it a work of Jewish wisdom,¹⁶ others the remnants of an apocalyptic sect.¹⁷

All of this might well lead one to throw in the towel and let this ancient artifact be. Our arguments and disputes could go on forever. But what if Thomas is too important to let go. What if it does have something interesting and important to tell us about Christian origins? What if it really does reveal something new about a figure of enormous significance in the history of western religion? What if Thomas really should change everything? After twenty-some years of studying this text I have a very strong hunch that it should. That hunch was planted, to be sure, by scholars like Helmut Koester,

¹² Nicholas Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian*, Academia Biblica 5 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2002).

¹³ Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, Second Edition (Oregon House, CA: Bardic Press, 2005), pp. 14–17.

¹⁴ Most recently, E. Popkes, *Das Menschenbild des Thomasevangeliums. Untersuchungen zu seiner religionsgeschichtlichen und chronologischen Einordnung*, WUNT 206 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2007).

¹⁵ April DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas*, Supp to VC 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

¹⁶ Thomas Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*, NHMS 47 (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

¹⁷ April DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation, with a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel*, LNTS (JSNTSup) 287 (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006).

James M. Robinson, and Hans-Martin Schenke. They saw what Grenfell and Hunt saw at the very first glimpse of this gospel in POxy 1: sayings of Jesus of a “primitive cast”—some of them with synoptic parallels, but some of them entirely new.¹⁸ When the whole gospel came to light a half-century later we could see that fully half of the sayings in Thomas were new. Leaving aside the question of whether the author of Thomas knew the synoptic gospels, there could be no question that all of this new material means Thomas was a gospel like John, with its own sources and its own distinct interpretation of Jesus. What is more, “new” and “distinct” did not mean “late.” Its form—the sayings collection—was not late, but ancient and common. Its theology, once labeled as “gnostic” (meaning “late and heretical”), would eventually be seen as more or less at home in the theological world of Hellenistic Judaism, where Plato’s soul and its heavenly journey home had long been embraced, and whose ideas would one day be taken into the very heart of Christianity. Thomas, it turns out, was not even all that strange. But it was interesting: a gospel different in form and theology, yet using the same building blocks available to our more familiar canonical gospels. This does not mean that Thomas *must* change everything. But it has left me with a very strong hunch that in the story of the Gospel of Thomas there is a chapter of Christian origins that has gone missing for many years. These collected essays are my attempt to follow that hunch to see where it leads.

¹⁸ ΛΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ: *Sayings of our Lord from and Early Greek Papyrus* (London: Henry Frowd, 1897), p. 16.

CHAPTER ONE

THE VIEW FROM ACROSS THE EUPHRATES¹

A NEW VANTAGE POINT

This essay is about broadening the perspective from which we view the origins of Christianity. The vehicle is a gospel by now perhaps as familiar to students of the New Testament as the canonical four, the Gospel of Thomas. It is well known among specialists that the content of this gospel overlaps with that of the synoptic tradition roughly by half. Also well-known, perhaps, is that it presents this commonly-held content in a very different form, the sayings collection, and by consequence, under the supposition of a different theological paradigm: wisdom theology. So, here is a different gospel, a wisdom gospel, in which the words (λόγοι) of Jesus take center stage. Since the 1970s, when Helmut Koester and James M. Robinson placed it within the context of Walter Bauer's theory about the diverse nature of earliest Christianity,² the Gospel of Thomas has become a prime illustration of that diversity. It can help us see the potential of the Jesus tradition to develop in directions we could scarcely fathom before. But can it tell us more?

When one compares the Gospel of Thomas with the much better-known canonical gospels, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, one immediately notices some clear differences, long noted as *absences* in this new and unusual gospel: Thomas is lacking a passion narrative and is almost completely devoid of interest in the death of Jesus. Thomas is also lacking the great apocalyptic speeches from Mark and Q (which also find their way into Matthew and Luke), as well as the apocalyptic cast of much of the material common to both Thomas and the synoptic tradition. Finally, not often

¹ This essay was originally published as "The View From Across the Euphrates." *HTR* 104 (2011): 411–431.

² Helmut Koester and James M. Robinson, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), especially the essays "LOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q," (pp. 71–113) by Robinson and "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," (pp. 114–157) and "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," (pp. 158–204) by Koester.

noted, and perhaps only true by a matter of degree, one might further observe the absence of the intense anti-Jewish rhetoric that so characterizes the canonical gospels at certain key points. Why are these features absent from the Gospel of Thomas? In what follows I will offer what I believe is an answer to this question, but in so doing, I hope to raise another question that should be equally obvious and compelling to students of the New Testament: why are these features *present* in the synoptic gospels?

It is the premise of this essay that the Gospel of Thomas is not simply a new focal point in the diversity of early gospel traditions. It can also be a *vantage point* from which to gain new perspective on other, more familiar early traditions. Much of what we see in the canonical tradition is taken for granted as original, natural, and normative. The canonical story *is* the Christian story because it is seen as the original story. Jesus is the messiah who comes into the world, is rejected and crucified, but in the end is raised from the dead. This is Mark's story, the synoptic story; and though John's details diverge widely from Mark and the other synoptic gospels, the broad strokes of its story are the same. But is this the original, natural story? The synoptic story is Mark's story, penned many years removed from the actual life and times of Jesus. It resembles John's story not so much because they both know the real story, but because they both knew how to write a martyr's story.³ Paul, too, knows this tradition of the noble death, and formulates his kerygma accordingly.⁴ But it is an interpretation, an effort to render meaningful the memory of Jesus in a particular cultural context and in light of a particular experience: the experience of living as a dissident within the Roman Empire. Jesus was in fact executed as a dissident in the Roman Empire. This was a fact to which his dissident followers could relate, and so, their stories focus on Jesus' martyrdom: his life, death, and redemption. But was it the only way Jesus might be remembered? In this

³ On the martyr's story as the template by which Mark's passion narrative was created, see George Nickelsburg, "The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative," *HTR* 73 (1980): 153–184; also *idem*, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*, HTS 26 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). Whether John made use of Mark for the passion narrative, or shared with Mark an earlier source, which was itself shaped according to the canons of the wisdom tale, is not important for our purposes here. The significance of Nickelsburg's work is that it demonstrates the extent to which the canonical story is a conventional story and a conventional stratagem for interpreting the premature death of a hero. For John and martyrdom, see Paul Minear's study, *John: The Martyr's Gospel* (New York: Pilgrim, 1984).

⁴ Sam Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept*, HDR 2 (Missoula, MT: Scholars' Press, 1975); David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation*, JSNTSup 28 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

essay I wish to offer some observations first about the Gospel of Thomas and its geographic home, Edessa and the region east of the Euphrates River. The memory of Jesus that is cultivated through the Gospel of Thomas is very different. But, then, so was the cultural context in which it arose. Edessa, east of the Euphrates, was not a Roman city. It was an independent city-state, a caravan town, a place where people from across the Levant met, passed through, and sometimes settled. These differences—in text and context—are not incidental. The Gospel of Thomas turns out to be well suited to its environment and the questions that came with it. In what follows, I will explore this. But then I wish to use Thomas, in its place, as a vantage point from which to gaze back across the boundary that was the Euphrates River, and ask whether Mark and the rest of the canonical tradition makes more sense now in *its* geographic home. In the end I hope to have shown that the relative absence of reflection on Jesus' death, apocalypticism, and anti-Jewish polemic in Thomas is not to be seen as a divergence from the more original, natural canonical tradition, but a difference that exposes the canonical tradition as contingent in its own way.

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS: ASSUMPTIONS

My argument is predicated on certain assumptions that cannot be argued out in full in this limited frame. So, I will simply state them for the sake of clarity, noting that none of them is idiosyncratic, and yet, as in all historical work, none is beyond dispute.

1) *The Gospel of Thomas represents an autonomous development of the Jesus tradition that is more or less independent of the synoptic tradition.* This is not to say that our present Coptic manuscript is devoid of all influence from the synoptic texts—either at the later stages of scribal transmission, or even at earlier stages where “secondary orality” might have resulted in cross-influence between the synoptic gospels and the text of Thomas. Still, it is becoming clearer to students of this gospel that it was not composed by an author who went about extracting sayings from one or another of the synoptic gospels.⁵ In other words, in the Gospel of Thomas we have fundamental

⁵ This question has proven to be a thorny problem in the history of the Thomas discussion. My own view, strongly shaped by John Sieber's dissertation (“A Redactional Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels with regard to the Question of the Sources of the Gospel of Thomas,” [Dissertation, Claremont, 1966]) was laid forth in *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma,

evidence for the potential of the Jesus tradition to develop differently, not the once-cherished assumption that non-canonical traditions tend to corrupt canonical ones.

2) The Gospel of Thomas is a list, and therefore was likely written in many stages over many years.⁶ This makes it very difficult to date. Some of its

CA: Polebridge, 1993), pp. 9–110; more recently I renewed this argument in a more nuanced way in “The Gospel of (Judas) Thomas and the Synoptic Problem,” in *The Oxford Conference in the Synoptic Problem (Oxford Conference, April 2008): Essays in Honor of Christopher Tuckett*, ed. John Kloppenborg, et al., BETL 239 (Leuven, Paris, Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011), pp. 783–808. For an older review of the literature see Stephen J. Patterson, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A Forschungsbericht and Critique,” *Forum* 8 (1992): 45–97; more recently see Nickolas Perrin, “Recent Trends in *Gospel of Thomas* Research (1991–2006): Part I, The Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels,” *CBR* 5.2 (2007): 183–206. More recent proposals have made the discussion even more complex, including especially that of Hans-Martin Schenke, “On the Compositional History of the Gospel of Thomas,” *Forum* 10 (1994): 9–30. Schenke argues on the basis of a series of apparent narrative spurs in Thomas that its sayings were drawn from a narrative work, but not one of our known gospels. The idea of “secondary orality,” first promulgated by Kline Snodgrass some years ago (“The Gospel of Thomas: A Secondary Gospel,” *Sec Cent* 7 [1989–1990]: 19–38), has been revived by Risto Uro in “Thomas and the Oral Gospel Tradition,” in *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas*, ed. Risto Uro, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 8–32, as a way of arguing for Thomas’ dependence on the synoptic gospels in some cases, while acknowledging evidence in Thomas of a certain freedom over against the synoptic text themselves. Similarly, Jens Schröter argues that the synoptic formulation of sayings has influenced Thomas in specific instances, but rejects the direct literary dependence of Thomas upon the synoptic gospels (*Erinnerung an Jesu Worte. Studien zur Rezeption der Logienüberlieferung in Markus, Q und Thomas*, WMANT 76 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997] *passim*). While variation and nuance now characterize the discussion, a consensus around the position of basic independence, or autonomy is beginning to emerge. There are exceptions, such as the recent study by Nicolas Perrin (*Thomas and Tatian: The Relationship Between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron* [Academia Biblica 5; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002]), which revives the older thesis of Han Drijvers (“Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity,” *Sec Cent* 2 [1982]: 157–175) that Thomas is dependent on Tatian’s Diatessaron, or Harry Fleddermann’s theory that Thomas is dependent on Mark (based on the hypothesis that Mark is dependent on Q; see his *Mark and Q: A Study of the Overlap Texts* [Leuven: Peeters, 1995]). Neither of these novel contributions has attracted a following among Thomas specialists.

⁶ The fact and its implications was pointed out first, perhaps, by Robert McL. Wilson in “Thomas and the Growth of the Gospels,” *HTR* 53 (1960): 231 (see also his *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* [London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960], pp. 9, 145). He called it the “snow-balling” effect, drawing from Henry Chadwick’s similar observations made about another early sayings collection, the Sentences of Sextus (*The Sentences of Sextus: A Contribution to the History of Christian Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], p. 159). But many have made the point similarly: see, e.g., Ernst Haenchen, “Literatur zum Thomasevangelium,” *ThR* 27 (1961/62): 306–307; Henri-Ch. Puech, “The Gospel of Thomas,” in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. Robert McL. Wilson; 2 vols.;

sayings probably originated with Jesus, and could well come from early collections of Jesus sayings that were later gathered together into the Gospel of Thomas; others will have been added relatively late, even as late as the fourth century, when our sole surviving complete copy of the text was created by an anonymous Coptic scribe. Nonetheless, I have elsewhere argued that the relative paucity of influence from the synoptic texts, together with the relative simplicity of many of its synoptic parallels, probably indicates that *the collection we know as the Gospel of Thomas generally originated relatively early, before the synoptic gospels had reached their eventual ascendant status, and when oral tradition was still the dominant mode of communicating the Jesus tradition.* A reasonable guess would be in the closing decades of the first century, or perhaps the early second—in other words, roughly contemporaneous with the canonical gospels.⁷ For the purposes of the present argument, more precision than this is unnecessary.

(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963 [German orig. 1959]) 1:305; Wolfgang Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur gnostischen Synoptikerdeutung*, BZNW 29 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), p. 10; Stephen J. Patterson, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition," 65; *idem*, "Understanding the Gospel of Thomas Today," in Patterson, James M. Robinson, and Hans-Gebhard Bethge *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2011), pp. 33–34; Stephen J. Patterson, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Historical Jesus," in *Coptica—Gnostica—Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. Louis Paichaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier, Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Section "Études" 7 (Laval: Les Presses de l'Université Laval/Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2006), pp. 672–673; and Werner Kelber, "Die Anfangsprozesse der Verschriftlichung im Frühchristentum," *ANRW* II, 26, 1: 26: "Listen haben weder Anfang noch Ende." The general point is made also by Kevin V. Neller, "Diversity in the Gospel of Thomas: Clues for a New Direction?" *Sec Cent* 7 (1989/90): 1–17; and more recently by April DeConick in "The Original Gospel of Thomas," *VC* 56 (2002): 167–199, and more programmatically in her recent two-volume treatment of Thomas: *Recovering the Gospel of Thomas: A History of the Gospel and Its Growth*, LNTS 286 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), and *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation, with a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel*, LNTS (JSNTSup) 287 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006).

⁷ Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 113–118. Similarly, B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt on P. Oxy. 1 in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London: Henry Frowde [for the Egypt Exploration Fund] 1904) vol. 1, p. 2: "(it is) earlier than 140 A.D., and might go back to the first century"; Helmut Koester, "Introduction" (to the Gospel According to Thomas) in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 together with XII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1)*, and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655, ed. Bentley Layton, NHS XX, The Coptic Gnostic Library (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 39–41; or more recently Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel According to Thomas* (New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 12–21 (early second century). Older estimates of a mid-second century date usually mistakenly credited Grenfell and Hunt with this view; see e.g., Puech, "Gospel of Thomas," 305; Wilson, *Studies*, 7; Bertil Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), pp. 271–272; Haenchen, "Literatur," 155; Johannes Leipoldt, *Das Evangelium nach Thomas Koptisch und Deutsch*, TU 101 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1967),

3) The Gospel of *Judas Thomas*, as it should properly be called, comes originally from the region of Osrhöene, or eastern Syria, and more specifically, the chief town there, Edessa. This position, widely held, rests on the identification of Judas Thomas with that place, a connection that appears to be very old.⁸ This is not to say that parts of the collection may not have originated elsewhere—perhaps Jerusalem, where James “the Just” (Thomas 12) was likely a key figure. But the Gospel of Thomas as a whole appears to have been at home in Edessa, both in its apostolic claim and its theological orientation. As we shall soon see, it shares with other early Christian texts from Edessa a tendency to read the Jesus tradition in a “Platonizing” way (see below).

In these basic assumptions the initial course of this essay is suggested. First, we shall ask about the distinctive theological voice of the Gospel of Thomas. Second, we shall ask what is distinctive about Edessa in the family of ancient cities that played host to early Christian communities. Then, we shall see if the answers to these first two questions make any particular sense when considered together.

p. 17. The argument for a very late date, after the appearance of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, made first by Drijvers (“Facts and Problems,” 172–173) and recently revived by Perrin (*Thomas and Tatian*), fails to reckon with the date of POxy 1 at end of the second/beginning of the third century. Attempts to date it earlier, say on the basis of formal similarity to Q (e.g. S. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Wisdom* [New York: Seabury, 1983], pp. 14–17) also skate on thin ice.

⁸ See Puech, “The Gospel of Thomas,” 286; Gilles Quispel, “L'Évangile selon Thomas et les Clémentines,” *VC* 12 (1958): 181–196; *idem*, “L'Évangile selon Thomas et le Diatessaron,” *VC* 13 (1959): 87–117; *idem*, “The Syrian Thomas and the Syrian Macarius,” *VC* 18 (1964): 226–235; *idem*, “L'Évangile selon Thomas et les origines de l'ascèse chrétienne,” in *Aspects du judéo-christianisme: Colloque de Strasbourg 23–25 avril 1964 / Travaux du Centre d'Études Supérieures Spécialisées d'Histoire des Religions de Strasbourg* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), pp. 35–52; Wilson, *Studies*, 10; Gärtner, *Theology*, 271–272; A.F.J. Klijn, “Das Thomasevangelium und das altsyrische Christentum,” *VC* 15 (1961): 146–159; *idem*, “Christianity in Edessa and the Gospel of Thomas: On Barbara Ehlers, Kann das Thomasevangelium aus Edessa stammen?” *NovT* 14 (1972): 70–77; Koester, “GNOMAI DIAPHOROI,” 126–128; *idem*, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) vol. 2, p. 152; *idem*, “Introduction,” (the Gospel of Thomas), 40.; *idem*, *Ancient Christian Gospels* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990/London: SCM, 1990), p. 79; Benley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1987), pp. 360–364, 377; J.D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992), pp. 23–26; Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 118–120; Neller, “Diversity in the Gospel of Thomas,” 7–8; Jens Schröter and Hans-Gebhard Bethge, “Das Evangelium nach Thomas [Einleitung],” in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 1. Band: *NHC I, 1–V, 1*, ed. Hans-Martin Schenke, Hans-Gebhard Bethge, and Ursula Ulrike Kaiser, GCS n.F. 8 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 151–163 (esp. 156–157); Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008), pp. 17–22.

WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS?

Thomas is a very different gospel. It is a wisdom gospel.⁹ Formally this is seen in the focus on Jesus' wise and revelatory words: Thomas is a sayings collection. The first saying in the collection asserts this orientation: "Whoever finds the meaning of these words will not taste death" (Thomas 1). As with many sayings collections, Thomas invites a certain hermeneutic of sustained reflection,¹⁰ admonishing "the one who seeks to continue seeking until he finds" (Thomas 2). It is within this framework that Thomas includes dozens of aphorisms and parables of Jesus, many of them familiar: "Love your brother like your soul" (Thomas 25); "When you cast the beam out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to cast the speck from your brother's eye" (Thomas 26); "Do not be concerned from morning until evening about what you shall wear" (Thomas 36); "Grapes are not harvested from thorns" (Thomas 45). These forms are well suited to the genre, for they invite reflection. So do the parables: a fisher who releases his entire catch only to retain a single large and beautiful fish (Thomas 8); a sower who sows carelessly and yet still reaps an abundant harvest (Thomas 9); a rich farmer who dies before he can enjoy his wealth (Thomas 63)—the parables are stories designed to prick the imagination and encourage deeper thought.

But there is more to Thomas' theological framework than the simple sayings collection form would suggest. The wisdom theology espoused in the Gospel of Thomas was steeped in the thought of Plato, especially as it re-emerged in the late Hellenistic renaissance of Platonic thinking known as Middle Platonism.¹¹ In this gospel the search for Jesus' kingdom of God

⁹ The point was originally made with respect to form by James M. Robinson in "LOGOI SOPHON: Zur Gattung der Spruchquelle," in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. E. Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1964), pp. 77–96; revised: "LOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q," in Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories*, 71–113. It has been underscored more recently with respect to content by Davies in *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* and Thomas Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*, NHMS 47 (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

¹⁰ J. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 302, 305.

¹¹ The interpretation of the Gospel of Thomas as deeply influenced by Middle Platonism is argued more fully by the author in "Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas," in *Das Thomasevangelium, Entstehung—Rezeption—Theologie*, ed. Jorg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes, and Jens Schröter, BZNW 157 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 181–205 (= chapter 2 in the present volume). The influence of Plato in this gospel is also argued by Jon Ma. Asgiersson, "Conflicting Epic Worlds," in *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas*, ed. Asgiersson, April DeConick, and Risto Uro, NHMS 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2006). See also Howard Jackson, *The Lion Becomes the Man: The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition*, SBLDS 81 (Atlanta: Scholars' Press,

begins with the self: “The kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, you will become known and you will realize you are children of the living Father” (Thomas 3). “Know thyself”—one will mark correctly in this restatement of the Delphic Maxim the influence of Platonism in logion 3, and throughout this gospel.¹² Those who read and valued the Gospel of Thomas would have been at home among those Hellenized Jews who held the Jewish scriptures in one hand and Plato in the other.¹³ Like other Jews who shared this philosophical interest, those who read Thomas might have found a certain concurrence between Plato and Genesis. Like Philo, they perhaps would have read Genesis 1:27 and thought of the first human, Adam, as both male and female, an androgyne (“male and female he created them”), and believed that the perfect unified form of male and female was the ideal human state to which everyone might one day return (Thomas 22).¹⁴ They would have read Genesis 2:7 and seen there the echoes of Plato’s anthropology: that a person consists of both a body (σῶμα) and a soul (ψυχή) conjoined in an oft-troubled mixture (Thomas 87; 112), but that each person also possesses a spirit (πνεῦμα), a piece of the divine dwelling as a resident alien within the mortal human being (Thomas 29).¹⁵ They might also have thought of this spirit as the image

1983) for the Platonic background for logion 7. Others have also indicated in passing the relevance of Middle Platonic concepts to Thomas: Hans-Gebhard Bethge and Jens Schröter, “Das Evangelium nach Thomas [Einleitung],” 155; Enno Edzard Popkes, *Das Menschenbild des Thomasevangeliums. Untersuchungen zu seiner religionsgeschichtlichen und chronologischen Einordnung*, WUNT 206 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2007), pp. 331–333. The assumption of Bethge, Schröter, and Popkes that such Platonic speculation would take Thomas decisively out of the Jewish milieu and into a later time frame is unwarranted.

¹² Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 184–186. For the significance of the Delphic maxim in Middle Platonism see Hans-Dieter Betz, “The Delphic Maxim ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ in Hermetic Interpretation,” *HTR* 63 (1970): 465–484.

¹³ Many scholars have seen the relationship of Thomas’ theology to Hellenistic Judaism, including Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (also, later, his essay “The Christology and Protology of the Gospel of Thomas,” *JBL* 111 [1992]: 662–682); John Dominic Crossan, *Four Other Gospels* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985), pp. 31–35; and Elaine Pagels, “Exegesis of Genesis 1 in Gospel of Thomas and John,” *JBL* 118 (1999): 477–496.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Philo, *Opif* 134; for discussion see esp. A.F.J. Klijn, “The ‘Single One’ in the Gospel of Thomas,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 271–278. The idea may derive originally from Plato, *Sym* 189D–192E; for discussion see Dennis R. MacDonald, *There is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying in Paul and Gnosticism*, HDR 20 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), pp. 25–26.

¹⁵ For this typically Middle Platonic anthropology see, e.g., Plutarch, *Mor (de facie)* 943A; Philo, *Leg All* 2.2, etc. The Platonic seed of this idea is to be found in *Tim* 30AB and *Phaedr* 247C–248B. For a discussion of these ideas in Thomas, see Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 186–190. Asgierrson also sees the Platonic framework behind these sayings, but assumes that they take a more polemical stance over against the Genesis account (“Conflicting Epic Worlds,” 162–171).

of God, the true self concealed within the earthly self (Thomas 84)—a concept familiar to both Middle Platonists and Hellenistic Jews with an interest in philosophy.¹⁶ The goal in this tradition was to recover the lost image of God (Thomas 22), and return to the heavenly realm of the Father, from whence all the elect, the “children of the living Father,” have originally come (Thomas 49–50). The elect are “people of light” (Thomas 24; cf. Thomas 61, 83), who have “come from the light,” and who will someday return to the “place where the light came into being” (Thomas 50).¹⁷

The world in this tradition is not evil—a fact that distinguishes this view from what is commonly known as Gnosticism. It is simply something dead (Thomas 56, 80), and as such a distraction (Thomas 21, 28), which one should rightly view as inferior and unworthy of devotion (Thomas 110–111). Withdrawal from the world is therefore appropriate; a temperate strain of asceticism is probably to be presupposed.¹⁸ People should “fast from the world” (Thomas 27). Many of the familiar counter-cultural sayings of Jesus, well-known from the synoptic gospels, and now appearing here, are to be understood in this light: “No prophet is accepted in his own village” (Thomas 31); “Whoever does not hate his father and mother cannot be my disciple” (Thomas 55); “If you have money ... give it to someone from whom you will not get it back” (Thomas 95); “seek his unfailing and enduring treasure, where no moth comes near to devour and no worm destroys” (Thomas 76). In this way, the Platonizing world-view of the Gospel of Thomas provided a home for those world-denying sayings of Jesus that placed him at odds with many who heard him in the early days of the Jesus movement.¹⁹

Missing from this picture are some very familiar staples of early Christianity. First, there is no passion narrative in Thomas, and very little interest in Jesus’ death. In logion 55 Jesus does speak of taking up one’s own cross “in my way,” but the concern here is with emulating Jesus’ lifestyle, not the

¹⁶ For the true self as the image of God, see e.g., *Alc* 1, 133BC; for the concept among the later Middle Platonists and Stoics, see, e.g., Cicero, *Leg* 1.22.59; Seneca, *Ep* 31.11; Philo, *Opif* 69; for discussion of the various other Jewish expressions of the idea, see Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei*, FRLANT 76 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960); Hans-Martin Schenke, *Der Gott “Mensch” in der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 120–143; and Jarl Fossum, “Gen 1:26 and 2:7 in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Gnosticism,” *JSJ* 16 (1985): 202–239.

¹⁷ Cf. Seneca, *Ep* 102.21–28; Plutarch, *Mor (de facie)* 943–945; Philo, *Opif* 70–71; for discussion see Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 196–197.

¹⁸ On the asceticism of the Gospel of Thomas see Richard Valantasis, “Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical? Revisiting an Old Problem with a New Theory,” *J ECS* 7 (1999): 55–81.

¹⁹ On the continuity of the Thomas Christianity with the social radicalism of the early Jesus movement, see Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 121–214.

development of a theological interpretation of his death.²⁰ The resurrection of Jesus also is not in view, even though some have argued that the Christological designation “living Jesus” in the Prologue to the gospel ought to be equated with the “risen Jesus,” so that the entire collection would presuppose the resurrection.²¹ In Thomas, however, the theological perspective is protological, not eschatological. What matters is not the end, but the beginning, when God created the human one and breathed into him the divine spirit, the breath of life, immortality. In Thomas the “living Jesus” is the *immortal* Jesus who brings to others the secret of immortality.²²

Second, there is in Thomas little of what might be called the apocalyptic perspective so much in evidence in the canonical texts. As noted, it assumes the protological perspective of much of Hellenistic Judaism, in which things ultimately return to their primordial original perfection. For this reason, sayings that carry an apocalyptic perspective are rare in the Gospel of Thomas—though not absent entirely.²³ There is simply no attempt to describe the world or current events in apocalyptic terms.

²⁰ Other possible allusions to Jesus’ death are few and equivocal: Thomas 12 refers to a time when Jesus will be absent; Thomas 71 commands “destroy this house,” but the reference is unclear; saying 66, alongside saying 65, appears to refer to Jesus death/resurrection (cf. Mark 12:10–11), but, presented as a separate saying, it may have a different referent altogether (see John Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*, WUNT 195 [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2006], p. 257).

²¹ So, e.g., Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), p. 118; Gärtner, *Theology*, 98; Jacques-E. Ménard, *L’Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 76–77.

²² So, variously, Joseph Fitzmyer, “The Oxyrhynchus Logoi of Jesus and the Coptic Gospel According to Thomas,” in *idem, Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, Sources for Biblical Study 5 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), pp. 368–369; Leipoldt, *Evangelium nach Thomas*, 55; Koester, “One Jesus, Four Primitive Gospels,” 167; James M. Robinson, “Jesus—From Easter to Valentinus (Or to the Apostles’ Creed),” *JBL* 101 (1982): 23; Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 81–85; Marvin Meyer, “The Beginning of the Gospel of Thomas,” in *Semeia* 52: *How Gospels Begin*, ed. Dennis Smith (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 164–165.

²³ Sayings 11 and 111 might be considered apocalyptic; sayings 10 and 16 are apocalyptic sayings in their synoptic contexts, but here less clearly so; the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Thomas 57) could be understood as an allegory for the apocalypse, as it probably is in Matthew (13:24–30). Margaretha Lelyveld’s attempt to ground Thomas more thoroughly in Jewish apocalyptic (*Les Logia de la vie dans l’Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 34 [Leiden: Brill, 1987]) has met with little support in the literature. More recently DeConick has tried to identify an early apocalyptic core of speeches in Thomas (*Recovering the Gospel of Thomas*, 113–155), but most of the sayings she considers to be apocalyptic are not necessarily so. Often the saying in question takes on an apocalyptic cast—either by context, or through allegorization—in the synoptic tradition, which is missing in Thomas. Thomas’ parable of the Feast (saying 64), for example, is considered by DeConick to have apocalyptic significance. In Matthew and Luke (and perhaps Q) it does, but in Thomas there is nothing to suggest

Third, the polemical engagement with other forms of early Judaism is very little in evidence in Thomas. The “Pharisees and scribes” appear as the subject of criticism in Thomas 39; the Pharisees are cursed in Thomas 102; and in Thomas 43 the disciples are compared unfavorably to “the Jews.” Otherwise, a handful of sayings take up questions that Jews moving in Gentile areas would find relevant—Thomas 14 (on eating unclean foods), 53 (on the necessity of circumcision), and 89 (on ritual washing). But there is nothing like the sustained argument against the “scribes and Pharisees” one finds all through the Gospel of Mark, let alone the extended diatribe against the Pharisees in Matthew 23, the extended rants against “the Jews” in John, or the decision reflected in the passion narrative to lay blame for the death of Jesus at the feet of the Jews. In Thomas the anti-Jewish polemic is minimal.²⁴

Before leaving this subject it should be noted that much of what has been said here about the Gospel of Thomas can also be said about the other texts we might count as evidence for Christianity as it developed east of the Euphrates in the region of Edessa up to the end of the second century. This would include the other texts associated with Thomas: the Acts of Thomas and the Book of Thomas (the Contender), but also the *Odes of Solomon*, Tatian’s *Oratio ad Graecos*, Bardaisan’s *Liber Legum Regionum*, and (perhaps) also the Gospel of Philip. All of these texts share to an extent the orientation to Platonism—or Middle Platonism—found in Thomas, as well as, of course, the brand of Hellenistic Judaism reflected in Philo of Alexandria.²⁵ And the *absences* we have just noted are just as noteworthy

it. One of the most distinctive things about the Thomas tradition is that so many of the apocalyptic sayings and parables from the synoptic tradition are found here as wisdom or prophetic sayings and simple metaphoric stories.

²⁴ The point is perhaps debatable—see, e.g., Antti Marjanen, “Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices,” in Uro, ed., *Thomas at the Crossroads*, 163–182. But Paul argues against circumcision and abrogates kashrut, and yet by most accounts should still be understood as he understood himself, that is, as a Jew. To engage in debate over Jewish practices, especially in the context of the Jewish diaspora, is not necessarily a manifestation of anti-Judaism. In any event, the pertinent point is that the Thomas folk did not engage in recrimination against their fellow Jews, blaming them for the death of Jesus or even the destruction of Jerusalem in the Jewish revolt.

²⁵ The influence of Middle Platonism on Tatian is extensive; see Martin Elze, *Tatian und seine Theologie*, *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), pp. 27–33; also Drijvers, “Early Syriac Christianity: Some Recent Publications,” *VC* 50 (1996): 173; for Bardaisan, see Han Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, *Studia Semitica Neerlandica* 6 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966) pp. 96–126 and 218–225; in the *Acts of Thomas* the Hymn of the Pearl is probably to be understood as the Platonic journey of the soul in mythic form (Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 367); for Middle-Platonic anthropology see esp. *Act. Thom.*

in these texts as well. The cross is mentioned just once in the *Odes of Solomon* (27.3), and *Ode* 42 is probably a meditation on Jesus' death as God's persecuted righteous one. But beyond this the death of Jesus plays virtually no role in this literature. Apocalyptic is also foreign to it. Tatian speaks of a resurrection of the dead at the end of time,²⁶ but this is not accompanied by an apocalyptic scenario; likewise, Bardaisan apparently spoke of a new world to come, but it was not to be ushered in with violent signs of the times.²⁷ The Book of Thomas borrows the Greek notion of Hades, with its fiery torments, but restricts this idea to the afterlife.²⁸ In general, this literature is simply not interested in an apocalyptic interpretation of current events. Finally, most of these works presuppose the Jewish identity of both author and audience and reveal no animosity between the Jesus-followers who might have read or heard them and the larger Jewish community of which they seem to have been a part. Only the Gospel of Philip suggests that the term "Hebrew" designates someone who is something less than enlightened.²⁹ To be sure, there were probably a good number of Marcionites in the area later,³⁰ but our second century sources do not reveal a Marcionite orientation, and Bardaisan is said by Eusebius to have written dialogues against them.³¹ Tatian's conversion to Christianity came from reading the Jewish scriptures.³²

Why are these things—reflection on Jesus' suffering and death, apocalyptic eschatology, and anti-Jewish polemic—absent from these texts? Were their authors unfamiliar with these themes in other early Christian literature? This seems doubtful. Tatian, recall, had been to Rome, studied with Justin, and created the *Diatessaron* from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And the Gospel of Philip is clearly familiar with a variety of New Testament texts, even quoting at one point from the passion narrative itself.³³ It is not

94. The Book of Thomas (the Contender) advocates asceticism based on a Platonic anthropological dualism (see J. Turner, "The Book of Thomas the Contender [II,7]" in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. James M. Robinson, Revised Edition [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988], p. 200; also generally, Drijvers, "Facts and Problems," 174).

²⁶ *Or ad Graec* 6.

²⁷ *Book of the Laws of the Countries*, trans. H.J.W. Drijvers (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), p. 63.

²⁸ NHC II 142.26–143.7.

²⁹ Gos Phil 62.6.

³⁰ W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Robert Kraft, et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 16–17.

³¹ *Hist eccl* 4.30.1.

³² *Or ad Graec* 29.1.

³³ Gos Phil quotes Mark 15:34 (see 68, 26–28), and elsewhere refers to the tearing of the temple veil (see 84, 24–35).

that Jesus-followers in Edessa did not know one could interpret the Jesus tradition apocalyptically, or that Jesus-followers in other places saw Jesus' significance to lie primarily in his death. And they must surely have been aware of the animosity growing between Jesus-followers and other Jews further to the west. They must have known these things. They simply chose to go in another direction. Why? To answer this question we will need first to ask a little more about the place of their origin: Edessa.

EDESSA, EAST OF THE EUPHRATES

Edessa³⁴ was a caravan town located on the great road proceeding east from Antioch, the first place of consequence reached after crossing the Euphrates River at Zeugma. It also hosted traffic on the north/south trade route connecting Armenia in the north with Egypt to the south. Its location on ancient east/west and north/south trade routes would have made it a multi-cultured place in the late first and early second centuries, where elements of east and west, north and south met and mingled. In the mix were Greek-speaking Jews,³⁵ who would have migrated up the trade routes from Syro-Palestine to settle in cities like Edessa and Nisibis. Adiabene, with its famous Jewish queens and kings, lay further east. The Jews in these cities seem to have flourished in the first two centuries CE, and no doubt played an active role in the unique religious and intellectual culture thriving there.³⁶

The Gospel of Thomas represents a development of the Jesus tradition that would have been at home—or or at least relevant—in this environment. It offers a perspective on the worldly life of the caravan town—the

³⁴ Modern treatments include A.F.J. Klijn, *Edessa, die Stadt des Apostels Thomas* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965); J.B. Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970); Han Drijvers, "Hatra, Palmyra, and Edessa. Die Städte der syrisch-mesopotamischen Wüste in politischer, kulturgeschichtlicher und religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung," *ANRW* II/8 (1977): 863–896; Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East 31BC–AD 337* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1993), pp. 472–481; and Steven K. Ross, *Roman Edessa: Politics and Culture on the Eastern Fringes of the Roman Empire, 114–242 C.E.* (London: Routledge, 2001).

³⁵ Han Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, *EPRO* 82 (Leiden: Brill, 1980), pp. 190–192; *idem*, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in *The Jews Among the Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, ed. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 127–129. Segal (*Edessa*, 42) notes that there are Jewish names, as well as inscriptions in Hebrew and Greek in the cemetery of Kirk Magara. Jews buried there also carry Macedonian, Roman and Parthian names.

³⁶ For a general account see Jacob Neusner, *A History of Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 1: *The Parthian Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

fortunes made and lost, the temptation to immerse oneself in the shallow life of commerce and its various fleeting pleasures: “If you have money, do not lend (it) out at interest. Rather give [it] to someone from whom you will not get it (back)” (Thomas 95); “If you do not fast to the world, you will not find the kingdom” (Thomas 27); “Blessed are the beggars, for yours is the kingdom of heaven” (Thomas 54); “Become passers-by” (Thomas 42). It is easy enough to see how Thomas speaks to this cultural context with a clear alternative understanding of the life well-led—the counter-cultural wisdom of the Jesus tradition, dressed-up with a dash of Plato’s more sophisticated world-renouncing philosophy, is offered as the true wisdom of the living Jesus. Tatian’s ideas, too, are at home here, as are those of Bardaisan in the second half of the second century, and later the Acts of Thomas and the Book of Thomas. All of them develop a Platonizing reading of the Jesus tradition that serves to relativize the claims of the world on the life of the Jesus-follower.

But there is something else to be noted about Edessa as well—something unique about it in the family of great cities that played host to Jesus-followers as they wandered out from the Jewish homeland. *It lay east of the Euphrates River*. At the end of the first century the Euphrates still marked the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. Edessa, like the other cities that lay beyond it, were independent city-states loosely aligned with Rome’s principal rival to the east, Parthia.³⁷ This was true until 114 CE, when Trajan pushed across the Euphrates and began his major offensive against the Parthians, advancing all the way to the Persian Gulf before insurrection throughout the newly conquered lands forced him into retreat.³⁸ By 117 CE he had withdrawn his forces back beyond the Euphrates and soon thereafter set sail for Rome. He died *en route* and was succeeded by Hadrian. But Hadrian, who had been governor in Syria, saw little promise in prosecuting Trajan’s war in those vast territories east of the Euphrates, and so, the ancient river became once again the eastern-most limit of Roman rule.³⁹ With minor exceptions, it remained so for another century, and Edessa continued to exist as an independent city state until Caracalla made it a Roman colony in 214 CE.⁴⁰ Edessa suffered at least one violent attack during Trajan’s offensive,⁴¹ but apart from

³⁷ Strabo 11.9.2; Cassius Dio 40.14; Pliny, *Nat Hist* 5.88; discussion: Michael Rostovtzeff, *Caravan Cities*, trans. D. and T. Talbot Rice (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932).

³⁸ On Trajan’s Parthian War see Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 30–33.

³⁹ Cassius Dio 68.33.

⁴⁰ Cassius Dio 78.12; Drijvers, “Hatra, Palmyra, and Edessa,” 878–879; Segal, *Edessa*, 13–14.

⁴¹ Cassius Dio 68.30; see Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 34–35.

this it was a place of relative peace, where Jews and Christians could blend into the cityscape and live free of serious conflict with the civic authorities.

This is really quite different from the experience of Jesus-followers living to the west, on the other side of the Euphrates, in what we will now call the Roman East. Consider especially the situation that must have obtained for Jesus-followers in *western* Syria at precisely the same time that the Gospel of Thomas was coming into use in *eastern* Syria. The Jews who lived in the Roman East were just then entering what would certainly become one of the most dangerous and tumultuous periods in their remembered history. The Judean revolt of 66–70 CE had just ended in disaster, the Temple was in ruins, and ahead lay the even more devastating Bar Kokhba rebellion, the second bookend to a period of deep distress and unrest in the Jewish homeland.⁴² This was a time in which Jews living in places like Antioch, Damascus, and Caesarea Philippi would have lived on edge. At the outbreak of the first revolt Josephus offers a troubling portrait of persecution and slaughter all throughout the region, as Greek cities purged their populations of Jews.⁴³ For the most part, Jesus-followers would have shared the fate of other Jews living in those regions. They too would have experienced the war and its aftermath as a dangerous and humiliating time. Let us take, to illustrate, the events that unfolded in Caesarea-Philippi immediately following the war, a city where John Wilson finds reason to locate those early Christian communities that developed the cycle of stories associated with Caesarea-Philippi in the synoptic gospels.⁴⁴ Josephus says that Titus took his troops there following the siege of Jerusalem to relax and recuperate in the spa-like atmosphere of Agrippa's famous capital.⁴⁵ With them they brought many prisoners of war (Josephus says thousands, perhaps exaggerating), whom Titus used in staged contests, games, and re-enactments of battles won. On the occasion of the birthday of his brother, Domitian, Josephus says that 2,500 Jewish captives were killed "in contests with wild beasts or one another or in the flames."⁴⁶ In Caesarea Philippi, and in any number of other cities and towns

⁴² Discussion: Maurice Sartre, *The Middle East Under Rome*, trans. Catherine Porter and Elizabeth Rawlings (Cambridge: Harvard, 2005), pp. 117–131.

⁴³ *War* 2.457–498.

⁴⁴ John Francis Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi: Banias, the Lost City of Pan* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 78–84. He discusses Peter's confession at Caesarea-Philippi (Mark 9:27–30, pars.), the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8, pars.), and the healing of the demon-possessed boy (Mark 9:14–29, pars.).

⁴⁵ *War* 7.23–25.

⁴⁶ *War* 7.37–38.

in the Roman East, Jews, and among them the Jesus-followers, were facing difficult questions about the meaning of violence, the significance of history, and the trouble with being Jewish in the wake of the failed Judean revolt.

But elsewhere, further west, in Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome, the Jesus-followers did not find themselves any more at home in the Roman Empire. When Christians first appear on the Roman scene, it is because Nero chose to take advantage of their unpopularity and use them as scapegoats after the great Roman fire of 64 CE.⁴⁷ When next we hear of them, in Bithynia-Pontus, it is because Pliny suspects them of disloyalty and has inquired of his emperor, Trajan, whether it is advisable to execute them because they refuse to sacrifice “to our gods.”⁴⁸ We encounter this experience from the other side in the literature of the Jesus-followers themselves. Much earlier, in the 50s CE, we have the correspondence of Paul writing to the Jesus-followers in Philippi from an imperial prison cell, and apparently struggling to stay alive (Phil 1:19–26). It is worth noting that in this predicament, Paul finds solace in relating his own fate to that of Jesus, who also suffered and died at the hands of the empire, by recalling for his readers the hymn so well-known now from Phil 2:6–11. Later, at about the same time Trajan was approving Pliny’s policy of executing recalcitrant Christians in Asia Minor, we have from the Roman East the letters of Ignatius, written as he was being transported to Rome for execution. He too finds meaning in his own death by relating his fate to that of Jesus: “Let there come to me fire and cross and fighting with wild animals ..., only that I might hit the mark of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁹ Like many martyrs in the Christian west, he drew a direct correlation between his own suffering, death and hoped-for resurrection and Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection. Moreover, his denunciations of docetism in the letters underscores how important this connection was for him: if Christ’s suffering was to have real significance for his own real suffering, then Christ’s suffering will need to have been real as well.⁵⁰

None of this was the case in that far off place east of the Euphrates, where the Thomas gospel was at home. When Tatian left Rome after the death of his teacher, Justin Martyr, and returned home to his native Osroene, he was going home to an entirely different world. Here the Jesus-followers were part of the Jewish community. They were not dissidents in an empire intolerant

⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Sulpicius Severus, *Chron* 2.29.

⁴⁸ *Letters* 10.96–97.

⁴⁹ Ignatius, *Rom* 5.3.

⁵⁰ So, e.g., *Trall* 10.1; *Smyrn* 2.1–3.3.

of dissent. There were no martyrs in Edessa.⁵¹ They had not needed to survive two spasms of revolutionary violence, each countered by the overwhelming crush of Roman military power. The gospel that developed among these Jesus-followers was quite different, because their lives were quite different.

DIFFERENCE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

By placing the Gospel of Thomas more clearly in its Edessene context, we are perhaps in a better position to understand why the Gospel of Thomas lacks some of the elements we have come to take for granted in the synoptic gospels: a focus on Jesus' death and resurrection, an apocalyptic scenario locating the gospel community near the end of the present era, and a running polemic with other Jewish groups—the scribes and the Pharisees, the priests, etc. These things are not present in the Gospel of Thomas because they were not relevant. Those who made use of this gospel in eastern Syria, east of the Euphrates, did not face death or serious persecution, so they did not spend time meditating on the death of Jesus. They did not face a cataclysmic war, so they did not turn to apocalyptic scenarios that could place that sort of violence in a theological context. And they seem to have blended into the Jewish community in Edessa in a relatively harmonious way such that anti-Jewish polemic would have been pointless. Context makes a difference. In Edessa, the caravan town, a different sort of Christianity grew up, one that found a resonance in the lives of men and women wishing to follow the wisdom of Jesus, to escape the shallowness of the worldly life of commerce, and to arrive at a self-understanding that lent dignity and value to each human being as a “child of the living Father.”

Hopefully, this analysis will stand up as more or less a straightforward accounting of the differences one finds in the Gospel of Thomas. Edessa was a different sort of place; from it emerged a different sort of gospel. But is that all Thomas might mean for our understanding of early Christianity? Is it simply an exotic relic from a little-known caravan town, an historical side-trip out to the heretical fringe, away from the more important centers of early Christianity in the west—Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, or Rome? It would be easy to fall into such presumptions, but this is to be resisted.

⁵¹ Cf. the remarks of Susan Ashbrook Harvey (“Syria and Mesopotamia,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 1: *Origins to Constantine*, ed. M. Mitchell and F. Young [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006] 363): “... Christians in this region had little if any direct experience with persecution until the fourth century”

After all, the center is defined geographically and historically by one's own place and perspective. Edessa, too, was a center of nascent Christian activity. As such, it offers the historian a vantage point from which to gaze back across the Euphrates and see developments there—developments we have often taken for granted as original, or natural—in a new light. Thomas demonstrates that the possibilities for interpreting the Jesus tradition were multiple. The cross and resurrection was not the only possible focus for early Christian preaching; the coming apocalypse was not the only way of imagining the future; antipathy for “the Jews” was not a necessity for early Christian self-definition. The absence of these elements from Thomas has elicited many explanations, including the one offered here. But their absence from Thomas should call with equal urgency for some explanation of their *presence* in the canonical tradition.

Consider: the canonical gospels were all written by Jesus-followers who lived as part of a dissident community within the Roman Empire. What is more, at least three of the four—Mark, Matthew, and John—were written during or in the aftermath of the Jewish War, and all gained prominence during the extraordinarily violent time bracketed by that war and the equally disastrous Bar Kokhba rebellion 60 years later. Their authors had considerable experience with violent death. They had considerable experience with the violence and chaos of war. And they had seen Jews intimidated and driven from their homes in the Roman East in the aftermath of the rebellion. Their questions are easily imagined: What is the meaning of death at the hands of your enemies? Does the violence and chaos of war have a larger purpose in some unseen plan? Why has disaster come upon our people, and are they, indeed, still *our* people? And so, the story of Jesus was told as the story of his martyrdom; his appearance was understood as part of a larger, divine plan, in which Jesus does cosmic battle with the forces of evil and chaos; and his own people would come to be seen as his principal enemies, whose demise at the hands of Rome's legions was the result of their own recalcitrant rejection of the messiah. As natural and original as the canonical story appears to those who have inherited it as scripture, when viewed from across the Euphrates looking back, it seems more clearly to have been a choice. What we have marked as an *absence* from the Gospel of Thomas is to be marked just as clearly as a *presence* in the canonical gospels. To narrate the story of Jesus as a martyrdom, as part of an unfolding cosmic drama, in which “the Jews” are cast in the role of adversaries—these are not simply the natural ingredients of the Jesus story. They were chosen for their value in stating the meaning of contemporary events and the experience of Jesus-followers living as dissidents in the Roman Empire.

CHOICES

Far to the west of the Euphrates, and half a century before the Thomas gospel was becoming popular in Edessa, Paul sat down in another early Christian center to dictate a letter to a cluster of Jesus-communities he had helped to create in the Roman provincial capital of Corinth—the letter we now know as 1 Corinthians. Paul had likely fled Corinth little more than a year earlier after running into difficulties with Roman authorities there. It seems that a new teaching had now taken hold among the Corinthian Jesus-followers, a teaching that differed from Paul's own. But the new ideas were not terribly unlike the ideas we later encounter in the Gospel of Thomas.⁵² Apparently some of the Corinthians had come to understand baptism as initiation into the teachings of certain great teachers—Paul, Peter, Apollos, even Christ (1 Cor 1:13–17).⁵³ It appears from Paul's rhetoric that some were presenting themselves as purveyors of word (λόγος) and wisdom (σοφία), conveyed as the secret teaching of God (μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ⁵⁴) (2:1). These partisans must have understood themselves to be “spirituals” (πνευματικοί), though Paul disparagingly down-grades them to mere “psychic” (ψυχικός) or “fleshly” (σάρκινος) status (2:14, 3:1–4). From the rest of the letter we might guess that these “spirituals” engaged in asceticism (7:1–40). They also experimented liturgically with a gender-bending manner of dress (or possibly hairstyle⁵⁵) when engaging in prayer and prophecy (1 Cor 11:2–16), so that in these moments

⁵² The Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom background of these chapters is well-known: Jacques Dupont, *Gnosis: La connaissance religieuse dans les épîtres de Saint Paul* (Paris: Gabalda, 1949), pp. 172–180; Ulrich Wilckens, *Weisheit und Torheit: Eine exegetische-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu 1. Kor 1 und 2*, BHTh 26 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1959); Birger Pearson, *The PNEUMATIKOS-PSYCHIKOS Terminology in 1 Corinthians*, SBLDS 12 (Missoula: Scholars, 1973); Richard Horsley, “PNEUMATIKOS vs. PSYCHIKOS: Distinctions of Spiritual Status among the Corinthians,” *HTR* 69 (1976): 269–288. The tendency of Pearson and Horsley to use Jewish Wisdom categories (rather than “Gnosis”) to account for the Corinthian position is to be preferred. For the relationship of this theological perspective to the Gospel of Thomas see Helmut Koester, “Gnostic Writings,” 248–250; *idem*, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 55–62; Stephen J. Patterson, “Paul and the Jesus Tradition: It is Time for Another Look,” *HTR* 84 (1991): 36–40 (= chapter 10 in the present volume).

⁵³ For the likely role of baptism in the Gospel of Thomas, see Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Garments of Shame,” *HR* 5 (1965/66): 235–236; Wayne Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *HR* 13 (1974): 193–194; and Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 117–137.

⁵⁴ As the text reads in P⁴⁶.

⁵⁵ That the question in 11:2–16 is one of hair style rather than “veils” is shown by Jerome Murphy O'Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Cor 11:2–16,” *CBQ* 42 (1980): 482–500 and *idem*, “1 Corinthians 11:2–16 Once Again,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 265–274.

of sacred communion with the divine, the male and the female would be one and the same, and the male would not be male, and the female would not be female (cf. Thomas 22).⁵⁶ And some had arrived at the conclusion that “there is no resurrection of the dead” (15:12). This last statement is, of course, a source of great controversy not to be settled here.⁵⁷ But Thomas offers another theological context for understanding Paul’s charges of a realized eschatology in 1 Cor 4:8: “Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Apart from us you have begun to rule!” Recall that in the Gospel of Thomas the search for insight leads one ultimately to “rule over the All.”⁵⁸ And this can only mean that immortality—the “rest of the dead” (or possibly “resurrection of the dead”⁵⁹)—is not a future reality that lies beyond the grave, but a present state to be realized already now (Thomas 51).

It should not be surprising to find this kind of theologizing so early in the Jesus movement. After all, the philosophical tools that were available to the Edessene Christians at the end of the first century had been available for a long time. Philo of Alexandria, among Jews, had honed them to a fine edge. It is probably not just coincidence that they appear in Corinth simultaneously to the appearance there of the wandering disciple from Alexandria, Apollos. They were, of course, also available to Paul, who appears to have mastered at least enough of the basics of this theology to conjure up a pretty fair imitation of it in his own counter-argument to the partisans.⁶⁰ While his initial impulse is to eschew wisdom altogether (1:18–25), in 2:6–13 he famously reverses course and introduces his own true “secret and hidden wisdom of God” meant only for the mature (τέλειοι). It is in this context that

⁵⁶ That the background of the Corinthian practice was the myth of primordial androgyny well known from Hellenistic Judaism and attested in the Gospel of Thomas is suggested by Meeks (“The Image of the Androgyne,” 202) and argued in detail by Dennis R. MacDonald, *There is No Male and Female*, 92–111.

⁵⁷ Discussion: Christopher Tuckett, “The Corinthians Who Say ‘There is no resurrection of the dead.’ (1 Cor 15:12),” in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, BETL 125 (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), pp. 247–275.

⁵⁸ Koester makes note of the connection between Thomas 2 and Paul’s ironic statement in 1 Cor 4:8b (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, 60); generally, see Ernst Haenchen, *Die Botschaft des Thomasevangeliums*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 6 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1961), pp. 71–72.

⁵⁹ The Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften, whose text and translation of Thomas appears in the 15th edition of the *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, proposes that the text be emended at this point to read ἀνάστασις rather than ἀνάπαυσις, on the assumption that a scribe has assimilated the beginning of saying 51 to the end of saying 50; for discussion see Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 132.

⁶⁰ So Pearson, *PNEUMATIKOS-PSYCHIKOS Terminology*, 27–42; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 57–60.

Paul then quotes a saying from some as-yet unknown written source that bears a striking resemblance to logion 17 of the Gospel of Thomas:⁶¹

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him,” God has given to us through the Spirit.
(1 Cor 2:9–10a)

Compare:

Jesus said, “I shall give you what no eye has seen, and what no ear has heard, and what no hand has touched, and what has never occurred to the human mind.”
(Thomas 17)

This saying, built perhaps upon Isa 64:4, and attributed to the *Apocalypse of Elijah* by Origen,⁶² may also have been known to the author of Q, which includes a beatitude that appears closely related to it: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see and the ears that hear what you hear ...” (Luke 10:23//Matt 13:16).⁶³ Whatever the logion’s ultimate provenance,⁶⁴ what is of importance for our purpose here is the difference between Paul’s use of the sayings and Thomas’s. In Thomas it needs little explanation: Jesus the revealer speaks of the wisdom, hidden through the ages, which he now reveals. But this will not do for Paul. He must frame the logion in such a way as to move it exegetically in a very specific direction. Observe:

Yet among the mature we do communicate wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are being made superfluous. We communicate a secret and hidden wisdom of God declared before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had known, *they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory*. But as it is written, “What no eye has seen”
(1 Cor 2:1–9)

⁶¹ The similarity was pointed out by H. Koester in “One Jesus, Four Primitive Gospels,” 186; see also later: “Gnostic Writings,” 248–250; and *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 55–62; also Patterson, “Paul and the Jesus Tradition,” 36–38.

⁶² *Comm in Matt*, 5.29. For a critical evaluation of this attribution, however, see Josef Verheyden, “Origen on the Origin of 1 Cor 2,9,” in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, 491–511.

⁶³ Koester, “One Jesus, Four Primitive Gospels,” 186; *idem*, “Gnostic Writings,” 249–250; also James M. Robinson, “Kerygma and History in the New Testament,” in *idem* and Koester, *Trajectories*, 42–43.

⁶⁴ For a thoughtful critique of Koester, Robinson, and the author’s own position see Christopher Tuckett, “Paul and the Jesus Tradition: The Evidence of 1 Corinthians 2:9 and Gospel of Thomas 17,” in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, ed. Trevor Burke and J. Kieth Elliott, NovTSup 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 55–73. Tuckett raises important questions about a) whether the same saying is reflected in Q 10:23, and b) whether Paul and the Corinthian partisans knew the saying as a saying of Jesus. He does not, however, dispute the striking similarity between the theological position of the Corinthian partisans and that of the Gospel of Thomas, which must also play a role in any explanation of the relationship between 1 Cor 2:9 and Thomas 17.

In Paul's understanding, the reason he may speak of wisdom hidden from the world is the fact that the world revealed its ignorance by crucifying its messenger. Why is this? Why must Paul's understanding of Jesus first of all be defined by the crucifixion, and the themes of suffering and humiliation that go with this concern? It is because for Paul, the life of the true apostle is defined by the prospect of rejection, even death (1Cor 4:9). This is apparently how he experienced his own calling. The true apostle is a fool, not wise; weak, not strong; shamed, not honored; hungry, thirsty, poorly dressed, beaten up, and homeless (1Cor 4:10–11). This is what Paul believes it means to follow Jesus, the crucified messiah. If Paul will tolerate any wisdom theology, it is only when it is qualified as cruciform wisdom—that is, “the foolishness of the cross” (1Cor 1:18–25). He rejects the Corinthian wisdom theology because he fears it will denigrate the meaning of the crucifixion (1Cor 1:17).⁶⁵ For this reason the Gospel of Thomas and its entire approach to the Jesus tradition would have been entirely inadequate to Paul, as the Corinthian wisdom teaching was. It simply did not make sense of his own experience as a follower of the crucified messiah, a dissident in a hostile empire. The authorities who crucified the messiah were the same authorities under which he would live and suffer. When he chose to follow this messiah, he understood himself to be choosing the way of the cross.

In the history of Christianity as it grew up in the west, it would be difficult to overestimate the defining effect this choice would come to have in the shaping of Christian faith. Paul, with his theology of the cross, became the great apostle of the west. The wisdom theology that would come to flourish in the lands east of the Euphrates, he rejected. And so in the annals of Christian history it came to be known as the Corinthian heresy—unfit because it did not give due weight to the cross and the future-oriented apocalyptic eschatology favored by Paul. But this was clearly a choice. Paul's cross-theology seemed the only right choice for him because it interpreted his experience of suffering and humiliation, an experience he believed one could not avoid if one were truly to embrace the life of Jesus. But far to the east, east of the Euphrates, Christianity was taking hold in another world. In that world the Jesus-followers were not dissidents. They were not harassed by the authorities, imprisoned, or martyred; neither were their fellow Jews, among whom they settled. So their theological choices were

⁶⁵ Cf. Birger Pearson, “Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom Speculation in Paul,” in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. R.L. Wilken (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1975), pp. 57–58.

different. They came to see Jesus as a wisdom teacher, a purveyor of words to be contemplated, interpreted, and followed. Their Jesus was not the crucified messiah in whom Paul found his compass. Their Jesus was the “living Jesus,” whose insights would guide them back to the source of life, the “living Father.” The faith of Jesus, it turns out, did not have relevance only for those who found themselves in the role of the dissident disciple of the dissident, crucified messiah. East of the Euphrates, beyond the bounds of Roman imperial authority, the faith of Jesus became relevant in a different way. Here his words became the key to wise living, and signaled the hope that the world of buying, selling, the embrace of conventional ambition, even family life, was not the end of things. To know oneself as a “child of the Living Father” was to know that there is more to life than this. This represents a very different theological choice.

The discovery of the Gospel of Thomas has opened the way to understanding how the Jesus tradition could develop in very different, sometimes surprising ways. But it has also opened the way to a deeper understanding of the more familiar texts and traditions that have come down to us as the New Testament. Paul, John, and especially the synoptic gospels have so shaped the way we understand earliest Christianity that it has become almost impossible to imagine Christian origins in a different way. The Pauline kerygma of the death and resurrection was, it seemed, *the* early Christian kerygma. *Of course* the sayings of Jesus would find their most natural frame in the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. This is what we in the west have come to assume the religion of Jesus is all about. But against the alternative framework of the Gospel of Thomas, we can now see that this was not the only way the Jesus tradition could prove helpful to those who cherished and cultivated it in the years following Jesus’ death. We can now see that the life, death, and resurrection framework represents a choice, a response to the common experience of being a dissident follower of the dissident messiah in the Roman imperial east. The religion of the crucified messiah was born in the crucible of protest and resistance. But the theological potential of the Jesus tradition was greater than just this. There is in the sayings of Jesus also a wisdom tradition that offers insight about life lived deeply, without regard for the merely transient, that watches for God in the midst of life, the kingdom of God, “spread out upon the earth,” waiting for people to see it. The Jesus tradition was, and is, polyvalent.⁶⁶ Mark,

⁶⁶ The term, originally coined by Crossan to describe the parables of Jesus (see, e.g. *Cliffs of Fall* [New York: Seabury, 1980]), has been revived by Jacobus Liebenberg to describe the

Paul, John, Thomas—each represents a piece of the potential of this tradition to bring insight to a variety of human experiences and circumstance. This polyvalence invites the exploration of its variety and depth, a task too long delayed by a diminished vision of the acceptable range of its meaning.

Jesus tradition more broadly (*Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, BZNTW 102 [Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2001]).

CHAPTER TWO

JESUS MEETS PLATO: THE THEOLOGY OF THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS AND MIDDLE PLATONISM¹

THE PROBLEM OF THOMAS' THEOLOGY

After more than fifty years of study, the theology of the Gospel of Thomas remains elusive. Older attempts to label it "Gnostic" have foundered on the problem that Thomas shows no interest in the Gnostic demiurge and the idea of cosmic devolution,² and more recently on the question of whether

¹ This essay was originally published as "Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas," in *Das Thomasevangelium, Entstehung—Rezeption—Theologie*, BZNW 157, ed. J. Frey, et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 181–205.

² Among the many scholars who argued early in the discussion that the Gospel of Thomas is a Gnostic gospel one may count J. Leipoldt, "Ein neues Evangelium? Das koptische Thomasevangelium übersetzt und besprochen," *TLZ* 83 (1958): 481–496; *idem*, *Das Evangelium nach Thomas: Koptisch und Deutsch*, TU 101 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1967); R.M. Grant, "Notes on the Gospel of Thomas," *VC* 13 (1959): 170–180; *idem* and D.N. Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City: Doubleday/London: Collins, 1960); W.R. Schoedel, "Naasene Themes in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas," *VC* 14 (1960): 225–234; R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960); F.W. Beare, "The Gospel of Thomas: A Gnostic Manual," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 6 (1960): 102–112; R. Roques, "Gnosticisme et Christianisme: L'Évangile selon Thomas," *Irenikon* 33 (1960): 29–40; A.F. Walls, "The References to the Apostles in the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS* 7 (1960/61): 266–270; E. Haenchen, *Die Botschaft des Thomasevangeliums*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 6 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1961); R. Kasser, *L'Évangile selon Thomas: Présentation et commentaire théologique*, Bibliothèque Théologique (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1961); B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins/New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961); J.-B. Bauer, "Zum koptischen Thomasevangelium," *BZ* 6 (1962): 283–288; W. Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomasevangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen, Zugleich ein Beitrag zur gnostischen Synoptikerdeutung*, BZNW 29 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964); P. Vielhauer, "ANAPAUSIS: Zum gnostischen Hintergrund des Thomasevangeliums," in *Aphorreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen zu seinem siebenzigsten Geburtstag*, BZNW 30, ed. W. Eltester and F.H. Kettler (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), pp. 281–299; J.-E. Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1975); J.-M. Sevrin, "L'Évangile selon Thomas: Paroles de Jesus et révélation gnostique," *RTL* 8 (1977): 265–292; G. MacRae, "Nag Hammadi and the New Testament," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), p. 152; A. Lindemann, "Zur Gleichnisinterpretation im Thomasevangelium," *ZNW* 71 (1980): 214–243; and M. Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium. Einleitung, Kommentar, und Systematik*, NTAbh 22 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991). Others were less sanguine

Gnosticism itself is a viable construct.³ And many of the ideas that seemed Gnostic to that earlier group of scholars could be found in literature not normally considered “Gnostic”—in Philo, for example.⁴ But if the genre, ΛΟΓΟΙ ΣΟΦΩΝ, or “sayings of the wise,” seems assuredly to place it within the Jewish sapiential tradition,⁵ its more speculative passages turned out to be quite different strategically from the speculative turn taken by Philo, its most illustrious example. For Thomas shares none of Philo’s scribal interest in the Jewish scriptural tradition and his complex allegorical method.⁶ Hermeticism, too, seemed in some ways close,⁷ and yet it revolves around pagan mythological schemes that are also quite foreign to the Gospel of Thomas. Mysticism is certainly in the mix,⁸ as is asceticism of a sort.⁹ But these practices were

about this designation: esp. G. Quispel, “The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament,” *VC* 11 (1957): 189–207; K. Grobel, “How Gnostic is the Gospel of Thomas?” *NTS* 8 (1961/62): 367–373; A.J.B. Higgins, “Non-Gnostic Sayings in the Gospel of Thomas,” *NovT* 4 (1960): 292–306; W.H.C. Frend, “The Gospel of Thomas: Is Rehabilitation Possible,” *JTS* 18 (1967): 13–26; Y.O. Kim, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Historical Jesus,” *Northeast Asia Journal of Theology* 2 (1969): 17–30; S. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983), pp. 18–35; and most recently T. Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*, *NHMS* 47 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 101–135.

³ M. Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); also K. King, *What is Gnosticism* (Cambridge/London: Belknap, 2003). For a more positive, but still more limiting view of the category, see B. Layton, “Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism,” in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne Meeks*, ed. L.M. White and O.L. Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 334–350.

⁴ See esp. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas*.

⁵ So, J.M. Robinson, “*LOGOI SOPHON*: Zur Gattung der Spruchquelle,” in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. E. Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1964), pp. 77–96; revised ET: “*LOGOI SOPHON*: On the Gattung of Q,” in Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 71–113.

⁶ On the peculiar absence of scribality in Thomas see V. Robbins, “Rhetorical Composition and Sources in the Gospel of Thomas,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1977 Seminar Papers* 36, ed. David Lull (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), pp. 86–114.

⁷ Many parallels are indicated by Quispel, “The Gospel of Thomas Revisited,” in *Colloque internationale sur les textes de Nag Hammadi* (Québec, 22–25 août 1978), Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, section “Études,” ed. B. Barc (Québec: Laval University Press/Louvain: Peeters, 1981), esp. pp. 259–266. Quispel argues here that one of Thomas’s sources was a “Hermetic gnomology.”

⁸ Most recently see A. DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas*, Supp to *VC* 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁹ Among those who have seen the gospel as explicitly or implicitly endorsing sexual asceticism, or encratism, see, among others, O. Cullmann, “Das Thomasevangelium und die Frage nach dem Alter der in ihm enthaltenen Tradition,” *TLZ* 85 (1960): 327; W.H.C. Frend, “The Gospel of Thomas: Is Rehabilitation Possible?” *JTS* n.s. 18 (1967): 13–26; C. Richardson, “The Gospel of Thomas: Gnostic or Encratite?” in *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in*

ancillary to any number of theological orientations and ancient schools of thought. And Thomas is certainly “Jewish Christian,”¹⁰ if one expands that concept to include sentiments such as those expressed in logion 53. But if so, one will have to count virtually all of the New Testament in this category as well—as perhaps one should. In any event, this label, like the others, reveals only a partial truth about this gospel.

This history of partial success, and failure, tells us something that is all too obvious: our Thomas gospel is a very complex text. This we should expect. The text we have is, after all, the product of a long and variegated history. Its basic form, the list, or collection, makes it seem simple. But this is deceptive. There are multiple layers here, growth, development, redaction, much of which will perhaps remain forever obscure to modern scholarship.¹¹

Honour of the Very Reverend Georges Vasilievich Florovsky ... on the occasion of his Eightieth Birthday, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 195, ed. D. Nieman and M. Schatkin (Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), pp. 65–76; Jean-Daniel Kaestli, “L’Évangile de Thomas: Son importance pour l’étude des paroles de Jésus et du gnosticisme chrétien,” *ETR* 54 (1979): 394; M. Meyer, “Making Mary Male: The Categories of Male and Female in the Gospel of Thomas,” *NTS* 31 (1985): 554–556; A. DeConick and J. Fossum, “Stripped Before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas,” *VC* 45 (1991): 123–150; and A. DeConick, “Fasting from the World: Encratite Soteriology in the Gospel of Thomas,” in *The Notion of “Religion” in Comparative research: Selected Proceedings from the XVth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Rome, 3rd–8th September 1990*, Storia della Religioni 8, ed. U. Bianchi (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1994), pp. 425–440. For a contrary view, however, see J. Jacobsen Buckley, “An Interpretation of Logion 114 in the *Gospel of Thomas*,” *NovT* 27 (1985): 270; and Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 22. For a thorough discussion of the issues see R. Valantasis, “Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical?” *J ECS* 7 (1999): 56–81.

¹⁰ G. Quispel, “Thomas and the New Testament,” *VC* 11 (1957): 189–207. Quispel proposed the Gospel of the Hebrews as the source for Thomas’ synoptic-like sayings, citing scant evidence. While few have embraced his hypothesis about Thomas and the Gospel of the Hebrews, most assume some affinity with Jewish Christianity, especially as it grew up in Edessa.

¹¹ Henry Chadwick observed this “snow-balling effect” in connection with another collection, the Sentences of Sextus (*The Sentences of Sextus: A Contribution to the History of Christian Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959]), which R. McL. Wilson applied to the Gospel of Thomas (“Thomas and the Growth of the Gospels,” *HTR* 53 [1960]: 231; also *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* [London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960], pp. 9, 145); see also H.-Ch. Puech, “The Gospel of Thomas,” in Hennecke/Schneemelcher, *NTA* I:305; W. Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 10; S.J. Patterson, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A Forschungsbericht and Critique,” *Forum* 8 (1992): 65; *idem*, “Understanding the Gospel of Thomas Today,” in S.J. Patterson, J.M. Robinson, and H.-G. Bethge, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998), pp. 35–36; and W. Kelber, “Die Anfangsprozesse der Verschriftlichung im Frühchristentum,” *ANRW* II. 26.1 (1992): 26: “Listen haben weder Anfang noch Ende,” K.V. Neller, “Diversity in the Gospel of Thomas: Clues for a New Direction?” *Sec Cen* 7 (1989/90): 1–17; and more recently see A. DeConick, “The Original Gospel of Thomas,” *VC* 56 (2002): 167–199.

Within this complexity, however, all is not without precedent or pattern. The partial success was, after all, partial *success*. There are connections to the esoteric *varia* represented by the old category “*Gnosis*.” There are indeed affinities with Philo and the Hermetic writings, especially *Poimandres*. And the textual connections to Tatian’s *Diatessaron* are matched by a certain theological relationship to Tatian’s (Jewish Christian) tract, the *Oration to the Greeks*. The question, then, is not whether Thomas is “Gnostic” or sapiential or Hermetic or Jewish Christian. The question is this: What is the theological world that Thomas shares with all of these traditions, texts, and figures?

In fact the Gospel of Thomas is not slow to tell us the answer to this question. The gospel in its present shape begins with three sayings with three themes. They are very instructive. After the prologue (which should include logion 1) Thomas opens with the admonition to seek and find (Thomas 2). That, of course, is a dominant theme of Jewish Wisdom theology, which forms a kind of base-line orientation for the Thomas tradition. The next saying clarifies: the object of one’s seeking ought to be the Empire of God—an empire that is not located in another world, or simply present in this world, but “inside you and outside you” (Thom 3:1–3). That is the theology of the Jesus movement, of which Thomas Christianity was clearly a part. But then Thomas 3 continues with a third saying offering further instruction in this quest: “When you come to know yourselves,” it says, “you will be known, and you will realize that you are children of the living Father” (Thom 3:4). Know thyself—the age-old maxim. That, in the late Hellenistic era, is Plato.

In what follows I will argue that what holds all of these spheres of thought together—*Gnosis* (so-called), Philo, Hermeticism, Tatian—is their common interest in Plato. They are all affected by that revival of interest in Plato that called attention once again to the more speculative passages in *The Republic*, *Alcibiades*, *The Sophist* and others, but especially, the *Timaeus*. When certain sayings in the Gospel of Thomas sound like Philo or *Poimandres* or Valentinus or Tatian, it is because they all wanted to sound like Plato. They all spoke a ‘dialect’—so to speak—of Middle Platonism. This is not to say unequivocally that Thomas is a Middle Platonic gospel. It is first a wisdom gospel and an early Christian gospel. But what I hope to show is that Thomas’ distinctive voice, which I have at times called “Gnostic” or “gnosticizing” and at other times, more vaguely, “esoteric,” can be characterized more precisely as Platonic. Thomas dons the garb of Middle Platonism in the loose-fitting way that allowed so many in the late Hellenistic era to make the Platonic tradi-

tion their own, and which helped to make Platonic language and concepts the broadly ecumenical and eclectic intellectual force it became. In Thomas this includes the general admonition to self-understanding, the presence of a divine spirit dwelling within, the identity of this inner self with God—understood as the image of God or the divine light of God, the spiritual goal of “rest” to be achieved already in the midst of frenetic life, and the eventual return of the spirit to its heavenly origin. The presence of these ideas in the Gospel of Thomas clearly locate it in the Middle Platonic conversation, which found many diverse participants in the first two centuries of the common era.

KNOW THYSELF

The admonition to “know yourself” (γνῶθι σαυτὸν)—the Delphic maxim—represents a long and rich tradition in Greek philosophy, pre-dating Plato considerably. Hans-Dieter Betz divides this tradition into two main streams.¹² The older of the two understands the maxim primarily to imply limitation: Know yourself, that you are (merely) human. But Plato considered the maxim in a new light, informed by the Socratic insight that the true self, the soul, was like unto God. True self-knowledge could thus come only by contemplating the soul within. But to arrive at such knowledge was at the same time to come to know the divine.¹³ It was this interpretation of the maxim that took root among the later Stoics and Middle Platonists, such as Posidonius, and the many who were influenced by him, including Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus.¹⁴ For them, “Know yourself” was not about limitation, but self-transcendence. Know yourself, your *true* self, which is part of the divine. Cicero offers an instructive example:

For he who knows himself will realize, in the first place, that he has a divine element within him, and will think of his own inner nature as a kind of consecrated image of God; and so he will always act and think in a way worthy of so great a gift of the gods, and, when he has examined and thoroughly tested himself, he will understand how nobly equipped by Nature he entered life, and what manifold means he possesses for the attainment and acquisition of wisdom.¹⁵

¹² “The Delphic Maxim ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ in Hermetic Interpretation,” *HTR* 63 (1970): 465–484, esp. 470–477.

¹³ Betz, “The Delphic Maxim,” 471.

¹⁴ For this analysis and the references to follow, see Betz, “The Delphic Maxim,” 471–477.

¹⁵ *Leg* 1.22.59.

Seneca offers a second example, also instructive. If one wishes to know God, he says, one need not go to a temple to beg access to the deity, “as if in this way our prayers were more likely to be heard.”

