

# The Gospel According to Thomas: A Gnostic Manual

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JUST after the end of the war, in 1945 or 1946, a remarkable collection of Coptic manuscripts was discovered by some Egyptian farmers in a ruined tomb near the village of Nag-Hammadi, the ancient Chenoboskion, in Upper Egypt. They contained nearly fifty documents in thirteen books, all in the codex form (not scrolls, but quires of folded leaves), written on papyrus, most of them still in their original leather bindings. Many circumstances combined to delay publication of the new documents. First there were disputes over ownership; one of the books was brought to Switzerland and added to the Bodmer Library in Geneva, where it was given the name of the Jung Codex, in honour of the great psychologist;<sup>1</sup> the others came gradually into the possession of the Egyptian government and have been lodged in the famed Coptic Museum of Old Cairo, where an international team of scholars is working at them. The Suez troubles led to a long interruption in the work, and the desire of the scholars themselves to make their studies as complete as possible put off still further the actual printing of the texts.<sup>2</sup> So it comes that it is only in the last two or three years that these important and interesting documents have begun to be put at the disposal of learned investigators, apart from the few who have been immediately charged with preparing them for publication.

## I. GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE COLLECTION

It has now become apparent that this library belonged to a Gnostic sect which stemmed from the school of Valentinus, the greatest of the Gnostic theologians of the second century. He was an Alexandrian Greek who moved

1. F. L. Cross, *The Jung Codex* (London, 1955); the *editio princeps* is published under the title *Evangelium Veritatis* (Zurich, 1956), by M. Malinine, H.-Ch. Puech, and G. Quispel, with translations into French, German and English. Four missing leaves, now in the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo, have been published in photographic facsimile by Dr. Pahor Labib in *Coptic Gnostic Papyri in the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo*, Vol. I (Cairo, 1956), which also contains photographs of the Thomas manuscript.

2. Dr. W. C. Till recently remarked: "There is little hope that these texts will be published in rapid sequence unless the present idea that a detailed commentary ought to be given in the *editio princeps* is abandoned" (*New Sayings of Jesus in the Recently Discovered Coptic 'Gospel of Thomas,' Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Vol. 31, No. 2, March 1959, p. 448, n. 3). Since then Thomas has been published in a preliminary edition—*The Gospel According to Thomas: Coptic Text established and translated*, by A. Guillaumont, H.-Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, W. Till and the late Yassah 'abd al Masih (Leiden and New York, 1959). Philip has been presented in a German translation, with notes, in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung* for January, 1959. Dr. Till himself promises an early edition of the Cairo pages of the Gospel of Truth in *Orientalia*.

to Rome about the middle of the century; he appears to have remained in the communion of the church until several years later. Until now, he has been known to us chiefly through the medium of his catholic opponents, especially St. Irenaeus, the great bishop of Lyons; but some writings of his disciples have long been available and there are a few citations from his own works in Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus. The new texts will greatly increase our knowledge of his school and of its characteristic doctrines, and enable us to depict more clearly the theological struggles of the church of the second century.

## II. THREE NEW GOSPELS

Of the documents that have been published up to the present time, three bear the name of Gospel. First came the *Gospel of Truth* (part of the Jung Codex), then the *Gospel according to Thomas*, and most recently the *Gospel according to Philip*. Thomas consists wholly of *logia*—sayings attributed to Jesus, and sometimes little dialogues between Jesus and other people—Thomas, Matthew, Simon Peter, Salome, Mary (Magdalene), his disciples, and occasionally an indeterminate “he” or “they.” The others are quite different in character; they do not profess to report words of Jesus, except incidentally, but are enunciations and expositions of Gnostic doctrines, offered as the true understanding of the Christian faith. What they actually teach is an esoteric theosophy, the “Gnosis (that is, knowledge) falsely so-called” against which we are warned by a contemporary Christian teacher writing in the name of Paul (I Tim. 6:20). The basic teaching of Thomas is no different, but it is presented as “the secret words which the Living Jesus spoke,” with the assurance that “whoever finds the understanding of these words will not taste death.” In fact, a great part of the book consists of authentic sayings of Jesus. Nearly half of them are paralleled in our own Gospels, from which indeed they may have been derived; and it is possible that some of the others may be genuine sayings of our Lord which have not been preserved in the canonical Gospels—they must be considered on their merits. But whether authentic or not, all the sayings are employed here in the service of the Gnostic doctrine.

