

THOMAS

SEEKING THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT
OF THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

RISTO URO



Thomas

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the *Gospel of Thomas*

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The subdivision of the sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* follows the style established by the Westar Institute, which has been adopted, for example, in J. S. Kloppenborg *et al.*, *Q-Thomas Reader* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1990). I have frequently modified the existing English translations of *Thomas* and notified which translation has been the basis of my modification. If no such information about translation is given, the quotation is from Thomas O. Lambdin's translation in Bentley Layton, ed. *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7 together with XIII,2**, *Brit. Lib. Or.4926(1)*, and *P.Oxy. 1, 654, 655*. Vol. 1. NHS 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

Abbreviations

AASF DHL	Annales Academiæ scientiarum fennicæ. Dissertationes humanarum litterarum
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
<i>AJT</i>	<i>American Journal of Theology</i>
<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. Haase. Berlin, 1972–
<i>BASP</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
BG	Berlin Gnostic Papyrus 8502
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CG	Cairensis Gnosticus
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>FzB</i>	<i>Forschung zur Bibel</i>

<i>FZPhTh</i>	<i>Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie</i>
HDR	Harvard Dissertation in Religion
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JAC	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>MTRS</i>	<i>Method and Theory in the Study of Religion</i>
<i>Mus</i>	<i>Muséon: Revue d'études orientales</i>
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codex/Codices
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testament Supplements
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OBT</i>	<i>Overtures to Biblical Theology</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RelScRev</i>	<i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i>
<i>RelSRev</i>	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
<i>RTP</i>	<i>Revue de théologie et de philosophie</i>
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SAQ	Sammlung ausgewählter Kirchen-und dogmengeschichtlicher Quellenschriften
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study

<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SecCent</i>	<i>Second Century</i>
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (supplement to <i>Numen</i>)
SJLA	Studies in Judaism and Late Antiquity
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and Its World
SymBU	Symbolae biblicae upsalienses
<i>TF</i>	<i>Theologische Forschung</i>
<i>TQ</i>	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
<i>TRu</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
VCSup	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i> supplements
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YCS	Yale Classical Studies
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

Prologue:

The blind encountering an elephant

As a whole, the *Gospel of Thomas* does not make sense. Thomas has a scattering of proverbs, parables, metaphysical claims, chreiai, mystagogic obscurities, and enigmatic sentences bound together by their introductory 'Jesus said'. But *Thomas*' diverse units of sayings data do not come together to communicate a coherent agenda.¹

My heart jumped when I heard Stevan Davies opening his paper with these words. They were certainly not what I expected to hear. It was his book on *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* published more than a decade earlier that had first raised my interest in this debated writing.² I was preparing my dissertation on Q in the mid-eighties when Davies' book happened to fall into my hands, although in my dissertation work I was inclined to pass over the *Gospel of Thomas* with a few marginal references in footnotes. Without much reflection of my own, I was following the German and major European scholarly opinion in which *Thomas* was seen as a late gnostic harmonization of the New Testament gospels, more relevant to church history and the history of Gnosticism than to the study of early Jesus traditions. Of course, I was aware of the alternative opinions that were current among many North American scholars. Davies' book, however, was lucid and bold enough to arouse my curiosity and to challenge my preconceptions about the gospel. Even though I did not accept all of his views, e.g., the very early date of the gospel or *Thomas*' this-worldly wisdom theology, his book marked for me the dawning of the idea that *Thomas* made sense as an independent and valuable source for New Testament studies.

My awakened interest in the *Gospel of Thomas* had not much influence on the completion of my dissertation,³ but when I was

¹ Davies 1994, 1.

² Davies 1983.

³ Uro 1987.

pursuing post-doctoral studies in 1989 in Claremont, California, I was hooked enough to take a Coptic course held in the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity. In 1992 I was back in Claremont, full of enthusiasm, and making plans for a proposal for a SBL group on Thomasine Christianity together with Jon Asgeirsson, Marvin Meyer, Greg Riley, and others. We started as a Consultation the next autumn. A year after that, I was sitting and listening to Davies' paper. He went on:

One can make sense out of a subset of sayings by isolating them and then producing a self-consistent theoretical framework which, supposedly, an ancient author intended. I have walked that path. But I do not trust it. The pitfall is that I (or anyone similarly inclined) can produce a coherent system only by ignoring the majority of the sayings while isolating a subset on the grounds that it can be made to make sense. The sayings ignored can subsequently be taken into account by allegorical reading in light of the discovered theoretical framework, but that is a circular argument. Consideration of my own essays, and those of others, leads me to believe that we are like the blind men who encounter an elephant. One holds the tail and finds it to be like a snake, one holds an ear and finds it to be like a rug, and so forth.⁴

After having put forward his thesis that *Thomas* does not convey a specific ideological programme or any other meaningful structure, Davies went on to present his solution to the dilemma: *Thomas* is a list of oracles to be used in random oracular divination comparable to the Chinese *I Ching*,⁵ the *Homer Oracle* of PGM VII.1–148⁶ or the tarot cards popular today in many countries. But I was no longer listening very carefully. I was pondering over our project on *Thomas*. Even the short time I had been engaged in Thomasine scholarship had taught me how controversial scholars' views of the gospel were and how easily different ideological and theological presuppositions biased our approaches. Were we not like the blind encountering an elephant, arguing about our partial perspectives and filling the gaps in information with theories guided by our own mind-set?

I continued my work on *Thomas* notwithstanding the moment of doubt provoked by Davies' paper. The essays included in this book

⁴ Davies 1994, 5–6.

⁵ Blofeld 1968.

⁶ Betz 1992, 112–19.

are results of that work.⁷ I have, however, done my best to avoid the pitfall described by Davies. I do not want to put forward a thesis on 'a self-consistent theoretical framework' through which *Thomas* should be viewed. I do not claim to know much about the author's 'intentions' either. Redaction criticism on *Thomas* is an extremely arduous task and the gospel does not allow many safe arguments for such criticism. We do not know why the author or authors organized the material as it now stands.⁸ We have not achieved consensus about the sources used in the composition. We know precious little about the purpose of the composition. Was *Thomas* originally used for the post-baptismal teaching,⁹ in classrooms, for religious debates on the street,¹⁰ or mystical meditation?¹¹ There is no way of knowing. The issues about the authorial intention or the original *Sitz im Leben* remain subjects of constant debate and speculation.

Although the essays included in this book are not free of such debated issues, their objective is not to find one hermeneutical key by means of which *Thomas* should be read. I am inclined to regard such a goal as a mirage created by *Thomas*' promise to those who find the interpretation of the sayings and are able to unlock the secret of life (*Gos. Thom.* 2). Instead of trying to find a single key to *Thomas*, I am looking for a place for *Thomas* in broader terms by defining a space in which various perspectives, readings and historical explanations can be considered. It may not be possible to reconstruct a coherent ideology behind the gospel or to be informed about the author's intentions, but various symbols and recurring themes create a space within the limits of which some readings and interpretations are more probable than others. There is plenty of room between a coherent agenda and total randomness.

⁷ See also my other two essays published earlier in Uro 1998c together with essays of my Finnish colleagues. I am building largely on and continuing the work done in the Finnish research project on 'Myth and Social Reality in Gnostic and Related Documents', which from 1999 onwards has been led by Antti Marjanen.

⁸ Compare, however, a recent analysis by Callahan (1997) on the compositional technique used in the gospel.

⁹ Davies 1983, 136.

¹⁰ Cf. Patterson 1993a, 122.

¹¹ Cf. De Conick (1996b and 2000), who has argued for *Thomas* being a mystical writing. She does not, however, offer a specific hypothesis about *how* the gospel was used among the ascetically and mystically oriented Thomasine Christians.

This hermeneutical space¹² is defined by comparing aspects of the gospel with some related aspects in other early Christian writings. Comparison of sources is, of course, a basis of all historical analysis.¹³ The meaning of *Thomas*, or some parts of it, can only be arrived at in connection with other texts (in the final analysis, of course, this includes the texts produced by modern interpreters as well). There is no absolute 'meaning', to be found or to be rejected, no 'metalan-guage' which would transcend other discourses.¹⁴ We can understand *Thomas* as part of the network of other texts, observing connections, differences or dialectical relationships. It is through such a process that meaning is produced. Paradoxically, then, *Thomas* cannot be assessed 'in its own right'¹⁵ without putting it in the context of other texts or intertexts. *Thomas* can make a difference only through the analysis of differences.

The comparison should be fair without giving a privileged position to any parts of the comparison. This ideal, of course, runs into many difficulties that are due to our one-sided picture of Christian origins created by the canonization,¹⁶ the sporadic survival of extracanonical texts, and our own ideological preferences. We also have a tendency to give a place of privilege to earlier traditions and interpretations, which reflects our deeply-rooted belief in pristine origins of Christian movements and its later decline to less authentic and corrupted forms of religion.¹⁷ This myth of uncorrupted origins has contributed to the scholars' obsession to hunt for literary influences and genealogies

¹² This concept was used and elaborated by Syreeni in his analysis of Luke's paradigmatic language (1991). According to Syreeni, 'every text has a hermeneutical space within which its interpretation can take place, but the width and forms of interpretative space vary'. For Syreeni, the hermeneutical space is 'something like the "code"' for understanding the message of the text. Its forms 'are culturally and historically conditioned'. The reader has a certain freedom to define the text's hermeneutical space, 'but the more creative the interpretation is, the more it will have to be treated as a new text with hermeneutical space of its own'. *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³ For an excellent introduction to the problems and prospects of comparative analysis, see Smith 1990.

¹⁴ The impossibility of 'metalan-guage' is a central poststructuralist or postmodern theme; see, e.g., Moore 1994, 6.

¹⁵ Cf. Fallon and Cameron 1988, 4237. *Thomas* 'in its own right' was a slogan often voiced in the SBL *Thomasine* Consultation and Group.

¹⁶ Cf. Cameron (1999), who argues that '[t]he New Testament serves as the sole framework for scholarly imagination of Christian origins, even when scholars recognize that picture as rendentious, overly simplified, or legendary' (*ibid.*, 239).

¹⁷ Uro 1998a, 2–3; see also Smith 1990, 47–8.

between various early Christian texts¹⁸ and, in particular, between *Thomas* and the canonical gospels. Intertextual relations will be also traced in this book, but from a wider perspective than from that of 'establishing direct relations of borrowing and dependency'.¹⁹

It is clear that meanings produced by comparing *Thomas* with other early Christian texts are, as all exegetical efforts, scholarly attempts to arrange the existing material and to create some order in the scattered and often fragmentary data. 'Similarity and difference are not "given"'.²⁰ The argumentative force of the comparative analyses for explaining the actual history of early Christianity, its various groups and the use of the gospel in these groups, depends on the selection of the aspects that are compared with each other and on how well the selections illustrate the relevant texts and evidence. The success of the interpretations offered in this book is, of course, for the reader to decide. I would like briefly to set out the reasons for and the background of my choices.

Scholars have long recognized a special link among those early Christian writings which appeal to the authority of the mysterious apostle called 'Judas Thomas', namely, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Book of Thomas*, and the *Acts of Thomas*. The name of the apostle has been seen as one of the most important clues to the origin and cultural setting of the gospel. An internal comparison among these writings is, therefore, a natural point of departure for defining a hermeneutical space for *Thomas* (Chapter 1). Theories about a special Thomas trajectory or group of people who cherished traditions ascribed to him have been suggested. The SBL group mentioned above also started with such a hypothesis, identifying itself as the 'Thomas Christianity Consultation',²¹ although the eventual group was more loosely committed to 'Thomas(ine) Traditions'.²² My critical views of the various hypotheses concerning a Thomasine 'Christianity' or 'school' evolved in that context. The apostle Thomas plays a role in the Gospel of John, too, which has recently given rise to a number of studies

¹⁸ See also Smith 1990, 47.

¹⁹ Cameron 1999, 238 (Cameron refers to Smith 1990, 47).

²⁰ Smirh 1990, 51.

²¹ This was not least because of Riley's dissertation, which dealt with resurrection beliefs in John and *Thomas* and relied heavily on the hypothesis of Thomas Christians. The book appeared in 1995.

²² Thomas Traditions Group met seven times in the years 1995–2001. The chair of the group was Jon Ma. Asgeirsson.

comparing John and *Thomas* and their respective communities.²³ Since others have dealt with the issue extensively, I will not focus on John in this study. This does not mean, however, that John is an insignificant intertext for my interpretation of *Thomas*.

For a long time, one major interpretive horizon for *Thomas* was derived from the writings which have been traditionally labelled 'gnostic'.²⁴ Recently, however, the category of 'Gnosticism' has itself lost its self-evident nature and become a subject of critical discussion and re-evaluation. In Chapter 2 the implications of that discussion for the study of *Thomas* will be examined. These considerations lead to finding a close ideological relative among the Nag Hammadi writings, the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, which shares the same cosmology and basic religious pattern with *Thomas*. This result questions the usefulness of some common ways of defining *Thomas*' religious perspective and underscores the need for postulating new categories and trajectories.

In New Testament scholarship it is still not uncommon to encounter opinions which are based on the caricatures or stereotypes of Hellenistic or gnostic 'dualism'. One-sided interpretations of *Thomas*' anthropology are good examples of these overly simplified views.²⁵ Chapter 3 focuses on the 'body sayings' of *Thomas* and reads them in the light of recent studies on the human body and self in the Hellenistic intellectual world and early Christianity. *Thomas*' relation to the body is defined by means of two intertexts: Stoic authors, especially Epictetus, whose understanding of the body and the world comes surprisingly close to that expressed in *Thomas*, and Paul, whose anthropology is seen as not dramatically different from that of *Thomas*, in contrast to many previous interpretations. An important difference, however, lies between Paul's emphasis on the social body and *Thomas*' lesser interest in ritual, purity, and internal cohesion of the group.

The considerations concerning the social body lead to the examination of *Thomas*' view of leadership and traces of social organization in the gospel (Chapter 4). The much-debated sayings on James' leadership in *Gos. Thom.* 12 and the 'masterless' ideal connected with the apostle Thomas in *Gos. Thom.* 13 are the obvious points of departure for such

²³ Riley 1995; Dunderberg 1997; 1998a; 1998b; Attridge 2000; De Conick 2001.

²⁴ Marjanen's careful discussion of the issue (1998b) appeared in a previous collection of essays (Uro 1998c), but the most recent discussion on the category of Gnosticism did not yet have much influence on that study.

²⁵ See also my former study on *Thomas*' asceticism (1998b).

an examination. The analysis of these sayings opens up a number of central issues about the role of the apostles in the legitimation of the Thomasine traditions and in the formation of early Christian traditions in general. The point of comparison is the Gospel of Matthew, which appears to promulgate the ecclesiastical power of Peter in striking contrast with the masterless ideal of *Thomas*. However, both *Thomas* and Matthew share an antihierarchical stance and are suspicious of the emerging leadership roles in early Christian communities.

Finally, Chapter 5 raises the issue of *Thomas*' relationship to the canonical gospels, the issue which has dominated the field of Thomasine studies ever since the gospel was first published. For the most part, the conventional redaction- and source-critical methods have been employed in the debate. What has not so often been considered is the need for a refinement of these conventional exegetical tools and the role *Thomas* could play in such a methodological discussion. Studies on orality and literacy, in particular, have challenged many of the basic assumptions that dominated twentieth-century research on the New Testament gospels.²⁶ The *Gospel of Thomas* not only provides material for the study of Jesus traditions but the study of *Thomas* itself becomes an experimental laboratory producing new insights and approaches.

The five essays published in this volume hardly cover the relevant topics of Thomasine research to any considerable extent, yet they allow me to make a few general conclusions and suggestions which are offered in the epilogue. I may have probed a spot on the elephant's ear, a piece of its trunk, areas of its back, and so on. My conclusions remain a blind man's tales about a mysterious creature. Together with reports by other companions, however, I hope these essays will contribute to a more reliable picture of this fascinating discovery.

²⁶ See also Uro 1993.