God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. This is what I mean, Lucilius: a holy spirit indwells within us, one who marks our good and bad deeds, and is our guardian. As we treat this spirit, so are we treated by it. Indeed, no one can be good without the help of God.¹⁶

For Seneca, this holy spirit dwelling within is the soul (*animus*); it connects a person to God because it comes originally from God. What is a soul, he says, but “a god dwelling as a guest in a human body,”¹⁷ “an image in the likeness of God.”¹⁸ When one becomes aware of this, the soul begins to strive toward its origins in the heavenly realms and is able easily to ascend these heights—“if vices do not hold it down.”¹⁹

Philo, the leading Jewish voice in the Platonic revival, also embraced this understanding of the ancient maxim.²⁰ He writes:

Know thyself, and the parts of which thou dost consist, what each is, and for what it was made, and how it is meant to work, and who it is that, all invisible, invisibly sets the puppets in motion and pulls their strings, whether it be the Mind that is in thee or the Mind of the Universe.²¹

Here Philo expounds his general idea that the Mind—νοῦς, in Platonic terms, the highest element of the soul—stands sovereign over all aspects of sensory, corporeal existence. To know yourself is to know this basic fact. He expresses this thought again in the *Migration of Abraham*, where Gen 12:1–3 is taken as an allegory for the Mind, the real self, taking leave of corporeal existence. “Earth,” he says, represents the body, and “kindred” the perceptions of the senses, and “thy father’s house” refers to speech.²² One is to take leave of such things, or to rise above them and to rule over them as a king rules his subjects:

Thou art a king, school thyself once and for all to rule, not to be ruled; evermore be coming to *know thyself*, as Moses teaches thee in many places, saying ‘Give heed to thyself.’²³ (emphasis added)

¹⁶ *Ep* 41.1–2.

¹⁷ *Ep* 31.11.

¹⁸ *Ep* 31.11.

¹⁹ *Ep* 92.30.

²⁰ Betz, “The Delphic Maxim,” 477–481; DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, 120–122.

²¹ *De fug* 46.

²² *Mig Abr* 7.

²³ *Mig Abr* 8 (LCL: Colson and Whitaker, trans.).

Only in this way, Philo says, will the Mind begin “to know itself and to hold converse with the things of Mind.”²⁴ Philo here uses that most characteristically Platonic term for the divine inner self, Mind (νοῦς). On other occasions he may use other terms,²⁵ like διάνοια (“thought”),²⁶ λόγος (“reason”),²⁷ or πνεῦμα (“spirit”).²⁸ In any event, he is speaking of the divine element planted by God by which one might come to know God by knowing the true, inner self. With discipline, he says, it is possible for the Mind to withdraw into itself, abandoning the world of the body and of sense perception for the “noetic” world, the world of the universal Mind, and thus “arrive at the contemplation of Him that is.”²⁹ In this, the body is of little use, a corpse,³⁰ and the soul (ψυχή), weighed down by this “leathern hulk,”³¹ a “corpse-bearer.”³²

This, generally, is the sea of thought in which those who used the Thomas gospel were trying to swim: the search for the true self; the discovery of one’s own identity with the divine, the deprecation of the world and the body as a distraction from this goal, the use of asceticism and mysticism to overcome corporeal existence—these ideas and practices are all at home in Middle Platonism. The efforts of our Thomas group were spare, restricted perhaps by the aphoristic and esoteric form in which they chose to develop their tradition. They also opted for modes of expression more at home in the Jesus movement, rather than the technical terms of the Middle Platonists. They do not speak of “mind,” but of “spirit.”³³ They speak of ruling,³⁴ but also of discovering the Empire of God within.³⁵ They do not speak of becoming like God, but of becoming like Jesus.³⁶ Like him, they are to realize that they are sons of the living Father.³⁷ But the Platonic revival left its mark on Thomas Christianity. As those who cultivated this tradition began to speculate on the

²⁴ *Mig Abr* 13.

²⁵ Philo’s use of terms is not always consistent, and therefore is confusing; see H. Wolfson, *Philo* (Harvard University Press, 1948), vol. I, p. 362.

²⁶ *Opif* 135.

²⁷ *Deter* 83.

²⁸ *Deter* 83; *Spec Leg* 1.171.

²⁹ *Mig Abr* 195.

³⁰ *Leg All* 3. 69, 72; *Quaest Gen* 4. 77.

³¹ *Leg All* 3. 69.

³² *Leg All* 3. 74; *Quaest Gen* 1.93.

³³ *Thom* 29:1–2; also 14:3, 53:3, and 114:2.

³⁴ *Thom* 2:4.

³⁵ *Thom* 3:3.

³⁶ *Thom* 108.

³⁷ *Thom* 3:4; cf. 50:3.

real truth about human nature and destiny, it was to Plato's voice, diffused and developed through the efforts of the Middle Platonists, that they gave ear. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus meets Plato.

BODY, SOUL, AND SPIRIT

When the Middle Platonists re-opened the discussion of speculative physics, human nature was high on their list of questions. They turned to Plato, especially the *Timaeus*, and discovered that the Peripatetic notion of a bi-partite *anthropos*, consisting of body and soul, was not quite the correct view. Consider Plutarch on this matter:

Most people rightly hold man to be composite but wrongly hold him to be composed of only two parts. The reason is that they suppose mind to be somehow part of soul, thus erring no less than those who suppose soul to be part of body, for in the same degree as soul is superior to body so is mind better and more divine than soul.³⁸

Rightly or wrongly, Plutarch's notion of the tripartite nature of human being apparently derives from his reading of the Platonic tradition. Just as (according to the *Timaeus*) the cosmos is fashioned as a body endowed with both mind and soul, mind residing in soul and soul within body,³⁹ so also the human being is said to have both a soul and a mind⁴⁰—or in the *Timaeus* itself, a mortal soul and an immortal soul.⁴¹ Philo was convinced of this as well. The soul, he says, comprises both a rational and an irrational part.⁴² For the former he, like Plutarch, sometimes uses the Platonic term “νοῦς,”⁴³ but as we have noted, other terms—such as πνεῦμα⁴⁴—may also be used. That he thought of the immortal, rational part of the soul as “spirit”⁴⁵ perhaps suggested the exegetical explanation for this divine element he ventures in connection with Gen 2:7. When God breathes the breath of life (LXX: πνοήν ζωής) into the newly formed human it is in fact this divine spirit (πνεῦμα

³⁸ *Mor (de facie)* 943A (LCL: Cherniss and Helmbold trans.).

³⁹ *Tim* 30A–B.

⁴⁰ *Phaedr* 247C–248B.

⁴¹ *Tim* 69Cff.

⁴² *Leg All* 2.2.

⁴³ E.g., *Immut* 10.45.

⁴⁴ *Deter* 83; *Spec Leg* 1.171; also λόγος or διάνοια (see above).

⁴⁵ The idea can be found in others influenced by Middle Platonism; see, e.g., Seneca, *Ep* 41.1 (“a holy spirit dwells within us”).

θείον) that he imparts.⁴⁶ It is this divine element within that connects one to God and makes possible knowledge of God.⁴⁷

Among the Jewish Christians in Edessa one finds a very similar idea in the work of Tatian, whose Platonic inclinations are also well known.⁴⁸ Tatian believed that a human being consists of a body and a soul, and that both derive from the creation, and thus are mortal. But “when one becomes obedient to Wisdom,” he says, the Spirit of God draws near and makes the soul immortal, “giving it wings with which to fly heavenward to God.”⁴⁹ It is not the soul that renders one immortal, but this third element, the Spirit of God, that makes this possible.

In contrast to these various philosophically oriented expositions, Thomas’ sayings about the human self are not so elaborate. They are, rather, brief and cryptic—aphoristic, but they reflect this basic Middle-Platonic anthropology, especially as developed by Philo and others based on Gen 2:7, as read through a Platonic lens. Two sayings—doublets—are of particular interest in this regard:

¹Jesus said: “Wretched is the body (σῶμα) that depends on a body (σῶμα).

²And wretched is the soul (ψυχή) that depends on these two.” (Thom 87)

¹Jesus says: “Woe to the flesh (σὰρξ) that depends on the soul (ψυχή). ²Woe to the soul (ψυχή) that depends on the flesh (σὰρξ).” (Thom 112)

The second of these sayings is the more straightforward of the two. Here, distilled to aphoristic brevity, is the basic Platonic notion that a person consists of flesh (σάρξ) and soul (ψυχή). Note, however, that as in Philo, Plutarch, Tatian, or others influenced by Middle Platonism, here also the soul is not necessarily seen as superior to the body. The saying does not yet speak of the “spirit” (πνεῦμα) or “mind” (νοῦς)—that purely divine element capable of elevating the soul above its worldly attachments. Its focus, rather, is on the difficult relationship that exists between the body and the soul. The detriments of the body to the soul are well known. But Plutarch, for example, also discusses problems that arise when the soul, occupied with unhealthy passions, like greed or jealousy, can become a detriment to the

⁴⁶ *Opif* 135.

⁴⁷ *Deter* 83, 86–90; *Leg All* 1.35, 37–38.

⁴⁸ Drijvers, “Early Syriac Christianity,” *VC* 50 (1996): 173; in general see also E. Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century: The Case of Tatian* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 104–108.

⁴⁹ Tatian, *Or Graec* chs. 13–14 (Whittaker trans., *Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments* [Oxford: Clarendon 1982]). The idea of the winged soul recalls Plato’s famous image in *Phaedr* 243E–257B.

body.⁵⁰ In this he was but a student of Plato, whose Timaeus discusses at some length the problems that arise when the body and the soul are mismatched and out of proportion. A body that is too large and overpowering will cause the soul to become obtuse and dull-witted, ignorant; and the soul that is too great for the body it inhabits can cause it to fill with disease or to succumb to nervous jitters.⁵¹ Body and soul can commingle for good, but usually it is for ill. Logion 112 describes this unholy mix of body and soul that is the essence of mortal existence.

Thom 87 deals with the same concepts, but in a rather more opaque way. It speaks cryptically of the “body that depends on a body”—referring, perhaps, to sexuality,⁵² the eating of meat,⁵³ or (most likely) simply involvement in the affairs of the world. In the Gospel of Thomas, the world itself is likened to a dead body.⁵⁴ The “body that depends on the body” is a body consumed by worldly concerns. In this saying, then, it is not the body *per se* that brings trouble to the soul; it is the body given to the base affairs of the world that is the problem. Woe to the soul that is joined to such a body. One thinks here Tatian’s notion that the mortal soul encased in the body may enjoy one of two fates. If it is attuned to Wisdom, it may be united with the Spirit of God and so become immortal; but if not so attuned, it turns from God to live in darkness, and so remains mortal and perishes with the body.⁵⁵

The sayings of the Gospel of Thomas do not use the Platonic term “mind” (νοῦς), but in a third saying that is structurally similar to Thom 87 and 112 the idea of the “spirit,” a Middle Platonic synonym for νοῦς,⁵⁶ is introduced. When “*spirit*” and “*flesh*” (or “*body*”) are juxtaposed, the relationship is quite different from what we have just seen:

‘Jesus says: “If the flesh (σὰρξ) came into being because of the spirit (πνεῦμα), it is a marvel. ²But if the spirit (πνεῦμα) (came into being) because of the body (σῶμα), it is a marvel of marvels.” ³Yet I marvel at how this great wealth has come to dwell in this poverty. (Thom 29)

⁵⁰ Plutarch, *Mor* (*Tu san*) 135E–F; *Mor* (*Quaest conv*) 681D–F; discussion: R. Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2003), pp. 58–59.

⁵¹ *Tim* 87C–88C.

⁵² Haenchen, *Die Botschaft*, 54–55; Ménard, *L’Évangile selon Thomas*, 188–189.

⁵³ Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 74–77.

⁵⁴ Elsewhere Thomas compares the world to a dead body (Thomas 56 and 80). So Uro, *Thomas*, 60–62, following P. Sellew, “Death, the Body, and the World in the Gospel of Thomas,” in *Studia Patristica XXXI: Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1995*, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), p. 530.

⁵⁵ *Or Graec* 13.

⁵⁶ Philo, *Deter* 83; *Spec Leg* 1.171; *Opif* 135; Seneca, *Ep* 41.1–2.

Clearly “spirit” (πνεῦμα) here is not the same as “soul” (ψυχή) in Thomas 87 and 112. When the spirit comes to dwell in the body of flesh⁵⁷ it is as a resident alien that does not truly belong there; it is “great wealth” dwelling in abject “poverty.” It is superior to the body, so much so that the aphorist can scarcely comprehend how spirit and body have come into association at all. It cannot be that flesh somehow exists for the sake of the spirit (29:1); and yet even more absurd is the notion that spirit somehow exists for the sake of the body (29:2). They simply do not belong together.⁵⁸

Behind this saying there surely lies an exegetical tradition similar to Philo’s reading of Genesis 2:7.⁵⁹ The spirit that does not belong in the body of flesh is the Divine spirit, breathed in by God in the moment of creation. This is the third element in the Jewish and Christian adaptation of the Platonic tripartite anthropology. As in Philo’s ruminations on Genesis 2:7,⁶⁰ this saying poses a question that is more than obvious: If the body is corporeal, transient, mortal, and ultimately to be shed at death, why then should God have bothered to breathe the Divine spirit into this temporary shell? Philo offers two answers: 1) that God loves to give, and 2) that possession of the divine breath would make the mortal one aware of virtue, and thus more responsible to God.⁶¹ Logion 29 simply leaves the reader/hearer with this conundrum to be pondered. It is a “wonder of wonders.”

THE IMAGE OF GOD

We have seen that in speaking of the true self, Cicero could refer to it as a kind of “image of God” resident within a person.⁶² Similarly, Seneca speaks of the *animus* as “an image in the likeness of God.”⁶³ This may be seen as a development of the very wide-spread and ancient notion that saw νοῦς and

⁵⁷ Body (σῶμα) and flesh (σὰρξ) should be considered synonymns here: see Uro, *Thomas*, 62–63.

⁵⁸ *Contra Davies, Gospel of Thomas*, 73.

⁵⁹ Cf. Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*, 122; also Uro, *Thomas*, 63–64. Uro’s suggestion that Thom 29:1 would then refer to the account in Gen 1:26, which Philo regarded as the creation of the first, more perfect human, created in the image of God (see, e.g. *Opif* 60), is less likely, since Philo did not think this first man was corporeal at all, but purely “mind” (νοῦς).

⁶⁰ *Leg All* 1.33.

⁶¹ *Leg All* 1.34–35.

⁶² *Leg* 1.22.59.

⁶³ *Ep* 31.11.

θεός as intimately bound in both origin and essence.⁶⁴ This peculiar language of the Middle Platonists, of course, found a ready point of attachment for someone like Philo, as he held Genesis in one hand and Plato in the other. Commenting on Gen 1:26–27 he writes:

After all the rest, as I have said, Moses tells us that a man (ἄνθρωπος) was created after the image (εἰκὼν) of God and after his likeness. Right well does he say this, for nothing earth-born is more like God than man. But let no one represent the likeness as one to a bodily form; for neither is God in human form, nor is the human body God-like. No, it is in respect of the Mind (νοῦς), the sovereign element of the soul (ψυχὴ), that the word “image” is used; for after the pattern of the single Mind, even the Mind of the universe as an archetype, the mind of each of those who successively came into being was molded.⁶⁵

In this passage Philo endeavors in a fashion typical for him to show that the Jewish scriptures are not the work of a primitive mind, presenting the Divine in crudely anthropomorphizing terms, but the work of a true philosopher. Plato’s psychology, as understood by the Middle Platonists, gave him the conceptual framework to do this: it is the Mind only, not the body, that bears the image and likeness of God. As for the “bodily form” of the human being, Philo will argue later in the same tractate that Moses tells of its creation in Gen 2:7, which speaks of the human one formed of clay. This human form is very different from the being created in Gen 1:26–27, he says:

For man as formed now (in Gen 2:7) is perceptible to the external senses, partaking of qualities, consisting of body and soul, man or woman, by nature mortal. But man, made according to the image of God (in Gen 1:26–27) was an idea, or a genus, or a seal, perceptible only by the intellect (νοῦς), incorporeal, neither male nor female, imperishable by nature.⁶⁶

He brings the two accounts together by noting that God “breathes into” this second created one the “divine breath,” so that the resulting human being is both mortal and immortal:

For when he uses the expression, “he breathed into,” etc., he means nothing else than the divine spirit proceeding from that happy and blessed nature, sent to take up its habitation here on earth, for the advantage of our race, in order that, even if man is mortal according to that portion of him which is visible, he may at all events be immortal according to that portion which is invisible; and for this reason, one may properly say that man is on the

⁶⁴ Discussion: J. Behm, s.v. νοέω, νοῦς, ktl., *TDNT* IV: 954–955.

⁶⁵ *Opif* 69.

⁶⁶ *Opif* 134.

boundaries of a better and an immortal nature, partaking of each as far as it is necessary for him; and that he was born at the same time, both mortal and the immortal. Mortal as to his body, but immortal as to his intellect (νοῦς).⁶⁷

Thus Philo weaves together the speculative anthropology of the Greeks and the mythic narratives of Moses and finds them to be fully coherent. God first created the invisible—the human one in the likeness of God, androgynous, pure Mind (νοῦς). Then he created the visible aspect—the clay-formed one, consisting of body and soul, differentiated as to male and female. Finally, the immortal mind was made to dwell in the mortal human by God's act of in-breathing. In this way the human being is both mortal and immortal: mortal with respect to the body, immortal with respect to the mind, which bears the image and likeness of God.

This sort of reflection on Gen 1:26–27 was not confined to Philo's Jewish circle of exegetes in Alexandria but was widespread in the Jewish world, taking on many forms.⁶⁸ We should note especially that Tatian hints at its presence among Jewish Christians in Edessa when he writes:

We have knowledge of two different kinds of spirits, one of which is called soul (ψυχή), but the other is greater than the soul; it is the image (εἰκὼν) and likeness of God. The first humans (ἄνθρωποι) were endowed with both, so that they might be part of the material world, and at the same time above it.⁶⁹

(*Or Graec* 12:1)

In Tatian's anthropology it is the second, which he will elsewhere call the "image of immortality" (εἰκόνα τῆς ἀθανασίας),⁷⁰ that is planted in the human one by the divine Logos and thus becomes the point of connection between the human and divine realities.

In the Syrian Hymn of the Pearl this idea finds another sort of mythic expression. In this most famous allegory for the descent of the soul into corporeal existence, the prince who leaves home must leave behind his brilliant "glittering robe," which, as we shall learn, bears embroidered upon

⁶⁷ *Opif* 135.

⁶⁸ See J. Jervell, *Imago Dei*, FRLANT 76 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), also Hans-Martin Schenke, *Der Gott "Mensch" in der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 120–143; J. Fossum, "Gen 1:26 and 2:7 in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Gnosticism," *JSJ* 16 (1985): 202–239; E. Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis 1 in Gospel of Thomas and John," *JBL* 118 (1999): 479. That Philo's exegetical work was part of a larger Alexandrian tradition, see Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation*, CBQMS 14 (Washington, D.C.: CBA, 1983), 32–33; 172–174.

⁶⁹ *Or Graec* 12.1.

⁷⁰ *Or Graec* 7:1.

it the “image (εἰκών) of the King of Kings.” The robe left behind represents the image of God, once possessed by the son, but now given up.⁷¹ But as he takes leave of the heavenly realm he receives this promise from his parents:

If you go down into Egypt,
And bring the one pearl,
Which is in the midst of the sea
Around the loud-breathing serpent,
You shall put on your glittering robe
And your toga, with which you are contented,
And with your brother who is next to us in authority,
You shall be heir to our kingdom.⁷²

When later he returns from his journey successful in his task, this promise is fulfilled. As the young prince draws near to his homeland the hymn reaches its climax as the robe is sent to him to be put on once again. In an encomium of praise, he says of this once familiar, but now forgotten robe: “the garment seemed to me to become like a mirror of myself.”

I saw it all in all,
And I too received all in it,
For we were two in distinction,
And yet again one in likeness

And the image (εἰκών) of the king of kings was embroidered and depicted in full all over it.⁷³

In this particular mythic form, the divine image of God—the robe—is not actually resident in one’s mortal body, but exists somewhere else, in heaven, waiting for one to return home to receive it back. It is recognizable as one’s own image because it is “one in likeness” with the person who has left it behind, and yet it also bears the image of God.

This understanding of the image of God, as something left behind in heaven to be reclaimed, appears to have been characteristic of Syrian Christianity,⁷⁴ but its origins are unclear. It may be that the Platonic idea that

⁷¹ Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne,” *HR* 13 (1974): 187.

⁷² Acts Thom 108:12–15.

⁷³ Acts Thom 112:77–80, 86.

⁷⁴ In addition to the *Acts of Thomas*, *Odes of Solomon*, and Tatian’s *Oratio ad Graecus*, a similar idea occurs in the Syrian Gospel of Philip (58,10–14), where supplicants ask God to join them with their “angels,” which are also called their “images” (or perhaps to unite them with their angels in order to restore them as images). This seems to restore them to androgynous perfection (see 65, 8–11 and 24–26; discussion: DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, 149). See also Book of Thomas 138,39–139,12, where the idea may occur, but without the characteristic biblical terminology.

everyone has a *daimon*, a kind of guardian angel who resembles its earthly charge,⁷⁵ combined with Jewish speculation about Adam's fall from paradise, in which the image of God is taken from him, could account for it.⁷⁶ Already by the middle of the first century, Paul seems to have been familiar with some form of this concept of the heavenly image waiting to be received back at a future time. Thus in 1 Corinthians 15 he speaks of shedding the earthly image of the first Adam and receiving the heavenly image of the second Adam, Christ, at the resurrection of the dead.⁷⁷ In the Pauline tradition perhaps the best illustration of the motif is to be found in Colossians,⁷⁸ where one is enjoined to a higher ethical standard in view of the fact that "you have put off the old person" and "put on the new, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of the one who created it" (3:10–11).⁷⁹

This generally is the world in which those various sayings in the Gospel of Thomas that speak of the "image" (εἰκών) are to be understood.⁸⁰ Logion 84, for example, reads:

Jesus says: "When you see your likenesses you are full of joy.² But when you see your *images* (εἰκών) which came into existence before you—they neither die nor become manifest—how much will you bear?" (Thom 84:1–2)

The saying begins with a mundane observation: how nice it is to see one's own likeness, say in a mirror, a pool, or a painting. But then it speaks more mysteriously, of "images that came into being before you." Recall for a moment Philo's reading of the first creation account in Gen 1:26–27. It is here that God creates the part of the human being that bears God's image *before*, in the second account (Gen 2:7), God creates the mortal

⁷⁵ *Phaedr* 107; later see, e.g., Epictetus, *Disc* 14. 12; and Seneca, *Ep* 41. 2. Philo also ruminates on Plato's concept of the *daimon* and connects it with the Jewish notion of angels, but not with this notion of εἰκών (*Gig* 6; *Somn* 1.141; discussion: Wolfson, *Philo*, I: 367–368).

⁷⁶ So G. Quispel, "Das Ewige Ebenbild des Menschen. Zur Begegnung mit dem selbst in der Gnosis," in *idem*, *Gnostic Studies*, 2 vols., Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 34 (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1974/75), vol. I, pp. 140–157; *idem*, "Genius and Spirit," in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honor of Pahor Labib*, NHS 6, ed. M. Krause (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 155–169.

⁷⁷ 1 Cor 15:42–50, esp. 49.

⁷⁸ Discussion: R. Scroggs, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 70; also Davies, "The Christology and Protology of the Gospel of Thomas," *JBL* 111 (1992): 668–669.

⁷⁹ The undressing/dressing imagery recalls the above discussion of Thom 21 and 37; cf. Meeks, "Image of the Androgyne," 188.

⁸⁰ Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 62–80; Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis," 479–488.

parts from clay. This is the image that comes into being “before you.”⁸¹ The saying proceeds *mutatis mutandis*: if your mortal, visible likeness makes you happy, how overwhelming will it be when you can see your immortal, divine image?⁸² Those who used the Gospel of Thomas apparently believed, like many Hellenistic Jews inclining to Platonic thought, that there is a part of them that bears the image of God. This image is immortal, but invisible. Like others in the Syrian milieu, they may have thought of this image as existing outside of them, residing in the heavenly realm waiting for them to return and claim it—thus the future tense: “how much *will you bear*” (τετναγι). But the sense of the saying is, in this respect, not entirely clear.

The next saying, logion 85, probably finds its placement in the collection in connection with this notion of the image’s immortality. Recall, again, Philo’s interpretation of the two creation stories in Genesis. For Philo it is the first created one, made in the image of God, that later becomes the immortal part of the human being.⁸³ But in ancient Jewish thought human beings in their present state are not immortal, owing to the sin of Adam. As Paul, for example, says: “sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin” (Rom 5:12). By some ancient accounts, in his act of disobedience Adam was actually rendered mortal insofar as he was made to give up the image of God. According to Irenaeus, Tatian apparently believed something like this.⁸⁴ Some combination of these thoughts may lie behind the arrangement that places Thomas 85 directly after 84:

‘Jesus says: “Adam came from great power and great wealth. But he did not become worthy of you. ²For had he been worthy, [he would] not [have tasted] death.” (Thom 85)

Adam once bore the image of God; but he lost it and so tasted death. But for those who heed these sayings, the image of God will be restored.

This notion of the divine “image” and its eventual recovery also occurs in logion 22. This enigmatic cluster of sayings begins with a brief chreia more or less familiar from the synoptic tradition:⁸⁵

⁸¹ *Contra Pagels* (“Exegesis of Genesis,” 480), who thinks the verse refers to Gen 1:3, where the double entendre contained in φῶς (n.b. φῶς [“man”] and φῶς [“light”]) led some to speculate that the primordial anthropos was actually created here, before the later accounts of Gen 1:26 and 2:7.

⁸² Cf. Thomas 19, where the idea may also occur.

⁸³ E.g., *Opif* 134–135.

⁸⁴ Cf. Tatian’s supposed notion that salvation was denied to Adam (Irenaeus, *Adv Haer* 1.28.1).

⁸⁵ Cf. Mark 10:13–16, pars.

¹Jesus saw little ones receiving milk. ²He said to his disciples: “These little ones being nursed are like those who enter the kingdom.” (Thom 22:1–2)

But then a second question from the disciples evokes a response from Jesus that takes the discourse in a more speculative direction:

³They said to him: “Then will we enter the kingdom as little ones?”

⁴“When you make the two into one and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below,—⁵that is, to make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female will not be female—⁶and when you make eyes instead of an eye and a hand instead of a hand and a foot instead of a foot, an image instead of an image, ⁷then you will enter [the kingdom].” (Thom 22:4–7)

The mysterious words of Thom 22:4 would be completely opaque without the explanation that follows in 22:5: when Jesus speaks of making the two one, he is speaking about returning to that androgynous state of the primordial, first-created human, who, created in the image of God, was originally both male and female, a singular, undifferentiated being.⁸⁶ The idea that the first, primordial human being was androgynous was a relatively common idea in antiquity, though its origins are obscure.⁸⁷ Some see it as ultimately Platonic in origin,⁸⁸ though this is far from certain. That its appearance here is related to Hellenistic Jewish readings of Genesis 1–2, in which the future is imagined as a recapitulation of the primordial past, when human beings would once again regain that pre-lapsarian androgynous state once enjoyed by Adam, is relatively clear.⁸⁹ In any event, the use of the term “single one” (οὗα οὐωτ) in this saying probably also offers the key to understanding those several sayings in Thomas that refer to becoming a “single one,”⁹⁰ or making “two into one.”⁹¹ they invite one to strive toward this primordial androgynous state of a-sexual perfection.⁹²

⁸⁶ A.F.J. Klijn, “The ‘Single One’ in the Gospel of Thomas,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 275–278; note, however, the reservations of Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren*, 229–237.

⁸⁷ Meeks, “Image of the Androgyne,” 185–186; also M. Delcourte, *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity* (London: Studio Books, 1961); M. Eliade, *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 108–111; and E.L. Dietrich, “Der Urmensch als Androgyne,” *ZKG* 58 (1939): 297–345.

⁸⁸ Cf. the legend that heterosexual human beings derive ultimately from a race of originally androgynous beings in *Sym* 189D–192E. But the idea may have pre-Socratic origins. See MacDonald, *No Male and Female*, HDR 20 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 25–26.

⁸⁹ Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 126–132.

⁹⁰ οὗα οὐωτ: Thom 4:3, 23:2.

⁹¹ ετετνωαφ πτωαυ οὗα: Thom 106:1; cf. 11:4.

⁹² In later Syrian Christianity the term *ihîd a yâ*, or “single one” came to designate the

Thom 22:6, with its strange suggestion of bodily regeneration, part by part, is strongly evocative of ancient theories of asceticism, whereby the ascetic strives towards the creation of a new self, part by bodily part, until the old self has passed away leaving a new in its place.⁹³ When at last a new self, unfettered by worldly desires, has replaced the old self one might recover again the divine image once lost. This is the meaning of the final phrase in 22:6 (“an image instead of an image”). This conundrum trades on the difference between the standard Platonic use of the term “image” to refer to visible, corporeal things, and the more idiosyncratic use of the term in Hellenistic Judaism to refer to the first created *anthropos*, perfect as an image of God. Instead of focusing on one’s image—à la Plato: the visible, imperfect, corporeal manifestation of oneself—one must concentrate instead on one’s *image*—à la Genesis: the invisible, perfect, androgynous image of God.

LIGHT

To discover one’s true self bearing the image of God is to discover in oneself that most quintessentially divine quality in the recently revived Platonic universe: light. Logion 61:5 reads (as reconstructed by the Berliner Arbeitskreis):

If someone is < at one with himself >,⁹⁴ he will become full of light. But if he is not one with himself he will become full of darkness.

Or again, in logion 24:

Light exists inside a person of light, and he [or: “it”] shines on the whole world. If he [or: “it”] does not shine, there is darkness.

The enormous symbolic power of “light” in the whole history of Hellenistic religion need not be rehearsed here, except to note that shift from the earlier Greek (and Jewish) poetic uses of light to indicate the virtuous or enlightened way of life, to the later Hellenistic idea of light as a kind of divine essence or transcendent quality. As Bultmann deftly summarized the

status one who was celibate, and in the case of Aphraat, someone who was neither male nor female (*Aphraatis Demonstrationes*, col. 216 [J. Parisot, *Patrologia Syriaca* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1984)]). See Klijn, “The ‘Single One,’” 271–278. In Thomas, however, there is no explicit exhortation to celibacy, though Thom 75 may allude to it (see Patterson, *Thomas and Jesus*, 153; Meyer, “Making Mary Male,” 557–558).

⁹³ R. Valantasis, “Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical?” 71–75.

⁹⁴ The manuscript reads “If someone is destroyed, ...”

difference: if light was in the earlier period a mode of being, in the Hellenistic period it becomes a substance: a cosmic power, the power of life, understood especially as eternal life.⁹⁵ Behind this new development was the Platonic revival. Plato, recall, developed light not so much as a symbol of virtue, but as a symbol of the *real*. In the Allegory of the Cave,⁹⁶ when that strange captive is freed from his fetters to look about, he discovers that behind the shadows he thought were real, and behind the shapes that made the shadows, behind it all was light, a light illuminating an entire world, the *real* world, completely unknown to the shrouded inhabitants of the cave. They live not so much in sin, but in ignorance. To be enlightened is to know the true nature of things.

Among the later interpreters of Plato one finds these insights translated into more explicitly theological terms. Philo, for example, understands light to belong to God's fundamental essence. Typically, he derives the notion scripturally, reading Genesis 1:4 with Platonic lenses:

God is light, for there is a verse in one of the psalms, "the Lord is my illumination (φωτισμός) and my savior." And he is not only light, but the archetype of every other light, nay, prior to and high above every archetype, holding the position of the model of a model. For the model or pattern was the Word which contained all his fullness: light, in fact—for, as the lawgiver tells us "God said, 'Let there be light'"—whereas He Himself resembles none of the things which have come into being.⁹⁷

Philo makes much here of the fact that God's first creative word in Genesis 1:3 is "Let there be light (φῶς)." It thus stands before all else, as a kind of Platonic model for everything that will come into being: a model of a model—the *εἰκὼν* that stands behind all other *εἰκονα*. Elsewhere, reflecting on this same passage, Philo will describe this first-created light as the "image of the Divine Word" (θείου λόγου ... εἰκὼν).⁹⁸ It stands behind the creative agency of God, the pattern behind God's all-designing *Logos*. In other words, light is the source of all that will come into being in the divine act of creation.⁹⁹

This, of course, includes the creation of human beings. In the Hermetic tract, *Poimandres*, one finds the scenario worked out mythically, where the creation of the human is described in this way:

⁹⁵ "Zur Geschichte der Lichtsymbolik im Altertum," *Philologus* 97 (1948): 25.

⁹⁶ *Resp* 7.514A–577A.

⁹⁷ *Som* 1.75.

⁹⁸ *Opif* 31.

⁹⁹ This is probably the idea animating logion 77.

Nature took spirit from the ether and brought forth bodies in the shape of the human. From life and light the man became soul and mind; from life came soul, from light came mind.¹⁰⁰

Presupposed here is the typical tripartite anthropology of the Middle Platonists, who as we have seen, regarded the *anthropos* as consisting of body, soul, and mind. The mind (νοῦς)—that most god-like quality residing in the human being—is light. This is the authentic core of human being. Such notions no doubt stand behind logion 61:5: to be like God is to be full of light. In *Poimandres*, to learn this essential truth about oneself is to take a step closer to God. *Poimandres* quizzes his pupil on this point:

Why is it that ‘he who has understood himself advances toward God,’ as God’s discourse has it?

The seer replies:

Because ... the father of all things was constituted of light and life, and from him the human came to be.

Poimandres again:

You say your speech well. Life and light are God and Father, from whom the man came to be. So if you learn that you are from light and life and that you happen to come from them, you shall advance to life again.

Thus the quest to “know thyself” becomes a quest for one’s origins in God, the source of light and life.¹⁰¹ Know that you are from light and life, and you shall advance to life again.

These or very similar ideas find expression in logia 49 and 50 of the Gospel of Thomas:

49 ¹Jesus says: “Blessed are the solitary,¹⁰² the elect, for you will find the kingdom. ²For you come from it (and) will return to it.”

50 ¹Jesus says: “If they say to you: ‘Where do you come from?’, (then) say to them: ‘We have come from the light, the place where the light came into being by itself, established [itself] and appeared in their image.’

²If they say to you: ‘Is it you?’, say: ‘We are his children, and we are the elect of the living Father.’

³If they ask you: ‘What is the sign of your Father among you?’, (then) say to them: ‘It is movement and rest.’”

¹⁰⁰ CH 1.17.

¹⁰¹ Cf. the very similar notions in Philo (*Spec Leg* 1.42; *Abr* 70; *Mut Nom* 4–7).

¹⁰² ἀγῶ is to be understood as equivalent to the exegetical καί and not as a copula.

This exchange probably presupposes a scenario encountered with some frequency—in the Gospel of Mary, or the Apocryphon of James, for example¹⁰³—in which pilgrims on the heavenly journey home encounter certain heavenly guardians who must be satisfied before the travelers are allowed to pass through the heavenly spheres and finally reach their goal. This, and the mytheme so common among the so-called Gnostic texts, of a primordial light scattered in the act of creation, but now to be reunited as the elect make their way home to God, has led many to understand Thomas 49–50, and indeed the entire gospel, in terms of Gnosticism.¹⁰⁴ And this would not be incorrect, except that it is probably an overly narrow reading of the tradition. For the bare notion that the heavenly sphere was a place of light to which the soul would someday return belonged to the fundamental beliefs of all who revered Plato in those times. The illustrations are several and remarkable, from Plutarch's vivid account of the fate of souls in *The Face of the Moon*—how they ascend to the moon, where the soul is dissolved and the Mind sent off to mingle once again with the light of the sun,¹⁰⁵ or Philo's stunning vision of the ascent of the Mind to the heavenly realm, where its approach to God is finally met with “pure and un-tempered rays of concentrated light” that “stream forth like a torrent, so that by its gleams the eye of the understanding is dazzled.”¹⁰⁶ Seneca's famous description of the soul's destiny will serve to illustrate:

The soul's homeland is the whole space that encircles the height and breadth of the firmament, the whole rounded dome within which lie land and sea, within which the upper air that sunders the human from the divine also unites them, and where all the sentinel stars are taking their turn on duty

We cannot yet, except at rare intervals, endure the light of heaven; therefore look forward without fearing to that appointed hour—the last hour of the body but not of the soul

Someday the secrets of nature shall be disclosed to you, the haze shall be shaken from your eyes, and the bright light will stream in upon you from all sides.

Picture to yourself how great is the glow when all the stars mingle their fires; no shadows will disturb the clear sky. The whole expanse of heaven will shine evenly; for day and night are interchanged only in the lowest atmosphere.

¹⁰³ The motif is frequent in mystical texts as well; discussion: C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study in Apocalyptic and Early Judaism* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), p. 398; DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, 50–63.

¹⁰⁴ Gärtner (*Theology*, 198) regards Thom 49 “almost as a Gnostic creed.”

¹⁰⁵ *Mor (de facie)* 943A–945.

¹⁰⁶ *Opif* 70–71.

Then you will say that you have lived in darkness, after you have seen, in your perfect state, the perfect light—that light which you now behold darkly with vision that is cramped to the last degree. And yet, far off as it is, you already look upon it in wonder; what do you think the heavenly light will be when you have seen it in its proper sphere?¹⁰⁷

MOTION AND REST

Now, what of that oddly opaque phrase at the end of logion 50, the final response of the *electi* as they make their way home?

If they ask you: ‘What is the sign of your Father among you?’, (then) say to them: ‘It is movement and rest.’ (Thom 50:3)

Rest (ἀνάπαυσις) as a metaphor for the fate of the soul is, of course, very common in antiquity.¹⁰⁸ In Jewish wisdom literature it is the promised goal of the life spent in pursuit of Wisdom.¹⁰⁹ This is probably how one should understand Thom 90, with its close parallel in Matt 11:28–29:

Jesus says: “Come to me, for my yoke is easy and my lordship is mild. And you will find rest (ἀναπαύσις) for yourselves.”

In apocalyptic literature paradise is sometimes the place of promised rest for the souls of the righteous.¹¹⁰ It may be that Thom 51 takes its bearings from this notion when it asks “When will the rest (ἀναπαύσις) for the dead come, and when will the new world come?” But when Jesus replies, “That which you are awaiting has (already) come, but you do not recognize it,” it is clear that there is more to this concept in Thomas than a simple view of the afterlife. In fact, in using this terminology the Gospel of Thomas is probably tapping into an extraordinarily rich and diverse vein of meaning scattered throughout the literature of Hellenistic Judaism.¹¹¹ But to understand why this concept plays such an important role in the Gospel of Thomas, we must once again take account of the Platonists.

¹⁰⁷ Ep 102.21,23–24,28.

¹⁰⁸ C. Schneider, “Anapausis,” RAC I:415.

¹⁰⁹ Sir 6:23–31; 51:23–28.

¹¹⁰ E.g., 4 Ezr 7:36; 8:52; Apoc Ezr 1:12; cf. Rev 14:13; Heb 3:7–4:10.

¹¹¹ Discussions: J.W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy*, CBQMS 13 (Washington, D.C.: CBA, 1982), pp. 81–91; H. Attridge, “Excursus: The Image of Entry into Rest,” pp. 126–128 in *idem*, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Vielhauer, “ANAPAUSIS,” E. Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), pp. 68–75.

A close reading of Thom 50:3 yields three telling observations about this mysterious logion. First, “rest” (ἀνάπαυσις) here is not to be understood in the common wisdom sense as a kind of goal, or in the apocalyptic sense of future reward—this is, as we have just seen, tried and rejected in the very next saying, logion 51. It is, rather, a kind of inner quality. Second, this inner quality is said to be a sign that signals one’s identity with the divine realm—with the Father. Third, the logion does not speak simply of “rest,” but of *motion* (κίνησις, that is, presumably, κίνησις) and rest.

This combination of concepts belongs uniquely to the Middle Platonists. One encounters it, for example, when Plutarch wishes to summarize the central metaphysical section of *The Sophist*. Existence, he says, consists of five elements: being, identity, differentiation, and “over them all” (ἐπὶ πάντι), movement (κίνησις) and rest (στάσις).¹¹² More simply, and roughly, in the *Corpus Hermeticum* we find the simple equation of matter with motion and mind with rest.¹¹³ Philo speaks of true rest (ἀνάπαυσις) as belonging finally only to God; this is why, he says, Moses speaks in Ex 20:10 of “God’s Sabbath.”¹¹⁴ However, he goes on to explain that this rest is not mere inactivity, for God, the creator, is the first cause of everything:

But Moses does not give the name of rest (ἀνάπαυσις) to mere inactivity. The cause (αἰτία) of all things is by its very nature active; it never ceases to work all that is best and beautiful.¹¹⁵

God is, paradoxically, at rest and yet at work.

All of these ideas represent adaptations of notions Plato lays out in mythic form in the *Timaeus*. A brief excursus might therefore be in order.

Plato could observe the universe and see that it is in constant motion.¹¹⁶ But not all motion is the same. Some is regular and creates stability, but most of it is irregular and destabilizing. The most regular and stabilizing motion, when applied to the most perfect and beautiful of forms, the sphere, is rotation—so thinks Plato.¹¹⁷ Movement up and down, back and forth, and side to side simply tosses the sphere around irregularly. But the rotating sphere is perfectly stable. When Plato observed the big things in his

¹¹² *Mor (De forac)* 428C.

¹¹³ *CH* 10.11.

¹¹⁴ *De Cher* 87, 90.

¹¹⁵ *De Cher* 87 (LCL: Colson and Whitaker, trans.).

¹¹⁶ There are major discussions, of course, in the *Timaeus*, *The Sophist*, and book 10 of *Laws*.

¹¹⁷ So, e.g., *Tim* 34A.

universe: the sun, the moon, the earth itself, he could see—as many did—that they were all round, and that they rotated. This made sense to him: the universe is a rational, stable place. But this also meant for him that *everything* said to partake of the divine, rational nature, must be of like form and movement. So he imagined that the world soul was also round, like the world itself, and was spinning, just like the world, a perfect sphere rotating within a perfect sphere.¹¹⁸ He thought the stars—the lesser deities—must be spinning spheres as well.¹¹⁹ Likewise the human soul, or mind, he considered to be round (thus filling the head) and also rotating in imitation of the universe itself.¹²⁰ At every level, the spinning sphere—it was the physical basis for Plato’s rational universe. But with respect to the other motions—back/forth, up/down, etc.—these divine realities were said to be unmoved and at rest.¹²¹

Now, this was true only in a qualified way for the immortal soul, or Mind, of human beings. The Mind, after all, must live in a human body, which is far from perfect, and subject to forces other than the very rational first cause. The body is subject to the errant cause—“necessity” (ἀνάγκη)—by which all the motions are brought to bear on an object.¹²² The result is the constant tumult that is life. So when the immortal soul, perfect in shape and regular in its motions, is placed in a body for the first time the results are disastrous. Plato likens it to being tossed, helpless, into a raging river:

With violence [the immortal souls] rolled along and were rolled along themselves, so that the whole of the living creature was moved, but in such a random way that its progress was disorderly and irrational, since it partook of all six motions: for it progressed forwards and backwards, and again to right and to left, and upwards and downwards, wandering every way in all six directions.¹²³

Chaos. But the situation is not hopeless. With time, and training, he says, the soul can begin to cope with these motions. Gradually, he says, “the revolutions [of the soul] calm down and pursue their own path ... and render their possessor intelligent”¹²⁴ once again. Herein lies a key moment in Platonic soteriology:

¹¹⁸ *Tim* 34B–37C.

¹¹⁹ *Tim* 40A–B.

¹²⁰ *Tim* 44D.

¹²¹ E.g., *Tim* 40B: ἀκίητον καὶ ἐστός.

¹²² In the *Timaeus* the discussion begins at 47E.

¹²³ *Tim* 43C (LCL: Bury trans.).

¹²⁴ *Tim* 44B.

And if it happens that the state of his soul is reinforced by right educational training, the person becomes wholly sound and faultless, having escaped the worst of maladies; but if he has been wholly negligent therein, after passing a lame existence in life he returns again unperfected and unreasoning to Hades.¹²⁵

The second half of the *Timaeus* is devoted to describing the various maladies of the errant cause, and the human body through which its onslaught is felt. Plato's purpose in this is, presumably, to enable the sage to cope more effectively with the realities of embodied existence and to coax the soul back into its rational rotational motion, while remaining unmoved—at rest—in response to fate, the errant cause. At the end of the *Timaeus* Plato summarizes:

These each one of us should follow, rectifying the revolutions within our head, which are distorted by our birth, by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the Universe, and thereby making the part that thinks like unto the object of its thought, in accordance with its original nature, and having achieved this likeness attain finally to that goal of life which is set before men by the gods as the most good both for the present and for the time to come.¹²⁶

In the tractate *de Posteritate Caini* Philo makes a set of observations that display these principles quite faithfully, albeit in his own cultural idiom. Proceeding allegorically from scripture, he notes that when Cain is expelled from Eden he goes into the land of Nod. Taking exegetical advantage of the linguistic proximity of נֹד to תֹד ("tossing"), he renders this place name with the Greek word, σάλος ("Tossing").¹²⁷ Cain, then, stands for the foolish person, who, given over to the change and vicissitudes of the created world "is subject to tossing and tumult ... and has never even in fancy had experience of quietness and calm." But the wise person, who seeks after God and desires to be near God is calmed. It is a simple matter of cause and effect, says Philo:

Proximity to a stable object produces a desire to be like it and a longing for quiescence. Now that which is unwaveringly stable is God, and that which is subject to movement is creation. He therefore that draws nigh to God longs for stability, but he that forsakes him, inasmuch as he approaches the unresting creation is, as we might expect, carried about.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ *Tim* 44C.

¹²⁶ *Tim* 90D.

¹²⁷ *De Post Cain* 22.

¹²⁸ *De Post Cain* 23 (LCL: Colson and Whitaker, trans.)

In Philo's adaptation of the Platonic scheme, creation is characterized by motion (κίνησις), but God, the unmoved, is characterized by stability (στάσις). In this vein Philo carries on:

But what shows in the clearest light the firm steadfastness (εὐστάθεια) of the man of worth is the oracle communicated to the all-wise Moses which runs thus: "But as for thee stand thou (στῆθι) here by me" (Deut 5:31). This oracle proves two things, one that the Existent Being who moves and turns all else is Himself exempt from movement and turning; and secondly that he makes the worthy man sharer of His own nature, which is repose (ἡρεμία).¹²⁹

"What is the sign of the Father within you?" "It is motion and rest." We may never know exactly what this meant to the readers of our Gospel of Thomas, but we can at least know what the text is talking about. Motion and rest are the properties of Plato's universe. And latter day Platonists would have seen in words like στάσις, ἡρεμία, or ἀνάπαυσις, the key to overcoming the problems associated with mortal existence.

Sometime in the second century Clement of Alexandria came across this saying of Jesus in the Gospel of the Hebrews:

He who seeks shall not cease until he finds, and finding he will be astonished, and having been astonished he will rule, and having ruled he will rest (ἀναπαύσεται).¹³⁰

We know this saying, of course, from the Gospel of Thomas, especially in its Greek form.¹³¹ When Clement read this saying it was not mysterious to him because he had read Plato. He would later use it in the *Stromateis* to illustrate how Plato is in fact good preparation for hearing the gospel. This saying, he says, is just what Plato says at the end of the *Timaeus*:

You must necessarily assimilate that which thinks to the object of its thought, in accordance with its original nature; and having achieved this likeness attain finally to that goal of life which is set before men by the gods.¹³²

¹²⁹ *De Post Cain* 28. Philo here uses the term for rest that more characteristic of Plato. That Philo generally prefers ἀνάπαυσις or its synonym κατάπαυσις το ἡρεμία is probably due to the fact that he works exegetically, often reflecting on the sabbath texts, esp. Gen 2:2, where God is said to rested (κατέπαυσεν) on the seventh day (more on this below).

¹³⁰ Clem Alex, *Strom* 5.14.96.

¹³¹ POxy 654.5–9: Jesus says, "Let him who seeks not rest until he finds, and when he finds he will be astonished, and having been astonished, he will rule, and having ruled, he will rest (ἀναπαύσεται)."

¹³² Clem Alex, *Strom* 5.14.96.

The text he cites here is that to which we have just referred above, the *Timaeus* 90D. The original nature of the human Mind, like all divine realities, is to move in the rational rotation of the sphere, and with respect to the other motions, to be at rest.

JESUS MEETS PLATO

Was Thomas a Middle Platonists' gospel? It would be difficult to say this without much qualification. It does not dwell on many of the common themes of the Platonic revival: the Ideas and their immanent Forms; the concept of the One and the Dyad; or the notion of *daimones* as mediator figures. There are no extended, sophisticated examinations of these or other metaphysical issues. But Thomas is neither a treatise nor a dialogue. It is a collection of sayings: proverbs, aphorisms, parables, and riddles. Its insights are offered up piecemeal, and often cryptically. It is a wisdom gospel: it reveals its truth only in contemplation. And what it asks one to contemplate is the nature of the true self: that there is a Spirit within that connects one to God; it is an image of God to be recovered again; it makes one a child of God. This quest for the transcendent within, together with the notion that this transcendent element connects a person to the transcendent realm and makes it possible to become like God, lies at the heart of Middle Platonism. It is this that gives Thomas its distinctive flavor when compared to Q or the synoptic texts, with which it shares so much. At the very least, one must say that the Gospel of Thomas is a wisdom gospel that has been brushed over with the animating notions of Middle Platonism. It is also possible, however, that its cryptic, riddle-like sayings mask a deeper devotion to Platonic concepts than one might initially suspect. The question cannot be answered with certainty. What is clear, however, is that the Gospel of Thomas works with one of the dominant religious and philosophical schools of its day, Middle Platonism. In this sense, it stands near the beginning of what would become a long tradition of Platonic Christian theology, and is probably our earliest exemplar of such effort.

CHAPTER THREE

PLATONISM AND THE APOCRYPHAL ORIGINS OF IMMORTALITY IN THE CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION OR WHY DO CHRISTIANS HAVE SOULS THAT GO TO HEAVEN?

Lionel Whiston II

In memoriam

Each year the Dean of the Harvard Divinity School invites a distinguished scholar to deliver the annual Ingersol Lecture on Human Immortality. In 1955 the lecturer was Oscar Cullmann. It was the only time in memory when the words of the Ingersol Lecturer actually inspired hate mail. What had the learned and pious Alsatian said that so raised the public ire? It was that the New Testament knows nothing of the immortality of the soul.¹ When French versions were published, one of Cullmann's compatriots responded: "the French people, dying for lack of the bread of life, have been offered instead of bread, stones, if not serpents."² In spite of the fact that virtually every branch of western Christendom affirms the New Testament idea that in the end the dead shall be raised, it seems that almost no one actually believes this. If they believe anything, they believe that human beings have bodies and souls, and when the body dies the soul goes to heaven. In truth, the confessions teach this as well, but they combine it with what would seem to most believers an additional superfluous doctrine of bodily resurrection. This is what the Westminster Catechism teaches, for example:

Question 86: What is the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?

Answer: The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they

¹ Cullmann's famous lecture was entitled, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead." It was published in the *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin* 21 (1955/56): 5–36, and later in *Immortality and Resurrection: Four Essays by Oscar Cullmann, Harry A. Wolfson, Werner Jaeger, and Henry J. Cadbury*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: MacMillan, 1965), pp. 9–53.

² Stendahl, *Immortality and Resurrection*, 47.

behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, till the resurrection and judgment of the great day.³

Students of antiquity will recognize this as a combination of the Greek idea of the soul's immortality and the Jewish idea of the resurrection of the dead. This hybrid concept became the orthodox view in the West through the all-pervasive influence of Augustine, but his synthesis was itself the product of two hundred years of Christian theological rapprochement with Plato in the work of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocians. Apologists today might still attempt to trace the soul's immortality into the New Testament itself, whose own hybridity permits at least an occasional toe-hold for the most diligent proof-texter.⁴ But Cullmann was essentially correct. Paul, the evangelists, even John of the Apocalypse did not really hold to the idea of an immortal soul. They all believed in the resurrection of the dead.

But before Augustine, Origen, and even Clement, there were followers of Jesus who did believe in the immortal soul. Modern believers who cannot fathom the need for resurrection, even in the hybrid orthodox form of the great confessions, might have found comfort in their scriptural remains. The problem is they are not in the Bible. The Gospel of Thomas,⁵ the *Book of Thomas*,⁶ the *Acts of Thomas*,⁷ the Gospel of Philip,⁸ the *Treatise on Resurrection*,⁹ and many other apocryphal texts express more or less the Platonic view of a mortal body and an immortal soul, which flies heavenward when

³ "The Westminster Larger Catechism, 1648," in *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church*, ed. T.F. Torrance (London: James Clarke & Co., 1959), pp. 202–203.

⁴ The most common texts, of course, are Luke's parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), Jesus words to the penitent thief who was crucified alongside him, likewise in Luke (Luke 23:43), Paul's statement that he would desire "to depart and be with Christ" in Philippians (1:23), and similarly in 2 Cor 5:8 that he would "rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." But given the apocalyptic views of these and other New Testament texts, one might better understand them in terms of Jewish apocalyptic lore, such as one finds in 1 Enoch 22, where the souls of the dead are kept until the day of judgment. A similar idea is to be found in Revelation (6:9–11).

⁵ See discussion, below.

⁶ 143.10–15.

⁷ 39, 157, 160–163, etc.

⁸ 56.20–57.10.

⁹ 45.23–46.1.

the body dies. This creates something of an irony in the history of Christian theology. For the view that most pious believers hold today is not to be found in the New Testament, but in texts long-deemed heretical. This irony invites examination. If one were to write a history of the Christian idea of the immortal soul, the first chapter would have to be written outside the boundaries of the biblical canon. The present paper undertakes to write that first chapter. It might be called, "Why do Christians Have Souls that Go to Heaven?"

PLATONISM AND THE SEEDS OF THE IMMORTAL SOUL

All pagans in the ancient world did not believe in the immortality of the soul. The pagan view of death was in fact rather diverse.¹⁰ In Homer the dead are seen to pass into a netherworld of ghostly shades, lifeless images of what they once were¹¹—and Homer was still the most revered body of literature in our period of interest. There were also those who, for their own philosophical reasons, doubted the notion of life after death. Aristotle explicitly rejected the Platonic notion of individual immortality, even while positing a kind of collective immortality of the whole human race.¹² Epicurus believed that the soul was, like the body, corporeal and therefore mortal.¹³ Among the Stoics there were those who believed in the survival of individual souls, and those who did not.¹⁴ Popular views were apparently as diverse as those of the philosophers. Graves offer an interesting contrast. On the one hand, Greek and Roman epitaphs are notoriously morose on the matter of life after death, as in the very common Latin inscription, NON FUI.FUI.NON SUM.NON CURO (I was not. I was. I am not. I care not.).¹⁵ On the other

¹⁰ Surveys: Jan Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); W.C.K. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, Revised Edition (New York: Norton, 1966); Franz Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism* (New York: Dover, 1959); and Gregory Riley's useful treatment relative to the Gospel of Thomas: *Resurrection Reconsidered* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 7–68.

¹¹ Thus Achilles exclaims after reaching for his friend Patroclus only to see him vanish like a mist: "Look, now, even in the house of Hades there is left something—a spirit and an image, but there is no life in it" (*Il* 23.103–104).

¹² *De Anima* 1.1, 2.1, 3.4–5.

¹³ Diog Laert 10.63; 10.125.

¹⁴ Riley, *Resurrection*, 39. Panaetius apparently denied the possibility of the soul's post-mortem existence (Cicero, *Tusc Disp* 1.32.79), but most of the great Stoic teachers seemed to have accepted it (*Tusc Disp* 1.11.24).

¹⁵ W.C.K. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston: Beacon, 1950), pp. 260–264.

hand, folk religious practices associated with grave sites, including funeral meals on the anniversary of the deceased's passing,¹⁶ probably indicate that in popular imagination the dead continued to exist in some form of diminished sentient state.

Still, in the history of western views of life after death, none has proven more influential than the idea that when death comes, the body dies but the soul lives on. Here is Plato's simple summary:

We believe, do we not, that death is the separation of the soul from the body, and that the state of being dead is the state in which the body is separated from the soul and exists alone by itself and the soul is separated from the body and exists alone by itself.¹⁷

Plato's most fulsome discussions are here, in the *Phaedo*, where he offers through the character of Socrates a philosophical defense of the immortal soul and its survival beyond death, the *Phaedrus*, where one finds Socrates' meandering metaphor of the charioteer driving two winged horses, one of noble breed and the other ignoble, and the *Timaeus*, the mythic/quasi-scientific description of the universe and how it came to be. The ideas contained in these dialogues were, of course, rooted in earlier Orphic myth and Pythagorean speculation. But they come down to us, and more importantly, to our period of interest, through the formulations and arguments of Plato.

These texts and their ideas are well-known. Nonetheless, there are some things we should note about these roots before passing on to the period of Christian origins. The first is that there is good reason for thinking that Plato's anthropology was more tripartite than bi-partite. He seldom speaks of a simple division of body and soul, but of the more complex notion of a body enlivened by a soul that is multifaceted, comprising both an irrational or mortal part and a rational or immortal part. The mortal soul is the seat of passions like anger, foolishness, and fear, and the life force that enlivens the body.¹⁸ The immortal soul, on the other hand, is nothing less than a portion of the divine soul itself, which descends from the heavens to inhabit a mortal body but for a time. It is this soul that endures the round of repeated incarnations in its long journey back to the heavenly realm from whence it came.¹⁹ Elsewhere he might call the immortal soul "mind" (νοῦς),²⁰ for, recall,

¹⁶ On the Greek and Roman cult of the dead, see Riley, *Resurrection*, 44–47.

¹⁷ *Phaed* 64C (Fowler, trans., LCL).

¹⁸ *Tim* 69Bff.

¹⁹ *Tim* 41Aff.

²⁰ *Phaedr* 247C.

in Plato's universe the human being is a kind of microcosm of the larger created order, itself a "Living Creature," in which mind (*νοῦς*) resides within soul (*ψυχή*), and soul within body (*σῶμα*).²¹ Just so, in each human being there is *νοῦς*, the immortal seed, which has the capacity to guide one in the ways of God.²²

This is an extraordinarily optimistic view of human being. In it, each person is imagined not only as immortal, but also ultimately *good*, even in the way that God is good. To be sure, there are both good and well-disciplined souls as well as errant souls, and a fate for each.²³ But in the end of things, even the errant, undisciplined soul is redeemed through the rounds of metempsychosis by which the passions are brought under control and the values of justice and beauty made to reign.²⁴ Thus, one can see that the idea of an immortal soul derives from a fundamental question about the nature of human being and a particularly optimistic answer to it: that human beings, though temporarily bedeviled and misguided, are fundamentally and finally good. This is true not just of some people, but of everyone.

But it also involves a somewhat dim view of the world. "Dim," I think, is the right word, for Plato thought of the world as the place of shadow and darkness. One need only think of the metaphor of the cave, in which normal, undiscerning existence is like living in a cave, in which one sees only the shadow of things as they really are. The real world is the world beyond the cave, the world of light.²⁵ The mythic version of this metaphor is found in the *Timaeus*, where we learn that the world came into being when God, here called the "craftsman" (*δημιουργός*), decided to *create*—that is, make a tangible, sensible copy of that which is intangible and beyond sense perception.²⁶ The result is good, for the creator is good, but it is only a copy of the truly real upon which it is modeled. In the universe of *being* and *becoming*, the world belongs to *becoming*, that is, it "becomes and perishes and is never really existent."²⁷ The immortal soul belongs to *being*, thus, to another, higher, purer, truer reality. To discover this is the definition of true wisdom (*φρόνησις*).²⁸

²¹ *Tim* 30A–B.

²² *Tim* 90A–C.

²³ So, e.g., *Phaed* 81A–E.

²⁴ *Tim* 42B–C.

²⁵ *Resp* 7.514A–577A.

²⁶ *Tim* 28C–29D.

²⁷ *Tim* 28A.

²⁸ *Phaed* 79D.

For Plato, then, the question of life beyond death is posed and answered as part of the larger question about human being in the world. The human being is good, even divine, but the world is less than this. It is, therefore, to be viewed as a temporary home. When death comes to the mortal, earthly body, the immortal soul ultimately makes its way back to God, its true home.

After the death of Plato, his ideas about the soul struggled to live on. Aristotle did not accept them and the Stoics waffled. Even within the Academy itself, a period of skepticism finally set in that took faint interest in the sort of speculative physics represented by the *Timaeus*. But in the latter half of the second century BCE, interest in Platonic physics was once again rekindled. The revival began, arguably, with Antiochus of Ascalon,²⁹ who revived Plato's argument from the *Phaedo*, that a human being's instinctive knowledge of certain things must mean that there is an immortal soul, or mind, dwelling within that is not brand new to the world.³⁰ From the late second century BCE to the second century CE, Middle Platonism flourished in Athens as well as the other great center of ancient learning, Alexandria. Most of its key figures are known only through the works of those whom they influenced, such as Cicero and Seneca, and the reports of Diogenes Laertius.³¹ But from Athens we have the large corpus of Plutarch, and from Alexandria the works of Philo. There is also from Egypt the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which illustrates how widely the interest in Plato's physics had spread beyond the more sophisticated schools.

The philosophical starting point for the Middle Platonists was the Platonic notion that each person possesses a portion of the divine soul dwelling within. When one comes to *know oneself* truly, it is this divine element that one discovers. The well-led life consists of acting in such a way that this divine element within becomes the compass of one's living. Cicero casts the idea in popular form:

For he who knows himself will realize, in the first place, that he has a divine element within him, and will think of his own inner nature as a kind of

²⁹ John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, Revised Edition (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 52–106. Dillon thinks Antiochus too much a Stoic to be considered the true founder of the Platonic revival, but he did revive dogmatic Platonism and recapture the Academy from the skeptics.

³⁰ See Cicero, *Tusc Disp* 1.24.57—on the theory that Antiochus lies behind this work.

³¹ In addition to Plutarch and Philo, Dillon treats Eudorus of Alexandria (whom he considers to be the real founder of Middle Platonism), the Athenians, Nicostratus, Calvenus, Atticus, Harpocration, and Severus, and from the school of Gaius, Albinus, Apuleius of Madaura, and Galen.

consecrated image of God; and so he will always act and think in a way worthy of so great a gift of the gods, and, when he has examined and thoroughly tested himself, he will understand how nobly equipped by nature he entered life, and what manifold means he possesses for the attainment and acquisition of wisdom.³²

The defining mark of Middle Platonism is the quest to become more and more God-like in one's living. For this idea the new Platonists could appeal to Plato himself, whose Socrates says in the *Theatetus*, "we ought to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous, holy, and wise."³³ Thus, for the Middle Platonists the goal of life became assimilation to God through wise living. Here is Eudorus' extant statement on the matter:

Socrates and Plato agree with Pythagoras that the *telos* is assimilation to God. Plato defined this more clearly by adding: "according as is possible," and it is only possible by wisdom (φρόνησις), that is to say, as a result of Virtue.³⁴

As for the nature of the soul itself, few of the Middle Platonists held to a simple division of mortal body and immortal soul. Drawing from Plato's statements in the *Timaeus* (30 and 90; see above), most held to a tripartite schema to explain human being. Plutarch illustrates the thinking:

Most people rightly hold man to be composite but wrongly hold him to be composed of only two parts. The reason is that they suppose mind to be somehow part of soul, thus erring no less than those who suppose soul to be part of body, for in the same degree as soul is superior to body so is mind better and more divine than soul.³⁵

Here is the basic scheme of body (σῶμα), soul (ψυχή), and mind (νοῦς), where the body is corporeal, the soul the force that enlivens it, and the mind that divine element within that guides the wise in the ways of God. As with Plato, the Middle Platonists may also speak of a rational and irrational soul, wherein the rational soul corresponds to mind, the image of God dwelling within.

While these Platonists believed in the ultimate redemption of the soul, like Plato himself, they did not think that the proximate fate of the individual's soul was pre-determined. It depended, rather, on the efforts of

³² *Leg* 1.22.59 (Keyes, trans., LCL).

³³ *Theat* 176A–B (Fowler, trans., LCL).

³⁴ Seneca, *Ep* 89 (Gummere, trans., LCL).

³⁵ *Mor* (*De facie*) 943A (Cherniss, trans., LCL).

the individual to cultivate a harmonious existence for the soul dwelling within to prepare it for the heavenly journey home. In the *Timaeus*, Plato describes the life of the soul cast into the throes of life as tumultuous and chaotic. But gradually, over time, the wise come to realize that the soul has its own movements—imagined as a kind of spinning sphere, constant, stable, perfect—by which the wise might set their own lives and find peace and harmony. Such a soul, upon death, finds its way home. Souls which do not achieve this pass at death into Hades to await rebirth in another bodily form, eventually to regain the divine harmony through repeated experiences leading to insight.³⁶ The Middle Platonists took this all to heart and reflected on the kind of life that might lead to achieving this desired result. Thus, from the *Didaskalikos* of Albinus:

We may attain to the goal of becoming like unto God by being in control of suitable natural faculties (φύσις), by correct habitation and training and discipline (ἀσκήσις), and most especially by the use of reason and teaching (διδασκαλία) and the transmission of doctrines, so as to transcend for the most part human concerns, and to be always in contact with intelligible realities.³⁷

Thus, the life of self control, asceticism, and learning can raise one above normal “human concerns” and prepare the soul for its journey back to God. That journey itself is sometimes described, but nowhere more colorfully than in Plutarch’s *On the Face of the Moon*.³⁸ Here Plutarch offers that when death comes, the earth receives back the body to the basic elements from which it is constructed, but the soul, together with the mind, rise up into the heavens and proceed to the moon. The passage may be brief or extended, depending on how long it takes the soul to shed all vestiges of bodily existence. When at last the soul reaches the moon, there it stays while the mind is slowly separated from the soul. For the wicked and reprobate this process may be painful and punishing, but for the wise it is easy. The mind, once freed from the soul, then proceeds to the sun, to which it is drawn “by love of the image in the sun through which shines forth manifest the desirable and fair and divine and blessed, towards which all nature in one way or another yearns.”³⁹ The final resting place of the enlightened mind is thus the sun, the place of light. Similarly, in the *Hermetica*: “Life and light are God and Father,

³⁶ *Tim* 42E–44D.

³⁷ *Didaskalikos* 28, after Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 300.

³⁸ *Mor* (*De facie*) 942F–945D.

³⁹ *Mor* (*De facie*) 944E (Cherniss, trans., LCL).

from whom the human came to be. So if you learn that you are from light and life and that you happen to come from them, you shall advance to life again."⁴⁰

The revival of Plato in the period of Christian origins was more than theoretical. It was really ethical. The Middle Platonists resisted the Stoic idea that the world is as it should be, guided by the *logos* that seeks to guide us all. In Plato they saw instead the notion that human beings are more than they appear to be. Hidden within them is a part of God that yearns to depart this world of cares and ascend to the divine light that shines in the heavens above, their true home. The way home began with the earthly life they would lead, full of righteousness, wisdom, and otherworldly harmony. The whole western cultural conviction about life after death, in which bodies die and souls go to heaven, begins, more or less, here.

THE JEWISH VIEW: RESURRECTION AND MUCH MORE

The dictum that 'the Jews believed in resurrection' is, of course, but a half truth. The resurrection of the dead is the most distinctive contribution Jewish sages brought to the mix of ideas about the future life in the Hellenistic world. Outside the Jewish community it was not given much consideration, so it was truly distinctive of Judaism. But it is another thing to say that resurrection was *the* Jewish view of the afterlife. Jewish texts from the period of Christian origins demonstrate both a diversity of views and considerable hybridity, as elements from the more dominant culture of Hellenism were incorporated into the Jewish view, which was itself in a period of flux and change. The ancient view, that the dead exist as lifeless shades in the shadows of Sheol,⁴¹ was shared with ancient Greeks and Romans. That this view persisted among Jews in the Hellenistic period (as it did among pagans) is clear enough from the wisdom literature. Qoheleth laments, "The fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same All are from the dust, and all return to dust again."⁴² The Sadducees at first glance might be seen to persevere in this ancient belief in denying the possibility of resurrection,⁴³ but Josephus' description makes them sound more Epicurean than traditionally Jewish:

⁴⁰ CH 1.17 (Copenhaver, trans., B.P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992]).

⁴¹ See, e.g., Ps 115:17; Isa 38:18–19, etc.

⁴² Eccl 3:19–20.

⁴³ See Acts 23:8; cf. also Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 4:1, 20:27.

[they] take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to everyone, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades.⁴⁴

Essenes, if Josephus is to be trusted, adopted the Greek view informed by Plato, in which the immortal soul is seen as a prisoner in a mortal body. Upon death, the souls of the virtuous depart to a pleasant place “beyond the ocean,” but the wicked to Hades, where they are punished.⁴⁵ Reports of the Pharisees present a picture less clear. On the one hand, Josephus describes their view (perhaps also his own⁴⁶) in terms that could be understood as the distinctive Platonic idea of transmigrating souls.⁴⁷ On the other hand, we have the witness of Paul—himself a Pharisee⁴⁸—who believed in the future resurrection of the dead, albeit into “spiritual bodies.”⁴⁹ In the period of Christian origins, Judaism permits a variety of different ideas about the future life, and in a variety of combinations. For the purpose of our history, however, I wish to make some observations now about two in particular: the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul.

Resurrection of the Body

Resurrection exists at least as an idea in Judaism already in the Exilic period, as may be seen by the well-known vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37. Here the issue is not really the future life of individuals, but the future life of Israel.⁵⁰ Still, the scene makes metaphoric use of the resurrection of individuals who have been slain: “And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live.”⁵¹ The metaphor presupposes the concept of resurrection. This may also be true of the Isaiah apocalypse,⁵²

⁴⁴ *War* 2.164f.

⁴⁵ Josephus, *War* 2.154–158; see also *Ant* 18:18–22. Philo's description of the *Therapeutai* offers a similar picture (see *Contempl* 1–3).

⁴⁶ See *War* 3:372–374.

⁴⁷ *War* 2.163.

⁴⁸ See Phil 3:5; also Acts 23:6.

⁴⁹ 1 Cor 15.

⁵⁰ Alan Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p. 256.

⁵¹ Eze 37:13–14.

⁵² Isa 24–27.

where the issue, again, is the whole people of Israel, not individuals.⁵³ Nonetheless, here are the roots of the idea that will become very important in the period of Christian beginnings. Resurrection is the answer to the plight of defeated Israel. The concept of resurrection arose out of an experience of defeat and conquest and its most pressing question: does God still care?

In the Hellenistic-era texts in which resurrection emerges with greater force and clarity, this is still the issue. This is certainly true of Daniel, written in response to the forced Hellenization of Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Here, resurrection is part of an apocalyptic scenario that will make recompense for those faithful sages who have suffered for their faithfulness. The events alluded to in the critical passage transpired in 168 BCE, when the Romans forced Antiochus out of Egypt, who then sought to consolidate his own power by cracking down on the Jerusalem resisters.

Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant; but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And those among the people who are wise shall make many understand, though they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder, for some days. When they fall, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery; and some of those who are wise shall fall, to refine and to cleanse them and to make them white, until the time of the end, for it is yet for the time appointed.⁵⁴

And what, then, happens to those who have fallen at the time of the end?

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.⁵⁵

The picture is a hybrid one—that the faithful become stars in the heavens certainly recalls the Platonic view that the stars are souls who have returned to their heavenly home.⁵⁶ The Jewish contribution is resurrection.

⁵³ Segal, *Life After Death*, 260.

⁵⁴ Dan 11:31–35.

⁵⁵ Dan 12:1–3.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., *Tim* 41D–E.

Important, though, is to see that it occurs as part of a cluster of ideas that also includes martyrdom and apocalypse. Resurrection is part of a divine response to the suffering of martyrs: in the coming apocalypse, the righteous dead are raised and their persecutors are punished. The question is not, “What happens when someone dies?” but “What happens when a *martyr* dies?”

The apocalyptic vision of Daniel turns out to have been formative for the literature of second temple Judaism, as several other texts took up its patterns and ideas. The development has been sketched by George Nickelsburg in the judgment scenes of several other apocalypses, including the *Testament of Moses* 10, *Jubilees* 23; the *Testament of Judah* 20–25; *1 Enoch* 104; *4 Ezra* 7, and Revelation 12.⁵⁷ Each is born of the problem of suffering and persecution and the perception that the righteous suffer in vain. Consider:

... they who have died in grief shall arise in joy, and they who have lived in poverty for the Lord's sake shall be made rich, and they who have been in want shall be filled, and they who have been weak shall be made strong, and they who have been put to death for the Lord's sake shall awake in life.⁵⁸

This is not an answer to the general problem of death. The issue is whether one can say that God is truly just when it appears that the poor suffer unduly, the weak have suffered at the hand of the strong, and the righteous have died without reward. Resurrection is the second chance, God's initiative to make things right. It is possible, of course, also to answer this question with speculation about the fate of souls, some of which go to Hades, some to Paradise. There are Jewish texts which take this path. But these resurrection texts are distinctive. Perhaps their appeal lay in the physicality of resurrection.

This is suggested most strongly by 2 Maccabees, which also offers an interpretation of Antiochus' attack on Jerusalem and the resistance of the Maccabean martyrs. This is the story of how seven brothers and their mother refuse to give in to Antiochus' policy of Hellenization, even under the pressure of torture and death. The suffering of these martyrs is offered in graphic detail, but they do not flinch. Their hope lies in the future promise of resurrection: “the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.”⁵⁹ After witnessing the death of two of

⁵⁷ George Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, Revised Expanded Edition, HTS 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁵⁸ *TestJud* 25:4.

⁵⁹ 2 Macc 7:9.

his brothers, and seeing the fate that awaits him, the third brother, it is said, “quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, ‘I received these from Heaven, and because of His laws I disdain them, and from Him I hope to get them back again.’”⁶⁰ The suffering of the martyrs is physical. Resurrection offers recompense for the physical losses the martyr sustains.

Thus, against the backdrop of what must have been the common view, that death is final and the deceased exists only in the diminished state of the shades in their tombs, resurrection offered an answer to the question of what happens when the righteous are killed by their enemies. Does God care? Is there ultimately justice in the world? Indeed, everyone dies. But when the just die out of season, resurrection is God’s initiative to bring them back to live again, to enjoy the life they should have had in the first place.

Immortality of the Soul

Let us shift now from 2 Maccabees to 4 Maccabees. This first century CE text is based on 2 Maccabees, and in many respects its treatment of the suffering of the Maccabean martyrs is more graphic than in 2 Maccabees. But while 2 Maccabees attempts to interpret a real historical situation of suffering and martyrdom, 4 Maccabees has a different purpose. Its question is not recompense for righteous suffering, but the philosophical question “whether devout reason is absolute master of the passions.”⁶¹ Indeed, the heroic brothers, their mother, and the aged priest Eleazar make for a dramatic proof of the proposition. Their resolute reason is not swayed by pain or threat of death. And this is the point: one should live so resolute. But what is their fate, finally, in 4 Maccabees? It is not resurrection. Their fate is immortality. Moreover, observes Nickelsburg, “the function of immortality here is broader than that of resurrection in 2 Maccabees 7.”⁶² There, the brothers’ reward is correlated directly to their martyrdom. In 4 Maccabees their souls go to heaven as “a reward for obedience like the reward that the patriarchs received for their righteousness.”⁶³ The life of righteousness is not like martyrdom. It is not unique, special. Anyone can live righteously. Just so, in the Greek world, immortality is not unique, special. Everyone has an immortal soul, which ought to be listened to and honored.

⁶⁰ 2 Macc 7:10b–11.

⁶¹ 4 Macc 1:1.

⁶² Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 139.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 140.