## III. GENERAL FEATURES OF THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

It is highly significant that in this Gospel, Jesus never acts. He is the Revealer, but he makes his revelation wholly by words. Now it is fundamental to the whole concept of divine revelation as given to us in the Bible that God reveals himself above all in action; “the mighty *acts* of the Lord” are the theme of the whole Old Testament, and the Jesus who speaks to us in the Gospels is not just a Voice proclaiming hidden truths, but a man of action, who “went about doing good, and healing all that were under the

tyranny of the devil" (Acts 10:38).<sup>3</sup> But the Jesus of the Gnostics is not a man of action. In fact, he is not a man at all. He is a heavenly Aeon or Emanation of divinity, who is neither born nor crucified—he has no real union with the human appearance in which men have seen him. The revelation which he brings is not given through the medium of a truly human life, lived in the particular human circumstances of Galilee, Jerusalem and Judaea of the early first century. Even the words, which are all that remain of his revelation, are not the words which he spoke in public, but "secret words" which he delivered to his disciples and which are known and understood only in the privileged circles of Thomas and his friends.

The Logia in Thomas, then, are not embedded in a narrative or related to a ministry of love and power. They are not even arranged in any kind of order. They are self-contained units, each standing by itself, without any connection with what follows or what has gone before. It is perhaps significant that the materials which have parallels in the Synoptic tradition never stand in the same order in Thomas as in Mark or Matthew or Luke. He has, for instance, all seven of the parables which are given in Matthew 13; but if we number these in the Matthaean order, we find that in Thomas the numbers would run as follows: 7, 1, 3, 2, 4, 6, 5—and they are not collected, but spread over a wide area, from Logion 8 (The Fishnet) to Logion 109 (The Hidden Treasure). We might add, also, that just as Jesus never acts, in this Gospel, so none of his words embody a call to action on the part of his disciples; there is nothing remotely resembling the call to take up the cross and follow Jesus, to love your neighbour, or even to pray. Thomas, indeed, seems to be opposed to prayer and fasting and giving of alms. The knowledge of the truth has no issue in works of piety and charity.

#### IV. DATE OF THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

The manuscript which contains Thomas cannot be dated with certainty; competent specialists place it as early as the third century and as late as the sixth. The translation into Coptic will of course have been made somewhat earlier. The main question, however, is the date of the Greek original. The editors are inclined to think that it may have been compiled as early as A.D. 140; in any case, it cannot be much later than the middle of the second century. The significance of this early dating lies in the fact that there were still floating oral traditions of Jesus which had not been embodied in documents, and this means that we must envisage the possibility that Thomas drew part or all of his material from oral tradition, or that what he drew from documents may have been modified by independently-transmitted oral versions with which he was acquainted. The problem of determining the sources of this Gospel is accordingly very complex. In part, the author (or

3. Cf. the profoundly true remark of Austin Farrer: "God's revelation is not what anyone says, even though the speaker be Jesus himself. It is a power, a fact, active in the world, and compelling recognition" (*St. Matthew and St. Mark*, London, 1954, p. 10).

compiler) seems to have made use of other apocryphal gospels, especially the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* and the *Gospel according to the Egyptians*; for some of his *Logia* coincide with the wording of citations from these Gospels or correspond to remarks about them which we find in the early Fathers. In part, he seems to have drawn upon our canonical Gospels, especially Matthew and Luke; and it is possible that all of his *Logia* which are represented by parallels in the Synoptics are derived from them, however differently they may be framed and arranged—"Thomas" himself may be responsible for the recasting. In part, he makes use of materials which are not found elsewhere; and in every case, we must try to determine whether he has invented them himself or whether they may possibly be fragments of an oral tradition; and there is always the possibility that genuine sayings survived in oral tradition as late as the middle of the second century. Questions such as these cannot be easily or hastily answered; they will call for patient investigation and strenuous debate. It has already been shown that there are some interesting points of contact between the *Logia* of Thomas and the form in which sayings of Jesus are cited in the Clementine literature;<sup>4</sup> and other byways of ancient Christian writings will have to be explored diligently in the search of kindred relationships.