The secret of Judas Thomas

1. The writings ascribed to Judas Thomas

Ever since two complete writings appealing to the authority of 'Judas Thomas' were discovered among the Nag Hammadi codices, scholars have increasingly been fascinated by the traditions associated with this mysterious apostle. The *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Book of Thomas (the Contender)*¹ both claim to present 'the secret words' spoken to or written down by Judas Thomas. These Nag Hammadi documents were connected with the previously known *Acts of Thomas*,² which narrates the missionary journeys and career of Judas, also called Thomas. These three Thomasine writings represent quite different literary genres. The gospel can best be described as a 'sayings gospel' deriving its model from various kinds of wisdom and chriae collections widespread in the ancient world.³ The *Book of Thomas* belongs to the genre of 'revelation dialogue', which takes the form of discussions between Jesus and the disciples, usually set in a post-resurrection scene. The Nag Hammadi Library includes several works which can be labelled as representing the

¹ Schenke (1989, 193–5) prefers the title the *Book of Thomas* instead of the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, since he thinks that the latter is based on an erroneous reading of the syntax of lines 145.17–19. I also use the shorter title (except for the standard abbreviation *Thom. Cont.*), but mainly for the sake of convenience. Irrespective of the syntax, the 'Contender' on line 145.18 refers to the author of the book.

² The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and the *Apocalypse of Thomas* are not usually ascribed to the same group of Thomasine writings, since they do not attest the tradition of Judas Thomas or the Twin. Cf., however, Gunther (1980, 115–16), who counts the *Infancy Gospel* among the 'Thomas-Apocrypha', in which, according to him, the apostle is described as the twin of Jesus 'teaching enlightening, life-bringing ascetic mysteries' (*ibid.*, 116). The evidence he offers for the twin symbolism in the *Infancy Gospel* is extremely meagre.

³ The seminal study is Robinson 1971. A good introduction to different types of sayings collections in the ancient world is Kloppenborg 1987, 263–316. For *Thomas* as a chriae collection, see also pp. 109–18 below.

dialogue genre.⁴ The *Acts of Thomas* were already in antiquity transmitted together with other 'Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles', which employed features similar to those in Greco-Roman novels⁵ and biographies⁶ and continued in later Christian martyrological and hagiographical literature.

In spite of the different nature of these writings, it is not unusual to suggest a particular interrelation among them. The connecting links have been variously determined. Most scholars assume that the documents came into existence or at least were formed into their present shapes in eastern Syria, where traditions in connection with the name 'Judas Thomas' were cherished and literary works or legends were attached to this twin brother of Jesus. It is also customary to suggest literary connections between some of the Thomasine writings. Moreover, some scholars are willing to define the relationship in societal terms, so that the documents are claimed to derive from the *school of Thomas* with a clear theological profile⁷ or from a certain early Christian *community* which legitimated its traditions by appealing to the authority of the apostle Thomas.⁸

The last suggestions about a Thomasine school or community surely are the boldest and most controversial.⁹ They lead us, however, to some important issues about the origin of the Thomasine traditions and, in particular, about the setting of the *Gospel of Thomas*, which is the main concern of this book. In the following, I will seek to determine the interrelation between the writings carrying the name of Thomas and to evaluate the various hypotheses proposed by scholars. Do the other Thomasine writings give any clue to the historical setting of the *Gospel of Thomas*? Is there enough evidence for suggesting a specific group which revered the apostle Thomas and produced various literary works in the name of the apostle?

⁴ See Rudolph 1968 and Perkins 1980.

⁵ Söder 1932. A concise introduction to the ancient novel is Holzberg 1995.

⁶ For a comparison between pagan and Christian biographies of sages and holy men, see Drijvers 1990.

⁷ Layton 1987, 359–409.

⁸ Riley 1991; 1995.

⁹ See recent discussions in Davies 1997; Dunderberg 1997; 1998a, 56–7; Poirier 1996; 1997; Cameron 1999; Attridge 2000; Sellew 2001.

2) The twin brother of Jesus

It is generally acknowledged that Judas Thomas or Judas the Twin was a character that was peculiar to East Syrian Christianity. The reasons for this location of the tradition are well known and I will only briefly list the major arguments here.

- 1) First, the Old Syriac versions of John 14:22 read instead of 'Judas, not Iscariot' 'Thomas' (sy^s) and 'Judas Thomas' (sy^c).¹⁰ This means that the Syriac scribes identified the other Judas in John's gospel (cf. Ἰούδας Ἰακώβου, 'Judas the Son of James', in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13) with Thomas, who does not have this double name in the New Testament or in the Western early Christian tradition in general. Secondly, the double name appears in sources that are certainly of Syrian origin: the Abgar legend (Eusebius, *Church History* 1.13.10; *Doctrine of Addai* 5¹¹) and Ephraem, *Sermons on Faith* 7.11.3.
- 2) Thirdly, the *Acts of Thomas*, which also derives from East Syria and was probably originally written in Syriac,¹² relates a story of the apostle Judas,¹³ who is described as the 'twin' of Jesus (*Acts Thom.* 31 and 39). It is generally acknowledged that the name 'Thomas' is a transliteration of the Aramaic word ܛܘܡܫܐ (Syr. ܛܘܡܫܐ) meaning 'twin'.¹⁴ There is no evidence that it was used as a proper name in pre-Christian Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew,¹⁵ and there are clear indications that it was long understood as a nickname in the Syriac Christian tradition.¹⁶ This

¹⁰ Drijvers (1984a, 16 and n. 51) argues that 'Judas Thomas' in the Old Syriac gospel goes back to a *Diatessaron* reading.

¹¹ Phillips 1876.

¹² Klijn 1962, 13; Attridge 1990; Drijvers 1992a, 323.

¹³ The apostle is named differently in the surviving manuscripts. In the Greek text of *Acts Thom.* 1, edited by M. Bonnet (1903), the apostle is called 'Judas Thomas Didymos' (cf. the incipit of the *Gospel of Thomas*), and the double name 'Judas Thomas' appears in *Acts Thom.* 2; 11; 20; 21; 54; 62; 70; 73; 74; 93; 118; 119; 171. In the oldest known Syriac text of the *Acts of Thomas* (Sinai 30), which is fragmentary, the protagonist is called 'Judas'. For variant readings of the name of the apostle, see Klijn 1962, 158. Klijn (1970, 92; see also 1972, 76–7) argues that the *Acts of Thomas* 'originally dealt with the apostle Judas' and it should therefore really be called 'the Acts of Judas'.

¹⁴ Klijn 1970, 89: 'It is almost certain that the Greek θωμάς is a transliteration of the Aramaic' (that is, the Aramaic word ܛܘܡܫܐ).

¹⁵ *Ibid.* The only instance of a name formed from the stem ܛܘܡܫܐ is found in Phoenician; see Lidzbarski 1898, 383. The remark in Bauer's dictionary (1988, 746) that the Aramaic word for 'twin' 'keineswegs nur als Beiname gebraucht worden ist' (cf. also Dunderberg 1997, 373) is thus somewhat misleading. According to Klijn (1970, 89 n. 3), all Greek evidence for the name θωμάς is found in writings of post-Christian origin.

¹⁶ Klijn 1970, 90–1.

means that the tradition of Judas, the twin of Jesus, is most likely to have been born and preserved in the Syriac/Aramaic-speaking milieu, not in the Greek-speaking environment, where 'Thomas' came to be understood as a proper name.¹⁷

The Syrian nature of the traditions about 'Judas Thomas' is thus well attested and provides a firm foothold for further examination of the historical setting of the *Gospel of Thomas* and the Thomasine literature.¹⁸ The origin and the historical roots of this tradition are less clear, however.¹⁹ In Chapter 4 I will make some suggestions about the reasons which may have led to the emergence of the figure of Judas the Twin, but these, as other explanations, will remain conjectural.²⁰ At this point, it suffices to note that the twin apostle called Judas and the symbolism evolved around this figure are characteristically Syrian and there is no evidence for this tradition outside the orbit of Syrian Christianity.

The idea that Judas Thomas is the twin of Jesus does not, however, get equal weight in the Thomasine writings. In the gospel, the double name appears only in the incipit without further elaboration of the meaning of the name. It is possible that the combination of the sayings on James and Thomas in *Gos. Thom.* 12–13 reveals that the compiler of the sayings knew about the tradition that Thomas was a member of Jesus' family,²¹ but this implicit reference cannot be compared to the extensive use of the twin motif in the *Acts of Thomas*. Not only is Thomas explicitly described as the twin brother of Jesus,²² his close

¹⁷ Note, however, that the author of John's gospel is still clearly aware of the original meaning of the name 'Thomas' (see $\theta\omega\mu\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ ὁ λεγόμενος δίδυμος, 'Thomas, called the Twin', in John 11:16; 20:24 and 21:2).

¹⁸ Klijn 1972, 77: '[N]obody can deny that the earliest traces of this tradition can only be found in Syria.' See also Ménard 1968; Koester 1971, 133–4; Layton 1987, 361; Drijvers 1992a, 324–5.

¹⁹ Cf. Koester (1971, 133), who argues that the Thomasine tradition in eastern Syria must be viewed as one of the primitive local traditions comparable to the Pauline tradition in Asia Minor or the Petrine tradition in western Syria. Koester seems to think that these traditions 'had their ultimate origin in the actual missionary activity of these apostles' (*ibid.*, 133–4), although in the case of Thomas '[t]his must remain a mere conjecture' (*ibid.*, 133). For a more confident statement about the historicity of Thomas' mission, see Gunther 1980, 120 and Riley 1995, 78. Drijvers has criticized this kind of 'romantic and nostalgic picture' (1984a, 2). For him, Thomas 'is a totally unhistorical personage, a combination of Thomas Didymos ... and Judas ... the brother of James' (1992b, 133).

²⁰ See pp. 95–7 in this book.

²¹ See the arguments offered on pp. 95–6.

²² *Acts Thom.* 31 (Gr.; Syriac is clearly secondary) and 39 (Gr. and Syr.).

resemblance or likeness to Jesus is a recurring theme in the writing, often causing confusion about the identity of both Jesus and Thomas.²³ Thomas has 'two forms' (*Acts Thom.* 34 Gr.) and is thus polymorphic like Jesus.²⁴ What is common to the Acts and the gospel, however, is the role of Thomas as a recipient of the secret words and ineffable mysteries. With an echo of the tradition in *Gos. Thom.* 13, the miraculously talking colt addresses Thomas in *Acts Thom.* 39: 'Twin brother of Christ, apostle of the Most High, a fellow-initiate into a hidden word of Christ. You have received his secret sayings and are the fellow worker of the Son of God.' Later on (47), Thomas himself confirms this by praying to the Lord: 'Jesus, the hidden mystery that has been revealed to us, you are the one who has made known to us many mysteries; who did set me apart from all my companions and speak to me three words, because of which I am inflamed, and I cannot tell them to others.'²⁵

The *Book of Thomas* has also an emphatic statement about Thomas being the twin brother of Jesus in the beginning of the document:

The Savior said: 'Brother Thomas, while you have time in the world listen to me, and I will reveal to you the things you have pondered in your mind. Now since it has been said that you are my twin and true companion,²⁶ examine yourself and learn who you are, in what way, and how you will come to be. Since you are called²⁷ my brother, it is not fitting that you be ignorant of yourself. And I know you have understood, because you had already understood that I am the knowledge of the truth. So while you accompany me, although you are uncomprehending, you have (in fact) already come to know, and you will be called "the one who knows himself". For he who has not known himself has known nothing, but he who has known himself has at the same time already achieved knowledge about the depth of the all. So then you my brother Thomas have beheld what is obscure to men, that is, what they ignorantly stumble against.' (138.4–21.)²⁸

²³ See, e.g., *Acts Thom.* 11; 34; 45; 57; 151.

²⁴ See Klijn 1962, 228.

²⁵ Cf. also *Acts Thom.* 10. The translations of the Greek text are modified from Schneemelcher 1991–2.

²⁶ Nagel (1980, 67) reads the Coptic ΠΑΩΒΡ̅ ΠΜΗΕ ('my true companion') as a misunderstanding of the Greek word συναθλήτης. For philological details and critical assessment of Nagel's suggestion, see Schenke 1989, 67–70.

²⁷ Layton (1989, 2:180) reads erroneously the future form ΕΝΔΕΛΟΜΕΥΤΕ ('you will be called') and Turner follows this in his translation against his earlier correct rendering (1975, 8–9). The correct reading is, however, ΕΜΟΜΕΥΤΕ ('you are called'). I owe this observation to Antti Marjanen (see Dunderberg, Marjanen and Uro 1996).

²⁸ Translation modified from Turner's translation in Layton 1989.

The train of thought in this passage raises some difficulties. Why is it said that Thomas still has time in the world, even though the narrative frame suggests that such a comment would rather apply to Jesus (cf. 138.23)? Why does the author claim that Thomas in some way is both 'ignorant' (138.14) and the one who has *already* understood and seen 'what is obscure to men, that is what they ignorantly stumble against' (138.20–2)?

Scholars have made attempts to answer these questions by suggesting two separate traditions²⁹ or by peeling off a secondary dialogue to discover the underlying paraenetic source used by the author.³⁰ However one assesses these hypotheses, the present form of the text creates some rhetorical undercurrents that may not go unnoticed. Hans-Martin Schenke has paid attention to the impersonal expressions in Jesus' characterization of Thomas ('it has been said . . .', 'since you are called . . .'), which he takes as indications that the author of the *Book of Thomas* had a somewhat detached attitude towards the 'Thomas' tradition. In his words, 'although the author . . . is well aware of the "Judas Thomas" tradition, he does not himself stand within this tradition'.³¹ In the *Book of Thomas*, Thomas is not the model of the perfect ascetic, such as he is in the Acts. He is almost downgraded to the level of an ordinary disciple, who has 'not received the height of perfection' (138.36).³² The wavering between 'ignorant' and 'understanding' Thomas in the above passage has also a very different tone compared with *Gos. Thom.* 13, in which Jesus says that he will no longer be the 'teacher' or 'master' of Thomas.³³ Even though Thomas' ignorance may be partly influenced by the literary convention of the dialogue genre,³⁴ it is easy to hear a certain amount of *irony* in the Saviour's words on Thomas. Since Thomas is called (by many) Jesus' 'twin and true companion', he should examine himself so that he could eventually become what he has in fact been all the time, although

²⁹ Turner (1975, 122–6) separates two sections in the Saviour's opening speech; one dealing with Thomas as the twin brother of Jesus and one containing the gnostic call to self-knowledge. See also Kuntzmann 1986, 55–61.

³⁰ Schenke 1989, 71–2.

³¹ Schenke 1989, 65 (my translation from German).

³² Cf. the incomprehension of the disciples in the *Gospel of Thomas*. See pp. 90–2 in this book.

³³ For an analysis of this saying, see Ch. 4 in this book.

³⁴ The disciples are often described as being perplexed and grieving (e.g., *Ap. John* II 1.6–17; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* 91.1–8). For the narrative settings of the gnostic revelation dialogues, see Perkins 1980, 37–58.

without knowing it himself. The ambiguous language of the author could be understood against the background of a milieu where Thomas' authority as the recipient and preacher of the true tradition was largely accepted, but where everybody was not willing to approve the message of the author of the *Book of Thomas*.³⁵ The tradition about the twin brother of Jesus is, for the author, more an instrument of legitimation than the essential part of his message.

Is it possible to recognize any development or trajectory in the tradition of the twin apostle of Jesus? John D. Turner identifies the first part of the *Book of Thomas*, an originally independent document that he named 'Section A' (approximately 138.4–142.21), as belonging to the Thomasine tradition. He suggests that this document 'occupies a median position in terms of relative dominance of Thomas as a character in the literature bearing his name'.³⁶ Turner concludes that the three Thomasine works 'reflect a growing tradition centered on the apostle Thomas, the twin of Jesus and recipient of his secret words, and which increasingly understands him as a contender and missionary for the cause of abstinence from all that is worldly, especially sex'.³⁷ Although widely accepted, Turner's suggestion is not without problems. It does not explain why the Thomasine writings should follow the model of 'a growing tradition', with the increasingly dominating role of the apostle and stricter and stricter demands for sexual *askesis*. Even if that be the case, it is difficult to see how the *Book* and the *Acts of Thomas* would be very different in terms of asceticism, since for both of them the renunciation of sexuality is a matter of extreme importance.³⁸

³⁵ It seems clear that the opponents described in the *Book of Thomas* are Christians who do not accept the ascetic praxis promulgated by the author (see 141.19–25). See also Perkins 1980, 104–5.