In the mix of Hellenistic Judaism were a good many who did not embrace the apocalypses as the answer to the question of what happens when we die. Resurrection addressed the situation of heroes, martyrs, not ordinary people. For those seeking a more general answer, Plato lay close at hand. In fact, one of the most prolific figures in the Platonic revival was a Jew: Philo of Alexandria. Philo wrote with one finger in the Torah and another in the *Timaeus*. He came from a wealthy Alexandrian Jewish family, was well-educated and well-placed socially. When hostilities broke out between Jews and Greeks in the time of Gaius Caligula, Philo went to Rome to represent his people before the emperor. Martyrdom was not in his plans. His interest was not in death, but in how to live. For this he turned to the Torah; and to Plato. He brought them together through a highly refined technique of allegorical exegesis.

To understand the mysteries of human being, Philo turned to Genesis 1–3, but when reading the verses he saw Plato peeking from between the lines. When in Genesis 2:7 God breathes the breath of life into the man formed of clay, Philo understood that here is an account of how the earthly body received from God the divine breath (πνεύματος θείου), that is, the soul, which originates from God the Father and Ruler of all. This is how the human being comes to be “at once mortal and immortal, mortal in respect of the body (σῶμα), but in respect of the mind (διάνοια) immortal.”⁶⁴ Like Plato, Philo will sometimes speak of the soul as comprising both an irrational and a rational part.⁶⁵ The latter he may call “mind” (νοῦς), but also “reason” (λόγος),⁶⁶ or “spirit” (πνεῦμα).⁶⁷ In this way Philo arrived at Plato’s tripartite anthropology: a body enlivened by an irrational soul, but guided by the mind or spirit that comes from God.

As with other Middle Platonists, Philo thought of the divine soul as God-like, the image of God. This he derives from the first creation story, where God creates the first human in the “image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:27):

After all the rest, as I have said, Moses tells us that a man (ἄνθρωπον) was created after the image (εἰκόνα) of God and after his likeness. Right well does he say this, for nothing earth-born is more like God than man. But let no one represent the likeness as one to a bodily form; for neither is God in human form, nor is the human body God-like. No, it is in respect of the Mind (νοῦν),

⁶⁴ *Opif* 135.

⁶⁵ *Leg All* 2.2.

⁶⁶ *Deter* 83.

⁶⁷ *Deter* 83; *Spec Leg* 1.171.

the sovereign element of the soul ($\psi\chi\gamma\iota\varsigma$), that the word “image” is used; for after the pattern of the single Mind, even the Mind of the universe as an archetype, the Mind of each of those who successively came into being was molded.⁶⁸

This is all taken directly from the creation account in the *Timaeus*, where God instructs the lesser deities to construct the human one from earthly substance, but to pour into each a measure of the great World Soul, the Mind of God.⁶⁹

Thus the soul comes from the divine realm, and so to it shall return. Philo looked for scriptural proof. He found it in the story of Abraham, in which God promises the patriarch, “But you shall go to your fathers, nourished with peace, at a ripe old age.”⁷⁰ Philo comments:

He here clearly indicates the incorruptibility of the soul: when it transfers itself out of the abode of the mortal body and returns as it were to the metropolis of its native country, from which it originally emigrated into the body. Since to say to a dead man, “Thou shalt go to thy fathers,” what else is this but to propose to him and set before him a second existence apart from the body as far as it is proper for the soul of the wise man to dwell by itself? But when he says this he does not mean by the fathers of Abraham his father, and his grandfather, and his great-grandfathers after the flesh, for they were not all deserving of praise so as to be by any possibility any honor to him who arrived at the succession of the same order, but he appears by this expression to be assigning to him for his fathers, according to the opinion of many commentators, all the elements into which the mortal man when deceased is resolved. But to me he appears to intend to indicate the incorporeal substances and inhabitants of the divine world, whom in other passages he is accustomed to call angels.⁷¹

This is fairly close to what Plato says in the *Phaedrus*, that upon death, the soul rises heavenward to “the place where dwells the race of the gods.”⁷²

But for Philo, immortality was not simply the future reward of the righteous. He followed Plato in the view that the practice of philosophy was practice in the art of death. The sage’s aim was to separate from the world of bodily existence and join oneself to the noetic world. The sage wholly devoted to God was already living an immortal life.⁷³ Through study and

⁶⁸ *Opif* 69 (Whitaker, trans., LCL).

⁶⁹ *Tim* 41A–43A.

⁷⁰ Gen 15:15 (LXX).

⁷¹ *Quest Gen* 3.11 (Colson, trans., LCL).

⁷² *Phaedr* 246D (Fowler, trans., LCL); discussion: Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, Fourth Revised Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), vol. I, p. 402.

⁷³ *Spec leg* 3.345.

asceticism the sage should seek to “die to the life of the body,” and aspire to “a higher existence, immortal and incorporeal, in the presence of him who is Himself immortal and uncreated.”⁷⁴

For Philo, then, immortality functioned quite differently from resurrection in the apocalypses. Resurrection arose in answer to historical injustice and the question of whether God was a just God after all. Resurrection was about the fate of heroes, martyrs, and the oppressed. Immortality addressed a different question. It concerned the nature and fate of every person. Everyone has a soul. Everyone can follow the soul’s leading. Everyone can be immortal.

So, when the followers of Jesus began to face the question of death and the future life, they had ready to hand a variety of traditions from which to choose, from the fatalism of the Sadducees, to the apocalyptic hope of resurrection, to the Platonic idea of the immortal soul. They did not all choose alike.

THE APOCRYPHAL ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN IMMORTALITY

Philo’s way of thinking about the future life—the Platonic way—is the way most believers in the Christian world choose to think about it today. Alan Segal goes so far as to say, “It was Philo who crafted the notion of the immortal soul which is so familiar to us in the West.”⁷⁵ But the canonical evangelists did not choose to think about it this way. They chose, rather, resurrection as the paradigm upon which to hang their future hopes. To be sure, there is hybridity here as well. Matthew, for example, clearly presumes the final resurrection of the dead,⁷⁶ but can also speak in terms that sound vaguely Platonic: “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”⁷⁷ John’s peculiar treatment of the resurrection is a special case, but presume it he does. Paul, too, offers elements of hybridity, but leaves no doubt about his view: there is a resurrection, and those who say there is not risk undermining everything that he preaches.⁷⁸ When Cullmann insisted that resurrection, not immortality is the New Testament view, he was not wrong. But early

⁷⁴ *Gig* 14 (Colson, trans., LCL).

⁷⁵ Segal, *Life After Death*, 373.

⁷⁶ See, esp., Matt 27:52–53, where the dead already have begun to come out of their tombs.

⁷⁷ Matt 10:28.

⁷⁸ 1 Cor 15:12–20; even here, though, Paul bends some to the Greek view when he grants that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (15:50).

Christian texts that would eventually fall outside the canon of scripture are another matter. Some of these texts favor the Platonic view. One of them is the Gospel of Thomas.

From the very beginning of the Gospel of Thomas the subject matter is immortality. Logion 1 announces: "Whoever finds the meaning of these sayings will not taste death." This gospel is about the quest for immortality through study, contemplation, and asceticism. The method is Platonic: "When you come to know yourselves you will be known and you will realize that you are children of the Living Father" (*Thom* 3:4). This is the fundamental notion from Middle Platonism that self-knowledge is key, and that the object of knowing, the thing to be discovered, is the fact that you are intimately related to the divine. Philo says it in more clearly Platonizing language:

Know thyself, and the parts of which thou dost consist, what each is, and for what it was made, and how it is meant to work, and who it is that, all invisible, invisibly sets the puppets in motion and pulls their strings, whether it be the Mind that is in thee or the Mind of the Universe.⁷⁹

To be a "child of the Living Father" is to be alive, "to live from the Living One" (*Thom* 111:2). This does not refer to mere bodily existence. The body in Thomas is "wretched." But so is the soul. Consider:

Jesus said: "Wretched is the body that depends on a body, ²and wretched is the soul (ΨΥΧΗ) that depends on these two". (*Thom* 87)

Jesus said: "Woe to the flesh that depends on the soul (ΨΥΧΗ). ²Woe to the soul (ΨΥΧΗ) that depends on the flesh". (*Thom* 112)

These riddles are best understood in terms of Middle Platonic anthropology. Soul is in this case not the immortal soul, but the vital soul, the irrational soul that enlivens the body, but nothing more. That body and soul were interdependent and needed careful balance was Plato's claim in the *Timaeus*. An overpowering body could render the soul dull-witted and slow; an overactive soul could give a body the jitters.⁸⁰ This is perhaps the gist of 112. Logion 87 is more opaque. Does it refer to sexual appetite,⁸¹ eating meat,⁸²

⁷⁹ *De fug* 46 (Whitaker, trans., LCL).

⁸⁰ *Tim* 87C–88C.

⁸¹ Ernst Haenchen, *Die Botschaft des Thomasevangeliums*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 6 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1961), pp. 54–55; Jacques-E. Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 188–189.

⁸² Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983), pp. 74–77.

or involvement in the affairs of the world, itself likened to a (dead) body?⁸³ In any event, these sayings speak of the body and the mortal soul. But consider:

'Jesus said, "If the flesh came into being because of the spirit (πνεῦμα), it is a marvel; ²but if the spirit (came into being) because of the body, it is a marvel of marvels. ³But I marvel at how this great wealth has come to dwell in this poverty" (Thom 29)

This saying embraces terminology we have seen Philo use in his exegesis of Genesis 2:7. The spirit (πνεῦμα) is nothing other than the divine breath of God. Here is the divine element within, the rational soul, the Mind. Thomas simply uses terminology more at home in Jewish circles. So why *did* God lend some of the divine stuff to create the world of human beings? Philo speculates about this too.⁸⁴ Thomas offers no answer, but a conundrum to be pondered.

Here, then, is the basic tripartite anthropology of the Middle Platonists, the foundation of the concept of immortality. The human being consists of body, soul and spirit. Body and soul are mortal, intertwined in the living creature in a life of wretchedness and woe. Into this mix is cast πνεῦμα, the Spirit, God's own gift, the divine element within that connects one to God and makes one a child of God.

The Middle Platonists also thought that this divine element within was a kind of image of God. Philo saw this implied in Genesis 1:27, but a Roman could think in this way as well. Recall Cicero: "For he who knows himself will realize, in the first place, that he has a divine element within him, and will think of his own inner nature as a kind of consecrated image of God."⁸⁵ Here is the concept in the Gospel of Thomas:

'Jesus said: "When you see your likenesses (εἴκε) you are full of joy. ²But when you see your images (ἑξικων) which came into existence before you—they neither die nor become manifest—how much will you bear?" (Thom 84)

The first statement uses the term εἴκε, in Greek perhaps ὁμοῖωμα, that is, simply a reflection, as in a mirror or a portrait. Everyone likes to see their

⁸³ Risto Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2003), pp. 60–62; Philip Sellew, "Death, the Body, and the World in the Gospel of Thomas," in *Studia Patristica XXXI: Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1995*, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), p. 530; see logia 56 and 80.

⁸⁴ *Leg all* 1.33.

⁸⁵ *Leg* 1.22.59 (Keyes, trans., LCL).

own likeness. But the second statement uses the more heavily fraught term εἰκών. This is what Philo saw in Genesis 1:27 that sparked his imagination. This first human—created “in the image (εἰκών in the LXX) and likeness of God”—he believed was created first, before the earthly creature of 2:7. This is probably the detail to which our text refers when it says that this image “came into existence before you.” This first human, created in God’s image, Philo says, “was an idea, or a genus, or a seal, perceptible only by the intellect (νοῦς), incorporeal, neither male nor female, imperishable by nature.”⁸⁶ In the Gospel of Thomas it is this εἰκών that is the object of seeking and the subject of surprise. The next saying in Thomas reads:

‘Jesus said: “Adam came from great power and great wealth. But he did not become worthy of you. ²For had he been worthy, [he would] not [have tasted] death”.

(Thom 85)

In the legends surrounding Genesis there is the notion that when Adam sinned, he lost the image of God and became mortal. In Thomas the path to immortality includes recovering the memory of once having borne the image of God.

Finally, as with the Platonists’ various schemes, the path to immortality includes a heavenly journey home. In Thomas this journey is described in sayings 49–50:

(49) ‘Jesus said, “Blessed are the solitary, the elect, for you will find the Kingdom. ²For you come from it and you will return to it.” (50) ‘Jesus said, “If they say to you, ‘Where do you come from?’ say to them, ‘We have come from the light, the place where the light came into being by itself, established itself, and appeared in their image.’ ²If they say to you, ‘Is it you?’ say ‘We are his children, the elect of the living Father.’ ³If they ask you, ‘What is the sign of your Father within you?’ say, ‘It is movement and rest’”.

(Thom 49–50)

This scenario of the soul’s ascent through the heavens is a well-known feature from other Nag Hammadi texts,⁸⁷ as well as the anti-Gnostic heresiologists.⁸⁸ But the idea that the soul could ascend to the heavens is by no means a Gnostic invention. One finds this motif in apocalypses as well, not to mention ancient mysticism.⁸⁹ As in Paul’s account of his own ascent experience,⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Opif* 134 (Whitaker, trans., LCL).

⁸⁷ See, e.g., the *Gospel of Mary* or the *Apocryphon of James*.

⁸⁸ See Kurt Rudolf, *Gnosis* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983), pp. 171–180.

⁸⁹ Discussion: April DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas*, Supp to VC 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 50–63.

⁹⁰ See 2 Corinthians 12.

here also three spheres are presupposed,⁹¹ each with a guardian by which one must negotiate passage. This is the ancient version of St. Peter at the Pearly Gates with language that is distinctly Platonic. Light is the fundamental character of the truly real in Plato.⁹² This resonated with the Jewish Platonist, Philo, in particular because of the way Genesis begins. God's first creative word is, "Let there be light." In Philo's thinking, Genesis 1:3 indicates that light stands behind all other reality. It is the image that stands behind all other images, from which the whole created order proceeds.⁹³ For Philo, as for Plato, to gaze into the heavens was to encounter divine light, by day the sun, and by night the myriad stars, each a piece of the celestial light, each a rational soul waiting to descend into a body.⁹⁴ Those who go and come again to the heavenly realm are literally children of light.

What then of the final question/response: "What is the sign of your Father within you?" say, 'It is movement and rest'?" Is this to be understood Platonically as well? Indeed it is, but to see this we will need the help of an actual Platonist. Our tutor is Clement of Alexandria, who once upon a time read in the Gospel of the Hebrews a version of a saying we have also in the Gospel of Thomas. What Clement read was this:

He who seeks shall not cease until he finds, and finding he will be astonished, and having been astonished he will rule, and having ruled he will rest (ἀναπαύσεται).⁹⁵

We know this as *logion* 2 of the Gospel of Thomas, especially in its Greek form:

¹Jesus says, "Let him who [seeks] not rest [until] he finds, ²and when he finds [he will be astonished, ³and when he has been] astonished, he will rule, and [when he has ruled, he will] rest (ἀναπαύσεται)."⁹⁶

⁹¹ 2 Cor 12:2.

⁹² *Resp* 7.514A–577A.

⁹³ *Opif* 31; *Somn* 1.75.

⁹⁴ Plato, see *Tim* 41D–E; for Philo, see *Gig* 8.

⁹⁵ Clem Alex, *Strom* 5.14.96 (Wilson, trans., ANF).

⁹⁶ POxy 654.5–9. Attridge restores the text to ἐπαναπαύσεται, but the non-prefixal form is as possible; see "Appendix: The Greek Fragments," in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 Together with XII, 2 Brit. Lib. Or.* 4926 [1], and *P. Om* 1. 654. 655; Vol. 1: *Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes*, ed. Bentley Layton, NHS 20 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), p. 111.

When Clement read this saying he did not think about the pursuit of wisdom,⁹⁷ or the apocalyptic paradise in which the righteous find respite,⁹⁸ or even Gnosticism.⁹⁹ He thought of Plato. What Clement says about the saying is this:

You must necessarily assimilate that which thinks to the object of its thought, in accordance with its original nature; and having achieved this likeness attain finally to that goal of life which is set before all by the gods.¹⁰⁰

These words are nearly a quotation from the end of the *Timaeus* (90d) and they require explanation. “That which thinks” in Plato’s work is the mind, that is, the rational part of the soul, which, as we have seen, is a small piece of the great World Soul, the Mind of God. “The object of its thought” is those things that are proper to it—divine, eternal things, like beauty, truth, and justice, not everyday things like what horse to bet on or how to bed your lover. If one can train the mind to dwell on divine things, says Plato, one can become immortal.¹⁰¹ Now, why should Clement think of these ideas from the *Timaeus* when he read this saying? What pricked his imagination was the concept of “rest.”

What does it mean, for Plato, for the Mind to be at rest? The Mind, in Platonism, belongs to the class of things that are divine. Now, Plato thought that these divine things have a certain shape and quality. Plato’s guide, Timaeus, an astronomer, would have directed us to the sky and the celestial spheres that dwell there. He would have pointed out that they are round, the perfect shape. And he would have pointed out that they move in a certain way. They spin, which is most stable condition for a sphere, and they move forward on their coordinated paths. Everything is in motion. Now, there are seven possible motions: up, down, right, left, back, forward, and spinning in place. In the *Timaeus*, Plato’s astronomer tells us that divine realities—all divine realities, including the Mind—are in motion, spinning and moving forward, but with respect to the other motions, “they are at rest and move not (ἀκίνητον καὶ ἐστός), so that each of them might attain the greatest possible perfection.”¹⁰² This is true of mother earth, he tells us. It is true of the

⁹⁷ Sir 6:23–31; 51:23–28.

⁹⁸ 4 Ezra 7:36; 8:52; Apoc Ezr 1:12, etc.

⁹⁹ Phillip Vielhauer, “ANAPAUISIS: Zum gnostischen Hintergrund des Thomasevangeliums,” in *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen zu seinem siebenzigsten Geburtstag*, BZNW 30, ed. W. Eltester und F.H. Kettler (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), pp. 281–299.

¹⁰⁰ Clem Alex, *Strom* 5.14.96 (Wilson, trans., ANF).

¹⁰¹ *Tim* 90C.

¹⁰² *Tim* 40B (Bury, trans., LCL).

stars. And it is true of the Mind. All of them are a combination of motion and rest. So, when that great student of Plato, Philo, gazed up into the night sky he did not see stars, but souls moving in their perfect harmonious motions: “for these also are entire souls pervading the universe, being unadulterated and divine, inasmuch as they move in a circle, which is the kind of motion most akin to the Mind, for every one of them is the parent Mind.”¹⁰³

What happens, then, when one of these beautiful, spherical, spinning souls is placed in a human body? Plato’s account is both vivid and fanciful.¹⁰⁴ It is as though the soul has been cast into a raging river, carried along and tossed around by various motions—up and down and back and sideways—overwhelmed by actual mortal human experience. At first it is disoriented and for a long time it knows no harmony. That is why babies cry and children are so impetuous. But with maturity and experience, gradually the soul begins to re-establish its regular motion. Of course, some adults never really mature—and these souls will need many lifetimes to regain their original perfection. The second half of the *Timaeus* is an attempt to mitigate this problem by exploring all the ill effects the chaos of the world might exert upon the embodied soul. The philosopher is one who attends closely to these things, understands them, and so is able gradually to calm the Mind and, as Plato says in the text that came to Clement’s mind that day:

[rectify] the revolutions within our head, which are distorted by our birth, by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the Universe, and thereby making the part that thinks like unto the object of its thought, in accordance with its original nature, and having achieved this likeness attain finally to that goal of life which is set before men by the gods as the most good both for the present and for the time to come.¹⁰⁵

All things are in motion. But only the becalmed Soul is both in motion and at rest. This is the sign that the sage has truly achieved immortality.

Immortality, then, is not a state to be achieved at death. It is a state of being that must be cultivated one’s whole life long. Immortality is a way of life. This was how Philo thought about the life of the sage. The scholar devoted to the quest for the truly existing God is fully alive. In contrast to the godless, whose souls are dead, the scholar enrolled in the search for God

¹⁰³ *Gig* 7–8 (Colson, trans., LCL).

¹⁰⁴ *Tim* 42E–44C.

¹⁰⁵ *Tim* 90D (Bury, trans., LCL).

is alive, and “lives an eternal life.”¹⁰⁶ This is precisely what “living” means in the Gospel of Thomas. “The dead are not alive and the living will not die” (*Thom* 11:2). “Living” here means “immortal.” This is why Jesus in Thomas is called the “Living Jesus” (*Thom incipit*) or the “Living One” (*Thom* 52). It is not because he has been raised from the dead.¹⁰⁷ The resurrection of Jesus never comes in view in this gospel. It is because he has discovered the key to immortality. By studying his wisdom, others can realize their own immortality (*Thom* 1; 13:5; 108:1; 114:2). This is not something to discover when one dies, but during one’s own lifetime: “observe the living one while you live, lest you die and try to see him and are unable to see” (*Thom* 59). This is why the brief catechism in in Thomas 49–50 concludes with one additional thought:

¹His disciples said to him: “When will the rest of the dead take place, and when will the new world come?” ²He said to them: “That which you anticipate has (already) come, but you do not recognize it”. (*Thom* 51)

The Berliner Arbeitskreis has argued that “rest” ought here to be emended to “resurrection.”¹⁰⁸ But the change is not warranted. Originally an anti-apocalyptic statement, here the saying has been re-appropriated to express what we might call Thomas’ ‘realized protology’. Immortality comes not at the end of life, but the beginning, when God breathes in the divine breath that makes one a living human being. Similarly:

¹The disciples said to Jesus, “Tell us how our end will be.” ²Jesus said, “Have you discovered the beginning, then, that you now seek the end? ³For where the beginning is, there the end will be.” (*Thom* 18)

“Tell us how our end will be.” What happens when life ends? This is the question immortality of the soul answers. The spirit breathed into the first human at the beginning of time is the same spirit that lives eternal in every human being. When the end comes, that immortal spirit remains and returns to the heavenly realm where it began.

¹⁰⁶ *Spec leg* 1.345.

¹⁰⁷ Contra Robert Grant and David Noel Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City: Doubleday/London: Collins, 1960), p. 118; Bertil Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins/New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 98; Ménard, *L’Évangile selon Thomas*, 76–77.

¹⁰⁸ See their text in the 15th edition of Aland’s *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*; for discussion see Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008), p. 132.

IMMORTALITY VERSUS RESURRECTION IN THE SECOND CENTURY

From the Gospel of Thomas we may assume that by the end of the first century there were nascent Christian communities, or at least individuals, who preferred Plato's ideas about the immortality of the soul to resurrection. If Paul's opponents in 1 Corinthians can also be shown to have entertained such thoughts,¹⁰⁹ then we might even assume that there were people who thought this way in the earliest decades of the Jesus movement. In the second century there is ample evidence that this way of thinking about the future life persisted. We have on the one side texts that advocate something like the immortality of the soul.¹¹⁰ On the other side, there are apologists from the period who argue explicitly against those who hold this view as an alternative to the future resurrection of the dead. Here is Justin denouncing such believers to his antagonist, Trypho:

For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven; do not imagine that they are Christians¹¹¹

From these texts one can see clearly that from the point of view of the orthodox church fathers, immortality of the soul *without the resurrection of the body* was unacceptable. This last qualification is important, for Justin was a Platonist and on those grounds still clung to the immortality of the soul.¹¹² It is just that this alone was not satisfactory to him. Those who believed in the soul's immortality, but not the resurrection of the flesh,¹¹³ were in his view not really Christians. Why was this so crucial?

Part of the answer may lie with the way we see Justin using resurrection as a defining claim. Here is another way he defends his position against those who might embrace the soul's immortality, but deny the resurrection:

¹⁰⁹ Esp. 1 Corinthians 1–4 and 15.

¹¹⁰ E.g. in the Thomas tradition, the *Acts of Thomas* (39, 157, 160–163, etc.) and the *Book of Thomas* (143.10–15); the view also is to be found among the Valentinians: *Treat Res* 45.23–46.1; *Gos Phil* 56.20–57.10—though here the idea is more “spiritual resurrection.”

¹¹¹ *Dial Tryph* 80.4 (Dods and Rieth, trans., ANF); cf. also 2 *Clem* 9.1–5; Polycarp, *Phil* 7.1.

¹¹² *Dial Tryph* 105; 1 *Apol* 18. In 2 *Apol* 10 he explicitly invokes the Platonic anthropology we have been speaking about to describe the fullness of Christ, “who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being, both body, and reason, and soul.”

¹¹³ Justin apparently coined this phrase (Claudia Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* [Leiden: Brill, 2004], p. 75).

Why do we any longer endure those unbelieving and dangerous arguments, and fail to see that we are retrograding when we listen to such an argument as this: that the soul is immortal, but the body mortal, and incapable of being revived? For this we used to hear from Pythagoras and Plato, even before we learned the truth. If then the Savior said this, and proclaimed salvation to the soul alone, what new thing, beyond what we heard from Pythagoras and Plato and all their band, did He bring us? But now He has come proclaiming the glad tidings of a new and strange hope to men. For indeed it was a strange and new thing for God to promise that He would not keep incorruption in incorruption, but would make corruption incorruption.¹¹⁴

Justin believed that he had already acquired from Plato all the conceptual equipment necessary to explain what happens to the soul when a person dies. But believing in the resurrection of the flesh is for him something else, something new. It is what makes a Christian a Christian; it is the flag under which Christians will rally. Similarly Tertullian: "The resurrection of the dead is the Christian's trust. By it we are believers."¹¹⁵ Resurrection was an odd and distinctive idea in antiquity—a "strange and new hope." Odd beliefs do have the ability to produce strong group boundaries—think of the Flat Earth Society or the current odd American phenomenon of "Birthers." It is in this sense that Claudia Setzer argues that resurrection belief functioned to create a strong sectarian identity among second century Christians and establish community boundaries.¹¹⁶

But can we say more than this—that Christians believed in the resurrection because that is what a proper Christian believes? Perhaps. During this period there was a closely related argument around which opposing sides were also beginning to form: the question of Jesus' own death and resurrection. We get our first glimpse of this dispute from Ignatius, who was, shortly after the turn of the first century, arrested and condemned to be sent from his home in Syria to Rome for execution. Along the way he wrote his several letters. In the *Letter to the Trallians* he makes a telling complaint:

Be deaf therefore when anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who ... was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and under the earth, who was truly raised from the dead, when his Father raised him up, as in the same manner his Father shall raise up in Jesus Christ us who believe in him But if some affirm who are

¹¹⁴ *De res* 10 (Dods, trans., ANF).

¹¹⁵ *Res* 1.1 (Holmes, trans., ANF).

¹¹⁶ Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body*, 46–47, 84–85 (on Justin), and 95–96 (on Athenagoras).

without God—that is, are unbelievers—his suffering was only a semblance ..., why am I a prisoner, and why do I even long to fight with beasts? In that case I am dying in vain.¹¹⁷

Here is the beginning of a thread that runs all through the second century, from Ignatius to Irenaeus. There were believers who cast doubt upon Jesus' actual suffering and death, thinking that such a spiritual being as he should have had tricks by which to avoid such humiliation unbecoming the Son of God. But the suffering and death of Jesus were important to Ignatius. Here was a story to match his own. Because Jesus suffered, he would suffer. Because Jesus died, he would die. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, he would be raised as well.

The second century was not a time of mass, organized persecution of Christians. But the followers of Jesus were dissidents living within a hostile imperial environment. They revered a person whom the Romans crucified as a criminal. As a result, many, like Ignatius, refused to show allegiance to the empire. Ignatius was executed, like most of the first generation of leaders before him. Tacitus tells of how Nero scapegoated Christians in Rome after the great fire of 64, burning some as human torches and throwing others to the beasts for entertainment.¹¹⁸ The first appearance of Christians in pagan literature is in an exchange of letters between Pliny the Younger and the emperor, Trajan, in which they discuss what to do with this mysterious new group of dissidents. They are agreed: if the case be proven against them and they do not repent, they are to be killed.¹¹⁹ Later Justin was killed, and Polycarp, as were dozens of Irenaeus' companions in Lyon and Vienna. It was an age of martyrs, when Christian credentials, when revealed to the authorities, could be quite dangerous.

Elaine Pagels argued persuasively in *The Gnostic Gospels* that the orthodox insistence on the actual, physical suffering and death of Jesus was closely bound to this experience of suffering. She summarizes:

Why does faith in the passion and death of Christ become an essential element—some say *the* essential element—of orthodox Christianity? I am convinced that we cannot answer this question fully until we recognize that the controversy over the interpretation of Christ's suffering and death

¹¹⁷ *Trall* 9–10 (Lake, trans., LCL).

¹¹⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

¹¹⁹ Pliny the Younger, *Ep* 10.96–97.

involved, for Christians of the first and second century, an urgent practical question: How are believers to respond to persecution, which raises the imminent threat of their *own* suffering and death?¹²⁰

But if this was true of Christ's suffering and death, it was also true of Christ's resurrection from the dead. Ignatius' point was not simply that it was noble to suffer and die like Christ suffered and died, but that the reward for such fortitude would be resurrection—just as Christ was raised from the dead. This is, after all, what Paul says about it a generation earlier. To those in Corinth who say there is no resurrection of the dead, he counters:

... if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? I die every day If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die".

(1Cor 15:16–19, 30–32)

Immortality belonged to everyone by virtue of the immortal soul. What the martyr sacrificed was not the soul, but the body, mortal life itself. Resurrection was the promise that the martyr's body would be restored to life so that the martyr could resume the life of which he/she had been deprived.

Of course, not everyone thought that martyrdom was a good idea. To such a one, resurrection might have been considered a bad idea, a false hope that only led to needless suffering and death. In *The Testimony of Truth* an Alexandrian teacher who held to a more Platonic version of the gospel calls those who give themselves over to martyrdom "foolish" for thinking that just because they make a public confession and are killed for it they will be saved. "For if only words which bear testimony were effecting salvation, the whole world would endure this thing and be saved."¹²¹ By challenging the authorities they are only destroying themselves, he says. "When they say, 'On the last day we will certainly arise in the resurrection,' they do not know what they are saying." The "last day" has already come,¹²² he says, and those who have come to know themselves are those whom "Christ will transfer to the heights since they have renounced foolishness and have advanced to

¹²⁰ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, Paperback Edition (New York: Random House, 1981), pp. 91–92.

¹²¹ 32.9–11.

¹²² The text is fragmentary, but one may note the use of the perfect (I) throughout.

knowledge.”¹²³ Those, however, who expect the resurrection of the flesh are expecting nothing. “They do not understand the power of God, nor do they understand the interpretation of the scriptures.”¹²⁴

In the second century—and earlier, even from the beginning—the nascent church in imperial lands was a dissident movement. Martyrdom was a possibility, and while not yet an empire-wide policy, Christians had grounds to fear it. It was a particularly compelling part of their reality. This forced upon them the question not just of death generally—for everyone must die eventually—but of violent, premature death, death for a cause. What is the meaning of death when it comes in this way? Many early Christian thinkers and myth-makers chose to embrace the Jewish idea of resurrection because it offered a narrative for understanding the problem of martyrdom. The resurrection tradition, after all, arose in response to Israel’s own experience with violent death and martyrdom. It responded to the questions that arise when good people die: Is this the final word? Is there no justice in the world? Does God care, and can God actually do anything? As early followers of Jesus contemplated the fate of their hero, Jesus, and their own fate at the hands of hostile authorities, the resurrection tradition gave them a way of tying their experiences to the life and death of Jesus, and to cast it all in a narrative that proved the justice of God. Though their opponents now had the upper hand, time would soon reveal a season of reckoning, when the righteous dead would be raised to live again, and their enemies would be punished.

Immortality offered another way of thinking about all of this, but it was not as effective. It was not that immortality was a Greek idea and resurrection was Jewish, and so to be preferred. In the second century immortality was just as much a part of Jewish thinking about the future life as resurrection. It was that immortality responded to a different question: What is the meaning of death, generally? To this question it offered a good answer: we are not simply mortal, but also immortal. Death, then, is not an end to existence, but a change, from mortal, bodily existence, to immortal, spiritual existence. For the martyr, freedom from the body might be a good thing to think about. That is, after all, what the image of the laughing savior is all about. It is a kind of out-of-body fantasy in which one becomes impervious to the torturer’s irons. We must not assume that the heterodox that chose

¹²³ 34.26–36.29.

¹²⁴ 36.29–37.9.

to believe in immortality and not resurrection were never martyred.¹²⁵ But immortality was not—apparently—the best answer to the problem of martyrdom. The martyrs were deprived of life here and now, with loved ones, friends, food, drink, and all the things that make life beautiful and treasured. The immortal mind rising to be among the stars was cold comfort to such losses. Resurrection offered to return all of that dear life to the martyr. And it offered it as part of a larger scenario in which those who had taken away all that was dear would suffer for it. In imperial lands, then, resurrection prevailed. Every orthodox writer whose works survive that period in tact embraced it.

But outside of imperial lands the situation was different. It is worth noting in passing now that the Gospel of Thomas, our earliest exposition of immortality in Christian form, was not composed in imperial lands, but in Edessa, east of the Euphrates, then the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. In Edessa martyrdom was not an issue. There, followers of Jesus would have blended in with other Jews who themselves blended into the complex cityscape of the market town. The issues presented in such a life were quite different. In the hustle and flow of the caravan hub, where fortunes came and went as frequently as the traders themselves, the questions were more about life itself, and how to live it more meaningfully than the world of buying and selling, the world of the temporary gain, the world of fleeting pleasures could offer. That was the kind of question Plato's ideas could answer well: rise above it all; you are not really of this world. This is why Thomas embraces Plato. For this same reason, we may suppose, every Christian text from eastern Syria in the second century—the *Acts of Thomas*, *Thomas the Contender*, (possibly) the Gospel of Philip, but also Tatian's *Oration to the Greeks*, and the legacy of Bardaisan—all of them have a Platonic slant on the gospel. After Caracalla made Edessa a *colonia* of Rome in 214,¹²⁶ all of that would change. Christianity in third century Syria became a very different thing from what it had been in the second century.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Irenaeus (*Adv Haer* 4.33.9) admits as much, and the apocryphal literature associated with James dwells on his martyrdom (see Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 108–110).

¹²⁶ Cassius Dio 78.12.

¹²⁷ For more on the difference Thomas' Edessene origins makes for its theology and ideology, see S. Patterson, "The View from Beyond the Euphrates," *HTR* 104 (2011): 411–431 (= chapter 1 in the present volume).

CONCLUSION

We began by observing an irony in the history of Christian thinking about the future life. What most believers think about life beyond the grave is not to be found in the New Testament. The New Testament answers this question with resurrection, not the immortality of the soul. The seeds of this idea are indeed planted in the earliest soils of nascent Christianity, but they are not biblical soils. We see the idea first in shadow form, in the reflection of Paul's opponents in 1 Corinthians. The first text in which Plato's ideas about immortality form a fundamental core is the Gospel of Thomas.

We can now perhaps see why this is. During the second century, when important ideas were forming about what to regard as scriptural in the Christian tradition, immortality by itself was not acceptable to those who finally claimed ascendancy in the Christian West. Their lives were interpreted by martyrdom and resurrection. That is why they preferred gospels like Mark, Matthew, and Luke. They were not bothered by elements of hybridity in these gospels. After all, they were themselves hybrid thinkers, who still thought that a human being consisted of body and soul. What drew them to these gospels was the way they cast the story of Jesus in martyrological terms: though he had died at the hands of his enemies, he was raised from the dead. This was their story. Paul could be read multiply, and many claimed him. But his clarity about the centrality of resurrection made him scriptural to the second century fathers. John, too, could be read multiply, but with the ecclesiastical additions about the resurrection of the dead, it could become the most treasured gospel. The Gospel of Thomas, on the other hand, could not. It makes no mention of resurrection.¹²⁸ It relies completely on Plato's ideas about the immortality of the soul. It was therefore of no use to the likes of Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian.

One day the problem of martyrdom would pass, as the church gained first legitimacy, and then dominance in the Western world. The Roman Empire became the Holy Roman Empire and the martyrs became saints. With this, one would think that the doctrine of the resurrection would lapse into obscurity. But it did not. By then it was a biblical doctrine and could survive on that strength alone. There would be times when the suffering of the world would make resurrection vital again, but without the

¹²⁸ Pace Riley, *Resurrection*, 127–156. Riley is, in my view, right to see Thomas in conflict with other forms of nascent Christianity on the matter of what becomes of the person upon death. The evidence, however, for an active polemic against resurrection in Thomas is slim.

overweening pressure of martyrdom, the question for most believers became the more general and universal question of what happens when we die. To this, the immortal soul is a better answer than the resurrection of martyrs. Thanks to the latent Platonism in all of those fathers who insisted on resurrection, the immortal soul had survived along with resurrection. Christian orthodoxy would combine them in the great creeds, confessions, and catechisms—resurrection because it was biblical, immortality because it was useful. Resurrection would become the appendix of Christian theology, while immortality became its heart.

Today most believers in the Christian West believe that when they die, their souls go to heaven. This is no small detail in Christian faith. For many, this idea is the heart of the matter. But it is not really a biblical idea. Its gospel origins are apocryphal.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GOSPEL OF (JUDAS) THOMAS AND THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM¹

THOMAS AND THE SYNOPTIC TRADITION

Less than a year after the publication of the Gospel of (Judas) Thomas, Gilles Quispel published an essay in which he claimed to have found in the new gospel a way back to Jesus that was completely independent of the synoptic tradition, and yet so remarkably like the synoptic tradition that one could at last see how utterly mistaken the skepticism of the form critics about the historicity of the gospels had been after all.²

And when we keep in mind that a great number of these sayings are if not identical, very similar to the wording of our Synoptics, and yet come from a different and independent Aramaic tradition, we see clearly that the almost nihilistic skepticism of certain “Histories of the Synoptic Tradition” about the authenticity of the words attributed to Jesus in our Scripture has not such solid foundations as it claims to have. In this sense the Gospel of Thomas confirms the trustworthiness of the Bible.³

The new gospel, it seems, would save both Jesus and the Bible from Bultmann and German nihilism.

So the stage was set for a rather complicated and protracted debate that would unfold around this gospel, one that would link it intractably to the discussion of the synoptic tradition. It is not an easy debate to follow. The first Bultmannians to weigh in were inclined to dismiss Quispel's theories in favor of a more negative assessment of its historical value.⁴ But in the United States the liberal/conservative turf was staked out differently. Robert Grant argued that Thomas was unavailable for the study of Jesus and the

¹ Originally this essay appeared as “The Gospel of (Judas) Thomas and the Synoptic Problem,” in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem (Oxford Conference, April 2008): Essays in Honor of Christopher M. Tuckett*, ed. J. Kloppenborg, et al., BETL 239 (Leuven, Paris, Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011), pp. 783–808.

² G. Quispel, “Thomas and the New Testament,” VC 11 (1957): 189–207.

³ Ibid., 207.

⁴ See, e.g., Ernst Haenchen's critical appraisal of Quispel's work in “Literatur zum Thoma-sevangelium,” *ThR* 27 (1961/62): 162–169.

synoptic tradition because it was late, derivative, and corrupt.⁵ On the other side, Helmut Koester saw in Thomas an independent tradition, and used it to explore Walter Bauer's hypothesis about the diversity of early Christianity at the earliest layers of the tradition.⁶ The first full study of Thomas in the United Kingdom was R. McL. Wilson's very moderately paced and modestly titled, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*.⁷ Wilson's position was that the Gospel of Thomas was probably not written in a single act of composition, but was the result, rather, of cumulative growth over time, an original basic list to which sayings were gradually added.⁸ This means that some of Thomas' sayings must surely derive from the synoptic gospels, but where there are significant differences, Thomas may give evidence of a tradition that is independent of the synoptics.⁹

Wilson's study provides a good excuse to foreshorten a more extensive *Forschungsbericht* on the question of Thomas and the synoptic tradition¹⁰ because after nearly half a century of discussion, it is fair to say that most thoughtful minds are returning to a position that is more or less what Wilson had proposed already in 1960. That is, the Gospel of Thomas is a collection variegated in every respect: theology, form, and provenance. The reason for this is a series of caveats that have arisen in the study of this gospel that have proven unavoidable, as inconvenient as they may be.

FOUR CRITICAL CAVEATS

The first of these is the fact that Thomas is not a gospel like our canonical *narrative* gospels, but a relatively simple list.¹¹ The list, of course, is an

⁵ R.M. Grant, "Notes on the Gospel of Thomas," *VC* 13 (1959): 179.

⁶ H. Koester, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: On the Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," *HTR* 58 (1965): 279–318; reprinted as pp. 114–157 in Koester and J.M. Robinson, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); also "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," *HTR* 61 (1968): 203–247; reprinted as pp. 158–204 in Koester and Robinson, *Trajectories* (cited as in *Trajectories*).

⁷ London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960.

⁸ *Studies* 9, 145; argued again in Wilson, "Thomas and the Growth of the Gospels," *HTR* 53 (1960): 231.

⁹ *Studies*, 50–51.

¹⁰ For a treatment of the issue through 1990 see S.J. Patterson, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A *Forschungsbericht* and Critique," *Forum* 8 (1992): 45–97.

¹¹ J.D. Crossan, "Lists in Early Christianity: A Response to *Early Christianity, Q, and Jesus*," in *Semeia* 55: *Early Christianity, Q, and Jesus*, ed. J. Kloppenborg and L. Vaage (Atlanta, GA, Scholars, 1992), p. 237.

extremely malleable form. Unlike the narrative, where additions and subtractions can be made only with the skilled care of a redactor, items may be added to or dropped from a list with little thought to the effect on the whole. The Gospel of Thomas is potentially the result of myriad such additions and deletions, most of which could never be detected in the copy available to us today. Still, a close reading of the text reveals plenty of evidence that these collected sayings derive from a variety of sources. Take, for example, the various listing formulae employed in Thomas. Most of its sayings are introduced with the simple formula "Jesus said." There must have been a time in the collection's history when this pattern prevailed as a literary convention. But there are many sayings in which this (or any) introduction fails;¹² others carry the simpler form "He said"¹³—and one of these does not refer to Jesus.¹⁴ Some begin with a question posed by the disciples,¹⁵ others with questions posed anonymously.¹⁶ Sayings 51 through 53 seem to have their own formulaic pattern: each begins with a question posed by the disciples (ΠΕΧΛΑϞ ΝΑϞ Ν-ΒΙ ΝΕϞΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ ... / "His disciples said to him ..."), to which Jesus then responds (ΠΕΧΛΑϞ ΝΑϞ ... / "He said to them ..."). Here is a brief dialogue that a redactor has most likely incorporated whole cloth into the collection, perhaps without much alteration. These observations suggest very strongly that Thomas, like any anthology, is an aggregate list, and came over time to "possess the qualities of a snowball."¹⁷ The implication of these observations,

¹² Thomas 27, 43:2, 69:2, 93, 101, and 113.

¹³ Thomas 8, 20, 21, 24, 65, 72:2, 79:2, 91, 99, and 100.

¹⁴ Thomas 74.

¹⁵ Thomas 6, 12, 18, 20, 21, 24, 37, 43, 91, 99, and 113.

¹⁶ Thomas 72, 79, 100, and 104.

¹⁷ Henry Chadwick observed this "snow-balling effect" in connection with another collection, the Sentences of Sextus (*The Sentences of Sextus: A Contribution to the History of Christian Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959] 159), which Wilson applied to the Gospel of Thomas ("Thomas and the Growth of the Gospels," 231; see also *Studies*, 9, 145); others embracing this view include Haenchen, "Literatur," 306–307; H.-Ch. Puech, "The Gospel of Thomas," in Hennecke/Schneemelcher, *NTA*¹ I, p. 305; W. Schrager, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur gnostischen Synoptikerdeutung*, BZNW 29 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), p. 10; S.J. Patterson, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition," p. 65; *idem*, "Understanding the Gospel of Thomas Today," in S.J. Patterson, J.M. Robinson, H.-G. Bethge, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age*, revised edition (London: T. & T. Clark, 2011), p. 28; W. Kelber, "Die Anfangsprozesse der Verschriftlichung im Frühchristentum," *ANRW* II, 26, 1, (1992): 26 ("Listen haben weder Anfang noch Ende."); K.V. Neller, "Diversity in the Gospel of Thomas: Clues for a New Direction?" *SecCen* 7 (1989/90): 1–17; and most recently by A. DeConick, "The Original Gospel of Thomas," *VC* 56 (2002): 167–199;

of course, is that what may be said of the provenance of one or several sayings, cannot be inferred for the whole.¹⁸

The second is the overwhelming reality of orality in the ancient world. In a time and place where literacy was rare and books rarer still, we must imagine the composition of literature and its role very differently. If Harris is correct, we must assume that 95 % of ancients could only have experienced the Jesus tradition aurally.¹⁹ Moreover, in a primarily oral culture, texts tend to function as part of the oral tradition: what is heard at the reading of a text is repeated by its auditors, and so simply becomes another, temporarily static performance of the oral tradition. All of this means that the process we imagine for the synoptic tradition itself, where an author has before him one or more texts from which things are adapted and entered into the new composition, would have been a rare form of intertextual influence. So, if we see small shards of synoptic influence in Thomas, echoes, or intimations, we must always ask whether these derive directly from the synoptic text, or are they instances of “secondary orality?”²⁰

The third caveat is the lack of an “Aland” text for the Gospel of Thomas. For most of this text we have but one exemplar, relatively late, and a Coptic translation at that. Sometimes the Greek fragments lend greater confidence to our judgments about the original, but the fact is we cannot create a hypothetical “original” of Thomas. The manuscript evidence offers us no opportunity to cull out mistakes, scribal additions, harmonizing, or other tendentious alterations to arrive at a best-educated-guess original of the gospel.²¹

idem, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas: The History of the Gospel and Its Growth*, LNTS (JSNTSup) 286 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005).

¹⁸ So J.M. Robinson, “On Bridging the Gulf from Q to the Gospel of Thomas (or vice versa),” in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and early Christianity*, ed. C.W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson, Jr. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), Pp. 162–163.

¹⁹ W.V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); for Palestine in particular see M. Bar-Ilan, “Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries CE,” in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, ed. S. Fishbane and S. Schoenfeld (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992), pp. 46–51; also Catherine Hetzer, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 81 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2001).

²⁰ Originally Haenchen, “Literatur,” 311–314, following Søren Giversen, *Thomasevangeliet. Indledning, Oversættelse og Kommentarer* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1959), p. 21; similarly, K. Snodgrass, “The Gospel of Thomas: A Secondary Gospel,” *Sec Cent* 7 (1989–1990): 19–38; R. Uro, “‘Secondary Orality’ in the Gospel of Thomas: Logion 14 as a Test Case,” *Forum* 9 (1993): 305–329.

²¹ Cf. J. Horman, “The Source of the version of the Parable of the Sower in the Gospel of Thomas,” *NovT* 21 (1979): 326–343. Horman notes esp. the tendency to harmonize in the Coptic translation of the New Testament (see pp. 328–329, 335–337).

This means that piecemeal evidence for Thomas' relationship to the synoptic texts must be evaluated not just as a source-critical question, but first as a *text*-critical question.

Finally there is the fact of the Coptic translation. The most thorough attempt to show Thomas' dependence on the synoptic gospels remains that of Wolfgang Schrage.²² Schrage, of course, worked at the level of the Coptic text, comparing the Coptic of Thomas to the various Coptic rescensions of the New Testament. He reasoned that if one could see dependence at that level, then one could infer dependence at the level of the Greek as well.²³ Most have rightly rejected this claim as *non sequitur*.²⁴ But few have appreciated the real significance of Schrage's very meticulous and careful study. There are several occasions where Schrage showed dependence *precisely* at the level of the Coptic translation. These were occasions where Thomas' translator had chosen to render the Greek original with a Coptic word that was unusual or rare, but which also turned up in one or another of the Coptic renderings of the parallel synoptic passage. These unusual translational choices, he argued, showed that the Coptic New Testament had influenced Thomas' Coptic translator. Perhaps so. But if we know that Thomas' Coptic translator was glancing at a Coptic New Testament, then any evidence of influence must first be tested at this level of the tradition, before it is used to argue for literary dependence of the original upon Matthew, Mark, or Luke.²⁵

These are the conditions under which we must study the Gospel of Thomas. Each in a different way underscores the unavoidable fact that the text we have before us is an aggregate text that was relatively fluid. Between the time of its original composition and the much later creation of our surviving Coptic translation, there would have been many opportunities for influence from the synoptic texts. Is there, then, evidence of synoptic influence, and what does it suggest?

²² *Das Verhältnis* (see note 17, above).

²³ *Das Verhältnis*, 11, 15 (esp. n. 46).

²⁴ Perhaps, implicitly, even Schrage himself, who supplemented his earlier work with an attempt to identify cases of dependence at the level of the Greek fragments of Thomas: "Evangelienzitate in den Oxyrhynchus-Logien und im koptischen Thomas-Evangelium," in *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen*, ed. W. Eltester and F.H. Kettler, BZNW 30 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), pp. 251–268.

²⁵ Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Foundations and Facets: Reference Series (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1993), pp. 91–93; cf. J. Horman, "Source," 329; J.-É. Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), p. 23.

SYNOPTIC INFLUENCE ON THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

Answering this question is not an easy matter. It depends for the most part on identifying details in Thomas that reflect the redactional hand of one or another of the synoptic evangelists. But much of the Thomas/synoptic overlap consists of Q material, where the absence of the Q original often makes the identification of Matthean and/or Lukan redaction difficult. Markan redaction is even more problematic; and instances of Mark/Q overlap more difficult still. Christopher Tuckett's very careful study of 1988²⁶ took all of this into account and offered five instances in which he thought Thomas reproduces clear synoptic redaction.²⁷ To these I would add seven instances where I believe the wording of a Thomas logion may reflect redactional material found in one or another synoptic text,²⁸ and four more where the synoptic order seems to have influenced the order of sayings in Thomas.²⁹ Thus, let us say that one might reasonably identify 16 instances where Thomas might have been influenced by the synoptic text.³⁰ The total number of Thomas/synoptic parallels is, more or less, 95. Thus, the evidence for Thomas' dependence on the synoptic tradition may be summarized as follows: in just under 17 % of all Thomas/synoptic parallels one might find

²⁶ "Thomas and the Synoptics," *NovT* 30 (1988): 132–157.

²⁷ "Thomas and the Synoptics," esp. 145–156. He identifies the following instances of synoptic influence: Thomas 5 (cf. Luke 8:17a, par. Mark 4:22a); Thomas 16 (cf. Luke 12:51–53//Matt 10:34–35, Q); Thomas 55 (cf. Matt 10:37–38//Luke 14:26–27, Q); Thomas 20 (Mark 4:30–32; par. Matt 13:31–32//Luke 13:18–19, Mark-Q overlap); and Thomas 9 (Mark 4:2–9//Matt 13:3–9//Luke 8:4–8).

²⁸ Thomas 31 (cf. Luke 4:23); Thomas 32 (cf. Matt 5:14b); Thom 39:1 (cf. Matt 23:13); Thom 45:3 (cf. Luke 6:35); Thom 47:3 (cf. Luke 5:39); Thom 104:1, 3 (cf. Mark 12:18); and Thom 104:3 (cf. Luke 5:33–35) (Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 92–93).

²⁹ Thomas 32, 33:2–3; 65–66; 92:1 and 93–94; and 43:3–45:4 (Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 97–99).

³⁰ This number naturally does not include every instance of influence ever suggested in the literature. It does include all but one of the instances H. McArthur identified in his early essay, "The Dependence of the Gospel of Thomas on the Synoptics," *ExpT* 71 (1959/60): 286–287. H. Fleddermann's novel theory that Mark made extensive use of Q would reveal a series of redactional moves in Mark that would also turn up in Thomas, thus (in Fleddermann's view) proving Thomas' dependence on Mark (see his *Mark and Q: A Study of the Overlap Texts*, BETL 122 [Leuven: University Press/Peeters, 1995]). But Fleddermann's theory has garnered little support. Schrage's myriad suggestions (*Das Verhältnis*) cannot be answered here, but John Sieber covers most of this ground in his highly-regarded thesis, "A Redactional Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels with regard to the Question of the Sources of the Gospel of Thomas" (Dissertation, Claremont, 1966). Nevertheless, in what follows Schrage's work is consulted closely.

evidence of influence. The evidence is always very slight: a single word (“bush” not “tree” in logion 20), or phrase (“not worthy of me” in logion 55), a grammatical construction (ὁ οὖν in logion 5), or a common sequence (Thom 65–66).

These observations concern the entire corpus of Thomas/synoptic parallels: parallels with Q, Mark/Q overlap, special material, all of which can be difficult to evaluate because of the preponderance of unknown factors. But what does the evidence look like if we eliminate as many of those unknowns as possible? This can be tested by simply asking only about those cases of overlap where there is a clear Markan parallel that has been used and redacted by Matthew and/or Luke. In that more controlled sub-set, how many times does Thomas reproduce the redactional changes made by Matthew or Luke to Mark?

By my count there are 25 such cases in this sub-set.³¹ Within this sub-set there are two instances where the text of Thomas might betray familiarity with Matthean or Lukan redaction of the Markan text:

- 1) In Thomas 31, the second half of the double-stich version of this saying (“no physician heals those who know him”) is close enough to Luke 4:23 (“Doubtless you will quote to me the proverb: ‘Physician, heal yourself.’”) to raise suspicion.³²

³¹ Thom 4:2 (par. Mark 10:31//Matt 19:30; Matt 20:16//Luke 13:30 [Mark/Q overlap]); Thom 5:2 and 6:4 (par. Mark 4:22//Luke 8:17; Matt 10:26//Luke 12:2 [Mark/Q overlap]); Thom 9:1–5 (par. 4:2–9//Matt 13:3–9//Luke 8:4–8); Thom 11:1 (par. Mark 13:31//Matt 24:35//Luke 21:33; Matt 5:18//Luke 16:17 [Mark/Q overlap]); Thom 14:5 (par. Mark 7:15//Matt 15:11); Thom 20:2–4 (par. Mark 4:30–32; Matt 13:31–32//Luke 13:18–19 [Mark/Q overlap]); Thom 22:2 (par. Mark 10:15//Luke 18:17, cf. Matt 18:3 and 19:14); Thom 25:1 (par. Mark 12:31a//Matt 22:39//Luke 10:27b); Thom 31:1 (par. Mark 6:4//Matt 13:57//Luke 4:24; cf. John 4:44); Thom 35:1–2 (par. Mark 3:27; Matt 12:29//Luke 11:21 [Mark/Q overlap]); Thom 41:1–2 (par. Mark 4:24–25//Matt 13:12; Matt 15:29//Luke 19:26 [Mark/Q overlap]); Thom 44:1–3 (par. Mark 3:28–30//Matt 12:31–32//Luke 12:10); Thom 46:2 (par. Mark 10:15//Luke 18:17, cf. Matt 18:3 and 19:14); Thom 47:4–5 (Mark 2:21–22//Matt 9:16–17//Luke 5:36–39); Thom 48 (par. Mark 11:23//Matt 21:21b; Matt 17:20//Luke 17:5 [Mark/Q overlap]); Thom 55:2b (par. Mark 8:34//Matt 16:24//Luke 9:23; par. Matt 10:38//Luke 14:27 [Mark/Q overlap]); Thom 65 and 66 (par. Mark 12:1–12//Matt 21:33–46//Luke 20:9–19); Thom 71 (par. Mark 14:58//Matt 26:61; cf. John 2:19); Thom 99:1–2 (par. Mark 3:31–35//Matt 12:46–50//Luke 8:19–21); Thom 100:1–3 (par. Mark 12:13–17//Matt 22:15–22//Luke 20:20–26); Thom 104:3 (par. Mark 2:20//Matt 9:15//Luke 5:35); Thom 106:2 (par. Mark 11:23//Matt 21:21b; Matt 17:20//Luke 17:5 [Mark/Q overlap]); and Thom 111:1 (par. Mark 13:31//Matt 24:35//Luke 21:33; Matt 5:18//Luke 16:17 [Mark/Q overlap]).

³² So R. Grant and D. Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City: Doubleday/London: Collins, 1960), pp. 149–150; B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins/New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 52; McArthur, “Dependence,” 287; K. Snodgrass, “The Gospel of Thomas: A Secondary Gospel,” *SecCent* 7 (1989/90): 31–32.

- 2) Thom 47:3 corresponds to Lukan redaction in Luke 5:39 (drinking old wine).³³

Tuckett would add Thom 5:2 to this list, on the grounds that the POxy 1 version of this saying uses the relative construction $\delta\ \sigma\tilde{\upsilon}\ \varphi\alpha\nu\eta\rho\delta\acute{o}\nu\ \gamma\epsilon\nu\acute{\eta}\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$, and thus agrees precisely with Luke's redaction of the Markan original $\acute{\epsilon}\delta\acute{\alpha}\nu\ \mu\eta\ \acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\ \varphi\alpha\nu\epsilon\rho\omega\theta\eta\grave{\iota}$.³⁴ This may be another instance, but the Q version of the saying (Matt 10:26//Luke 12:2) also uses the relative construction ($\delta\ \sigma\tilde{\upsilon}\ \gamma\nu\omega\theta\acute{\eta}\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$). In any event, let us consider it a third instance. So, there are 25 instances where Matthew and/or Luke redact a Markan saying that is found also in Thomas, and in only three (12 %) is there any evidence of Thomas' familiarity with the synoptic redaction.³⁵

A WORKING HYPOTHESIS

Based on this evidence, my working hypothesis is that the Gospel of Thomas derives for the most part from an autonomous gospel tradition that overlaps considerably with the synoptic tradition. Presumably they both drew from a common, fluid, oral tradition associated with Jesus. This accounts for the high number of parallels between the two distinct traditions, and the relatively few instances of clear textual cross-influence. Those few instances may be accounted for as late additions, examples of secondary orality, or harmonization at the level of the Greek or the Coptic translation. As exceptions, they are the equivalent of Western harmonizations or minor agreements in the case of the two-source hypothesis. The proper term for them might be *occasional influence*. When we encounter them, we may not assume an entirely independent tradition;³⁶ but where we do not encounter them, we

³³ MacArthur, "Dependence," 286; Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 112.

³⁴ Tuckett, "Thomas and the Synoptics," 145–146, following MacArthur, "Dependence," 287.

³⁵ These two experiments presuppose the two-source hypothesis. On the Farrer-Goulder hypothesis the results would be quite different. In tracking the changes from Mark to Matthew one would still find no evidence that Thomas knew Matthew (or Mark); however, in tracking the changes in the third, Lukan stage of the tradition—on the hypothesis that Luke knew and was redacting the Matthean passages they share, one would find overwhelming evidence that Thomas knew and used Luke. Presupposing the neo-Griesbach (or Two-Gospel) hypothesis would also yield a different result, since Thomas almost always agrees with Mark against Matthew and Luke.

³⁶ It should be noted that occasional influence may also flow in the other direction, from Thomas to the synoptic tradition; see G. Riley, "Influence of Thomas Christianity on Luke 12,14 and 5,39," *HTR* 88 (1995): 229–235; S. Davies, "The Use of the Gospel of Thomas in

should assume that Thomas does indeed represent an instantiation of the Jesus tradition that is not dependent upon the synoptic gospels.

USING THOMAS TO STUDY THE SYNOPTIC TRADITION

If this hypothesis is sustainable, then Thomas might be of considerable use in the study of the synoptic tradition. In what follows I will limit my remarks to four areas in particular: 1) the reconstruction of Q; 2) understanding Markan redaction more clearly; 3) understanding the provenance and redaction of Matthean and Lukan special material; and 4) exposing the roots of the synoptic tradition itself.

Q Reconstruction

The reconstruction of the text of Q is a difficult task that often produces results that are only tentative at best. Can Thomas be of help? Yes, but only indirectly and only under certain circumstances. There is no evidence that Thomas knew or made use of Q,³⁷ so it cannot provide a third, direct witness to the Q text itself. But if the sayings of Jesus found in the Gospel of Thomas were drawn ultimately from the same oral tradition that funded much of the synoptic gospel tradition, then Thomas can offer another window into that oral tradition. It will not provide us with firm details—there are no *firm* details in oral tradition. But by giving us a better sense of the oral tradition, it might occasionally settle a question about what is tradition and what is redaction where Matthew and Luke differ on a Q text. An example may serve to illustrate.

Q 14:26–27: Luke 14:26–27 and Matt 10:37–38 are generally thought to preserve different versions of the Q logion on Hating Family. But which preserves the more original version? It is generally agreed that Luke's "hate" is more original than Matthew's more irenic "love me more than";³⁸ in this case the claim of Luke's text is strengthened by Thomas 55:1: "Whoever does not *hate* his father and mother cannot be a disciple to me." Thomas also

the Gospel of Mark," *Neot* 30 (1996): 307–334; and *idem* and K. Johnson, "Mark's Use of the Gospel of Thomas; Part Two," *Neot* 31 (1997): 233–261.

³⁷ See esp. B. McLean, "On the Gospel of Thomas and Q," in *The Gospel Behind the Gospels: Current Studies on Q*, ed. R.A. Piper, NovTSup 75 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 321–345 (esp. p. 341).

³⁸ J.M. Robinson, P. Hoffmann, and J. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress/Leuven: Peeters, 2000), p. 452.

confirms the first pair from which one must sever ties: “*father and mother ...*” (cf. Luke 14:26a//Matt 10:37a).³⁹ But as the saying unfolds in Matthew and Luke, respectively, they part company on the other family members to be abandoned in deference to a new loyalty to Jesus. In Matthew, sons and daughters are to take second place (10:37b); in Luke one must hate “wife and children, brothers and sisters, even one’s own life” (Luke 14:26b). Matthew’s “sons and daughters” and Luke’s “wife and children” would seem to suggest that Q counseled the abandonment of children, or perhaps wives and children, but the actual text is obscured by the differences. The International Q Project finally printed “son and daughter.”⁴⁰ But Thomas 55 raises another possibility: “Whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters ... will not be worthy of me.”⁴¹ “Brothers and sisters” are present in Luke’s version, but without Thomas one would never have suspected that here we might find the original text of Q. Yet, indeed, perhaps Q spoke not of abandoning wives and children, but of young people abandoning their families of origin: Father and mother, brothers and sisters.⁴² Again, the two-stich form of the saying in Thomas does not insure that Q originally also spoke of leaving parents and siblings, but it does indicate that the saying was sometimes performed in a way that encouraged leaving one’s family of origin, not abandoning one’s own children (cf. Mark 9:37!).

Understanding Markan Redaction

It is usually assumed that Mark redacted and used materials available to him as freely as Matthew and Luke made use of Mark itself. But in the absence Mark’s sources, identifying Markan redaction, too, can be fraught with difficulty and uncertainty. Thomas was not one of Mark’s sources, so

³⁹ “Father and mother” are also in Q: Robinson, et al., *Critical Edition of Q*, 452.

⁴⁰ Robinson, et al., *Critical Edition of Q*, 452.

⁴¹ The independence of Thomas in this case is disputed (see, e.g., Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 120–121). In my view, however, the case for independence is relatively strong for Thomas 55; with Thomas 101 one may need to reckon with secondary influence from Matthew (see Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 44–45).

⁴² See Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 45: “Yet both Matthew and Luke might have altered their source, which likely stood closer to Thomas than to either synoptic text. Matthew will have substituted υἱὸν ἢ θυγατέρα (son or daughter) for τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφάς (brothers and sisters) in order to conform his text more closely to 10:34–35, with which he has secondarily joined this cluster to form a speech on discipleship. For his part, Luke will have preserved the Q text in τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφάς (brothers and sisters) but expanded it with τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα (wife and children) to fill out the family circle (cf. the similar additions to Mark 10:29 in Luke 18:29b).”

as with Q, it does not solve this problem directly. But, as with Q, if Thomas can offer another glimpse at oral traditions it shares with Mark, it might give some inclination about how Mark has worked with the tradition. Again, an example will illustrate.

Mark 4:3–9, par. Thomas 9 (The Sower): A standard treatment of Mark 4:3–9 might point out the following secondary features: the Markan introduction and transition (Mark 4:2); the interpretive invitation in 4:9; the transitional section leading to the allegorical explanation (4:10–12) and the allegorical interpretation itself (4:13–20).⁴³ None of these features appear in Thomas, just as one would expect on the hypothesis of an independent rendering in Thomas. This underscores Mark's allegorical interest in this parable and highlights his redaction of it. But there is more to be observed. Crossan points to a certain awkwardness in Mark's account of the second seed that falls "on rocky ground." In Mark 4:5–6 there is too much: the rocky soil and poor roots that result are enough to inhibit the yield. Yet Mark adds to this the improbable idea that the seed grows too quickly and so withers with the first heat of the day.⁴⁴ But if one looks ahead to the allegorical interpretation that follows in Mark 4:13–20 (esp. vv. 16–17) this redundancy finds an explanation: Mark wishes to liken this seed to those who show great initial enthusiasm at the Word, but wither quickly under the heat of persecution. In contrast to this convoluted account of the second seed, Thomas offers a very simple and straightforward version: "Others fell on rock, did

⁴³ J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 10. Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), pp. 75–77 (whether Markan or pre-Markan); Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 9. Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), p. 202; H. Weder, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu als Metaphern: Traditions- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Analysen und Interpretationen*, FRLANT 120 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), pp. 108–115; H.-J. Klauck, *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten*, NTAbh 13 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), pp. 204–206; B.B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), pp. 346–347; A. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 183–193.

⁴⁴ J.D. Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 40; *idem*, *Cliffs of Fall* (New York: Seabury, 1980), p. 32; cf. Crossan's slightly different position earlier in "The Seed Parables of Jesus," *JBL* 92 (1973): 246. Crossan's earlier position, that all of 4:6 is redactional, is used by Tuckett ("Thomas and the Synoptics," 155) to argue that Thomas agrees with Mark precisely on a point of Markan redaction. The Coptic text of Mark and Thomas seem to substantiate this in their verbal agreement at the level of the Coptic: both read ⲙⲡⲟⲩⲭⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲛⲉ (Mk: ⲡⲟⲩⲛⲉ). But this verbal correspondence does not extend to the level of the Greek, and does not encompass the whole of the verse, so it is difficult to know what to make of it. The poor fit with Mark's Greek begs the question whether Mark⁸⁰ might have been influenced by Thomas on this point.

not take root in the soil, and did not produce ears.” Now, one could never be certain that Mark was working with a version of the parable that resembled closely that of Thomas—in fact Luke’s simpler version may provide that.⁴⁵ But by giving us another, independent performance of the parable,⁴⁶ it casts Mark’s redactional work in starker relief.

The Provenance and Redaction of Special Material

There are a number of overlaps between Thomas and Matthean or Lukan special material. Occasionally this has been used as an argument for the dependence of Thomas upon the synoptic texts. But one should not assume this, for it involves the prior assumption that special material comes only from the hand of the evangelist, with no prior or on-going oral history. This is probably not the case. But if some of this material did have a prior and on-going oral history apart from the gospel texts in which we now find it, can Thomas help to illuminate that heretofore-shrouded corner of synoptic studies? Perhaps. An example will illustrate.

Matt 13:47–50, par. Thomas 8. Matthew’s parable of the Catch of Fish occurs in Matthew’s parables chapter, together with two other parables that tell of finding something unexpected: the parable of the Treasure (13:44) and the parable of the Pearl Merchant (13:45–46). That they form something of a set is suggested by the identical way in which they are introduced: ὁμοίᾳ ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν + a dative *comparandum* (see 13:44, 45, and 47). From this formulaic repetition one might almost assume that they circulated together prior to their inclusion in the Gospel of Matthew. But when one examines them, one finds that only the first two share a common structure, theme, and (presumably) point. The Treasure and the Pearl Merchant each describes a situation in which someone makes a chance, surprise discovery, and in response acts quickly and boldly to secure this precious discovery for himself. In the Treasure, a man discovers a treasure while plowing his field and decides to sell all he has to buy the field and the treasure in it. In the Pearl Merchant, a man discovers a valuable pearl and so decides to sell all he has to buy the pearl. Both of these parables, by the way, are found also in the Gospel of Thomas in a form more or less consistent with the versions found in

⁴⁵ So Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 350.

⁴⁶ Schrage argues a piecemeal case for dependence (*Das Verhältnis*, 44–46), but it is inconclusive. For arguments on the other side of the issue, see Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 22–23.

Matthew 13.⁴⁷ But the Catch of Fish turns out not to follow this same pattern. Instead, Matthew's fisher nets a routine catch of fish—nothing remarkable about it—and then proceeds to sort through the good and the bad fish as any fisher does at the end of the day. This, then, is likened to the apocalyptic scenario Matthew imagines for the future, when “the angels will appear and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire” (13:49b–50a). So, in spite of the repeating formula it shares with the Pearl Merchant and the Treasure, in Matthew one is not invited to link the Fisher with these two adjacent parables, but with another parable Matthew includes earlier in the chapter, the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (13:24–30), understood similarly as an allegory for the coming judgment.

None of this would occasion a second thought if it were not for Thomas 8:

¹And he said, “The human is like an intelligent fisher, who cast his net into the sea (and) drew it up from the sea filled with small fish. ²Among them he found a fine large fish. ³He threw all the small fish back into the sea (and) chose the large fish without difficulty. ⁴Whoever has ears to hear should listen.”

There are features here that most likely may be credited to the hand of the Thomas collector: the “human being” (πρωμε/ἄνθρωπος) as the *tertium comparationis*,⁴⁸ the note that the fisher is “wise” (ριῖζητ/σόφος),⁴⁹ and perhaps other details as well.⁵⁰ But the most striking thing about this fishing parable is the fact that structurally it mirrors exactly the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl: it, too, speaks of a surprise discovery for which the discoverer sacrifices all else in order to secure the singular, fine thing. If, then, Thomas 8 is an independent rendering of the parable Matthew knew and used in

⁴⁷ The Pearl = Thomas 76; the Treasure = Thomas 109.

⁴⁸ So, e.g., Crossan, *In Parables*, 34; H. Montefiore, “A Comarison of the Parables of the Gospel According to Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels,” *NTS* 7 (1960/61): 247; E. Haenchen, *Die Botschaft des Thomasevangeliums*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 6 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1961), p. 48; Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 37–38; R. Cameron, “Parable and Interpretation in the Gospel of Thomas,” *Forum* 2 (1986): 26.

⁴⁹ E.g. Scott, *Hear, Then, the Parable*, 315, Cameron, “Parable and Interpretation,” 26. Cameron notes, however, that the wise man is a common figure in wisdom literature (Job 34:34; Prov 16:14; 29:9; Sir 18:27; 20:7; 33:2; 37:23, 24).

⁵⁰ S. Patterson, “The Parable of the Catch of Fish: A Brief History (On Matthew 13:47–50 and Gospel of Thom 8),” in L. Painchaud and P.-H. Poirier, eds., *Colloque International: “l’Évangile selon Thomas et les Textes de Nag Hammadi,” Québec, 29–31 mai 2003* (Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Section “Études” 8; Laval/Paris: Les Presses de l’Université Laval/Éditions Peeters, 2007) 371–373 (= chapter 8 in the present volume).

13:47–50,⁵¹ it offers us remarkable purchase on the use to which Matthew has put this parable, and an insight into why it shares an introductory formula with the Treasure and the Pearl in 13:44–46. Matthew, it seems, knew a trio of parables, a set, with each member introduced with the formula, *πάλιν ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν* + a dative *comparandum*. And each parable in the set had a similar structure: a surprise discovery leads to decisive action to secure that prized discovery: a farmer discovers a treasure; a merchant finds a pearl; a fisher catches a big fish. Matthew took up the trio as a set, but focused his interpretive efforts on the last of the three, transforming it into an allegory for the final judgment and aligning it thematically with the parable of the Wheat and Weeds. But originally it must have looked very similar to the parable we have in Thomas 8.⁵²

TAPPING THE ROOTS OF THE SYNOPTIC TRADITION

So far as may be determined by the evidence, those who compiled the Gospel of Thomas did not make (systematic) use of the synoptic texts (or their sources, such as Q). It is also evident that the synoptic texts did not make (systematic) use of Thomas.⁵³ If this is true, then the large number of Thomas/synoptic parallels is quite remarkable. So why does Thomas share so much with the synoptic tradition, and what might these parallels tell us about the history of the Jesus tradition? The question might be approached by examining the parallels source by source, beginning with the Thomas/Q parallels, then Thomas/Mark, and finally, Thomas/Special Matthew and Special Luke.

Thomas and Q

The largest group of parallels occurs between Thomas and Q. This is perhaps to be expected. Thomas and Q, after all, share a genre, *Logoi Sophon*, or Sayings of the Wise, and so could be said to share certain interests. This is confirmed on closer examination of the parallel sayings themselves, a preponderance of which is sapiential in nature: proverbs, aphorisms, parables,

⁵¹ For a discussion of the issues, see Patterson, “The Parable of the Catch of Fish,” and on the other side, Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 37–41.

⁵² So Patterson, “Parable of the Catch of Fish.”

⁵³ For possible exceptions see the studies by Riley and Davies cited in n. 36, *supra*.

and the like.⁵⁴ There are also several prophetic sayings among the parallels.⁵⁵ But even these tend to have a sapiential quality; that is, they often rely on general observation or common experience.⁵⁶ Consider, for example, the macarisms found in Thomas and Q's inaugural sermon.⁵⁷ They articulate a prophetic critique and a future hope, but cast it in the typical wisdom form of the macarism, which appeals to general observation for validation. The combination produces a strongly ironic effect: you look upon these beggars and see only their misfortune, but something about the Empire of God renders them, in fact, blessed (Thom 54/Q 6:20b). This same ironic effect is achieved with the extremely malleable saying common to Thomas, Q and Mark:

For there are many who are first who will become last ... (Thom 4:2a)

So the last will be first, and the first last. (Q 13:30)

But many that are first will be last, and the last first. (Mark 10:31)

Its strongest, most ironic form is in Matt 20:16 (likely the original Q version),⁵⁸ which Matthew attaches as a wry observation to the Parable of the Vineyard Workers (Matt 20:1–15). Here one can see its sapiential qualities most clearly: reversal of fortune is always an unexpected surprise. But Mark, Thomas, and Luke (13:30) could all see in this saying a prophetic element: such reversal is inevitable in God's eschatological (Mark, Luke) or protological (Thomas) future.

This blending of wisdom and prophetic elements works in favor of the peculiar sort of wisdom promulgated within this subset of the Jesus tradition. Together with a number of similarly challenging community rules⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Thom 5:2//Q 12:2; Thom 6:3//Q 6:31; Thom 6:4//Q 12:2; Thom 20:1–4//Q 13:18–19; Thom 21:5//Q 12:39–40; Thom 26:1–2//Q 6:41–42; Thom 33:2–3//Q 11:33; Thom 34//Q 6:39; Thom 35:1–2//Q 11:21; Thom 36//Q 12:22–31; Thom 43:3//Q 6:43; Thom 45:1–4//Q 6:44b–45; Thom 47:5//Q 5:36; Thom 64//Q 14:16–24; Thom 76:3//Q 12:33; Thom 78:1–3//Q 7:24–25; Thom 86:1–2//Q 9:58; Thom 94//Q 11:9–10; Thom 95//Q 6:34; Thom 96:1–2//Q 13:20–21; Thom 103//Q 12:39–40; Thom 107:1–2//Q 15:3–6.

⁵⁵ Thom 4:2//Q 13:30; Thom 11:1 and 111:1//Q 16:17; Thom 16:1–3//Q 12:51–53; Thom 33:1//Q 12:3; Thom 39:1–2//Q 11:52; Thom 41:1–2//Q 19:26–27; Thom 46:1//Q 7:28; Thom 54//Q 6:20; Thom 68:1 and 69:1//Q 6:22; Thom 69:2//Q 6:21; Thom 91:1//12:56.