## V. PERSONALIA OF THE LOGIA

### (1) THOMAS

The book opens with the sentence: "These are the secret words which the Living Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote." Here we might remark that the Gnostic sects generally claimed to possess a tradition of secret teaching which Jesus had communicated to one or other of his disciples, and which had then been preserved by an elite group but was unknown to the *doctrina publica* of the church. Against this, the catholic Fathers argued that the apostolic tradition was not secret in the first place, and that it was absurd to suppose that the apostles would have withheld an esoteric doctrine from their legitimate successors, the bishops, while they committed it to the obscure founders of the Gnostic schools. But the author of this Gospel is not content with a general theory of secret doctrines. For him, there are some doctrines which are still more secret and may not even be uttered. According to Logion 13, Jesus asked his disciples to say what he was like. Simon Peter compared him to a righteous angel, and Matthew to a philosopher; but Thomas affirmed that his mouth would be unable to express any such comparison. This answer was evidently taken as a mark of superior spiritual discernment, for Jesus now declared: "I am not your Master, for you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring which I have meted out." The thought is probably that Thomas no longer needs a Master, for he has the source of knowledge within himself;

4. G. Quispel, "L'Évangile selon Thomas et les Clémentines," *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (December, 1958), pp. 181-196).

intoxication is here probably a figure for the highest spiritual ecstasy, the mystical participation in the divine nature. With that, Jesus took Thomas aside and spoke three words to him. Afterwards, the others asked Thomas what Jesus had said, but he refused to tell them; for, said he, "If I tell you . . . , you will take up stones and stone me; and fire will come from the stones and burn you up." Perhaps there is an echo here of St. Paul's words about his visions and revelations of the Lord, when he "was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not permissible for a man to utter" (II Cor. 12:4). We are inclined to believe that the whole scene is a deliberately reconstructed version of the episode of the Messianic Confession at Caesarea (Mark 8:27-30). For the Gnostics, Jesus was not the Jewish Messiah, and the confession of the disciples must needs be cast in a quite different form; it is in keeping with Gnostic ways of thought that it should be veiled in mystery. Even the refusal of Thomas to tell what he has heard may be suggested by the words of Mark 8:30: "He charged them to say nothing about him."

Thomas is a considerable name in apocryphal literature. There is an infancy gospel, quite different in character from this Gnostic work, which is also known as the "Gospel of Thomas,"<sup>5</sup> and there is a Syrian book of the "Acts of Thomas,"<sup>6</sup> which even uses the double name "Judas Thomas" found in our text—the name "Didymus," which is joined with them, is simply the Greek equivalent of the Semitic name Thomas, which means "Twin." There is, of course, no reason to suppose that the Apostle Thomas had the remotest connection with any of these books, which were produced long after his death. The author has simply adopted an apostolic name to give authority to his work. A speculative interest in Thomas is already evident in the Fourth Gospel (John 11:16; 14:5; and especially the resurrection-story of John 20: 24-29); the name Didymus may itself have awakened this legend-creating interest, which was ultimately to credit Thomas with the evangelization of India. In the Acts of Thomas, the source of this legend, Thomas is the twin brother of Jesus.

## (2) SIMON PETER

The Prince of the Apostles plays a relatively slight role in the Gospel of Thomas, being mentioned in only two logia. Yet some trace of the tradition of his primacy is retained even in Logion 13 (discussed above), in that he is the first of the disciples to speak; and again, in the last logion of the book (No. 114), he seems to act as spokesman for the whole company of disciples in questioning the presence of Mary Magdalene (see below). There is an apocryphal *Gospel according to Peter*, which survives only in fragments.

## (3) MATTHEW

Matthew is mentioned only in Logion 13, but merely as a foil to Thomas. Another apocryphal Gospel was put out under his name.

5. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 49-70.

6. K. Lake and J. de Zwaan, "Acts (Apocryphal), 5. The Acts of Thomas," in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Vol. I, p. 37.

## (4) MARY MAGDALENE

Mary is introduced twice in this Gospel, by her personal name alone; it is from other Gnostic works that we know that it is she, and not any other Mary, who is meant. She has an astonishing place in Gnostic speculation. In the Gospel of Philip she appears several times, and is called the "companion" or "partner" or "associate" (*koinōnos*—the Greek word is transliterated) of Jesus, and Jesus speaks much of his love for her, and of kissing her. There may be in all this a parallel to the pattern of Simon of Samaria, one of the earliest of the Gnostic teachers, who is said to have gone about with a prostitute of Tyre whom he called *Ennoia* ("Thought" or "Mind"), teaching people that she was a heavenly essence who had fallen into the defiling mire of this world, and had been redeemed by him.<sup>7</sup> The Mary Magdalene of the Gospels, the woman out of whom Jesus was said to have cast seven devils, was a natural candidate to play a like partner to the Gnostic Jesus.