³⁶ Turner 1975, 234. See also 1972, 118 and 1992.

³⁷ Turner 1972, 118. Turner also speaks of 'the stream of the ascetic Syrian Thomas-tradition as we move from the *Gospel of Thomas* to the *Acts of Thomas*' (1972, 234). Many scholars similarly suggest an encratite tradition closely associated with the apostle Thomas. Perkins (1980, 99) speaks of the Thomas tradition which 'claims that orthodox Christianity fails because it thinks that salvation without rigorous asceticism is possible'. Gunther (1980) argues that 'the name "Thomas" was originally associated with Encratism' (*ibid.*, 132) and that this group later 'confused Judas Thaddaeus (brother of Jesus and apostle of Syria) and Didymus Thomas (the alleged spiritual twin of the Lord and apostle of Parthia)' (*ibid.*, 113).

³⁸ Turner (1975, 235) argues that in the *Acts of Thomas* the sexual abstinence motif is no longer conveyed in enigmatic metaphors, as in the *Book of Thomas*, 'but explicitly in the

A different chronological order for the Thomasine documents has also been proposed. Paul-Hubert Poirier argues that the *Acts of Thomas* 'are ultimately responsible for the Thomas Didymus figure and the twin symbolism, which are reworked on the basis of the traditional data borrowed from the *Gospel of Thomas*'. Poirier concurs with Schenke, holding the view that the author of the *Book of Thomas* uses the tradition only 'in a secondary manner'³⁹ and 'exhibits nothing more than a literary rehashing of the twin symbolism in order to confirm a revelatory discourse'. Since the *Acts of Thomas* is the real originator of the twin tradition, according to Poirier, the *Book of Thomas* must then be dependent on the *Acts of Thomas* and therefore later. This leads us to consider the literary relationships among the Thomasine writings.

3. Intertextuality in the Thomasine literature

3.1 *The Gospel and the Acts*

Henri-Charles Puech was the first who drew attention to certain common features between the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Acts of Thomas*.⁴⁰ In addition to the appearance of the peculiar name of the apostle, Puech observed that in both documents the apostle has 'the privilege ... of being the confidant of the most secret teachings of Jesus' (Acts Thom. 10, 39, 47, and 78)⁴¹ This and some other parallels made him conclude that the Acts are dependent on the gospel. It is indeed obvious that author of the Acts was familiar with the tradition preserved in *Gos. Thom.* 13, as the above citations demonstrate.⁴² But does this mean that the author also knew of and used the whole gospel more extensively? Note the following parallels.⁴³

form of erotic tales in which lovers are enjoined to continence'. The demand for sexual abstinence, however, is explicit enough for any reader of the *Book of Thomas* and the erotic tales in the Acts do not necessarily add to severeness of the demand but are due to the different literary strategy employed by the author. It is hard to see any growth from the *Book of Thomas* to the Acts in terms of asceticism.

³⁹ Poirier 1996, 25; 1997, 303.

⁴⁰ Puech 1978, 43–4 [orig. 1957]; 1963, 286–7.

⁴¹ Puech 1978, 43.

⁴² See also *Acts Thom.* 45 and 163.

⁴³ The translations from the *Acts of Thomas* are taken from H. W. Attridge's translation to be published by Polebridge Press and cited in Attridge 1997.

I shall no longer remain covered, since the *garment of shame* has been taken away from me. (*Acts Thom.* 14.)

When you disrobe without being ashamed and take up your garments ... (*Gos. Thom.* 37:2.)

The apostle said: 'The storeroom of the holy king has been opened and those who partake worthily in the goods therein *find rest, and as they attain rest they come to rule*'. (*Acts Thom.* 136.)

Let he who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds he will be amazed, and when he becomes amazed, he will rule. And once he has ruled, he will attain rest. (*Gos. Thom.* 2 [Gr].)

*That which is within I have made without, and that which is without <within>, and all of your fullness has been fulfilled in me.*⁴⁴ (*Acts Thom.* 147.)

When you make the two, and when you make the inside like the outside, and the outside like the inside ... (*Gos. Thom.* 22:4.)

You will be members of a wedding party who *go into that bridal chamber* which is full of immortality and light. (*Acts Thom.* 12.)

Many are standing at the door, but it is the solitary who will enter the bridal chamber. (*Gos. Thom.* 75.)

The allusions to the sayings or expressions in the *Gospel of Thomas* are clear enough, but one cannot conclude from these that the author of the Acts used the gospel directly and extensively.⁴⁵ The language appearing in *Gos. Thom.* 2; 22; 37 and 75 was widely available in early Christianity and one cannot be sure whether such expressions as 'entering the bridal chamber'⁴⁶ or the 'garment of shame'⁴⁷ reveal that

⁴⁴ See also *Acts Thom.* 129.

⁴⁵ Puech's view has been criticized by Ehlers 1970, 307. See also Attridge 1997, 113.

⁴⁶ See pp. 50–1 in this book.

⁴⁷ The Coptic version of *Gos. Thom.* 37 can be translated either 'when you put off your shame' or 'when you unclothe yourselves without being shamed', but the Greek version in *P.Oxy.* 655.22–3 supports the latter interpretation. For an analysis of the saying, see pp. 70–4 in this book.

the *Gospel of Thomas* is the primary source for them in the Acts.⁴⁸ In any case, the allusions to traditions, especially to that of the twin apostle of Jesus, found also in the *Gospel of Thomas* indicate that the gospel is one of those 'cultural texts'⁴⁹ that influenced the writing of the Acts. They share the same intertextual milieu,⁵⁰ even though, in view of the evidence, it may be too much to say that both writings represent the same *stream* of tradition,⁵¹ unless the whole of early Eastern Christianity is understood as one big stream.

3.2) *The Book of Thomas and the Gospel*

The *Book of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Thomas* both claim to present the 'secret words' that the Saviour or Jesus spoke to Judas Thomas. Whereas in the gospel Thomas is described as the one who wrote down Jesus' words, the *Book of Thomas* gives this role to Matthaias, who is said to have been 'walking, listening to them to speak with another' (138.2–3). Scholars have considered this construction to be somewhat artificial⁵² and resulting from a compilation of different sources or traditions. It has been assumed that the incipit of the *Gospel of Thomas* is among these sources⁵³ and this indicates that the idea of Thomas as a recipient of the secret words of Jesus derives from the gospel. However, scholars have noticed that Matthaias or Matthias – assuming that we are dealing with the spelling variants of the same name⁵⁴ – is also known to have been associated with the secret words of Jesus in early Christian literature. In his *Refutatio*, Hippolytus mentions that Basilides and his followers used the secret words (λόγοι ἀποκρύφου) of Matthias (*Ref.* 7.20.1,5).⁵⁵ This writing has sometimes been

⁴⁸ For parallels, see also *Gos. Hebr.* 4 (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.9.45 and 5.14.96); *Dial. Sav.* 30 and 2 *Clem.* 12.2; *Acts Pet.* 38; *Acts Phil.* 140; *Gos. Phil.* 67.30–4.

⁴⁹ This concept does not necessarily signify that the author of the Acts received this tradition in the written form.

⁵⁰ Matthews 1997, 132.

⁵¹ The word 'stream' is used, e.g., by Attridge 1997, 110.

⁵² Turner 1975, 105–13; Schenke 1989, 63–4.

⁵³ Schenke 1989, 61.65; Turner 1975, 136; cf., however, *ibid.*, 112; Poirier 1996, 23; 1997, 303; see also Sellow 2001.

⁵⁴ The spelling in 138.2 differs both from the way of writing of 'Matthew' in *Matt.* 10:2 (S) and in other Nag Hammadi writings (e.g., *Dial. Sav.* 19; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* 94.1) as well as from that of 'Matthias' in *Acts* 1:23 (S). See Dunderberg, Marjanen and Uro 1996, 11 n. 12.

⁵⁵ Hippolytus writes: 'Basilides and Isodore, the true son and disciple of Basilides, say that Matthias spoke to them secret words which he heard from the Savior when he was taught in private' (translation taken from Puech and Blatz 1991, 385).

identified with the *Traditions of Matthias*⁵⁶ referred to by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 7.82) and characterized as ascetic (3.26.3), but this identification is controversial.⁵⁷

It is somewhat unclear what one should infer from these dispersed references to the works attributed to Matthias and their alleged relation to the incipit of the *Book of Thomas*. Turner has identified the 'secret words of Matthias' as the original title of 'Section B' of the *Book of Thomas*, which 'was a collection of the Savior's sayings gathered into a homiletical discourse'.⁵⁸ The first part, Section A, was originally a dialogue between Thomas and the Saviour. This is an attractive hypothesis, but several objections can be raised. First, the relation of the 'monologue' of the latter part to the tradition of Jesus' sayings is fairly remote. This fact made Turner argue that Section B represents the end-product of a process in which original sayings have been 'all but obliterated by the accretion of (ascetic) interpretation'.⁵⁹ But at least as possible is the hypothesis that the form of homiletical discourse was in the beginning and the discourse was appended to the dialogue between Thomas and Jesus at some stage of the redaction.⁶⁰ Secondly, the appearance of Matthias as a scribe of the discussion between Jesus and Thomas is not too surprising, since similar kinds of 'chains of tradition' can also be found in other Nag Hammadi documents.⁶¹ Thirdly, as Turner himself has observed, there are some other thematic links between the first seven sayings of the *Gospel of Thomas* and the

⁵⁶ The *Gospel of Matthias* is mentioned by Origen (*Hom. Luc.* 1.5.14) and Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25.6) along with the *Gospel of Thomas* in the list of heterodox works. For further testimonia to the gospel under the name Matthias, see Puech and Blatz 1991, 382.

⁵⁷ For the discussion, see Puech and Blatz 1991, 385. The fragments of the *Traditions* that have been preserved by Clement in *Stromateis* reveal that this work was not identical with the *Book of Thomas*, even though such hopes could be raised before the publication of the latter (e.g., Oulton and Chadwick 1954, 52 n. 70). The first fragment (*Strom.* 2.9.45 and 5.14.96: 'Wonder at what is present') is a close parallel to *Gos. Thom.* 5:1. Clement states that this logion derives from the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.

⁵⁸ Turner 1975, 215.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁶⁰ Perkins 1980, 100–101; cf. Schenke 1985, 263–92; 1989; 1991a, 232–49. Schenke argues that the author of the *Book of Thomas* used 'a basic document,' which was 'a platonising, Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom writing' (1991a, 236). This work was Christianized by the author in a way not unlike the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. The basic document reconstructed by Schenke does not, however, include the latter monologue part of the *Book*.

⁶¹ Cf. *1 Apoc. Jas.* 36.15–23 and *2 Apoc. Jas.* 44.13–17. In both passages, a difference is made between a recipient of Jesus' teaching and a scribe.

beginning of the *Book of Thomas*,⁶² which may provide further evidence for the view that the latter is in some way dependent on the gospel.⁶³

The hypothesis that the *Gospel of Thomas* influenced the *Book of Thomas* is thus sufficient to explain the similarities in the incipits of these two writings. The explanation need not be burdened with other source-critical hypotheses. The reference to the 'Secret Words of Matthias' by Hippolytus is interesting but too obscure to help us to identify any lost source used by the author of the *Book of Thomas*. It should be stressed, however, that most of the parallels are restricted to the beginning of the *Book of Thomas*. The author does not elsewhere use sayings from the *Gospel of Thomas*, except for a few general expressions, such as 'resting' and 'reigning' in 145.10–16. If we did not have the incipit in the *Book of Thomas* we would probably not have come to suggest a particularly close link between these two Nag Hammadi documents.

3.3) *The Book of Thomas and the Acts*

Poirier pointed out that the prologue of the *Book of Thomas* 'expounds the Thomasian theme with a vocabulary found nowhere else except in the *Acts of Thomas*.'⁶⁴ He mentions three epithets of Thomas: 'brother' (*Acts Thom.* 11–12), 'twin' (*Acts Thom.* 31, 39) and 'friend or companion' (*Acts Thom.* 156).⁶⁵ These similarities do not, however, make a strong case for Poirier's view that the author of the *Acts* created the twin symbolism and that the *Book of Thomas* is dependent on the *Acts*. Both authors can as well have drawn upon a tradition that was widely known in Syrian Christianity.⁶⁶ The similarities are hardly conclusive for deciding about the literary relationship between these writings either. Thomas being a 'brother' or 'twin' of Jesus is essential for the twin tradition itself, which may quite well have been transmitted

⁶² Turner (1975, 136) lists the following themes, which appear in the same order in both writings: 1) secret words spoken to Judas Thomas; 2) seeking and enquiring (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 2 and *Thom. Coni.* 138.8 [22f]); 3) knowing thyself (*Gos. Thom.* 3:2 and *Thom. Coni.* 138.8–10); 4) hidden and revealed (*Gos. Thom.* 5 and 6 and *Thom. Coni.* 138.19–33); 5) beasts and eating (*Gos. Thom.* 7 and *Thom. Coni.* 138.39–139.11).

⁶³ The more complex formulation of the incipit in the *Book of Thomas* clearly indicates that it was modelled upon the gospel rather than vice versa.

⁶⁴ Poirier 1997, 303.

⁶⁵ Poirier 1996, 23; 1997, 303.

⁶⁶ This is especially clear if the *Gospel of Thomas* presupposes knowledge of the tradition that Thomas is the twin brother of Jesus. For the issue, see pp. 95–7 in this book.

separately from the literary works, and the Coptic expression for the 'true friend' in the *Book of Thomas* 138.7 has a closer parallel in the Gospel of John (cf. 15:14–15)⁶⁷ than in the *Acts*' idea that *Jesus* is the companion and helper of the believer.⁶⁸ Apart from the twin tradition and the encratite theology of the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Book of Thomas*, I cannot find any other specific links between these two writings.

4. The school of St Thomas?

Bentley Layton's *Gnostic Scriptures* includes three works associated with Judas Thomas under the title 'The School of St. Thomas.'⁶⁹ In addition to the *Gospel* and the *Book of Thomas*, the so-called *Hymn of the Pearl*, incorporated in *Acts Thom.* 108–13, for Layton attests to a "school" of writers who honored St. Thomas as their patron saint.⁷⁰ This school, which was most probably located in Edessa, cherished and developed the Thomasine tradition, in which the twin motif

provided a profound theological model for the reciprocal relationship of the individual Christian and the inner divine light or 'living Jesus': to know oneself was to know one's divine double and thence to know god; to follow the living Jesus was to know and integrate one's self ... Thus the twinship and companionship of Jesus and Thomas metaphorically expressed a general model of salvation through acquaintance (*gnosis*) with god, emphasizing both practical discipleship and self-awareness.⁷¹

Layton further suggests that the model of divine twinship present in Thomasine literature influenced the Valentinian and Manichaean systems in which the ideas of the humans' angelic counterparts or the Twin Spirit of Mani himself played an important role. The school of

⁶⁷ Schenke (1989, 65–9) finds in the address 'my true friend' in the *Book of Thomas* a clue to Thomas' identity as the Beloved Disciple of the Gospel of John. This is, however, speculative. For a criticism of Schenke's hypothesis, see Dunderberg 1998b, 70–2.

⁶⁸ The passage Poirier refers to is from Judas' prayer, in which he addresses the Lord as the 'companion and helper' (Gr. ὁ ἑταῖρος καὶ σύμμαχος; *Acts Thom.* 156). It is quite typical of the *Acts* that Jesus is described as the companion and fellow-traveller of the believer (see, e.g., 10, 37, 80). In *Acts Thom.* 39 (Gr.), the apostle is said to be 'the fellow-initiate (συνμυστήτης) of the hidden word of Christ' and the 'fellow-worker' (συνεργός) of Christ. The latter expression does not have an equivalent in the Syriac manuscripts.

⁶⁹ Layton 1987, 358–409.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 359–60.