⁵⁶ See esp. Thom 11:1 and 111:1//Q 16:17; Thom 39:1–2//Q 11:52; Thom 41:1–2//Q 19:26–27; Thom 54//Q 6:20; Thom 68:1 and 69:1//Q 6:22; Thom 69:2//Q 6:21; Thom 91:1//12:56.

⁵⁷ Thom 54//Q 6:20; Thom 68:1 and 69:1//Q 6:22; Thom 69:2//Q 6:21.

⁵⁸ Robinson, et al., *Critical Edition of Q*, 418.

⁵⁹ See esp. Thom 14:4//Q 10:8; Thom 55:1–2a and 101:1//Q 14:26; Thom 55:2b//Q 14:27; Thom 89:1–2//Q 11:39–40.

they promulgate a wisdom and a mode of life that is sharply countercultural. Family life is condemned (Thom 55 and 101:2/Q 14:26–27), poverty is embraced (Thom 54/Q 6:20b) wealth is a liability (Thom 95:1–2/Q 6:34–35a) or a fleeting illusion (Thom 76:3/Q 12:33), food and clothing are relegated to afterthought (Thom 69:2/Q 6:21a; Thom 36/Q 6:39). There are sayings which challenge conventional rules about clean and unclean (Thom 14:4/Q 10:8–9; Thom 89/Q 11:39–40). Criticism of elites is entertained (Thom 39:1–2/Q 11:52; Thom 78:1–3/Q 7:24–26), and there is a certain foreboding about future change and struggle (Thom 4:2/Q 19:26; Thom 10/Q 12:49; Thom 16:1–2/Q 12:51; Thom 35:1–2/Q 11:21–22; Thom 103/Q 12:39). Suffering for the sake of principle is contemplated (Thom 68:1–2/Q 6:22–23). In sum, the Thomas/Q overlaps present the preaching of Jesus as encouragement to a countercultural stance that is critical of the surrounding world. Formally, it is broadly sapiential with a critical prophetic edge. Much of this material figured strongly in Theissen's *Wanderradikalismus* theory,⁶⁰ and may be considered central to the peculiar *askesis* of the Jesus tradition.⁶¹

Equally important are those things that do not occur in the fund of sayings common to Q and Thomas. Q has virtually none of the esoteric, Platonizing theology that is so distinctive of the Gospel of Thomas.⁶² Conversely, Thomas has little of the apocalyptic theology that most scholars associate with the redaction of Q.⁶³ Thomas does have several sayings that, in Q, carry an apocalyptic message.⁶⁴ But when we encounter them in Thomas,

⁶⁰ G. Theissen, "Wanderradikalismus. Literatursoziologische Aspekte der Überlieferung von Worten Jesu im Urchristentum," *ZTK* 70 (1973): 245–271, and the other essays gathered and reprinted in Gerd Theissen, *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, 2. Auflage, WUNT 19 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983).

⁶¹ S. Patterson, "Askesis and the Early Jesus Tradition," in *Asceticism and the New Testament*, ed. L. Vaage and V. Wimbush (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 49–69 (= chapter 7 in the present volume).

⁶² An exception to this, of course, is the highly mythological material in Q 10:22–24, which appears to combine two sayings we have separately in Thomas (Thom 61:3b and 17). Here Jesus speaks as the divine messenger common to the speculative Jewish Wisdom theology from which Thomas derives. Though the concept plays little role in Q, its presence demonstrates how early this idea had taken root among the followers of Jesus, only to flourish in later texts like the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of John.

⁶³ Most notable by their absence are the many Son of Man sayings in Q, in which Q's overarching message of judgment comes to expression, and any sayings from Q 17, the Q apocalypse (Koester, "One Jesus," *Trajectories*, 170–172). Luke 17:22 (par. Thom 38:2) is not likely from Q—see Robinson, et al., *Critical Edition of Q*, 500–501.

⁶⁴ See Thom 5:2 and 6:4//Q 10:26; Thom 35//Q 11:21–22; Thom 39:1–2//Q 11:52; Thom 41//Q 19:26; Thom 46:1–2//Q 7:28; Thom 73//Q 10:2; Thom 78//Q 7:24–26; Thom 89//Q 11:39–41; Thom 91//Q 12:56; Thom 21:5 and 103//Q 12:39.

apart from the synoptic context in which we are more used to seeing them, most of these sayings no longer appear apocalyptically motivated at all. Rather, they turn out to be multivalent sayings easily adapted to the theological surroundings in which they are used. The metaphor of the thief in Thom 21:5 and 103//Q 10:39 provides a good illustration. In Q the image of the thief is applied (somewhat awkwardly) to the apocalyptic figure of the Son of Man, who will come like a thief in the night, just when you least expect it. In Thomas the image of the thief is used quite differently. Here it is a metaphor for the hostile world, an ever-present threat to the well-being of the Jesus-follower. The application is quite natural, and its difference revealing: the metaphor of the thief is not essentially apocalyptic. It is sapiential, which is also to say, multivalent.

On the other side, Q also holds a few sayings that, in Thomas, have been made to carry its characteristic Platonizing wisdom theology.⁶⁵ But as in the case of Q, without exception one can easily see how Thomas has achieved this secondary effect, either by altering the saying or by giving it a suggestive setting. Logion 2 will serve to illustrate. Those who used and shaped the Gospel of Thomas knew the saying in Thom 2:1 as a simple wisdom admonition to seek after insight (cf. Thomas 94). But in logion 2 they chose to develop it into something much more. Here it has become the first step in the quest for divine rest, a key soteriological concept in the Platonizing form of Christianity given expression in Thomas:⁶⁶

'Jesus said, "Let him who [seeks] not rest [until] he finds, ³and when he finds [he will be astonished, ⁴and when he has been] astonished, he will rule, ⁵and [when he has ruled, he will] rest."⁶⁷

In Q 11:9, however, the saying retains its simple wisdom form, enjoining the follower of Jesus to look for insight.

⁶⁵ Thom 2 and 92//Q 11:9–10; Thom 69:1//Q 6:22–23; Thom 101//Q 14:26–27.

⁶⁶ For this theme, and the Platonizing tendency in the theology of Thomas see S. Patterson, "Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas and Middle Platonism," in *Das Thomasevangelium, Entstehung—Rezeption—Theologie*, ed. J. Frey, et al., BZNW 157 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 181–205 (= chapter 2 in the present volume). See also Thomas 92, where it is also developed mythologically.

⁶⁷ Citing the Greek version of the saying from P. Oxy. 654, which is likely the more original version of the saying (so P. Luomanen, "'Let Him Who Seeks, Continue Seeking': The Relationship Between the Jewish Christian Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas," in *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas*, ed. J. Ma. Asgeirsson, et al., NHMS 59 [Leiden: Brill, 2006], p. 130).

Comparing the parallel sayings shared by Q and Thomas thus reveals a pattern.⁶⁸ The vast majority of their shared material is sapiential in character. One finds several sayings from this common fund that are used apocalyptically in Q, but retain a more sapiential orientation in Thomas. One also finds sayings from the common fund that are interpreted Platonically in Thomas, but retain their more sapiential orientation in Q. The pattern thus observed suggests that Q and Thomas share an early fund of dominical sayings that was broadly sapiential in nature. From this common fund of material, two trajectories emerged, one that produced Q and another that produced Thomas. In the Q trajectory an apocalyptic reading of the tradition took hold, in the Thomas trajectory, a more Platonizing reading flourished. Both of these theological options were, of course, ready to hand in the diverse world of first century Judaism.

Thomas and Mark

A similar pattern of development may be detected by an examination of the parallels common to Thomas and Mark. Of the 27 sayings with parallels in Thomas and Mark, 12 are also found in Q.⁶⁹ Thus, while the occurrence of Mark/Q overlap is relatively rare, among the Mark/Thomas parallels they represent almost half of the material. In other words, as with the Thomas/Q parallels, the Thomas/Mark parallels are concentrated in material that is demonstrably very early.

Also similar to the Thomas/Q parallels, the Thomas/Mark parallels contain a number of sayings that are sapiential in nature: proverbs, wisdom sayings, and parables.⁷⁰ More common than in the Thomas/Q parallels, however, are prophetic sayings⁷¹ and especially community rules.⁷² A closer

⁶⁸ For the following description and the analysis behind it, see S. Patterson, "Wisdom in Q and Thomas," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John Gammie*, ed. L.G. Perdue, et al. (Louisville, KY: W/JKP, 1993) pp. 187–221 (= chapter 6 in the present volume).

⁶⁹ Thom 4:2//Mark 10:31//Q 13:30; Thom 5:2 and 6:4//Mark 4:22//Q 12:2; Thom 11:1 and 11:11//Mark 13:31//Q 16:17; Thom 20:2–4//Mark 4:30–32//Q 13:18–19; Thom 35:1–2//Mark 3:37//Q 11:21; Thom 41:1–2//Mark 4:24–25//Q 19:26–27; Thom 44:1–3//Mark 3:28–30//Q 12:10; Thom 48 and 106:2//Mark 11:23//Q 17:5–6; Thom 55:2b//Mark 8:34//Q 14:27.

⁷⁰ Thom 5:2 and 6:4//Mark 4:22; Thom 9:1–5//Mark 4:2–9; Thom 20:2–4//Mark 4:30–32; Thom 31:1//Mark 6:4; Thom 35:1–2//Mark 3:27; Thom 47:4//Mark 2:22; Thom 47:5//Mark 2:21; and Thom 65:1–7//Mark 12:1–9.

⁷¹ Thom 4:2//Mark 10:31; Thom 11:1 and 11:11//Mark 13:31; Thom 21:10//Mark 4:29; Thom 41:1–2//Mark 4:24–25; Thom 66//Mark 12:10; and Thom 71//Mark 14:58.

⁷² Thom 14:4//Mark 7:15; Thom 22:2 and 46:2//Mark 10:15; Thom 25:1//Mark 12:31a; Thom 44:1–3//Mark 3:28–30; Thom 48 and 106:2//Mark 11:23; Thom 55:2b//Mark 8:34; Thom 99:1–2//Mark 3:31–35; Thom 100:1–3//Mark 12:13–17; Thom 104:3//2:18–20.

examination of these sayings, however, reveals that many of them have a certain generalizing quality one would associate with wisdom. For example, both Mark and Thomas preserve the following saying as a community rule:

For what goes into your mouth will not defile you. Rather, it is what comes out of your mouth will defile you. (Thom 14:5)

There is nothing outside a person, which by going in can defile him, but things which come out of a person are what defile him. (Mark 7:15)

As used in each gospel, the saying authorizes, albeit differently, a certain laxity on the issue of clean and unclean foods. That is, it functions as a community rule. But considered by itself, the logion is not formulated as a rule. It is, rather, an aphorism expressing a critical insight about traditional attitudes associated with food customs.⁷³ The same is true of several prophetic sayings common to Mark and Thomas. Take, for example, the saying about having and receiving, which is found also in Q:

¹Whoever has (something) in his hand, to him will be given (more), ²and whoever has nothing, the little he has will be taken from him. (Thom 41:1–2)

For to the one who has, more will be given; and from the one who has not, more will be taken away. (Mark 4:24–25)

To everyone who has, more will be given, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (Q 19:26–27)

Is this saying a prophetic saying or an aphoristic observation? In Mark it is used as a comment on the rewards of listening and learning. In Q it is attached to the Parable of the Talents, perhaps as a warning. In Thomas it stands by itself as a dominical saying to be pondered. It is malleable and multivalent because it rests on careful observation, and lights upon a common human experience: the rich get richer and the poor poorer. It has a sapiential dimension. In such instances,⁷⁴ one may only surmise that an early sapiential corpus of sayings associated with Jesus tradition has gradually been adapted to the inevitable demands of social formation, however loosely one might imagine this in the Thomas trajectory. As questions of practice

⁷³ Several community rules among the Thomas/Mark parallels share this sapiential quality, including Thom 25:1//Mark 12:31; Thom 48 and 106:2//Mark 11:23; Thom 99:1–2//Mark 3:31–35; Thom 100:1–3//Mark 12:13–17; and Thom 104:3//Mark 2:18–20.

⁷⁴ Other prophetic sayings among the Thomas/Mark parallels that share this sapiential quality might include Thom 4:2//Mark 10:31; Thom 11:1 and 111:1//Mark 13:31; and Thom 66//Mark 12:10.

arose, or conflicts, dominical insights about life were transformed into community rules and prophetic sayings that could respond to these eventualities.

Both Mark and Thomas can also be seen frequently to take advantage of the sapiential malleability of these sayings in using them to express their respective theological concerns. We have already observed, for example, the variety of ways Thomas, Mark and Q have made use of the saying found in Thom 4:2, Mark 10:31, and Q 13:30. The variety of uses to which this logion has been put illustrates its remarkable range: the insightful observation that in life fortunes are often reversed would prove *a propos* many times in the tradition. This flexibility affords an opportunity for study. In Thomas 4 it is used to punctuate an esoteric saying: an old man will ask a child less than seven days old about the place of life. In one way or another, this saying relates to the esoteric protological theology of the Gospel of Thomas.⁷⁵ The concept of reversal is thus applied in a very Thomean way. In Mark 10:31 the saying is used to interpret the eschatological scenario spelled out in 10:27–30: the disciples who have given up everything (the last) will receive everything back a hundredfold in the “age to come.”

Or consider the saying in Thom 11:1 and Mark 13:31. Though Thomas and Mark both use it as a prophetic saying, this logion’s use in Q 16:17 reveals its more fundamental character as a simple wisdom cliché expressing near impossibility. It uses hyperbole to express exasperation at the unwillingness of others to foreswear strict adherence to the Law. In both Thomas and Mark, however, the saying has been used more tendentiously to give expression to the theological tendencies at work in each. In Thomas it has been read Platonically, as a declaration of the transient nature of the cosmos:

¹Jesus said, “This heaven will pass away and the one above it will pass away.
²And the dead are not alive, and the living will not die.”

In Mark the expression is given an eschatological application, asserting the enduring nature of Jesus’ words in the face of the imminent apocalypse:

Truly, truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
 (Mark 13:30–31)

⁷⁵ A.F.J. Klijn, “The ‘Single One’ in the Gospel of Thomas,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 271–278 (esp. 273–275); F. Trevijano Etcheverría, “El anciano preguntará al niño (Evangelio de Tomás Log. 4),” *EstBib* 50 (1992): 521–535.

This same pattern is to be seen with another malleable wisdom form shared by Mark and Thomas, the parable. The most revealing example is perhaps the Parable of the Tenants. In Mark the parable is presented as an allegory for the death of Jesus at the hands of his opponents, the Temple leadership in Jerusalem, and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of its enemies.⁷⁶ It is thus woven into the Markan narrative as an explanation for the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem in Mark's own day: it was punishment for Jerusalem's rejection of Jesus the messiah. The parable then becomes a narrative template for the remaining chapters of the Gospel of Mark, as Jesus enters Jerusalem, is rejected, and finally killed.⁷⁷ In the Gospel of Thomas none of this is apparent. Thomas's parable lacks specifically those elements that create of it an allegory in Mark. Jerusalem is not in view, neither is the war that led to its destruction, nor the death of Jesus. Rather, in Thomas the Parable of the Tenants is grouped with two other parables, the Rich Fool (Thom 63) and the Great Feast (Thom 64), and used to decry the foolish pursuit of worldly gain and warn against the ruin that is sure to follow,⁷⁸ a theme that is common in the Gospel of Thomas.⁷⁹

This last example points to a larger, more overarching difference that separates the Gospel of Thomas from the synoptic tradition: interest in the death of Jesus. In the synoptic gospels the traditions about Jesus are woven into a story that begins just a few months before his death, works steadily in the direction of his death by showing how he comes into conflict with his enemies, is betrayed, unfairly tried, convicted, abused, and finally crucified.⁸⁰ The synoptic tradition is a martyrological tradition in large measure. This tone is set, of course, by Mark, which Matthew and Luke follow—albeit with waning commitment to the centrality of Jesus' death. In Q one finds some of this same martyrological emphasis.⁸¹ The reason for this is relatively straightforward. Mark was written, and Q redacted, generally during the time of the Jewish War, where questions of faithfulness and

⁷⁶ See, e.g., Scott, *Hear, Then, the Parable*, 238–241.

⁷⁷ M. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), pp. 231–299.

⁷⁸ J.-M. Sevrin, “Un groupement de trios paraboles contre les richesses dans l'Évangile selon Thomas (Ev Th log. 63, 64, 65),” in *Les paraboles évangéliques: Perspectives nouvelles*, ed. J. Delmore, *Lectio divina* 135 (Paris: Cerf, 1989), pp. 425–439.

⁷⁹ Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 137–146.

⁸⁰ The martyrdom of Jesus as the death of God's righteous one, following this familiar pattern, in the synoptic passion narrative is spelled out most clearly by G. Nickelsburg, “The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative,” *HTR* 73 (1980): 153–184.

⁸¹ D. Seeley, “Jesus' Death in Q,” *NTS* 38 (1992): 222–234.

loyalty, endurance in the face of opposition and courage at the prospect of suffering, and finally how to die true to one's convictions in the hope that God will redeem, were themes all too relevant for Jews living through the violence and chaos of the war. The synoptic story is the story of God's suffering righteous one.

All of this is virtually absent from the Gospel of Thomas.⁸² Why? If Thomas was composed initially in roughly the same time frame as the synoptic gospels,⁸³ the difference must derive in some sense from its different provenance. If Thomas was composed in Edessa,⁸⁴ beyond the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire,⁸⁵ and in this way removed from the violence that engulfed Jews living further to the west, one can perhaps comprehend this difference. Thomas is not a martyr's gospel because it was not written for potential martyrs. Instead, those who used it lived in a place where Jews

⁸² Thom 55:2 is perhaps an exception.

⁸³ The fact that Thomas is a list makes it impossible to assign a date to the whole, in the way one might do this, say, for the canonical gospels (Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 113–118); nevertheless, one might reasonably argue for a core collection in Syria by the end of the first century or beginning of the second, and few have argued for a date much earlier or much later (for a survey of views see R. Cameron and F. Fallon, "The Gospel of Thomas: A Forschungsbericht and Analysis," *ANRW* II.25.6 [1988], pp. 4224–4227).

⁸⁴ There is near consensus on this: see H.-Ch. Puech, "The Gospel of Thomas," 286; G. Quispel, "L'Évangile selon Thomas et les Clémentines," *VC* 12 (1958): 181–196; *idem*, "L'Évangile selon Thomas et le Diatessaron," *VC* 13 (1959): 87–117; *idem*, "The Syrian Thomas and the Syrian Macarius," *VC* 18 (1964): 226–235; *idem*, "L'Évangile selon Thomas et les origines de l'ascèse chrétienne," in *Aspects du judéo-christianisme: Colloque de Strasbourg 23–25 avril 1964 / Travaux du Centre d'Études Supérieures Spécialisés d'Histoire des Religions de Strasbourg* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), pp. 35–52; R. McL. Wilson, *Studies*, 10; B. Gärtner, *Theology of the Gospel of Thomas*, 271–272; A.F.J. Klijn, "Das Thomasevangelium und das altsyrische Christentum," *VC* 15 (1961): 146–159; *idem*, "Christianity in Edessa and the Gospel of Thomas: On Barbara Ehlers, Kann das Thomasevangelium aus Edessa stammen?" *NovT* 14 (1972): 70–77; H. Koester, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI," 126–128; *idem*, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress/Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982), vol. 2, p. 152; *idem*, "Introduction," in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 ... Vol. 1: The Gospel of Thomas*, ed. B. Layton, *NHS* 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), p. 40.; B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City: Anchor, 1987), pp. 360–364, 377; J.D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992), pp. 23–26; Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 118–120; Neller, "Diversity in the Gospel of Thomas," 7–8; J. Schröter and H.-G. Bethge, "Das Evangelium nach Thomas (NHC II,2): Einleitung," in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 1. Band: *NHC I,1–V,1*, ed. H.-M. Schenke, et al., *GCS*, n.F. 8 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 156–157.

⁸⁵ The Euphrates was the traditional eastern boundary of the empire until Trajan attempted to push it further east in 114 CE. (Strabo 11.9.2; Cassius Dio 40.14; Pliny, *Nat Hist* 5.88). But Trajan's gains were not permanent (see Cassius Dio 68.33) and the region was not made a Roman imperial province until Caracalla annexed it in 214 (Cassius Dio 78.12).

were fairly well integrated into all aspects of life, living peacefully and un-harassed by their neighbors.⁸⁶ They struggled not with the hostility of enemies, but the shallow allure of the crassly commercial world that was the everyday of Edessa, the first stop on the old Silk Road east as it proceeded out of Antioch, and a crossroads north and south as well. Their question was not how to die bravely, but how to live wisely, unsullied by the worldly pursuits that might corrupt their souls and prevent them from making the heavenly journey home. In the Gospel of Thomas the Jesus tradition is marshaled around this goal. The result is a very different gospel from the first canonical three, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Thomas and Special Material

Before summarizing, we should consider briefly the parallels Thomas shares with Matthean and Lukan special material. As with the Thomas/Q parallels and the Thomas/Mark parallels, the list of Thomas/Special Material parallels is dominated by sapiential forms. There are several parables,⁸⁷ wisdom sayings,⁸⁸ and two macarisms.⁸⁹ For the most part these sayings function in their respective contexts as simple wisdom sayings or parables. In a few cases one is invited by context to understand a saying that is fundamentally sapiential in nature in a way that reflects the more distinctive theological tendencies of each tradition. Consider, for example, the way Thomas and Luke make use of the proverbial logion: "Two will rest on a bed, one will live, the other die."⁹⁰ Because it speaks of the vicissitudes of life and death both see in it an opportunity to reflect on soteriology. Thus, Luke places it at the end of his apocalypse in chapter 17, where he understands it as a comment on the coming judgment: some will make it, some will not. In Thomas, on the other hand, it is used to launch a somewhat elusive exchange between Jesus and Salome concerning the true life that comes from becoming like God, full of light. Like other wisdom sayings, the original aphorism was malleable enough to serve either tradition with little need for adjustment. In other instances, one can see the evangelists exercising more overt

⁸⁶ J. Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), pp. 41–42.

⁸⁷ Thom 8:1–3//Matt 13:47–48; Thom 57:1–4//Matt 13:24–30; Thom 76:1–2//Matt 13:45–46; Thom 109:1–3//Matt 13:44; and Thom 63:1–4//Luke 12:16–21.

⁸⁸ Thom 32//Matt 5:14b; Thom 39:3//Matt 10:16b; Thom 62:2//Matt 6:3; Thom 93//Matt 7:6; Thom 47:3//Luke 5:39.

⁸⁹ Thom 79:1–2//Luke 11:27; 79:3//Luke 23:29; one may perhaps consider these prophetic sayings, but they are couched in a sapiential form.

⁹⁰ Thom 61:1//Luke 17:34.

redactional efforts to adapt a saying to its new theological context.⁹¹ But in most cases, one can still detect the sapiential basis for the tradition.

In this group of sayings there are at least three that may be considered prophetic sayings: Thom 10 (Luke 12:49), Thom 40 (Matt 15:12–13) and the doublet in Thom 3 and 113 (Luke 17:20–21). The first two would seem to carry apocalyptic overtones in both Matthew and Thomas, though the conflict and sorting they envision need not be considered only in apocalyptic terms. They may also signal the stresses and strains of novel social formation, and the change and uncertainties such experimentation inevitably brings.

The third is very curious, for in each tradition it seems oddly out of step. Luke 17:20–21 clearly cuts against an apocalyptic understanding of Jesus' words,⁹² but it stands at the beginning of Luke's (largely Q's) long apocalyptic discourse in 17:22–37.⁹³ Thom 113 stands very close to Luke's form of the saying. Thom 3 is formulated more in the sapiential tradition of the search for wisdom,⁹⁴ but it too asserts the immediacy of the kingdom against the notion that it must somehow be (temporally or spatially) remote. This concept of the kingdom present now, in the midst of life, is certainly congruous with the many kingdom parables in Thomas, in which the kingdom comes to life in everyday scenes and situations. But it is apparently contradicted by the concept of the kingdom that is represented in Thom 49–50, where the Kingdom of the Father is a remote place, from which God's chosen ones have come, and to which they will eventually return.

⁹¹ Overt redaction is especially evident in Thom 30 (par. Matt 18:20) and Thom 109 (par. Matt 13:44). On the Matthean side one sees overt adaptation in the Fisher parable (13:47–48; cf. Thom 8—see analysis in S. Patterson, "The Parable of the Catch of Fish").

⁹² Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), pp. 70–74; *idem*, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 45. This is probably to be preferred over Bultmann's more awkward future-oriented reading (*Geschichte*, 128), or more recent attempts to rectify the contradiction (e.g., N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996], p. 469).

⁹³ That Luke drew the material in 17:20–21 from Q is a distinct possibility; see, e.g., R. Schnackenburg, "Der eschatologische Abschnitt Lk. 17.20–37," in *Mélanges bibliques en hommage au R.P. Bédé Rigaux*, ed. A. Dechamps and R.P. André de Halleux (Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), pp. 213–234 (esp. 214 ff.); also J.M. Robinson, "The Study of the Historical Jesus after Nag Hammadi," in *Semeia 44: The Historical Jesus and the Rejected Gospels*, ed. C. Hedrick (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), pp. 50–53.

⁹⁴ T.F. Glasson, "The Gospel of Thomas, Saying 3, and Deuteronomy xxx.11–14," *ExpT* 78 (1966/67): 151–152; F. Altheim und R. Stiehl, "Erwägungen zum Thomasevangelium," in *Die Araber in der alten Welt: Fuenfter Band, Zweiter Teil: Nachtraege—Das christliche Askum*, ed. F. Altheim und R. Stiehl (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969), pp. 368–373; S. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983) 41–45; T. Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*, NHMS 47 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 173–174.

What to make of this incongruity is one of the great puzzles of Christian origins. Is the kingdom a present state of being in the world—thus, a sapiential concept—or is it a transcendental reality removed from the present either spatially or temporally? And why should both the immediate and transcendental options be present in a single work like Thomas or Luke?

The fact that this logion occurs independently in both Thomas and Luke (and perhaps earlier, in Q) indicates that it probably comes from an early period in the development of the Jesus tradition. It did not first arise only later, as a response to the failure of various apocalyptic scenarios laid out in Mark, for example.⁹⁵ On the contrary, the pattern to be observed in the Thomas/synoptic parallels suggests another scenario. Throughout these parallels we have noted the predominance of sapiential forms and content. Even the community rules and prophetic sayings tend to have a sapiential basis upon which their fundamental point is grounded. Occasionally the synoptic version of a saying or parable will carry apocalyptic overtones, or even an explicitly apocalyptic message. But this occurs almost exclusively on the synoptic side of the parallels, not on the Thomas side. Occasionally the Thomas version of a saying or parable will carry the more esoteric strains of Thomas' speculative philosophical theology. But this occurs almost exclusively on the Thomas side of the parallels, not on the synoptic side. What this suggests is that the early Jesus tradition from which both Thomas and the synoptic tradition derived was sapiential in nature. As that tradition was taken up and developed in the Thomas trajectory, on the one hand, and the synoptic trajectory, on the other, it was wedded to the theological proclivities that are more distinctive of those respective traditions, and thus began to take on new forms. In the synoptic tradition, this early wisdom tradition was overlaid with a more apocalyptic orientation; in the Thomas tradition, it was overlaid with a Platonizing form of Jewish Wisdom theology.⁹⁶ In this case, the anti-apocalyptic saying in Luke 17:20–21 and Thom 3/113 is not a late corrective to an earlier apocalyptic theology known to both Luke and Thomas. Rather, it is representative of an early commitment to seeing the

⁹⁵ So, e.g., B. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York, NY: Oxford, 1999), pp. 130, 177. That Luke 17:20–21 is not simply Lukan redaction is widely recognized (see, e.g., F. Bovon, *L'Évangile selon Luc (15,1–19,27)*, Commentaire du Nouveau Testament, Deuxième Série IIIc [Genève: Labor et Fides, 2001], pp. 147–148).

⁹⁶ Patterson, "Wisdom in Q and Thomas;" further, J.D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. 247–256.

kingdom in sapiential terms, as a present reality and way of being in the world, not a transcendental reality, temporally or spatially removed from the present.

In summary, the comparison of Thomas and the synoptic gospels reveals a great deal of overlapping material. Lacking any evidence for an actual written source linking them, one should assume that this overlap owes to a common fund of material that was essentially oral. What dominated this early fund of material was the peculiar counter-cultural wisdom of Jesus, as expressed in many aphorisms, parables, and community rules. There was also a strong prophetic element complimenting the implicit cultural critique of this sapiential material. Less present was the more distinctive philosophical theology of the Thomas tradition or the apocalypticism and martyrological strains more typical of the synoptic tradition. The theological perspectives more distinctive of Thomas and the synoptics, respectively, would have emerged within these traditions as they developed over time. The synoptic tradition took on a more apocalyptic orientation, while Thomas adopted the Platonizing philosophical theology of Hellenistic Judaism. The synoptic tradition tried to make sense of the chaos and violence that characterized its war-torn environment, and broached the question of faithfulness unto death. The Thomas tradition tried to negotiate its world of commerce and trading, and counseled how to live wisely without giving in to the corruption it regarded as characteristic of that world.

The tradition from which both Thomas and the synoptic evangelists drew was no doubt diverse, with many theological roots. But comparing Thomas and the synoptic texts reveals that one very important root was a tradition that was broadly sapiential. This sapiential Jesus tradition, like all wisdom tradition, was remarkably malleable and adaptable to the various unfolding situations in which the followers of Jesus would come to find themselves. Thomas and the synoptic tradition represent two trajectories, or interpretive strategies, that emerged in the early years of the Jesus tradition. One was apocalyptically oriented and largely martyrological; the other was oriented to speculative Jewish wisdom theology of the sort one finds in the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, and many others who brought Plato and the Torah into the same world of meaning.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS AND HISTORICAL JESUS RESEARCH¹

AN ODD GOSPEL

Anyone who writes today on the historical question of what Jesus said and did must deal with the issue of the Gospel of Thomas. Is this odd new gospel—odd by our standards of what a gospel ought to be, standards honed over centuries of reading only the canonical four—to be taken seriously as a source for historical work on Jesus? And if it is, how? What do its peculiarities demand from the historian who wishes to be rigorous and judicious in his or her work?

To bring this new gospel into the discussion is a technical challenge of no small degree. But its challenges are more complex even than the formal, linguistic, and other technical difficulties would suggest. For with Thomas one encounters a series of more nebulous issues which lurk beneath the surface of the discussion, but which are clearly felt by anyone familiar with the literature. These are personal and theological, or ideological issues that come into play because Thomas is a gospel, but not *canonical*. It is a gospel whose ecclesiastical aspirations have, so to speak, been denied. This awkward situation creates a charged atmosphere around the discussion of Thomas. Those who would take this gospel seriously in their historical work may hint that those who do not are simply tradition-bound, unable to separate canonical authority from the separate issue of historical relevance. Those who would leave Thomas aside might suggest that those who use it are being taken in by something spurious, running after the latest exciting discovery, or perhaps simply attracted by the iconoclasm of finally discovering the real truth about Jesus in a gospel that was rejected or even suppressed by the church. No one wishes to be accused of dabbling in such *ad hominem* innuendo, but

¹ This essay originally appeared as “The Gospel of Thomas and Historical Jesus Research,” in *Coptica, Gnostica, et Manichaica. Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk à l’occasion de son 60^e anniversaire*; BCNH, section “Études,” 7, ed. L. Painchaud et P.-H. Poirier (Québec: Laval/Louvain-Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2006), pp. 663–684.

one feels it all the time as it affects the discussion of the Gospel of Thomas in oblique ways. For example, on which side of the imaginary line that we draw between the first century and the second does one locate Thomas? Does it go on the first century side, where all the legitimate historical texts belong, or on the second century side, where the heretical works reside? Forget that there is no reliable way of dating Thomas; and forget that the magical year of 100 AD meant nothing to the ancients who had not yet learned to divide time in the Christian manner. “The end of the first century” is a magical phrase in the scholarly imagination, and where Thomas falls relative to this line in the sand has always been an extremely important issue.

THOMAS AND THE NEW QUEST

These burdens of dealing with such a challenging text belong to this generation of questers by chance. Had all of Thomas been discovered half a century earlier,² or if the discoverers had published their find more expeditiously,³ Thomas might have landed in Ernst Käsemann’s lap.⁴ One might

² The Coptic Gospel of Thomas was discovered in 1945 (see James M. Robinson, “The Story of the Nag Hammadi Library,” in Stephen J. Patterson, James M. Robinson, and Hans-Bebhard Bethge, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age*, revised edition [London: T. & T. Clark, 2011], pp. 67–73). Parts of this gospel were discovered and published about 50 years before, but without sufficient information to identify these “fragments of an unknown gospel” as the Gospel of Thomas (see B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 1 [London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898], pp. 1–3 and *idem*, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 4 [London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1904], pp. 1–28). In 1957 H.–Ch. Puech made the connection between these three fragments from Oxyrhynchus and the newly-discovered Gospel of Thomas from Nag Hammadi (see “Une collection de paroles de Jésus récemment retrouvée: L’Évangile selon Thomas,” in the annual report of the French Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres, *Comptes rendus des séances de l’année 1957* [1957]: 146–166).

³ Though discovered in 1945, the Gospel of Thomas was not published until the late 1950s. In 1956 Pahor Labib published photographs of the original papyrus leaves containing the Gospel of Thomas (*Coptic Gnostic Papyri in the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo* [Cairo: Government Press—Antiquities Department, 1956]), on which basis Johannes Leipoldt published in 1958 an unauthorized translation of the text (“Ein neues Evangelium: Das Koptisch Thomasevangelium übersetzt und besprochen,” *TLZ* 83 [1958] cols. 481–496). The *editio princeps* was published in 1959 by A. Guillaumont, H.-Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, W.C. Till, and ‘Abed al Masih, *The Gospel According to Thomas: Coptic Text Established and Translated* (Leiden: Brill/Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959). The story of the fate of the Nag Hammadi codices and the delays in their publication is told by Robinson, “The Story of the Nag Hammadi Library,” 73–84.

⁴ Ernst Käsemann unofficially launched the New Quest with his much noted lecture to the “Old Marburgers” at Jugenheim, West Germany in 1953, later published as “Das Problem des historischen Jesus,” *ZThK* 51 (1954): 15–47.

think that the New Questers, with their focus on the sayings of Jesus, would have welcomed this problem. But when the Gospel of Thomas did become available in 1959, it did not have much of an impact on the New Quest. This is perhaps simply because by then most of the New Questers had made their definitive contributions to the discussion without Thomas.⁵ Or perhaps it was that early Thomas scholars such as Quispel had presented the new gospel as an antidote to the historical skepticism that had come with Bultmann's version of form criticism,⁶ which most of the New Questers took for granted even while re-opening the quest on new, post-Bultmannian terms. Ernst Haenchen's take on Thomas stood as the standard among the post-Bultmannians for many years: a relatively late, Gnostic interpretation of the sayings of Jesus, largely derived—directly or indirectly—from the synoptic tradition.⁷ Finally, it should be remembered that the New Questers were interested not just in the sayings of Jesus, but in how one might see anticipated in those sayings the early church's kerygma about Jesus—a kerygma defined largely in terms of the Pauline and Markan focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus. But Thomas did not share this particular kerygma. Haenchen's work made it clear that Thomas in fact had its own kerygma, its own distinctive view of the significance of Jesus, which had little to do with his death and resurrection. If Thomas were to be taken seriously by the New Quest, its entire program would have to be re-stated. The question would not be how Jesus had anticipated the early Christian kerygma, but rather, how one might understand the preaching of Jesus in relation to the various and diverse early Christian *kerygmata*. This, of course, was how Helmut Koester did more or less formulate the question

⁵ Among the better-known New Questers, Günther Bornkamm published his classic *Jesus von Nazareth* in 1956 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer); Hans Conzelmann's "Jesus Christus" article appeared in the third, 1959 edition of *RGG*; all of the essays in Ernst Fuchs' collection *Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus* (Fuchs, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Band 2 [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1960]) were originally published or conceived before 1959.

⁶ G. Quispel, "The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament," *VC* 11 (1957): 207: "And when we keep in mind that a great number of these Sayings are if not identical, very similar to the wording of our Synoptics, and yet come from a different and independent Aramaic tradition, we see clearly that the almost nihilistic skepticism of certain "Histories of the Synoptic Tradition" about the authenticity of the words attributed to Jesus in our Scripture has not such solid foundations as it claims to have. In this sense the Gospel of Thomas confirms the trustworthiness of the Bible."

⁷ Ernst Haenchen, "Literatur zum Thomasevangelium," *TR* n.F. 27 (1961–1962): 147–178, 306–338; also *idem*, *Die Botschaft des Thomasevangeliums*; Theologische Bibliothek Töppelmann 6 (Berlin: Töppelmann, 1961).

in his now landmark essay of 1965, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Christianity."⁸ But by then the New Quest had pretty much run its course. Among the New Questers, only Robinson saw the significance of Koester's approach and took up his challenge, collaborating with him to produce their important collection of programmatic essays, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*.⁹ But this is not a book about Jesus, but rather the diverse nature of early Christianity. It would be many years before this school of thought would return again to the question of Jesus himself.

WORKING THOMAS IN

Meanwhile, a handful of scholars had, like Koester, become convinced that Thomas offered a version of the Jesus tradition that was at least in part independent of the synoptic tradition and so asked, what, if any of these new sayings might actually be attributed to Jesus. J.-B. Bauer was one.¹⁰ Unlike Koester, though, Bauer did not see that Thomas, in its difference, might undermine our confidence in the assumed historicity of the synoptic portrait of Jesus. Rather, in asking about particular sayings, Bauer tended to evaluate them in terms of how well they might square with information about Jesus' life and preaching found in the synoptic tradition. In the end, a handful of sayings pass this test: Thomas 82, 81, 58, 51, and 52. R. McL. Wilson's highly regarded study of Thomas approached this question similarly, asking whether any of Thomas' new sayings might plausibly fit into "the context of the life of Jesus"—a life of Jesus understood basically in terms of the synoptic portrait.¹¹ Of the sayings Wilson judged to have met this test, most have synoptic parallels: Thomas 31, 32, 39, 102, 45, and 47.¹²

Claus-Hunno Hunzinger took another tack.¹³ Hunzinger was more interested in how Thomas, as an independent tradition, could help one to understand better the history of those sayings already known to us from the

⁸ *HTR* 58 (1965): 279–318; later published in *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (see below) pp. 114–157.

⁹ (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

¹⁰ "Echte Jesusworte," in W.C. van Unnik, *Evangelien aus dem Nilsand* (Frankfurt: Verlag Heinrich Scheffer, 1960), pp. 108–150.

¹¹ *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960), see esp. p. 151.

¹² For comment on Thom 31, see *Studies*, p. 60, on Thom 32, p. 61, on Thom 39, pp. 75–76, on Thom 102, pp. 76–77, on Thom 45, p. 77, on Thom 47, pp. 77–79.

¹³ "Ausersynoptisches Traditionsgut im Thomasevangelium," *TLZ* 85 (1960): 843–846.

synoptic gospels. Hunzinger applied the basic techniques of form criticism to several of the sayings common to Thomas and the synoptic gospels and discovered that in some cases the Thomas version of a saying was, from a form critical point of view, less developed than its synoptic counterpart, and in other cases, more. But among the latter, Hunzinger noted that Thomas' own peculiar developments could not be seen to build on the synoptic form of the tradition in particular. This indicates that in Thomas we have a tradition that is fundamentally independent of the synoptic gospels, and which, consequently, might be used to reconstruct the early history of the Jesus tradition.

At about the same time Hugh Montefiore published a study of the parables in Thomas and their synoptic counterparts, applying to them Joachim Jeremias' "laws of transformation."¹⁴ His results were similar to Hunzinger's. In some cases the Thomas version of a parable was found to be less developed, in some, more. But when the Thomas version was more developed, its peculiar developments were not predicated on the synoptic version of the parable. If that is so, then again, one might well use the Thomas tradition not so much to discover new sayings of Jesus, but to understand the early transmission history of certain sayings of Jesus we already know about.

In 1962 Jeremias himself published the sixth, revised edition of his classic, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, in which all of the Thomas parables were included.¹⁵ This was a turning point of sorts, for here for the first time the material from this new gospel was integrated into a full-scale study of the Jesus tradition. Jeremias used Thomas to illustrate points he had made in earlier editions of his work about the secondary developments to be seen in the synoptic parables tradition: the tendency to embellish, to allegorize, to incorporate allusions to the LXX and to popular lore. Time and again he uses the Thomas version of a parable to throw into critical relief these secondary developments in the synoptic texts, which are lacking in Thomas. Of course, Thomas' parables themselves often exhibit secondary features similar in kind to those which one observes in the synoptic tradition, thus demonstrating that such secondary developments characterize the tradition generally speaking, not just the synoptic tradition. When Jeremias draws his study to a close, summarizing the preaching of Jesus as it comes to expression in the parables, the

¹⁴ "A Comparison of the Parables of the Gospel According to Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels," *NTS* 7 (1960/61): 220–248.

¹⁵ Joachim Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 6. Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

Gospel of Thomas appears to play a significant role. Thomas' version of the Parable of the Great Feast (Thom 64) and its Parable of the Tenants (Thom 65) are used to illustrate God's mercy for sinners.¹⁶ Thomas' Parable of the Leaven (Thom 96) and the Mustard (Thom 20) express Jesus' ultimate trust in God.¹⁷ Throughout this section of the book, Jeremias makes generous use of Thomas, thus leaving the impression that Thomas has been influential in shaping his view. This impression is a little misleading, however. For when one compares the fifth edition of his book, which did not incorporate material from Thomas, with the sixth edition, which did, one finds very little that is different. An independent Thomas tradition confirmed what Jeremias had thought was true about the developmental tendencies at work in the parables tradition. What he did not consider was how the different reception history of the sayings and parables of Jesus evident in the Gospel of Thomas might suggest a different understanding of the Jesus tradition in its inception.

The same might be said about Norman Perrin's work on the preaching of Jesus, done originally under Jeremias' direction in the early 1960s. Perrin's judicious assessment of Thomas and its relevance for historical Jesus work offered in his *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (1967) warrants citing. After summarizing the sort of form critical and tradition-historical evidence we have just been discussing, Perrin writes:

This may not justify the absolute claim that Thomas is independent of the canonical synoptic tradition, but it certainly justifies the acceptance of this as a working hypothesis, and hence the use of Thomas material, where relevant, in addition to the canonical material in an attempt to reconstruct the history of the tradition and to arrive at the earliest form of the saying or parable.¹⁸

This probably comes close to stating the current consensus among Thomas scholars today (see below). Perrin follows through methodologically with this observation in his analysis of the crux passage, Luke 17:20–21, where he makes extensive use of the Thomas parallels in Thom 3 and 113.¹⁹ This is perhaps the most important place in the tradition for Perrin to make his case for a Jesus who was oriented more prophetically than apocalyptically. His arguments, though, are not significantly different from those he had

¹⁶ *Gleichnisse Jesu*, p. 128 (referencing the 10th, 1984, edition).

¹⁷ *Gleichnisse Jesu*, 145–149, 152.

¹⁸ *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 37.

¹⁹ *Rediscovering*, 68–74.

made several years earlier in his Göttingen dissertation, there making use only of Luke 17:20–21.²⁰ As with Jeremias, the new material from Thomas only strengthened a view already arrived at on the basis of the synoptic evidence alone.

THOMAS AND THE CURRENT DISCUSSION

When scholars today make use of Thomas in historical Jesus research it is usually along the lines pioneered by Montefiore, Hunzinger, Jeremias and Perrin. Few now are convinced that Thomas will yield up a significant number of new sayings to be added to the corpus of the authentic Jesus tradition. Even the Jesus Seminar, in which a majority of Fellows clearly regarded Thomas as basically an independent tradition, did not ascribe any new sayings from Thomas unequivocally to Jesus.²¹ But just about everyone agrees that the possibility that Thomas, in individual cases, might preserve an independent version of a saying already known from the synoptic tradition necessitates that one always cast an eye to Thomas when working at issues of tradition history. The question remains, however, to what extent this will actually make a difference in one's understanding of Jesus. On the one hand, one can find in the work of John Meier no impact at all from the Gospel of Thomas, even though he grants in theory the need to keep an open mind about Thomas.²² Similarly, Dale Allison, who clearly regards Thomas

²⁰ *Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), pp. 174–178.

²¹ Two parables, the Woman and the Jar (Thom 97) and the Assassin (Thom 98) were given a “pink” (probably from Jesus) designation in *The Five Gospels* (R.W. Funk, ed. [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997]) although on the first two occasions in which these parables were considered, they were voted “gray” (probably not Jesus). A third logion, Thom 42 (“Become passersby”) came close in a vote that went 20% red, 30% pink, 30% gray, and 20% black—a statistical tie. It was printed “gray” by the Jesus Seminar, following the Seminar's rule that in case of a tie vote, the ‘nays’ have it.

²² *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*; 3 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994, 2001). The Gospel of Thomas is dealt with as a problem of method in using sources in vol. 1: *The Roots of the Problem*, 124–139. Meier's position on Thomas is fairly negative: “Since I think that the Synoptic-like sayings of the Gospel of Thomas are in fact dependent on the Synoptic Gospels and that the other sayings stem from 2nd-century Christian gnosticism, the Gospel of Thomas will not be used in our quest as an independent source for the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, I realize that not all scholars will agree with my evaluation of the Gospel of Thomas. To give due consideration to their views, I will always keep one eye on the sayings in this gospel as a check and control on my own interpretation of the data in the canonical gospels.” ‘An open mind about Thomas’ might not fairly capture his position; I can find no

as potentially an independent witness to the Jesus tradition, construes the preaching of Jesus more or less as Schweitzer did a century ago using primarily Matthew's gospel.²³ On the other hand, one may point to Crossan's more "revolutionary biography," in which years of meticulous tradition-historical work on the parables²⁴ and sayings²⁵ of Jesus, always making use of Thomas to help reconstruct the earliest form of the tradition, come to fruition in a very different understanding of Jesus—a Jesus grounded less in Jewish apocalyptic and more in sapiential traditions.²⁶ Crossan's revolution has certainly caused a stir, but even he has only used Thomas to bring out the more sapiential aspects of the synoptic tradition and to give them chronological priority over the more apocalyptic strains. In so doing, he leaves stones still unturned. What if, for example, one were to take more seriously Stevan Davies' apparently well-founded claim that cross-culturally, exorcists and shamans tend to make use of trance states and various mystical practices in casting out demons.²⁷ Then would it not make sense (pressing the envelope!) to look again at some of those odd, mystical sayings more distinctive of the Gospel of Thomas itself and ask whether there is not a *Sitz im Leben* Jesus in which even these strange sayings might plausibly fit? Will Thomas make no difference at all, some difference, or an even more startling difference than we have seen thus far?

There is probably no longer a question of *whether* Thomas will be part of the historical Jesus discussion. To leave it aside altogether would be

instances in his work where Meier actually allows Thomas to shape his own reading of the tradition. For a critique of Meier's position and the arguments by which he arrives at it, see David Aune, "Assessing the Value of the Apocryphal Jesus Traditions," in *Der historische Jesus: Tendenzen und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Forschung*, ed. Jens Schröter and Ralph Brucker, BZNW 114 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 244–258.

²³ *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998). Allison does not devote a discussion to Thomas, but from his work on the Jesus tradition elsewhere (e.g. with W.D. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991]) it is clear that he regards Thomas as potentially and independent source, certainly for some synoptic parallels. In his "objective inventory of major themes and motifs" and "rhetorical strategies" in the Jesus tradition (pp. 46–51) he makes generous use of material from Thomas.

²⁴ *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

²⁵ *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

²⁶ *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1991); later: *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1994).

²⁷ *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

to ignore most contemporary research on Thomas, which is reaching a consensus that at least some of Thomas' sayings may derive from an independent tradition.²⁸ The question will now be how shall we use Thomas, and what difference might it make to the discussion. The latter question cannot be answered in advance; we will just have to wait and see. The former, methodological question, deserves some reflection, however, and it is to this that I would like now to turn.

THE PROBLEM OF THE LIST

There is one overriding methodological issue that needs to be considered first, for from it derive a whole series of issues to which we must attend if our use of Thomas is to take account of the real difference of this gospel, and the challenges this difference poses for using it in our historical work. This overriding issue is the fact that Thomas is not a narrative, but a list.

²⁸ Consensus, of course, is hard to measure or prove in our field. Still, I think this is a fair assessment for those actively working on Thomas now. German scholarship, which was for a long time influenced by Schrage's work, has taken a turn toward the "American position" (i.e., the view that Thomas is basically independent) in the current generation of Thomas scholars (e.g., Jens Schröter, Thomas Zöckler, Jacobus Liebenberg); the Finnish contribution has been made working basically under this assumption (e.g., Ristow Uro, Ismo Dunderberg, Antti Marjanen). The French, too, have arrived more recently at a more nuanced position than the presumption of dependence one finds in Ménard's commentary of a generation ago (e.g., Francois Bovon, Jean-Daniel Dubois, Jean-Marie Sevrin). At the recent gathering of Thomas scholars at Laval (May 29–31, 2003) I could find no one who would defend the older position of complete and utter dependence on the synoptic gospels. The more recent American work also continues to favor the view that Thomas is basically independent (e.g., Valantasis, De Conick). Most scholars are clearly taking the more nuanced position that in some cases Thomas provides an independent witness to the synoptic tradition, even if in some cases it does not. One must proceed on a case by case basis. There are exceptions, such as the recent study by Nicholas Perrin (*Thomas and Tatian: The Relationship Between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002]), which argues the improbable thesis that Thomas is dependent on Tatian's Diatessaron, or Harry Fleddermann's theory that Mark is dependent on Q, which yields a number of theoretical Markan redactional moves that would also turn up in Thomas, thus indicating that Thomas had used Mark (*Mark and Q: A Study of the Overlap Texts*, BETL 122 [Leuven: University Press; Uitgeverij: Peeters, 1995]), a novel idea that has not yet proven persuasive. Most recently two studies have appeared which would revive a more robust theory of Thomas' dependence on the synoptic gospels: Simon Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original language and Influence*, SNTSMS 151 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). These contributions will surely freshen the debate.

Much has been said about the fact that Thomas is a sayings collection,²⁹ but what has not been stressed enough is the fact that as a simple list of sayings, Thomas probably has a cumulative history that is far more complex than whatever histories might lie behind our narrative canonical gospels. In a narrative gospel there is a basic story that gives the whole its overall shape and structure. Redactors might tweak the thing here and there, as with, for example, the “ecclesiastical redactor” in the case of John, or the various editions of Mark that may have existed in the first two centuries. But the basic gospel, as a whole, remains more or less the same. This is probably not true of a sayings collection, which has the simple and very malleable structure of the list. A list is the easiest sort of document to change. If you find something you like, you simply add it to the list. If something no longer fits, you cross it out. Lists grow and contract over time.³⁰ There may well have been dozens of “versions” of the Gospel of Thomas over its long history. Any time a new copy of Thomas was created, sayings might well have been added or deleted as occasion and personal or communal tastes dictated. The implications of this for how one approaches Thomas are considerable.

CAN ONE DATE THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS?

For example, can one really date the Gospel of Thomas with any confidence? I have made what I think is about as reasonable an argument as one can for a date in the last decades of the first century, that is, roughly contemporaneous with the canonical gospels.³¹ But could this date be assumed for each saying in the Gospel of Thomas? Not at all. Some of its sayings will have been drawn from oral traditions about Jesus, and some certainly will have come from Jesus himself. But others are manifestly late, reflecting ideas

²⁹ Noteworthy, of course, is the study by James M. Robinson, “LOGOI SOPHON: Zur Gattung der Spruchquelle,” in *Zeit und Geschichte. Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. E. Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1964), pp. 77–96 (later revised published as “LOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q,” pp. 71–113 in *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*) and the response and discussion it has engendered.

³⁰ Henry Chadwick observed this “snow-balling effect” in connection with another collection, the Sentences of Sextus (*The Sentences of Sextus: A Contribution to the History of Christian Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959]), which Wilson applied to the Gospel of Thomas (“Thomas and the Growth of the Gospels,” *HTR* 53 [1960]: 231; also *idem*, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* [London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960], pp. 9 and 145).

³¹ *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Foundations and Facets (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1993), pp. 116–118.

current in the second century, or even later.³² Some still date Thomas at around 140, a choice arbitrary in its own way.³³ But would this date—any date—necessarily help one settle the provenance of any *particular* saying in the collection? Certainly not.³⁴

The list also raises the question of what it means to date a document, or what value this exercise might have for tradition-historical work. There may be good reasons for wanting to know when the whole Gospel of Thomas was written, even if this question cannot really be answered with any degree of certainty. But for the purposes of the historian interested primarily in Jesus, dating this gospel is not all that important. Far more critical will be the issue of whether a particular saying in the list is drawn from some earlier known source, such as one of the synoptic gospels, or offers a previously unknown independent witness to the tradition. The latter could be true regardless of whether one dates Thomas early (say, 50 CE) or late (say, 150 CE). As Koester and others have shown, the oral tradition did not die out once written gospels began to appear.³⁵ To the contrary, if Harris is correct that literacy rates in the Roman Empire were extremely low—less than 10 % even in urban areas³⁶—one must probably assume that the Jesus tradition was experienced by the vast majority of people orally/aurally, even after a few

³² E.g., Howard Jackson persuasively places Thomas 7 in the context of second or third century Egypt in his study of this saying, *The Lion Becomes Man: The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition*, SBLDS 81 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

³³ The common choice of this date derives from Grenfell and Hunt's initial assessment of POxy 1, which contains parts of Thom 28–33. Based on paleography and archaeology, they dated this fragment to about 200 CE. But they reasoned further: "The primitive cast and setting of the sayings, the absence of any consistent tendency in favor of any particular sect, the wide divergences in the familiar sayings from the text of the Gospels, the striking character of those that are new, combine to separate the fragment from the apocryphal literature of the middle and latter half of the second century, and refer it back to the period when the Canonical Gospels had not yet reached their pre-eminent position" (*ΑΟΓΙΑ ΙΗΣΟΥ: Sayings of Our Lord* [London: Henry Frowde, 1897], p. 16). They thus proposed 140 CE as a *terminus ad quem*. Many have taken this as the secure date of the collection, or even its *terminus a quo*.

³⁴ So Wilson, *Studies*, pp. 9 and 145; also James M. Robinson, "On Bridging the Gulf from Q to the Gospel of Thomas (or vice versa)," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and early Christianity*, ed. C.W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson, Jr. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986), pp. 162–163.

³⁵ *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den apostolischen Vätern*, TU 65 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957).

³⁶ William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); for Palestine in particular see M. Bar-Ilan, "Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries CE," in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, ed. S. Fishbane and S. Schoenfeld (Hoboken: Ktav, 1992), pp. 46–51; also C. Hetzer, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 81 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2001).

persons who could read or write wandered into the Jesus movement and began to work creatively with it.³⁷ Moreover, we cannot assume that authors and collectors did not have other written sources now lost to us from which to draw their material.

Thus, regardless of when one ventures a date for the Gospel of Thomas as a whole, for the purposes of tradition-historical work, one may not presume the relevance of this guess for any particular saying in the collection. Some are early; some are late. The historian is advised to proceed piecemeal.

CAN ONE IDENTIFY SOURCES IN THOMAS?

The malleable nature of the sayings collection poses similar problems for the question of possible sources behind the Gospel of Thomas, or stages in its development. The presence of doublets in Thomas³⁸ probably suggests that different sources have been brought together to form this collection, but beyond the actual doublets themselves, one can scarcely determine the parameters of those sources, let alone hypothesize about their date. I once argued that embedded in our Gospel of Thomas there might well be an earlier collection that circulated under the authority of James.³⁹ But as likely as I think that is, it is far from possible now to determine the parameters of that earlier collection. The sort of editorial markers that help one define John's *Semeia* source, or even the literary cues Kloppenborg uses to delineate layers in Q, are completely absent in Thomas. Hans-Martin Schenke has noticed what are quite likely narrative spurs lingering in some sayings that may indicate they have been drawn from some larger literary context (though no known extant document).⁴⁰ But would this describe the origin of every saying in the list? It is doubtful. Thus, as with the matter of date, so also with sources, we are forced to proceed piecemeal.

³⁷ A point underscored recently by James D.G. Dunn in his SNTS Presidential Address: "Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisioning the Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition," *NTS* 49 (2003): 139–175.

³⁸ E.g., Thom 2, 92, and 94; Thom 3 and 113; Thom 87 and 112; Thom 55 and 101; Thom 56 and 80; Thom 68 and 69; Thom 81 and 110.

³⁹ "A Primitive Gospel of James?" unpublished paper read at the SBL Annual Meeting, New Orleans (1996); see also *Thomas and Jesus*, 116–117.

⁴⁰ "On the Composition History of the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 10 (1994): 9–30.

IS THOMAS DEPENDENT ON THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS OR NOT?

And what of the very specific and much debated question of Thomas' relationship to the synoptic gospels?⁴¹ The cumulative nature of Thomas as a list must certainly affect this discussion as well. It was once assumed that if one could show that one or two of Thomas' sayings had been influenced by the synoptic tradition, then the whole collection must therefore be derivative. This way of thinking about the issue has all but disappeared for reasons that are by now obvious. That someone using this collection in the second, third, or fourth centuries might have known a saying from one of the canonical gospels and added it to the list is not only likely, it is virtually certain. Thus, when evidence turns up in a handful of instances that surely suggest some knowledge of the synoptic tradition,⁴² this does not say anything at all about the origin of the collection as a whole. On the other side, the fact that most of Thomas' synoptic parallels show no evidence at all of synoptic influence⁴³ does not mean that individual sayings could not have been influenced by the synoptic texts, or even drawn more or less directly from those sources. Given the cumulative qualities of the list, one may no longer assume that settling this issue for one saying, settles it for the whole. Again: piecemeal.

There are two aspects to this discussion that warrant further attention. Recently an idea first suggested by Haenchen⁴⁴ has gained new advocates,

⁴¹ For details of the discussion see S.J. Patterson, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A Forschungsbericht and Critique," *Forum* 8 (1992): 45–97.

⁴² By my reckoning there is evidence of synoptic influence in Thom 32; 39:1; 45:3; 104:1 and 104:3; the synoptic texts may also have influenced the order of sayings in Thom 32 and 33, Thom 43–44–45, Thom 65 and 66, and Thom 92–93–94 (Thomas and Jesus, esp. 92–93). To these other instances may perhaps be added that are less clear (see esp. Christopher Tuckett, "Thomas and the Synoptics," *NovT* 30 [1988]: 132–157).

⁴³ The most complete case for pervasive influence from the synoptic texts, that of W. Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen*, BZNW 29 (Berlin: Töppelmann, 1964) was answered by John Sieber, "A Redactional Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels with Regard to the Question of the Sources of the Gospel According to Thomas" (PhD dissertation, Claremont, 1965), and later by S.J. Patterson, *Thomas and Jesus*, 18–81.

⁴⁴ "Literature," 311–314, following S. Giversen, *Thomas-evangeliet. Indledning, Oversættelse og Kommentarer* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1959), p. 21. See the similar suggestions of K. Snodgrass, "The Gospel of Thomas: A Secondary Gospel," *Sec Cent* 7 (1989–1990): 19–38; and G. Sheppard, "Parables Common to the Synoptic Gospels and Thomas" (PhD. Dissertation, Emory, 1965).

most notably Risto Uro⁴⁵ and Jens Schröter.⁴⁶ This is the theory that Thomas draws from oral traditions that were themselves based upon one or another of the synoptic gospels. Uro calls this phenomenon “secondary orality.” In principle one must certainly grant this possibility. Once someone had heard a gospel read to them, or read it him/herself, he or she would certainly have talked about it to others and in this way placed back into the oral tradition what had once been written. But caution is in order. Given the work of Harris, to which I have alluded above, one should be careful not to over-estimate the role and influence of texts in the ancient world and in the early Jesus movement in particular. Texts are all we have, so they tend to attract our attention. But given the overwhelming orality of cultural transmission in the ancient world, one should not assume too much for them. One might argue for a case of secondary orality only when synoptic redactional features are clearly present in Thomas. But this is rare. Both Uro and Schröter invoke this explanation to account for traces of Matthean or Lukan redaction of Q they find also present in Thomas. This may credit too much our ability to reconstruct Q with the kind of precision necessary to make such a judgment. Seldom are these decisions undisputed in the literature.

The second aspect of this discussion has to do with Wolfgang Schrage's well-known study of 1964.⁴⁷ Though Schrage's arguments for Thomas' dependence on the synoptic texts have for the most part been answered point by point,⁴⁸ there are valuable aspects to his meticulous study that have been perhaps under-appreciated. One is the way Schrage argued the case at the level of the Coptic text. Schrage argued in a number of instances that the Coptic Gospel of Thomas agreed with the Coptic New Testament in rendering a particular Greek word with a Coptic equivalent that was somewhat unusual, a departure from what one would normally expect. For example, in Thom 73 (“The harvest is large, but the workers are few ...”) the Coptic word *coḃḃ* is used to render what was presumably *ὀλίγοι* in the Greek original. In so doing, Thomas agrees with both Matthew 9:37 and Luke 10:2 in the Sahidic New Testament, both of which also use *coḃḃ*. But this is a very unusual

⁴⁵ “‘Secondary Orality’ in the Gospel of Thomas: Logion 14 as a Test Case,” *Forum* 9 (1993) 305–329.

⁴⁶ *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte: Studien zur Rezeption der Logienüberlieferung in Markus, Q und Thomas* (WMANT 76; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukircher Verlag, 1997).

⁴⁷ *Das Verhältnis* (see note 43 above).

⁴⁸ See note 43, above.

translation. Schrage notes that out of 40 instances where ὄλιγος occurs in the New Testament, only here does the Sahidic New Testament use ⲥⲟⲩⲃ̅ to translate it. In every other instance the more common ⲕⲟⲩⲓ is used. For Schrage, this is just too much of a coincidence and it indicates that the Coptic of Thomas is dependent upon the Coptic New Testament.⁴⁹ In the course of his treatment, Schrage points out a dozen or so similar instances where this peculiar phenomenon occurs. What does it mean?

Schrage thought that if one could show that the Coptic Gospel of Thomas was dependent on the Coptic New Testament, then one could also infer that the Greek *Vorlage* of Thomas was dependent on the Greek New Testament.⁵⁰ But the inference does not follow. To the contrary, such arguments show that influence from the *Coptic* New Testament was exercised on Thomas *precisely* at the level of the Coptic translation, not before. These several instances indicate that the choices of Thomas' Coptic translator were being affected by his knowledge of the Coptic New Testament. Perhaps he simply knew that translation from memory; perhaps he actually had a Coptic text of the gospels to which he could refer as a "pony" when translating difficult passages. That this is the right description of things is shown by the fact that elsewhere in Thomas' version of the "Harvest" logion, the translator seems to have made different choices. For example, he places ⲁⲉ before ⲡⲭⲟⲓⲉⲓ, rather than in the more correct post-positive position, where one finds it in the Sahidic New Testament; and he makes use of the object marker ⲛ̅ before ⲡⲭⲟⲓⲉⲓ where the Sahidic New Testament omits it. These details show that Thomas' translator was not copying the Coptic New Testament, but referring to it occasionally to solve particular problems. More telling perhaps is the fact that Thomas introduces the final clause of the logion with ⲱⲛⲁ, which probably indicates a ἵνα clause in its *Vorlage*, while the Sahidic versions of the saying use ⲭⲉⲕⲁⲥ (Matthew) and ⲭⲉ (Luke), respectively, both of which normally translate ὅπως, which is how the clause begins in the Greek New Testament. This of course shows that the actual Greek text

⁴⁹ *Das Verhältnis*, 154.

⁵⁰ *Das Verhältnis*, 15. Schrage notes the possible problems with the assumption: "Zu erhärten ist durch den Vergleich von sa und Th nur die Abhängigkeit des koptischen (!) Th vom NT. Ob auch der dem koptischen Text zugrundeliegende griechische Text vom NT abhängt, ist durch den innerkoptischen Vergleich nicht gleichzeitig schon mitbeantwortet." He then continues the thought in a footnote (n. 46): "Trotzdem werden wir im allgemeinen von der Voraussetzung ausgehen, dass dort, wo sich die koptische Fassung von sa/bo abhängig erweist, solche Abhängigkeit auch für den zugrunde liegenden griechische Text vorliegt."

behind our Coptic version of the logion was different from the Greek of the New Testament versions. The similarities one sees at the level of the Coptic translation belong strictly to that level of the tradition, and not before.

If, as Schrage argues, these instances show that Thomas' translator was influenced by the Coptic New Testament, then any argument that the Greek *original* of this or that saying in Thomas was influenced by the synoptic tradition would need first to rule out the possibility that the traces of synoptic influence evident in Thomas derive from the level of the Coptic translation. One might do this, for example, in the case of Thomas sayings that survive also in the Greek fragments.⁵¹ But where we have no surviving Greek original, this will necessarily be difficult.

This digression perhaps illustrates the complexity of this issue. When using the sayings of Thomas to work at the tradition history of a particular logion, one must bear in mind these various possibilities. The Thomas version might be entirely independent of the synoptic version(s). In my view, this will in fact be the case most of the time. But one might also find evidence of synoptic influence on the Thomas version of a saying at some point in its history: at its inception in the oral tradition as an example of secondary orality; at some later point in scribal activity; or later still at the level of the Coptic translation. It is also conceivable that some of Thomas' sayings are drawn directly from one or another of the synoptic gospels, though this has never been shown to be the case. The point here, once again, is that one must proceed piecemeal.

DOES THOMAS HAVE A THEOLOGY?

The same problems affect our discussions of the theology of the Gospel of Thomas. There are clearly sapiential strains in Thomas, Gnostic or speculative Jewish Wisdom strains, ascetical ideas, and mysticism all present in this text.⁵² Such a theological cornucopia in a narrative gospel might well call forth debate to sort through the issues and identify the real theology

⁵¹ As Schrage himself does in "Evangelienzitate in den Oxyrhynchus-Logien und im koptischen Thomas-Evangelium," in *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen*, ed. W. Eltester, BZNW 30 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), pp. 251–268.

⁵² See Stephen J. Patterson, "Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas," in *Das Thomasevangelium. Entstehung-Rezeption-Theologie*, ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes, and Jens Schröter, BZNW 157 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2008), 181–182 (= chapter 2 in the present volume).

at work in the text. But with a list, such theological diversity is perhaps to be expected. As the list changed and grew over the centuries, cultivated by different people and in different communities with their own various theological convictions, the result is bound to be a grab bag of theologies, perhaps related (or relatable) in some way, but not sharing a common origin.

Moreover, the prologue and first logion in Thomas as we presently have it from Nag Hammadi offer no warrant for expecting an author to have laid out an obvious theological agenda in the sayings that follow. Unlike our narrative gospels, where plot, the treatment of characters, and other features may reveal something of the implied author's theological intentions, in Thomas we are simply offered a list and an invitation to find meaning in its individual parts by reflecting upon them. Thomas, interestingly, operates on a heuristic model that might be regarded as thoroughly post-modern: the real meaning of the text resides not in the text itself, but in the reader, the seeker after wisdom and insight. This heuristic may be the reason why so many of Thomas' parables lack the allegorical or moralizing features that are so often found in their synoptic counterparts. Mark knows what the Parable of the Tenants is about, and he wants his reader to know too. His allegorization of the parable makes this all perfectly transparent. The person who included this same parable in Thom 65 had no such pretensions. And so the story of a tenant farm gone bad is simply told, with an invitation to listen carefully ("Anyone who has ears to hear, let them hear.") This heuristic difference ought to be borne in mind when evaluating the alleged theological worlds many claim to have found spinning inside the tiniest variation in one or another of Thomas' sayings when they are laid alongside their synoptic parallels. Such analyses, of course, are learned from the work of the redaction critics working on the synoptic texts, where a different word can make a world of difference. In texts where authors are at least presumed to have some agenda, this may be a legitimate exercise.⁵³ But when the implied author indicates that the meaning of a text will not be obvious, our approach must be completely different. Interpreting Thomas must be a matter not of disclosing the intended meaning of an implied author, but rather, exploring the possibilities of meaning that a particular saying might hold for an ancient reader/hearer.

⁵³ But see the recent critical remarks of James D.G. Dunn in "Altering the Default Setting," esp. p. 169.

The implications of this for doing tradition-historical work are obvious. In our work on the synoptic tradition we are very accustomed to identifying and omitting from earlier layers the clear, theologically-motivated redactional changes made by one or another of the synoptic evangelists, whose agendas are (presumably) fairly well understood. With Thomas this will not be so easy. We should not expect that every little detail unique to the Thomas version of a saying is filled with authorial intention. Rather, one should probably assume that the author, or more properly, the collector, is content not to give the seeker too much of an agenda, but to leave more room for thought. Whether this results in a more original, less redacted version of a particular saying in Thomas will have to be determined on a case-by-case basis. It will probably hold true in large measure with the parables, which come with their own thought-provoking potential.⁵⁴ It will probably be less so with proverbial material, which can leave the mind less room to wander. The Thomas tradition seems often to “juice up” this proverbial material considerably, rendering obtuse and mysterious what originally might have been a fairly straightforward wisdom saying.⁵⁵

A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH

Thomas is playing an ever-expanding role in the sort of tradition-historical analysis of the Jesus tradition are used to practicing in search of the most authentic voice of Jesus recoverable from the tradition. But is this the only role for the Gospel of Thomas?

In many respects, our understanding of Jesus comes not simply from recovering a corpus of his words and deeds, but from observing how he is remembered and re-presented in the various texts of earliest Christianity. Historical work on Jesus ought in some sense to help one imagine a Jesus from whom one might also imagine the various manifestations of the Jesus movement emerging. Historical Jesus work, with its tendency to focus almost exclusively on the synoptic tradition, has perhaps been lacking in this respect. What ought we to assume about Jesus to account, not just for the synoptic portrayal of Jesus, but also for the various features of

⁵⁴ So, for example, Thom 8 (the Fisher), Thom 9 (the Sower), Thom 64 (the Great Feast), and Thom 65 (the Tenants)—all of which preserve a well-known parable of Jesus without the allegorical features present in their various synoptic versions.

⁵⁵ So, for example, Thom 2, which unfolds a simple wisdom saying (“Seek and you shall find.”) with a series of esoteric phrases; also Thom 3, Thom 22, and Thom 68, et al.

Pauline Christianity, or the various representatives of the Jesus movement we encounter indirectly through Paul's engagement of them in his letters? And what of Johannine Christianity and its predecessors? Is there any way in which the historical Jesus we imagine could somehow be refracted in the *semeia* source, or even in the long and obscure revelatory passages so characteristic of John? What was it about the experience of Jesus that could ultimately have lead to that thoroughly kerygmatic presentation of him?

It would probably behoove us to ask these sorts of questions about the Gospel of Thomas as well. One of the great challenges posed by Thomas is the fact that it includes so much of our beloved synoptic tradition, but derives from it an understanding of Jesus that is very different from the synoptic view. One might even call it a "Johannine" take on Jesus, if only to use Thomas to make the point that the Johannine school can now no longer be so easily quarantined from the rest of early Christianity, as though it were completely unrelated to other developments in the Jesus tradition. What is there in these synoptic sayings in Thomas that could lead the followers of Jesus in this very different direction? One can no longer reason that the synoptic view of Jesus is more historical because it is based on the historical words and deeds of Jesus, while John is different because it has so little connection with his actual words and deeds. The Gospel of Thomas, with its dozens of synoptic parallels, has just as much connection to the historical Jesus as any synoptic gospel, and yet it sees Jesus in ways very similar to John: he is a revealer figure sent into the world to give eternal life to anyone who would attend to his words.⁵⁶

Also intriguing in Thomas are the ascetical and mystical impulses so evident in its sayings.⁵⁷ Does this asceticism or mysticism have anything to do with the historical Jesus? The very strangeness of these sayings, is, I suspect, what makes Thomas seem to many to be so late in comparison to the synoptic texts, which sound to our ears so much more straightforward. But this is an illusion. The asceticism and mysticism of Paul are no less pronounced, and no less strange than the beliefs and practices we might see reflected in

⁵⁶ Cf., e.g., Thom 28 with the Johannine Prologue; or Thom 38 with John 7:33–34; or Thom 49–50 with John 17; or Thom Prologue and Thom 1 with John 8:51, etc.

⁵⁷ For the ascetical ideas expressed in such sayings as Thom 56, 80, 29, and 22, see Richard Valantasis, "Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical: Revisiting an Old Problem with a New Theory," *J ECS* 7 (1999): 55–81; also his commentary, *The Gospel of Thomas*, New Testament Readings (London: Routledge, 1997) *passim*. For mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas, see esp. April de Conick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas*, VC Supp 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

the Gospel of Thomas.⁵⁸ And if Paul himself *seems* less speculative and more straightforward than the implied author of Thomas' more challenging sayings, think on Paul's opponents: the pneumatics of 1 Corinthians or the ritual circumcisers of Galatians, especially. These strange figures, too, were part of earliest Christianity. "Strange" does not mean "late." Should not an historical treatment of Jesus be able to account as much for these developments in the broad and diverse Jesus movement as for the narrow band of early Christian experience represented by the synoptic tradition?

And what of the more general wisdom orientation of the Gospel of Thomas? To some extent, it is seeing in Thomas the potential of the Jesus tradition to develop in ways closely connected to Jewish wisdom theology, and not necessarily dependent on an apocalyptic frame of reference, that has opened the way to the more sapiential understanding of Jesus that has so disturbed the apocalyptic consensus of the last century.⁵⁹

Where these final observations might be leading in terms of our actual historical work is far from clear. What does seem clear to me, however, is that we often assume a kind of natural continuity between Jesus and the synoptic tradition's version of what Christianity is all about. But among the earliest followers of Jesus there were clearly other ideas about the meaning and significance of what he said and did. Are any of these ideas also derived in any way from Jesus himself? Thomas both challenges, and shows how other early Christian texts and traditions challenge this predilection for a synoptic Jesus as the natural expression of the historical Jesus himself. With its many synoptic parallels, Thomas shows that the synoptic construal of even these sayings is not necessarily natural. They could have been, and

⁵⁸ There is, of course, renewed interest in these aspects of Pauline thought and practice; see, e.g., L. Vaage and V. Wimbush, eds., *Asceticism and the New Testament* (London: Routledge, 1999) esp. Part 2: "Paul (The Real Thing)," pp. 159–251; C.R.A. Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate," *HTR* 86 (1993): 177–217, 265–292; and Alan Segal, "Paul and the Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other-Worldly Journeys*, ed. John Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany: St. University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 95–122.

⁵⁹ Best known for this turn, of course, is Crossan, whose work makes much use of the Gospel of Thomas (see note 26, above). For the theoretical issues see Stephen J. Patterson, *Thomas and Jesus*, 226–241; Patterson, "The End of Apocalypse: Rethinking the Eschatological Jesus," *Theology Today* 52 (1995): 29–48; and "Wisdom in Q and Thomas," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of John Gammie*, ed. L. Perdue, et al. (Louisville: W/JKP, 1993), pp. 187–221 (= chapter 6 in the present volume). The arguments are engaged critically by Dale Allison in *Jesus of Nazareth*, esp. 122–129, and then further in conversation with Marcus Borg, Crossan, and myself in Dale Allison, Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, and Stephen J. Patterson, *The Apocalyptic Jesus: A Debate*, ed. Robert Miller (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2001).

were, taken in quite a different direction in Thomas Christianity. So who was right about Jesus? Was it Mark? John? Paul? Paul's opponents? Thomas? Or shared among these various early Christian *kerygmata* was there a Jesus who somehow functioned as the criterion for the beliefs and practices fostered by all of them in his name? Answering this question may be as important an exercise in the quest for the historical Jesus as the piecemeal tradition-historical work that lies ahead.