Mary comes before us first in Logion 21, but only to put the question to Jesus: "What are thy disciples like?" In reply, he gives the parable of the Children in a Field, of which we shall have more to say later. More striking is the thought of Logion 114. Here Peter proposes that she should be dismissed from the company, on the ground that women are not worthy of the Life. To this Jesus answers that he will transform her into a male, so that she may become a "living spirit" like the others; and he adds the strange saying: "For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven." With this we may compare a saying attributed to Jesus in the Gospel according to the Hebrews: "I am come to destroy the works of the female." Perhaps there were some who took this as a variant of the saying in the First Epistle of John, that "the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." More seriously, it is clear that sayings like this reflect the asceticism, the demand for total abstinence from sexual relations, which characterized some of these sects.<sup>8</sup> Others, we may remark in passing, took the opposite course of permitting and even of advocating unbridled license.

## (5) SALOME

Salome, like Mary, is a favourite figure among the Gnostics, who sometimes present her as the midwife of the Nativity. She appears only once in our Gospel, in Logion 61, where she says to Jesus: "Who are you, man, and whose son are you? You took your place upon my bench and ate from my table." To this she receives an enigmatic answer, and responds: "I am thy disciple." This Salome does not suggest the daughter of Herodias, the charming dancing-girl who asked for the head of John the Baptist, but the Salome who is mentioned in the canonical gospels as one of the three who

7. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, i. 26; see the article "Simon Magus," by J. E. Roberts, in Hastings' *DAC*, Vol. II, pp. 493 ff. The Hymn of her redemption is translated (from Irenaeus) by R. M. Grant, in *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: 1959), pp. 76f.

8. See, for instance, the *Acts of Thomas*, c. vi; and the warnings in the Pastorals against sects which forbid marriage (I Tim. 4:3).

were last at the Cross and first at the Tomb (Mark 15:40 and 16:1). By the harmonization of these verses with John 19:25 and Matthew 27:56, she was identified as the sister of St. Mary the Virgin and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. All this rather suggests that the canonical gospels themselves already show indications of Christian speculation about Salome; at any rate, they provide in her a figure made to order for Gnostic allegorizing.

## VI. THE PARABLES IN THOMAS

The new Gospel contains fourteen parables. Eleven of these are known to us from the Synoptic tradition; three are otherwise unknown.

### A. PARABLES OF THE SYNOPTIC TRADITION

The eleven parables which are represented also in one or more of the Synoptic Gospels are sometimes given in Thomas with little significant change of form, sometimes even in a form that appears simpler and more primitive than that which they have assumed in the Synoptic tradition.

The Parable of the Sower (Logion 9) is a good instance. Here the picture is even simpler than in Mark 4:3-8, which is the source of the parallel versions in Matthew and Luke. The new Coptic text actually confirms the conjecture made by several scholars, that the phrase "by the wayside" (Gk. *para tēn hodon*) is a mistranslation of the Aramaic used by Jesus, which meant "on the road."<sup>9</sup> The Aramaic phrase *'al 'urha* is ambiguous, and susceptible of either translation. Now Justin Martyr, who writes about A.D. 150, quotes the Greek text in the form *eis tēn hodon*—"in, that is, upon the road"—the form that lies behind our Coptic text. It has been held that this is evidence to indicate that our parable was independently translated into Greek from the Aramaic.<sup>10</sup> There is at least a possibility that Thomas has here drawn upon a line of Syrian oral transmission independent of the Greek Gospels.

The Parable of the Slighted Invitation (Logion 64) is another which is simpler in structure than either of the parallel versions. The comparison here is particularly interesting, in that it is generally recognized that both Matthew and Luke give this parable in forms that have undergone substantial transformation in the course of transmission by word of mouth.<sup>11</sup> In Matthew (22:2-14), the story tells of a king who prepares a marriage-feast for his son; when the guests treat his invitation with disdain, and attack and even kill the servants whom he sends to carry it, he calls out his army and destroys the city and kills the murderous citizens; then he sends messengers out into the highways to invite everyone they meet to come to the wedding.

9. J. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1909), *ad loc.*; J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, tr. S. H. Hooke (London, 1958), p. 10, n. 4.

10. G. Quispel, "The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament," in *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. XI, No. 4 (December, 1957), pp. 201-2.

11. See my own article, "The Parable of the Guests at the Banquet," in *The Joy of Study: Papers . . . to Honor F. C. Grant*, ed. S. E. Johnson (New York, 1951), pp. 1-14.