St Thomas, however, lacks the sophisticated mythological systems of these later religious systems and presupposes only 'an uncomplicated Hellenistic myth of the divine origins of the self'.⁷² According to this myth,

... the individual true self (spirit, soul, living element) 'has come from' or 'has been sent from' the 'kingdom of light' in the East, i.e. belongs to the spiritual world. It now resides within a realm, i.e. a state, of 'sleep, drunkenness, darkness, and death', whose rulers are malevolent authorities ... By the will of the 'king' or 'father' a savior (Jesus), or personified message, is sent to awaken, sober up, illuminate and vivify the self, which learns to recognize itself and to distinguish between light and darkness. The savior's message causes the self to return to its proper home (the kingdom), i.e. to its proper state; ...⁷³

This mythic understanding is most integrally expressed in the *Hymn of the Pearl*, but Layton believes that it is clear enough in other Thomazine writings. The Hymn is a poetic presentation of the young prince, whose parents send him away from their kingdom in the East to Egypt in order to fetch a precious pearl lying in the midst of the sea near a dangerous serpent. In Egypt, however, the prince forgets his work and falls asleep, but is reminded of his task by a 'flying letter' sent by his father. The prince charms the serpent, takes the pearl and returns to the kingdom of his father. The prince is clothed in his royal robe which is amply described and much emphasized at the end of the story.

One can distinguish two elements in Layton's characterization of the school of Thomas: 1) what he calls 'the Hellenistic myth of the divine origins of the self', presented in narrative form in the *Hymn of the Pearl*, and 2) the model of divine twinship, exemplified by the figure of Thomas. Since the first is quite common in other Christian and non-Christian writings,⁷⁴ it is the combination of these two elements that must be seen as a distinctly 'Thomazine' feature. Is the *Hymn of the Pearl* 'Thomazine' in that sense? Layton himself admits that this is not so obvious as his initial statement suggests. Together with the majority of the scholars,⁷⁵ Layton thinks that the Hymn was not originally

⁷² Ibid., 360.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ For example, the Hymn shares many structural and individual motifs with the stories of the soul presented in the *Exegesis on the Soul* and *Authoritative Teaching*. I am indebted here to Ulla Tervahauta's analysis. She is preparing a dissertation on 'The Story of the Fallen Soul in the Nag Hammadi Library'.

⁷⁵ For the history of the research, see Poirier 1981.

composed as part of the *Acts of Thomas*. Layton assumes two possibilities: the Hymn may presuppose knowledge of the Thomasine tradition, but it is also possible that it has been composed somewhere other than in Edessa, and 'its original meaning may have been something quite different from the theology of the divine twinship'.⁷⁶ In the latter case it would have been 'secondarily adopted by the school of St. Thomas for its own purposes'.⁷⁷ There are, indeed, reasons to believe that the Hymn was not originally composed as an allegorical presentation of the Thomasine theology. It does not contain clear Christian elements,⁷⁸ although it certainly lent itself to Platonist-Christian interpretations. The association of the hymn with the apostle Thomas may be secondary and most likely did not happen before the Hymn was incorporated into the *Acts of Thomas*.⁷⁹ The clearest point of contact with the 'twin' tradition is the description of the moment when the prince receives his 'glittering robe':

But I could not recall my splendour;
For, it was while I was still a boy and quite young that I had left it behind in my father's palace.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ This is contested by Quispel (1967, 39–64), who argues for a (Jewish-)Christian origin. Quispel takes notice of three features in the Hymn: its connection with Matthew's parable of the pearl (Matt. 13:45–6), the idea of a guardian angel, and the heavenly clothes in which the believer will be clothed. None of these features are strong indications of the Christian origin of the Hymn. The connection with the NT parable is thin (the peculiar expression 'one pearl' on line 12 [cf. Matt. 13:45] may be due to a Christian redaction), and the ideas of the guardian angel and heavenly clothes are not specifically Christian notions, as Quispel's own analysis well demonstrates. On the other hand, one does not have to postulate any pre-Christian 'Iranian Gnosis' to explain the origin of the Hymn (*pace* Widengren 1960, 27–30). The story of the prince sent to a foreign land was widely circulated in Mesopotamia, as has been recently demonstrated by Simo Parpola (2001). He compares the Hymn with several ancient Mesopotamian myths, which were popular in the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. Some of them, especially the stories about Ninurta, offer quite close parallels to the tale told in the Hymn. The following common features can be detected: the princely status of the protagonist, the initial peace at the father's court, the subsequent dangerous mission to the foreign land, the fight against the monster, the initial defeat, the invigorating message from home, the victory over the monster, the retrieval of its possessions, and the triumphal return and exaltation at home (*ibid.*, 189–90).

⁷⁹ Cf., however, Drijvers (1992a, 331), who argues that the Hymn may also have separately circulated under the name of Judas Thomas. But there is very little in the Hymn itself that would support this view. The title of the Hymn in Syriac ('The Hymn of Judas Thomas the Apostle in the country of the Indians'; cf. also the title at the end: '... which he spoke in the prison') may be more original than the introduction in Greek, but it nevertheless presupposes knowledge of the narrative framework of the Acts.

But when suddenly I saw my garment reflected as in a mirror,
 I perceived in it my whole self as well,
 And through it I recognized and saw myself.
 For, though we derived from one and the same we were partially divided; and
 then again we were one, with single form. (*Acts Thom.* 112, 75–8.)⁸⁰

There is no doubt that the idea of the heavenly counterpart with whom one is reunited is described here. The passage bears some resemblance to the language of ‘two becoming one’ and ‘image’ used in the *Gospel of Thomas* (*Gos. Thom.* 4; 22; 23; 83). This is an interesting parallel and shows that both the Hymn and the *Gospel of Thomas* presuppose knowledge of the same tradition concerning the heavenly double or ‘image’ of the human self. The appearance of this idea is the most obvious reason for the association of the Hymn with the Thomasine tradition, but the idea itself was much more widely circulated.⁸¹ One can thus define the *Hymn of the Pearl* as a Thomasine work only in a limited sense: it shares with the *Gospel of Thomas* the same religious ideas of one’s heavenly double and reunion with it.

The *Book of Thomas* creates a different kind of problem for Layton’s reconstruction. This problem is also noticed by Layton himself. He admits that the ‘myth of the soul,’ which is represented in the *Hymn of the Pearl*, provides only a framework for the Saviour’s teaching in the *Book of Thomas* and ‘does not form an important part of his message.’⁸² The document does not indeed explain salvation in terms of ‘the two becoming one’, as does the *Gospel of Thomas*, or speak metaphorically of one’s reunion with the heavenly ‘glittering robe’ (cf. the *Hymn of the Pearl*), nor does it speak of one’s ‘images’ or becoming ‘like’ the Saviour (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 108). The *Book of Thomas* presents a simple wisdom-

⁸⁰ Transl. from Layton 1987, 374. Layton’s translation is based on the Greek text. It is largely acknowledged that the Syriac version of the Hymn is closer to the original than the Greek version, but at this particular point the Greek text has probably preserved a better reading on line 77, where the Syriac text reads ‘I saw it all in all, and also received all in it’ (ܕܠܟܘܪܐ ܡܢ ܕܘܠܐ ܕܝܟܘܪܐ ܕܠܘ ܕܘܠܐ ܕܠܘ ܕܠܘ ܕܠܘ); transl. from Wright 1968; Gr. καὶ ὅλον ἑμαυτὸν ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἐθεασαμῆν, καὶ ἔγνων καὶ εἶδον δι’ αὐτῆς ἑμαυτὸν; see Harviainen 1999, 348. The Hymn has been preserved only in one Syriac and one Greek manuscript.

⁸¹ Quispel and De Conick derive the idea from the Greek concept of δαίμων (*Lat. genius*), a guardian spirit, who could be described as the exact counterpart to the person to whom it belonged. Acts 12:15 and Matt. 18:10 show that it was part of the shared world view of the NT authors. Rabbinic authors are familiar with the concept as well. See Quispel 1967, 39–63; 1974; De Conick 1996b, 148–57.

⁸² Layton 1987, 400.

type soteriological model of the 'two ways', one way leading to hell and eternal peril, and the other leading to eternal rest and detachment from bodily sufferings and *pathos*.

If the model of divine twinship is lacking in the soteriological system presupposed by the *Book of Thomas*, and if the use of the model in the beginning of the document is somewhat detached or even ironical, as argued earlier, one should question whether the idea of the 'school of St Thomas' that produced the *Gospel* and the *Book of Thomas* is a very helpful hypothesis. To be sure, the use of the term 'school' is a matter of analogy and it does not necessarily have to presuppose strict doctrinal coherency in the group. Students did not always follow the teaching of their masters.⁸³ But to be able to speak of a 'school' in a sensible way, one has to trace at least some kind of sociological continuity and school activity behind the Thomasine writings. There is a little evidence for such matters beyond the facts that these works used the tradition about Judas the Twin, one or two of them (the *Book of Thomas*, and, more indirectly, the *Acts of Thomas*) may be dependent on the gospel, and two of them (the gospel and the Hymn) employed the idea of the heavenly double or 'image'. This is not to say that the primary communities which produced and used these books did not have any characteristics of ancient schools.⁸⁴ However, there is simply too little evidence for reconstructing a particular Christian school with Judas Thomas as its founder figure.⁸⁵

⁸³ For example Apelles, a student of Marcion, modified his master's dualism and docetism considerably (see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.13). Note also that Tatian's teacher was Justin.

⁸⁴ Cf. Culpepper's definition of 'school' in 1975, 258–9. According to him, the ancient schools were 1) groups of disciples which usually emphasized *filia* and *koinonia*; 2) they gathered around, and traced their origins to a founder; 3) they valued the teaching of their founder and the traditions about him; 4) members of the schools were disciples or students of the founder; 5) teaching, learning, studying, and writing were common activities; 6) most schools observed communal meals, often in memory of their founders; 7) they had rules or practices regarding admission; 8) they often maintained some degree of distance or withdrawal from the rest of the society; and 9) they developed organizational means of ensuring their perpetuity. This list is as complete as possible, and our information about the groups that can with good reasons be classified as 'schools' in antiquity is insufficient at best. Yet, at least some of the above criteria are needed for calling a group or alleged group behind some writings a 'school'.

⁸⁵ For the second-century Christian schools and the *Gospel of Thomas*, see p. 104 in this book.

5. A Thomasine community?

The suggestion about a 'community' which produced the Thomasine writings is similar to the 'school' hypothesis, and most of the arguments against the latter view are valid for assessing this. A leading advocate of this view, Gregory J. Riley, argues that there existed a 'Thomas community' which 'produced the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Book of Thomas* . . . , and evoked from the community of the Beloved Disciple the Doubting Thomas pericope of John 20'.⁸⁶ Riley also believes that the *Acts of Thomas* is 'in conscious continuity with this tradition'.⁸⁷ Riley's main thesis, namely that there was a 'controversy between the two closely related Christian communities of Thomas and John' on the issue of resurrection,⁸⁸ has been rightly challenged by several scholars,⁸⁹ but that is not the main issue here. The suggestion that the Johannine literature was produced by a community or network of communities⁹⁰ is widely accepted in scholarship. Could this give support for the view that the works written under the name Thomas would similarly derive from a group or groups that were connected by their use of the Thomasine traditions?

There are indeed some interesting similarities between the Beloved Disciple of John and the role of Thomas in the Thomasine literature.⁹¹ Both function as the guarantors of the traditions in certain early Christian writings. Both characters merge traditional figures or names with ideal and symbolic elements.⁹² In both cases this process has resulted in an obscure and ambiguous identity of the apostle. The dissimilarities between Johannine and Thomasine writings are nevertheless revealing. One can list many more linguistic and theological similarities in the Johannine writings (at least in the Gospel and First

⁸⁶ Riley 1991, 533. The thesis is fully elaborated in Riley 1995.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Riley even sees the Thomas Christians in today's India as being a historical continuation of the earliest followers of the apostle Thomas (1995, 78).

⁸⁸ Riley 1995, 2. Cf. also De Conick (2000), who holds that this controversy was about the mystical encounter with the divine, i.e., John responding negatively to the mystical soteriology of the Thomasine Christians.

⁸⁹ See Davies 1997; Dunderberg 1997; 1998b; Cameron 1999.

⁹⁰ The term 'community' is, of course, problematic when applied to the earliest Christian groups. In many areas, it is more accurate to speak of a network of small house-churches which may have consisted merely of a few families and their close associates. See Sellwe 2001 and the discussion about the Matthean community on pp. 97–102 in this book.

⁹¹ See Dunderberg's comprehensive analyses of the issue in 1998b and 2002.

⁹² For apostles as symbols, see pp. 81–4 in this book.

John)⁹³ than in the books appealing to the authority of Thomas (cf. the comparisons above). Furthermore, there is unmistakable communal language in the Johannine literature, which reinforces the impression that we are dealing with the community identity connected with the testimony of the Beloved Disciple (most strikingly the use of 'we' in John 21:24).⁹⁴ And finally, the Johannine literature, especially the letters, give us direct information about the communal situation of the group behind the writings. Such evidence suggests that we are in a much better position in suggesting the existence of the Johannine community than the alleged Thomas Christianity.⁹⁵ It is, of course, quite legitimate to seek signs of communal language and setting of *each* Thomasine writing. For example, the *Acts of Thomas* offers abundant materials for the study of the ritual practices described by the author. Such an analysis could yield interesting results concerning the social setting of the writing. I believe that the *Gospel of Thomas* also reveals at least some signs of the communal identity of its primary readers.⁹⁶ However, the hypothesis that all three Thomasine works (or even two of them) derive from the same 'community' is much more speculative than the hypothesis that there existed a group which produced and transmitted the Johannine writings.⁹⁷

6. *Thomas* and early Syrian Christianity

The above analysis has made it clear that the ideological and verbal links between the three Thomasine writings should not be emphasized without simultaneously drawing attention to the obvious differences

⁹³ These are listed in Schnelle 1987, 53–4. I follow the majority opinion that the Revelation of John does not derive from the community that produced the Gospel and the letters. See Brown 1997, 802–5.

⁹⁴ Note also the use of such words as φίλοι, τέκνα, and ἀδελφός in the Gospel of John and in the letters. See Schnelle 1987, 53–4.

⁹⁵ I am not, however, suggesting that the Beloved Disciple was a historical disciple of Jesus and the founder and the leader of the Johannine community. For problems with this view, see Dunderberg 2002.

⁹⁶ Similarly Sellew (2001, 29), who admits that in the *Gospel of Thomas* 'some limited signs of group consciousness are visible'. See also pp. 77–92 in this book.

⁹⁷ This conclusion concurs with Sellew's (2001) assessment of the 'Thomas Christianity' hypothesis. Sellew rightly observes that Riley nowhere explains or seeks to justify his presumption (which goes back to Koester) that a group of Thomas Christians existed. He also notes that the evidence offered by Riley 'need not point to anything beyond the existence of a literary influence (and presumably also an ideological influence) of one or two of these books on the others'. *Ibid.*, 28.

between them.⁹⁸ The positive side of the analysis is that the Syrian provenance of the *Gospel of Thomas* is much more probable than specific theories about the Thomasine school or Christianity. In addition to the tradition about the apostle 'Judas Thomas', Thomasine scholarship has been able to identify some other factors that point to a Syrian origin or at least to an early use of the gospel in that area. Individual readings and traditions to be found in the gospel can be detected in works which are largely considered to be of Syrian origin, for example in Tatian's *Diatessaron*,⁹⁹ *Liber Graduum*,¹⁰⁰ the *Odes of Solomon*,¹⁰¹ and the *Gospel of Philip*.¹⁰² Ascetic currents were influential early in Syrian Christianity and these are clearly reflected in the *Gospel of Thomas*.¹⁰³ Sometimes one can find linguistic and conceptual

⁹⁸ Similarly Sellew 2001, 34: 'We cannot simply confine the varieties of Syrian Christianity to a "Thomasine" church'.