CHAPTER SIX

WISDOM IN Q AND THOMAS¹

Two of the oldest Christian documents that survived antiquity (directly or indirectly) are cast in the form of one of wisdom's favored genres, the sayings collection. They are the sayings gospel known as Q and the Gospel of Thomas. Their presence at the very beginning of early Christian literary activity raises acutely the question of the role played by wisdom in Christian origins.² This essay addresses this question through a tradition-historical study of these two documents. First, the overlapping of traditions in Q and Thomas is used to establish a minimal core of material, a cross section if you will, of the early Christian wisdom tradition that eventually produced these two documents. This common tradition is described and characterized in its particularity within the larger corpus of Jewish and Hellenistic wisdom tradition. Second, the documents themselves are considered. Of particular importance here is the way in which the common tradition is taken up and used toward a particular end in each document. In this way something

¹ This essay originally appeared as "Wisdom in Q and Thomas," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of John G. Gammie*, ed. Bernard Brandon Scott and Leo G. Perdue (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 187–221. It appears here lightly revised.

² For the most part scholars have treated this question from the standpoint of Q and/or the Synoptic tradition in general (seldom, however, with Thomas in view). Recent contributions include: Alan P. Winton, *The Proverbs of Jesus: Issues of History and Rhetoric*, JSNTSup 35 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); Ronald A. Piper, *Wisdom in the Q-Tradition: The Aphoristic Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); James G. Williams, *Those Who Ponder Proverbs: Aphoristic Thinking and Biblical Literature* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1981); Charles E. Carlston, "Proverbs, Maxims, and the Historical Jesus," *JBL* 99 (1980): 87–105; D. Zeller, *Die weisheitlichen Mahnsprüche bei den Synoptikern*, Forschung zur Bibel 17 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1977); and Joël Delobel, ed., *Logia: Les Paroles de Jésus—The Sayings of Jesus (Festschrift for Joseph Coppens)*, BETL 59 (Louvain: Uitgeverij Peeters/Louvain University Press, 1982). Among older studies, especially helpful are those by William A. Beardslee, "Uses of Proverb in the Synoptic Gospels," *Int* 24 (1970): 61–73; and *idem*, "Wisdom Tradition in the Synoptic Gospels," *JAAR* 35 (1967): 231–240; see also his "Proverbs in the Gospel of Thomas," in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays for Allen P. Wikgren*, ed. David E. Aune, NovTSup 33 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 92–103. John Dominic Crossan offers a rare look at the history of the aphoristic tradition that includes data from the Gospel of Thomas in *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

is learned about the potential of wisdom theology to unfold in various ways under particular circumstances, and ultimately about the relationship between wisdom and two other theological paradigms current in earliest Christianity: apocalypticism and rudimentary Platonism. Before all of this, however, the relative obscurity of these two texts necessitates a brief word of introduction to both.

THE SAYINGS SOURCE: Q

Q is an early Christian document widely held to have been used by Matthew and Luke in the composition of their respective Gospels. The Q hypothesis is one-half of the most commonly held explanation for the extensive parallels between the first three canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This hypothesis—commonly referred to as the two-source hypothesis—was made popular by Heinrich Julius Holtzmann in the late nineteenth century.³ It holds that Matthew and Luke made independent use of two sources: the Gospel of Mark and a second source, Q.⁴ This second source was composed mostly of sayings attributed to Jesus. Unfortunately it did not survive antiquity and must therefore be reconstructed on the basis of Matthew's and Luke's use of it.⁵ However, that it was indeed a written document and not simply a commonly shared body of oral tradition is suggested by the

³ H.J. Holtzmann, *Die Synoptischen Evangelien: Ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1863). Holtzmann did not invent the hypothesis. C.H. Weisse, drawing upon the earlier work of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Lachmann, had made a similar proposal already in 1838 in *Die evangelische Geschichte kritisch und philosophisch bearbeitet*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Hartel, 1838). It was Holtzmann's work, however, that established the two-source hypothesis as a working scholarly consensus.

⁴ The siglum Q derives from *Quelle*, the word for "source" in German, the language in which the hypothesis was first proposed and discussed. On the use of "Q" to designate this document, see Lou H. Silberman, "Whence the *Siglum* Q? A Conjecture," *JBL* 98 (1979): 287–288.

⁵ There have been many attempts to reconstruct the document Q. The first was by Adolf von Harnack in *Sprüche und Reden Jesu* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1907); Eng.: *The Sayings of Jesus*, trans. J.R. Wilkinson (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons/London: Williams and Norgate, 1908). A recent critical tool for this work has been provided by John Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels: Synopsis, Critical Notes and Concordance* (Foundations and Facets; Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1988). The most recent and thorough work is a project of the Society of Biblical Literature International Q Project, James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., Milton C. Moreland, Managing Editor, *The Critical Edition of Q*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress/Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

extensive verbal correspondence found in parallel texts ascribed to Q.⁶ Further evidence for its existence as a written source can be adduced from the fact that while Matthew and Luke tend to insert sayings from Q into different contexts in the Markan narrative, they nonetheless frequently make use of Q sayings in the same relative order.⁷ Though the actual document used by Matthew and Luke has been lost, scholarly convention assigns all of the parallel texts shared by Matthew and Luke, but not found in Mark, to this sayings source.⁸ That Matthew and Luke made use of it necessitates a date for Q sometime before the mid-80s CE (the date normally assigned to Matthew), but Mark's probable knowledge of some Q texts makes a date of around 60 CE more likely, though an earlier date is not ruled out.⁹

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

The Gospel of Thomas, like Q, is a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus. And like Q the Gospel of Thomas disappeared sometime after the close of the early Christian period. In fact, it was lost to the modern world until 1945, when a chance discovery in the sands of Egypt brought it once again into the light of day.¹⁰ The fact that this non-canonical text shares so much in common with Matthew, Mark, and Luke (about half of Thomas's sayings are found also in the Synoptic Gospels) at once made it both the object of much

⁶ For a discussion of the issue see John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 42–47.

⁷ This discovery was made by Vincent Taylor; see "The Order of Q," *JTS* 4 (1953): 27–31; reprinted: *idem*, *New Testament Essays* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; London: Epworth, 1970), pp. 90–94; and *idem*, "The Original Order of Q," in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Honor of T.W. Manson*, ed. A.J.B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), pp. 246–269; reprinted: *idem*, *New Testament Essays*, 95–118.

⁸ There are exceptions to this general rule, for occasionally the content of Mark and Q probably overlap. Such cases are identified by doublets (when Matthew or Luke contain the same story twice, in slightly different versions) or by agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark. For a general treatment see Rudolf Laufen, *Die Doppelüberlieferung der Logienquelle und des Markusevangeliums*, BBB 54 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1980).

⁹ Dieter Lührmann makes a plausible case for a date in the 50s or 60s in *Die Redaktion der Logienquelle*, WMANT 33 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969) 85–89.

¹⁰ For an account of this remarkable discovery see James M. Robinson, "The Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices," and "Getting the Nag Hammadi Library into English," *Biblical Archaeologist* 42/4 (1979) 206–224 and 239–248, respectively; more recently see *idem*, "The Story of the Nag Hammadi Library," in Stephen J. Patterson, Hans-Gebhard Bethge, and James M. Robinson, *The Fifth Gospel*, Revised Edition (London: T. & T. Clark, 2011), pp. 67–96.

attention and the center of much controversy. At issue were its relationship to the canonical tradition and its date. While a full-scale discussion of these important issues is not possible here, my own position may be summarized as follows:¹¹ the Gospel of Thomas derives for the most part from oral and written traditions that are parallel to, but not derived from the canonical Gospels and their sources. That this is true is indicated by the following facts: (1) Thomas shows no consistent patterns suggesting its use of Synoptic materials—no extensive verbal correspondence, no shared order,¹² and only rare instances where Thomas shares a detail thought to have been unique to one or another of the Synoptic authors.¹³ (2) From a form-critical point of view, Thomas's sayings are more primitive, or derive from forms that are more primitive, than their Synoptic counterparts.¹⁴ (3) As a sayings collection, Thomas belongs in an early Christian genre that does not presuppose the development of the narrative gospel and that, if the fate of Q is instructive, seems to have died out after the end of the first century.¹⁵ (4) Finally, there are Synoptic parallels for only about half of Thomas's sayings; for the rest one must assume independent (oral or written) sources.¹⁶ Cumulatively these factors indicate that Thomas represents an autonomous gospel tradition. While Thomas is notoriously difficult to date, all of these factors are relevant for this second question as well. The primitive nature of its sayings, its independence from the canonical tradition, and its genre all suggest a

¹¹ For a more thorough discussion see Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Foundations and Facets (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1993).

¹² So Robert McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960), pp. 50–51.

¹³ On the last point see the particularly helpful study by John Sieber, *A Redactional Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels with Regard to the Question of the Sources of the Gospel According to Thomas*, PhD Dissertation, Claremont, 1965 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1966). Sieber's work is an important corrective to the earlier work of Wolfgang Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomasevangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur gnostischen Synoptikerdeutung*, BZNW 29 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964).

¹⁴ This is most evident in the parables tradition that is shared by Thomas and the synoptic gospels; see esp. Hugh Montefiore, "A Comparison of the Parables of the Gospel According to Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels," *NTS* 7 (1960–1961): 220–248; also Helmut Koester, "Three Thomas Parables," in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of Robert McL. Wilson*, ed. A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), pp. 195–203, and Ron Cameron, "Parable and Interpretation in the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 2 (1986): 3–34.

¹⁵ On this see Claus-H. Hunzinger, "Außersynoptisches Traditionsgut im Thomasevangelium," *TLZ* 85 (1960): 843.

¹⁶ So, originally, Oscar Cullmann, "Das Thomasevangelium und die Frage nach dem Alter in ihm enthaltenen Tradition," *TLZ* 85 (1960): 334.

date in the first century. Without a compelling reason to date it later, one should probably regard it as roughly contemporaneous with Q.¹⁷

Q AND THOMAS AS WISDOM GOSPELS

As a pair, then, Q and Thomas make up one of the earliest strata of Christian literary activity. Both documents are sayings collections. This fact has not gone unnoticed in the study of early Christianity, and its significance may be considerable. In 1964 James M. Robinson published an essay in which Q and Thomas are placed within the context of other sayings collections of Jewish and early Christian provenance.¹⁸ This was Robinson's attempt to work out more systematically Rudolf Bultmann's treatment of sayings from the Synoptic tradition under the heading: "Logia (Jesus as a Teacher of Wisdom)."¹⁹ Focusing on the sayings collection as a genre, and using its native vocabulary (λόγοι or λόγια) to follow its path, Robinson begins by tracing its development forward. The path leads to the Gospel of Thomas, whose *incipit* identifies it as one such sayings collection (ἡ ἀρχὴ, i.e., λόγοι). But Robinson, noting in Thomas the presence of a number of sayings of a more esoteric nature, argues that here the sayings genre had begun its modulation into a genre more typical of Gnosticism, namely, discourses of the risen Lord, a development continued in a work like *Thomas the*

¹⁷ Since the original publication of this essay I have argued for a date in the closing decades of the first century, or roughly contemporaneous with the synoptic gospels (*The Gospel of Thomas*, 113–118). Others have dated it as early as the 50s (Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Wisdom* [New York: Seabury, 1983] 14–17) and as late as the end of the second century, after Tatian (Nicholas Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian: The Relationship Between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron*, Academia Biblica 5 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002]), but neither proposal has gathered a following. Most scholars date Thomas in the late first or early second century. But this is all admittedly guesswork. There are no clear footholds in the material that would give us a clear date for Thomas. Moreover, the fact that the Gospel of Thomas is a list, and therefore very malleable and subject to constant change, makes it unlikely that dating any one saying in the collection would necessarily yield a date for the collection in general.

¹⁸ James M. Robinson, "LOGOI SOPHON: Zur Gattung der Spruchquelle," in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Erich Dinkler (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1964), pp. 77–96. A translated and revised edition of the essay was published as "LOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q," pp. 77–113 in *idem* and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) (all references are to the English translation.)

¹⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, revised edition, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 69–108.

Contender and brought to completion in a text such as *Pistis Sophia*, in which traditional sayings are juxtaposed freely with esoteric interpretation and cast in the form of a discourse of the resurrected Lord with his disciples.²⁰ Robinson then reverses his direction, tracing the genre backwards from Q to other early Christian sayings collections, such as that found in *Didache* 1:3–6 or Mark 4:1–34, and pre-Christian collections imbedded in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and the *Similitudes of Enoch*.²¹ Ultimately he locates its roots in Jewish wisdom literature, in particular the collections of *logoi* found in Prov 22:17–24:22, whose superscription lends a designation for the genre as a whole: *logoi sophōn*, or “sayings of the sages.”

Two things from Robinson’s work stand out as important for the present study. First, in settling the literary context within which Q and Thomas are to be considered, Robinson also suggests a theological paradigm within which they are to be understood: wisdom. Second, Robinson notes that within early Christianity the use of the wisdom genre, *logoi sophōn*, was not a static, but a dynamic phenomenon. Thomas, while continuing the tradition of collecting Jesus’ sayings, moved this genre into the service of another theological paradigm, Gnosticism. Thomas is no longer simply a wisdom gospel, and Jesus in Thomas is no longer simply Wisdom’s sage or prophet; he has become a Gnostic revealer. What Robinson did not notice was that Q in its present form likewise is not a wisdom gospel in any pure sense, but itself represents a development away from the idea of Jesus as Wisdom’s sage or prophet. This was Helmut Koester’s insight.

In two articles published shortly after Robinson’s initial essay, Koester noticed that while Thomas indeed represents a secondary development away from the wisdom orientation suggested by its genre, when compared to Q it shows some primitive traits as well.²² More specifically, Koester points out that when one compares the content of Q and Thomas, one finds that conspicuously absent from Thomas is any of the apocalyptic expectation so typical of Q. There are, for example, no Son of man sayings in Thomas, so central to Q’s own apocalyptic tradition.²³ This, in Koester’s view, is not the result of a systematic purge of apocalyptic material from the sayings

²⁰ Robinson, “LOGOI SOPHŌN,” 76–85.

²¹ Robinson, “LOGOI SOPHŌN,” 106–109.

²² Helmut Koester, “GNŌMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity,” *HTR* 58 (1965): 279–318; and *idem*, “One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels,” *HTR* 61 (1968): 203–247. Both are reprinted in Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories*, 114–157 and 158–204, respectively (all references are to *Trajectories*.)

²³ Koester, “One Jesus,” 168–170.

tradition in Thomas. Rather, building on the work of Philipp Vielhauer,²⁴ who had argued that the earliest stages of the Synoptic tradition did not yet contain apocalyptic speculation about the Son of man, Koester suggests that Thomas's lack of an apocalyptic element is a primitive feature deriving from the earliest stages in the sayings tradition. Q, with its Son of man apocalypticism, represents a secondary development.²⁵ Thus, while Q and Thomas are, in terms of genre, wisdom gospels, neither has retained wisdom as its operative hermeneutical paradigm: Thomas has moved the genre in the direction of what Robinson called Gnosticism²⁶ while Q has moved it in the direction of apocalypticism.

KLOPPENBORG: Q¹ AND Q²

Koester's hunches about Q were subsequently pursued by John Kloppenborg in his composition-critical study of Q.²⁷ Kloppenborg sought to clarify the redactional history of Q by posing the question in literary-critical terms: What principles of composition can be seen as formative for the Q document, and what elements appear to be redactionally secondary? Kloppenborg discovered that the compositional structure that underlies the Q document as a whole is a series of wisdom speeches: Q 6:20b–49;²⁸ Q 9:57–62; 10:2–16, 21–24; Q 11:24, 9–13; Q 12:1–12; Q 12:22–34; and Q 13:24–30, 34–35; 14:16–24, 26–27; 17:33; 14:34–35.²⁹ To this foundational layer in Q (= Q¹) are affixed, at irregular intervals, a number of sayings whose character may generally be described as “the announcement of judgment”: Q 3:7–9, 16–17; Q 7:1–10, 18–23, 24–26, (16:16), 31–35; Q 11:14–26, 29–32, 33–36, 39–52; Q 12:

²⁴ Phillip Vielhauer, “Gottesreich und Menschensohn in der Verkündigung Jesu,” *Festschrift für Gunther Dehn*, ed. W. Schneemelcher (Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1957), pp. 51–79; repr. In *idem, Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (Munich: Kaiser, 1965) 55–91; and *idem*, “Jesus und der Menschensohn,” *ZTK* 60 (1963): 133–177; repr., *Aufsätze*, 92–140.

²⁵ Koester, “One Jesus,” 186–187.

²⁶ When this essay was originally published in 1993 I was of the view that Gnosticism, or rudimentary Gnosticism was the best way to describe the speculative philosophical theology of Thomas. I would now sooner call it a rudimentary form of Middle Platonism (see “Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas,” chapter 2 in the present volume).

²⁷ Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*.

²⁸ By convention, texts from Q are cited using the versification of Luke, since Luke is generally considered to have preserved the original order of Q more faithfully. In the event that a Matthean text without a Lukan parallel is thought to have come from Q it is cited as a Matthean text.

²⁹ Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 171–245.

39–40, 42–46, 49, 51–53, (54–56), 57–59; and Q 17:23, 24, 26–30, 34–35, 37.³⁰ It is Kloppenborg's hypothesis that this second redactional layer of Q (= Q²) was added as the Q community came ever more to the realization that their initial preaching was not being received with enthusiasm. Their frustration with this course of events inspired the strains of judgment spoken against "this generation" so characteristic of Kloppenborg's Q² materials.³¹ As might be expected, all of the apocalyptic Son of man sayings Koester regarded as secondary to the Q tradition are found in this later redactional layer. Kloppenborg's composition-critical study of Q thus confirmed what Koester's comparison of Q and Thomas had suggested earlier: while Q in the form used by Matthew and Luke was an apocalyptic document, the Q tradition nonetheless had its origins in an early Christian sapiential tradition that focused not on judgment and an imminent, cataclysmic end to history, but on Jesus' words.

It seems clear from this work that in Q and Thomas we have the remnants of an early Christian tradition in which emphasis was placed on Jesus' words; this tradition is thus in the broadest sense sapiential. In its later manifestations—in Thomas and in Kloppenborg's Q²—this early sapiential orientation gave way to theological paradigms at home in the world of Christian origins. But questions linger. If Q and Thomas lie on diverging trajectories each grounded in, yet moving away from, an early sapiential tradition, what can be said about this early tradition itself? The quest for origins begins with the material common to both traditions; this common tradition will provide at least a minimal inventory of the tradition out of which the Q and Thomas trajectories emerged.

THE COMMON TRADITION

The tradition common to Q and Thomas may be inventoried as follows:

1. There are a number of sayings and parables that have not been recast by the respective hermeneutical tendencies at work in each trajectory (apocalypticism in Q, Platonizing philosophical theology in Thomas). In both trajectories they appear to share the same basic meaning: Thom 6:3 // Q 12:2 (Hidden, Revealed); Thom 14:4 // Q 10:8–9 (Eat What Is Set Before You);

³⁰ Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 102–170.

³¹ Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 167–168.

Thom 20:24 // Q 13:18–21 (The Mustard); Thom 26:1–2 // Q 6:41–42 (Speck and Log); Thomas 32 // Matt 5:14 (City on a Hill); Thom 33:1 // Q 12:3 (Preach from Housetops); Thom 33:2–3 // Q 11:33 (Lamp on a Lamp Stand); Thomas 34 // Q 6:39 (Blind Leading the Blind); Thomas 36 (Coptic) // Q 12:22 (What You Shall Wear); Thom 45:1 // Q 6:44b (Grapes and Thorns); Thom 45:23 // Q 6:45 (Good Person, Good Heart); Thom 47:2 // Q 16:13 (Serving Two Masters); Thomas 54 // Q 6:20b (Blessed Are the Poor); Thomas 55 // Q 14:2&–27 (Hating One's Family); Thomas 58 // Q 6:22 (Blessed the Sufferer); Thomas 63 // Q 12:1&–21 (The Rich Fool); Thom 68:1–2 // Q 6:22–23 (Blessed Are the Persecuted); Thom 69:2 // Q 6:21a (Blessed Are the Hungry); Thom 72:1–2 // Q 12:13–14 (Jesus Not a Divider); Thomas 73 // Q 10:2 (The Harvest Is Great); Thom 76:3 // Q 12:33–34 (Abiding Treasure); Thom 86:1–2 // Q 9:58 (Foxes Have Holes); Thomas 94 // Q 11:9–10 (Seek and Find); Thom 95:1–2 // Q 6:34–35a (Lend Without Return); Thom 96:1–2 // Q 13:20–21 (The Leaven); Thomas 107 // Q 15:3–7 (The Lost Sheep); Thomas 113 // Luke 17:20–21 (The Present Reign of God).

2. A number of sayings and one parable are found in both Thomas and Kloppenborg's second redactional layer in Q (Q²). However, even though they were added to Q at a time when the Q community was engaging in apocalyptic speculation, these sayings, when isolated from their secondary Q contexts, do not themselves connote an apocalyptic understanding of the world. What they do share in common, however, is a noteworthy polemical flavor: Thomas 24 // Q 11:33–36 (The Light Person); Thom 39:1–2 // Q 11:52 (Taking the Keys of Knowledge); Thom 44:1–3 // Q 12:10 (Blaspheming the Holy Spirit); Thom 46:1, 2b // Q 7:28 (None Greater Than John); Thom 64:1–12 // Q 14:15–24 (The Great Supper); Thom 78:1–3 // Q 7:24–26 (Why Have You Come Out?); Thom 89:1–2 // Q 11:39–41 (Washing the Outside).

3. Several sayings have been drawn into and recast in the service of the apocalypticism of Q²; however, they survive in Thomas in a more basic sapiential form: Thomas 10 // Q 12:49 (Fire on Earth); Thom 16:14 // Q 12:51–53 (A House Divided); Thom 35:1–2 // Q 11:21–22 (Binding the Strong Man); Thom 41:1–2 // Q 19:26 (Have and Receive); Thomas 91 // Q 12:56 (Reading the Moment); Thomas 103 // Q 12:39 (Expecting the Thief).

4. There are also several sayings that have been drawn into and recast in the service of philosophical theology in Thomas, but which survive in Q in a more basic sapiential form. Interestingly, all of these sayings are also attested elsewhere in Thomas, but in similarly sapiential forms: Thomas 2;

92 (cf. Thomas 94) // Q 11:9–10 (Seek and Find); Thomas 3 (cf. Thomas 113) // Luke 17:20–21 (The Present Reign of God); Thom 5:2 (cf. Thom 6:3) // Q 12:2 (Hidden, Revealed); Thom 69:1 (cf. Thom 68:1–2) // Q 6:22–23 (Blessed Are the Persecuted); Thomas 101 (cf. Thomas 55) // Q 14:26–27 (Hating Family).

5. Several sayings have undergone transformation in each trajectory, Q recasting the saying in terms of apocalyptic judgment, Thomas in terms of Thomas' more speculative philosophical theology: Thom 4:2 // Q 13:30 (First, Last); and Thom 21:3³² // Q 12:39 (Expecting the Thief); Thom 61:1 // Q 17:34 (One Will live, One Will Die); Thom 61:3 // Q 10:22a (Things Given of the Father).

From this material two things are evident. First, by far the largest category—i.e., category (1)—is that fund of common tradition upon which the apocalypticism of the Q trajectory and the esotericism of the Thomas trajectory have had little or no impact. This is remarkable, considering that, as pointed out above, neither Q nor Thomas is in its present form a wisdom book in any pure sense. However, it confirms in a very concrete way the theoretical arguments of Robinson and Koester that Q and Thomas are rooted in an early Christian sayings tradition that is neither apocalyptic nor Platonic. This is further suggested by categories 2, 3, and 4, in which each saying is preserved in an early form despite its having been appropriated either for Q's apocalypticism or Thomas's philosophical theology. Laying the parallels out in this way makes it clear that Q and Thomas indeed lie on divergent trajectories—Q moving in the direction of apocalypticism, Thomas in the direction of Platonism—which are nonetheless rooted in a common tradition that is neither apocalyptic nor Platonic.

The second thing that stands out from this data, however, is the lack of any clear pattern between the parallels that would suggest a specific and concrete relationship between Q and Thomas themselves. For example, there is no extensive verbal correspondence or residual cases of shared order that would suggest, as in the case of Matthew's and Luke's use of Q, an actual document shared by Q and Thomas. This raises two issues: (1) how to account for these extensive Q-Thomas overlaps, and (2) how to describe the corpus of overlapping sayings as any sort of meaningful whole.

³² Note the more original form of the saying in Thomas 91.

The first of these questions is perhaps the easiest to answer. At this early stage in the development of the Jesus tradition it may not be supposed that the movement was yet very large. If Paul—the only early Christian preacher about whom we have any detailed knowledge—may be taken as illustrative of the situation early on, even he, who traveled to regions of the empire quite remote from the Eastern roots of the movement in Palestine and Syria, had intimate contact with its original leaders in the East (Gal 1:18–20; 2:1–14). It seems probable that those who proffered the oral traditions that eventually found codification in Q and Thomas, respectively, simply knew one another and consequently shared traditions.

The second of these questions is more difficult. The lack of evidence for a document at such an early stage in the Jesus movement is not in itself surprising. It cannot be supposed that the Jesus movement, having begun in a culture whose rate of literacy was generally very low, was originally grounded primarily in texts and literary activity.³³ The Q-Thomas overlaps derive quite clearly from shared oral tradition. But how might one characterize this oral tradition? Does the fact that its earliest written codification took the form of *logoi sophōn* suggest anything about its earlier oral character? Can one speak legitimately here of an early Christian wisdom tradition, or even a wisdom school? Is it meaningful to characterize an oral tradition in terms that normally imply a scribal or learned context? What is more, σοφία (“wisdom”) or its cognates are never mentioned in the common material. Nor, for that matter, is wisdom ever mentioned explicitly in the earliest written codifications of this tradition: Thomas and Q¹. The terminology specific to wisdom theology occurs first in Q²: (Q 7:35; 10:21; 11:31; and 11:49). To answer

³³ See esp. William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); also Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 17–18; D.J. Wiseman, “Books in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament,” *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to Jerome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 37; and Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 152–153, who argues that this state of affairs predominated even until the nineteenth century. Certainly prior to the rise of print technology one cannot assume that people shared the modern preoccupation with books and print, since such things were simply not available to the general public. Even among the literate elite of antiquity there was a distinct preference for the oral report over the written word—so Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 55–60; *idem*, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New Accents; London and New York: Methuen, 1982), pp. 79–80, 96–98. Thus, Papias’s preference for the oral reports of elders over those of books (Eusebius *Hist eccl* 3:39:3–4).

these questions we must first learn more about this still obscure comer of Christian origins, beginning with a more precise description of the character of the tradition common to Q and Thomas. Once this has been done we can go on to look more carefully at how its subsequent tradition history is played out in the Q and Thomas trajectories.

CHARACTERIZING THE COMMON TRADITION

Common Forms

In the absence of a specific document to which we could point as the source of this tradition, form criticism suggests itself as an appropriate point of departure for further investigation. While there may have been some written traditions prior to Q and Thomas, one must assume that this early phase of the Jesus movement for the most part cultivated its traditions orally. When one looks at the material common to Q and Thomas as a whole, the forms that predominate are from the wisdom tradition—the sort of forms Bultmann listed under the category “Logia (Jesus as the Teacher of Wisdom).” There are, for example, numerous maxims,³⁴ some formulated on the basis of the natural world (Thom 5:2 and 6:5–6 // Q 12:2; Thom 45:1 // Q 6:44b); some formulated on the basis of human experience (Thom 4:2 // Q 13:30; Thomas 24 // Q 11:3436; Thom 33:2–3 // Q 11:33; Thomas 34 // Q 6:39; Thom 65:1–2 // Q 11:21–22; Thom 41:1–2 // Q 19:26; Thom 45:2–3 // Q 6:45; Thom 47:2 // Q 16:13; Thom 86:1–2 // Q 9:58); and others formulated as macarisms (Thomas 54 // Q 6:20b; Thomas 58 // Q 6:22; Thom 68:1–20 // Q 6:22–23; Thom 69:2 // Q 6:21a; Thomas 103 // Q 12:39).³⁵ There are also several hortatory formulations³⁶ (Thom 14:4 // Q 10:8–9; Thom 26:1–2 // Q 6:41–42; Thomas 36 // Q 6:39; Thomas 94 // Q 11:9–10; Thom 95:1–2 // Q 6:34–35a) and sapiential questions (Thom 89:1–2 // Q 11:39–41).³⁷ Finally, there are six parables (Thomas 20 // Q 13:18–19; Thomas 63 // Q 12:16–21; Thomas 64 // Q 14:15–24; Thomas 76 // Q 12:33–34; Thomas 96 // Q 13:20–21; and Thomas 107 // Q 15:3–7).

³⁴ Bultmann's term was *Grundsätze* (*Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* [9th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979], p. 77).

³⁵ The Q 12:39 version is probably secondary here; it has been reformulated to prepare for the hortatory conclusion appended in Q 12:40.

³⁶ Bultmann's term was *Mahnworte* (*Geschichte*, 80).

³⁷ Q's polemical formulation is probably secondary; so Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International/London: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 91–92; see also Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 149–150.

The large number of wisdom sayings in this common tradition has hermeneutical implications: it tells us that those who propagated the Jesus tradition in this way had before them a wisdom agenda. That is, they were about the quest for insight—insight into the nature of human existence and of the world and especially of humanity's proper stance in the world. The task is both bold and basic. For this reason the sages tended to formulate their insights in rather bold, universal sounding terms using maxims, exhortations, and the like. However, as William Beardslee has argued, this should not lead one to conclude that the sage was typically focused on Truth writ large, universals that have no particular grounding in the historical reality of human existence.³⁸ For the sage, the key to true sagacity was the ability to be wise in a particular situation, to appropriate and properly apply insights derived from other situations of analogous quality. The sage was to be a master interpreter of human experience in the world. That is what the early Jesus movement that formulated its traditions in terms of the wisdom tradition was striving for: an interpretation of human experience.

Uncommon Content

By the first century, wisdom was a well-known theological and hermeneutical category within Judaism. But it was not limited to Jewish culture. Wisdom in antiquity was an international phenomenon; the work of the sage played a role in all of the ancient cultures of the Near East. The Greco-Roman world, too, had its instructional tradition, embodied especially in the philosophical schools of late antiquity, which codified their wisdom in collections of *gnomologia*.³⁹ Thus it is not unusual that the Jesus movement, with roots in the thoroughly Hellenized Jewish culture of lower Galilee, should choose to cultivate its own traditions in this form.⁴⁰ However, when

³⁸ William Beardslee, "Uses of Proverb," 65–66. Beardslee cites the earlier study by Hans Heinrich Schmid as decisive for his conclusion: *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1969). This squares well with the oral origins of the synoptic tradition. Ong points out that "oral cultures must always conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human life world, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings" (*Orality and Literacy*, 42).

³⁹ For a convenient survey of Near Eastern and Greco-Roman instruction see Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 263–316.

⁴⁰ Lower Galilee was no cultural backwater; so J. Andrew Overman, "Who Were the First Urban Christians? Urbanization in Galilee in the First Century," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers*, ed. David Lull, SBLSP 27 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 160–188 and

one lays this early Christian wisdom tradition alongside its contemporary cousins, it is not without its own unique qualities.

Wisdom in the ancient Near East was for the most part a school tradition carried on under official sponsorship. Sages were retained in the employ of the royal court as a corps of educated elites, whose learning was used to further the cause of the ruling family. As such, wisdom tended to be rather conservative. Its interests were those of the status quo: moderation, order, hierarchy, wealth as a sign of divine favor, and so on. As James L. Crenshaw aptly summarizes: "The sages did not want anyone to rock the boat." Accordingly, they encouraged any means that would mollify anger, and they refused to become involved in efforts at social reform.⁴¹ This generally conservative tendency of the wisdom tradition can be seen even in the small literary preface used by the sages to present their material: as the collected insight of a parent passed along to the children.⁴² The last generation's wisdom becomes that of the next, with all the legitimating power that can be conveyed only through the cultural codes of parental authority.

In comparing the wisdom of Q with the broader tradition of ancient Near Eastern instruction, Kloppenborg has called attention to two anomalous qualities in Q: (1) Q does not present its material in the guise of parental instruction. (2) Rather than sharing the generally conservative tone of most ancient Near Eastern instruction, "Q presents an ethic of radical discipleship which reverses many of the conventions which allow a society to operate, such as principles of retaliation, the orderly borrowing and lending of capital, appropriate treatment of the dead, responsible self-provision, self-defense and honor of parents."⁴³ This generally radical character of the early Christian sayings tradition may be illustrated in the common tradition no less than in Q. Here, too, family life is eschewed (Thomas 55 and 101:2–3 // Q 14:26–27) or depicted as disintegrating (Thom 16:1–4 // Q 12:51–53); poverty and begging are embraced (Thomas 54 // Q 6:20b; Thom 69:2 // Q 6:21a; Thom 14:4 // Q 10:8–9; Thomas 36 // Q 6:39; Thom 95:1–2 // Q 6:34–35a);

Douglas R. Edwards, "First Century Urban/Rural Relations in Lower Galilee: Exploring the Archaeological and Literary Evidence," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers*, ed. David Lull, SBLSP 27 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 169–182.

⁴¹ James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p. 20.

⁴² For this feature of wisdom see Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 33; Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 274–275, 284, 301.

⁴³ Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 318.

homelessness is lamented, but accepted (Thom 86:1–2 // Q 9:58). More than that, the cultural codes that form the social boundaries between Jews and Gentiles here fall under attack (Thom 89:1–2 // Q 11:39–41; Thom 14:4 // Q 10:8–9).⁴⁴ No ordinary sages these. Despite the presence of a number of sayings of a more conventional quality,⁴⁵ here they are clearly not employed in the interest of the status quo. At least two of these proverbs seem to imply conflict (Thom 35:1–2 // Q 11:21–22; Thomas 103 // Q 12:39). There is criticism afoot (Thom 41:1–2 // Q 19:26; Thom 39:1–2 // Q 11:52; Thom 78:1–3 // Q 7:24–26; Thomas 91 // Q 12:56). “Boat rocking” is in the air (Thom 4:2 // Q 19:26; Thomas 10 // Q 12:49; Thom 16:1–2 // Q 12:51). Persecution is welcomed as the legitimization of faithfulness in the face of a hostile and unfaithful world (Thom 68:1–2 // Q 6:22–23).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

As sayings of the sages these sayings are quite remarkable. Rather than enforcing the cultural codes and conservative comportment essential to the perpetuation of the status quo, they offer a radical critique of culture. This is obviously not the product of officially sanctioned activity. These early Christians were not operating in the normal setting for sages: the court of the king. However, even while noticing this, our attention is drawn to a group of sayings in the common tradition having to do with the “kingdom” (βασιλεία).⁴⁶ In order to understand the full significance of these sayings it is important to recall that the term βασιλεία is an overtly political term. This is the word used to refer to the ancient and legendary kingdoms of Egypt and the ancient Near East, and later those that succeeded Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE. More importantly, this is the contemporary term for “empire,” namely the *Roman* empire. In choosing this term, these latter-day

⁴⁴ In the latter saying traveling among Gentiles is implied (see Stephen J. Patterson, “Paul and the Jesus Tradition: It Is Time for Another Look,” *HTR* 84 [1991]: 32–33 [= chapter 10 in the present volume]).

⁴⁵ The following sayings are more proverbial in character: Thom 6:5–6 // Q 12:2; Thom 26:1–2 // Q 6:41–42; Thom 33:2 // Q 11:33; Thomas 34 // Q 6:39; Thom 45:1–2 // Q 6:44b–45; Thom 47:2 // Q 16:13; Thomas 94 // Q 11:9–10; Thomas 24 // Q 11:34–36; Thom 35:1–2 // Q 11:21–22; and Thomas 103 // Q 12:39.

⁴⁶ Thomas 3, 113 // Q 17:20–21; Thom 14:2 // Q 10:8–9; Thom 46:1, 2b // Q 7:28; Thomas 54 // Q 6:20b; Thomas 68 // Q 6:22–23; Thomas 76 // Q 12:33–34; Thomas 96 // Q 13:20–21; Thomas 20 // Q 13:18–21; Thomas 64 // Q 14:15–24 (a kingdom parable in Matthew’s version of Q); and Thomas 107 // Q 15:3–7 (a kingdom parable in the Thomas version).

Q-Thomas sages understood what they were doing: though their attitude toward any official court can only be seen as indifferent at best and hostile at worst, they did see themselves as operating within a setting appropriate to the sage-the court service of an empire.

Now, this in itself might have been seen as a radical position *vis-a-vis* the powers that be. There could be no mistake about this. To speak of *another* βασιλεία, an empire of God, or an empire of heaven, or an empire of the Father,⁴⁷ would have been rather daring in the deeply suspicious and oppressive atmosphere of Palestine under Roman rule.⁴⁸ For as Mack points out rhetorically, “Why, indeed, a kingdom symbol at all, unless kings, kingdoms, and social circumstances were up for discussion?”⁴⁹ And if up for discussion among the peasants of Galilee, surely it would have been a critical discussion. And this is precisely what the empire and its beneficiaries did not want.

The setting for this kind of talk may be illustrated by a close contemporary example—one of a relative few instances in Jewish literature where one finds the term “kingdom of God” to describe Israel’s utopian future—from the Psalms of Solomon, psalm 17.⁵⁰ The problem for the latter day psalmist is the domination of Israel by Gentiles, about which he takes a Deuteronomistic view: that Israel has been given over to foreign rulers in punishment for her sins (Ps Sol 17:4–22). But the psalmist’s hope is in the eternal “kingdom of our God” (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν) (17:3) and the expectation that God will raise up a new king, a “son of David” who will purge Jerusalem of its Gentile rulers (17:21–22). The hostility to Roman rule—however justified by Israel’s sins—is evident throughout these psalms. And in this particular psalm one cannot mistake the implied critique of the Roman empire’s preferred mode of expansion and domination: “He will not

⁴⁷ All these forms are attested in Q and Thomas, as well as the simple *basileia* without predication.

⁴⁸ The recent work of Richard Horsley provides an important corrective to earlier, more romantic accounts; see esp. *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 1–58 and (with John S. Hanson) *Bandits, Prophets and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

⁴⁹ Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 70.

⁵⁰ Most scholars date this text to the years of Roman rule in the aftermath of Pompey’s conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE, but a date in the first half of the first century CE, before the destruction of the Temple in the Judean revolt (66–70 CE), is also possible. See R.B. Wright, “The Psalms of Solomon: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *The Old testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James Charesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 639–670 (esp. 640–641 for the issue of dating).

rely on horse and rider and bow, nor will he collect gold and silver for war ..., nor build up hope in a multitude for a day of war" (17:33). The *just* king will rule by the "wisdom of his justice" (17:29). He will drive out the sinners "by the strength of his word" (17:36). His power will reside in the holy spirit, wisdom, and sense of justice given to him by God (17:37).

But Jewish prophets and singers were not the only people in Rome's empire who dared to speak of an ideal empire (βασιλεία) and thereby engage in social criticism of the most basic sort. In the various schools of popular philosophy contemporary to the emergence of the Jesus movement, much effort was spent on this topic. Philosophers operating from the periphery of public life explored the nature of just rule in treatises using kingship as the operative metaphor. Mack summarizes:

Cynics also saw themselves as "kings" standing over against tyrants as well as against a society blindly following unreasonable rules. Using metaphors such as king, overseer, physician, gadfly, and teacher, Cynics understood themselves to be "sent" from God to preside over the human situation. Epictetus even refers to the Cynics' vocation as a reign (*basileia*, "kingdom") in order to catch up the challenging aspects of representing publicly a way of life grounded in the divine laws of nature.⁵¹

The Cynics were not well received in the halls of power. Nero, Vespasian, and Domitian all expelled the street philosophers from Rome as a threat to the social stability of the empire.⁵² Jesus followers, with their own talk of a new kingdom—*empire* (βασιλεία)—would in their own day and time suffer similar rebuke and sanction.

There is not space here to discuss all of the kingdom sayings in the common tradition in detail. However, closer attention to two parables from this category will illustrate the seditious character of the tradition's use of *basileia* language: the parable of the mustard (Thomas 20 // Q 13:8–21) and the parable of the leaven (Thomas 96 // Q 13:20–21). What is noteworthy about these two parables is their audacious comparison of the kingdom to proverbial symbols of nuisance and defilement. There is more to the parable of the mustard than the contrast between the smallness of the seed and the

⁵¹ Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 72–73. The reference is to Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.22.63, 76. More extensive discussion is to be found in Ragnar Höistad, *Cynic Hero and Cynic King* (Uppsala: Bloms, 1948) and Erwin R. Goodenough, "The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship," *Yale Classical Studies* 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928): 55–102 (as cited by Mack).

⁵² See Donald R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism from Diogenes to the 6th Century A.D.*, (London: Methuen, 1937) 125–142.

largeness of the plant. In fact, allusion to the noble cedar of Ez 17:22–24 in the final line of the parable renders the mustard's size a mere parody by contrast.⁵³ At least as important for its parabolic content is what everyone knew about mustard: once you plant it in a place it soon takes over such that it is almost impossible to be rid of it.⁵⁴ So prolific was mustard that it was forbidden to plant it in a garden or in a field in more than a few small patches, lest it threaten to take over an entire area and crowd out the more desirable crops, such as grain.⁵⁵ It would be more to the point to call this the parable of the mustard *weed* rather than the mustard *seed*.⁵⁶ Add to this the parable's final stroke: and it attracts birds to nest in its branches (the last thing a farmer wants in a grain field!). This is what the kingdom of God is like: it grows from the smallest of seeds to become the most threatening of weeds—it can take over, overwhelm a neatly planted field, and, worst of all, attract unwanted guests. The image is hardly decorous.

The parable of the leaven has a similar, slightly threatening tone. Leaven in antiquity was a proverbial symbol of defilement and corruption.⁵⁷ One can see this in the New Testament itself, where its metaphoric use is confined to this negative range.⁵⁸ But throughout Jewish and Hellenistic culture it was also so regarded. A.R.S. Kennedy summarizes: "In the view of antiquity, Semitic and non-Semitic, panary fermentation represented a process of corruption and putrefaction in the mass of dough."⁵⁹ Leaven is a symbol of corruption. The parable of the leaven uses this negative symbol to conjure up a particularly seditious image: in each version the leaven is *hidden* in the flour—much flour!⁶⁰ Presumably the prank would not have been discovered

⁵³ See Robert W. Funk, *Jesus as Precursor*, Semeia Studies (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 23.

⁵⁴ Pliny *Nat Hist* 19.170.

⁵⁵ Joachim Jeremias calls attention to the problem with sowing mustard in a garden in his *The Parables of Jesus*, Second Revised Edition, trans. S.H. Hooke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 27, n. 11. For a more extensive discussion see Bernard B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 381–383.

⁵⁶ So Douglas Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 8 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), pp. 123–128, esp. 127: "It is hard to escape the conclusion that Jesus deliberately likens the rule of God to a weed."

⁵⁷ See Scott's discussion, *Hear Then the Parable*, 374–375; also Windisch, ζυμή, ζυμός, ἄζυμος, *TDNT* 2: 903–906.

⁵⁸ Cf. Matt 16:5–12; Mark 8:14–21; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor 5:6–8.

⁵⁹ A.R.S. Kennedy, "Leaven," in *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, ed. T.K. Cheyne and J.S. Black (New York and London: Macmillan, 1902) 3:2754 (as cited by Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 324).

⁶⁰ Jeremias called attention to the great amount of flour indicated in "three measures" (σάτα τρία): "In the parable of the Leaven they drastically pictured the overflowing mass of dough by borrowing from Gen. 18.6 ... the number of 3 *se'a* (39.4 liters)—3 *se'a* are something

until one wished to use the flour, at which time the baker would have something of a surprise in store. A small thing can be a very large nuisance indeed. In both of these parables, as with the *basileia* sayings in general, the new empire is not painted with broad, acceptably conventional strokes. Its form is irreverent and seditious, countercultural at a very basic level.

COUNTERCULTURAL WISDOM

The tradition common to Q and Thomas presents one with a dilemma. On the one hand, it makes overwhelming use of wisdom forms, which suggests a hermeneutic consistent with the (conservative) aims of the sages. On the other hand, it fills these forms with a content that is socially radical and confrontational, critical of the conventions that made ancient Jewish and Hellenistic social life possible.⁶¹ This is precisely the opposite of what one would expect from a wisdom school. What are we to make of this curious combination of disparate traditions? The radical content of the sayings tradition has not gone unnoticed: Eugene Boring and Helmut Koester have argued, for example, that this makes this tradition much more prophetic than sapiential in character.⁶² While there is some merit to this

like 50 pounds of flour, and the bread baked from this amount would provide a meal for more than 100 persons" (*Parables of Jesus*, 147). See also the discussion in Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 326–327.

⁶¹ A qualification to this must be added: the tradition common to Q and Thomas is curiously silent about the temple. In the tradition common to Thomas and Mark there is the so-called Temple Word (Thomas 71 // Mark 14:57–58; cf. 13:2; 15:29), so that we need not suppose that the earliest Jesus movement was uninterested in such things, even from a critical standpoint. The omission, however, is curious.

⁶² M. Eugene Boring, *Sayings of the Risen Jesus: Christian Prophecy in the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS 46; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 180–181. Boring suggests that Q is closer to Jeremiah than to Proverbs. Koester's position is more nuanced (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, 150–162). Noting the radicality of the tradition, Koester writes: "The behavior which Jesus requests is a demonstration of the kingdom's presence, i.e., of a society which is governed by new principles of ethics. This not only ascribes a kerygmatic quality to the ethical demands of Jesus, it presents Jesus as a prophet rather than a teacher of wisdom. Although formal claims of Jesus to prophetic authorization, such as a vision of a calling or the introductory formula 'thus says the Lord,' are missing, the prophetic role of Jesus is evident in the address of these ethical demands to a community, not just to individual followers" (ibid., 160). Richard Horsley, claiming that almost half of Thomas's sayings are "prophetic and apocalyptic" material, proposes that Robinson's designation for the genre be adjusted to LOGOI PROPHETON ("Logoi Propheton? Reflections on the Genre of Q," *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* [B.A. Pearson et al., eds; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991] 195–209, esp. 200–201). However, while there may be prophetic sayings (using

proposal,⁶³ there are problems with it as well. While the Jewish prophetic tradition is on the whole very specific, aiming its social criticism at particular persons or institutions or policies, the early Q-Thomas tradition is very general and hortatory.⁶⁴ In this sense the content, while socially radical, is still very wisdom-like. Gerd Theissen and Burton Mack have suggested Greco-Roman Cynicism as a particularly apt point of comparison for understanding this early tradition.⁶⁵ However, while there are indeed many instructive parallels between the Jesus movement and Cynicism, especially in terms of style of dress and public comportment, missing from the Jesus tradition is the one overarching theme that seems to characterize Cynicism as a whole: self-sufficiency.⁶⁶

In my view, this tradition—even with all of its radicality—is still best described as wisdom. To be sure, in many ways it defies what we have come to expect of wisdom; however, in other respects it is very wisdom-like indeed. Most significantly, it shares wisdom's basic task: the interpretation of human existence as lived out in the intense historicity of everyday life.⁶⁷ A radical perspective like that of the Q-Thomas tradition could well have led to an utter disregard for the world and withdrawal into fantasies of a transcendent reality in which the ideals of the Jesus movement might be more fully realized. But in choosing familiar wisdom forms as the medium through which to present their social critique, those who propagated this tradition

Koester's ethical definition of "prophetic"), there are few apocalyptic sayings in Thomas. For a discussion of this problem see chapter 9 in the present volume: "Apocalypticism or Prophecy and the Problem of Polyvalence: Lessons from the Gospel of Thomas."

⁶³ There are many sayings from the common tradition that could be called sapiential or prophetic. One thinks, for example, of the saying in Thomas 17:1 (cf. Q 10:23–24), in which Jesus speaks using the words of Isa 64:4. The parallel use in 1 Cor 2:9, however, suggests that early Christians understood this in terms of speculative wisdom. The classification of the Q-Thomas beatitudes is also problematic. Bultmann classified them as prophetic and apocalyptic sayings (*History*, 109–110), but the designation is much disputed (see the discussion in Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 187–189). Kloppenborg uses the felicitous term "radical wisdom" to describe them (p. 189; cf. Hans-D. Betz, "The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount [Matt. 5:3–12]," *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], pp. 117–136, who calls them "anti-wisdom").

⁶⁴ The exception is Thom 39:1–2/Q 11:52, where the Pharisees are criticized. But this does not characterize the tradition as a whole. In this sense it is very much unlike Jeremiah.

⁶⁵ Gerd Theissen, "Wanderradikalismus: Literatursoziologische Aspekte der Oberlieferung von Worten Jesu im Urchristentum," *ZTK* 70 (1973): 255–256; also *idem*, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 15; Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 72–74, 84–87.

⁶⁶ Cf. Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 338–344.

⁶⁷ So Beardslee, "Wisdom Tradition," 231–232.

made the decision to remain rooted in their historical reality and engage their culture directly, even though what they had to say about that culture turned out to be quite unconventional by wisdom standards.⁶⁸ Rather than undergird the cultural systems that define human existence, this “wisdom” served to undermine culture. This was countercultural wisdom.

To define the tradition only negatively in this way leaves something to be desired. It tells us what the common tradition is against, but not what it is for; it tells us what it seeks to deconstruct, but not what it would erect in its place. But such a definition is in a sense true to the common tradition itself. Its proclivities are far more deconstructive than constructive. Yet something positive may be drawn even from this characterization: it tells us by whom and for whom this tradition was cultivated. The question, What next?—that is, the question of what shall replace the culture that is so critically undermined by the early Jesus movement—is a question that would arise only from those who were somewhat invested in the status quo. For such persons the demise of the status quo would present a crisis: How shall I survive? ... How shall I exist? ... What will my future be? But there are others in an agrarian culture, such as that from which this tradition originally emerged, for whom this would not be true. These are the persons whom Gerhard Lenski calls the “expendable class”—the beggars, the criminals, the itinerant and chronically underemployed.⁶⁹ For these “expendables,” who had no stake whatsoever in culture, in the future, or in the empire, and for whom survival already stood in question—for these persons it would have been enough to deconstruct the status quo and sweep it away.⁷⁰ It would matter little what shape this new empire of God would take—just so long as it belonged to the beggars (Thomas 54 // Q 6:20b), and no one asked them to wait for it (Thomas 113 // Q 17:2–21). Countercultural wisdom is wisdom pursued in the interest of the culturally marginalized.

⁶⁸ This hypothesis is built upon that of Beardslee (see “Wisdom Tradition” and “Uses of the Proverb”). The point is also stressed by Norman Perrin (*Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976], pp. 48–54) and especially John D. Crossan in his distinction between the conventional “proverbial” saying and the more radical, “dis-ordering” aphorism (*In Fragments*, 3–36).

⁶⁹ Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966), pp. 281–282. We might also include here Lenski’s “unclean and degraded classes”—prostitutes, tax collectors, etc.—familiar figures from the Synoptic tradition. Crossan suggests the appropriateness of Lenski’s categories (*Historical Jesus*, 43–46, esp. 273).

⁷⁰ Cf. Theissen’s similar suggestion in “Wanderradikalismus,” 252; also *Sociology*, 15–16.

FROM THE COMMON TRADITION TO Q AND THOMAS

Having described the foundational tradition out of which the Q and Thomas trajectories emerged, it is now possible to look at how the history of this tradition is played out as it reaches the literary phase of its two trajectories, Q and Thomas. In the case of Q one may observe this process over a relatively extended period by noting how materials from the common tradition are incorporated into the two distinct phases of Q's history, Q¹ and Q². In the case of Thomas the possibilities are more limited since knowledge of the history of this document has not progressed beyond a monolithic conception of its composition, even though its form suggests an aggregative compositional history even more complicated than that of Q. Here a few general remarks must suffice.

Q¹: Training the Tradition

A majority of the sayings common to Q and Thomas were taken up into Q in its first redaction.⁷¹ The continuity between oral and written tradition here is considerable. For example, in Q¹ the tradition has been arranged into a series of wisdom speeches. But one may suppose that the sages of earliest Christianity were constantly doing this *ad hoc* long before the writing of a particular set of speeches, as they sparred with, debated, and cajoled anyone who would care to join in on the streets and in the marketplaces of the ancient world. Nevertheless, the fact that the tradition has now been written down has implications. First, writing implies something about the social makeup of the group: someone in the group can now write. No longer is the community made up entirely of the socially marginalized. Literacy itself implies social standing and—presumably—social investment. These early Christians have made allies. Second, writing things down changes the nature of the tradition itself. In distinction from the fleeting, temporary character of the spoken word, the written word has a permanent, fixed form. It is subject to analysis, comparison, and manipulation—it can be applied consistently toward a particular end. Its very existence can become a “statement” around which thoughts and actions can be organized.⁷² The ramifications of these

⁷¹ This comprises most of the sayings listed in category (1) in the inventory of Q-Thomas parallels above.

⁷² This seems to me to be one of the implications of Goody's observations about the nature of writing as over against spoken communication (*Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 37). Writing, that is, fixing a text in some permanent form, writes Goody, “encouraged, at the very

changes may be seen in the way Q¹ makes use of the common tradition in three of its speeches: the Q Sermon (Q 6:20–49), the discourse commonly titled “On Cares” (Q 12:22–32), and the Mission Discourse (Q 10:1–12).

Several sayings from the common tradition have been taken up into the Q¹ Sermon (Kloppenborg’s “Inaugural Sermon” [Q 6:20–49]): Thomas 54 // Q 6:20b; Thom 69:2 // Q 6:21b; Thomas 68 // Q 6:22; Thomas 95 // Q 6:30; Thomas 34 // Q 6:39; Thomas 26 // Q 6:41–42; Thomas 45 // Q 6:43–45. The first three of these are beatitudes; they have been incorporated into the beatitude collection that begins the Q Sermon (Q 6:20–23). There is nothing here to distinguish them over against their significance as free sayings in the common tradition until v. 23, where Q attaches to the fourth beatitude (Thomas 68 // Q 6:22) the admonition: “Rejoice ... for your reward is great in heaven.” This changes things. A thought is given over to the future: a reward lies ahead. No longer simply a reflection on the existence of culturally marginalized persons, these sayings now express an ethic, a program, whose following merits a reward. Reflection on marginal living has become a radical ethic of the reign of God.⁷³ The saying in Thomas 95 // Q 6:30 is the closest thing to an admonition in the common tradition; it is used as such in the Q Sermon. With the remaining Q-Thomas sayings in the sermon, however, there is a considerable transformation to be observed. All three are at base simple wisdom sayings. Yet in Q they have been cast together with several other sayings (Q 6:39–45) as a kind of paraenetic supplement to the instruction in the main body of the sermon (Q 6:20–38). Rather than offering general insight into the nature of human existence, each now addresses itself to the one who hears/reads this instruction: listen and learn lest you be as the blind who would attempt to lead in ignorance (Thomas 34 // Q 6:39), lest you stumble around with a log in your eye trying to remove specks from another’s (Thomas 34 // Q 6:39; Thomas 26 // Q 6:41–42), lest you be found bearing bad fruit (Thomas 45 // Q 6:43–45).⁷⁴ No longer simple proverbs, these sayings have become the sanction for the radical ethic outlined in the sermon. A similar transformation can be

same time, criticism and commentary on the one hand and the orthodoxy of the book on the other.” I would add that it can encourage both the orthodox *character* of the book and the orthodox *status* of the book. Once something has been written down it can become a reference point around which organization can take place.

⁷³ So Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 189. Kloppenborg prefers the term “radical discipleship.”

⁷⁴ Kloppenborg (*Formation of Q*, 184–185) compares it to the paraenesis in Rom 14:2–23 and Jas 4:11–12.

seen in the Q¹ speech commonly titled “On Cares” (Q 12:22–32). There are antecedents for this well-crafted discourse in the common tradition, but they are limited to an admonition not to worry about what clothing to wear (Thomas 36 [Coptic] // Q 12:22), or perhaps a Cynic-like general affirmation of nature’s providential care (Thom 36:1–2 [Gk.] // Q 12:22, 27, 29).⁷⁵ As such the saying(s) provide sage advice to those struggling on the margins of social acceptability. In Q¹, however, the tone has shifted slightly; the addition of v. 31 makes all the difference. Here is a program: “Instead, seek his reign and these things will be added to you.” The Q author does not entertain a kind of naive trust in the providential goodness of the universe, but rather a program: seeking the reign of God. It is through “seeking the reign” of God that care is provided.⁷⁶

Finally, we might look at how Q¹ makes use of the common tradition in composing its version of the Mission Discourse (Q 10:1–12).⁷⁷ There are two identifiable sayings from the common tradition in this speech: Thomas 73 // Q 10:2 and Thom 14:4 // Q 10:8–9. The first of these is most instructive. In Thomas the saying stands alone, without any context to suggest its appropriateness to mission activity. Its frame of reference is broader: it has meaning to anyone fighting an uphill battle and in need of more help. Its appeal to anyone thinking and living counter-culturally is readily explicable. In the case of Q on the other hand, its use is somewhat awkward. It is placed on the lips of Jesus ostensibly in an address to missionaries being sent out to visit various cities and towns. In such a context, how is one to understand

⁷⁵ The tradition history here is complex and not fully understood. Thomas 36 exists in two versions, a shorter version (Coptic) and a longer version (Greek), which incorporates more of the material found in the Q version of the tradition (longer still than both Thomas versions). Under the theory that traditions expand over time, the Coptic version would be the oldest, followed by that of Greek Thomas and finally the Q version. But traditions do not always expand, and the propensity of oral tradition to preserve a tradition in multifarious forms is well known. Furthermore, the fact that two different Thomas manuscripts of relatively late date preserve the tradition differently shows that the oral tradition continued to affect the shaping of the tradition long after it was written down for the first time. Under such circumstances it may be impossible to determine which version stands closest to the “original.”

⁷⁶ So Hans D. Betz, “Cosmogony and Ethics in the Sermon on the Mount,” in *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, 89–123, esp. 118.

⁷⁷ It is possible that Q did not compose this discourse from scratch, but used a tradition it holds in common with Mark 6:8–13. However, the fact that only in Q 10:2–12 do we find parallels to the Thomas material suggests that at any rate, basic to Q’s work was the incorporation of materials from the common oral tradition into this complex. Thus, Q¹’s Mission Discourse provides an opportunity to examine how Q combines free sayings with a traditional complex.

its final clause? ("Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.") As addressed to the laborers it makes little sense. One is left to agree with Mack's observation that although in the fictive pretext of the Q discourse this saying is addressed to those being sent out, in reality the Q author has in mind to address through this saying those who are to do the sending.⁷⁸ It has been employed to undergird a program of mission activity.

The other saying from the common tradition taken up by Q in this discourse has been similarly used. Thom 14:2 is sage advice for beggars: "And if you go into any land and walk about in the countryside and they take you in, eat what they set before you and care for the sick among them." Apart from its Q context the saying simply presumes an itinerant context in which begging is cast in the form of an exchange: food for care.⁷⁹ Q's use of the saying is more complex. Set now among a series of instructions for assessing the receptivity of households and towns (Q 10:5–11), it becomes part of the program of spreading the reign of God. The effect of this new context may be seen in the saying itself through the addition of the words, "And say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (10:9b). The entire Mission Discourse is an etiology for the organizational aspect of the program: even as travelers are commissioned, communities are asked to supply both more recruits for the task and support for those already engaged.⁸⁰

In all three of these cases, the largely critical and dismantling agenda of the common tradition has been trained in the service of a program: the reign of God. To be sure, this program retains much of the countercultural impetus of the common tradition. The difference is that in Q¹ there are indications that considerable reflection has been given to the future, to establishing something. When one considers the shifting sociology of the group suggested first and foremost simply by the writing down of the tradition, the new developments become explicable. What was once the creation of a socially and culturally marginalized group has become meaningful to persons from a somewhat higher niche in society, persons whose cultural position has afforded them the rare possession of writing.⁸¹ It is no longer enough

⁷⁸ See Burton Mack, "The Kingdom That Didn't Come," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers*, ed. D.J. Lull, SBLSP 27 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), p. 623.

⁷⁹ Cf. Theissen's suggestion that the early Jesus movement engaged in "begging of a higher order" ("Wanderradikalismus," 260; *Sociology*, 14).

⁸⁰ So Mack, "The Kingdom That Didn't Come," 623.

⁸¹ Writing alone would indicate the presence of such persons in the group in antiquity writing was the possession of a small elite (see n. 33, above). *Why* such persons would be attracted to the Jesus movement is another question. Theissen points to a number of

to deconstruct the status quo. Some thought must now be given to training the tradition in the direction of a program, through which a new future is to be secured.

Q²: Transcendentalizing the Tradition

When one turns to the texts assigned by Kloppenborg to Q's second edition (Q²), two theological developments stand out. The first is that for the first time the language peculiar to the speculative side of Jewish wisdom literature is introduced (Q 7:35; 10:21–22; 11:31–32; and 11:49–51).⁸² The second is the introduction of a number of passages whose general theme is judgment, whether this be in the form of a call to prepare for its imminent arrival (Q 3:7–9, 16–17; 12:39–40, 42–46, 49, 51–59), a description of its actual unfolding (Q 17:23, 24, 26–30, 34–35, 37), or criticism of those against whom it is ultimately aimed (Q 7:31–35; 11:29–32, 39–52).⁸³ The two developments are related.

Both of these developments, in contrast to the basically optimistic and confident strains of proverbial wisdom, reflect a profound sense of disappointment. Both traditions are used in Q² to sound a warning against those who have neglected to heed the Q group's preaching.⁸⁴ Both traditions are used to give expression to its despair at not having made more of an impression on its audience. On the nature of speculative wisdom, Beardslee writes:

factors—political, economic, and ecological—that might have threatened a broad segment of first-century Palestinian society (not just the poorest of the poor) with social up-rootedness and downward mobility. See esp. his “Wir Haben Alles Verlassen’ (Mc. X,28): Nachfolge und soziale Entwurzelung in der jüdisch-palästinischen Gesellschaft des 1. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.,” *NovT* 19 (1977): 161–196; also *Sociology*, 39–46. More recently William Arnal has focused this general picture more closely on village scribes, whose social status in first century imperial Galilee would have been threatened by the changing socio-political situation under the empire (see his *Jesus and the Village Scribes* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001]).

⁸² See the primary discussion by Dieter Lührmann (*Redaktion*, 97–100). All of these passages belong to Q². Note, however, that two seem to relate to wisdom tradition in a positive way (7:35 and 11:49), but the third seems very negative toward the sages (10:21), and a fourth seems to suggest that the teaching of the Jesus movement has now surpassed that of the sages (11:31). The implication is that while the Jesus movement on some level embraced wisdom tradition, it probably finds itself in competition with other Jewish groups that likewise have laid claim to its legitimate interpretation.

⁸³ For discussion see esp. Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 102–166; also Lührmann, *Redaktion*, *passim*.

⁸⁴ On this relationship between apocalyptic and speculative wisdom in Q see Lührmann, *Redaktion*, 99–100.

In this line of development, the despair of finding God's righteousness in the world, instead of leading back to the Law as a concrete revelation, stimulates a reaching beyond the world to a transcendent Wisdom not manifested in this world. This development leads to a reversal of the meaning of Wisdom. Instead of something to be identified through a sound understanding of the world, Wisdom becomes something unavailable to men, not existent in the world. It has come to men by some special knowledge.⁸⁵

The despair of which Beardslee speaks is, of course, also at the root of the apocalypticist's strains of judgment spoken against "this generation." No longer confident of a reign' of God to be realized in the present world of human endeavor, the apocalyptic redactor of Q² turns to the transcendent realm of the future, in which God's intervention sets things aright. The program so industriously pursued in the rhetoric of Q¹ is now given a contingent status as the Q community regroups and rethinks its agenda in the light of what must have been at best a lukewarm response to its preaching. Concerning this moment in the life of the Q community, Mack observes: "A program thought to be constructive was experienced as ineffective. In response to those whose rejection hindered the progress of the program, the mode of 'instruction' switched to the mode of defense, reproach, and threat of judgment."⁸⁶

In this effort of regrouping and reinterpretation, the Q redactor goes once again to draw from the well of tradition, appropriating and transforming sayings from the common tradition in the service of this new apocalyptic paradigm. A number of instructive examples suggest themselves. For example, in Q 19:26 an originally free-standing saying about the rich getting richer while the poor grow poorer (cf. Thom 41:1-2) is given a more positive interpretation and attached to Q's parable of the talents, here read as an allegory for the coming judgment. In Q 11:39-41 an originally free-standing saying critical of popular piety is incorporated into a long polemical speech against the Pharisees (Q 11:14-26, 29-32, 33-36, 39-52). This critical attitude toward the Pharisees is not original to Q; at least one saying from the common tradition bears this mark early on. It too is incorporated into this Q speech (Q 11:52 // Thom 39:1-2). Four sayings from the common tradition are taken up into the Q speech calling for preparation before the coming judgment (Q 12:39-40, 42-46, 49, 51-53, [54-56], 57-59). In their Q contexts they all seem vaguely

⁸⁵ Beardslee, "Wisdom Tradition," 233 (also his n. 10).

⁸⁶ Mack, "Kingdom That Didn't Come," 619. Mack here follows especially Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 102-170 (esp. 167-168), 324-325.

appropriate, yet when seen as independent sayings they do not necessarily connote that which is imposed upon them in Q. For example, Q 12:39 // Thomas 103 is an exhortation to watchfulness, but not necessarily a warning that apocalyptic judgment is near. Likewise, Q 12:56 // Thomas 91 speaks of recognizing the significance of the events in which this group is involved, but there is no indication here that the sage regards the moment as an apocalyptic one. Further, Q 12:49 // Thomas 10 has a more ominous tone, as does Q 12:51–53 // Thom 16:1–4, but it is Q that provides the apocalyptic framework in which these polemical sayings take on a more apocalyptic flavor.⁸⁷

In Q² the sayings tradition takes a transcendental turn. The early tradition of countercultural wisdom, whose proverbial and aphoristic character suggests a hermeneutic grounded in the world of human experience, has been overlaid with traditions of a more speculative nature. Wisdom theology provides one of the new paradigms from which Q² draws. The other is provided by apocalypticism. It is into the latter that Q² is able to incorporate sayings from the common tradition, for there already one could find material of a polemical nature to augment—perhaps even suggest—the new theological strategy of divine judgment.

THOMAS: PERSONALIZING THE TRADITION

The Gospel of Thomas is different from Q. To be sure, both are sayings collections, but in contrast to Q, with its elaborate speeches designed to weave its sayings into a rhetorically effective presentation, Thomas presents its sayings in a very simple serial format. It is much more like a list than the literary work that is Q. As such, functionally it lies much closer to the oral context of its genesis than does Q.⁸⁸ It still relies upon the skill of the sage to choose sayings wisely from its repertoire and combine them to form a persuasive argument. Thus, most of the sayings from the common tradition taken up by Thomas have not been given a specifically “Thomean” interpretation;⁸⁹ it is the task of the sage schooled in the Thomas tradition to “discover” this (Thomas 1).

⁸⁷ For a non-apocalyptic reading of this saying see Stephen J. Patterson, “Fire and Dissension: *Ipsissima Vox Jesu* in Q 12:49, 51–53?” *Forum* 5 (1989): 135.

⁸⁸ For lists as a primary form of writing see Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 74–111.

⁸⁹ These sayings are listed under groups (1), (2), and (3) in the inventory of Q-Thomas parallels above.

Still, by fixing words in a permanent visual field, writing invites comparison, reflection, and ultimately manipulation of the word.⁹⁰ We must assume that many of Thomas's sayings have been recast in forms congenial to the collector's own interpretation of the tradition. However, there are only a handful of sayings from the common tradition in which something of this process may be observed with any degree of control. These are sayings that have been drawn into and recast in the service of the esoteric theology peculiar to Thomas, but which survive in Q in a more original form. That Q indeed preserves a more original version in each case is confirmed by a second version of the saying in Thomas that reads roughly the same as that found in Q. This confirms that Thomas also knew these sayings originally in more or less their Q form. The sayings are: Thomas 2 and 92⁹¹ // Q 11:9–10; Thomas 3⁹² // Luke 17:20–21; Thom 5:2⁹³ // Q 12:2; Thom 69:1⁹⁴ // Q 6:22–23; and Thomas 101⁹⁵ // Q 14:26–27. They are instructive for clarifying Thomas's own handling of the common tradition.

In Thom 6:3 and Q 12:2 there is a saying from the tradition common to these two texts. A third witness in Mark 4:22 (par Luke 8:17) attests to its wide currency within the early Jesus movement. Its Q version reads:

Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

It is a flexible saying. It can be used as a caution against indiscreet talk (as in Q), or as an admonition to speak up so that the truth will out (as in Matthew's rendering of Q or Mark's use of the saying), or as a warning against private behavior one would not want exposed to divine scrutiny (as in Thom 6:3). In all instances it speaks of the inevitability of public disclosure. In Thomas 5, however, it finds another use:

'Jesus said, "Come to know what is before your eyes and what is hidden from you will become clear to you,² for there is nothing hidden that will not become manifest."⁹⁶

⁹⁰ So Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 37; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 103–105.

⁹¹ Cf. the more original form of the saying in Thom 94.

⁹² Cf. the more original form of the saying in Thom 113.

⁹³ Cf. the more original form of the saying in Thom 6:3.

⁹⁴ Cf. the more original form of the saying in Thom 68:1–2.

⁹⁵ Cf. the more original form of the saying in Thom 55.

⁹⁶ Cited according to the Coptic version. The version of the saying in POxy 654 contains what is probably a secondary expansion: "nor buried that will not be raised" (so H.W. Attridge, "Appendix: The Greek Fragments," in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 Together with XII, 2 Brit.*

The saying is presented in truncated form so that its focus is tightly fixed on “revelation.” More important, however, is the first part of the saying, to which our aphorism has been appended as interpretation. Of particular importance is the inclusion of three second-person, singular, male pronouns: *your* eyes (lit., “face”) (πεκχο); from *you* (εροκ); to *you* (νακ). The saying cannot now refer to the inevitability of *public* disclosure. It has become a promise to an individual, a promise that understanding will come. The disclosure of which the aphorism now speaks is not public, but *private*.

The invitation to discovery is found also in the saying from the common tradition attested in Q 11:9–10 and, at its simplest, in Thom 94:

¹Jesus [said]: “The one who seeks will find.

²To [the one who knocks], it will be opened.”

Its theme, the admonition to seek instruction, derives from the wisdom tradition.⁹⁷ Its place in the common tradition is therefore clearly explicable. However, in addition to Thomas 94, Thomas presents the saying in two other versions. The first is Thom 92:

¹Jesus said, “Seek and you will find. ²But the things you asked me about in past times, and what I did not tell you then, now I am willing to tell them, but you do not seek them.”

Nothing is said here of the object of seeking, or the results of finding. The admonition to seek instruction is used simply to introduce the saying’s more central focus: the one whose role it is to reveal wisdom, Jesus. In Thomas the quest for wisdom is not to be carried out in the world. Wisdom is inaccessible, hidden, not self-evident. It must be revealed, and the request for revelation must be timely.

A third version, Thom 2, of the saying in Thomas reads as follows:

¹Jesus said, “Let him who seeks seek until he finds, ²and when he finds, he will be disturbed, ³and when he is disturbed, he will marvel, ⁴and he will rule over the universe.”⁹⁸

Lib. Or. 4926 [1], and *P. Om* 1. 654. 655; Vol. 1: *Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes*, ed. Bentley Layton, NHS 20 [Leiden: Brill, 1989] 101).

⁹⁷ Cf. Prov 8:17; Sir 6:27; Wis 6:12.

⁹⁸ The POxy 654 version is slightly different. It omits any reference to the “All” and adds the sentence: “And [once one has ruled], one will [attain rest].”

One is struck by how obscure the saying appears. It speaks of the object of revelation, but only obliquely. Its language is not that of wisdom; it is esoteric language, coded for an audience who understands it. What is it that one discovers? Why does it disturb? What is its power? We do not know. The esotericism of the saying is impenetrable; its secrets are not for the outsider to know. Elsewhere (Thomas 77) Thomas equates Jesus with “the universe,” but in the next breath clarifies: “From [Jesus] did the universe come forth.” The deeper we dig, the more mystifying the tradition becomes.

The object of knowing is clearer in Thomas 3. This saying is based loosely upon the saying from the common tradition attested in Thomas 113 and Q 17:20–21. The earlier version speaks of the presence of the kingdom in a way that is quite at home in the earliest stratum of countercultural wisdom discussed above. Its Thomas version reads:

¹His disciples said to him, “The kingdom—when will it come?” ²(Jesus said,) “It will not come by watching for it. ³They will not say, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ ⁴Rather, the kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth and people do not see it.”

The kingdom exists as potential, realizable whenever people chose to “see it.” But Thomas 3 speaks differently of the kingdom:

¹Jesus said, “If those who lead you say to you, ‘Behold, the Kingdom is in the sky, the birds of the sky will precede you.’ ²If they say to you, ‘It is in the sea,’ then the fish will precede you. ³Rather, the Kingdom is inside you and outside you. ⁴When you come to know yourselves you will be known and you will realize that you are sons of the Living Father. ⁵But if it happens that you never come to know yourselves, then you exist in poverty, and you are the poverty.”

Whether this is in fact a version of the earlier saying or just a free composition based upon it is not of significance.⁹⁹ What is important is that here the kingdom is no longer something to be discovered “spread out upon the earth.” It is “inside” you as well as “outside” you. The transition from v. 3 to v. 4 is awkward and vague; however, it is apparent that the author wishes to identify the kingdom’s disclosure somehow with self-disclosure and self-understanding. The content of this disclosure is one’s true identity as a child “of the Living Father.”

⁹⁹ The first part of the saying is a freehand burlesque of the popular Jewish motif of seeking after wisdom in the furthest reaches of the universe, taking Job 28:12–15 and Bar 3:29–4:1 as its point of departure (so T.F. Glasson, “The Gospel of Thomas 3, and Deuteronomy xxx, 11–14,” *ExpTim* 78 [1976–1977]: 151–152; also Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 41–46).

This brings us close to the heart of the matter for Thomas. Now it is clear that we are not dealing with the wisdom tradition in a form similar to that attested in the tradition common to Q and Thomas, or even in the first redaction of Q. For Thomas the great truths about human existence are not to be discovered in the deconstruction of oppressive cultural systems, or in the pursuit of a culturally radical program (kingdom), but in awakening to words of revelation spoken by a redeemer who has come from God (Thomas 28; 38). Truth comes through private disclosure (Thomas 23; 62; 83–84; 108). It has to do with recognizing one's alien status in the world (Thomas 56; 80; 110) and recognizing the one whose words are 'revelation and life' (Thomas 1; 13; 15; 43; 52:2; 59; 61:3; 77; 91; 111). The kingdom is no longer an earthly reality, even in potential terms, but a transcendent realm to which identity as its children constitutes entitlement. A brief catechism stands at the heart of the Thomas collection (Thomas 49–50):

49 'Jesus said, "Blessed are the solitary, the chosen ones, for you will find the Kingdom. ²For you come from it and you will return to it."