But among the guests, he sees one that has not put on a wedding-garment, and orders him to be thrown out. In Luke (14:16-24), there is no king, no wedding-feast, no war and massacre. It is a man with only one servant, who issues invitations for a dinner-party at his home. When the guests refuse at the last moment, he sends his servant into the streets and lanes of the city to invite the beggars—the poor, the blind, the crippled; and since there are still empty seats at the dining-table, he sends his servant out again to call in more strangers from the highways and hedges of the countryside. In Thomas, it is a man who invites “guest-friends”; and they all refuse, with one excuse or another. The host then sends his servant out into the roadways to invite everyone that he meets; and the parable concludes with the saying: “Tradesmen and merchants shall not enter the places of my Father.” It is manifest that the structure of the parable in Thomas is much simpler than in either Matthew and Luke. It lacks the king with his retinue of servants which we find in Matthew; it lacks the double invitation, which Matthew offers as an allegory of the double rejection of God’s messengers by Israel—first the prophets, then the apostles; it lacks the slaughter of the murderous citizens and the burning of the city, which in Matthew is an allegory of the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, regarded by the early Christians as a punishment for the rejection of Christ and the persecution of his church; it lacks the Matthaean supplement of the expulsion of the improperly-clothed guest. At the same time, it lacks the Lucan extension of the invitation, first to the poor of the city, then to the wayfarers outside the walls, which in Luke is an allegory of the calling of publicans and sinners into the kingdom after the priests and the Pharisees have refused the invitation, and the subsequent expansion of the gospel into Gentile lands. Apart from the closing sentence, the parable in Thomas represents precisely what modern scholars would generally regard as the original form created by Jesus. The closing saying is itself probably a distorted reminiscence of the text which Jesus quoted to the money-changers in the Temple: “Make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise” (John 2:16—not in the Synoptics).

Other parables, however, are given with radical changes, which have certainly been made deliberately, in order to transform them more explicitly into vehicles of Gnostic teaching. Here we must walk circumspectly, for it is now agreed by nearly all scholars that even in the canonical gospels, the parables of Jesus have been adapted to serve teaching purposes for which they were not designed. Professor Joachim Jeremias of Göttingen, in his great study of *The Parables of Jesus* (transl. S. H. Hooke, London, 1958), has distinguished seven “principles of transformation” which the parables have undergone in the usage of the church, by embellishment in detail, by application to a different audience, by a shift from eschatological warning to moral exhortation, by allegorizing, by fusing one parable with another, and so forth; and he has shown how very difficult and delicate a task it is to remove a parable from the setting in which the evangelists have placed it, in relation to the situation of their own time, and to reconstruct the setting



in which Jesus uttered it in the first place—which often gives it a very different point. The Gnostics, we must admit, were not without good ecclesiastical precedent for taking liberties with the parables to make them vehicles of their own teaching. Let us remark in passing that we have here an indisputable demonstration that the Scriptures, even the Gospels themselves, are not to be separated from the life of the church. The parables of the canonical gospels are not self-explanatory, but require to be interpreted by “the analogy of faith,” that is, in terms of the wide tradition of teaching preserved and developed by the church; just as truly as the parables of this Gnostic gospel require to be interpreted in relation to the essential tenets of Gnosticism.

The Parable of the Fishnet (Logion 8) offers a good illustration. In our canonical gospels, it occurs only in Matthew (13:47–50), and is generally regarded as one of those which has already been reshaped into an allegory. T. W. Manson,<sup>12</sup> for instance, suggests (following R. Otto) that as Jesus delivered it, it consisted only of the first sentence: “the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.” “In the parable,” he remarks, “the fishing presumably represents missionary work (cf. Mk. 1:17); but it is very curious missionary work which wins people only in order to reject them immediately they are won.” He takes it that “the original parable has nothing to do with good and bad Christians. It has to do with the fact that just as a net collects fish of many different species, so the preaching of the Kingdom brings in men of many different sorts and conditions, men from all levels of society and of all degrees of culture, and so on.” But in the course of oral transmission, or perhaps in the editing of Matthew himself, the parable has been transmuted into a warning that not all who enter the church will attain final salvation—unworthy and unfaithful Christians will be cast out. This point is made explicit in the interpretation which is given in verses 49–50; but the interpretation does not in fact fit the parable. In the parable it is the fishermen—that is, presumably, the missionaries themselves—who sort the fish as soon as they are caught, and cast out the bad (although the call is to sinners!—how then can they be turned away as soon as they have responded to the call?). In the interpretation, it is the angels of God who make the separation at the end of the age.