⁹⁹ Quispel 1975b, 70–97, 159–68: See also the list in Baarda 1983. For the parallels with the *Gospel of Thomas* and Tatian, Drijvers (1982, 172–3) argues that the gospel is dependent on the *Diatessaron* and Tatian's theology and dates it around 200 CE. Drijvers' evidence does not, however, show that Tatian has influenced the *Gospel of Thomas* and not vice versa. If the conventional date of the Greek papyrus fragments is accepted, Drijvers' date of the composition, as Fallon and Cameron argue, 'virtually makes P. Oxy 1 an autograph of the Gos. Thom. in Greek, though Drijvers thinks the Gos. Thom. was originally written in Syriac' (Fallon and Cameron 1988, 4225).

¹⁰⁰ See Baker 1965–6.

¹⁰¹ The *Odes of Solomon* is often seen as a typical representative of Syrian Christianity. See Klijn 1965, 45–64 and several articles in Drijvers 1984b and 1994. Charlesworth (1998, 23) argues for a provenance in western Syria, but assumes, nevertheless, that Syriac was the original language of the *Odes* (ibid., 22). The parallels between the *Odes* and the *Gospel of Thomas* has not been systematically studied. Compare, e.g., 3:7 and *Gos. Thom.* 106 and 108; 6:10 and 113; 11:1–3 and *Gos. Thom.* 53; 11:7 and *Gos. Thom.* 13; 11:18–24 (cf. also 20:7) and *Gos. Thom.* 19; 12:5 and *Gos. Thom.* 13; 25:8 and *Gos. Thom.* 37; 41:1 and *Gos. Thom.* 21. See also Drijvers 1970, 18.

¹⁰² See Isenberg 1989, 138; Marjanen 1998a, 134 n. 97. The appearance of the Syriac words and etymologies in *Gos. Phil.* 63.21–3; 56.7–9; 62.6–17 and Eastern sacramental practice have generally been taken as indications that the *Gospel of Philip* was composed in eastern Syria; see Ménard 1968; Layton 1987, 325; Isenberg 1989, 134; Schenke 1991b, 183 (with hesitation).

¹⁰³ Not all early Syrian sources represent encratite theology, however. There is no indubitable evidence for ascetic practices in the *Odes of Solomon* or in *Doctrina Addai*, apart, perhaps, from the general statement in the latter on p. 50 that 'all men and women' lived 'in solitude'. *Odes Sol.* 9:11. ('Put on the crown in the true Covenant of the Lord') is too ambiguous to support the claim that the *odist* represents an encratite theology (pace Murray 1975, 14). Bardaisan was certainly not an ascetic. The *Gospel of Thomas* is more ambivalent than the *Book* and the *Acts of Thomas*, but it clearly reflects encratite tendencies (see Uro 1998b). One can also find similar ascetic tendencies elsewhere than in Syria. The *Acts of Paul*, for example, displays a very similar encratite theology to the *Acts of Thomas*, though it is usually thought to have been written in Asia Minor, not in Syria.

peculiarities which are best explained if one assumes that Syriac was used besides Greek in the milieu where the gospel was composed or edited.¹⁰⁴

Scholars often locate the gospel in Edessa ('Orhai), the capital of the kingdom of Osroëne in northern Mesopotamia. Balanced between Rome and the Parthians, the small kingdom managed to preserve its relative independence until it was finally made a Roman colony in 214 CE.¹⁰⁵ Edessa became the centre of Syrian Christianity, and at the end of the fourth century there was a famous church of St Thomas, to which the bones of the apostle were removed in August 394 from outside the city walls.¹⁰⁶ The story about the correspondence between the king, Abgar, and Jesus and about the conversion of the city to Christianity was widely known in antiquity. The story was probably composed in the third century as a response to the Manichaean mission¹⁰⁷ and contains no reliable information about the beginning of the Christian church in Edessa.¹⁰⁸ The beginnings and the earliest history of Edessene, as well as Syrian Christianity, are obscure.¹⁰⁹ If the gospel originates there, it provides very early evidence for Christianity in that area.¹¹⁰ Although it may be wise not to be too specific about the localization of the place where the *Gospel of Thomas* or an edition of the gospel was written, Syriac-speaking (bilingual) northern Mesopotamia has much to recommend it.¹¹¹ In addition to the works

¹⁰⁴ Baker 1965 and Guillaumont 1981; see also Baarda 1991, 252–3. For the view that the *Gospel of Thomas* was originally written in Syriac, see Drijvers 1984a, 15.

¹⁰⁵ For the history of Edessa, see Segal 1970 and Drijvers 1977, 863–96; see also Barnard 1968.

¹⁰⁶ For details, see Segal 1970, 174–6.

¹⁰⁷ Thus Drijvers 1982, 159–66. Segal (1970, 67–9) takes the legend as a Christian counterpart of the (apparently historical) conversion of the Adiabene royal family to Judaism, as related by Josephus.

¹⁰⁸ Drijvers 1982, 166; see also Klijn 1965, 38; Segal (1970, 69–70) sees a historical kernel in the story and argues that 'the king in whose reign Christianity made a notable advance in Edessa was not Abgar Ukkarna, but his namesake Abgar the Great', who reigned 177–212 CE. For a criticism of this view see, e.g., Millar 1993, 476.

¹⁰⁹ Drijvers 1992b, 129.

¹¹⁰ Early evidence that there were many Christians in the second century beyond the Euphrates and as far as Nisibis is provided by the Greek funerary inscription of a Christian called Abercius. He had travelled from Asia Minor and visited Syria in the latter half of the second century. He writes: 'I saw the Syrian plain, and all the cities – [even] Nisibis, having crossed the Euphrates. Everywhere I found people with whom to speak.' See Segal 1970, 69 and Murray 1975, 6.

¹¹¹ Drijvers 1994, 237. Cf. also 1996, 172. Ehlers' (1970) critical arguments against the Edessene origin of the *Gospel of Thomas* have been responded to by Klijn (1972).

associated with the apostle Thomas, therefore, it is quite reasonable to read the gospel together with other early Syrian sources and literature.

Students of Syrian literature have recognized that Christianity in the East early developed expressions of belief which were different from what is known from the West. There are some distinctive ideological features that seem to be typical of most traditions and writings from that area before the mid-third century.¹¹² *The Gospel of Thomas* shares many of them. One may note, for example, that the Syrian authors do not centre on the vicarious death of Christ. Sin and atonement are not emphasized and, for the most part, are absent. Salvation is not described in metaphors taken from judicial or sacrificial language, but rather as a return to the original condition of the paradisic state which humanity has lost in the fall. Moreover, the Syrian writers did not see a radical break between God and humankind. Living in the world of death and corruption, a human being is encouraged to seek and to find his or her true divine self. Given the great stress put on the divine origin of humanity, the complete identification between Christ and the believer that is expressed, for example, by means of the twin motif is not surprising. The author of the *Odes of Solomon* reveals this identification by putting the words of Jesus in the mouth of the singer without giving any clue as to who at which point is 'I'.¹¹³ The poet also describes the union with Christ as a relationship between two lovers, recalling the 'bridal chamber' imagery in *Gos. Thom.* 75.¹¹⁴

I love the beloved and my soul loves him,
 And where his rest is, there also am I.
 And I shall be no stranger,
 Because there is no jealousy with the lord most high and merciful.
 I have been united to him, because the lover has found the beloved,
 because I love him that is the son, I shall become a son. (3:5-7.)¹¹⁵

Syrian Christianity is sometimes said to have been developed in a cultural enclave that is virtually untouched by Hellenism.¹¹⁶ Yet such a view leaves unnoticed the fact that the earliest known personalities of

¹¹² The features mentioned here are largely based on Klijn's summary in 1965, 139-47.

¹¹³ This has been observed by Drijvers 1994, 244.

¹¹⁴ For the possible Mesopotamian roots of this imagery, see pp. 50-1 in this book.

¹¹⁵ Transl. modified from Charlesworth 1973. Cf. also *Gos. Phil.* 67.25-6, where a person who has received the sacraments is described as 'no longer a Christian but a Christ'.

¹¹⁶ Cf., e.g., Brock (1980, 5), who states that '... earliest Syriac writers are virtually "uncontaminated" by Greek - and hence European - culture'.

Syrian Christianity, Tatian and Bardaisan, were deeply influenced by Greek ideas. Stoic and Middle Platonist influences in both writers' works are largely acknowledged,¹¹⁷ and Tatian, who was a trained rhetorician, reveals wide reading of Hellenistic philosophies. One may, of course, argue that it was only with Tatian that Hellenistic ideas penetrated Syrian Christianity. However, it is hardly reasonable to see one man as being responsible for such deeply penetrating cultural influences. Edessa and other eastern Syrian cities were not isolated from the exchange of cultural ideas.¹¹⁸ Edessa, in particular, was a junction of important caravan roads. One may surmise that the busy highroads from Antioch to Edessa and from Edessa via Nisibis all the way to India carried, in addition to material goods, religious and philosophical thoughts.

It is not difficult to locate the *Gospel of Thomas* in this kind of cultural and ideological environment which displays a mixture of religious ideas, Gentile, Jewish, and Christian. The following chapters will examine how the various ideas and influences come together in the gospel as a distinctive type of religious teaching.

¹¹⁷ Drijvers 1992a, 336; 1996, 172. For Bardaisan's philosophical position on the issue of will, see Dible 1982, 108–10.

¹¹⁸ Drijvers 1984a, 2–3; 1992b, 128.

Gnosticism without demiurge?

1.) The issue of 'Gnosticism'

Regardless of quite different approaches and ultimate conclusions, two recent attempts to solve the conceptual difficulties involved in the category of 'Gnosticism' made by Bentley Layton and Michael A. Williams, both emphasize the centrality of the cosmological myth in defining the issue.¹ Williams argues that the category of 'Gnosticism' has become burdened with so many clichés and distorted generalizations that it has failed to function as a reliable tool for the study of ancient religions. His book is chiefly aimed at demonstrating the diverse nature of the texts and systems traditionally dealt with under the rubrics of 'gnosis' or 'Gnosticism' and illustrating the uselessness of some of the most common clichés connected with these terms, such as world-rejection, hatred of the body, asceticism, and determinism. However, Williams also makes a provisional suggestion for an alternative category, 'biblical demiurgical traditions', as referring to those currents in Jewish and Christian circles which ascribed 'the creation and the management of the cosmos to some lower entity or entities, distinct from the highest God'.²

Layton, on the other hand, starts from the use of the term *γνώστικός* ('good at knowing') by ancient Christian and pagan authors as referring to certain 'schools of thought' (*αἰρέσεις*). These

¹ Layton 1995; Williams 1996. For recent discussions on the issue, see also Pearson 1994 and contributions by King, Lüdemann, Marjanen, Pearson and Williams in Marjanen forthcoming. The agreement between Layton's and Williams' studies has also been noticed by Williams: '... much of Layton's program is to me uncontroversial and indeed essential, and something with which I understand my own recommendations to be in accord' (see the article in Marjanen forthcoming).

² Williams 1996, 51; see also p. 26.

ancient references and summaries are what he calls 'direct testimonia'.³ Although they are very meagre and give an extremely inadequate historical picture, some of them summarize the actual writings or mention titles of the works written by persons who belonged to the gnostic schools. Since some of these works have been preserved as complete or fragmentary manuscripts, the most important of them being the *Apocryphon of John*, and common mythographic features can be recognized in this text corpus, it is the mythological system reconstructed from these works that can genuinely be called 'gnostic'. By extension the number of the gnostic works can be increased with other writings from Nag Hammadi which reflect similar myths of the origin of the cosmos and humanity. These writings largely represent a type of cosmography which Hans-Martin Schenke had identified as the 'Sethian' gnostic system.⁴ Even though Layton's approach leads to a much more narrow and specific definition than Williams' suggestion of biblical demiurgical traditions, it is the myth of creation – for Layton the Sethian type – that similarly is the 'touchstone by which other, undenominated textual material can be recognized as being Gnostic'.⁵

Have these recent discussions on the issue of 'Gnosticism' any bearing on the understanding of the ideological perspective prevalent in the *Gospel of Thomas*? At first sight it seems that both scholars' arguments push *Thomas* into a marginal position with respect to the issue. Many recent contributors have emphasized that *Thomas* is not 'gnostic', at least in the sense that it reveals signs of the myth featured in the *Apocryphon of John*.⁶ However, Williams' approach emphasizing the diversity of the various ideologies which have been regarded as 'gnostic' could be applied to the analysis of the *Gospel of Thomas*. The gospel has after all some connection with the phenomenon at issue in both Layton's and Williams' studies, whatever name we give it. One should note, for example, that part of the Thomasine literature is included in Layton's *Gnostic Scriptures*,⁷ even though he does not regard them as gnostic in the proper sense of the word.⁸ In Layton's

³ Layton 1995, 340.

⁴ Schenke 1974; 1981.

⁵ Layton 1995, 340–1.

⁶ Davies 1983; De Conick 1996b; Marjanen 1998a.

⁷ Layton 1987, 359–409.

⁸ Layton 1987, xiv: 'In itself the Thomas scripture shows no influence of the gnostic sect. But it expresses a mystical concept of salvation through self-acquaintance, which is identical with one of the main Christian components in Valentinus' revisionism.'

reconstruction, there is a historical relationship between 'the school of St Thomas' and Valentinus and his school, the latter of which he defines as 'a distinct mutation, or reformed offshoot, of the original Gnostics'.⁹ In the previous chapter I have presented arguments against the hypothesis of the school of Thomas. This result does not, however, mean that one should cease looking for signs of historical relationships and trajectories between the *Gospel of Thomas* and other writings which present themselves as reasonable points of comparison. It is important to continue the efforts to locate *Thomas*' ideology within the wide spectrum of traditions and belief systems that can be found in Nag Hammadi and other related documents. This task has become even more urgent after the publication of Williams' study.

It should be noted that this chapter is not intended to give an 'essentialist' definition of Gnosticism in conceptual or sociological terms.¹⁰ The observation that a certain kind of cosmogony is the least common denominator behind the recent attempts to categorize the various phenomena in the sources does not mean that the 'true nature' of Gnosticism or gnostic religion has been discovered. To reduce a religious cult or ideology to one mythic discourse, even though it is prominent in many sources studied under the rubric of Gnosticism, would suggest a very narrow way of interpreting the data.¹¹ Instead, the application of Layton's and Williams' terminologies is intended to be what Karen L. King has called 'a pragmatic-contextualist approach', in which definitions are understood as 'intellectual tools in the historian's toolbox'.¹² Their adequacy is determined by their capacity to 'do the job.' In my case, the 'job to do' is to delineate *Thomas*' distinctive characteristics and make the comparison with other related texts clearer.

⁹ Layton 1995, 343.

¹⁰ Cf. Karen King's discussion in Marjanen forthcoming. King refers to Raziel Abelson's article on the philosophical issues involved in 'definition' (1967).

¹¹ The reversed way of arguing is also problematic. One religious discourse should not a priori be restricted to one religious group or school. Cf. Williams' balanced judgement: 'We could affirm social continuity where there is the strongest evidence of it, but at the same time be open to the possibility that some of the linkages we are looking at were less a matter of communal or school continuity than merely the recycling and adaptation of certain motifs by *different* groups or individuals' (Williams' italics); see Williams forthcoming.

¹² King forthcoming. King draws upon Abelson's terminology and description of approaches (see above, note 10).

2. A point of comparison: the *Dialogue of the Saviour*

In the following analysis, I shall focus on one Nag Hammadi writing which is expected to shed some light on *Thomas*' ideological and social location, namely on the *Dialogue of the Saviour*. An obvious flaw in this choice is that the only extant manuscript of the *Dialogue*, the Coptic translation preserved in NHC III, 5 (120–47), is not in good condition and substantial lacunae remain in the critical edition of the text.¹³ In spite of the fragmentary nature of the document, however, those parts that can be read offer ideas and language that exhibit striking similarities with the *Gospel of Thomas*. We are told, for example, about 'elect' and 'solitary',¹⁴ 'seeking and finding',¹⁵ 'self-acquaintance',¹⁶ 'ruling',¹⁷ 'resting',¹⁸ 'place (of life)',¹⁹ and 'entering the bridal chamber'.²⁰ The number of such common expressions raises the issue of a particular relationship between these two writings. One should also notice that both documents discuss the place of women in the Christian community. They highlight the female followers of Jesus as being more perceptive than the male disciples;²¹ yet they also use 'womanhood' as a negative symbol.²² One of the three interlocutors of the Lord in the *Dialogue* is Judas, who is often identified as the same disciple as 'Judas Thomas' in the Thomasine literature.²³ Both documents suggest a relatively uncomplicated myth of the soul's divine origin and its return to the heavenly home, although the mythic sections of the *Dialogue* (or better, what is left of them) clearly assume more sophisticated mythographic narrations. With respect to the issue of 'Gnosticism', the

¹³ Emmel (ed.) 1984. The division of sayings used in this paper is based on that edition. Unless otherwise noted, the English translation used in this chapter is from Emmel's edition. Pierre Létourneau has produced a new critical edition with a French translation for the Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi (University of Laval). I thank Louis Painchaud, the director of the project, for allowing me to use the manuscript before its publication.