50 'Jesus said, "If they say to you, 'Where do you come from?' say to them, 'We have come from the light, the place where the light came into being by itself, established itself, and appeared in their image.' ²If they say to you, 'Is it you?' say 'We are his children, the elect of the living Father.' ³If they ask you, 'What is the sign of your Father within you?' say, 'It is movement and rest.'"

How shall we identify this way of thinking in antiquity? I was once of the view that one could rightly label Thomas as "Gnostic," especially on the strength of these two sayings, even though Thomas does not share many elements commonly seen to be critical to Gnosticism, such as the notion of an evil demiurge who creates the world as an act of rebellion against the one true God, and other Gnostic *theologoumena*.¹⁰⁰ But since the original publication of this essay I have come to see this as mistaken. Without these distinctive features of Gnosticism, most of the speculative or philosophical theology one encounters in the Gospel of Thomas is more or less characteristic of the Middle Platonism flourishing in this period. The idea of complex anthropology consisting of body, soul, and spirit (Thomas 112, 87, and 29), the rejection of the world as deficient and unworthy of the enlightened person (Thomas 111), the quest to know oneself and thereby become

¹⁰⁰ Davies is particularly critical in this regard and argued instead that Thomas was an example of speculative Jewish Wisdom theology akin to that found in the works of Philo (*The Gospel of Thomas*, 18–61).

enlightened (Thomas 3), and the idea expressed here, of the soul's final journey home are all at home in Middle Platonism. In the Thomas trajectory the traditions of this tradition seem to have embraced a rudimentary form of Middle Platonism and began to read the Jesus tradition through this lens.

In both Q and Thomas, then, one can see the Jesus movement coming to grips with its problematic relationship with the world, a relationship that must have characterized the Jesus movement from the very beginning, when the world and its powers put to death its teacher and founder. Q expressed its enmity with the world by embracing Jewish apocalyptic, with its criticism of this evil generation and the hope for a coming day of judgment. Thomas Christianity took a different turn, finding in Platonism a higher claim and personal status that served, among other things, to relativize the world and reaffirm the truth claims of the Jesus movement in the face of opposition. It shares this with Johannine Christianity and perhaps also those early opponents of Paul who laid claim to a higher wisdom revealed only to the spiritual elite (1 Corinthians 1–4).

CONCLUSIONS

At the base of the early Christian sayings tradition represented by Q and Thomas there lays a body of sayings (parables, proverbs, aphorisms, community rules, etc.). Among these sayings a predominance of wisdom forms suggests a hermeneutic consonant with wisdom tradition: they are about insight into human existence and what it means to live life faithfully toward God. The tradition is grounded in a quest for answers to the very real dilemmas of historical existence. Their insights, however, are quite radical and culturally critical. They are given to speaking of a reign of God, in which their cultural critique is most direct, as they layout in parable and aphorism an alternative to common ways of ordering human existence. At first their critique is more negative than positive, without a clear program (the common tradition). With Q¹, however, a more positive program comes into view, as its now anonymous author, in composing a series of sapiential speeches, can be seen to layout the radical ethic more clearly. In Q² the social radicalism that characterized the earlier sayings tradition is still intact; however, any hope for actualizing any of the movement's program, given the present state of affairs in the world, has evaporated. The redactor has turned to two other theological paradigms to give expression to this disappointment about the past and pessimism about the future: speculative wisdom and the closely related tradition of apocalypticism. On the Thomas side of the tradition our

redaction-critical work has not progressed to the point of making us privy to any distinct phases in the history of this trajectory. However, when it is picked up in the latter part of the first century in the form of the Gospel of Thomas, it is clear that something not unlike what happened in the Q trajectory has happened here as well. Any of wisdom's optimism about finding meaning in the world of human existence has given way to a hope only for personal salvation. Refracted now through the prism of Platonism the reign of God has become a transcendent realm to which faithful, discerning souls will someday pass, leaving the world behind.

Wisdom is about the quest for insight into the nature of the world and human existence in it. If one experiences the world as a benevolent place, or if one at least sees this possibility, wisdom can be a theological exercise in optimism and confidence. But what if one's experience indicates that the best one can say about the world is that it is dead, illusory, or even evil? Then there are other traditions close at hand that can be drawn upon to give this experience its own proper expression. When early Christians experienced the world in this way they turned to apocalypticism and rudimentary Platonism. Q embraced Jewish apocalyptic; Thomas embraced the revived teachings of Plato, and so the tradition bifurcated into two trajectories, each traveling its own path from a common starting point: the sayings of Jesus.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ASCETICISM IN THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS AND Q: THE PECULIAR PRACTICE OF THE EARLY JESUS TRADITION¹

INTRODUCTION

Was Jesus an ascetic? What shall we make of someone who leaves house and home to pursue the life of a mendicant holy man, eschewing family, village, economic stability, and religious acceptance? Whatever one might call this socially radical life, it has not normally been seen as ascetical. Part of this has to do with our ideas about the historical Jesus; more than that, however, it has to do with our ideas about asceticism. We tend think of ascetics as strange—strange in a disturbed sort of way. Many would like to think of Jesus as unusual, but not strange and certainly not disturbed. He is our Savior, after all. And whatever we might think of him, it would be nice to know at least that we could get along easily with our Savior. It is hard to imagine an intimate walk in the garden with Simon Stylites. These are, of course, common stereotypes with which one must contend in any attempt to bring fresh insights about asceticism to bear upon New Testament texts. In what follows, I intend to look at the figure of Jesus and the early Jesus tradition, as represented especially by the sayings tradition shared by Q and the Gospel of Thomas, to see whether *askesis* proves to be a helpful category wherewith to understand the practice of earliest Christianity. I will argue that indeed it does, but only when one moves beyond the stereotypes to consider what asceticism really represented in the ancient world. Drawing on a number of recent theoretical discussions of the phenomenon,² I will suggest that asceticism is an appropriate framework for understanding what the early Jesus movement was all about.

¹ Originally this essay appeared as “*Askesis* and the Early Jesus Tradition,” in *Asceticism and the New Testament*, ed. L. Vaage and V. Wimbush (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 49–69.

² I refer especially to the studies collected in *Asceticism*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Q, THOMAS, AND THE SOCIAL
RADICALISM OF THE EARLY JESUS MOVEMENT

Let us begin with the tradition among Jesus' early followers of cultivating and collecting sayings attributed to him. We know of two documents from the first century CE that represent the fruits of that labor, one lost but recoverable through careful research, the other lost but rediscovered by chance in 1945. The first, of course, is Q. Many scholars date Q in the 50s or 60s of the first century CE on the grounds that it betrays no knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem, a fact that is so prominent in later texts like Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Many also follow the hypothesis of John S. Kloppenborg that Q passed through two major compositional phases: an early phase consisting of several sapiential speeches (Q¹) and a later phase in which severe words of judgment against "this generation" were added (Q²).³ In any event, Q is perhaps the earliest repository for material attributed to Jesus and cultivated by his initial followers.

The second "sayings-gospel" from this early period is the Gospel of Thomas, which cannot be dated with any certainty. However, the fact that the tradition it preserves is basically autonomous, that is, rooted in the oral traditions common to Q, Mark, and the later gospel writers and not literarily dependent on the canonical gospels means that the Gospel of Thomas, too, is a repository for material whose provenance is possibly very early.⁴ Moreover, since it is an autonomous tradition, the overlapping material between Q and Thomas stands to be very old—older than the first editions of Q or the Gospel of Thomas and potentially very revealing of the basic content and ethos of the early sayings tradition from which both the Q and Thomas trajectories originally emerged.

³ See John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). Kloppenborg also discusses a third phase, relatively late, of little significance for this discussion.

⁴ For the autonomy of the Thomas tradition, see Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Foundations and Facets (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1993), pp. 9–110. An earlier helpful study is that of John Sieber, *A Redactional Analysis of the Synoptic Gospels with regard to the Question of the Sources of the Gospel of Thomas*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Claremont, 1965 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1966). For a review of the scholarly discussion of this issue, see Patterson, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A *Forschungsbericht* and Critique," *Forum* 8 (1992): 45–97; more recently, Nicholas Perrin, "Recent Trends in *Gospel of Thomas* Research (1991–2006): Part I, The Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels," *CBR* 5.2 (2007): 183–206.

In an earlier essay, I assembled the material common to both Q and Thomas and examined it as a cross-sectional sampling of the earliest layer of the Jesus tradition.⁵ Since I will here rely on that earlier work, a brief summary of the results is in order.

Q, THOMAS, AND THE SOCIAL RADICALISM OF THE JESUS TRADITION

In the material shared by both Q and Thomas there is a preponderance of wisdom forms of the sort that Bultmann listed under the category "Logia (Jesus as the Teacher of Wisdom)." There are, for example, numerous maxims,⁶ some formulated on the basis of the natural world (Thom 5:2 and 6:5–6//Q 12:2; Thom 45:1//Q 6:44b); some formulated on the basis of human experience (Thom 4:2//Q 13:30; Thom 24//Q 11:34–36; Thom 33:2–3//Q 11:33; Thom 34//Q 6:39; Thom 35:1–2//Q 11:21–22; Thom 41:1–2//Q 19:26; Thom 45:2–3//Q 6:45; Thom 47:2//Q 16:13; Thom 86:1–2//Q 9:58); and others formulated as macarisms (Thom 54//Q 6:20b; Thom 58//Q 6:22; Thom 68:1–2//Q 6:22–23; Thom 69:2//Q 6:21a; Thom 103//Q 12:39⁷). There are also several hortatory formulations⁸ (Thom 14:4//Q 10:8–9; Thom 26:1–2//Q 6:41–42; Thom 36//Q 6:39; Thom 94//Q 11:9–10; Thom 95:1–2//Q 6:34–35a) and sapiential questions (Thom 89:1–2//Q 11:39–41).⁹ Finally, there are six parables (Thom 20//Q 13:18–19; Thom 63//Q 12:16–21; Thom 64//Q 14:15–24; Thom 76//Q 12:33–24; Thom 96//Q 13:20–21; Thom 107//Q 15:3–7).

This preponderance of wisdom materials suggests that those who cultivated this tradition had an interest in the questions posed by the ancient Near Eastern wisdom tradition.¹⁰ Theirs was a quest for insight into the

⁵ See Patterson, "Wisdom in Q and Thomas," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman (Louisville: Westminster/Knox, 1993), pp. 187–222 (= chapter 6 in the present volume).

⁶ Bultmann's term was *Grundsätze* (see Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 9. Aufl. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979], p. 77).

⁷ The Q-version is probably secondary here; it has been reformulated to prepare for the hortatory conclusion appended in Q 12:40.

⁸ Bultmann's term was *Mahnworte* (see Bultmann, *Geschichte*, 80).

⁹ Q's polemical formulation is probably secondary—so Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International/London: SCM, 1990), pp. 91–92. See also Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 149–150.

¹⁰ This was the basic insight of James M. Robinson in "LOGOI SOPHON: Zur Gattung der Spruchquelle," in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Erich Dinkler

nature of human existence, of humanity's proper stance within the world and the ultimate reality that underlies the world and everything in it. Theirs was a theological quest rooted in the world of human experience and reflection.

But if the form of this material suggests roots in the wisdom tradition of the ancient Near East, its content betrays a markedly different orientation from that which one usually finds in ancient wisdom. Wisdom in the ancient Near East was, for the most part, a school tradition carried on by scribes and scholars working under official sponsorship. As such, it tends to be rather conservative in its approach to the ultimate questions it raises. Its values are those of the status quo: moderation, order, hierarchy, wealth as a sign of diligence and reward, and so on. The ancient sages were not especially interested in rocking the boat or agitating for social reform.¹¹

In comparing the wisdom of Q with the broader tradition of ancient Near Eastern instruction, Kloppenborg has called attention to the fact that Q does not share the generally conservative orientation of ancient wisdom. Rather, "Q presents an ethic of radical discipleship which reverses many of the conventions which allow a society to operate, such as principles of retaliation, the orderly borrowing and lending of capital, appropriate treatment of the dead, responsible self-provision, self-defense and honor of parents."¹² What is true for Q is no less true for the early tradition shared by Q and Thomas. Here, too, family life is rejected (Thom 55 and 101:2–3//Q 14:26–27) or depicted as disintegrating (Thom 16:1–4//Q 12:51–53); poverty and begging are welcomed (Thom 54//Q 6:20b; Thom 69:2//Q 6:21a; Thom 36//Q 6:39; Thom 14:4//Q 10:8–9; Thom 95:1–2//Q 6:34–35a); homeless is legitimated (Thom 86:1–2//Q 9:58). In addition, certain cultural practices that form the social boundary between Jews and Gentiles here come under attack (Thom 89:1–2//Q 11:39–41; Thom 14:4//Q 10:8–9).¹³

(Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1964), pp. 77–96; revised ET: "LOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q," in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 71–113.

¹¹ See James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1981), p. 20.

¹² See Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 318.

¹³ This is implied especially by the last of these sayings. The issue of whether or not to eat what is offered would have arisen primarily as itinerants wandered among Gentiles (see S. Patterson, "Paul and the Jesus Tradition: It Is Time for Another Look," *HTR* 84 [1991]: 32–33) (= chapter 10 in the present volume).

These are not ordinary sages. Despite the presence of a number of sayings of a more conventional quality,¹⁴ they are here clearly not employed in the interest of preserving the status quo. At least two of these sayings indicate conflict (Thom 35:1–2//Q 11:21–22; Thom 103//Q 12:39). Criticism is in order (Thom 41:1–2//Q 19:16; Thom 39:1–2//Q 11:52; Thom 78:1–3//Q 7:24–26; Thom 91//Q 12:56). Trouble-making is threatened and imminent (Thom 4:2//19:26; Thom 10//Q 12:49; Thom 16:1–2//Q 12:51). Persecution is welcomed as a sign of faithfulness in the face of hostility from the outside world (Thom 68:1–2//Q 6:22–23).

GERD THEISSEN AND *WANDERRADIKALISMUS*

The preceding litany of socially radical attitudes and behavior will no doubt call to mind the work of Gerd Theissen, who, in a series of publications in the 1970s, offered a social-historical description of earliest Christianity under the general rubric of *Wanderradikalismus*.¹⁵ According to Theissen, at the center of the Jesus movement was a group of itinerant charismatic leaders, the likes of which we see in figures such as Peter, Stephen, Paul, Barnabas, and other less illustrious figures, such as Lucius from Cyrenaica or Agabus the prophet.¹⁶ The role of the wandering radical was not institutionally grounded, but based on a call to a life “over which he had no control.”¹⁷ It was a charismatic role. To accept this role meant a life of homelessness (Mark 1:16–20; 10:28–31; Matt. 8:20; 10:5–15, 23; 23:34; Acts 8:1),¹⁸ turning away from family (Mark 10:29–30; 1:20; 6:4; 3:32; Matt. 8:22; 19:10–11; 16:17; 10:24; Luke 14:26; 8:19–21; 11:27–28; 12:52–53),¹⁹ shunning wealth and possessions (Mark 10:17–22, 25; Matt. 6:19–21, 25–34; 10:10, 42; Luke 16:13, 19–31; 6:24; 10:1–12),²⁰

¹⁴ The following sayings are more conventional in character: Thomas 6:5–6//Q 12:2; Thomas 26:1–2//Q 6:41–42; Thomas 33:2//Q 11:33; Thomas 34//Q 6:39; Thomas 45:1–2//Q 6:44b–45; Thomas 47:2//Q 16:13; Thomas 94//Q 11:9–10; Thomas 24//Q 11:34–36; Thomas 35:1–2//Q 11:21–22; and Thomas 103//Q 12:39.

¹⁵ The most important of these studies were collected and published together in Gerd Theissen, *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, WUNT 19, 2. Aufl. (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983). Theissen published a simpler version of his theses as *Soziologie der Jesusbewegung* (München: Kaiser, 1977); ET: *The Sociology of Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

¹⁶ Theissen, *Sociology*, 9.

¹⁷ Theissen, *Sociology*, 8.

¹⁸ Theissen, *Sociology*, 10–11.

¹⁹ Theissen, *Sociology*, 11–12.

²⁰ Theissen, *Sociology*, 11–14.

and the rejection of any means of protection on the road (Matt. 5:39,41; 10:17–23).²¹ The picture Theissen offers is one of the itinerant preacher who wanders from place to place, offering preaching and healing in exchange for hospitality.

These wandering radicals did not carry out their mission alone. Theissen argues that they were supported by a network of communities to whom they could turn for support and hospitality. These persons he calls “local sympathizers.”²² One may see the imprint of these local sympathizers on the tradition in the form of a certain tension in the gospels between the material cited earlier that sanctions a wandering radical lifestyle and other material that seems rather to endorse a more settled and conventional existence. On the matter of the law, for example, Theissen observes:

Some communities wanted to see the law fulfilled down to the smallest detail (Matt. 5:17 ff.) instead of criticizing it (Matt. 5:21 ff.). They felt that scribes and Pharisees were legitimate authorities (Matt. 23:1 ff.) instead of morally corrupt groups over which one could only throw up one's hands in horror (Matt. 23:13 ff.). They recognized the temple and its priesthood through sacrifice (Matt. 5:23), paying the temple tax (Matt. 17:24 ff.) and accepting priestly declarations of wholeness (Mark 1:44), instead of rejecting its cultic practices (Mark 11:15 ff.). They accepted patterns of fasting practiced around them (Matt. 6:16 ff.) and had a positive attitude towards marriage and the family (Mark 10:2 ff.; 10:13 ff.).²³

There are similar tensions in the way in which authority is assigned in early Christian groups. For example, Matthew assigns all authority “to bind and to loose” to the early Christian community (Matt. 18:18), even while including a tradition that assigns authority to Peter (Matt. 16:19).²⁴ Or consider how community boundaries are policed. In Matt. 18:15–17 one learns of procedures for expelling persons from the community. But in the *Didache* (11:1) wandering prophets are exempted from any such provisions, for they are subject only to “the judgment of God.”²⁵ To account for these tensions, Theissen imagines the situation to have been as follows:

At first, wandering charismatics were the authorities in the local communities. In any case, local authorities were unnecessary in small communities. ‘Where two or three were gathered together in the name of Jesus (Matt. 18:20),

²¹ Theissen, *Sociology*, 14.

²² Theissen, *Sociology*, 17–23.

²³ Theissen, *Sociology*, 18–19.

²⁴ Theissen, *Sociology*, 20.

²⁵ Theissen, *Sociology*, 21.

a hierarchy was superfluous. Problems were resolved either by the community as a whole or by wandering charismatics who happened to arrive.... The less the structures of authority in local communities had come under the control of an institution, the greater was the longing for the great charismatic authorities. And conversely, the greater the claim of these charismatics to authority, the less interest there was in setting up competing authorities within the communities.²⁶

Yet, as such communities grew in size, becoming more complex and demanding more reliable and consistent forms of leadership, the older structure of authority gradually became obsolete. As Theissen points out, there inevitably arose the need to establish local authorities who quite naturally found themselves in competition with the wandering charismatics.²⁷

If Theissen's thesis is essentially right, we have a framework within which to understand the social radicalism of the early sayings tradition common to both Q and the Gospel of Thomas. These materials would come from that early period in which wandering radicals moved from community to community, cultivating a tradition of countercultural wisdom as a way of responding to their earlier experience of Jesus, who presumably was the originator of this tradition. Moreover, it would not be surprising to find in this early tradition a greater emphasis on the socially radical ethos of the itinerants than on the more conventional lifestyle of their supporters. The latter would have arisen later, as local communities began to form and to function between the occasional visits by the wandering charismatics. Indeed, I have attempted to demonstrate exactly this in a previous essay. There I argue that already in Q¹ one can begin tracking a shift from the itinerant social radicalism of the earliest tradition shared by both Q and the Gospel of Thomas to a perspective that is more centered on local, settled groups.²⁸

CRITICISM OF THEISSEN'S THESIS

In recent years Theissen's hypothesis has been subject to criticism from many different angles. Out of this critical discussion, two correctives in particular are pertinent to the present discussion and should be noted at this

²⁶ Theissen, *Sociology*, 19–20.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Patterson, "Wisdom in Q and Thomas," 208–212.

point.²⁹ The first is that of Burton Mack. Mack's concern is primarily with the idea that the early itinerants described by Theissen were engaged in a mission to spread a word of repentance to an intransigent world standing on the edge of apocalypse.³⁰ This view, attributed to many scholars (it is not clear that Theissen himself holds to it), is, according to Mack, faulty in two ways. First, it assumes that all of earliest Christianity was apocalyptically oriented. Such a view does not (could not yet) take into consideration John Kloppenborg's redactional layering of Q into an early, sapientially oriented collection of speeches and a later, apocalyptically oriented statement of judgment against "this generation." When Kloppenborg's work is considered, it becomes much less likely that the earliest phase of the Q group's activity was apocalyptically motivated. Second, Mack questions the sense of "mission" in the scenario of radical itinerancy, noting that some of the sayings Theissen uses to establish the itinerancy thesis in the first place are rather ambiguous and could be taken as addressing persons in settled communities rather than itinerants. Mack concludes, "Apparently radical itinerancy was not the only way, or not the way at all, in which the reign of God was talked about, practiced and announced by the tradents of Q."³¹

Part of this critique is, in my view, valid, and part of it is not. Mack is right to call attention to Kloppenborg's work on Q and to the general collapse of the apocalyptic hypothesis of Christian origins as necessary correctives to Theissen's view. This is confirmed all the more when we broaden our view beyond Q and take into account the early tradition common to both Q and Thomas, which is almost devoid of apocalyptic interest.³² Mack's related concern over the idea of an early Christian "mission" is also to be

²⁹ I leave aside criticism of those parts of Theissen's thesis having to do with later developments, which Theissen refers to as *Liebespatriarchalismus*. I also leave aside for now the broad critique by Richard A. Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Crossroads, 1989), pp. 13–64; see also *idem*, "Questions about Redactional Strata and Social Relations Reflected in Q," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. David J. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), pp. 186–203, especially regarding the lack of attention to political matters. These criticisms I find largely valid, but not relevant to the topic at hand. Those criticisms by Horsley having a direct bearing on the itinerancy thesis itself will be dealt with as they arise in the discussion that follows.

³⁰ Burton L. Mack, "The Kingdom That Didn't Come," in David J. Lull, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), pp. 620–621.

³¹ Mack, "The Kingdom That Didn't Come," 623.

³² Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 168–170; also *idem*, "Wisdom in Q and Thomas," esp. 208–220.

sustained, in the sense that when the urgency of apocalyptic catastrophe is removed from the picture, a mission to save the world from imminent doom is also removed. This is not to say, however, that what these early Christians were up to was entirely without purpose. How to name that purpose is the question—a question which deserves closer consideration.

Where Mack's critique of Theissen's thesis runs aground is in moving beyond these observations to call into question the notion that early Christians were engaged in radical itinerancy at all. His conclusion that itinerancy was "not the only way, or not the way at all" is tenuously worded, and rightly so. It is true that some of the Q texts Theissen uses to substantiate his thesis are ambiguous and applicable to any number of situations and not just radical itinerancy (wisdom tradition is by nature malleable and adaptable to various life circumstances). But Theissen does not focus his thesis particularly on texts from Q, but rather cuts a wide swath through early Christian tradition, drawing from a wide variety of texts to substantiate his thesis, including Mark, James, the *Didache*, the Pauline texts, and Acts.³³ In this way, Theissen provides a broader context within which to understand the Q texts, and thus to clarify or to specify their ambiguity. Herein lays the strength of Theissen's thesis. Critiques of it which focus too narrowly on Q fail to appreciate this. Mack's critique is typical in this respect. By focusing too narrowly on Q¹, Mack fails to provide a plausible early Christian context within which to understand the Q¹ material.

A second corrective to Theissen's thesis has been suggested by Kloppenborg.³⁴ Kloppenborg acknowledges that Theissen's basic scenario of

³³ Theissen overlooks the Gospel of Thomas, as does Mack, which only adds to the evidence for itinerant social radicalism. See Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 121–157. Recently, William Arnal ("The Rhetoric of Marginality: Apocalypticism, Gnosticism, and Sayings Gospels," *HTR* 88 [1995]: 480–482) has questioned my analysis, relying on the criticisms of Theissen offered by Mack, Kloppenborg, and Horsley to argue that Theissen's hypothesis may now be dismissed. But of these three, only Mack actually rejects the itinerancy thesis itself. Neither Horsley nor Kloppenborg rejects the idea that there were people in the early Jesus movement who were itinerant. The way in which Horsley and Kloppenborg understand the phenomenon is simply different from Theissen's (for Kloppenborg, see my note 34; for Horsley, see his "Redactional Strata and Social Relations," 198). And of these three, none considers the evidence from the Gospel of Thomas. Arnal's analysis is limited to Thomas 42 and 73, which he considers too ambiguous on their own to suggest itinerancy. But this leaves aside Thomas 14, which presumes itinerancy, and Thomas 86, which justifies it. There are also the sayings that imply leaving behind one's family (see esp. Thomas 55; also Thomas 101 and 99).

³⁴ Kloppenborg, "Literary Convention, Self-Evidence, and the Social History of the Q People," in *Semeia* 55: *Early Christianity, Q, and Jesus*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Leif E. Vaage (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), pp. 89–90.

wandering radicals moving among settled communities that supported them is essentially right, but argues that it needs certain qualification. First, lower Galilee was so densely populated in the first century CE that any program of itinerancy must be imagined as a series of short excursions, or quick moves from place to place, rather than as something approximating the long journeys of Paul. Second, in the Q texts dealing with itinerancy (especially Q 10:2–12), acceptance or rejection of the wandering radicals seems to depend as much on the village as on the individual household. This suggests that one might imagine a network of supportive villages rather than a network of supportive households. Third—and this is the most pertinent of Kloppenborg’s observations for the work at hand—Kloppenborg sees little evidence in Q 10:2–12 that the wandering radicals were expected to function as “leaders,” in those places they visited. Their position among those who might receive them, in fact, seems rather weak, and must be defended (Q 10:7). But if they were not the “leaders” of these communities, what, then, were they?

To summarize, recent criticism of Theissen’s thesis cannot really dispute the presence of material in the early sayings-tradition that indicates that some of the early followers of Jesus were engaged in a lifestyle we shall still call wandering radicalism.³⁵ Some of these persons did leave house and home, abandoning family and village ties to live as mendicants moving from place to place, offering care for the sick in exchange for food. Their critique of local culture included attacks on the family, as well as on conventional codes of work and economic life, religion, and politics. They were itinerant social radicals. However, two critical questions have been raised concerning how one ought to regard this itinerant social radicalism and those who pursued it in the name of Jesus. First, from Mack: If these wandering radicals did not see themselves as carrying out a mission per se, how shall we describe what they were doing? Second, from Kloppenborg: If the wandering radicals were not leaders in the early Jesus movement, what, then, was their function?

³⁵ Recently the basic view that the Q Christianity included itinerant radicals has been reaffirmed by Leif E. Vaage, *Galilean Upstarts: Jesus’ First Followers According to Q* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), esp. pp. 17–39.

RECENT THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS OF ASCETICISM

To answer these two questions, I want to turn first to some recent discussions of the phenomenon of asceticism. In short, my thesis is that if we look at how ascetics understand themselves and what it is they are doing, we might have a viable paradigm for understanding the itinerant radicalism of the early Jesus movement. What these wandering radicals were doing was not so much a “mission” as it was *askesis*. They were understood by their contemporaries to be not so much “leaders” as “performers” exemplifying through their activity a new understanding of human existence and of human life lived faithfully to God.

Ware: Ascetics Are Not Sick

To think of Jesus and his early followers as ascetics will not come easily to many moderns, whose perceptions of asceticism will likely include suspicions of fanaticism, extreme austerity, even social pathology.³⁶ The harsh rigor most people associate with asceticism does not fit well with the figure of Jesus, who, in contrast to the austere John, came “eating and drinking,” a reputed “drunkard and glutton” (Q 7:34). Of course, most Christians are not much predisposed to see Jesus as an overweight alcoholic, either. A moderate figure, one easily embraced by the moderate people we imagine ourselves to be, is probably the tacit assumption most people bring to the task of imagining Jesus. But Jesus and his early followers were not moderate people. They did embrace an unusual lifestyle that, in its own way, demanded a kind of mental and physical rigor that cannot be lost from sight if we are to appreciate what the early Jesus movement was about.

This does not mean, however, that we must think of the early Jesus movement as fanatical or pathological. Here our stereotypes of asceticism must give way to the ideas and attitudes ancient ascetics held about themselves. Common sense might tell us that those involved in *askesis* would not see their own activity as unduly extreme or pathological. Still, Kallistos Ware’s study, “The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?”, is a necessary reminder that the stereotypes we bring to this discussion may exercise a distorting effect.³⁷ Ware shows that the basic impulse behind ancient ascetic

³⁶ Wimbush and Valantasis, “Introduction,” in *idem*, *Asceticism*, xix–xxxiii.

³⁷ Kallistos Ware, “The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?” in Wimbush and Valantasis, *Asceticism*, 3–15.

practice was not negative but, by and large, positive. *Anachoresis*, or withdrawal from the world, was not usually carried out in a spirit of misanthropic pessimism, but out of a desire to help those who could not withdraw in the same way. With the words of St. Seraphim of Sarov, Ware summarizes: "Acquire the spirit of peace, and then thousands around you will be saved."³⁸ *Enkrateia*, or self-denial, Ware argues, was not motivated by a deep desire to do violence to the flesh or to be at war with the body—or so one may say, at least, of "natural asceticism." Drawing upon the definition of Dom Cuthbert Butler, Ware agrees that what distinguishes natural from unnatural asceticism is precisely one's attitude toward the body. Unnatural asceticism, which assaults the body with pain and privation, evinces an implicit rejection of creation. Natural asceticism, on the other hand, aims to reduce life to its simplest—plain clothing, basic shelter, moderate fasting, drinking only water, sexual abstinence—to reaffirm creation's basic goodness and adequacy. The point is not to destroy the body, but to free it from the passions and thereby to return it to health. "Natural asceticism," Ware argues, "is warfare not against the body, but for it."³⁹

This is the first point to be drawn from current ascetical theory: The basic impulse of asceticism is not negative but positive. It is motivated by a sense of constructive purpose, not a desire to leave a cruel world behind or to do violence to one's bodily self. But what is the constructive purpose of *askesis*? How exactly does it work for its practitioners and those who observe them?

Malina: Shrinking the Self

In another helpful study, Bruce Malina offers several observations from the fields of psychology, social psychology, and cultural anthropology that may help clarify how asceticism actually functions.⁴⁰ The basic observation Malina makes runs the risk of anachronism, since it may rely too much on current psychological theories of how the modern self or "I" is formed. However, the main point still bears consideration.

According to Malina, if one looks at the various behaviors and activities one might call ascetical—dieting, vegetarianism, fasting, sexual abstinence, sexual control, virginity, retreat from society, neglect of the body, wearing

³⁸ Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics," 8.

³⁹ Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics," 10.

⁴⁰ Bruce Malina, "Pain, Power, and Personhood: Ascetic Behavior in the Ancient Mediterranean," in Wimbush and Valantasis, *Asceticism*, 162–177.

rough clothing, etc.—one might well observe that they all entail “shrinking the self.”⁴¹ The phrase invoked is borrowed from Roy Baumeister⁴² and reflects the idea that persons begin life with a basic psychophysical self: a body-plus-consciousness. Gradually, this self is then built upon through interaction with others, assuming thereby an identity, roles, status, aspirations, definitions of meaning, and so on. In this way, a psychological socialized self is constructed onto the psychophysical self. Asceticism, insofar as it aims to disengage one from so many features of socialization—developing relationships, acceptable appearance, food and clothing, esteem-generating pursuits—has the result of shrinking the self back down to its basic psychophysical starting point: a body-plus-consciousness.⁴³

Even though Malina’s theory is grounded in observations about modern human consciousness, it may nonetheless be valid as a way of understanding some aspects of ancient social-psychological formation as well. If modern folk rely on a certain social engagement for the development of a “self” or “I,” the same would only be truer for ancient folk, since one of the most important features distinguishing the modern from the ancient person is our modern predilection for social isolation and individualism.⁴⁴ If the sort of social engagement Malina describes is necessary for the formation of the modern, relatively isolated “self,” how much more would this be true for ancient persons, whose identity was much more oriented toward a primary community, such as a village or kinship group? Thus, the sort of “self-shrinking” activities Malina describes would have been even more striking and effective in an ancient context than in the modern world. This would be especially true of ascetics involved in withdrawal from family and village life, eschewing the values commonly held by ordinary ancient society.

One part of this theory, however, does not fit so well with what we otherwise can say about ancient ascetics. Malina speaks of the indicated self shrinkage again and again as escape or self-negation. This identification presumably comes from the contemporary psychological discourse upon which Malina relies for his theory. Modern psychologists, concerned primarily with various pathological manifestations of self-shrinking, such as

⁴¹ Malina, “Pain, Power, and Personhood,” 162.

⁴² Malina cites Roy F. Baumeister, *The Escaping Self: Alcoholism, Spirituality, Masochism and Other Flights from the Burden of Selfhood* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

⁴³ Malina, “Pain, Power, and Personhood,” 162–164.

⁴⁴ Malina, “Pain, Power, and Personhood,” 165.

anorexia, masochism, or even suicide, no doubt often find escape from the self, even the body itself, to be the ultimate motivation for such behavior. The problem with this vocabulary is that an ancient ascetic's explanation for what he or she did does not sound at all like a suicide note. Returning again to Ware, we might say that the ascetic's motivations are, for the most part, not negative but positive. If the effect of asceticism is indeed the shrinking of the self, the motivation for the same *askesis* may not be escape or flight from the self.⁴⁵ What, then, is the motivation?

Valantasis: Ascetic Power and Constructions of Reality

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to arrive at an overarching theory of asceticism is that of Richard Valantasis.⁴⁶ His basic idea, however, can be summarized succinctly. "Asceticism," says Valantasis, "may be defined as performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe."⁴⁷ Note, first of all, that like Malina, Valantasis sees asceticism as having to do with the self—a "subjectivity." But rather than viewing the process as entirely negative, Valantasis sees the process as "inaugural." That is, one might still agree with Malina that initially the practices of asceticism have the effect of reducing the social self. But if one listens to the voices of ascetics themselves, one finds that the goal of such activity is not ultimately the elimination of the self, but the inauguration of a new self. When Abba Joseph, having successfully mastered the ascetic practices of the Desert Fathers, comes to Abba Lot and asks, in a sense, "What next?", Abba Lot answers, "If you wish, become entirely as fire."⁴⁸ The ascetic is to find a new "subjectivity" out of which to live.

Of course, one cannot simply define oneself in isolation. The power to be a self requires an "other," over against which and in relation to which one can be and become "oneself." The "self" is always to some extent, in this regard, a "social self." Also, the self receives its identity only within a structured universe, within which it has a place. Valantasis recognizes both of these

⁴⁵ See Elizabeth Castelli's critique, "Asceticism-Audience and Resistance: Response to the Three Preceding Papers," in Wimbush and Valantasis, *Asceticism*, 181–182.

⁴⁶ Valantasis, "Constructions of Power in Asceticism," *JAAR* 63 (1995): 775–821; also idem, "A Theory of the Social Function of Asceticism," in Wimbush and Valantasis, *Asceticism*, 544–552.

⁴⁷ Valantasis, "Constructions of Power," 797.

⁴⁸ The reference is to Valantasis' example ("Constructions of Power," 775) of Abba Lot and Abba Joseph taken from the *Apophthegmata Agion Pateron* (Athens: Aster, 1970), p. 53.

insights from Berger and Luckmann.⁴⁹ Thus, his definition does not focus solely on the development of a new subjectivity out of which one might begin to live, but also includes the goal of constructing “different social relations” and an “alternative symbolic universe” as part of what the ascetic tries to achieve. By creating new associations of like-minded people and by articulating a new construction of reality the ascetic works at building up a new social-psychological self to replace the old. Valantasis summarizes:

Asceticism does not simply reject other ways of living (that is the misconception denoted by the negative implications of the word “asceticism”), but rather asceticism rejects precisely in order to embrace another existence, another way of living embodied in a new subjectivity, alternative social relations, and a new imaging of the universe. And this intentionality has power-power to create a new person, power to restructure society, power to revise the understanding of the universe.⁵⁰

ASCETICISM AS PERFORMANCE

There is one more aspect of Valantasis’ definition that deserves special attention. He refers to ascetic practices as “performances.” This is an astute observation. There is a certain performative quality to asceticism that is easily overlooked if one only thinks of asceticism as withdrawal. The ascetic withdraws from the social mainstream, but in a way that calls attention to himself or herself. The ascetic does not go quietly. In its most dramatic form, asceticism can take on a quality that is almost exhibitionist. Simon Stylites stands on a stage large enough only for him, and elevated for all to see. What he does, he does for others to observe. By Richard Schechner’s definition, this is a performance.⁵¹

What did ancient performers expect from their audiences? And what did ancient audiences expect from a performance? A performance in antiquity, whether it be a theatrical presentation, a dance, an exhibition of painting or sculpture, a poem, a musical performance,—any fine art—was, above all, an attempt at “imitation.” This much we learn from Aristotle’s famous dictum,

⁴⁹ See Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966). Valantasis also acknowledges Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, *Social Semiotics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁵⁰ See Valantasis, “Constructions of Power,” 799.

⁵¹ Ibid., 798, following Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, Revised Edition (London: Routledge, 1988).

“Art imitates nature” (ἡ τέχνη μιμείται τὴν φύσιν). This was true for the highest cultural expression of art as well as the most common. Among the fine arts, the most common and vulgar—street theater—was accorded the most mimetic quality; it alone was called *mimos*.⁵² When someone stepped out of the crowd to perform, what the crowd expected to see displayed before it was an imitation, *mimesis*.

But so as not to misunderstand Aristotle's observation, we must note that what he means by the “imitation” of nature has nothing to do with realism, literalism, or simple copying, as we might presume. When a performer offered an imitation of human life, she or he did not aim simply to present life as it was, but to present it with large, recognizable strokes, so that the audience might easily see the ideals being advocated or the vices being scorned.⁵³ In *Poetics* 2.1, Aristotle writes:

Since living persons are the objects of imitation, and since these are by necessity of higher and lower types (for moral character normally only answers to these differences, since all moral differences are distinguished by vice and virtue), then we must imitate people as better than in real life or as worse than in real life, or such as they are.

This is the basis for Aristotle's distinction between comedy and tragedy: “comedy imitates people as worse than in real life, tragedy as better than in real life” (*Poetics* 2.7). This sort of larger-than-life *mimesis* is not purposeless. An ancient performance usually did not have as its goal the simple entertainment of an audience. A performance exercised what power it had to move the audience to consider something anew. The source of this power lies in the largeness of the characters, their hyperbolized features, the extreme drama of their lives. Augusto Boal explains:

⁵² See Allardyce Nicoll, *Masks, Mimes, and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931), pp. 80–81. Nicoll cites the telling passage from Diomedes, *Artis grammaticae libri III*:

The mime is an imitation and irreverent [i.e., secular] expression of some dialogue, or the lascivious imitation of indelicate deeds and words; it is thus defined by the Greeks: “The mime is an imitation of life (*mimesis biou*).” ... The word “mime” comes from *mimeisthai* (“to imitate”) as if it had a monopoly of imitation, although other forms of literature are based on this. It alone, however, was granted this common quality as a privilege, just as the man who makes verse is called a poet (*poietae*, literally “a maker”) while artists, who also make something, are not called poets.

The internal quotation is of uncertain provenance, although Nicoll speculates that Theophrastus is its source.

⁵³ On *mimesis* and its meaning, especially in Aristotle, see S.H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (New York: Dover, 1951), pp. 121–122.

[W]hat did “imitate” mean for Aristotle? To recreate that internal movement of things toward their perfection. Nature was for him this movement itself and not things already made, finished, visible. Thus, “to imitate” has nothing to do with improvisation or “realism,” and for this reason Aristotle could say that the artist must imitate men “as they should be” and not as they are.⁵⁴

These observations help to specify the performative aspects of ancient asceticism, especially its characteristic extremism or physical and psychological rigor. The ascetic makes a public display, a performance, of his or her take on life; thus, open withdrawal from the social and cultural mainstream is an implicit, but very clear, indictment of this world. The practices in which the ascetic engages and the newly emerging subjectivity out of which the ascetic begins to act are at once rejections of older, inadequate understandings of self and demonstrations of new, ideal possibilities for self-understanding. The new social relations forged in the solidarity of ascetic practice suggest a new way of ordering the world and being in relationship to one another. Such asceticism is *mimesis* in the Aristotelian sense. The ascetic aims to imitate life not as it is, but as it ought to be.

WANDERRADIKALISMUS AS ASKESIS

The itinerant social radicalism characteristic of the earliest sayings-tradition is a form of *askesis*. It is a series of performances, done for others to see. The aim of these performances is to separate those who participate in them from the dominant social ethos, to create a new network of social relations in which an alternative symbolic universe might be articulated. And out of that new combination of activities, relationships, and discourse, those who participate begin to develop of new sense of self, a new way of being in the world, to which others might be drawn.

Itinerancy

First let us consider the texts central to the itinerancy thesis itself. In Q 10: 2–16 there is a rather elaborate discourse by Jesus, instructing his followers to fan out into the towns he intends to visit, go without the normal accoutrements of travel (purse, bag, sandals), enter a house with a word of peace,

⁵⁴ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), p. 8.

eat whatever the householder offers, and care for the sick there. The exact wording of the Q-discourse is difficult to reconstruct, since Matthew conflates this Q-speech with a similar speech from Mark 6:7–13, leaving us overly dependent on Luke's wording for the original text of Q. Still, Arland Jacobson's reconstruction of the Q-text will serve us well enough:

[And he said to them,] ²The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. Pray, therefore, the lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go! Behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals [and salute no one on the way]. ⁵And whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" ⁶And if the house is worthy, your peace will rest upon it; but if it is not worthy, it will come back to you. ⁷And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what is provided by them; for the laborer is worthy of his reward. [Do not go from house to house.] ⁸And when you enter a city, and they receive you, eat what is set before you, ⁹and heal those sick within it, and say to them, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you." ¹⁰And whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, when you go into its streets, say, ¹¹"Even the dust of your city that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. [Nevertheless, know this, that the Kingdom of God has drawn near.]" ¹⁶Whoever hears you, hears me, and he who rejects you, rejects me; and whoever rejects me, rejects the one who sent me.⁵⁵

This tradition is older than Q itself, as the very similar scene in Mark 6:7–13 demonstrates (presuming, of course, that Mark did not himself make use of Q at this point). And there are parts of the speech that are older still—sayings that circulated independently before they were incorporated into this speech. One such saying is found in Q 10:8–9.⁵⁶ An independent version of this saying is found in The Gospel of Thomas 14: "When you go into any region and walk about in the countryside, eat whatever they put before you, and care for the sick among them."⁵⁷ It is also a tradition known to Paul, who makes reference to it in settling a dispute among his followers in Corinth that arose over the eating of meat that had been offered in a sacrifice to a pagan god (cf. 1 Cor. 10:27).

How shall we regard the activity described in these texts and the persons who are engaged in it? As we have already noted, the idea that theirs is a mission to prepare the way of Jesus owes too much to the Q-context

⁵⁵ See Arland Jacobson, *The First Gospel: An Introduction to Q* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1992), pp. 139–140.

⁵⁶ I consider both verses to come from Q, as Kloppenborg indicates (*Formation of Q*, 195); see also Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 142; Siegfried Schulz, *Q Die Spruchquelle der Evangelisten* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972), pp. 406–407. Vaage, *Galilean Upstarts*, 128–131, omits v. 8 from his reconstruction.

⁵⁷ See Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 24–25.

in which this tradition is found to be generally useful. Notice that in the Thomas version of the saying, no mission is implied; the itinerants are simply presumed to be “out there,” at least some of the time. The itinerants also do not seem to be leaders. They are not guaranteed authority or even a kind reception in the places they will visit. So who are they, and what are they doing?

Recall, now, Valantasis’ definition of asceticism: “Asceticism may be defined as performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe.” The aforementioned itinerants are engaged in a kind of asceticism. Itinerancy itself suggests social separation, stepping outside the societal mainstream. Insofar as social location means locale, they have none. In this sense, the itinerants, like ascetics, are shrinking their social self, as Malina describes. And yet, they do not remain isolated. They seek out new social relations—anyone who will receive their message of peace and take them in. A new community is formed, albeit on unusual terms.

The itinerants are dependent on other people; indeed, radically so, lacking even the basics for survival on the road. They need this new community. And they have nothing to offer in return but humane care—the most affordable, yet most valuable, of commodities. Then they speak: “The reign of God has drawn near to you.” This naming of the activity asserts a new symbolic universe: God rules in this place and time. This is what caring and being cared for means.⁵⁸ The itinerants are no longer simple beggars, but agents of God’s reign. They are no longer themselves—artisans, farmers, fishers, clerks, weavers, maids—but have constructed and/or been constructed into a new subjectivity.

Then they move on. This, too, is interesting. For it now becomes clear that they do not necessarily expect that all with whom they come in contact will join them on their journey. They leave their hosts behind, for the itinerants need local supporters. If everyone did what they are doing, who would feed them? Rather, who they are and what they do is to be seen and experienced. It is a performance of something: the reign of God. Who they are and what they do imitates life, life as it ought to be. The itinerants are not leaders but performers who, in their *mimesis* of real life, draw people forward into a new way of thinking about themselves and their social relationships.

⁵⁸ This understanding of the tradition is indebted to John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), pp. 332–348.

Leaving Family

An aspect of the social radicalism of this early sayings-tradition is forsaking family ties. Perhaps this goes hand-in-hand with itinerancy itself. In an agrarian culture, all hands are needed to keep the family afloat. One could not leave home to wander among towns and villages without risking alienation from those left behind to carry on the work of the family alone.⁵⁹

As with itinerancy, the tradition of leaving behind one's family is also very old. There are indications of the phenomenon in Q, Thomas, and Mark. A tradition found in both Q and Thomas bears examining more closely. The Q-version of the tradition may be reconstructed from Luke 14:26–27 and Matt. 10:37–39, but it probably represents a later, more developed form of the tradition than the one found in Thomas 55; or, at least, one may say that neither of the Q-derived versions can be considered very old.⁶⁰ Thomas 55 is representative of the earliest tradition:

Jesus said, "Whoever does not hate his father and his mother cannot become my disciple. And whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and take up his cross in my way will not be worthy of me."

What is the point of hating one's parents, one's brothers and sisters? Is this really necessary? The same question must have occurred to Matthew. For, in the end, Matthew could not accept the idea, and so altered the tradition: "One who *loves* father and mother more than me is not worthy of me." It is not a question of hatred, but of priorities. Luke, too, must have winced at the tradition. He refuses to take it literally, adding "even one's own life" to the list of things one must hate. It is clear that Luke could accept the traditional saying only as hyperbole. But the Thomas version can be taken quite literally. And if one sees it as part of a package of ascetical practices centered on itinerant radicalism, it makes sense. Thomas 55 is perhaps the best example of removing oneself from the context in which one's social-psychological self is formed and maintained. The family, with its extended kinship network, was the most significant context in which ancient identities were formed. In

⁵⁹ See Theissen, *Sociology*, 12.

⁶⁰ Both are younger than the Thomas version of the saying. Thomas 55 presents us with a difficult, but eminently realistic, statement. A young person drawn into the Jesus movement might well feel compelled to leave behind his or her family of origin: mother, father, sisters, brothers. Horsley ("Redactional Strata," 198) notices this and consequently dismisses the notion that this tradition was ever really taken literally. But Horsley overlooks the Thomas version of the saying, which could easily have been taken literally.

the ancient Mediterranean world, the redefinition of self must surely have meant removing oneself from one's family. This would have been a necessary part of any ascetical program.

But we must remember that withdrawal is not the ultimate goal of *askesis*. Withdrawal enables entry into a new set of social relations. The reintegration of the itinerant into a new social system is, to be sure, not entirely evident in this particular text. However, in a related tradition found in both Thomas and Mark, the ascetical paradigm is more nearly completed:

¹The disciples said to him: "Your brothers and your mother are standing outside."

²He said to them: "Those here, who do the will of my Father, they are my brothers and my mother. ³They are the ones who will enter the kingdom of my Father."
(Thomas 99; cf. Mark 3:31–35)

Here is the introduction of the new set of social relations to which Valantasis refers, the alternative symbolic universe, and the inauguration of a new subjectivity. The rigorous follower of Jesus loses his or her family ties, but is integrated into a new kinship group, articulated in ideal terms and offered as a new construction of reality.

Finally, there is the performative aspect of leaving one's family. It would have been an extreme act, one that called attention to itself. What was the ideal it aimed to demonstrate? It demonstrates a fundamental connectedness, a kinship, that transcends familial bonds and relationships, that is mediated through a common relationship to God. With God as their Father, human beings are all siblings; this is the point of calling God *Abba*, according to Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.⁶¹ This idea became so important in the early church that it was retained, even as communities were formed that did not necessarily reject conventional family life. Paul, for example, spiritualizes the concept: "For all who are led by the spirit of God are sons (and daughters) of God.... When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the spirit itself bearing witness to our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:14–16). Pauline Christianity even found a way to translate the performative aspect of this tradition, by associating it with baptism. The drama of this liturgical act means, says Paul, that all are counted as sons and daughters of God: "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons (and daughters) of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is

⁶¹ See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), pp. 140–151, esp. 150–151.

neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26–28). This was perhaps a better way of giving expression to the ideal. In Paul's communities, anyone willing to go through this ceremonial act, a "staged" event in many respects, might participate fully in the dramatic transfer from the old symbolic universe to the new. In the days of the early Jesus movement, this transfer was "performed" by the itinerant for others, in a radical display of the ideal world to which the followers of Jesus were drawn.

TO DESTROY ONE'S LIFE

There is a saying in Q that may be used to summarize what the early sayings tradition is talking about. The saying is found in Luke 17:33 and Matt. 10:39; the Q-version might have gone something like this: "Whoever finds his/her life will destroy it; and whoever destroys his/her life will find it" (Q 17:33). This saying is perhaps one of the oldest attested sayings in the Jesus tradition. In addition to Q, Mark also knew it (8:35), as did John (12:25). The author of the Gospel of Thomas may have known it, too, if we can imagine the same sentiments lurking behind the following statement: Jesus said, "Let him who has found the world (and) become wealthy renounce the world" (Thomas 110). The paradox of the latter saying captures precisely the impulse that motivates the ascetic approach to life. Finding fullness of life involves leaving one's old life behind.

What the earliest followers of Jesus knew and, perhaps, what Jesus himself knew, was that life presents us with a script. We take our cues from the social world in which we are constantly immersed. This world has all the answers we need to life's most pressing questions: Who am I? What shall I do with my life? What shall I value? Whom shall I value? The world provides us with an identity and an agenda. The world can script our lives, if we let it. The ascetic is one who makes a conscious decision to lay down the script, to step outside of conventional roles, outside of the familiar world of commonly assumed values, activities, plans, agendas. The ascetic is one who ventures the performance of a newly imagined reality, drawing others to it in a radical display of otherness. This is what the itinerant social radicalism of the early Jesus movement was all about. It is in this sense that we may usefully think of Jesus and his early followers as ascetics, and the early Jesus tradition in terms of *askesis*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PARABLE OF THE CATCH OF FISH: A BRIEF HISTORY¹

INTRODUCTION

For as long as scholars have known about the Parable of the Fisher in the Gospel of Thomas (logion 8) it has been compared to the Parable of the Fish Net in Matt 13:47–48. The two parables read as follows:

Thomas 8

¹And he said, “The human is like an intelligent fisher, who cast his net into the sea (and) drew it up from the sea filled with small fish. ²Among them he found a fine large fish. ³He threw all the small fish back into the sea (and) chose the large fish without difficulty. ⁴Whoever has ears to hear should listen.”

Matt 13:47–48

Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, they drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into baskets, but the rotten they threw away.

Both parables obviously feature a great catch of fish. Early on in the study of this gospel, many commentators argued that Thomas’ parable was a radical re-working of the more original Matthean version, usually under the assumption that Thomas had systematically excerpted its sayings from the synoptic gospels and reworked them in the service of this or that Gnostic school of thought.² Others argued that both parables derived from an

¹ This essay originally appeared as “The Parable of the Catch of Fish: A Brief History (On Matthew 13:47–50 and Gospel of Thom 8),” in *L’Évangile selon Thomas et les textes de Nag Hammadi. Traditions et convergences. Actes du colloque tenu à Québec du 29 au 31 mai 2003*, BCNH, section “Études,” 8, ed. L. Painchaud et P.-H. Poirier (Québec: Laval/Leuven, Paris: Peeters, 2007), pp. 363–373.

² So, e.g., Robert M. Grant and David N. Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), p. 127; Bertil Gartner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins/New York: Harper, 1961), pp. 233–234; Rodolphe Kasser, *L’Évangile selon Thomas. Présentation et commentaire théologique*, Bibliothèque théologique (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Nestlé, 1961), pp. 40–43; Ernst Haenchen, *Die Botschaft des Thomas-Evangeliums*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 6 (Berlin: Töppelmann, 1961), p. 48; Wolfgang Schrager, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evange-*

original parable of Jesus preserved in Aramaic, and that some of the differences between them could be accounted for through variations in translation from that original source.³ Still others argued that the two parables did not really have much in common beyond the shared theme of a catch of fish, and were probably not originally the same parable at all, but two different parables built upon the common image of a net full of fish.⁴ When I first examined Thomas 8 and its counterpart in Matt 13:47–50, this was my conclusion as well.⁵

At the time this seemed a most reasonable position to take. On the one hand, Matthew's Parable of the Fish Net has by all accounts been heavily edited to repeat the sentiments expressed in the Parable of the Wheat and

lienübersetzungen, Zugleich ein Beitrag zur gnostischen Synoptikerdeutung; BZNW 29 (Berlin: Töppelmann, 1964), pp. 37–42; Andreas Lindemann, "Zur Gleichnisinterpretation im Thomas-evangelium," *ZNW* 71 (1980): 216–219. Now, more recently Craig Blomberg, "Tradition and Redaction in the Parables of the Gospel of Thomas," in *Gospel Perspectives 5: The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels*, ed. David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), p. 192; Michael Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar, und Systematic*, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, n. F. 22 (Münster: Aschendorf, 1991), pp. 47–50 and W.D. Davies and D. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 443.

³ Esp. Gilles Quispel, who has argued for various proposals, using supposed parallels between Thomas' sayings and Tatian's Diatessaron to argue that they both derive from a very early Jewish Christian gospel. See, e.g. "Gnosis and the New Sayings of Jesus," in *idem, Gnostic Studies*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1975) 2:189–191; also "Some Remarks on the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS* 5 (1958/59): 276–290; "L'Évangile selon Thomas et le Diatessaron," *VC* 13 (1959): 87–117; and *Tatian and the Gospel of Thomas: Studies in the History of the Western Diatessaron* (Leiden: Brill, 1975). Tjitze Baarda has devoted considerable effort to dismantling Quispel's hypotheses. See his essay "'Chose' or 'Collected': Concerning an Aramaism in Logion 8 of the Gospel of Thomas and the Question of Independence," *HTR* 84 (1991): 373–397, and the three essays he notes as forthcoming on p. 373, note 1.

⁴ Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), p. 90; Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, second revised edition (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 24; Claus-H. Hunzinger, "Unbekannte Gleichnisse Jesu aus dem Thomas-Evangelium," in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift Joachim Jeremias*, ed. W. Eltester, BZNW 26 (Berlin: Töppelmann, 1964), p. 217; H.W. Bartch, "Das Thomasevangelium und die synoptischen Evangelien: Zu Gilles Quispels Bemerkungen zum Thomas-Evangelium," *NTS* 6 (1959/60): 259; Robert McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960), p. 95; more recently Ron Cameron, "Parable and Interpretation in the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 2 (1986): 27–28. That the scene was a common *topos* for reflection is suggested by its use in a popular fable of Aesop found in *Babrius*, Fable 4 (Perry trans. [LCL] 9) and in the story of the flute-playing fisher attributed to Cyrus in Herodotus, *History* 1.141 (Godley trans. [LCL] 181).

⁵ Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Foundations and Facets (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1993), p. 73.

the Weeds and its interpretation in Matt 13:24–30; 36–43. And yet not a whisper of this Matthean redactional work turns up in Thomas 8. Thus, one could conclude that Thomas made use of Matthew's parable only on the general assumption that Thomas was dependent on the synoptic gospels for all of its synoptic parallels, which I considered to be unlikely. On the other hand, one could scarcely see Thomas 8, or something like it, standing behind Matt 13:47–50. Thomas 8 is a parable of surprise discovery; Matt 13:47–50 is focused not a surprise discovery, but on the ordinary and regular task of sorting through the catch of the day. Both begin with a common fishing scene, but there is a lot one might do with a net full of fish. They are simply different stories.

But now I have changed my mind. I am convinced that something like Thomas 8 did indeed stand behind Matt 13:47–50—convinced by a set of circumstances that I did not see then.

1. UNNOTICED CIRCUMSTANCES, AND A HYPOTHESIS

There are two things—circumstances—that suggest very strongly that originally Matthew's Parable of the Net was a parable very similar to Thomas' Parable of the Fisher.

The first is this: Matthew's fishing parable is the third of three parables in Matthew 13, which, from the identical way in which each is introduced, would seem to form a set. The first two, the Parable of the Treasure (13:44) and the Parable of the Pearl Merchant (13:45–46), are indeed introduced with words that are identical to those which introduce the third, our Parable of the Net:

13:44: ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεια τῶν οὐρανῶν + a dative *comparandum*
 13:45: πάλιν ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεια τῶν οὐρανῶν + a dative *comparandum*
 13:47: πάλιν ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεια τῶν οὐρανῶν + a dative *comparandum*

From these identical, formulaic introductions one is lead to expect to find a set of three, very similar parables clustered together. The first two are very similar—Jeremias regards them as a double parable.⁶ Each describes a situation in which someone makes a surprise discovery of something

⁶ Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 90. That the first compares the Empire of Heaven to a thing, while the second compares it to a person, is not significant. The real *comparandum* in each is not the thing or the person, but the situation as a whole—a point made by Jeremias (*Parables of Jesus*, 101–102) and many times since.

precious, and then acts boldly, selling everything he owns to buy that one precious thing. But then comes our Parable of the Net. It is not as we have expected, yet another parable about acting on a surprise discovery. The identical introduction turns out to be misleading. It is, rather, about sorting out a catch of fish. No surprise. No discovery. Of the three, it alone receives Matthew's explicit attention, as he appends an interpretation (vv. 49–50) that invites one to pair it with the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds, not the Treasure or the Pearl Merchant. That is the first circumstance: one expects to find a set of three similar parables in Matthew 13:44–50, but instead one finds only two that are similar, and a third that is quite different.

The second circumstance is this: the Parable of the Fisher in Thomas 8 is a parable about someone who acts on a surprise discovery; it is structurally identical to the first two parables in Matthew's set, the Treasure and the Pearl Merchant. As in those parables, a man makes a surprise discovery—a large and good fish in among the others drawn in by the net. He acts boldly, discarding all the other fish in order to secure the one fine fish. This is the second circumstance: the parable we might have expected to find as the third in the string in Matthew 13:44–50 is the parable we do find in Thomas 8.

And so we have a set of circumstances that are very compelling. From Matthew's text one is led to expect a set of three parables, each of which involves someone acting on a surprise discovery. Matt 13:47–50 fails to deliver the third parable in the set, but Thomas 8 offers a parable that would be a perfect fit. This is just too much coincidence to be dismissed. It suggests, rather, the following thesis: The author of Matthew had before him a set of three parables about someone who acts on a surprise discovery: in the first a treasure is discovered, in the second a pearl, and in the third a remarkable fish. Jeremias might have called them a 'triple parable.' Matthew's interest fell on the third parable of the set, where he saw in the scenario of catching fish in a net a fitting image for the final judgment. He includes all three parables from the set in his third great discourse, the so-called 'parables chapter,' but transformed the third into an allegory for the final judgment, a parallel to the Wheat and the Weeds, which he interprets identically. All of these parables are found also in the Gospel of Thomas (Thomas 57: the Wheat and the Weeds; Thomas 109: the Treasure; Thomas 76: the Pearl; and Thomas 8: the Fish), but without the evidence for any of this Matthean tradition-history. Behind Thomas is a different tradition-history. And so, in Thomas 8 we find a version of the Parable of the Fish similar to what must originally have been taken up into the little collection of parables about a surprise discovery that lies behind Matt 13:44–50.

These circumstances have not gone entirely unnoticed in the discussion of Thomas 8. Many have noticed the parallel structure shared by Thomas' Parable of the Fish and Matthew's Parable of the Pearl, and called attention to the fact that Clement of Alexandria in fact presents these images in tandem in the following proverb:

Among a great number of small pearls there is one, and in a great catch of fish there is the fine fish.
Stromateis 1.16.3 (ANF)

J.B. Bauer noticed this and concluded that Thomas 8 must have been composed by Thomas on the basis of this proverb and Matthew's Parable of the Pearl.⁷ Unless one dates the Gospel of Thomas very late, this would seem to stand the matter on its head. Our earliest Greek manuscript of Thomas shows that Thomas was present and circulating in Egypt at least by the end of the second century.⁸ If the gospel itself was composed in Syria at least a generation before this, and probably earlier still,⁹ should one not rather assume that Clement simply knew the Parable of the Fish in the form in which it occurs in Thomas 8, and thus linked it with the similar Parable of the Pearl?¹⁰

Others have noticed that all three—the Treasure, the Pearl, and the Fish—are structurally the same. W.G. Morrice noticed this, and even entertained a thesis similar to what I am now suggesting:

Does this mean that, in its original setting in the ministry of Jesus, the parable was more like that found in GTh. 8 and that Matthew gives this away by placing it where he does after vv. 44 to 46?¹¹

⁷ Johannes B. Bauer, "The Synoptic Tradition and the Gospel of Thomas," in *Studia Evangelica*, Vol. 3, TU 88, ed. F.L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), p. 315.

⁸ H. Attridge dates the earliest Greek fragment, P. Oxy 1, to shortly after 200 CE. See his "Introduction to the Greek Fragments of Thomas" in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7, Together with XII, 2*, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926 (1) and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, vol. 1, *Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes*, NHS 20, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1989), p. 97.

⁹ For the date and provenance of Thomas see my discussion in *Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 113–120.

¹⁰ Claus-H. Hunzinger ("Unbekannte Gleichnisse," 219–220) thought that the Parable of Pearl and the Fisher might have circulated as twins, and emends Thomas' parable (following Leipoldt, changing ἰσμεντοῦ to ἰσμεντι): the fisher sees the fish in "it," i.e. the sea, and so gives up all the fish in his net so as to catch the one large fish. But the emendation is hardly necessary to view the two parables as parallel.

¹¹ W.G. Morrice, "The Parable of the Dragnet and the Gospel of Thomas," *ExpT* 95 (1983–1984): 272.

But he then abandons the idea, since he has found in Matt 13:47 the kernel of a parable he regards as congenial to Jesus, the lesson being “the mixture of people found in the kingdom of heaven.”¹² He does not offer an opinion on where Thomas’ parable might have come from.

Similarly, W.D. Davies and D. Allison briefly consider the possibility that the three parables in Matt 13:44–50 “may in fact have come from a pre-Matthean parable collection.”¹³ But they ultimately reject the idea that Thomas 8 might be a more original form of the third parable in the set. Instead, they argue that Thomas has used Matthew’s Treasure and the Pearl as a model to create a parable about choosing—“whether or not Thomas’ text is about the redeemer choosing the Gnostic or the Gnostic choosing gnosis.”¹⁴ And in any event, Matt 13:47–48 is structurally parallel to Matt 13:24–30, “which in one way or another may go back to Jesus.”¹⁵

T. Baarda has recently complained that scholars who would see Thomas 8 as the more original form of the parable are motivated by nothing more than the mere “intuition that Jesus was a wisdom preacher rather than an eschatological prophet or an apocalyptic rabbi.”¹⁶ But in the case of this parable, intuitions about what Jesus likely said have played no small role on the other side of the question as well. So, in an effort to raise my argument above the level of mere intuition, I would like now to turn to the texts in question to show that the hypothesis I am proposing is probably the simplest and most reasonable explanation for the details to be observed in the texts themselves. In doing so I hope to demonstrate that 1) Matt 13:47–50 bears more than a “redactional touch”¹⁷ from Matthew’s hand, but rather has been so thoroughly edited that it is no longer possible to know what its *Vorlage* might have been based on Matthew alone. 2) That the parable in Thomas has been edited, but not so “drastically changed” as to suggest that it is an entirely new composition. 3) That the one redactional change most

¹² Morrice, “Parable of the Dragnet,” 272.

¹³ W.D. Davies and Dale Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 434.

¹⁴ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 443. Cf. the similar view of Baarda, “‘Chose’ or ‘Collected,’” 392 and Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 38.

¹⁵ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 443.

¹⁶ Baarda, “‘Chose’ or ‘Collected,’” 388. His targets are, in particular, Helmut Koester (*Ancient Christian Gospels* [London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990], p. 104) and Stevan Davies (*The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* [New York: Seabury, 1983], pp. 9, 29–30) with whom I now find myself in agreement. This is also, perhaps, the position of Ivor H. Jones, *The Matthean Parables: A Literary and Historical Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 357.

¹⁷ Baarda’s characterization, “‘Chose’ or ‘Collected,’” 390.

certainly assigned to Thomas suggests that Thomas in fact did not create this parable modeled on the Matthean parables of surprise and discovery, but inherited it from the Jesus tradition available to him.

2. MATTHEW'S PARABLE OF THE NET

There is no question that the text of Matthew 13:47–50 bears much Matthean redaction. The question is, how much?

First, it is widely understood that vv. 49–50 are of Matthean composition. Davies and Allison summarize with succinct ease:

As most modern commentators recognize, everything points to Matthean composition—word statistics, style, content. Moreover, of the four sentences in vv. 49–50, three are taken verbatim from 13:36–43 (which in part explains why the parable and its interpretation are not perfect mates ...). Compare v. 49a with v. 40b, v. 50a with v. 42a, v. 50b with v. 42b.¹⁸

Vv. 49–50 are Matthean in their entirety. But what about vv. 47–48? Has Matthew's hand been at work in these verses as well? In v. 47b most agree that Matthew's verb, συναγειν, has a Matthean ring to it.¹⁹ I.H. Jones thinks the entire second half of v. 47 is secondary.²⁰ Perhaps so. It is superfluous in view of v. 48a. And παντὸς γένους “underlines for Matthew the universality of the judgment and perhaps also hints at the Gentile mission.”²¹ In v. 48 there are several Matthean touches to note. The verb, συλλέγειν, is probably Matthean,²² carried over from the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds and

¹⁸ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 442. For similar analyses see Hans Weder, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu als Metaphern. Traditions- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Analysen und Interpretationen*, FRLANT 120 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), pp. 142–143; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), p. 123, n. 143; Jones, *Matthean Parables*, 357, etc.

¹⁹ Weder notes it as *Vorzugs vokabel* (*Gleichnisse Jesu*, 142–143). Statistically it seems so: Matt 24x, Mk 5x, Lk 6x. Moreover, Matthew often uses it in contexts that have eschatological overtones (e.g. 3:12; 12:30; 13:30; 22:10; 24:28; 25:24, 26, 32). So also Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* 441; and T. Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*, NHMS 47 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 139–140.

²⁰ *Matthean Parables*, 356. Jones notes the chiastic placement of the participle has a “studied character.” Note, however, that he does not necessarily think this derives from Matthew, but from one of his various pre-Matthean stages in the tradition history. In any event, it is not original.

²¹ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 441.

²² Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 441: it appears six times in Matthew 13. Baarda (“‘Chose’ or ‘Collected,’” 390) argues, on the contrary, that συλλέγειν belongs to the original parable, since in the West it would have been a better translation

its interpretation.²³ Matthew's terms for the "good" and the "bad" fish are awkward, especially σαπρά ("rotten"), which is hardly an appropriate word for fresh fish, however undesirable.²⁴ Elsewhere Matthew uses the term in reference to the "bad" fruit of trees to be cut down and thrown into the fire—in each case a metaphor for the final judgment, precisely the issue in view for Matthew here as well. Finally, the plural agents implied by the plural participle (ἀναβιβάζσαντες) have no antecedent in vv. 47–48, and so must anticipate the interpretive material in vv. 49–50, in which (plural) angels appear to separate the good from the evil at the close of the age.²⁵

If all of these Matthean redactional elements are bracketed out, what is left? Not very much: a fishing net is cast into the sea; when it is full, it is drawn up. Obviously there must be more. But the way in which the parable is filled out in Matthew is Matthean. That being the case, we simply do know what Matthew's *Vorlage* might have looked like based on Matthew alone. But recall the parable's introduction, which links it explicitly with the two parables of surprise and discovery that precede it. Matthew's parable should have been the third in a set. And recall also Thomas' parable involving a catch of fish—a parable of surprise discovery. Could the third parable in Matthew's *Vorlage* have looked something like this?

of Quispel's supposed Aramaic *Vorlage*, ܣܒܠ, than the ἐκλέγειν that lay behind Thomas' ܣܩܥܘܬܝܢ. But earlier in this same article he spends considerable effort demonstrating that Quispel's quest for an Aramaic original had been a blind alley, and that the choice of verb in each version of the parable was, rather, determined by the content peculiar to each. Matthew's fishers are "collecting" several good fish from among the bad, while Thomas' fisher is "selecting" a single fish from the many ("Chose" or 'Collected,' 383–387, esp. 387). Thus is the whole question of an Aramaic *Vorlage* for the two verbs not only highly conjectural, it is irrelevant.

²³ Cf. Matt 13:28, 29, 30, 40, 41, and 48. Otherwise the word occurs only here and in Q 6:44 (Luke 6:44//Matt 7:16).

²⁴ So Bernard B. Scott, *Hear, Then, the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), p. 314; also Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren*, 139. Cf. Davies and Allison: "σαπρός is often editorial" (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 441). Contra Baarda ("Chose" or 'Collected,' 391) who sees it as a designation for unclean, inedible fish, following Origen, *In Lev Hom* 7.7.

²⁵ Scott, *Hear, Then, the Parable*, 314. That a σαγήνη, or "dragnet" of the sort mentioned here might itself imply the presence of more than one agent, since a seine requires more than one person to handle, is an unwarranted inference. Baarda ("Chose" or 'Collected,' 378) notes two examples from Babrius in which such a net is handled by a single person.

3. THOMAS' PARABLE OF THE FISHER

But what about Thomas' parable? How much of it comes from the tradition, and how much of it owes to Thomean redaction? Has the Thomean redactor so "drastically changed the wording"²⁶ of this parable that its prior history, too, is rendered opaque? Or can we see here a parable of surprise and discovery that Thomas has drawn from the tradition?

The Parable of the Fisher in Thomas 8 is not free of Thomean redactional work. We might begin with the fish itself. Many have noted that Thomas likes to underscore the importance of things by making them "large": large branches (Thomas 20), large loaves (Thomas 96), large sheep (Thomas 107).²⁷ Thus, $\mu\omicron\varsigma$ may well be redactional, though hardly a "Gnostic" addition to the story. It may reflect something specific in the history of the Thomas tradition,²⁸ or it may be that big fish are simply better. The same should probably not be said of $\mu\alpha\lambda\omicron\upsilon\gamma\iota$ ("good"). Intrinsic to the story of surprise and discovery is the value of the thing discovered. So, whether "large" or "good," something must set this fish off from all the others, else the story is without sense.²⁹

Many also think that the fisher in Thomas 8 has been made "wise" ($\mu\eta\text{-}\mu\epsilon\lambda\eta\tau$) by the Thomean redactor.³⁰ This is probably so. It says too much for a parable in the Jesus tradition, which originally would have left it to the hearer/reader of the parable to decide whether such a person would be wise or not. The Thomean redactor has presumed to make the decision for us.

The word $\varsigma\omega\tau\tau\iota$ (to "choose") may be redactional. Elsewhere in Thomas, Jesus the redeemer comes to "choose you one out of a thousand, two out of ten thousand" (Thomas 23). And the concept of being chosen is common

²⁶ Baarda's characterization ("‘Chose' or 'Collected,'" 392).

²⁷ E.g. Baarda, "‘Chose' or 'Collected,'" 376, Quispel, "Some Remarks," 290.

²⁸ Ménard (*L'Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 5 [Leiden: Brill, 1975], p. 90) suggests that it reflects the practice of the Syrian church of referring to Christ as "the true great fish" in opposition to the Syrian mysteries of the Fish. Gärtner (*Theology*, 234) thinks that it might refer to the Jewish tradition of feasting on Leviathan in the great messianic banquet, and the related Christian practice of referring to the Eucharistic bread, the body of Christ, as the "great fish."

²⁹ So Scott, 315; Cameron, 26.

³⁰ E.g. Scott, *Hear, Then, the Parable*, 315, Cameron, "Parable and Interpretation," 26, Morrice, "The Parable of the Dragnet," 270, Baarda, "‘Chose' or 'Collected,'" 376. Cameron notes, however, that the wise man is a common figure in wisdom literature (Job 34:34; Prov 16:14; 29:9; Sir 18:27; 20:7; 33:2; 37:23, 24).

in Gnosticism.³¹ But this is true for most of early Christianity. Moreover, the story requires some action on the part of the fisher, and “choosing,” or “picking out” the single fish seems innocent enough, even though for the Thomean audience it might have taken on special significance.

Finally, there is the peculiar way in which this parable begins in Thomas: ἐπρῶμε τῆτων ... (“The human is like”). This is unique in Thomas. Thomas has a number of parables in which there is no explicit comparison; they are simply stories (Thomas 9, 63, 64, 65). In those parables in which explicit comparison is made, it is always to “the Empire (of God/Heaven)” (Thomas 57, 76, 96, 97, 98, 107, 109). The uniqueness of Thomas 8 in this respect has led some to suspect that πρῶμε is simply a mistake (notice Thomas 7 ends with ρῶμε),³² or perhaps the gloss of a later redactor.³³ Either is, of course, quite possible. But so long as the text can be understood as it stands, one ought first to try reading the text as it is.

Agreed by all is the fact that πρῶμε is secondary.³⁴ What it means is quite another matter. Does it refer to the Son of Man,³⁵ or some other redeemer figure,³⁶ that is (in Thomas) Jesus, the living one who’s words bring life? Or is

³¹ Ménard, *L’Évangile selon Thomas*, 90. The linguistic argument of Baarda, who prefers Matthew’s συλλέγειν to ἐκλέγειν (καὶ τῆ normally renders the Greek ἐκλέγειν) as a better translation of the supposed Semitic *Vorlage*, נבא, is unconvincing (see note 22, above).

³² So P. Nagel, “Die Parabel vom klugen Fischer im Thomasevangelium von Nag Ham-madi,” in R. Stiehl and H.E. Stier, eds., *Beiträge zur alten Geschichte und deren Nachleben 1 (Festschrift Franz Altheim)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), pp. 523–524; Jeremias, *Unbekannte Jesusworte*, 2. Aufl. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1983), p. 85; Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 2, 9, 154; Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren*, 140–141.

³³ Gilles Quispel, *Makarius. Das Thomasevangelium und das Lied von der Perle*, NovTSup 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), p. 112.