In Thomas, the parable takes on a surprisingly different form and has a quite different point. Here it reads: “The Man is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea. He drew it up from the sea full of small fish. Among them he found a large, good fish. That wise fisherman, he threw all the small fish back into the sea; he chose the large fish without regret.”

We observe that this is no longer a parable of the Kingdom of heaven at all. “The Man” would probably have been rendered “the Son of Mán” by the translators who stand behind the Synoptics; these are alternative renderings of the one Aramaic phrase *bar-nasha*, which means literally “son of man,” but has ordinarily the sense simply of “man.” It would follow that the parable does not speak of the missionary activity of the disciples,

12. *The Sayings of Jesus* (London, 1949), pp. 198 f.

which draws all sorts and condition of men into the Kingdom; but of the redeeming action of Jesus himself, which consists simply of selecting the elite few who are worthy of salvation. For to the Gnostics, the Gospel was not a word of power for the salvation of sinners, but a revelation of hidden truth for a select handful of mankind who were truly "spiritual" and did not really need redemption in the sense of the forgiveness of sins. Several of the other Synoptic parables are distorted in some degree, though the particular point is not often clear.

#### B. NON-SYNOPTIC PARABLES

Thomas gives us three parables which are not found in any form in the canonical Gospels. The most interesting of these, and the only one that may be regarded as a version of a genuine parable of Jesus, is that of Logion 97, which we might call the Parable of the Broken Jar. In it, the Kingdom (of the Father) is compared to a woman carrying a jar of meal. While she is still on the road, the handle of the jar breaks and the meal begins to pour out, but she does not notice it; so it came that when she reached home, she found her jar empty. I would not venture to guess what this parable meant to Thomas and his friends, or what it might have been intended to illustrate in the teaching of Jesus, if in some form it does go back to him.

The Parable of Killing a Mighty Man (Logion 98) may have some relation to the general picture of the overthrow of Satan which is a recurrent theme in our Gospels—though in them it is the "binding" of the strong man, or the "casting out" of the prince of this world, not his killing (Mark 3:27 and parallels; John 12:31).

In Logion 21, in response to a question put by Mary, Jesus compares his disciples to children in a field that is not their own. When the owners come and demand that they restore the field, they "take off their clothes before them . . . to give back their field to them." This is perhaps an illustration of the doctrine that the true disciple must have no use for the world or the things of the world. There is, of course, an orthodox Christian doctrine of rejection of the world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). But in the Christian context, "the world" has a different meaning—it means the ordered (or disordered) society of human relationships in its alienation from God and hostility to him. But for the Christian, the material universe is not evil: it is God's creation, and it is basically good. To the Gnostic, on the other hand, the material universe is not the creation of the "living Father" revealed by Jesus, but of an inferior deity, who is the God of the Old Testament, the God of the Jews, and even the God of Justice; but has nothing to do with the God of love, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This fundamental dualism of matter and spirit pervades all Gnostic teaching.

The writer hopes to offer further comments on this new Gospel in a

subsequent article. What is written here will be sufficient, however, to expose the absurdity of suggestions that this is a "fifth Gospel," as if it were in any way worthy of comparison with the great quartet which established themselves in the esteem of the Christian church before the end of the second century, in open competition with Thomas and many other heretical Gospels. There is a possibility that critical research and debate may establish that Thomas preserves some few sentences which may reasonably be regarded as sayings of Jesus, hitherto unknown; and there is good ground to expect that form-critical study, by comparing the Synoptic elements in Thomas with their parallels in Matthew, Mark and Luke, will be able to discern more clearly than ever the manner in which the tradition about Jesus has been modified in the history of its transmission.<sup>13</sup> But it would be sheer delusion to imagine that any substantial increase in our scanty knowledge of the Jesus of History will ever be gained from Thomas or from any of the new Gnostic documents.<sup>14</sup>

13. Some of the sayings of this Gospel were already known in the Greek, from some papyrus fragments found at Oxyrhynchus in 1897 and 1903 by an expedition of the Egyptian Exploration Society headed by two Oxford scholars, B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt. They gave rise at the time to a quite extensive literature, and some of them have been discussed recently, in relation to the question of authenticity and also to their proper interpretation, by Joachim Jeremias, in his little book *Unknown Sayings of Jesus* (transl. R. H. Fuller; London, 1958). Much of his discussion will require revision in the light of the new discoveries.

14. A general commentary on Thomas is offered in *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* by R. M. Grant, D. N. Freedman, and W. R. Schoedel (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1960).