¹⁴ Cf. *Dial. Sav.* 2 and *Gos. Thom.* 49.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., *Dial. Sav.* 20 and *Gos. Thom.* 2.

¹⁶ Cf. *Dial. Sav.* 30 and, e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 3.

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., *Dial. Sav.* 50 and *Gos. Thom.* 2; 81.

¹⁸ Cf. *Dial. Sav.* 1, 65–6 and *Gos. Thom.* 2 (Pap. Oxy. 654, 8–9).

¹⁹ Cf. *Dial. Sav.* 26–7 and, e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 4.

²⁰ Cf. *Dial. Sav.* 50 and *Gos. Thom.* 75; 104.

²¹ Cf. *Dial. Sav.* 53 and *Gos. Thom.* 21; 61.

²² *Dial. Sav.* 90–1; cf. *Gos. Thom.* 114. For gender language in the *Dialogue* and *Thomas*, see Marjanen 1996, 88–93 and 1996, 32–55 (= 1998c) respectively.

²³ Perkins 1980, 107.

Dialogue does not fit well into Layton's or Williams' categories. As in the case of *Thomas*, the ideological nature of the writing is not easy to fit into any given category. The prominent role the writings give to Jesus as the teacher of the 'way' (the *Dialogue*) or Jesus' life-sustaining words (*Thomas*) makes it nevertheless obvious that both are works of devoted Christians.

3) Cosmological myths

The *Dialogue of the Saviour* presents a conversation between the Lord and the disciples resembling many other revelation dialogues found in the Nag Hammadi Library. Such works do not contain progressive logical arguments comparable to philosophical dialogues, nor can one find any continuous narrative plot. The manner of discourse is episodic and it is built on repetition and variation rather than on tight linear organization.²⁴ For the modern reader, the answers of the Lord do not always directly answer the questions raised by the disciples. In many cases the answer opens up an entirely new perspective, a hermeneutical strategy that can also be found in the *Gospel of Thomas*.²⁵

The author combines several types of oral or written material, such as traditional sayings of Jesus, a liturgical prayer, apocalyptic-type visions and cosmological myths. Two blocks of material preserve fragments of a creation myth or myths (*Dial. Sav.* 15–18 and 21–4), but the issue of the origin of the world and humanity is also discussed elsewhere in the dialogue parts of the document.²⁶ *Dial. Sav.* 35 contains a passage about the origin of the elements, which beautifully summarizes the goal of the cosmological teaching in the writing:

If [one] does not [understand how] fire came into existence, he will burn in it, because he does not know the root of it. If one does not first understand water, he knows nothing. For what use is there for him to be baptized in it? If one does not understand how blowing wind came into existence, he will blow away with it. If one does not understand how body, which he bears, came into existence, he will [perish] with it. And how will someone who does [not] know [the Son]

²⁴ Perkins 1980, 32–3. To her, these characteristics indicate that the 'Gnostics still operate within the conventions of a world of oral tradition' (ibid., 32). For oral culture in early Christianity, see Ch. 5 in this book.

²⁵ Compare, e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 24 and *Dial. Sav.* 77–8.

²⁶ See *Dial. Sav.* 34; 37; 88–9.

know [the Father].²⁷ And to someone who will not know the [root] of all things, they remain hidden.

The list mentions the four elements by replacing earth with body²⁸ and thus echoes the biblical creation story, according to which man was created from earth. The passage bears some resemblance to the liberating knowledge explained by the Valentinian teacher Theodotus (*Exc. Theod.* 78: 'It is not only the washing that is liberating, but the knowledge of who we were, and what we have become . . .'),²⁹ which is often taken as a *locus classicus* of Gnosticism. The same basic orientation is found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. The true meaning and the goal of human life can only be understood by means of discovering 'the roots of all things' or the beginning: 'For where the beginning is, there will the end be' (*Gos. Thom.* 18). Thus, whatever specific myth is presupposed, *Thomas* and the *Dialogue* share a common orientation to the origin of the world, which is distinctive enough to differentiate them from some other Christian writings (for example, from most of those in the New Testament) and to connect them with others traditionally classified as 'gnostic'.

The chief 'characters' of the mythic drama(s) in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* are not numerous, although the cosmology is more elaborated than in *Thomas*. The supreme God is called the Father,³⁰ or alternatively the Greatness,³¹ of whom the Word or Logos was born.³² Sometimes a distinction between the Logos and the First Logos is made,³³ which seems to bring to the cosmic scene one more hypostasis. The Logos is apparently closely associated with the Son of Man in the apocalyptic vision, where the 'high place' and 'the place of the abyss' are seen.³⁴ In *Dial. Sav.* 40 it is said that 'a Word came forth from the Son of Man'. Whether or not the *Dialogue of the Saviour* drew upon Christian or non-Christian traditions, it is clear that the author employed these traditions in the service of the Christian incarnation

²⁷ 'The Son' and the 'Father' are based on Emmel's emendations in the critical apparatus classified as 'probable'. Létourneau includes them in the edited text.

²⁸ Koester and Pagels 1984, 8.

²⁹ Translation is from Casey 1934, 87. The passage is referred to by Koester and Pagels 1984, 11–12.

³⁰ *Dial. Sav.* 1; 2; 22; 34; 35; 89; 96; 104.

³¹ *Dial. Sav.* 34; 37.

³² *Dial. Sav.* 22; 34.

³³ *Dial. Sav.* 37; cf. also 34.

³⁴ *Dial. Sav.* 36–40.

story. It is the Lord-Jesus, the pre-existent Logos and the Son, who is one with the Father and who has come down to teach the way to the Father's home.³⁵ In this respect, similarities with Johannine Christology are unavoidable. Yet the story of the Logos sent to save the 'seed' which had fallen down in *Dial. Sav.* 37 is essentially a redeemer myth that goes beyond Johannine theology emphasizing the divine origin of those (i.e., the 'seed') who receive salvation.³⁶

A seed from a power became deficient and it went down to [the] abyss of the earth. The Greatness remembered [it] and he sent the [Word] to it. The Word brought it up into [his presence] so that the First Word might not fail.³⁷

The 'seed' appears the second time in the context of Mary's question concerning the parable of the mustard seed: 'Is it something from heaven or is it something from earth?' The Lord's answer is cryptic: 'When the Father established the cosmos for himself, he left much over from the Mother of All. Therefore he speaks and acts'.³⁸ It is here that scholars have usually found an indication of the gnostic Sophia myth. Martin Krause suggests that the Lord's answer refers to a similar myth preserved in the *Letter of Peter to Philip* 135.8–136.15, in which the 'disobedient and foolish mother' wants to call into being aeons, and as a result of her speaking the 'arrogant One' followed.³⁹ The story continues: 'When she left behind a part, the Arrogant One laid hold of it, and it became a deficiency.' The latter is explained to mean 'the deficiency of the aeons'. It is also told that 'when the Arrogant One had taken a part, he sowed it'. The Arrogant One is the demiurge who, with the help of his powers, creates a man, 'an image in the place [of an image]', and mortal bodies. Jesus declares he is the one 'who was sent down in the body because of the seed which had fallen away'.⁴⁰

The story of the disobedient mother in the *Letter of Peter to Philip* has obvious affinities with the crucial moments of the story told in the *Apocryphon of John* and summarized by Irenaeus in *Haer.* 1.29.1–4.⁴¹

³⁵ See *Dial. Sav.* 2, 96 and 1, respectively.

³⁶ This fact has often been taken as a decisive difference between the Fourth Gospel and the 'gnostic' redeemer myth (Meeks 1972, 68; Talbert 1976, 419). In itself, however, it only relates to whether the concept of the soul's divine origin has been applied or not.

³⁷ Translation modified from Emmel.

³⁸ *Dial. Sav.* 88–9.

³⁹ Krause 1977, 27.

⁴⁰ *Ep. Pet. Phil.* 135.17–136.18. Translated by F. Wisse (1991).

⁴¹ Meyer 1991, 230.

Both stories focus on the rupture in the divine world caused by the disobedience of Mother Wisdom, who produces the arrogant power, the creator of the material world. Yet the short answer of Jesus in *Dial. Sav.* 89 is not easily read in the light of this classic 'gnostic' myth (I am now adopting Layton's terminology). There is nothing in this saying or elsewhere in the *Dialogue* which would indicate that the creation of the universe is a result of a series of emanations and gradually degenerating principles, stressing the great distance between the human world and the supreme God. The phrase 'when the Father established the cosmos (ΤΑΖΟ ΕΡΔΤῆ ΜῆΚΟΜΟC) for himself' heavily militates against such a reading.⁴² In the gnostic creation myth even the creation of the higher realms, which comes before the creation of the human world, is not directly attributed to the 'Father of the all',⁴³ and in any case the word 'cosmos' most naturally refers to the universe including the visible, material world.⁴⁴ Significantly, the same phrase of the Father establishing the cosmos appears in *Dial. Sav.* 22, where there is no doubt about the matter. The section describes the creation of the visible world.

When the [Father established] the cosmos, he [...] water from it [...] word came from it and it inhabited many ... [...]. It was higher than the [path ...] ... the entire earth ... [...]. ... the [collected] water [...] existing outside them. [...] ... the water, a great fire [encircling] them like a wall ... [...] ... time once many things had become separated [from what] was inside. When the [...] was established, he looked ... [...] and said to it, 'Go and [spew] forth from yourself in order that [the earth might] not be in want from generation to [generation], and from age to age.'⁴⁵ [Then it] cast forth from itself [fountains] of milk and [fountains of] honey and oil and [wine] and [good] fruits and sweet flavor and good roots [in order that] it might not be deficient from generation [to] generation, and from age [to age].

Even though the description of the creation is fragmentary, it is obvious enough that it contains several allusions and ideas that derive from Gen.

⁴² To make a difference between 'creating' and 'establishing' the cosmos (Krause 1977, 26) is somewhat artificial, and even if the Coptic word implies less direct involvement in creation, it still says more than the myths in the *Apocryphon of John* and related documents.

⁴³ Cf. *Ap. John* II 2.25-4.1; 8.26-8.

⁴⁴ This is at least the case in the *Apocryphon of John*, in which ΚΟΜΟC usually refers to the world created and ruled by Yaldabaoth; see Marjanen 1998a, 136 n. 104.

⁴⁵ With Létourneau, I accept the emendations Ν{ΟΥΧΕ} ('spew') and ΝΝ{ΕΠΚΑ2} ('earth might not') included in Emmel's critical apparatus and classified as 'possible'.

1–2. It is striking that the mythical section does not contain the slightest antagonism toward the biblical creation story (cf. also *Dial. Sav.* 15–16). According to Koester and Pagels, the ‘myth relates how the water which was originally separated from the earth by a wall of fire made the world fruitful’,⁴⁶ which could be seen as an interpretation of Gen. 2:5. That the Logos plays an important role as the agent of the creation may be affirmed by the statement in *Dial. Sav.* 34: ‘It was it [i.e., the First Logos] that established the cosmos (ΕΡΤΑ2Ε ΠΚΟCΜΟC ΕΡΑΤ4) and inhabited and inhaled fragrance from it.’ The description of the goodness of the earth breathes the same positive creation theology as many psalms of the Hebrew Bible or Wisdom hymns. It is difficult to classify the ideas expressed in these fragments of myths in the same ideological world as the *Apocryphon of John* or any variation or mutation of it. Admittedly, stories about creation resembling the one told in the *Apocryphon of John* do not always separate the Father from the creation of the cosmos altogether, but the Father is always involved in the creation less directly than in the myth recorded in the *Dialogue*. For example, in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* the powers of darkness fall in love with the image of incorruptibility they have seen reflected in the waters, and in that image they model man out of dust.⁴⁷ It also said that the creation of heavenly powers and humanity ‘came to pass by the will of the father of the entirety’.⁴⁸ The point of the story is that in spite of the ignorance of the powers of darkness, the spirit appears and settles in the first human being.⁴⁹ Otherwise, the Father and the created world are separated by a ‘veil between the world above and the realms that are below’, where the shadow of matter prevails.⁵⁰ The cosmological myth in the *Dialogue*, on the other hand, does not form ‘a thick and almost inscrutable barrier between human world and god, shutting off god from humanity’.⁵¹ It does not develop a web of emanations any more than the orthodox Trinity doctrine does. Most importantly, it does not shift the responsibility of the creation of the cosmos to a lower creator god or powers, who are evil or ignorant.

⁴⁶ Koester and Pagels 1984, 8.

⁴⁷ *Hyp. Arch.* 87.11–88.15.

⁴⁸ *Hyp. Arch.* 88.10–11; cf. also 96.11–12.

⁴⁹ *Hyp. Arch.* 88.11–15.

⁵⁰ *Hyp. Arch.* 94.9–12.

⁵¹ Cited from Layton 1987, 23.

④ Demiurgical beliefs in *Thomas*?

Although many recent studies on *Thomas* do not support the view that one can find an ignorant or malevolent demiurge in the gospel, scholars are not unanimous on this. The most thorough argument for a demiurgical tradition in *Thomas* has been made by Howard M. Jackson in his dissertation (1985) on *Gos. Thom. 7*. The riddle-like saying runs: Jesus said, 'Blessed is the lion which becomes man when consumed by man; and cursed is the man whom the lion consumes, and the lion becomes man'. Jackson's study is richly documented and offers an enormous amount of information about leontomorphic deities and mythological figures in the ancient world. At the heart of the argument for the demiurgical interpretation of *Gos. Thom. 7* stands the fact that many gnostic sources from the one known by Celsus⁵² to *Pistis Sophia* describe the demiurge or his archontic doubles in the form of a lion or, as in the *Apocryphon of John*, in the form of the multi-faced beast, one of the faces being that of a lion (the shorter version),⁵³ or in the form of a dragon with the face of a lion (the longer version).⁵⁴

The weakness of Jackson's argument is that the gnostic nature of *Thomas* is simply assumed without any critical discussion of the gospel as a whole. From that premiss, the demiurgical traditions are taken as the key to the interpretation of the saying. However, *Gos. Thom. 7* is not a cosmological description of Sophia's bestial creation, unlike the texts referred to by Jackson. The point of the saying is, as he himself admits, anthropological and psychological. In the last part of his study,⁵⁵ Jackson makes an attempt to explain the saying on the basis of Plato's famous parable in the *Republic* (588B–589B; a free Coptic translation of this section is found in NHC VI,5), in which the soul is likened to a creature composed of three different forces: a many-headed beast, a lion, and man. This parable may be interpreted in the light of Plato's idea of the tripartite soul,⁵⁶ the beast representing the baser passion, the lion the nobler passion, and the man reason. According to Jackson, *Gos. Thom. 7* is an expression of a 'gnostic psychology' which drew upon the Platonic tradition. 'When the passions are under

⁵² See Origen, *Cels.* 6.27–30.

⁵³ NHC III 15.10–11 and BG 8502 37.19–21.

⁵⁴ NHC II 10.8–9.