³⁴ Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 101, 201; Morrice, “Parable of the Dragnet,” 270; Hunzinger, “Unbekannte Gleichnisse,” 218; Perrin, *Rediscovering*, 90; John D. Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 34; Schoedel, “Parables in the Gospel of Thomas,” 553; Hugh Montefiore, “A Comparison of the Parables of the Gospel According to Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels,” *NTS* 7 (1960/61): 247; Lindemann, “Zur Gleinesinterpretation,” 216–219; Wilson, *Studies*, 40, 94; Weder, *Gleichnisse*, 146–147; Kasser, *L’Évangile selon Thomas*, 40; Ménard, *L’Évangile selon Thomas*, 88–91; Grant and Freedman, *Secret Sayings*, 126–127; Haenchen, *Die Botschaft*, 48; Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 37–38; M. Meyer, *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1984), p. 99; Gärtner, *Theology*, 233–234; Baarda, “‘Chose’ or ‘Collected,’” 376, 391; Cameron, “Parable and Interpretation,” 26–27.

³⁵ Quispel, “Some Remarks,” 290. That the Son of Man can be substituted for the Kingdom of God is seen in the Gospel of Mary (BG 8502 8,15–19). But the conception (finding the Son of Man within) is not really fitting here.

³⁶ Weder, *Gleichnisse*, 147; Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 41.

it the primal “*anthropos*,” known from later Gnostic texts?³⁷ Is it the Gnostic in search of his/her true self, or of gnosis, or the divine, pneumatic element within?³⁸ And what, then, is the fish? Is it the gnosis sought by the Gnostic seeker, or the Gnostic him/herself, sought by the redeemer? Either could find a home in the Gospel of Thomas. Thomas 2 and 3 exhort the seeker to seek out the thing within that will be your salvation. And in Thomas 23, Jesus speaks as the redeemer who has come to choose people, “one from a thousand, and two from ten thousand.” Thomas 8 could be read as it stands as expressing either of these concepts. In any event, it seems that Thomas’ redactor is responsible for transforming a parable of the Empire of God into a parable about “the human.”

Of the redactional changes in Thomas 8, this last one is by far the most significant. That the fish is desirable because it is “large,” or that the fisher is called “wise” before we have a chance to decide this for ourselves—these things are of little consequence. Without these redactional elements the parable remains a story about acting on a surprise discovery: a fisher discovers an extraordinary fish in among the ordinary fish in his net. He then acts, and chooses the single fish, letting all of the others go. But substituting *πρωμε* for “the Empire of God” is another matter. This changes everything. It is now no longer a parable about a surprise discovery, but an allegory about someone in search of something.³⁹ If “the human” is the redeemer, the story is about the relentless efforts of the redeemer to save the lost. If it is the Gnostic, then it is a story about someone in search of his/her true self, or perhaps wisdom or gnosis. Both of these themes fit well in the Gospel of Thomas, but they do not fit the basic premise of the parable very well. The seeker *expects* to find something sooner or later—thus the seeking! The fisher might expect to find fish, but not the catch of a lifetime. That is a *surprise*.

It is now clear that the Thomean redactor did not create this parable, either on the basis of the common *topos* of the net full of fish, or by modeling it on Matthew’s parables of the Treasure and the Pearl Merchant. For in its structure, Thomas 8 remains a story about a surprise discovery. But Thomas is not interested in surprise discoveries. He is interested in seekers who eventually find what they are looking for, and a redeemer who chooses

³⁷ Wilson, *Studies*, 40, 94; Schoedel, “Parables,” 553; Quispel, *Makarius*, 112.

³⁸ Haenchen, *Botschaft*, 48; Gärtner, *Theology*, 233; Kasser, *L’Évangile selon Thomas*, 40; Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 40; Weder, *Gleichnisse*, 147; Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium*, 49–50.

³⁹ Cf. the similar point made by Morrice, “Parable of the Dragnet,” 272.

his own. One way or another, the substitution of πρῶμε for the Empire of God bends the parable in one of these directions. But the fit is awkward. Thomas' redactor did not create this parable; he simply bent it to his own purpose. What was the parable like that Thomas had before him? Substituting "Empire of God" for "the human," and omitting all other Thomean redaction, we have something like the following:

The Empire of God is like a fisher *who cast his net into the sea, and drew it up from the sea full of small fish*. Among them he found an [exceptional] fish. He threw all the small fish back into the sea and chose the [exceptional] fish without difficulty.

The italicized words are very close to the lines salvaged from Matthew's heavily redacted Parable of the Net. The rest represents an original structure that is identical to the two parables of surprise discovery that directly precede Matthew's Net. This, or something very close to it, must have been the third parable in Matthew's source, a collection of three parables of surprise discovery.

4. CONCLUSION

My hypothesis can be summarized as follows: Behind the fishing parables of Matthew and Thomas there is a parable of the Empire of God that told of a fisher who made a surprise discovery, a special fish amidst his normal catch. Like the man who discovers an unexpected treasure, or the merchant who discovers a remarkable pearl, he gives up the whole catch and takes hold of what is extraordinary.⁴⁰ This parable, together with one of its twins, the Pearl, stands behind the proverb uttered by Clement of Alexandria in *Stromateis* 1.16.3.⁴¹

Both the writer of Matthew and of Thomas encountered this parable—Matthew as part of a collection, Thomas as a single parable—and saw in it other potential. In this fishing metaphor, Matthew saw a poetic way to express his views of the final judgment. He thus altered the parable to resemble structurally the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds, and attached to it

⁴⁰ This is more or less what Crossan presumes to be the case; see *In Parables*, 34–35.

⁴¹ Cf. Schrage, *Verhältnis*, 37–38, who thinks that the fact Clement of Alexandria also compares the Empire of Heaven to a fisher, rather than a net, indicates that Clement shared with Thomas a common tradition of interpreting this parable; see also Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, 89, who agrees.

the same interpretation he had already given that parable. He included all three parables in the collection, giving greater heft to his parables discourse (Matthew 13), but redacted only the third of the three.⁴²

Thomas encountered this parable in isolation—though he knew of the others in the collection as well (see Thomas 109, 76). What he saw in it we can no longer say with certainty. His treatment is characteristically opaque: “The human is like ...” Perhaps he thought that someone who chooses gnosis, or the Empire of God within, is like the fisher who chooses the big fish over the small. Such a one is the image of the perfect human, the *anthropos* of Gnostic mythology. Or perhaps he thought of Jesus, the human redeemer—*πρωτης*—the great and wise fisher, who rescues his chosen ones from the deep. We do know for sure. It is a mystery to be contemplated. This is the point of the Gospel of Thomas, after all: to meditate on these sayings in search of an answer, an interpretation, wisdom.

⁴² Thus, exactly, Davies, *Gospel of Thomas*, 9.

CHAPTER NINE

APOCALYPTICISM OR PROPHECY AND THE PROBLEM OF POLYVALENCE: LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS¹

INTRODUCTION

Since its discovery in 1945 and subsequent publication in 1956, the Gospel of Thomas has played an increasingly important and sometimes controversial role in the discussion of Christian beginnings.² Among the most important developments associated with the entry of this new gospel in to the discussion is the re-consideration of the once (and for the most part, still) regnant view that early Christianity was fundamentally an apocalyptic movement. In the Gospel of Thomas we find an interpretation of the Jesus tradition

¹ This essay originally appeared as “Apocalyptic or Prophecy and the Problem of Polyvalence: Lessons from the Gospel of Thomas,” *JBL* 130 (2012): 795–817.

² Early landmark essays include Giles Quispel, “The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament,” *VC* 11 (1957): 189–207; James M. Robinson, “*LOGOI SOPHON*: Zur Gattung der Spruchquelle,” in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Erich Dinkler, ed. (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1964), pp. 77–96; revised ET: “*LOGOI SOPHON*: On the Gattung of Q” in Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 71–113; Helmut Koester, “GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Christianity,” *HTR* 58 (1965): 279–318; reprinted in *Trajectories*, 114–157; *idem*, “One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels,” *HTR* 61 (1968): 203–247; reprinted in *Trajectories*, 158–204; later attempts to integrate Thomas into the discussion of Christian origins include Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Foundations and Facets (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1993); John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998); and Risto Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2003). Surveys and analyses include Ron Cameron, “The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. Birger A. Pearson, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 381–392; *idem*, “Alternate beginnings—Different Ends: Eusebius, Thomas, and the Construction of Christian origins,” in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi*, ed. Lukas Bormann, et al., NovTSup 74 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 501–525; and Stephen J. Patterson, “The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Beginnings,” in *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas*, ed. Jon Asgerisson, et al., NHMS 59 (Brill: Leiden, 2006), pp. 1–18. Also, see the several essays in this last cited volume and in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung—Rezeption—Theologie*, ed. Jörg Frey, et al., BZNW 157 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

that, on the one hand, is more sapiential than apocalyptic, and on the other, relies on Jesus' sayings that are, from a form-critical point of view, often more primitive than their synoptic counterparts. This peculiar combination of factors makes Thomas an outlier to the story of Christian beginnings that was accepted for the most part without question a generation ago, and for this reason a flashpoint both for advocates of the new view and defenders of the old. And yet, the discussion of the Gospel of Thomas itself has not yet produced a consensus about the role of apocalypticism in this gospel. Some assume that Thomas is utterly devoid of apocalypticism, while others believe that it is fundamentally an apocalyptic document. In this study I wish to shine a light on this unresolved question in hopes of bringing a measure of clarity to an unresolved problem. In it I will show that while Thomas is not entirely devoid of apocalyptic language and imagery, those who argue for a great deal of apocalypticism in Thomas do so on the basis of prophetic sayings, whose polyvalent quality permits one to read them in a variety of ways. In the synoptic tradition, they often occur in contexts that harness them in the service of an apocalyptic worldview. But this apocalyptic use of prophetic sayings in the synoptic tradition is for the most part not mimicked in the Gospel of Thomas. Rather, Thomas offers these sayings in contexts that cast them in an entirely different light.

APOCALYPTICISM IN THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS?

Are there apocalyptic sayings in the Gospel of Thomas? Helmut Koester could be said once to have thought so. In his 1968 essay, "One Jesus, Four Primitive Gospels,"³ he observes that Thomas contains "a number of apocalyptic sayings," and then goes on to illustrate the point by listing all the sayings in which the term "kingdom" occurs.⁴ However, careful attention to Koester's observations reveals an important nuance to his argument. In searching for a place to locate Thomas' peculiar eschatological perspective, he distinguishes between three different concepts of eschatology in the Jesus tradition:

- (1) a developed, and even elaborate, 'revelation' about future events, as it occurs in the synoptic apocalypse of Mark 13; (2) the expectation of the Son of man and of 'his day,' as it is represented in Q, but which is also evident in

³ See footnote 2, above.

⁴ "One Jesus," 172 (pages are cited from *Trajectories*).

isolated sayings of Mark (e.g. Mark 8:38) and in the synoptic apocalypse in its present form; (3) the proclamation of the coming of the kingdom, which is older than the two other apocalyptic theories, and ultimately has its roots in the preaching of Jesus.⁵

Thomas, he notes, shows no evidence of the first two eschatological concepts, but from the third there are many examples, "apocalyptic sayings" about the kingdom (Thomas 3, 22, 27, 46, 82, 107, 109, 113), the kingdom of Heaven (Thomas 20, 54, 114), or the kingdom of the Father (Thomas 57, 76, 96–99, 113). "To be sure," he writes, "these sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* almost always show a tendency to emphasize the presence of the kingdom for the believer, rather than its future coming." Koester confesses that he once would have agreed with Robert Grant, that this must represent a later "spiritualization" of the earlier canonical tradition.⁶ But now he would revise that view. Thomas, he argues, does not represent a revision of the more original canonical, apocalyptic tradition, but a continuation of the distinctive eschatological message of Jesus himself:

Jesus radicalized the traditional apocalyptic expectation of the kingdom; his message demands that the mysterious presence of the kingdom in his words be recognized. The Gnosticism of the Gospel of Thomas appears to be a direct continuation of the eschatological sayings of Jesus. But the disclosure of the mysterious presence of the kingdom is no longer an eschatological event; it has become a matter of the interpretation of Jesus' words⁷

In his first encounter with the Gospel of Thomas, Koester instinctively read the material that was already familiar to him from the synoptic tradition in a familiar way. He assumed that what had functioned apocalyptically in the synoptic tradition was to be understood apocalyptically here as well.⁸ But with careful study and a more nuanced view of the eschatology of the synoptic tradition itself,⁹ Koester came to the realization that these sayings

⁵ "One Jesus," 172.

⁶ See, e.g., "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI" (see footnote 2) esp. 137 and 139 (pages are cited from *Trajectories*).

⁷ "One Jesus," 175.

⁸ "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI," 137, 139.

⁹ In "One Jesus" Koester was especially influenced by Philipp Vielhauer's then recent study of the Son of Man sayings, in which he showed that the proclamation of the kingdom and the apocalyptic expectation about the Son of man are incompatible from a history of religions point of view, and moreover, that the latter presupposed Christological developments that were younger rather than older (see Vielhauer, "Gottesreich und Menschensohn in der Verkündigung Jesu," in *Festschrift für Günther Dehn*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher [Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1957], pp. 51–79 and "Jesus und der Menschensohn," *ZThK* 60 [1963]: 133–177).

were not to be read apocalyptically after all. The synoptic tradition, it turned out, was not the only trail leading back to Jesus. This, of course, unleashed a storm of controversy that has not subsided to this day.

Margaretha Lelyveld's approach to the question was quite different. In her thesis, written under the direction of Jacques Ménard, she attempted to place Thomas in a Hellenistic Jewish context that was fundamentally apocalyptic, but with strong sacerdotal and sapiential undercurrents.¹⁰ Key to her reading, however, was not the synoptic material in Thomas, but the rather more enigmatic saying 4: "The man old in his days will not hesitate to ask a child of seven days about the place of life, and he shall live." In her view, the inscrutable expression "child of seven days" must refer to Jewish speculation about the creation of Adam. It invokes, she thinks, the idea, common in Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of Genesis, that the first account of Adam's creation in Genesis 1:27 intends to describe the creation of the heavenly prototype of humanity, not physical, but immortal and perfect like God, and androgynous—"male and female he created him." The creation of the first *earthly* human—the one formed of the dust of the earth—is narrated later, in Gen 2:7. The "child of seven days," Lelyveld argues, would be the child of the "perfect week," that is, the first week, in which the heavenly prototype, the first Adam, was created in the image of God, perfect, immortal, and androgynous.¹¹ This may well be.¹² But then Lelyveld makes an assumption: the context for such exegesis was Jewish apocalypticism, especially the Enoch literature. Ultimately she speculates that the "child of seven days" must be one of the "children of the elect" who descend to earth in the last days to mingle with the children of humanity (1 Enoch 39).¹³ This is no small leap: "the child of seven days" is a reference to the first week; the first Adam was created in the first week; this Adam was a heavenly being; the children of the elect in 1 Enoch descend from heaven; *ergo*, the child of seven days is one of the children of the elect, created, like Adam, in the first (not second) week of creation, who will descend to earth and mingle with the children of humanity in the final days. By this thread Lelyveld suspends Thomas in the world of Jewish apocalypticism.

¹⁰ *Les Logia de la Vie dans l'Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 34 (Leiden: Brill, 1987).

¹¹ *Les Logia de la Vie*, 27.

¹² Stevan Davies, "The Christology and Protology of the Gospel of Thomas," *JBL* 111 (1992): 668; Elaine Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis 1 in Gospel of Thomas and John," *JBL* 118 (1999): 482.

¹³ *Les Logia de la Vie*, 27–29.

Adamic speculation does play a role in many sayings in the Gospel of Thomas.¹⁴ But it is a mistake to think that this tradition was at home primarily in Jewish apocalypticism. The idea that Gen 1:27 describes the creation of a heavenly prototype, of sorts, a perfect version of humanity “in the image of God,” is laid out most explicitly in Philo’s account of the creation, *De Opificio Mundi*, where it serves to draw the Jewish tradition into sync with a then resurgent interest in Platonism.¹⁵ More than this, however, it turns out that such thinking was quite widespread in Hellenistic Jewish circles; in no sense can it be isolated within apocalyptic or even sapiential strains of thought.¹⁶ Still, Lelyveld’s convictions about logion 4 lead her to look for other apocalyptic sayings in Thomas, and thus to our concern. She finds them in Thom 11:1–2, 111:1–2, and 61:1.¹⁷

Thom 11:1–2

¹Jesus said, “This heaven will pass away and the one above it will pass away
²and the dead are not alive and the living will not die.”

Thom 111:1–2

¹Jesus said: “The heavens and the earth will roll up before you, ²and whoever is living from the living one will not see death.”

Thom 61:1

Jesus said, “Two will rest on a bed. The one will die and the other will live.”

Each of these sayings is quite enigmatic. Are they to be read apocalyptically? Possibly. But how does Lelyveld divine that they ought to be? For sayings 11:1–2 and 111:1–2 she turns to the possible synoptic parallel in Mark 13:30:

¹⁴ Pagels, esp. has shown this (“Exegesis of Genesis,” 479–488); see also Stephen J. Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas,” in Frey, et al., eds., *Das Thomasevangelium*, 181–205.

¹⁵ *Opif* 69, 134–135; see also *Leg all* 1.31. Lelyveld mentions Philo (*Les Logia de la Vie*, 28), but does not exploit his significance.

¹⁶ See esp. Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei*, FRLANT 76 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), also Hans-Martin Schenke, *Der Gott “Mensch” in der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 120–143; Jarl Fossum, “Gen 1:26 and 2:7 in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Gnosticism,” *JSJ* 16 (1985): 202–239; Pagels, “Exegesis of Genesis,” 479; and the comprehensive survey of John Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism*, JSPSup 1 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988). Philo’s own exegetical work was part of a larger Alexandrian tradition that was considering such issues (see Thomas Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation*, CBQMS 14 [Washington, D.C.: CBA, 1983], pp. 32–33; 172–174).

¹⁷ *Les Logia de la Vie*, 55–68.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” This, in her view, determines their meaning.¹⁸ There, in the midst of the Markan apocalypse, this brief little phrase would seem to be taken apocalyptically. But if we broaden our lens to take in the parallel in Q, we can see that the phrase “heaven and earth will pass away” was a more broadly used expression. Consider its use in Luke 16:17 (from Q): “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one jot of the Law to perish.” It is used similarly in Matthew 5:18: “... until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, not one jot will pass from the Law” Now we can see that the phrase is really a cliché meaning “a very long time”—as long as one can imagine. This has nothing to do with the notion of an imminent apocalyptic cataclysm, such as might be envisioned in Mark 13. The point is really the opposite: heaven and earth are not going to vanish any time soon, and neither is the Law. Even in Mark 13:30, where the context is apocalyptic speculation, this phrase does not function apocalyptically. Surely the point here is not that Jesus’ words are about to pass away, but that they will endure forever. In Thomas 11:1–2, the phrase functions similarly: those who are not truly alive will surly die, but those who are truly alive will never die—heaven and earth could pass away and this would not change.¹⁹

But what about saying 111? Of all the various uses of the cliché, this may be the only one that is truly meant to be taken apocalyptically.²⁰ One will note immediately the altered phraseology in this version: “Heaven and earth will *roll up* before you ...” This colorful expression is a relatively common apocalyptic phrase,²¹ based ultimately perhaps on Isaiah 34:4: “For the host of heaven will waste away, and the skies roll up like a scroll ...”²² This is arguably the most apocalyptic of the Isaian prophesies, and here the point is not some distant frame, but indeed, the imminent doom that awaits the Edomites. Perhaps Thomas 111 envisions this sort of end, which those who “live from the living one” will survive—one thinks, perhaps, of the Jewish

¹⁸ *Les Logia de la Vie*, 63–64.

¹⁹ Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, New Testament Readings (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 71; but cf. Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 2008), pp. 58–60, who detects in the saying an “eschatological” aspect. This may well be.

²⁰ See Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 191–192; Petr Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas: From the Interpretations to the Interpreted* (New York/London: T. & T. Clark, 2009 [Chezk orig., 1980]), p. 152.

²¹ See Rev 6:14; *Sib Or* 3.81–84; also possibly Heb 1:12.

²² Robert Grant and David Noel Friedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960) 189.

War or some other war-related catastrophe from the period. However, this genuinely apocalyptic interpretation of the saying is not achieved through reference to one or another synoptic usage, but by a seeming independent appeal to the Jewish prophetic tradition and the imagination of Isaiah.

Lelyveld's interpretation of Thomas 61 is also achieved with reference to the canonical versions of the saying. Without recourse to how Thomas uses the saying (cf. 61:2–5), she calls attention to its use in the Q apocalypse (Luke 17:34//Matt 24:40) and assumes that it means something similar here.²³ In Q the saying is used in reference to the coming day of judgment: two will be doing something together—sleeping, grinding, tending the fields—and one will be taken and the other will be left. The wording of the saying—one is taken (παράλαμβάνειν) and another is left (ἀποτιθέναι [Luke], ἀφιέναι [Matthew])—probably derives from the setting in Q (Luke 17:26–37//Matt 24:37–44 [Q]): some were *taken* onto the ark with Noah, others were *left* behind; some were *taken* out of the city with Lot, others were *left* behind. But in Q the fit is a little awkward. The saying seems to underscore the surprise involved in the moment: two people are doing exactly the same thing and suddenly one is taken while the other is left. This is not at all like Noah's months of preparation, or even Lot's more hastily arranged escape. In Thomas there is no imminent judgment, and so no reason to assume that this meaning is presupposed here as well.²⁴ Rather, here the saying is worded more generically: one will *live* and another will *die*. This is a simple and wise observation based on the common experience that death often comes as a surprise. Two people lay down together one evening, and in the morning one discovers that the other has died. In this sense, though cast in the form of a prophetic saying, the saying makes a point that seems more sapiential than prophetic: you never know when death will come calling and you never know whom it will take.

These sayings are not apocalyptic sayings. They are more properly prophetic sayings, though traditional form critics have never made a clear

²³ *Les Logia de la Vie*, 64–65.

²⁴ *Contra* Pokorný, *Commentary*, 106; April DeConick, *The of Thomas in Translation, with a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel*, LNTS [JSNTSup] 287 (London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006), p. 200, in addition to Lelyveld. Alternatively, Bertil Gärtner (*The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* [London: Collins/New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961], pp. 170–171) and Jacques-E. Ménard (*L'Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 5 [Leiden: Brill, 1975], pp. 161–162) presume that the eschatological context of the synoptic version has been replaced by a Gnostic one.

distinction between the two.²⁵ Prophetic sayings often comment on life. They share this function with wisdom sayings. They inspire reflection on current events or circumstances, and so, like wisdom sayings, they are malleable—polyvalent. This will deserve further comment below. For now, it is enough to note the way in which this polyvalency requires the interpreter to pay careful attention to context and specific use. Prophetic sayings that function apocalyptically in a synoptic context cannot be assumed to function similarly in Thomas.

Recently April DeConick has mustered the most elaborate argument to date for apocalypticism in the Gospel of Thomas.²⁶ Her thesis is that behind this gospel there lies an early collection of five “eschatological” speeches, now overlain with a series of accretions, each of which has deposited a new layer of interpretation on that original “kernel” gospel. This kernel, she argues, was fundamentally apocalyptic, as was the community that created it.

The idea that Thomas came to be over the course of several generations, each depositing its own layer of material in the collection, is not novel. Most scholars who have worked on this gospel over the last 50 years would agree that there are very likely a series of literary layers in it.²⁷ But no one

²⁵ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, revised edition, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 108–130.

²⁶ *Recovering the Gospel of Thomas: A History of the Gospel and Its Growth*, LNTS 286 (London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005); and *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 287; DeConick originally made the argument in “The Original Gospel of Thomas,” *VC* 56 (2002): 167–199.

²⁷ Henry Chadwick observed what he called the “snow-balling effect” of such lists in connection with another collection, the Sentences of Sextus (*The Sentences of Sextus: A Contribution to the History of Christian Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], p. 159), which Robert McL. Wilson later applied to the Gospel of Thomas (“Thomas and the Growth of the Gospels,” *HTR* 53 [1960]: 231; see also *idem*, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* [London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960], pp. 9, 145); for similar views see also Ernst Haenchen, “Literatur zum Thomasevangelium,” *ThR* 27 (1961/62): 306–307; Henri-Ch. Puech, “The Gospel of Thomas,” in Hennecke/Schneemelcher, *NTA* 1:305; Wolfgang Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur gnostischen Synoptikerdeutung*, BZNW 29 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), p. 10; Stephen J. Patterson, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A Forschungsbericht and Critique,” *Forum* 8 (1992): 65; *idem*, “Understanding the Gospel of Thomas Today,” in Stephen J. Patterson, et al., *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998), pp. 35–36; *idem*, “The Gospel of Thomas and the Historical Jesus,” in *Coptica—Gnostica—Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-H. Poirier, Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Section “Études” 7 (Laval/Louvain/Paris: Les Presses de l’Université Laval/Éditions Peeters, 2006), pp. 672–673; and Werner Kelber, “Die Anfangsprozesse der Verschriftlichung im Frühchristentum,” *ANRW* II, 26, 1:26: “Listen haben weder Anfang noch Ende.” See also Kenneth V. Neller, “Diversity in the Gospel of Thomas: Clues for a New Direction?” *Sec Cen* 7 (1989/90): 1–17.

has yet been able to uncover the original gospel beneath the many layers. The problem is one of method. To accomplish a *literary* task, one needs a *literary* method—Kloppenborg's work on Q²⁸ is perhaps the example that has inspired similar attempts to parse out the layers in Thomas.²⁹ Is there a literary method that would expose a literary sub-stratum comprising a series of eschatological speeches in Thomas? So far, no. The text of Thomas just does not provide the sort of literary clues one needs to see the various layers more clearly.

DeConick's method is not literary, but form-critical.³⁰ She observes that the sayings in the Gospel of Thomas exhibit several rhetorical features: they are sometimes organized into dialogues, there are secondary interpretive and explanatory clauses, and there are many brief chreia. These, she notes, are typical ways in which a rhetor might actively remodel traditional material in the course of oral performance. This much is sound. But then she assumes that these secondary features may be used to isolate and peel back secondary layers in the Thomas gospel. Tradition history is pressed into service as a literary method to discover the text's stratigraphy. This is a serious methodological misstep, for it overlooks the fact that Thomas is not actually an oral performance, but a document, which incorporates material from countless prior oral performances in which all manner of development and remodeling has already taken place. That a particular saying in Thomas bears the *oral* marks of secondary development is not an indication that it represents a secondary development in the *literary* history of the gospel in which it has landed. Tradition history can help one identify secondary features in particular sayings (within limits), but it cannot help one know when this or that development took place. A brief little dialogue might have been worked up by some author/editor of the Thomas gospel itself, but it could have been formulated earlier as well, in some now anonymous setting in the life of the community (*Sitz im Leben*) long before the material was included in the written form of the gospel. The implications of this methodological error are catastrophic for DeConick's reconstruction of the original gospel. A single example will illustrate the problem:

²⁸ John Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

²⁹ For an earlier attempt to do this with quite different results, see William Arnal, "The Rhetoric of Marginality: Apocalypticism, Gnosticism, and Sayings Gospels," *HTR* 88 (1995): 471–494.

³⁰ See "Original Gospel of Thomas," 188–189; *Reconstructing*, 64–65.

In DeConick's view, saying 20, the parable of the mustard, belongs to the original Gospel of Thomas, and thus should be read as a metaphor for the imminent arrival of the apocalypse.³¹ To accomplish this reading, DeConick begins by severing the introduction (20:1) from the parable (20:2–4), on the supposition that such introductions are form-critically secondary. The parable now stands alone as a simple form belonging to her “kernel” gospel. Its interpretation is to be governed by the context she then constructs around it. Immediately preceding the parable would have been saying 17. It is form-critically simple and therefore belongs to the kernel gospel. Sayings 18 and 19 are form-critically complex and are thus judged to be later accretions in the literary development of the gospel. Immediately following our parable would have been Thom 21:5, and then Thom 21:10. These are simple sayings, and so belong to the kernel gospel. Thom 21:1–4 is a dialogue and is therefore a later accretion; 21:6–8 is judged to be encratite, and so a later accretion; and 21:9 is a later accretion. So the new “rhetorical context” for the parable comprises Thomas 17 before the parable, and 21:5 and 21:10 after it. An apocalyptic interpretation of these three sayings leads to an interpretation of the parable: it means to show that the Kingdom, understood as the apocalypse, is already beginning and the disciple must be ready for it.³² As for 20:1 (the simple introduction to the parable: “The disciples said to Jesus, ‘Tell us what the kingdom is like.’”), it was added later, and expresses a “concern over the delayed Eschaton.”³³

Here the problems with using tradition historical analysis to do literary critical work are evident. While form criticism might suggest that the introduction to the parable (Thom 20:1) is secondary (20:2–4), there is no way to know whether it was added by an author/editor working with the text of the Thomas gospel, or in some earlier anonymous oral setting in the life of a community. Form criticism offers no *literary* warrant for peeling off Thom 20:1 to reveal a simpler form of the Thomas text. As a text, Thom 20:1–4 has integrity as a well-formulated apocritical chreia,³⁴ in which the sage responds to certain interlocutors with an extended answer. It is perhaps the most common literary form in the many chreia collections and *gnomologia* known from Hellenistic literature. At the level of the text, there

³¹ See *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 99–114, for the following details.

³² *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 107.

³³ *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 107.

³⁴ *eidos apokriticon kata pusma*—Theon, *Progymnasmata*, 61–66.

is nothing intrinsically secondary about the introduction. Similarly, one might well suppose that logion 17 and the Parable of the Mustard (logion 20) are older than the sayings in Thomas 18, 19, or 21, but there is no *literary* warrant for supposing that within the textual history of the Gospel of Thomas, sayings 17 and 20 predate 18 and 19 and 21.

Another kind of problem arises when DeConick assigns a meaning to these artificially isolated sayings. In the context of Thomas 21, the prophetic sayings in 21:5 and 21:10 serve as warnings to watchfulness against an intruding world. The thief in the night and the harvester's sharp knife provide apt metaphors for the perceived threat of a hostile world. But in DeConick's analysis they are left to stand alone as the rest of Thomas 21 is peeled away as secondary accretion. 21:5 now indicates that "the Eschaton is near and that preparations should be made for it"³⁵—an interpretation derived from the saying's use in Q 12 (Luke 12:29//Matt 24:43). 21:10 indicates "the eschatological nature of the times" and that "soon the harvest or Judgment would occur"³⁶—again, the meaning is determined by the synoptic parallel in Mark 4:29. In these examples one may observe the same problem encountered in Lelyveld's work: prophetic sayings that are used in an apocalyptic context in the synoptic tradition are assumed to have an apocalyptic meaning also in the Gospel of Thomas, even when there is a context in Thomas that would belie the assumption. This involves a fundamental miscalculation of the polyvalence of individual prophetic sayings, and, even when this polyvalence is acknowledged, the presumed originality and normative status of the synoptic valence.

This is what made Koester's insight in "One Jesus, Four Primitive Gospels" a breakthrough of sorts. When he acknowledged that his earlier judgment in "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI" had been mistaken, that the kingdom sayings in the Gospel of Thomas do *not* represent a secondary development of a more original apocalyptic concept to be found in the synoptic tradition, but derive in their own way from the prophetic preaching of Jesus, he focused the problem of Christian origins more clearly on the propensity of the Jesus tradition to adapt and develop in different ways. The sayings that had fooled Koester at first glance, and that would prompt him eventually to back-track, were all sayings he would later classify as "prophetic sayings."³⁷ The sayings

³⁵ *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 110.

³⁶ *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 114.

³⁷ See Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), esp. pp. 87–89.

that Lelyveld took to be apocalyptic were also prophetic sayings, as are many of the “eschatological” sayings in DeConick’s kernel gospel. It is these prophetic sayings that have proven to be so misleading in the discussion so far. They clearly warrant further attention.

PROPHETIC SAYINGS IN THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

There are many prophetic sayings in the Gospel of Thomas and they come in a variety of forms. These sayings generally offer admonishment, reprimand, or warning, often (though not always) by referencing the future. In this way, prophetic sayings forward an agenda of social, political, or cultural criticism with the intention of bringing about change. In Bultmann’s treatment of the synoptic tradition they include the *macarism*, or beatitude, sayings of warning or threat (*Drohorte*), and admonitions (*Mahnrede*).³⁸ These sayings are not *formally* distinct from apocalyptic sayings. Their future cast, together with elements of warning or foreboding, make them particularly adaptable to apocalyptic contexts. But admonitions, warnings, and even threats are by no means limited to apocalypticism. These forms are also to be found in wisdom literature. Consider, for example, Proverbs 1–8, where Wisdom takes up the function and persona of the prophet.³⁹ Wisdom and prophecy are just as intertwined in the history and literature of Israel as prophesy and apocalypticism.⁴⁰ When discerning the function and meaning of prophetic forms, one must constantly attend to context.

In my view, the interpretation of the Gospel of Thomas has suffered because this basic methodological issue has not been sufficiently registered in the discussion. In the remaining pages of this essay, I will examine the prophetic sayings in the Gospel of Thomas together with their synoptic parallels. This comparative analysis will show that prophetic sayings that are used in apocalyptic contexts in the synoptic gospels do not necessarily function with the same apocalyptic valence in the Gospel of Thomas. Rather, these sayings, not unlike wisdom sayings, also exhibit a considerable degree of polyvalence and must therefore be studied in context to determine

³⁸ Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 108–120.

³⁹ See, e.g., Prov 1:20–33; 2:20–22, etc.

⁴⁰ On the subject of wisdom and prophesy see J. Fichtner, “Jesaja unter den Weisen,” *TLZ* 74 (1949): 75–80; J. Lindblom, “Wisdom in the Old Testament Prophets,” *VT* 3 (1955): 192–204; J. William Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1971).

what precisely they might mean. In their Thomas context they function to bolster the cultural critique and life-choices the Thomas Christians have made.

Macarisms

Among the prophetic sayings shared by Thomas and the synoptic tradition, we might number several macarisms:

Thom 54//Q 6:20	Blessed are the poor ...
Thom 68:1 and 69:1//Q 6:22	Blessed are the persecuted ...
Thom 69:2//Q 6:21	Blessed are the hungry ...
Thom 79:1–2//Luke 11:27	Blessed is the one who has heard ...
Thom 79:3//Luke 23:29	Blessed is the barren one ...
Thom 103//Q 12:39	Blessed is the vigilant one

The macarism, as a form, is functional in sapiential, prophetic, or apocalyptic contexts.⁴¹ So, are these sayings to be seen as sapiential admonitions, prophetic critique, or apocalyptic hope? It depends on the context in which they are found.

Thom 54//Q 6:20b; Thom 68:1 and 69:1//Q 6:22; Thom 69:2//Q 6:21

The first three of these beatitudes are, of course, also to be found in Q's inaugural sermon, where they probably are to be read as wisdom sayings, albeit of a counter-cultural sort.⁴² In Matthew's expanded list they become ethical admonitions promising happiness to the disciple who embraces spiritual poverty, hunger for justice, meekness, peacemaking, etc. But if one pairs them with matching woes, as in Luke, they sound more like the promise of divine intervention on behalf of the poor and hungry when the apocalypse finally comes. In Thomas they are not grouped together and they do not function in concert. Thomas 54 is probably is an admonition to embrace poverty as a mode of discipleship.⁴³ Saying 69:1 (possibly 68:1

⁴¹ In wisdom: Ps 1:1–2; 2:12; 32:1–2; 34:8; 41:1; 84:12; 119:1; Job 5:17; Wis 3:13–14; Sir 14:20; 26:1; 28:19; Tob 13:14, etc.; in prophetic texts: Is 30:18; 31:9 (LXX); in apocalyptic: Sir 48:11; 1 En 82:4; Ps Sol 18:6; 2 Bar 10:6–7; 2 En 42:6–14; 52:1–14, etc.

⁴² See, e.g., Hans-Dieter Betz "The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:3–12): Observations on Their Literary Form and Theological Significance," in *idem, Essays on the Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p. 32.

⁴³ Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 139; Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 131–132; Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 54; Pokorný, *Commentary*, 99; DeConick, *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 187.

as well) offers encouragement to those who struggle for enlightenment.⁴⁴ Saying 69:2 is in its Coptic form ambiguous.⁴⁵ It too may offer the promise of enlightenment,⁴⁶ or it may praise the altruism of feeding the hungry beggar.⁴⁷ In any event, literary and social context always matters.

Thom 79:1–2//Luke 11:27; Thom 79:3//Luke 23:29

This is most evident with the clustered macarisms in Thomas 79. Gathered together in saying 79 of the Gospel of Thomas they probably function to endorse the ascetical practice of women.⁴⁸ But one would never guess this from looking at Luke's use of them. The beatitude in 79:3 functions in Luke 23:29 as a prophetic saying, probably referring to the fall of Jerusalem during the war. Luke inserts the little chreia found in Thom 79:1–2 at the end of the Beelzebul controversy (Luke 11:27–28), where it serves to turn back empty praise in favor of a more serious engagement in the spiritual warfare Jesus has just described. In all of these examples we can see that the macarism form is especially polyvalent.

Thom 103//Q 12:39

This is illustrated also by the macarism in Thomas 103:

“Blessed is the man who knows in which quarter the brigands are going to enter, so that [he] might arise, mobilize his [kingdom], (and) arm himself before they invade.”

⁴⁴ Ernst Haenchen, “Spruch 68 des Thomasevangeliums,” *Muséon* 75 (1962): 28; Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 201–202; Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 148; Pokorný, *Commentary*, 117; DeConick, *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 223.

⁴⁵ Discussion: Peter Nagel, “Die Neuübersetzung des Thomasevangeliums in der *Synopsis quatuor Evangeliorum* und in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch* Bd. 1,” *ZNW* 95 (2004): 247–248.

⁴⁶ Thomas O. Lambdin's rendering (in “Translation [of the Gospel of Thomas],” in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 together with XII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1)*, and *P. Oxy. 1*, 654, 655, NHS XX, The Coptic Gnostic Library, ed. Bentley Layton [Leiden: Brill, 1989], pp. 53–93) leaves open the possible metaphoric interpretation of hunger: “Blessed are the hungry, for the belly of him who desires will be filled;” for discussion, see Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 149.

⁴⁷ As suggested by the Berliner Arbeitskreis translation (in Hans-Gebhard Bethge, et al., “Das Thomas-Evangelium,” pp. 515–546 in *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 15. Aufl., ed. K. Aland [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1996 (second, corrected printing, 1997)]): “Blessed are those who suffer from hunger so that the belly of the one who wishes (it) will be satisfied;” for discussion, see Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 168.

⁴⁸ Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 154–155; Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 159. Others, however, have seen it as referring to some future apocalyptic event: Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 187; Pokorný, *Commentary*, 125. For discussion, see Risto Uro, “Is Thomas an Encratite Gospel?” in *Thomas at the Crossroads* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 147–149.

The tradition history of this saying is very complex: there is a Q version, which Luke and Matthew use variously: Luke retains its original Q position (see Luke 12:39), where it forms part of a warning to stay alert for the arrival of the Son of Man.⁴⁹ Matthew retains the thrust of the Q version, but includes the saying as part of his omnibus apocalypse in chapters 24–25 (see Matt 24:43). That such a saying must have existed very early is shown by 1 Thess 5:2, where Paul seems to presuppose something like the Q saying in its apocalyptic valence. From all of this one might assume that it carries the same apocalyptic overtones when it is taken up in the Thomas gospel as saying 103. But here there is no context to give it that meaning. And the wording is a little different. Thomas 103 appears to contemplate brigands who ride in from the desert raiding villages for booty, not a thief breaking into a house at night.⁵⁰ The saying is a call to arms to defend against some metaphoric invader. In Thomas, it is probably to be taken as a call to watchfulness against a world hostile to the ascetical lifestyle of Thomas' "solitaries."⁵¹ Or perhaps it means simply to warn against marauding brigands. The point is the saying is polyvalent. Context determines its meaning.

Prophetic Sayings in the Synoptic Apocalypses

The lesson to be learned from Thomas 103 is one that could be reiterated many times over, for there are several prophetic sayings in Thomas with synoptic parallels in either the apocalyptic warnings at the end of Q 12 or the apocalypse in Q 17. Consider first the sayings with parallels to Q 12:

Parallels to Q 12

Thom 21:5–7//Q12:39–40	Knowing when the thief comes ...
Thom 10//Luke 12:49	Casting fire on the world ...
Thom 16:1–3//Q 12:51–53	Not peace, but dissension ...
Thom 91//Q 12:56	Interpreting the present moment ...

⁴⁹ The placement of the saying by the International Q Project (see in James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John Kloppenborg, *The Sayings Gospel Q in Greek and English* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], pp. 124–125), pp. assumes its original position in the Lukan order. For discussion of this section of Q and its announcement of judgment see John Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 148–154.

⁵⁰ While Q speaks of a "thief" (κλέπτης) who breaks into a house (οἶκος) sometime during the night watch (φύλαξη) the Coptic of Thomas employs the Greek loan word λήστης in the plural (thus "brigands") and does not mention a house. Presumably desert brigands might attack anywhere—houses, villages, caravans, etc.

⁵¹ This is suggested more strongly in the doublet in Thom 21:5 to be taken up below.

Thom 21:5–7//Q12:39–40

Thom 21:5–7 is a doublet to Thomas 103,⁵² and so must be seen against the same tradition-historical backdrop: an early Q version, used variously by Mathew and Luke, and evidence that this saying, or something very like it, predates 1 Thessalonians, where Paul seems to refer to it (1 Thess 5:2).⁵³ But the apparent apocalyptic meaning of the saying in Q does not determine the meaning of the same material in Thomas. Thom 21:6 gives the Thomas version of the sayings their distinct valence here: “But you, be on guard against the world” In this version the threat is not the approaching Son of Man, or the Day of the Lord, but an actual threat to the life choices of the Thomas itinerants: “the world.”⁵⁴ It is probably futile to speculate whether this use or the alternate reading in Q is more original. But it is worth noting that the threatening image of the thief hardly offers a flattering *tertium comparationis* for the Son of Man. Whether primary or secondary, the usage found in Thomas is certainly explicable, and perhaps more natural.

Thom 10//Luke 12:49; Thom 16:1–3//Q 12:51–53

In Q 12 the ‘I-sayings’ in 12:49, 51–53 seem quite natural as the threatening words of the judge who will return to finish the work he has already started. But apart from the Q context, they are simply a comment on the disruptive effects of a radical teacher’s message.⁵⁵ Thus they turn out to be appropriate to the Thomas context as well, where such radical proposals as leaving home and family (see, e.g., Thom 55, 101) were still contemplated.

Thomas 91//Q 12:56

The ironic rebuke of those who are able to predict tomorrow’s weather, but unable to see the things happening right in front of them today, is

⁵² Note the similarity in wording between these verses and Thomas 103, which also speaks of “brigands” or “robbers” (ῥηστήρες) and of “arming” (lit: “girding the loins” [μοῦρα ... ἄρμε]).

⁵³ See discussion above.

⁵⁴ John Dominic Crossan, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 62; Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 127–128; Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 93–94; alternately, the spiritual body of the Thomas believer (Pokorný, *Commentary*, 66).

⁵⁵ On Thomas 10, see Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 69–70; Stephen J. Patterson, “Fire and Dissent: Ipsissima Vox Jesu in Q 12:49, 51–53?” *Forum* 5 (1989): 134–135; Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 57–58; Pokorný, *Commentary*, 50; but cf. DeConick, *Original Gospel of Thomas*, 76: “part of a rhetorical speech about the urgency of the Eschaton” On Thomas 16 see Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 136–137; Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 83–84; Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 71–72; Pokorný, *Commentary*, 59; but cf. DeConick (*Original Gospel of Thomas*, 93), who sees it as apocalyptic in her “kernel gospel,” but in the “complete Gospel” as referring to the social disruption of breaking family ties.

equally effective in the apocalyptic context of Q 12 or the sapiential setting of Thomas 91. In Q 12 the saying criticizes those who misread the signs of the times. The apocalyptic context lends to it an apocalyptic valence. But in Thomas the saying is both framed and worded differently. It occurs within a string of sayings governed by the theme of Wisdom's pursuit (see sayings 90–94). This probably accounts for the peculiar wording of the Thomas version. First, it is introduced by a question about Jesus' identity: "Tell us who you are, that we might believe in you" (Thom 91:1). Then follows the familiar saying, but between the familiar clauses (*you interpret the sky/you cannot interpret the times*) there is sandwiched an additional clause: "but the one who is in your presence you have not recognized." This expresses the common wisdom motif of humankind's failure to recognize Wisdom in her earthly sojourn.⁵⁶ Again, it is probably pointless to argue about the original meaning of this saying, except to note that its polyvalence should make us skeptical of any assumed original apocalyptic meaning. Framing and wording make all the difference in the world.

The same lessons are evident in those sayings with parallels to Q 17, two of which also have parallels in Mark 13:

Parallels to Q 17 and Mark 13

Thom 38:2//Q 17:22	You will look for me and not find me ...
Thom 113//Q 17:23//Mark 13:21	Look here; look there ...
Thom 61:1//Q 17:34	Two on a bed ...
Thom 11:1 and 111:1//Q 16:17//Mark 13:31	Heaven and earth will pass away ...

Thom 38:2//Q 17:22

The dominical saying in Thom 38:2 and Luke 17:22 is perhaps the best example of how a single prophetic saying might serve equally well in different settings.⁵⁷ Luke uses it to segue from the anti-apocalyptic logion in 17:20–21 to the Q apocalypse in 17:23 ff. There it takes on the apocalyptic coloring of the section in general, including reference to the Son of Man. But in Thomas

⁵⁶ Early interpreters saw this as a particularly "Gnostic" use of the saying (so Gärtner, *Theology*, 139–140; Ernst Haenchen, *Die Botschaft des Thomasevangeliums*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 6 [Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1961] 64; Schrage, *Das Verhältnis*, 176–177), but the motif is equally at home in wisdom theology, as well as in the Jesus tradition generally speaking (see, e.g. Mark 8:27–30, pars.).

⁵⁷ Are they two versions of the same saying? My earlier view that they are not (Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 87) seems to me now to be mistaken. The parallel in John 7:36 shows that the saying is relatively old.

the saying is joined to the wisdom logion in 38:1 (cf. Q 10:24), and so is to be heard as the words of Wisdom's envoy rebuking those who should have listened to her before, but refused, and therefore missed their chance (cf. Prov. 1:28).⁵⁸ The fact that John also has this saying (see John 7:34), and in its Thomas form and valence, shows that the Q version is not necessarily prior or normative. Its meaning is determined by its literary frame of reference.

Thom 113:3//Q 17:23//Mark 13:21//Luke 17:21

The "Look, here; Look there" saying warning against false claims about the arrival of the kingdom is obviously based on a very old tradition.⁵⁹ In Q 17:23 and Mark 13:21 it is taken as a warning against false apocalyptic hopes on the promise that the real thing is not far away. In Thomas 113 and Luke 17:21 it is used to dissuade apocalyptic expectation in general. So, is this saying an apocalyptic saying, or an *anti*-apocalyptic saying?⁶⁰ Context sometimes changes everything.

Thom 61:1//Q 17:34

As we have already seen, the saying in Thom 61:1 and Q 17:34 is equally at home in both contexts, but it has very different meaning in each. In Q it clearly has an apocalyptic meaning, placed as it is within the Q apocalypse. Presumably, when the apocalypse comes, "as in the days of Noah" (Q 17:26) some will be rescued and some will perish. But the observation that some live while others die turns out to be useful in pointing out the capriciousness of death in general. Thus, Thomas uses it to pose a problem, to which the Thomas gospel offers an answer: some have the key to life and others do not. Yet again, the meaning of the saying is wholly dependent on its context.

Thom 11:1 and 111:1//Q 16:17//Mark 13:31

Finally, there is the doublet in 11:1 and 111:1. As noted above, Thomas 111 is perhaps the closest thing we have to an apocalyptic saying in the Gospel of Thomas. The version in 111:1 is particularly valenced in this direction. Here alone one finds the wording "the heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence," language that certainly means to evoke something of Isaiah 34:4: "and the heavens will roll up like a scroll." Indeed, the whole of Thomas

⁵⁸ Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983), pp. 37–38; Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 114; Pokorný, *Commentary*, 84.

⁵⁹ See the analysis of Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, 311–313.

⁶⁰ Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, 316.

111 seems to read as a tiny apocalypse, in which the enlightened one is said to merit survival beyond this world's end:

Jesus said: "The heavens and the earth will roll up before you, and whoever is living from the living one will not see death." Does not Jesus say: "Whoever has found himself, of him the world is not worthy?"

But the peculiar thing about this saying is that its synoptic versions actually seem less apocalyptically tuned, and this even in Mark, where it is used in a specifically apocalyptic context. As noted above, the phrase "heaven and earth will pass away" in Mark 13:31 is used not so much as a prophecy of this world's end, but more as a cliché for transitory, as opposed to eternal things: "heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." The point here is not that Jesus' words will survive the apocalypse, but that they are *eternal*. Matthew (5:18) uses the Q version of the saying similarly to underscore the permanence of the Law: heaven and earth will pass away, but the Law will endure "until all is accomplished." Luke uses the Q saying to make the same point, only now with a strong ironic sense: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one jot of the Law to become void" (Luke 16:17). Here more than ever we can see how freely these prophetic sayings are used to various rhetorical ends. They are not simply the expression of an apocalyptic mentality.

Other Prophetic Sayings

The other sayings common to Thomas and the synoptic tradition that one might classify as prophetic can now be listed for further reflection on this problem:

Other Common Prophetic Sayings

Thom 4:2//Q 13:30//Mark 10:31	First/last; last/first ...
Thom 5:2 and 6:4//Q 12:2//Mark 4:22	Hidden/revealed ...
Thom 21:10//Mark 4:29	When the grain is ripe ...
Thom 39:1–2//Q 11:52	Hiding the keys ...
Thom 40//Matt 15:12–13	The plant rooted up ...
Thom 41:1–2//Q 19:26–27//Mark 4:24–25	The one who has, receives more ...
Thom 46:1//Q 7:28	Superior to John ...
Thom 71//Mark 14:58	Destroy this house ...
Thom 73//Q 10:2	Who has made me a divider ...

Thom 4:2//Q 13:30//Mark 10:31

The saying about the 'last becoming first' is so malleable that the synoptic evangelists end up using the saying in three different contexts: Mark, at

the end of the third passion prediction (10:31); Matthew, to interpret the parable of the Vineyard Laborers (20:16), and Luke, to conclude his speech on entering by the narrow door (13:30). In each, the apocalyptic framework in which the saying is embedded lends to it an apocalyptic valence. But the concept of reversal need not be tied to an apocalyptic scenario. In logion 4 of the Gospel of Thomas it describes the paradox of the old seeking instruction from the young.

Thom 5:2 and 6:4//Q 12:2//Mark 4:22

Q's use of the hidden/revealed logion to introduce an exhortation to fearless witnessing (Q 12:2–10; similarly Mark 4:22) is comprehensible, but awkward. Why hide things only to reveal them later?⁶¹ Better would be a saying that simply says “do not hide things; instead, reveal them.” In Thomas the saying has two entirely different meanings. In Thomas 5 it comments on the wisdom hiding in plain sight (“know what is in front of you”) that will presently be revealed to the diligent seeker.⁶² In saying 6 it is a warning: if you lie and do things you abhor, someone will eventually find out.⁶³ In any event, neither has an apocalyptic valence.

Thom 21:10//Mark 4:29

The reaping of grain is, to be sure, a well-known metaphor for judgment (see, e.g., Isaiah 27; Joel 3:13; Rev 14:15–16), but as a metaphor it has a wide range of possible applications. Philo, for example, uses it as a metaphor for the gains of the wise and the understanding (*Som* 2.23–24)—it is a polyvalent image.

Thom 40//Matt 15:12–13

At first glimpse the saying about the tree that shall be up-rooted might seem to carry apocalyptic overtones. And one could certainly imagine it in an apocalypse. But the image derives not from some imagined apocalyptic scenario, but a much older prophetic idea that the righteous are planted by God in the land of Israel (e.g. Is 61:3; Ps Sol 14:3–4). Its polemical thrust comes from the prophetic tradition, not the apocalypses. Even Matthew uses it in a manner that is more prophetic than apocalyptic. Following upon logion 39, with its critique of the scribes and the Pharisees, Thomas' use of the saying would appear to be quite similar to Matthew's.

⁶¹ Note: Mark 4:20 actually claims that one only hides things *in order to* (ἵνα) reveal them. Only magicians do this; most people hide things in order to conceal them.

⁶² Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 61–62.

⁶³ Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 21; Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 63–64.

Thom 71//Mark 14:58

Finally, logion 71, which speaks of destruction, might initially be understood to refer to some impending apocalypse. Its various synoptic versions refer to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple,⁶⁴ which Mark and Matthew associate with the apocalypse (Mark 13:14//Matt 24:15). John, of course, reinterpreted the saying to refer to the death of Jesus (John 2:16). But these various associations are not present in Thomas, which does not comment either on the destruction of the Temple or the death of Jesus. The saying, moreover, is formulated differently in Thomas, referring not to the Temple, but instead to a “house.” The reference may be to some ruling house—perhaps the House of Herod, or the House of David⁶⁵—or simply to the household and the social relationships this entailed.⁶⁶ In any event, it should not be read as though it were simply a re-iteration of the synoptic or Johannine versions of the saying.

Of the remaining sayings, none could be construed as apocalyptic in Thomas. They offer straightforward prophetic critique (Thom 39:1–2//Q 11:52), or ironic critical observation (Thom 41:1–2//Q 19:26–27//Mark 4:24–25), or serve an apologetic function (Thom 46:1//Q 7:28; Thom 73//Q 10:2). This is not the only way they could have been used. They have a kind of gnomic polyvalency. This makes them amenable to a number of different contexts, including the apocalyptic context of the synoptic tradition, but not limited to it. In the Gospel of Thomas, in the absence of apocalyptic, they function as prophetic sayings, leveling critique at the ways of the world, or sometimes against more specific foes.

THE PRESENCE OF AN ABSENCE

If this analysis holds up, it must be said that the Gospel of Thomas, for the most part, is lacking an apocalyptic element. It is not entirely absent, but almost. We have seen how Thomas 111 was probably to be read in an

⁶⁴ Note: in Mark and Matthew it is not actually a saying of Jesus, but something attributed to him by his opponents (Mark 14:58//Matt 26:61; Mark 15:29//Matt 27:40). Elsewhere Mark depicts Jesus as predicting the Temple's destruction (Mark 13:2), and later the desolation of the Temple is taken as a sign of the end (13:14), so that Mark's apparent reticence to ascribe the saying directly to Jesus is curious. John assigns it to Jesus (John 2:19), but reinterprets it to refer to Jesus' crucified and risen body (2:16). Again, the reticence to admit that Jesus might have actually said something like this about the Temple's destruction is curious.

⁶⁵ Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 150; Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas*, 172.

⁶⁶ Valantasis, *Gospel of Thomas*, 150.

apocalyptic way. Logion 57, the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds might also have been read apocalyptically. But other sayings that have sometimes been read apocalyptically have, on closer examination, turned out to carry a slightly different pedigree. They are prophetic sayings. What is surprising about them is their rather remarkable polyvalency. Like so many aphorisms and proverbs, they derive their meaning from the context in which they occur. In the Gospel of Thomas, in case after case, these sayings simply take on a variety of meanings; seldom do they take on the mantle of apocalypticism. In the Gospel of Thomas, apocalypticism is notably absent.

The presence of this absence is of course noteworthy because many believe, largely on the basis of the apocalypticism of the synoptic tradition, that the preaching of Jesus and the early Jesus movement were defined by imminent apocalyptic expectation. The fact that Thomas shares so much in common with the synoptic tradition, and yet has so little of its apocalypticism, therefore calls for some explanation.

DeConick believes that originally the Gospel of Thomas would have shared this apocalyptic perspective, but when the apocalyptic expectations of the Thomas group failed to materialize, someone undertook to radically alter the nature of the book by adding material here and there that would recast the book in a different light.⁶⁷ Sayings such as logion 3 and 113 were added, she avers, in an explicit effort to guide the community away from its earlier apocalyptic expectations. But as she tracks her accretions form-critically from saying to saying the editorial changes she assumes were made take on an extraordinary complexity. If she is right, the result would have been an extensive and elaborate endeavor to camouflage what had once been a collection of apocalyptic sayings. But we have already seen that the method by which DeConick arrives at her alleged early apocalyptic layer is highly problematic. Moreover, the imagined original collection would have been quite unique: an apocalypse devoid of narrative or scenario, and lacking any clear historical or cultural markers.

James D.G. Dunn, among many others, has offered a similar solution, but without the problems that attend DeConick's elusive original gospel layer. Angling against Koester's view of Thomas as the surviving strand of a pre-Son-of-Man, non-apocalyptic version of the Jesus tradition, he thinks that the author of this gospel was opposed to apocalypticism in principle (thus sayings 3 and 113), and therefore simply scrubbed the eschatology out

⁶⁷ See esp. DeConick, *Recovering*, 159–174; also “Original Gospel of Thomas,” 195–196.

of the tradition that came down to him, leaving a few sayings like the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (logion 57) behind as the “un-removed residue” of the more original apocalyptic Jesus tradition.⁶⁸

None of this is impossible. But when confronted with the details, the scenarios imagined by DeConick and Dunn do require considerable imaginative effort. Let us take the parables. Of the several shared by Thomas and the synoptics, only four are given explicitly apocalyptic interpretations in the synoptic texts: the Great Feast (Thomas 64; Luke 14:16–23//Matt 22:2–13), the Tenants (Thomas 65; Mark 12:1–11, pars.), the Fisher (Thomas 8; Matt 13:47–50), and the Wheat and the Weeds (Thomas 57; Matt 13:24–30). It is possible that Thomas’ author preferred Luke’s non-apocalyptic version of the Feast to Matthew’s elaborately allegorized apocalyptic version, that he meticulously removed the allegorical (apocalyptic) features of Mark’s version of the Tenants, re-wrote Matthew’s version of the Fisher, and then let the Wheat and the Weeds slip through his apocalyptic filter without notice. But this is probably not what happened. Luke’s Feast is probably much closer to the original parable than Matthew’s elaborate allegory for the history and future of salvation,⁶⁹ save for one redactional phrase added to encourage charity (Luke 14:21; cf. 14:13).⁷⁰ Since the Thomas version is structurally very close to Luke’s, but lacks precisely this redactional phrase, it may be assumed that Thomas also knew an early (non-apocalyptic) version of the parable, but independently of Luke.⁷¹ It is possible that Thomas knew the elaborately allegorized Markan version of the Tenants and de-allegorized it,⁷² but if there was a pre-Markan version of the parable that was not an allegory,⁷³ but

⁶⁸ James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 2006 [orig., 1977]), p. 310.

⁶⁹ So, e.g., Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 433; W.D. Davies and Dale Allison, *Matthew*, ICC (London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 1997) vol. 3, pp. 196–197; Arland Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 342–343; Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear, Then, the Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), pp. 162–163.

⁷⁰ Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, AB 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981) vol. 2, p. 1052; Scott, *Hear, Then, the Parable*, 162–165; Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 337; Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2008), p. 512.

⁷¹ Helmut Koester, “Three Thomas Parables,” in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of Robert McL. Wilson*, ed. A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), pp. 197–198; Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 77.

⁷² Thus, Andreas Lindemann, “Zur Gleichnisinterpretation im Thomasevangelium,” *ZNW* 71 (1980): 236.

⁷³ The issue is a matter of dispute. A few have argued that it was always an allegory, but most would ascribe this development to secondary stages—whether Markan or pre-Markan.

simply a story based on the struggle between owners and tenants,⁷⁴ it seems *prima facie* more likely that the Thomas version would have been derived from that earlier form of the parable.⁷⁵ Is Thomas 8 a de-allegorized version of Matt 13:47–50? Probably not. The structural similarity of Thomas' Fish parable to Matthew's Treasure and Pearl parables (see Matthew 13:44–46) suggests that these three likely circulated together as a trio of wisdom parables. It was Matthew who scooped them up and altered the Fisher to form an *inclusio* with the Wheat and the Tares in his parables chapter (13).⁷⁶ Thomas 8 therefore reflects a pre-Matthean tradition, not post. That leaves Thomas' version of the Wheat and the Tares (Thomas 57). It makes little sense that an editor would have meticulously removed the apocalyptic, allegorical features of the Fisher parable to create Thomas 8, but then left the Wheat and the Tares virtually untouched.

As one continues to think through this scenario saying by saying problems of a similar nature begin to pile up. For example, by Dunn's reckoning, the Thomas redactor will have peeled 21:5 (the Thief in the Night) out of its original Matthean (24:37–44) or Lukan (12:35–40) context to use in a new composition, leaving behind the rest of this material so as to avoid, presumably, the apocalyptic connotations of the original. But what an unfortunate (or inept) choice this would have been. For it is precisely *this* saying that Paul knew and used apocalyptically (see 1 Thess 5:2), and after him Revelation (3:3; 16:15) and 2 Peter (3:10). If his intention was to avoid the apocalypticism of the original, why would he have saved from the original composition the one saying most associated in the tradition with apocalyptic expectation? Also, Thomas concludes logion 21 with the saying derived from Joel 3:13 that Mark used (see Mark 4:29) to turn the parable of the Growing Seed (4:26–28) in a more decidedly apocalyptic direction. Again, this would be a very peculiar redactional choice if the aim were to scrub the tradition clean of all

For a thorough discussion see John Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, WUNT 195 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2006), pp. 50–148; further on Markan redaction of the parable, *ibid.*, 223–241.

⁷⁴ For proposals, see Kloppenborg, *The Tenants*, 106–148.

⁷⁵ The matter would be different if there were significant evidence to otherwise suggest that Thomas knew one or another of the synoptic versions. But this appears not to be so: see Kloppenborg, *The Tenants*, 257–271 for discussion.

⁷⁶ Stephen J. Patterson, "The Parable of the Catch of Fish: A Brief History (On Matthew 13:47–50 and Gospel of Thom 8)," in *Colloque International: "l'Évangile selon Thomas et les Textes de Nag Hammadi," Québec, 29–31 mai 2003*, Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Section "Études" 8, ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-H. Poirier (Laval/Paris: Les Presses de l'Université Laval/Éditions Peeters, 2007), pp. 363–378 (= chapter 8 in the present volume).

apocalypticism. If he had truly wished to wash the apocalypticism out of the tradition, one could much more easily imagine him dropping the saying from Joel and retaining the parable, an image of growth comparable to the Mustard or the Leaven. Finally, we might simply recall the peculiar case of logion 111. Here is an instance where a synoptic phrase ("heaven and earth will pass away") is found in a form that actually seems more apocalyptically attuned in Thomas than in Mark, Matthew or Luke (see discussion above).

It is true that sayings 3 and 113 indicate that at some point in the history of this tradition a redactor had decided that an apocalyptic reading of the Jesus tradition was wrong. And in theory, this has seemed enough of an explanation to account for the near absence of apocalypticism in the Gospel of Thomas: a Thomas redactor must have removed or obscured the original apocalypticism of the tradition. But a more detailed examination of individual sayings cannot sustain this theory. There must be another explanation.

In this analysis of prophetic sayings held in common by Thomas and the synoptic gospels I believe we have found an explanation that is much simpler and straightforward. In examining these roughly two-dozen sayings, we have found them to be remarkably polyvalent. In this regard they are very similar to the many more aphorisms and proverbs shared by Thomas and the synoptic gospels, and of course the parables. This accounts for a large chunk of the Jesus tradition generally speaking, enough to say that the legacy of Jesus' teaching carried with it a great deal of malleability. As frustrating as this may be to historians, who wish, perhaps, to know what Jesus really said, or more importantly, what he really *meant*, the reality of the polyvalence of this tradition cannot be avoided. As those who created the Gospel of Thomas set about gathering up the sayings they would include in it, they apparently chose sayings they thought they could use to provoke reflection on the nature of the world, human being, and the divine light within. These included aphorisms, parables, and a good many prophetic sayings in which others could, and did see quite another potential. Mark and the author/redactor of Q saw in them the seeds of an apocalyptic theology, which Matthew and Luke would, each in their own way, eventually endorse. The Thomas folk must have been aware of these or similar apocalyptic interpretations, and so made it clear that theirs was an alternative interpretation—thus the placement of sayings 3 and 113 near the beginning and end of the gospel. And they must have felt justified in their resistance to an apocalyptic interpretation of the tradition they contested. After all, the existence of a synoptic version of these two sayings (Luke 17:20–21) indicates

that they were not idiosyncratic in their views, and that even in synoptic circles the sentiment was shared, even if as a minority report.

For many years scholars have felt a certain assurance that the synoptic interpretation of the sayings of Jesus is more or less natural, and therefore normative. This, of course, has had implications for our understanding of the preaching of Jesus himself. But the Gospel of Thomas, which offers such a different reading of this familiar material, offers a substantial challenge to this long-standing view. Attempts to fit Thomas into that older view, like DeConick's argument for an original apocalyptic version of this gospel, or Dunn's hypothesis of redactional efforts to de-apocalypticize the tradition, may sound good in theory, but they ultimately founder in the details. This study of the prophetic sayings in Thomas and the synoptic tradition has shown that, like the aphorisms and parables, these sayings, too, have a certain polyvalent quality. It was this quality that made them available for the several interpretations of the Jesus tradition that would unfold in the decades and centuries following the brief period of Jesus own career. As these multiple interpretations come to light and compete once again for attention and legitimacy, history cannot weigh in by pronouncing one of them to be the original, earliest, or natural interpretation. Each will have to stand on its own merits as a very old and venerable interpretation of the Jesus tradition.

CHAPTER TEN

PAUL AND THE JESUS TRADITION: IT IS TIME FOR ANOTHER LOOK¹

THE JESUS-PAUL DEBATE

Among the most vexing problems in the history of New Testament scholarship has been the relationship between Jesus and Paul. The problem is this: although Paul became one of the most prolific representatives of the movement that began with Jesus, by most modern accounts, he pays so little attention to the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth that, paradoxically, one has been forced to conclude that Paul really did not know much about Jesus, or perhaps even that Paul simply was not interested in the historical person Jesus. The discussion of the relationship (or lack thereof) between Paul and Jesus has a history that is both long and complex. But when one surveys the vast literature devoted to the subject one thing stands out: the major advances in the discussion have generally been achieved not by efforts to understand the apostle Paul better, but by new developments in the study of the historical Jesus and the theological program that has always attached itself to this thorny issue.

This may be seen at the very root of the debate itself, in the work of F.C. Baur. Baur shifted the focus of historical study away from John (whose Christology was, in his view, quite advanced and therefore late) and onto the synoptic Gospels, which present us with nothing “extending beyond the idea of a purely human messiah.”² Paul in this scheme became a kind of theological stepping stone, still rooted in the notion of a very human Jesus, but now greatly idealized, so that the teaching of Jesus was not as important as the person and activity of Jesus, the crucified, suffering savior.³ Baur’s work stands at the beginning of a generation of New Testament scholarship

¹ This essay is a revised version of the essay originally published as “Paul and the Jesus Tradition: It Is Time for Another Look,” *HTR* 84 (1991): 23–41.

² Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Geschichte der christlichen Kirche*, vol. 1: *Kirchengeschichte der drei ersten Jahrhunderte* (Tübingen: Fues, 1863), p. 308.

³ Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Vorlesungen über neutestamentliche Theologie* (Leipzig: Fues [L.W. Reislan], 1864), pp. 123–124; Baur, *Geschichte der christlichen Kirche*, 1:309.

that would be characterized by an intense interest in describing the life of Jesus in the most human of terms, a quest chronicled in Albert Schweitzer's classic study.⁴ In many ways it marks the beginning of the liberal quest for the historical Jesus and provides it with its mentality: the thesis of Christianity is to be found not in Paul, but in the Jesus of the synoptic Gospels. Predictably, by the end of this period of liberal theology the chasm between the "morally religious" Jesus and the "dogmatic" Paul had opened even wider. William Wrede provided a yet more radical formulation of the Jesus-Paul debate to accompany the liberal synthesis.⁵ The rallying cry for liberal theology was "back to Jesus, not to Paul."

Wrede died one year after the publication of his book on Paul, and in that same year Albert Schweitzer's book *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* appeared, an apt epitaph to both the scholar and, as it seems in retrospect, the theological movement within which he existed. As Europe struggled through crisis after crisis, and the cultural optimism of the nineteenth century gave way to the sense of dread experienced widely in the years prior to the outbreak of World War I, the optimism of the liberal theology movement received a fatal blow. From the point of view of cultural history, it is perhaps not surprising that Schweitzer's uncompromising apocalyptic presentation of Jesus could now succeed where that of Johannes Weiss in 1892 could not.⁶ The liberal Jesus was dead, his moral teaching outmoded. Schweitzer's apocalyptic Jesus well suited the current theological atmosphere.

During this period of the early twentieth century, the debate over Paul and Jesus lay dormant.⁷ This, of course, is understandable. On the issue of the imminent end of the world, Jesus and Paul could be said to be in fundamental agreement.⁸ The tension between Jesus and Paul, so exploited by Baur and Wrede, seemed now to fade in importance. A significant new contribution to the discussion would not come again until a new synthesis had been reached on the Jesus front.

⁴ Albert Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1906); ET: *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910).

⁵ William Wrede and Wilhelm Bousset, *Paulus* (Halle: Gebauer-Schwetschke, 1904); ET: *Paul*, trans. E. Lummis (London: Philip Green, 1907).

⁶ Johannes Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892); ET: *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, trans. Richard Hyde Miers and David Larrimore Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁷ Victor Paul Furnish notes this lull in his masterful survey of the discussion: "The Jesus-Paul Debate: From Baur to Bultmann," *BJRL* 47 (1964/65): 361.

⁸ That Jesus and Paul were in agreement on the subject of the apocalypse had been argued already by Richard Kabisch, *Die Eschatologie des Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1893).

This synthesis came in the work of Rudolf Bultmann and the form-critical school. If one of the advances offered by the form critics was a much greater awareness of the extent to which the ancient modes of oral transmission undermine any confidence in the scholar's ability to reconstruct something of the actual preaching of Jesus, Bultmann never understood this radical historical skepticism to be a theological step backward or a threat to the authentic apprehension of Christian faith. On the contrary, he welcomed it as positive. While the liberal quest emphasized what it held to be the authentic moral teaching of Jesus, de-emphasizing the more christologically oriented preaching of Paul, Bultmann reversed this. Or rather, he placed the kerygma of Christ crucified and raised at the center of early Christian faith, a kerygma of which the most important early advocate was Paul. In so doing Bultmann did not really undo the position of Baur and Wrede, with their emphasis upon the lack of continuity between Jesus and Paul.⁹ However, in contrast to liberal theology's earlier assessment of this difference, which led to a dismissal of Paul as one who misunderstood the nature of Christian faith, Bultmann embraced Paul's thought. For Bultmann, Paul's genius was his realization that historical knowledge of Jesus' own life neither eases nor controls the decision one is called to make about Jesus as the eschatological in-breaking of God's reign. The decision whether to accept the Jesus event as the turning point of God's history in the world, and thus as crucial for ordering one's own existence accordingly, is a matter of faith. Knowledge about the historical Jesus is neither necessary nor helpful to this act of faith. The great chasm between Paul and Jesus opened up by Baur and Wrede had a theological home once again. This time, however, Paul stood in the limelight, while Jesus stepped back into the shadows.

A NEW PHASE IN JESUS RESEARCH

This brief review of the discussion is not intended to be yet another *Forschungsbericht* on the Jesus-Paul debate. Treatments more complete, and perhaps better conceived, are readily available.¹⁰ Rather, by reviewing a few

⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung des geschichtlichen Jesus für die Theologie des Paulus," *Theologische Blätter* 8 (1929): 137–139; ET: "The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Theology of Paul," in *idem, Faith and Understanding*, ed. R.W. Funk; trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), pp. 220–222.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Furnish, "Jesus-Paul Debate"; David L. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul: The Use of the Synoptic Tradition in the Regulation of Early Church Life*

high points of the debate, I have sought to demonstrate the extent to which each new round has been triggered by new advances in the Jesus question, and ultimately by the great theological syntheses that have emerged over the past century and a half as a result of critical exegesis.

In recent years we have seen a great deal of new work on the Jesus question, so much so that one might even speak of a renaissance of interest in this central problem of New Testament scholarship.¹¹ Much of this work reflects a post-Bultmannian situation that is skeptical about what may be known directly about the Jesus of history. Its focus falls instead on the "Jesus movement," as reflected especially in the early strata of the sayings tradition, often with the expectation that there would have been at least a modicum of continuity between Jesus and the early stages of the movement after his death. However varied the methods and approaches to the Jesus question have been in this latest flurry of activity, many of the most recent efforts have arrived at results that are relatively consistent, so that one may begin to speak of a growing new consensus. The view that seems to be emerging with some regularity is that of a Jesus movement, and by implication a Jesus, who violates social codes and undermines accepted values. He is highly critical of the world in which he lives: its politics, piety, and social economy. In a word, according to the emerging view, Jesus is a social radical.

The first to move the discussion in this direction was Gerd Theissen, with his essays collected in *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*,¹² and his more popular presentation of the thesis, *Soziologie der Jesusbewegung*.¹³

(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. xvii–xxxiii; Steven G. Wilson, "From Jesus to Paul: The Contours and Consequences of a Debate," in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honor of Francis Wright Beare*, ed. Peter Richardson and John C. Hurd (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1984), pp. 1–21.

¹¹ So Marcus J. Borg, "A Renaissance in Jesus Studies," *Theology Today* 45 (1988): 280–292. For additional recent bibliography see John Reumann, "Jesus and Christology," in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 501–564; Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 379–397; and James H. Charlesworth, "From Barren Mazes to Gentle Rappings: The Emergence of Jesus Research," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 7 (1986), pp. 225–230.

¹² Gerd Theissen, *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, WUNT 19 (Tübingen: Mohr—Siebeck, 1979). The first and most important of the articles collected here is "Wanderradikalismus. Literatursoziologische Aspekte der Überlieferung von Wörter Jesu im Urchristentum," first published in *ZTK* 70 (1973): 245–271.

¹³ Gerd Theissen, *Soziologie der Jesusbewegung*, Theologische Existenz Heute 194 (München: Kaiser, 1977); ET: *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

Theissen's thesis is aimed at the movement Jesus founded—the *Jesusbewegung*—more than at Jesus himself. His approach is to describe the Jesus movement in as much depth as possible, and then only to indirectly arrive at some notion of what Jesus was about, by assuming at least some continuity between the Jesus movement and Jesus himself.¹⁴ He argues that the Jesus movement was dominated by a group of homeless, wandering, Cynic-like preachers who lived without possessions, family, and means. Like the Cynics, their wandering radical lifestyle was more than an unfortunate circumstance of their existence; it was the point of their preaching itself.

Although Theissen's thesis about the earliest Christianity has been much disputed in its details and emphases, its success may be measured by the extent to which it has served to set the very terms of the current debate. Even those who have criticized Theissen on a number of points have essentially adopted positions very similar to his. For example, Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann disagree with Theissen over the socioeconomic background of those who would have been attached to such a movement, but they do not dispute his notion that the Jesus movement offered a radical critique of the social world of early Christianity and embraced those who would have been socially and politically marginalized within it.¹⁵ Likewise, Burton Mack has called into question what he sees as Theissen's rather naïve historicizing interpretation of the mission charge in Mark and Q (Mark 6:6b–13; Luke 9:1–6; 10:1–12; Matt 10:1–16). He sees little evidence for wandering missionaries in the sayings tradition, but accepts Theissen's basic characterization of the Jesus movement as something analogous to ancient Cynicism.¹⁶

If Theissen's work is to be faulted in any substantial way, it would be in the manner in which he makes use of the sources, especially the synoptic gospels. He gives virtually no attention to source criticism and the strata to be identified in the tradition. Drawing material from every part of the

¹⁴ Theissen, *Studien*, 91.