⁵⁵ Jackson 1985, 175–213.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., *Resp.* 435A–441C.

control, that is “devoured”, by the man, they may be blessed because they have become human.’ On the other hand, ‘when the inner man is weak and the lion unruly . . . the man is “polluted” by the failure to bring the lion to heel’.⁵⁷ The reason why the last sentence of the saying does not say, as one would expect for the sake of symmetry, that ‘the man shall become lion’,⁵⁸ is based on Plato’s theory of the transmigration of souls. Although the human soul may live the life of a beast, it still remains a *human* soul and thus cannot be transformed into a beast.⁵⁹ *Gos. Thom.* 7 is thus explained against the background of the gnostic and Platonic traditions which were used by the ‘enkratites’ or ‘ascetics’ who coined the saying,⁶⁰ another assumption about the ideological framework of the Thomasine sayings that Jackson takes for granted.⁶¹

The Platonic parable may be one ingredient of the enigmatic saying, but one can hardly decipher its meaning by means of Plato’s theory of the three forces in the soul. Why would the lion, representing the nobler feelings, stand for sexual passion, if the saying had been modelled upon the Platonic trichotomous hybrid? Jackson’s suggestion presupposes the identification of the lion with the leontomorphic demiurge, which would then have been assimilated with the many-headed beast in Plato, but this is very speculative and also presupposes the basic premiss that the gnostic myth is behind the saying. However we interpret the saying – the idea of the ‘devouring’ passion is certainly one possible reading⁶² – it cannot be used as evidence that *Thomas*

⁵⁷ Jackson 1985, 203.

⁵⁸ This correction has often been suggested since the *editio princeps*. See Guillaumont *et al.* 1959, 5; Haenchen 1961a, 15; Leipoldt 1967, 57 (plausible); Ménard 1975, 56–57. Lührmann (1990, 305) suggests that the last sentence is either an error or an addition by a Greek or Coptic scribe. For a critical discussion of the textual correction, see Jackson 1985, 4–7.

⁵⁹ Jackson refers to *Phaedr.* 249B.

⁶⁰ Jackson 1985, 207.212.

⁶¹ For a critical discussion of the view that *Thomas* is enkratite, see Uro 1998b.

⁶² The saying was doubtless open to various interpretations. Valantasis (1997, 38) finds in the saying a principle that relates eating to transformation and to a strictly demarcated hierarchy of being: human beings live higher on the scale of existence than the lion. The lion is fortunate since it rises higher on that scale by having been eaten by a human, while, according to the same principle, the human is wretched, if the lion by means of his death and consumption succeeds in rising to higher status. This basic principle, I think, could be applied literally or metaphorically to various situations in human life, of which the problem of sexual passion is but one. Didymos of Alexandria, for example, used the saying to illustrate the teacher–student relationship (*Commentary on Psalms*, Toura Papyrus V; the text is cited in Lührmann 1990, 312–6).

suggests Sophia's monstrous creation, let alone the whole myth to which this feature belongs.

Scholars have occasionally seen in *Gos. Thom.* 100 an indication that the gospel has been influenced by demiurgical traditions.⁶³ The saying is one of the rare instances in which the word 'god' (ΝΟΥΤΕ) appears in the gospel. It has a close parallel in the synoptic story on paying tribute to Caesar, except for the addition 'and give me what is mine' in *Thomas* (100:4; cf. Mark 12:17; Matt. 22:21; Luke 20:25). This addition as well as the avoidance of the word 'god' are taken as indications that *Thomas* assumes an inferior 'god', who is the ruler of the present evil world and subordinate to Jesus.

Three things can be pointed out against this interpretation. First, it is not accurate to argue that *Thomas* does not speak of the kingdom of God.⁶⁴ The term is attested in the Greek fragments of the gospel once with certainty (*P. Oxy.* 1.7–8; *Gos. Thom.* 27:1), and 'kingdom of God' may also be the most probable reconstruction on line *P. Oxy.* 654. 15 (*Gos. Thom.* 3:3). Moreover, the Greek version of saying 30 seems to contrast those who are 'without God' (ἄθεοι) with those with whom Jesus is,⁶⁵ which could hardly make sense, if the word 'god' would have been reserved for a lower or evil god or gods. Thus, the Greek author of the *Gospel of Thomas*, at least, does not use 'god' to denote a lower deity subordinate to Jesus or the Father. Secondly, the preference of the 'Father' to 'God' as a designation of the supreme deity does not necessarily mean that demiurgical beliefs have penetrated into the symbolic world of *Thomas*. As demonstrated above, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* shares this same preference for the 'Father,' even though the document does not reveal any signs of the demiurgical traditions or the Sophia myth. One may, therefore, assume a tradition or tendency in some early Christian circles to avoid the word 'god' as the name of their own transcendent, true deity, perhaps making a distinction from all other gods and deities. However, the transcendent divinity has not been estranged from the created world as radically as in the classic gnostic myth. One may compare the statement in *Dial. Sav.* 34 that the First Logos 'established the cosmos and inhabited it and inhaled fragrance

⁶³ Grant and Freedman 1960, 178; Wilson 1960, 27.59; Tuckert 1988, 152; Hall 1990, 485.

⁶⁴ Thus correctly Marjanen 1996, 36 n. 16.

⁶⁵ I follow here H. W. Attridge's reconstruction of *P. Oxy.* 1.23–7; see Attridge 1979, 153–57; 1989, 119. For *Gos. Thom.* 30, see also pp. 102–4 in this book.

from it' to the equally positive view in *Thomas* that 'the kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth' (113:4).

Thus, whether or not the word 'god' in *Gos. Thom.* 100 refers to a deity different from the Father in the Coptic version (cf. saying 30), the Greek original could hardly make such a differentiation because it would have led to a hopeless confusion with respect to the names of the true God. This does not, however, mean that the Coptic version of the gospel would represent the myth of a lower *creator* god. The Christian authors did not deny the existence of other divine beings in the universe. The *Dialogue of the Saviour* likewise shares the common antique cosmology, according to which the sun and the moon are divine beings and the universe is full of astral powers or aeons, although they do not participate in creation.⁶⁶

Perhaps the strongest evidence *against* the view that *Thomas* represents the demiurge myth is saying 85: 'Adam came into being from a great power and a great wealth, but he did not become worthy of you. For had he been worthy, [he would] not [have experienced] death'. It is very difficult to interpret the saying so that the 'great power' and 'great wealth' would stand for an ignorant or arrogant creator god, who had taken part in the creation of the mortal Adam. 'Great wealth' also appears in *Gos. Thom.* 29, in which it is contrasted with the mortal human body, the 'poverty'.⁶⁷ April D. De Conick has shown that the title 'Great Power' is not an uncommon name for God in many early (Jewish-)Christian texts.⁶⁸ For example, it is said in the *Teaching of Silvanus* that 'A Great Power and Great Glory has made the world known.'⁶⁹ There is no doubt that the Great Power in *Teach. Silv.* is the 'Almighty God,' who has created the world by his hand, that is Christ, since the writing attacks openly the belief that the creator is an ignorant demiurge.⁷⁰

The reference to Adam's death most likely alludes to the story in Genesis about Adam's fall,⁷¹ which no longer affects those who have

⁶⁶ See *Dial. Sav.* 23.

⁶⁷ For an analysis of this saying, see pp. 62–5 in this book.

⁶⁸ De Conick 1996b, 16–17. In addition to the passages in the *Teaching of Silvanus*, De Conick refers to *Acts Thom.* 12 (Syriac); Justin, *1 Apol.* 33.6; *Great Pow.* 36.3–4, 15, 27 and to the studies of Jarl Fossum on Samaritan traditions (e.g., Fossum 1985).

⁶⁹ *Teach. Silv.* 112.8–10.

⁷⁰ See *Teach. Silv.* 115.3–10; 116.6–9.

⁷¹ De Conick 1996b, 17.

overcome death by having found the interpretation of the life-sustaining words of Jesus (*Gos. Thom.* 1). Several recent studies have demonstrated the crucial position that the interpretation of Genesis has in *Thomas'* overall theology.⁷² This type of biblical exegesis is based on a Hellenistic-Jewish reading of the Septuagint and has probably also been influenced by Hermetic traditions.⁷³ Davies, for example, argues that 'Jesus, as Thomas portrays him, insists that the world ought to be considered to be in the condition of Gen. 1:1–2:4 [i.e., in the condition before the fall and the division of the original unity] and, accordingly, people should restore themselves to the condition of the image of God.'⁷⁴ This view assumes a Genesis exegesis according to which humanity was originally created according to the 'Image of God' (cf. Gen. 1:26–7) and this creation differed from the later creation of the mortal Adam (Gen. 2:5–3:24).⁷⁵ De Conick and Pagels understand the image of God as a primordial 'light-man' (Gen. 1:3), who could have demiurgical functions in the Jewish traditions.⁷⁶ *Thomas'* references to 'images', through which the self-begotten light 'became manifest' (*Gos. Thom.* 50) and which 'came into being before you' (84; cf. also 22), are then interpreted along the line of this exegesis.

Scholars still struggle with the meaning of the difficult sayings dealing with 'images' and 'light' in *Thomas*, and it is extremely difficult to reconstruct a full myth behind the aphoristic clues given in the sayings. For our purposes, it is enough to refer to some basic similarities in the structures of cosmology between the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Dialogue of the Saviour*. Both documents present interpretations about the origin of the world and humanity which make use of the first chapters of Genesis without the slightest hint of the 'celestial

⁷² Davies 1992; De Conick 1996b; Pagels 1999.

⁷³ On Hermetic influence in *Thomas*, see De Conick 1996b, 8–11. De Conick is relying on such works as Quispel 1981 and Mahé 1991.

⁷⁴ Davies 1992, 664.

⁷⁵ Davies 1992, 668; see also Uro 1998b, 149–50.

⁷⁶ Some Nag Hammadi writings preserve the tradition according to which the heavenly Man (often identified with the First Adam in Jewish thought) was brought into being on the first day of creation. See, e.g., *Orig. World* 108.2–9; *Eugnostos* 79.19–23 (*Soph. Jes. Chr.* 101.4–9); *Teach. Silv.* 112.35–7. Quispel and Fossum argue that this idea of the origin of the heavenly Man as the primordial light presupposes a pun $\phi\tau\omega\varsigma$ and $\phi\tau\acute{\omega}\varsigma$, 'light' and 'man'. See Quispel 1980, 6 and Fossum 1985, 280. The various Jewish and gnostic traditions about the heavenly Man or the First Adam are conveniently collected in Fossum 1985, 266–330.

sabotage⁷⁷ and the conflict between the Father and lower cosmic powers. Furthermore, they suggest a relatively uncomplicated idea of the Father's primordial emanation or hypostasis: the self-begotten light (*Thomas*) or Logos (the *Dialogue*). It is also likely that both authors want to present the Saviour-Jesus as the manifestation of this primordial Light or Logos, who was the agent of creation. This is the most probable reading of *Gos. Thom.* 77:1: 'It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. From me did the all come forth, and unto me did all extend.'⁷⁸ In *Dial. Sav.* 34 it is said that the First Logos created the world, although the identity of this hypostasis is not explicitly stated in the surviving parts of the text. Nonetheless, as I have argued above, the identification of the Logos with the Saviour is the most obvious reading due to the overall Christian nature of the *Dialogue*. The Christology that identified Jesus with the primordial being who functioned as the instrument of creation was not the special property of *Thomas* or the *Dialogue*, but widespread in early Christianity.⁷⁹ What makes the cosmic drama described in these writings distinct, for example, from the hymn in Colossians 1:15–17, is the emphasis on the divine origin of all humanity, not only on the divinity of Jesus, through whose redemptive act the church and its members can receive the 'inheritance in light' (Col. 1:12). For *Thomas* and the *Dialogue*, therefore, Jesus is the prototype of all those who realize their true selves and find their way back to their original home or become united with their divine images.⁸⁰ There is no substantial difference between Jesus and his true followers. This is why *Thomas* can say that Jesus himself becomes the person who drinks from the mouth of Jesus (108). It may also explain why the *Dialogue* can make the surprising statement that even for the Saviour it is difficult to 'reach the way' (*Dial. Sav.* 52; 78), even though he has himself 'opened the path' and taught the elect and solitary 'the passage they will traverse' (*Dial. Sav.* 1).⁸¹

⁷⁷ Pagels 1999, 486.

⁷⁸ Dunderberg 1998a, 58–9; but compare Marjanen 1998a, 123–4.

⁷⁹ E.g., John 1: 1–3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15–17; Heb. 1:2; *Odes Sol.* 12:10; 16:8–12, 19.

⁸⁰ Davies 1992, 669–70.

⁸¹ R. Reitzenstein introduced the concept 'redeemed redeemer', which is used in describing the idea that the gnostic redeemer is himself in need of redemption; see, e.g., *Exc. Theod.* 22.9; *Tri. Trac.* 124.32–125.2; *Gos. Phil.* 71.3–4 (Rudolph 1987, 121–2). Rudolph sees behind this the concept, 'fundamental to gnostic soteriology, that both partners, Salvator and Salvandus, are of one nature, i.e., form parts of the world of light' (*ibid.*, 122).

5. Cultural intertextuality

The similarities described above do not evince anything specific about the relationship between *Thomas* and the *Dialogue*. The idea of the divine origin of humanity (or some part of it) was a commonplace in antiquity and, as already noted, the belief in Jesus or Logos as a divine mediator in creation was shared by several early Christian groups. There are many Nag Hammadi writings which represent a Platonic cosmology similar to *Thomas* and the *Dialogue* and likewise reveal no traces of an evil or ignorant demiurge. Such writings include, for example, the *Exegesis of the Soul*, *Authoritative Teaching*, the *Teachings of Silvanus*, the *Sentences of Sextus*, and the *Book of Thomas*. Although these writings can loosely be characterized as Platonic-Christian or ascetic, there is little sense in lumping them together as representing a special tradition or trajectory within early Christianity. The great number of parallels and affinities between *Thomas* and the *Dialogue*, however, raise the issue of whether these two writings have a particular relationship with each other.

The predominance of the sayings with parallels in *Thomas* led Koester and Pagels to conclude that the primary source of the *Dialogue* (which, according to them, can be recognized in the dialogue parts of the work) 'may directly continue the tradition of the sayings represented in the *Gospel of Thomas*'.⁸² They interpret the whole dialogue source as 'a commentary on *Gos. Thom. 2*',⁸³ since the *Dialogue* intends to explain the disciples' place in the eschatological timetable presented in that saying on seeking, finding, marvelling, ruling and resting.⁸⁴ They also contend that the arrangement of the sayings in the *Dialogue* is organized according to the *ordo salutis* of *Gos. Thom. 2*. Sayings about seeking and finding predominate the first

However, this idea can also be found in such texts as the *Acts John* (95.1) and the *Odes Sol.* (8:21), which cannot today be taken as typical examples of 'gnostic soteriology'.

⁸² Koester and Pagels 1978, 68; compare their statement in 1984, 15: '[T]he gospel tradition used in the dialogue source resembles that of *Gos. Thom.* but does not show any signs of direct literary dependence upon that document.' Elsewhere Koester does not, however, exclude the possibility of direct literary dependence; see 1990a, 174. Note also De Conick 1996a, 184.193.

⁸³ Koester and Pagels 1978, 68. So also Helderman 1997, 69. According to De Conick (2000, 157) the *Dialogue of the Saviour* can be understood as 'a commentary written in response to the type of vision mysticism associated with the *Gospel of Thomas*'.

⁸⁴ So in *P. Oxy.* 654.5–9. The Coptic text has 'seeking', 'finding', 'troubling', 'marvelling', and 'ruling'.

section. After receiving the vision the disciples ‘marvel’, and finally they ask about ‘ruling’ and ‘resting’. It is, however, difficult to see how the four acts of the Greek version of *Gos. Thom.* 2 would structure the *Dialogue*. Sayings about seeking are not restricted to the first part of the writing but are found throughout the document.⁸⁵ Although sayings 37, 50 and 65–8 mention ‘marvel’, ‘ruling’, and ‘resting’ respectively, the *Dialogue* does not develop these themes in the manner that would justify Koester’s and Pagel’s conclusion. The document emphasizes the paradox of ‘realized’ and ‘futuristic’ eschatology⁸⁶ rather than creates an *ordo salutis* or arranges materials according to stages of spiritual growth.