¹⁵ Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus von Nazareth. Hoffnung der Armen*, Urban Taschenbücher 639 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978); ET: *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986). For their critique of Theissen, see pp. 48–49 (ET).

¹⁶ Burton L. Mack, "The Kingdom That Didn't Come: A Social History of the Q Tradents," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers* 27, ed. David Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 620–623; see also his *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), pp. 72–74, 84–87.

tradition, he makes no effort to assign relative dates to individual sayings or stories (or versions thereof), nor to assign priority to the material accordingly. Yet more recent efforts to devote more careful attention to such matters have served to confirm, rather than challenge, Theissen's general view. Three recent dissertations on the early Christian sayings gospel Q have reached conclusions essentially affirming Theissen's position.¹⁷ John Kloppenborg's highly regarded dissertation, now revised in monograph form, also supports this general view of earliest Christianity. Kloppenborg argues that originally Q comprised a series of wisdom speeches which "by means of their radical comportment, serve a properly kerygmatic function and point to the radical nature of the kingdom which is in the process of manifesting itself."¹⁸ Kloppenborg calls this early layer in Q "the radical wisdom of the Kingdom of God."¹⁹ In my own work I have attempted to show that the social radicalism identified by Theissen shows up especially in that part of the tradition that is witnessed to independently by Thomas and Q, Thomas and Mark, or by all three—that is to say, at the earliest identifiable stratum of the sayings tradition.²⁰

In addition to these studies there has been a flurry of new discussions that do not presuppose the historical skepticism of the post-Bultmannian era, but dare to speak of Jesus himself, portraying him as a social radical of one stripe or another. Ben Meyer sees Jesus as setting out self-consciously to critique and reform the temple, and thereby to effect a restoration of the true Israel.²¹ Similarly, E.P. Sanders sees Jesus as calling into question the social institution of the law in Judaism, thereby offending the priestly establishment and the temple.²² Marcus Borg presents a view of Jesus as an

¹⁷ Leif Vaage, *Q: The Ethos and Ethics of an Itinerant Intelligence*, PhD Dissertation, Claremont, 1987 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1988), later published as *Galilean Upstarts: Jesus' First Followers According to Q* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994); Risto Uro, *Sheep Among the Wolves: A Study of the Mission Instructions of Q*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae: Dissertationes Humanarum Litterarum* 47 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1987); and Jirair Tashjian, *The Social Setting of the Mission Charge in Q*, PhD Dissertation, Claremont, 1987 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1988).

¹⁸ John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, *Studies in Antiquity and Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 320–321.

¹⁹ Kloppenborg, *Formation*, 242.

²⁰ Stephen J. Patterson, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Historical Jesus: Retrospectus and Prospectus," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1990 Seminar Papers* 29, ed. David J. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 614–636 (esp. 627–636).

²¹ Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979).

²² E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

ancient Palestinian holy person, whose spiritual insight led him to oppose the growing Jewish nationalism under Roman occupation.²³ Borg argues that Jesus' use of apocalyptic language is not to be taken too literally, but to be understood as calling the present world order into question. Richard Horsley also sees Jesus' use of apocalyptic language as socially and politically subversive, and not at all transcendental. For Horsley, Jesus is a kind of proto-revolutionary, opposed to Roman occupation and the local social institutions that collaborated with it: temple, priesthood, Jerusalem.²⁴ To these points of view we could add a number of others, including the theories of Ebertz, Wink and Ringe.²⁵ This remarkable number of recent books on the subject, all of which present Jesus as a social radical, suggests that we are working once again toward a new synthesis of the Jesus question. I would submit that it is therefore time once again to take a fresh look at the Jesus-Paul debate.

NEW DATA: *THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS*

Since Baur the relationship between Jesus and Paul has been discussed primarily in terms of Paul's use of material directly traceable to the synoptic tradition; thus, the discussion must be carried on as much in terms of Paul's relationship to the Jesus tradition as in terms of Paul's relationship to Jesus himself. The problem, of course, is that Paul almost never has recourse to such material. On only three occasions does he actually quote a saying of Jesus that later appears in the synoptic Gospels.²⁶ Paul seems to allude to familiar synoptic sayings in a few more texts.²⁷ To be sure, when spread

²³ Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Mellon, 1984); and more recently, *idem*, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).

²⁴ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

²⁵ Michael N. Ebertz, *Das Charisma des Gekreuzigten. Zur Soziologie der Jesusbewegung*, WUNT 45 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987); Walter Wink, "Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus' Third Way," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers* 27, ed. David Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 210–224; Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation and the Biblical Jubilee*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* 19 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

²⁶ 1 Cor 7:10–11 (cf. Mark 10:11–12 // Matt 5:32; 19:9 // Luke 16:18); 1 Cor 9:14 (cf. Mark 6:8–9 // Matt 10:10 // Luke 9:3; 10:7); 1 Cor 11:23–26 (cf. Mark 14:22–25 // Matt 26:26–29 // Luke 22:14–20).

²⁷ Rom 12:14 (cf. Matt 5:44); Rom 12:17 (cf. Matt 5:39); Rom 13:7 (cf. Matt 22:15–22); Rom 14:13 (cf. Matt 18:7 // Mark 9:42 // Luke 17:1–2); Rom 14:14 (cf. Matt 15:11 // Mark 7:15); 1 Thess 5:2 (cf. Matt 24:43 // Luke 12:39); 1 Thess 5:13 (cf. Mark 9:50); 1 Thess 5:15 (cf. Matt 5:38–48).

throughout the Pauline corpus this is very little upon which to establish any sort of relationship. But the approach that simply tallies the number of synoptic sayings used or alluded to by Paul has its limitations.

First, we are concerned here not simply with the fact that Paul fails to make use of the synoptic tradition. Traditions usually have tradents; one generally assumes this for the synoptic tradition as well as for the traditions found in the Pauline letters. Thus, the problem is one that has social and historical dimensions that are easily lost when one simply counts up the number of sayings referred to by Paul. The social-historical dimensions are as follows: From the first two chapters of Galatians one learns that the early period of Paul's activity in the church was spent in the East. For three years after joining the movement he worked in and around Damascus, in the region of Arabia (Gal 1:16–17), and then, after the first Jerusalem conference, in the region of Syria and Cilicia for about ten years (Gal 1:21). This is a long period of time and a relatively small geographical area within which to move without having encountered at some point the Jesus movement with its rich heritage of sayings. It is true that Paul claims not to have been known among the Judean churches (Gal 1:22), but this claim says nothing of Galilee, Syria, or the Transjordan (Arabia?). To think that Paul came into the ranks of the Jesus movement in this region and yet had no contact with these early Christians who used and preserved the tradition of Jesus' sayings seems almost inconceivable. It is difficult to imagine Paul emerging from this period of his activity unaffected by the Jesus movement as described by Theissen and others.

A second difficulty with approaching the Jesus-Paul debate only in terms of Paul's relationship to the synoptic tradition is underscored by 1 Thess 4:15–17, where Paul quotes a tradition to which he refers as a word (λόγος) of the Lord. The material so designated is an apocalyptic scenario quite unlike that in Mark 13 and its parallels. It is a saying of Jesus that does not occur in the synoptic tradition at all.²⁸ Such instances serve as a reminder of the relatively limited picture of the Jesus tradition presented by those fragments of it that happened to survive antiquity. One should not assume that once one has identified all the Pauline parallels to the synoptic tradition that one has then plumbed the depths of Paul's relationship to the early Christian sayings tradition, in all of its phases and in all of its diversity.

²⁸ Cf. also 1 Cor 14:37, probably referring to 1 Cor 14:26–33a.

Since the discovery and publication of the Gospel of Thomas we have become much more aware of the limited, or “synoptic” view one receives of the sayings tradition from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They indeed do not provide a complete picture of the early Christian sayings tradition. If, as a majority of scholars has come to believe, the Gospel of Thomas represents a trajectory within the sayings tradition that is for the most part autonomous and not dependent upon the canonical gospels,²⁹ any new insights into the sayings tradition gained from the Gospel of Thomas may provide just cause to reexamine the relationship between Paul and the Jesus tradition. The problem may also have been the silence of the Jesus tradition, as we knew it, on positions traditionally associated with Paul. In what follows, I wish to argue that Thomas, by deepening our knowledge of the diversity of the sayings tradition, may help us to better understand the relationship between Paul and the Jesus movement in two ways. First, by broadening our general knowledge of the content of the sayings tradition, Thomas makes it easier to understand how Paul might have emerged from a socially radical Jesus movement with at least some of that earlier experience intact. Second, in providing us with a specific instance of how the sayings tradition might have developed, an instance quite different from that to which the synoptic Gospels witness, Thomas may provide a number of clues as to why Paul, despite his retention of some of the ethos of the earlier movement into which he was called, ultimately shied away from making extensive use of the sayings tradition so characteristic of that Jesus movement.

PAUL AND THE SAYINGS TRADITION IN THOMAS

First, it must be clearly stated that chronologically, the Gospel of Thomas post-dates all of the authentic Pauline letters by at least a decade, and probably more. While a few have wished to date Thomas in the 50s or 60s CE,³⁰ a date in the last decades of the first century or the early part of the second seems a more reasonable guess.³¹ Therefore, it is highly unlikely that

²⁹ For a survey of the literature see Francis T. Fallon and Ron Cameron, “The Gospel of Thomas: A *Forschungsbericht* and Analysis,” *ANRW* 2.25.6 (1988): 4213–4224. See also chapter 4 in the present volume.

³⁰ Most notably, Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983), pp. 16–17 (“contemporaneous with” or “even older than Q”).

³¹ Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Foundations and Facets (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1993), pp. 113–118. Similarly, B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt on P. Oxy. 1 in *The Oxyrhynchus*

the Gospel of Thomas might have been a source for Paul to draw upon, directly or indirectly.³² Rather, let us assume simply that, like the more familiar canonical gospels, the Gospel of Thomas also offers a glimpse into the sort of material that would have been attributed to Jesus in the broad and multi-faceted oral traditions that circulated through the communities of his followers that grew up in the aftermath of his death. Paul did not know the synoptic gospels, John, or the Gospel of Thomas. But in these texts we find evidence for the sayings of Jesus that Paul might have known and the ideas they conveyed. How, precisely, Paul came to know the Jesus sayings to be found in his letters is a question that lies beyond our ken.

On Circumcision

Since Krister Stendahl's landmark book on Paul,³³ students of Paul have become increasingly aware of the central place that the problem of Jewish-Gentile relations occupied in Paul's thought. It is the great issue around which the question of the validity of the law revolves and the problem at which Paul's doctrine of justification is aimed.

In Galatians Paul is dealing with this issue when he takes up the question of circumcision. The problem in the Galatian churches was that apparently, for whatever reason,³⁴ certain people had arrived there advocating that Gentiles in the community submit to circumcision in order to remain within the movement (Gal 5:2–12; also 2:1–10). Although Paul offers a sophisticated

Papyri (London: Henry Frowde [for the Egypt Exploration Fund] 1904) vol. 1, p. 2: "(it is) earlier than 140 A.D., and might go back to the first century"; Helmut Koester, "Introduction" (to the Gospel According to Thomas) in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 together with XII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, ed. Bentley Layton, NHS XX, The Coptic Gnostic Library (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 39–41; or more recently Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel According to Thomas* (New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 12–21 (early second century).

³² A lack of clarity about this in the original version of this essay led to considerable misunderstanding of my position. In the original essay I carelessly wrote of 1 Cor 2:9 that here "Paul quotes a saying of the Gospel of Thomas" ("Paul and the Jesus Tradition," 36). This is, to say the least, misleading. In what follows I will attempt to state more clearly what I meant then: Paul quotes a saying, a version of which is also found in the Gospel of Thomas.

³³ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

³⁴ The debate over the precise identity of these "opponents" is well known. For a discussion of the options see E. Earle Ellis, "Paul and His Opponents: Trends in Research," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, 4 vols., ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1975), vol. 1, pp. 264–298; for literature, see also Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. x, n. 22.

rhetorical and theological argument to convince the Galatians of the superfluity of this act, he realized that at base this is not a dispute over the fine points of legal theory. Rather, it is a question of whether Gentiles would continue to be a part of these communities at all. In Gal 4:17 Paul writes: “they make much of you, but for no good purpose; *they want to shut you out*, that you might make much of them.” Indeed, although a few eccentric Gentiles may actually have been considering such an act (5:2–3 seems to fend off an imminent possibility), one can hardly suppose that this would have seemed a reasonable requirement to most of the Gentile males who had become involved in the community. On the contrary, a majority would no doubt have excused themselves from the assembly, never to be heard from again.

Aside from Acts,³⁵ there is little evidence from the synoptic side of the sayings tradition to indicate that Paul could have inherited this socially radical position on circumcision from members of the Jesus movement whom he encountered in the early years of his work in the East. For all we knew, this position was the work of Paul, created out of necessity as he moved into areas dominated by gentile populations. The Gospel of Thomas, however, may indicate that such a position was not unique to Paul. Thomas 53 reads:

¹His disciples said to him. “Is circumcision beneficial or not?” ²He said to them, “If it were beneficial, their father would beget them out of their mother already circumcised. ³But the true circumcision, in the spirit, brings profit in every respect.”

Although it lacks the theological sophistication of Paul, this burlesque of the tradition surrounding circumcision represents, in its own way, precisely the views of Paul, who sums up his position on circumcision in Rom 2:29a: “One is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal.” Thus, such an abrogation of Jewish-Gentile social boundaries may have been part of the radical tradition to which Paul was exposed already in the East. Alternatively, Paul may have introduced to the Jesus movement the concept of “spiritual circumcision,”³⁶ which then became codified in the form of a legal saying in Thomas.³⁷ In any event, here

³⁵ The speeches and letter in Acts 15 are no doubt relatively late, reflecting conditions in the post-Pauline era.

³⁶ The expression “circumcision of the heart” is well known prior to Paul (see Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; Ex 44:7), but not “circumcision in spirit.”

³⁷ Simon Gathercole, as part of a larger project of demonstrating Thomas’ derivation from New Testament texts, argues that Thomas 53 was actually created on the basis of Rom 2:25–3:2. Both texts share the language of obligation (ἡ ὠφέλεια in Rom 3:1; ῥωφελεῖ in Thomas

is a new connection between Paul and the Jesus tradition that we did not know about before the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas.

Kashrut

The question of what to eat in mixed Jewish-Gentile gatherings was another issue that confronted the communities founded by Paul. If Jews and Gentiles were to gather, as did most ancient clubs and organizations, around the social occasion of a meal, some decisions would have to be made regarding the menu. Would it be “kosher” or not? That the value of defending purity in the form of kosher laws was already a subject of discussion among the early Jesus folk is demonstrated from Mark 7:14–23, especially 19b (= Matt 5:10–20). In *Thom* 14:2–3 we find this tradition combined with another saying, which may help to fill in the social-historical context in which such speculation originated:

⁴And if you go into any land walk about in the countryside and they take you in, eat what they set before you and care for the sick among them. ⁵For what goes into your mouth will not defile you. Rather, it is what comes out of your mouth that will defile you.

Thom 14:2 is simply good advice for homeless vagabonds such as those who promulgated the early sayings tradition (cf. Luke 10:8–9). But from its association with *Thom* 14:3 it is clear that the saying is intended not simply to address the question of how one is to obtain food. The question is whether one must seek to obtain only kosher food, a question that arises only when Jews have crossed over the social boundaries that separate them from Gentiles. Later Paul would use the same tradition to settle the question of how Christians were to behave toward gentile non-Christians on the matter of dietary laws:

53) and circumcision (περιτομή in Romans 2:25; 3:1; *ḥbḥ* in Thomas 53) “in spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι in Rom 2:29 and *ʿn ʾpny* in Thomas 53) (see Gathercole, “The Influence of Paul on the *Gospel of Thomas* [§§ 53.3 and 17],” in *Das Thomasevangelium, Entstehung—Rezeption—Theologie*, BZNW 157, ed. J. Frey, et al. [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008], pp. 76–78). This is, of course, possible. But Thomas lacks any apparent interest in Paul’s theology or themes—such as justification by faith—so it is unclear why Thomas’ author would comb through Romans looking for raw materials by which to create new Jesus sayings. By Gathercole’s account, he came up with two (saying 53 and saying 3 [based on Rom 10:7]), and one more from going through 1 Corinthians (saying 17 [based on 1 Cor 2:9])—precious little for all the effort. The scenario seems unlikely to me. Still, if Paul could be thought to originate the idea of “spiritual circumcision,” perhaps one could imagine indirect influence of Paul on the Jesus saying that appears in Thomas 53.

If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. (1 Cor 10:27)

Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians 10 is a casual occasion, an accidental or incidental occasion in which this question might happen to arise. But in Thomas (as in Mark) there is more implied: the program that was embraced by the Jesus movement involved such a decision by necessity. The Jesus people are to cross the ethnic boundary that divided Jew from Gentile. Our earliest account of this program is in Paul's letter to the Galatians (2:11–14), and from it we cannot tell if Paul had originated the idea of mixed table fellowship, or had merely become its most ardent defender. In any event, Thomas 14 demonstrates that Paul was not alone in his devotion to this practice, but that others who embraced the itinerant life of the apostle were devoted to it as well.

Women

Another social boundary that students of Paul are coming more and more to recognize as abrogated in the Pauline communities is that which existed between men and women.³⁸ While the sayings tradition, as preserved for example in Q, does not explicitly exclude women from participation or leadership in the Jesus movement, one does not find much positive evidence there for their participation.³⁹ Could Paul then have been the initiator of this practice? Thomas provides new information on this front as well. Thomas 114 reads:

¹Simon Peter said to them: "Let Mary leave us, for females are not worthy of life."

²Jesus said: "Look, I will guide her along so as to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit similar to you males. ³For very woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."

³⁸ See, for example, Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *JAAR* 40 (1972): 283–303; William O. Walker, "1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women," *JBL* 94 (1975): 94–110; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), esp. pp. 205–236.

³⁹ So Luise Schottroff, "Frauen in der Nachfolge Jesu in neutestamentlicher Zeit," in *Traditionen der Befreiung*, vol. 2: *Frauen in der Bibel*, ed. Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann (München: Kaiser, 1980) 91–133; *contra* Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 103–154.

As is obvious, this saying does not really free itself from the notions of its day about the relative worth of men and women. Nonetheless, what it says, in its own back-handed manner, is very important for the history of early Christianity. First, the legal saying at the end of this short dialogue indicates that women were involved in the Jesus movement; the mere necessity of such a ruling indicates this. Second, it probably indicates that not all were in agreement on whether women should be allowed to participate fully in the Jesus movement. The opposition to women voiced by Peter in this saying is not isolated, but reminds one of later evidence of a similar dispute in the *Gospel According to Mary* (BG 8502 17,7–18,15) and *Pistis Sophia* (I, 36; II, 72). The dispute evidently continued within early Christianity for many years. The Gospel of Thomas, of course, argues here in favor of women's participation, provided, of course, they "make themselves male."

What is it that this saying requires? What would it mean for a woman to "become male"? Marvin Meyer has demonstrated clearly how such a command might be interpreted among later gnostic groups, in which femaleness was viewed with great suspicion as the locus of passion, earthliness, and mortality, and thus to be transcended in the soteriological path back to the sphere of the divine.⁴⁰ But is there a way in which one might understand this saying in the most practical of terms as well? Could a woman "become male" in any real sense? Elizabeth Castelli has called attention, for example, to instances of actual "androgynization" in the later history of the early church, whereby women took up lives of asceticism, cropping their hair close, adopting male dress, and in extreme cases, enduring physical emaciation to the extent that the female bodily functions and characteristics all but disappeared.⁴¹ While such extreme forms of asceticism cannot be attested for our period, one is reminded of Thecla's wish to cut her hair short and adopt an attire that is more or less male in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*,⁴² whose legends are much older than the second-century date of this text would suggest.⁴³

⁴⁰ Marvin W. Meyer, "'Making Mary Male': The Categories 'Male' and 'Female' in the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS* 31 (1985): 554–570.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Castelli, "Virginity and its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2 (1986): 75–77. One is reminded of the macarism that occurs in *Thom* 79:3: "For there will be days when you say: 'Blessed are the womb that has not conceived and the breasts that have not given milk,'" discussion: Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 153–155.

⁴² So Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *HR* 13 (1974): 196. For Thecla's disguise see the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 3,25; 40.

⁴³ See Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), pp. 17–33.

When one thinks of the perils a woman itinerant might expect to encounter on the highways and in the marketplace of the ancient world, the practical nature of such traditions becomes apparent.⁴⁴

In any event, Thomas 114 provides clear evidence within the sayings tradition for the existence of women disciples. Mary (it is not clear which Mary is intended here) is taken as the predecessor of all women who would become disciples. Thus, Paul may well have had good precedent, even from out of the sayings tradition, for including both women and men in the organization of the Christian communities he founded.

In each of these instances one may see the continuity between Paul and the sayings tradition precisely in terms of the tradition of social radicalism that both share. Much more could be said along these lines. For example, one could explore further the extent to which Paul had himself adopted an itinerant lifestyle. Certainly he had made compromises, a choice that eventually bore awkward consequences for him when the Corinthian church discovered that other apostles from the East did not carry a trade, but chose instead to risk relying upon the provisions supplied by sympathetic patrons.⁴⁵ The extent to which Paul continued the social radicalism of the Jesus movement, generally speaking, is a subject worth pursuing.

Using the Gospel of Thomas to broaden our general knowledge of the early Christian sayings tradition may provide ways of imagining how Paul could have arrived at his socially radical interpretation of the gospel even through the sayings tradition. It may also help explain why Paul eventually decided to break from the sayings tradition, or at least adopt a reluctant stance rather than make use of it in his correspondence. To this question I now turn.

PAUL'S BREAK FROM THE JESUS (SAYINGS) TRADITION

In 1 Corinthians Paul engages a certain group that has arisen in the community he founded there, a group that seems to have distinguished itself by

⁴⁴ In popular literature of the period the dangers a woman traveler might encounter are exploited for the purposes of titillation in Xenophon's *Ephesaica*; for a readily available translation of this text see Moses Hadas, *Three Greek Romances*, Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), pp. 71–126.

⁴⁵ This is Theissen's interpretation of 1 Cor 9:3–18; 2 Cor 11:7–15, 12:13; see his "Legitimation und Lebensunterhalt. Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie urchristlicher Missionare," in *Studien*; ET: "Legitimation and Subsistence: An Essay on the Sociology of Early Christian Missionaries," in *idem*, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, trans., ed. John H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), pp. 40–54.

touting a theology rooted in Hellenistic Jewish wisdom speculation of the sort one finds, for example, in the writings of Philo of Alexandria.⁴⁶ To Paul's consternation, they have apparently claimed to possess special knowledge, a kind of esoteric wisdom, on account of which they have also sought to claim a special status within the community (1 Cor 1:10–4:21). Moreover, because of these claims members of this group have come to see themselves as having already entered the new age that is to come, a position that is described using various metaphors and acted out in terms of behavior. Already they have begun "to rule" (4:8); already they have begun to practice the freedom that is to accompany the new age (6:12; 10:23); and they reject the idea of a future resurrection of the dead, believing instead that by virtue of the spirit they had already transcended bodily existence and entered into immortality (15:12).⁴⁷ Paul for his part responds by stressing that the wisdom of God cannot be the basis of special claims to status within the community (e.g. 1:18–31); that the consummation of the reign of God is yet to come (e.g. 4:5); and that as Christ was raised from death, new life only comes through the future resurrection of the (transformed) body (15:20–28).

Paul adopts a variety of strategies to deal with the problems posed by the views of this group. For example, in 1 Corinthians 2 he uses the wisdom style of these opponents to compose his own "wisdom speech" (2:6–16), only to correct their views with a few well-placed Pauline twists.⁴⁸ In the midst of this speech Paul quotes the following saying:

But as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit. (1 Cor 2:9–10a)

⁴⁶ So Richard A. Horsley, "PNEUMATIKOS vs. PSYCHIKOS: Distinctions of Spiritual Status among the Corinthians," *HTR* 69 (1976): 269–288. Horsley takes as his point of departure the earlier work of Jacques Dupont, *Gnosis: La connaissance religieuse dans les épîtres de Saint Paul* (Paris: Gabalda, 1949), pp. 172–180, and Birger A. Pearson, *The PNEUMATIKOS-PSYCHIKOS Terminology in 1 Corinthians*, SBLDS 12 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1973), pp. 11–12, 17–21. See also John C. Hurd, *The Origins of 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965); and Ulrich Wilckens, *Weisheit und Torheit: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu 1. Kor 1 und 2*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 26 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1959).

⁴⁷ For a recent vetting of this common interpretation of 15:12, together with other theories, see Christopher Tuckett, "The Corinthians Who Say 'There is no resurrection of the dead' (1 Cor 15:12)," in *The Corinthians Correspondence*, BETL 125, ed. R. Bieringer (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Uitgeverij Peeters, 1996), pp. 247–275.

⁴⁸ For the position that Paul has composed the speech to mimic the wisdom style of those whom he opposes in Corinth, see Pearson, *PNEUMATIKOS-PSYCHIKOS Terminology*, 27–42; cf. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 57–60.

The source for this saying is a long-standing mystery. Paul obviously did not create it, as he refers to it as though he were quoting scripture. However, there is no obvious scriptural source for the saying. Isa 64:4 (64:3 LXX) provides two of its three poetic phrases ("what no eye has seen, nor ear heard"), but these phrases occur as window dressing in many and diverse places in Jewish and Christian tradition. Moreover, Isaiah uses them very differently from the saying in 1 Corinthians. In Isaiah no eye has seen nor ear heard of another God besides Israel's God; in 1 Corinthians no eye has seen nor ear heard the secret wisdom of Israel's God.⁴⁹ Where, then, did it come from? Origen famously attributed it to a secret book of Elijah,⁵⁰ but the extant recensions of the Apocalypse of Elijah do not contain it.⁵¹ There are many versions of the saying in early Christian literature, but all of them post-date Paul and so could not have been his source.⁵² Still, there are also many non-Christian parallels,⁵³ one of which lies relatively close to Paul's quotation both chronologically and formally.⁵⁴ One may therefore reasonably take Paul at face value and assume that he is quoting *something*, presumably a watchword for some Jewish tradition of revealed teaching. Further, if Pearson is right in assuming that Paul's use of the saying does not reflect his own intrinsic interest in esoteric teaching, but a desire to meet his opponents on their own terms,⁵⁵ we may also perhaps assume that this was a saying known to them as well. Perhaps it was a snippet of early Jewish liturgy,⁵⁶ which the Corinthian partisans had taken up into their own spiritualized ritual life.

⁴⁹ Thus Tuckett rightly rejects the theory Isaian derivation that extends back to Jerome ("Paul and the Jesus Tradition: The Evidence of 1 Corinthians 2:9 and Gospel of Thomas 17," in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, NovTSup 109, ed. Trevor Burke and J. Kieth Elliott [Leiden: Brill, 2003], pp. 57–58).

⁵⁰ *Comm in Matt* 27,9 ("in secretis Eliae prophetae").

⁵¹ For a recent discussion of Origen's claim see Joseph Verheyden, "Origen on the Origin of 1 Cor 2,9," in *The Corinthians Correspondence*, BETL 125, ed. R. Bieringer (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Uitgeverij Peeters, 1996), pp. 491–511. Verheyden concludes that "we have to dispense with the ApocEl hypothesis as a possible solution for the question about Paul's source" (p. 511).

⁵² 1 Clem 34.8; 2 Clem 11.7; Dial Sav 57; Martyrdom of Peter 10, Acts of Thomas 36, etc.

⁵³ Michael Stone and John Strugnell, *The Books of Elijah* (Parts 1 and 2), Texts and Translation 18, Pseudepigrapha Series 8 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979); further, Klaus Berger, "Zur Diskussion über die Herkunft von 1 Kor. II,9," *NTS* 24 (1977): 270–283.

⁵⁴ From Ps. Philo in the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 26.13.

⁵⁵ See note 48, above.

⁵⁶ So Pierre Prigent, "Ce que l'œil n'a pas vu, 1 Cor. 2,9," *TLZ* 14 (1958): 416–492 (esp. pp. 427–428); more recently Takashi Onuki, "Traditionsgeschichte von Thomasevangelium 17 und ihre christologische Relevanz," in *Anfänge der Christologie: FS F. Hahn*, ed. C. Breytenback and H. Paulson (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 398–415 (esp. 405–407).

Now, it so happens that this mysterious saying also turns up in the Gospel of Thomas as a saying of Jesus:

Jesus said, "I will give you what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no hand has touched, and what has not arisen in the human heart".

(Thomas 17)

This raises the question: is there any relationship between the theology of the Corinthian partisans and the Gospel of Thomas?

Helmut Koester pointed out already in his 1968 essay, "One Jesus, Four Primitive Gospels," that Paul's opponents in 1 Corinthians must have advocated something like the wisdom theology reflected in the Gospel of Thomas.⁵⁷ Indeed, the similarities are significant. The Corinthians, like the Thomas Christians, are clearly interested in the saving power of secret words of wisdom (1 Cor 1:18–25; cf. Thom 1). Furthermore, because of the immediacy of insight as a vehicle of salvation, they have jumped ahead of Paul's timetable: "Already you have become kings! (ἐβασιλεύσατε)" Paul rebukes, "And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!" (1 Cor 4:8b). This last charge is particularly interesting in view of Thomas, saying 2,⁵⁸ in which the successful outcome of one's quest for saving knowledge and insight is described precisely with the metaphor of "reigning":

¹Jesus said, "Let him who seeks seek until he finds, ²and when he finds, he will be disturbed, ³and when he is disturbed, he will marvel, ⁴and he will rule (ἡγαρῶ) / βασιλεύσῃ) over the universe."

⁵⁷ "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," *HTR* 61 (1968) 203–247; reprinted: in *idem* and James M. Robinson, *Trajectories Through Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 158–204 (see esp. *Trajectories*, 186); see also *idem*, "Gnostic Writings as Witnesses for the Development of the Sayings Tradition," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. I: *The School of Valentinus*, Studies in the History of Religions 16, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), pp. 248–250; and *idem*, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990), pp. 55–62. Koester calls attention to similarities in the language of 1 Corinthians 1–4 and several sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas*. He suggests that a sayings collection common to both Thomas and Paul may account for such similarities. See the similar remarks of James M. Robinson, "Kerygma and History in the New Testament," in *idem* and Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 42–43. Robinson, however, points to Q rather than Thomas: "First Corinthians and Q have in common the issue of Jesus and Wisdom. It is possible that the Q material may in part have had a *Sitz im Leben* similar to the conflict in Corinth; that is to say, the prevalent Bultmannian assumption that the sayings of the Lord are not likely to have played a role in Pauline Christianity might not be as obvious as it has seemed."

⁵⁸ Koester (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, 60) notes the connection and suggests that Paul's comments amount to an ironic rendering of Thomas 2.

Throughout 1 Corinthians Paul argues against those in Corinth whose enthusiasm has carried them into the kingdom of God ahead of Paul's schedule. The Thomas tradition would clearly stand with these enthusiasts against Paul. They might well have taken great stock in sayings such as Thomas 3, 113, and especially 51:

His disciples said to him, "When will the rest for the dead take place, and when will the new world come?" He said to them, "That which you anticipate has (already) come, but you do not recognize it."

One thinks here of 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul argues against the view that there is no future resurrection and that the wise have been assured of their immortality already in the present.⁵⁹

But perhaps most importantly, throughout 1 Corinthians Paul seems so intent upon reminding the church over and over again of the particular significance of Jesus' death (1:13, 17, 18–25; 6:14, 20; 11:26). One might well guess that Paul's opponents here would have assigned little importance to any of the content of the early Christian creedal formula Paul cites in 15:3–4: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures." The opponents were not interested in Jesus' death as a saving event. One is reminded that within the earliest sayings tradition, not only in Thomas, but also in the earliest version of the synoptic sayings source, Q, there is virtually nothing to indicate that its tradents would have had any use for such a formula.⁶⁰ But this is natural enough: in the Gospel of Thomas it is insight gained through Jesus' words that can bring about the presence of the reign of God here and now (Thomas 3).

So, were Paul's opponents in Corinth "Thomas Christians"? Had Apollos or someone else brought to Corinth a copy of the Gospel of Thomas? I do not think this to be very likely. The Gospel of Thomas was written later,⁶¹ and in a place far removed from Corinth and the Pauline mission.⁶² But the Gospel

⁵⁹ See note 47, above.

⁶⁰ I refer here to Kloppenborg's formative layer of Q (or Q¹), a collection of wisdom speeches in which there is no reflection upon the nature of Jesus' death as a saving event (*Formation*, esp. 171–245); see also Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 86.

⁶¹ See note 31, above.

⁶² Most scholars consider eastern Syria as the most likely provenance for the Gospel of Thomas; see esp. Henri Ch. Puech, "The Gospel of Thomas," in *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1: *Gospels and Related Writings*, trans. Robert McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), p. 286; Gilles Quispel, "L'Évangile selon Thomas et les Clémentines," *VC* 12

of Thomas clearly shows the potential of the Jesus tradition to develop in the direction of that Hellenistic Jewish wisdom tradition often thought to lay behind the theology of Paul's Corinthian opponents. Moreover, this turn toward seeing in Jesus' words a secret and revealed wisdom is not late, but early. Not only do we find it mirrored in 1 Corinthians, but also in the other early Christian wisdom gospel, Q, where it crops up in a cluster of sayings whose language also has a certain resonance with 1 Corinthians:

²¹[Jesus] said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you hid these things from sages and the learned (σοφῶν καὶ συνειτῶν) and revealed them to babies (νηπίοις); indeed, Father, for that is your will. ²²All things have been given to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."⁶³ (Q 10:21–22)

In this cluster of sayings we find the same concept expressed with the same terminology. Like Paul, the Q folk believed that God had chosen to reveal things to them that were hidden from the "wise" (σοφῶν) and "understanding" (συνειτῶν) (cf. 1 Cor 1:19). The author of Q here refers to the recipients of revelation as "babies" (νηπίοι), the opposite of "wise" in any conventional

(1958): 181–196; *idem*, "L'Évangile selon Thomas et le Diatessaron," *VC* 13 (1959): 87–117; *idem*, "The Syrian Thomas and the Syrian Macarius," *VC* 18 (1964): 226–235; *idem*, "L'Évangile selon Thomas et les origines de l'ascèse chrétienne," in *Aspects du judéo-christianisme: Colloque de Strasbourg 23–25 avril 1964 / Travaux du Centre d'Études Rupérieures Spécialisés d'Histoire des Religions de Strasbourg* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), pp. 35–52; R. Mc.L. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960), p. 10; Bertil Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins/New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), pp. 271–272; A.F.J. Klijn, "Das Thomasevangelium und das altsyrische Christentum," *VC* 15 (1961): 146–159; *idem*, "Christianity in Edessa and the Gospel of Thomas: On Barbara Ehlers, Kann das Thomasevangelium aus Edessa stamen?" *NovT* 14 (1972): 70–77; Helmut Koester, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: On the Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," *HTR* 58 (1965): 279–318; in *idem* and J.M. Robinson, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 114–157 (see pp. 126–128); *idem*, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 79; Benley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1987), pp. 360–364, 377; J.D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992), pp. 23–26; Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 118–120; Jens Schröter and Hans-Gebhard Bethge, "Das Evangelium nach Thomas [Einleitung]," in *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 1. Band: *NHC I,1–V,1*, GCS n.F. 8, ed. Hans-Martin Schenke, Hans-Gebhard Bethge, and Ursula Ulrike Kaiser (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 151–163 (esp. 156–157); Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008), pp. 17–22.

⁶³ The Q translation is based on the Q text as reconstructed in James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress/Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 192.

sense. Was this a term the Q folk used to describe themselves? Now, when Paul attacks the partisans in Corinth it is precisely this term that he selects to wield against them: "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of flesh, as babies (νηπίοις) in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1). Could Paul have been using the partisans' own self-designation against them? What else of their own making was Paul turning against them? As it happens, the very next saying in Q also sounds strangely familiar:

Blessed are the eyes which see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.⁶⁴ (Q 10:23)

This is obviously not exactly the same saying Paul quotes in 1 Cor 2:9, and which turns up later in Thomas 17. Tuckett argues that it is not the same saying at all: it is formally different (a beatitude) and it contains only two of the three clauses held in common by 1 Cor 2:9 and Thomas 17: here are eyes that see and ears that hear, but no hearts in which thoughts arise. And these two clauses are the precisely Isaian clauses, which occur in so many places. Yet, given the context in which the Q saying occurs and the use to which it is put, it is difficult to ignore Helmut Koester's instinct that here is yet another spur of this tradition.

It is not my project to explain the tradition history of this saying. Rather, I am interested only in the simple fact that the ideas Paul opposes in 1 Corinthians are in some way current in two early wisdom gospels—gospels in which the sayings of Jesus played a decisive role. This, it seems to me, offers us a way of understanding how Paul could share with the sayings tradition a strong sense of social radicalism, while at the same time eschewing the sayings tradition itself. He could go along with the notion of counter-cultural wisdom, of God choosing the foolish children of the world, rather than the conventionally wise and knowing, to reveal his secrets. But Paul could not accept the way wisdom theology finally works. For Paul it was not Jesus' words that compelled him into the counter-cultural life of the wandering apostle, but Jesus' death. But this is what goes missing in Thomas, and in large measure Q as well.

It is not insignificant that among Paul's letters his social radicalism reaches its finest expression in a *baptismal* formula:

⁶⁴ Based on the reconstructed Q text of Robinson, et al., *Critical Edition*, 196, 198.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:27–28)

As we have seen, at least on the issue of Jews and Greeks and males and females, Paul and Thomas Christians would have found no quarrel. The crucial difference is how one arrives at this status. For Paul this was not primarily a matter of hearing Jesus' words. It was a matter of baptism, baptism understood in the Pauline way:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? For we were buried therefore with him by baptism unto death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3–4)

Baptism for Paul is death. Only by dying to the world with Christ can one be raised into the new life in Christ, a life in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor male and female. Paul may have come to eschew the sayings tradition because in the form in which he encountered it (as perhaps among the Corinthian partisans), it did not emphasize the very thing that Paul considered to be crucial to entering into the socially radical position of this new movement: the death of Jesus. Paul shared with the Jesus movement its social radicalism; he simply could not arrive there by the same route. For them, the reign of God was present in the spoken word; for Paul it became real only when one could accept the cross as one's own death to the world.

Even though one should not press the point as far as saying Paul's opponents in 1 Corinthians were Thomas Christians, the Gospel of Thomas does provide some basic insights into the potential of the sayings tradition to produce precisely the sort of views Paul was combating in Corinth. Thus, it may not have been the case that Paul was simply uninterested in the sayings tradition, or even that because of his experience of the risen Lord, Paul was unconcerned with the Jesus of history. Paul may have come to reject the tradition of Jesus' sayings (despite the fact that he himself would have originally come into the Christian movement via the Jesus movement) because in the form in which he later encountered it among other missionaries to the West, its theological tendencies turned out to be unacceptable to him.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the relationship between Jesus and Paul is a theological problem, it must first be solved as a historical problem within the context of the

primitive Christian movement. How can one imagine Paul emerging from the Jesus movement in the East and at the same time failing to make use of the traditions so characteristic of that movement: the sayings of Jesus? Bringing the Gospel of Thomas into the discussion of this problem has demonstrated three things:

First, in seeking answers to these questions it is necessary to take into account the full diversity of earliest Christianity. Thomas reveals a side to the sayings tradition that one does not see when looking at the synoptic gospels alone. As the full range and theological potential of the sayings tradition becomes more and more apparent, as Thomas and other early Christian witnesses to the sayings tradition are included in the data base, new solutions to some of the vexing problems of Christian origins will no doubt begin to suggest themselves. Here I have tried to show how bringing Thomas's material into the data base for determining the scope and potential of the sayings tradition may help to explain why it was that Paul did not make much use of the sayings tradition.

Second, the differences to be observed between the synoptic tradition and Thomas may be one of the clearest demonstrations of how various interpretations of traditional material might proceed from a common beginning. This underscores an additional point: the various movements in earliest Christianity were not theologically static.⁶⁵ In the case of Q one may observe a gradual development away from earlier wisdom forms of speech toward apocalyptic speculation⁶⁶ and rumination on the significance of the death of Jesus, developments that would have been quite compatible with Paul's own thinking. But in the Thomas trajectory, one finds quite different tendencies at work. In Thomas the sayings tradition is moving in a more esoteric direction, tending even toward Gnosticism,⁶⁷ and ignoring the traditions growing up around the death of Jesus. With this Paul would not have been comfortable.

This leads then to a third point: tallying the overt or implicit parallels between Paul and the Jesus tradition will never solve the problem of their relationship. How a tradition was heard and used in its various contexts needs to be evaluated carefully. Where, how, and how often did Paul or the

⁶⁵ This is the fundamental insight suggested by the collected essays of Robinson and Koester in *Trajectories*.

⁶⁶ So Kloppenborg, *Formation*, 102–170, 322–325.

⁶⁷ James M. Robinson, "LOGOI SOPHON: On the *Gattung* of Q," in idem and Koester, *Trajectories*, 76–85.

communities he founded encounter the sayings tradition, and in what form? We should not assume that every time a saying of Jesus appears in Paul he or his readers would have heard it within the theological framework of a synoptic Jesus.

Including the Gospel of Thomas in our overall picture of what the tradition of Jesus' sayings could have meant to early Christians helps us to understand more clearly the relationship between Paul and the Jesus tradition. On the one hand, certain sayings in Thomas suggest how Paul may have arrived at some of his classic positions, such as the annulment of circumcision for Gentiles, the relativizing of dietary laws, and the inclusion of women as leaders in the church, not *in spite of* his relationship to the Jesus movement, but *because of* that relationship. Paul was not alone in any of these positions. Thus, the point of continuity between Paul and the Jesus movement may be established in terms of their common social radicalism. On the other hand, Thomas reveals some of the tendencies that might, and did, unfold within the sayings tradition, to which Paul would not have assented. It may therefore help also to explain why it was that Paul ultimately did not make much use of the sayings tradition. In that form in which he later encountered it, he simply did not agree with the turn it had taken.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS AND CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS¹

HAS THOMAS MADE A DIFFERENCE?

The Gospel of Thomas has been with us now for more than 50 years. What impact has this very different new text had on our understanding of Christian beginnings? In 1991 Ron Cameron wrote of the state of this question:

It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that *Gos. Thom.* has been treated in isolation, if not actually ignored, by most biblical scholars because its account of Christian origins does not square with the conventional picture gathered from the writings of the New Testament.²

Ten years later, regrettably, it must be said that Cameron's suspicions are still warranted today. Even though there is now a considerable body of research on Thomas, and a good bit of it of a revisionist nature, in the wider discussion of Christian origins the Gospel of Thomas still is not making much of an impact. A quick survey of the several major works devoted to Christian origins that have appeared in the last decade is, on the whole, discouraging. Ekkehard and Wolfgang Stegemann do not mention Thomas at all.³ Luise Schottroff and Gerd Theissen both make small, though magnanimous gestures toward Thomas,⁴ but have not allowed their overall conception to be affected by it. Even Greg Riley, whose investigations into Thomas are significant in their own right, does very little to integrate Thomas into his later project on Christian origins, *One Jesus, Many Christs*.⁵ The one exception to

¹ Originally this essay appeared as "The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Beginnings," in *The Gospel of Thomas in Recent Study*, ed. Jon Asgiernesson, et al., NHMS 59 (Brill: Leiden, 2006), pp. 1–18.

² Ron Cameron, "The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins," in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. Birger Pearson, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), p. 388.

³ Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O.C. Dean (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

⁴ Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), p. 87; Gerd Theissen, *The Religion of the Earliest Churches: Creating a Symbolic World*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 284–285.

⁵ Gregory J. Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs: How Jesus Inspired Not One True Christianity*,

all of this, of course, is John Dominic Crossan's *The Birth of Christianity*,⁶ to which I will turn shortly. While each of these works makes a creative new contribution to our view of Christian beginnings, the Gospel of Thomas and other extra-canonical literature still remain as pieces to be accounted for in a redrawn landscape of earliest Christianity.

In this essay I wish to sketch out some of the basic areas in which this task of broadening the textual base of our historical work to include Thomas might proceed, even while acknowledging the work that has been done so far.

THE DIVERSITY OF CHRISTIANITY AT THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY

There is first of all the task of understanding Thomas in itself, as a text of early Christianity at the end of the First Century. With Thomas more fully described we shall have a richer sense of the diversity of Christianity during that very crucial period. Happily, a number of very fine studies of Thomas that have appeared during the last decade or so have greatly enhanced our understanding of Thomas in itself.⁷ One may note here the work of Lelyveld,⁸ Davies,⁹ Pagels,¹⁰ Sellew,¹¹ DeCo-

But Many (New York: HarperCollins, 1997); cf. his earlier work, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

⁶ John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).

⁷ Recent surveys include Gregory J. Riley, "The Gospel of Thomas in Recent Scholarship," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 227–252; and Philip Sellew, "The Gospel of Thomas: Prospects for Future Research," pp. 327–346 in John Turner and Anne McGuire, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (NHMS 44; Leiden: Brill, 1997). Earlier see Francis T. Fallon and Ron Cameron, "The Gospel of Thomas: A Forschungsberichte and Analysis," pp. 4195–4251 in W. Haase and H. Temporini, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2/25.6 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988); and Ernst Haenchen, "Literatur zum Thomasevangelium," *ThR* n.F. 27 (1961/62) 147–178, 306–338.

⁸ Margaretha Lelyveld, *Les Logia de la Vie dans L'Évangile selon Thomas: A la Reserche d'une Tradition et d'une Rédaction*, NHS 34 (Leiden: Brill, 1987).

⁹ Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983); and more recently "The Christology and Protology of the Gospel of Thomas," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 663–682.

¹⁰ Elaine H. Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John," *JBL* 118 (1999): 477–496.

¹¹ Philip Sellew, "Death, the Body, and the World in the Gospel of Thomas," in *Proceedings of the XII International Patristics Conference, Oxford, 1995*, ed. E.A. Livingstone, *Studia Patristica* 31 (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), pp. 530–534.

nick,¹² Zöckler,¹³ Valantasis,¹⁴ and the studies by the Finish school collected and edited by Risto Uro.¹⁵ Now, not all of this work is similarly oriented. Lelyveld, for example, locates Thomas within a Jewish apocalyptic milieu, while Davies and Pagels place Thomas in the world of Jewish exegesis of Genesis associated especially with Philo of Alexandria, and DeConick stresses evidence for the practice of ascent mysticism among its readers. Each of these studies is, in my view, helpful in explaining some of the sayings in Thomas—sometimes astonishingly so. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to press all of the sayings of Thomas into one or another of these interpretive schemes. This may mean that we will look in vain for a single theological framework that will successfully hold the whole book together. It is, after all, most certainly a cumulative piece of literature gathered over several years, perhaps decades. A unified theological perspective may not be a realistic expectation from such a text. Or it may mean that the thing holding the whole collection together is not a set of ideas or a consistent theology, but, as Valantasis has suggested, a common agenda: the refashioning of a new self through *askesis*¹⁶—an agenda that is quite compatible with all the various theological tastes in evidence here.

The broadly redefined concept of asceticism Valantasis has brought to this discussion¹⁷ raises once again the issue I sought to highlight in my first attempt to understand Thomas in 1988: the social radicalism that seems to be promulgated by this text.¹⁸ Most aspects of this thesis remain undisputed, with many of them appearing in Valantasis' work, now helpfully redefined under a new theory.¹⁹ I say "most," for one very important aspect of this

¹² April D. DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); also *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature*, JSNTSS 157 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

¹³ Thomas Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium*, NHMS 47 (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

¹⁴ Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, New Testament Readings (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); and "Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical?" *J ECS* 7 (1999): 55–81.

¹⁵ *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) with essays by Risto Uro, Ismo Dunderberg, and Antti Marjanen.

¹⁶ Richard Valantasis, "Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical?" 78–79.

¹⁷ For the theoretical framework proposed by Valantasis, see his "Constructions of Power in Asceticism," *JAAR* 63 (1995): 775–821.

¹⁸ Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Foundations and Facets (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1993), esp. pp. 121–157.

¹⁹ See Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, *passim*.

social radicalism has been widely challenged in Theissen's work, from which I had drawn my own theoretical orientation, viz., itinerancy.²⁰ And more recently William Arnal has criticized my own work along these same lines.²¹ In spite of these critiques, I remain convinced that itinerancy was indeed an important part of the socially radical ethos promulgated by the Gospel of Thomas, as I have recently indicated.²² I persist for two reasons:

First, as Theissen argued, many of the socially radical sayings one finds in the Jesus tradition—and now in Thomas—are simply incompatible with normal village life. For example, no one could embrace Thom 55 (“Whoever does not hate his father and his mother ... his brothers and his sisters ... cannot become a disciple of mine.”) and remain comfortably in place in an ancient agrarian village, where one's entire social world begins and ends with stable family structures. It is not just those sayings that recommend or presume itinerancy that are important here, but also those sayings which would have necessitated it, if they had been embraced.

Second, neither Theissen's thesis nor my own appropriation of it rested primarily on an analysis of Q (as many have assumed), but on a variety of texts and traditions where itinerant practice seems to be reflected, including the Didache, 3 John, James, Acts, the Pauline epistles, and now Thomas. I thought, and still think I see itinerancy in Thomas not just because of my reading of Thom 42, 12, or 14, but because of the way its trajectory stands in relation to other trajectories running through the last decades of the first century. Following the work of Georg Kretschmar and Erik Peterson,²³

²⁰ For Theissen's theory see his “Wanderradikalismus. Literatursoziologische Aspekte der Überlieferung von Worten Jesu im Urchristentum,” *ZTK* 70 (1973): 245–271, and the other essays gathered and reprinted in Gerd Theissen, *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, 2. Auflage, WUNT 19 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983). Burton Mack has challenged Theissen's itinerancy thesis in “The Kingdom That Didn't Come,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers*, ed. David J. Lull, ed. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 620–621; as has Richard Horsely in *Sociology of the Jesus Movement* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 13–64. John Kloppenborg has also challenged Theissen's understanding of early Christian itinerancy, but not the presence of itinerant radicals. See his “Literary Convention, Self-Evidence, and the Social History of the Q People,” in John Kloppenborg and Leif Vaage, eds., *Semeia 55: Early Christianity, Q, and Jesus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), pp. 89–90.

²¹ William Arnal, “The Rhetoric of Marginality: Apocalypticism, Gnosticism, and Sayings Gospels,” *HTR* 88 (1995): 480–482.

²² Stephen J. Patterson, “*Askesis* and the Early Jesus Tradition,” in *Asceticism and the New Testament*, ed. Leif Vaage and Vincent Wimbush (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 54–56 (= chapter 7 in the present volume).

²³ Georg Kretschmar, “Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese,” *ZTK* 61 (1964): 27–67; Erik Peterson, “Einige Beobachtungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen Askese,” in his collected essays, *Frühkirche, Judentum, und Gnosis. Studien und Untersuchungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1959), pp. 209–220.

especially, it seemed to me that the path leading from Palestinian Christianity to Syrian Christianity was an itinerant one, marked on one end by the early Jesus tradition, and on the other by the itinerant, ascetical practices in evidence in texts associated with Edessa and the east. Thomas' content connects it to both ends of this journey, as simple aphorisms and parables from the early Jesus tradition sit side by side with and enclosed on either end by sayings that connect Thomas to Syrian Christianity—connections reinforced again recently by Alexei Siverstev.²⁴ I thus concluded that Thomas was quite likely a key text in that journey, both figuratively and literally. As Thomas Christians wandered to Syria, they brought with them their itinerant habits and their correlate theology.²⁵

However, there are two aspects of the critique of Theissen that must be taken to heart.²⁶ The first, from Mack, is that the notion of a "mission" in the early Jesus tradition seems to be rooted in the specific apocalyptic urgency of Q, which may not have characterized the whole of early Christianity.²⁷ This is borne out by an examination of the Thomas parallels to the "mission discourse" in Q. Thom 14 (= Q 10:8–9) offers no hint of a mission.²⁸ And the harvest saying used in Q to introduce the entire discourse as a "mission" (Q 10:2) occurs in Thomas as an independent logion (Thom 73) with no connection to the mission speech.²⁹ The second, from Kloppenborg, is that the wandering folk of the mission discourse in Q are not presumed to be leaders, but enjoy rather a weak position with respect to those who might take them in.³⁰ This is so in Thomas as well, where those who wander are not themselves leaders, but are counseled about how they might regard others who would lead them (see Thom 3 and 12, for example). These are valid criticisms of Theissen's hypothesis, and by extension, my own views

²⁴ Alexei Siverstev, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Early Stages of the Development of Christian Wisdom Literature," *J ECS* 8 (2000): 319–340.

²⁵ See my discussion in *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 166–168, 210–212.

²⁶ I restrict myself here to those aspects of the discussion that have a direct bearing on the earliest period of Christian beginnings. I will not take up, for example, the firestorm of critique occasioned by Theissen's notion of "Liebespatriarchalismus" in the Second Century church, which is another aspect of the discussion to be taken to heart.

²⁷ "The Kingdom That Didn't Come," 620–623.

²⁸ Ron Cameron, "Alternate Beginnings—Different Ends: Eusebius, Thomas, and the Construction of Christians Origins," in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi*, ed. Lukas Bormann, Kelly Del Tredici, Angela Standhartinger, *NovT Supp* 74 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 521.

²⁹ For the independence of the Thomas version of this saying and its tradition-historical implications see my *Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 56–57.

³⁰ Kloppenborg, "Literary Convention," 89–90.

on Thomas. The question, then, is: if these itinerants who promulgated the Thomas tradition were not on a mission, what were they doing? And if they were not leaders, what was their role in the circles they frequented?

In a recent essay³¹ I have tried to answer these questions with the use of Valantasis' theory of asceticism, to which I have alluded above. Valantasis describes ascetic practice as a set of "performances ... intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe."³² A more apt description of the practices advocated in the Gospel of Thomas one will not find. Gaining a new sense of self, a new "subjectivity," is at the heart of the Gospel of Thomas. And yet this centering on self is not a private thing. It involves interrupting and creating new social relations; it has a public side. As such, the practices and attitudes promulgated in its sayings bring one into a *performative* mode. And not only the practices advised in these sayings, but also the very act of collecting sayings itself presumes their later delivery in some kind of *performance*. The sage must hold forth—in the synagogue, in the agora, at table. And these performances of word must be followed by deeds to match: more performance in *praxis*. And what does one expect from a performance in antiquity? An ancient expects a performer to be engaged in *mimesis*, in the *imitation* of life—life not as it is, but better than it is (comedy), or worse (tragedy).³³ To Aristotle's categories we might add the performative life of the religious ascetic. An ascetic imitates life, not as it is, but as it might be in some imagined ideal. This describes, in my view, what the Thomas folk were about. Those who cultivated the traditions of the Gospel of Thomas were not leaders of a movement with a mission. They were performers of an existence and a self-understanding that is understood as an ideal. "When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father" (Thom 3:4).

Whether or not one accepts these arguments about itinerancy, one of the most important tasks before us now is to understand better the relationship between the socially radical ethos of Thomas Christianity and the various theological impulses contained in its sayings. This constitutes a program for

³¹ See note 22, above.

³² Richard Valantasis, "Constructions of Power in Asceticism," *JAAR* 63 (1995): 797. For Valantasis' own more recent attempt to apply this theory to the Gospel of Thomas, see his "Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical?"

³³ See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 2.7. For fuller discussion see Patterson, "Askesis and the Early Jesus Tradition," 59–61.

pursuing a “thick description” of Thomas Christianity in order to determine its distinctive contribution to and place within the diversity of Christianity at the end of the first century. Such a program is necessary regardless of how one finally resolves the much-debated question of Thomas’ relationship to the synoptic tradition.³⁴ For there is so much in Thomas that bears no relationship at all to the synoptic tradition, and the interpretive strategy for presenting those materials that are held in common is so distinctive, one would at any rate need to account for the Thomas *perspective* and the distinctive *practices* it entertains, as part of the theological and social-historical landscape of early Christianity. Just as one could not overlook, say, “Johannine Christianity” in a complete accounting of Christian beginnings, so also one cannot now overlook “Thomas Christianity” in its distinctive characteristics.

In pursuing this program, however, one must be very careful not simply to work Thomas into the existing model for Christian origins that, as Cameron has suggested, relies overly much on the myth of origins provided by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, and adopted by Eusebius as the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.³⁵ This will always be a temptation because Thomas does not provide its own alternative myth of origins to rival the story told by Luke (*contra* Cameron). To the contrary, as a sayings collection, this absence of story is one of the most distinctive and challenging aspects of Thomas. Indeed, Thomas does not need a story, a myth of origins, for it has no need of establishing the antiquity or uniqueness of its traditions.³⁶ Those who made use

³⁴ This question has proven to be a thorny problem in the history of the Thomas discussion. For a review of the literature see my “The Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptic Tradition: A Forschungsbericht and Critique,” *Forum* 8 (1992): 45–97. More recent proposals have made the discussion even more complex, including especially that of Hans-Martin Schenke, “On the Compositional History of the Gospel of Thomas,” *Forum* 10 (1994): 9–30. Schenke argues on the basis of a series of apparent narrative spurs in Thomas that its sayings were drawn from a narrative work, but not one of our known gospels. Risto Uro (“Thomas and the Oral Gospel Tradition,” *Thomas at the Crossroads*, pp. 8–32) has revived the idea of “secondary orality,” first promulgated by Kline Snodgrass some years ago (“The Gospel of Thomas: A Secondary Gospel,” *The Second Century* 7 [1989–1990]: 19–38), as a way of arguing for Thomas’ dependence on the synoptic gospels, while acknowledging evidence in Thomas of a certain freedom over against the synoptic text themselves. Similarly, Jens Schröter argues that the synoptic formulation of sayings has influenced Thomas in specific instances, but rejects the direct literary dependence of Thomas upon the synoptic gospels (*Erinnerung an Jesu Worte. Studien zur Rezeption der Logienüberlieferung in Markus, Q und Thomas*, WMANT 76 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997]: *passim*).

³⁵ Ron Cameron, “Alternate Beginnings.”

³⁶ Cf. Cameron’s analysis of the Eusebian tradition and its motivations in “Alternate Beginnings,” 507–511.

of this gospel were convinced that the insights they enjoyed from the living Jesus (Thom, *Prologue*) could now pour forth from *them* just as authentically as it did/or does from Jesus himself (Thom 13 and 108). Those who understand these sayings are themselves said to be full of life and light. This revelatory multiplicity is itself a challenge to the tendency to tell the story of Christian origins with a singular point of departure at its core. Thomas seems to presuppose a movement with Jesus at its center, but still a *movement*, not a cult.

SOME ELEMENTS OF A NEW STORY:
CROSSAN AND "ETHICAL ESCHATOLOGY"

The people who found the Gospel of Thomas useful did not need a story. If we want or need one, we will have to author it ourselves. How will the Gospel of Thomas help us to write that story differently? One way, of course, will be through a thick description of this gospel and the life it prescribes, and accounting this as part of the diversity of Christianity as it existed at the close of the first century. But Thomas can help us in other ways as well. One of the most interesting things about the critical discussion of Thomas has been the way it has helped us to see things in the Jesus tradition whose presence or significance had been overlooked before. The best instance of this is the presence of an aphoristic core in Thomas, much of which overlaps the synoptic tradition, in which however, the apocalyptic framework of the synoptic gospels is absent. This helped us to see in early Christianity an aphoristic tradition in which the operative theological perspective was sapiential, not apocalyptic. Understanding this as an important part of the diversity of Christian beginnings changes everything. No one has seen this more clearly than John Dominic Crossan, who has built these insights first into his work on the historical Jesus, and more recently into his quite revolutionary account of Christian beginnings, *The Birth of Christianity*. His discovery and description of "ethical eschatology" as "non-violent resistance to systematic violence"³⁷ is a development with implications reaching beyond the discipline of Christian origins, into the very heart of Christian theology itself. What would it mean for theology to take seriously the eschatological possibility of non-violent transformation, and to forswear once and for all our western Christian predilection to looking for divine activity in the chaotic and indiscriminate violence of apocalyptic?

³⁷ Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, 287.

But Crossan's description of this early Christian theology associated with the aphorisms of Jesus raises another question of origins—or more precisely, of disappearances. If Crossan's ethical, or "sapiential" eschatology existed, say, at mid-First Century, by the end of the century it had passed from the scene. The parables and aphorisms that conveyed that perspective had been absorbed into the synoptic gospels, which reframed them in apocalyptic mythology, or into the Gospel of Thomas, which presented them as esoteric teaching to transform the self in preparation for the heavenly journey home. In neither instance was this sapiential core retained to inspire non-violent cultural transformation. It was absorbed and washed over with perspectives interested less in transformation and more in culture's violent destruction (apocalyptic) or in abandoning the world altogether in favor of a heavenly home (speculative wisdom theology or gnosis). Why was this?

Part of the answer to this question must surely lie in the unfolding events that engulfed the eastern Empire, and the Jews especially, in the last decades of the First Century. As events spiraled ever closer to outright revolt and open warfare, chaos and violence would have become the dominant experience of Christians living in the eastern part of the Empire, most of them still Jews. As they, their families, and their friends were swept up into the violence of the Jewish War and the hardships of its aftermath, profound questions would have arisen among those committed to the reflective and non-violent processes of personal and cultural transformation cultivated in the aphoristic wisdom of the early Jesus movement. What happens when resistance to violence is rendered irrelevant by the overwhelming violence of war—not seen from a distance, but raging through one's own communities? In the face of such grave circumstances only those of 'Ghandian' fortitude persist. Most are moved, either to embrace a mythic framework within which violence can be reconciled to some overall divine plan for justice and the triumph of God (apocalyptic), or, to withdraw into the inner realm of mysticism or cosmic speculation with the hope of personal transformation and, ultimately, translation out of this world of woe (speculative wisdom theology or gnosis). Of these alternatives, the synoptic gospels represent the former, Thomas and John represent the latter. I can see no Christian Ghandi at the end of the first century.

The question of the disappearance of Crossan's "ethical eschatology" by the end of the First Century, together with the ascendancy of apocalyptic and speculative wisdom theology or gnosis, raises a related question, namely, the overwhelming influence the experience of war must have had on the texts of the New Testament and their various dominant ideas. With the exception of the earliest letters of Paul, all of the writings of the New

Testament would have been profoundly affected by this peculiar cultural situation. To what extent, then, is “New Testament Christianity” a wartime religion? How does this context determine the topics that emerge as important in the texts of the New Testament—such as martyrdom, loyalty (πίστις), or resurrection as vindication? And what does it mean that these topics have been given a normative role in shaping the Christian religion, even apart from the immediate experience of war? These are broad sweeping questions, but they are the kind of question that the project of re-charting the landscape of the first Christian century will ultimately occasion.

SOME ELEMENTS OF A NEW STORY:
THOMAS, PAUL, AND JEWISH MYSTICISM

With recent studies taking us deeper into the nature of Thomas Christianity in itself, one might anticipate that there are many more such discoveries to be made. How will the peculiar details of the Thomas trajectory help us to see other aspects of the story of Christian beginnings in a new light, or new episodes in that story we have overlooked entirely?

No one can know the answer to this question. Nonetheless, the possibilities might be illustrated with an example. April DeConick’s study of the Gospel of Thomas and her more recent study of the Gospel of John and Thomas,³⁸ have demonstrated anew that certain of Thomas’ sayings are best understood within the context of Jewish mysticism. Some of these sayings are among the most mysterious of Thomas’ gems (e.g. Thom 15, 84, 53) and generally have been regarded simply as part of the exotica to be expected from such a strange new text. But in recent years Jewish mysticism has emerged once again as an important topic in the history of early Judaism, with New Testament texts forming part of the basis for this discussion.³⁹ Of

³⁸ See note 12, above.

³⁹ See, e.g., Jarl Fossum, “Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism,” *VC* 37 (1983): 260–287; *idem*, “Kyrios Jesus and the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5–7,” *NTS* 33 (1987): 226–243; *idem*, “Colossians 1.15–18a in the Light of Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism,” *NTS* 35 (1989): 183–201; Gedaliahu Stroumsa, “Forms of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ,” *HTR* 76 (1985): 269–288; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroads, 1982); James Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul’s Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986); C.R.A. Morray-Jones, “Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12):

particular importance in this respect is Alan Segal's work on Paul.⁴⁰ Paul was clearly part of this tradition, and drew others into it as well.

This evidence for Jewish mysticism in both Paul and Thomas gives us a context for understanding the oft-noted parallel between 1 Cor 2:9 and Thom 17: "I will give you what no eye has seen, and what no ear has heard, and what no hand has touched, and what has not occurred to the human mind." What Jesus promises in Thomas, Paul claims to have received already "through the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:10). The result of this revelatory experience for Paul might well be termed "illumination." So we may conclude from the way in which Paul typically describes his encounters with the divine, as, for example in 2 Cor 4:6: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Paul is describing here the inner illumination he has received as a result of seeing the "glory of God in the face of Christ" in a visionary experience.⁴¹ Moreover, Paul believes that his own illumination is intended to shine forth as a light to others, whose unbelief or ignorance has kept them from "seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4).

These or similar ideas are all thoroughly at home in the Gospel of Thomas. Thomas also speaks of the image of God, in which there is light, and from which those who encounter it may also receive illumination (Thom 83; 61:5). What is more, a "person of light" is not to conceal the light, but to let it illuminate the whole world. This is the sense of Thom 24:

¹His disciples said, "Show us the place where you are, for it is necessary for us to seek it."

²Jesus said to them, "Whoever has ears to hear should listen: ³There is light within a person of light, and he sheds light on the whole world. If he does not shine, there is darkness."

In this saying the disciples wish to follow Jesus, the true light person (cf. Thom 77) to his place, the heavenly realm of light, "the place where the light has come into being by itself, has established [itself] and appeared in their image" (Thom 50). But Jesus refers them instead to their own place, the world, where they shall illuminate the "whole world."

The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate, Part 1: The Jewish Sources," *HTR* 86 (1993): 177–217, and "Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance," *HTR* 86 (1993): 265–292.

⁴⁰ Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990) esp. pp. 34–71.

⁴¹ Notice the context, 2 Cor 3:18–4:6; for discussion see Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 59–62.

Segal has shown that in Paul, as in Jewish mysticism generally speaking, illumination and ecstatic religious experience is accompanied by a profound sense of transformation, from earthly to heavenly, from mortal to immortal. Moses, Jacob, Enoch: these mortals all became immortal after ascending to the heavens and encountering the *kavod* (glory) of God. For Paul this is true as well, only—astonishingly—more so even than Moses. In contrast to Moses, who wore a veil over his face so that no one would notice that his visage, initially illuminated by the beatific vision, soon faded, “we,” says Paul are different: “... we all, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image (εἰκόνα) from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). What is most striking here is the idea, common in Jewish mysticism, that one who beholds the glory of God will be transformed by the experience into the likeness, or “image” (εἰκών) of God—God’s human form. For Paul, of course, the human form of God, the Son of Man, the “Lord,” is Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul thinks of himself as being “in Christ,” or even “having the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). And he speaks of a future resurrection in which the followers of Jesus will shed the “image of the man of dust,” which all have inherited from Adam, and bear the “image” of the “heavenly man,” Christ (1 Cor 15:49). They, Paul says, have been “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first born of a large family” (Rom 8:29). Thus, Paul looks forward to the day when the Lord “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil 3:20–21).

DeConick has shown that this same set of ideas about personal, even bodily transformation through mystical experience are present in the Gospel of Thomas as well. She argues, for example, that this is the proper framework for understanding the enigmatic Thom 22:4–7:

⁴Jesus said to them, “When you make the two one and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below—⁵that is, in order to make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female will not be female—⁶when you make eyes in place of an eye and a hand in place of a hand and a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, ⁷then you will enter the Kingdom].”

Strange as this saying may seem, its ideas are not all that different from ideas we find scattered throughout Paul’s letters. Paul, for example, more than likely knows the Jewish tradition of exegeting Genesis 1–2, in which Adam’s fall is taken to result in the sexual differentiation of humanity into male and

female—a rift now to be mended in Christ.⁴² And Thomas' description of part-by-part bodily transformation is only a more vivid statement of what Paul speaks of as being transformed gradually, "from one degree of glory to another," until finally the believer comes to share the same glorious "image" as Christ (2 Cor 3:18), exchanging "an image in place of an image."⁴³ Finally, Thomas is familiar with the idea, seen also in Paul, that the transformation one seeks is ultimately, to become like Jesus himself. This is what Thom 108 is speaking of, albeit using metaphors that are distinctive to Thomas over against Paul:

Jesus says, "Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me. ²I myself will become he ³and what is hidden will be revealed to him."

This, in Thomas' own distinctive parlance, is "having the mind of Christ."

To these ideas about spiritual transformation and identification with Christ (or Jesus) we should probably add the closely related idea from Jewish mysticism that those who experience God by ascending to the heavens will themselves become divine, or "children of God." This is how one should probably understand Paul's statement in Rom 8:14–16:⁴⁴

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ

Paul is speaking here of a moment of religious ecstasy in which it becomes clear to the ecstatic that he/she is a child of God. Thom 3:4 presents this same basic notion of religious awakening, though in this case not clearly associated with pneumatic ecstasy:

"When you know yourselves you will be known and you will realize that you are sons of the Living Father."

⁴² Cf. Gal 3:28 and the treatment of this early baptismal formula by Dennis MacDonald in his study *There is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying in Paul and Gnosticism*, HDR 20 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). On the role of speculative Jewish exegesis of Genesis 1–2 and its roll in Thomas' theology, see Elaine Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis 1," and Stevan Davies, "The Christology and Protology of the *Gospel of Thomas*," *JBL* 111 (1992): 663–683.

⁴³ That Valantasis ("Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical?" pp. 71–72) regards this saying as key to understanding Thomas' asceticism should not trouble here. The connection between asceticism and mysticism is well known, and Paul himself would be a second example of the coordination of these two phenomena in early Christianity to set along side the example of Thomas ...

⁴⁴ Segal (*Paul the Convert*, 249–250) suggests this is how to understand the passage.

The realization that one is a child of God was not without its detractors in early Christianity, especially when it was linked to the practice of baptism, as it likely was in both Pauline and Thomas Christian circles,⁴⁵ and understood as the achievement of immortality already in the present life. It was probably this idea of premature transformation, of becoming immortal already, among the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:8) that caused Paul to distance himself from baptism in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 1:14–16), for it had, in his view, led to excess claims of exalted status among the “strong” at Corinth. This is probably also the reason Paul follows the claim to “child of God” status in Romans 8 with the caveat in 8:17b: “provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” The exalted, glorified Christ of Paul’s vision was also Jesus, the crucified messiah, whose fate as a martyr was inextricably linked to his exaltation as the Son of God. Sharing in Christ’s glory meant also sharing in his inglorious fate (2 Cor 4:7–18).

And yet these problems did not lead to the abandonment of this idea in Pauline circles. It persisted as an element in Paulinism, where we encounter it near the end of the century in Luke, whose author was the great admirer and rehabilitator of Paul. It occurs in Luke’s version of Jesus’ reply to the Sadducees who try to stump him with a question about a woman’s marital status “in the resurrection” age to come:

Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed, they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”⁴⁶ (Luke 20:34–36)

David Aune rightly argues that this saying speaks of persons who have *already* been deemed worthy (note the aorist participle, καταξιωθέντες) in this life and elevated to the status “sons of God.”⁴⁷ He locates the saying in the context of early Syrian Christianity and the practice of “Christian baptism in a quasi-gnostic setting,”⁴⁸ where, of course, the Gospel of Thomas was also

⁴⁵ For Paul see Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 249 (in reference to Romans 6); for Thomas and baptism see Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Garments of Shame,” *HR* 5 (1965/66): 217–238 (in reference esp. to Thom 37).

⁴⁶ Cf. Mark’s version, which Luke has modified: “For when they rise from the dead they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”

⁴⁷ David Aune, “Luke 20:34–36: A ‘Gnosticized’ Logion of Jesus?” in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion. Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Peter Schaefer (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996), pp. 191–192.

⁴⁸ Aune, “Luke 20:34–36,” 196–199 (the quotation is from his conclusion, p. 200).

quite at home. But one should not overlook the roots of this idea in Christian circles evident already in Paul, whose own grounding in Jewish mysticism and speculative eschatology places him in this very same trajectory within early Christianity.

There is much more to be said here, of the way these ideas were grounded biblically through exegesis of Genesis 1–2, of the correlate practices that were worked out around these ideas, ascetical ideals, and of course, of difference and sameness, of overlaps and departures. Nevertheless, the point I am trying to make is this: understanding Thomas in itself, as part of the diversity of Early Christianity, will help us to see and understand aspects of other, better known ways of being “Christian,” that we had not noticed before. The idea of mystical transformation, present in Paul’s letters, and continuing on a trajectory in the Pauline school tradition, and even nominally present in the Gospel of Luke at the end of the century, is an example of how the presence of something in Thomas might serve to draw our attention to that same odd something elsewhere in the more familiar texts of early Christianity. This underscores once again the importance of not allowing later distinctions of “canonical” versus “non-canonical” to influence our thinking about where Thomas might fit into the landscape of early Christianity. Placing Thomas and other lesser known texts into the mix will change things by helping us to see phenomena we had never seen before, which nevertheless may have been very important for those who counted themselves in the followership of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the current literature on Christian origins that the Gospel of Thomas still has not made the kind of broad impact that one might have expected at its discovery some 50 years ago. Among those who have begun to take it seriously, however, the landscape of earliest Christianity has begun to take on some striking new features. And old features, previously overlooked or perhaps just misunderstood, have been seen in a new light. Eventually, Thomas may necessitate the drawing up of a new map of Christian beginnings, and new story to account for this uncharted geography will have to be told. In this retelling there will be new episodes, and the familiar episodes we thought we knew so well may appear unfamiliar in the new light cast upon them by Thomas and other rediscovered or newly appreciated texts. Luke’s metanarrative will have to be evaluated against all the actual experiences and their interpretations that filled the diversity of earliest Christianity in its

historical particularity. It is a large agenda, but the charting of this diversity in early Christianity has been underway now for more than a generation, beginning with Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*,⁴⁹ and developing through Robinson and Koester's programmatic essays in *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*,⁵⁰ and continuing more recently in the subtle historical work of Schuessler Fiorenza,⁵¹ Mack,⁵² and Crossan.⁵³ That Luke's vision of a seamless story with a single strand, a clear path in the history of salvation, was an artificial construct has for many years been widely recognized. Nonetheless, that tidy version of things has a powerful appeal that makes it difficult really to abandon. The Gospel of Thomas is one of the texts now forcing us to come to grips with the reality that earliest Christianity was not tidy. Its history was just as messy as history always is, and just as rich. The more we take Thomas seriously as part of that diversity of interpretation and experimentation that followed Jesus, the more we will appreciate the richness of Christianity's complicated origins.

⁴⁹ Originally published in German in 1931, translated by the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins in 1971 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

⁵⁰ James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁵¹ Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

⁵² Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

⁵³ Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*.

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