In his *Ancient Christian Gospels*, Koester lists sixteen passages in the *Dialogue* which parallel sayings in *Thomas*.⁸⁷ Most of these contain only parallel ideas or expressions, such as ‘seeking’, ‘place (of life)’, ‘bridal chamber’, ‘resting’, or ‘stripping’,⁸⁸ without more extensive similarity in structure or wording. There is very little in the *Dialogue* which indicates that the author (or the author’s source) drew upon the *Gospel of Thomas* or related collections of Jesus’ sayings. A few exceptions do not change this general impression. *Dial. Sav.* 56–7 clearly refers to a saying preserved in fuller form in *Thomas*.⁸⁹

[Matthew] said, ‘Tell me, Lord, how the dead die [and] how the living live. The [Lord] said, ‘[You have]⁹⁰ asked me about a saying [...] which eye has not seen, [nor] have I heard it except from you (sg).’

Compare with *Gos. Thom.* 17:

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.’

This saying was widely used in early Christianity⁹¹ and already cited by Paul, though not as a saying of *Jesus* (1 Cor. 2:9). The *Dialogue* seems

⁸⁵ See *Dial. Sav.* 7; 9–10; 16; 20; 26; 44; 70; 104.

⁸⁶ This is pointed out also by Koester and Pagels 1984, 11–12. De Conick (2000, 157–62; 1996a) argues that the *Dialogue*, in contrast to the *Gospel of Thomas*, emphasizes that ‘the “great vision” and immortalization cannot be realized until the body has been discarded at death’ (2000, 157–8; De Conick’s italics). For the issue, see also the analysis of *Gos. Thom.* 37 in the next chapter (pp. 70–4).

⁸⁷ Koester 1990a, 180–7.

⁸⁸ For the parallels, see above notes 14–22.

⁸⁹ Note also *Dial. Sav.* 20, line 129,13 parallels closely *Gos. Thom.* 81:2, if it is reconstructed as follows: ‘let h̄jm [who possesses] power renounce [it and repent]’. So Létourneau; Emmel as ‘probable’ in the critical apparatus.

⁹⁰ Emended with Létourneau, classified as ‘probable’ in Emmel’s critical apparatus.

⁹¹ See parallels listed in Stroker 1989, 184–6 and Hedrick 1989–90, 45–6.

to use here a similar 'shorthand technique' as in *Dial. Sav.* 53, in which Mary refers to three sayings of Jesus without citing them in full, suggesting that the audience could recall them in their fuller forms.⁹² There is nothing in *Dial. Sav.* 57 that would argue for the view that the *Dialogue* derived the saying from *Thomas* or its source. Instead, Mary's three sayings in *Dial. Sav.* 53 show that at some stage of its textual history⁹³ the author of the *Dialogue* was familiar with the Matthean tradition, since the first and third of them (Matt. 6:34 and 10:25) are found only in Matthew's gospel and the second saying accords with the Matthean wording of the saying on the labourer's reward.⁹⁴ The absence of fuller parallels between *Thomas* and the *Dialogue* in any case argues against the view that there is a direct relationship between these two documents or that the *Dialogue* largely exploited saying traditions available to *Thomas*.

This negative conclusion, however, does not mean that the parallel ideas and terms in *Thomas* and the *Dialogue* do not give any information about the cultural contexts of these writings. The juxtaposition of the 'elect' with the 'solitary' in *Dial. Sav.* 1–2 is of particular interest, since it recalls the peculiar language used in *Gos. Thom.* 49 ('Blessed are the solitary and elect, for you will find the kingdom'; cf. also *Gos. Thom.* 16 and 75). Neither of the writings use the term 'solitary' (ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ) in its later technical meaning denoting 'monk', nor does it refer to any other social role within the community.⁹⁵ The word should probably not be understood in the sense of 'celibate' either.⁹⁶ To be sure, *Gos. Thom.* 16 indicates that the term is associated with those who have somehow renounced family ties, but to argue that *Thomas* represents a clear-cut encratite stance (that is, the conviction that only the celibate will go to heaven) is to move beyond the ambivalent evidence

⁹² A similar shorthand list of dominical sayings is found in *Ap. Jas.* 8.4–11.

⁹³ For the arguments for the view that *Dial. Sav.* 53 is a redactional insertion, see Marjanen 1996, 85.

⁹⁴ Cf. Matt. 10:10 and Luke 10:7. It is widely assumed that Matthew changed Q's 'wages' to 'food'; cf. 1 Cor. 9:14, 17. So also *The Critical Edition of Q* (Robinson *et al.* 2000, 172). Hills (1991) argues that a small cluster of dominical sayings bound to the word 'sufficient' is behind *Dial. Sav.* 53 and that the second saying was only later, when the Coptic translation was done, made to its full, canonical, Matthean form.

⁹⁵ The earliest known text in which *monachos* clearly appears as a name of a recognized social type is found in a papyrus containing a petition of Aurelius Isodorus of Karanis, dated June 324 CE (P. Coll. Youtie 77); see Judge 1977, 72–89.

⁹⁶ See my discussion in Uro 1998b, 156–60.

of the gospel.⁹⁷ In the *Dialogue*, the only place which deals with the issue of childbearing and celibacy is the comment on the Lord's words on praying 'in the place where there is no woman' (*Dial. Sav.* 91).⁹⁸ The Lord's answer is explained by Matthew by means of another saying 'Destroy the works of womanhood', which is further explained to mean that 'women will cease [giving birth]' (*Dial. Sav.* 92). Matthew's comment, in turn, is responded to by Mary (*Dial. Sav.* 93), who challenges it ('They will never be obliterated'). Mary is presented in the *Dialogue* as a woman who understands completely (*Dial. Sav.* 53), and it is therefore uncertain whether Jesus here simply takes sides with Matthew. Jesus' answer in *Dial. Sav.* 94 further elaborates the issue, but the text is badly damaged and the thought remains unclear. It should be noted that Judas, too, seems to comment on Matthew's interpretation of childbearing (*Dial. Sav.* 95). The issue of celibacy is thus hotly debated rather than directly propagated.

Thomas and the *Dialogue* are the only writings in which 'solitary' is found in pre-monastic Christian usage as a general title of the 'elect' and those who enter the 'bridal chamber'⁹⁹ or have 'a single mind'.¹⁰⁰ Both writings reveal signs of debates about celibacy and the role of women in the Christian community (for the latter, see *Gos. Thom.* 114).¹⁰¹ They share a common way of conceptualizing central topics of religious life. They lay emphasis on seeking and finding, ruling, and resting; they speak of the heavenly home of the elect as the 'place of life'¹⁰² and use the imagery of the 'bridal chamber'. Although not all of these are unusual in early Christian literature, the common religious language

⁹⁷ Uro 1998b, 161.

⁹⁸ The opponents of Clement of Alexandria appealed to a similar slogan to support their anti-marriage view. It has often been suggested that the author of the *Dialogue* also advocates the encratite ideology (e.g., Wisse 1988, 301–2; Marjanen 1996, 89–90; De Conick 1996a, 184–5; for a different opinion, see Koester and Pagels 1984, 15), but this view ignores the fact that celibacy is a controversial issue in the text.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Gos. Thom.* 75 and *Dial. Sav.* 50.

¹⁰⁰ *Dial. Sav.* 3 (124.3); cf. also 'one' or 'single one' in *Gos. Thom.* 4; 11; 22; 23; 106.

¹⁰¹ Marjanen (1996, 51–2; 1998c, 103–4) argues that 'logion 114 has been added to the collection in a situation in which the role of women in the religious life of the community has for some reason become a matter of debate' (1998c, 103).

¹⁰² Koester (1990a, 179–80) argues that John 14:2–12 is 'a deliberate christological interpretation of the more traditional Gnostic dialogue', which the section on the 'place of life' in *Dial. Sav.* 25–30 has preserved in its original form. However, neither the structure nor the vocabulary of the sections in the *Dialogue* and John show agreements which would justify this claim.

and the above analysis point to a mode of intertextuality that presupposes a shared sub-cultural 'intertext'. In other words, *Thomas* and the *Dialogue* cannot easily be put in a linear order, one having been influenced by other, but they do reveal an intertextual relationship which is relatively close.

6. Date and provenance

More specific definitions about the relationship between the two documents are less certain. There are, however, some indications that the *Dialogue* was written in the same geographical area as *Thomas* probably was, i.e., in eastern Syria. Many scholars have sought to trace the earliest non-monastic usage of the word ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ ('solitary') in a Syriac-speaking milieu, where the Syriac equivalent of the word (ܡܢܚܚܐ) was widely used in Christian vocabulary.¹⁰³ The 'bridal chamber' appears in many sources which are known to be of Syrian origin.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, *Dial. Sav.* 3 (124.1) speaks of a 'crossing-place' (XIOOP), which those having 'a single mind' can safely pass after the 'time of dissolution' (*Dial. Sav.* 3; 123.2–3). This expression has an interesting parallel in Bardaisan's teaching quoted in Ephraem's *Prose Refutations of Mani* (164.41–165.12). According to Bardaisan, 'the death that Adam brought in was a hindrance to souls in that they were hindered at the crossing-place (ܡܢܚܚܐ)'.¹⁰⁵ The place where the souls would like to

¹⁰³ Adam 1953–4, 222; Morard 1973, 377; Griffith 1995, 223–9. For the view that the Syriac term presupposes the Greek word, see Vööbus 1958, 6–8. Murray (1974–5, 67) lists three aspects in the early meanings of the word ܡܢܚܚܐ: a) single with respect to wife or family; b) single in heart, not διψυχος (James 1:8); and c) united to the Only-Begotten. The appearance of the phrase 'those [with a] single mind (ΜΝΟΥΖΗΤ ΝΟΥΩΤ)' in *Dial. Sav.* 3 (124.2–3) supports the suggestion that the second meaning is present in the *Dialogue*. See also Judge 1977, 78–9.

¹⁰⁴ Such writings are the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Acts of Thomas*, *Excerpta ex Theodoto*; note also the passage from Bardaisan cited above. For different Coptic and Greek words used for 'bridal chamber' and exact references, see Helderma 1997, 72–8. The imagery is not, however, limited to the writings coming from that area. For example, the *Tripartite Tractate*, in which the 'bridal chamber' appears several times (see 122.15–16, 21–2; 128.19–129.16; 135.31; 138.12), has often been identified as a later representative of the Western school of Valentinianism (see, e.g., Attridge and Pagels 1985, 177–8). The imagery may have spread to the West because of its popularity in Valentinian circles. There is no certainty about the provenance of such writings as the *Exegesis of the Soul*, *Authoritative Teaching* or the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, which also use the imagery of the 'bridal chamber'.

¹⁰⁵ Translation is from Drijvers 1966, 155. The parallel between the *Dialogue* and Bardaisan was noticed by Helderma 1997, 84–5.

cross over is indicated more precisely as the 'bridal chamber of light' (ⲕⲓⲙⲁⲛ ⲛⲁⲗⲓ 164. 32–40). Bardaisan of Edessa (c. AD 154–222) was a Syrian eclectic theologian and philosopher, whose teaching, in addition to the detail mentioned above, has also other interesting points of contact with the *Dialogue*.¹⁰⁶

These indications hardly make a compelling case for the Syrian origin of the *Dialogue*. It is possible that similar ideas in *Thomas* and the *Dialogue* could have been recycled by many groups in different areas. One may also note that in the *Dialogue* Judas is not called 'Judas Thomas' as is the case in many Syrian sources and traditions.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the shared symbolic universe with *Thomas* suggested above supports closeness in terms of origin, although we cannot be sure how widespread was the cultural intertext behind the writings.

With necessary reservations, one can also suggest a relative close date for these two writings. Since the *Dialogue* does not have any quotations from the canonical works except for, perhaps, the Matthean traditions in *Dial. Sav.* 53 and is not directly dependent on *Thomas*, one should not date it too late. It is possible to argue that it, or at least some part of it, was composed before the middle of the second century.¹⁰⁸

7. Redefining *Thomas*

The comparison between the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Dialogue of the Saviour* has demonstrated that along with many other Nag Hammadi writings they both share a view of the divine origin of humanity and fail to give any signs of demiurgical traditions (Williams) or the gnostic myth opposed by the church fathers (Layton). This confirms the results of several recent analyses which have emphasized the difference of *Thomas*' religious perspective from the kind of gnostic mythology presented in the *Apocryphon of John* and related documents. At the same time, such categorization leaves *Thomas* and other relevant literature 'in the air', since Layton's or Williams' categories contribute to the

¹⁰⁶ E.g., the idea that the 'First Word' created the world is parallel to *Dial. Sav.* 34. For a summary of Bardaisan's teachings, see Drijvers 1966, 218–24. According to Drijvers, Bardaisan 'looks upon the world optimistically, as created by the Word of God's Thought. There is no question of a demiurge'. (ibid., 224).

¹⁰⁷ See pp. 10–11 in this book.

¹⁰⁸ For the date of *Thomas*, see pp. 134–6 below. Koester and Pagels (1984, 16) date the composition of the *Dialogue* to the early decades of the second century.

definition of their religious perspectives only in a negative way. *Thomas* and the *Dialogue*, in particular, reveal similarities that are so close that it is easy to imagine the ideal readers of both documents (those who fully accepted the cosmology and basic religious pattern presented in the documents) as 'living' in the same symbolic universe.¹⁰⁹ More research needs to be done, however, to show how widely this kind of symbolic universe was promulgated among the first- and second-century Christian groups and how this particular religious perspective was related to other non-demiurgical Christian traditions from Nag Hammadi. In any case, *Thomas* and the *Dialogue* represent a distinctive form of Christianity which differs both from the classic gnostic mythology or demiurgical traditions and from what later became an orthodox form of Christian confession.

Is it thus correct to characterize *Thomas*' religious perspective as 'gnosticizing',¹¹⁰ or being 'not so characteristically gnostic',¹¹¹ or not gnostic at all?¹¹² The problem of these definitions is that they are all equally correct but also equally incomplete. *Thomas* shares some essential features with the classic gnostic ideology (Layton), focusing on the interpretation of Genesis and on the divine origin of humanity. But it has not taken the decisive step by radically distancing the transcendent God from the creator and the created world. The term 'gnosticizing' might therefore be convenient, especially if one could show that the Thomasine trajectory somehow moved or grew toward the more radical Genesis interpretation. However, the comparison with the *Dialogue* demonstrates that early Christians could produce elaborated versions of the cosmologies resembling that presumed in *Thomas* without moving beyond the monistic theology. To argue that *Thomas* is not gnostic, on the other hand, gives full recognition to the fact that *Thomas* has not taken the decisive step, but leaves *Thomas*' relationship to the classic gnostic myth unanswered.

One reason for the difficulty in defining the form of Christianity *Thomas* and the *Dialogue* represent may be the fact that it is hard for us to see how natural the Thomasine interpretation of Jesus' sayings was in its contemporary historical context. Because of later orthodoxy and

¹⁰⁹ Berger and Luckmann 1967.

¹¹⁰ E.g., Koester 1989, 44.

¹¹¹ Pagels 1999, 479.

¹¹² E.g., De Conick 1996b, 3–27.

canonization, the Johannine prologue or the Colossian hymn sound like standard Christologies to us, while the Thomasine ideology appears somehow distorted or strange. However, exactly the opposite may have been the case for many early Christians. *Thomas* does not present a bunch of esoteric and odd doctrines, but its belief in the divinity of the self and its return to the heavenly home must have sounded standard and familiar to many Hellenistic Jews and pagans alike. That this Hellenistic interpretation of Jesus' message looks like formative Gnosticism to us, is a fact that must be taken seriously when the history of gnostic systems and schools is studied.

Body and community

The language related to the human body in the *Gospel of Thomas* is elusive and complex. Some of the 'body sayings' are so enigmatic that Thomazine scholars have often put them aside and given up presenting extensive exegeses about their meanings and ideological background. Some aspects of *Thomas*' 'body language', such as asceticism¹ or relation to the resurrection of Jesus,² have been dealt with more extensively in recent discussion. Yet it is not an easy task to give a comprehensive picture of the 'body' in the gospel considering both its physical and symbolic connotations.³

In recent years several significant studies have appeared which have considerably advanced our knowledge about how the human self was understood in the Hellenistic intellectual world⁴ and how early Christian authors reflected these conventional views.⁵ These studies have demonstrated in various ways that in the Greco-Roman world, during the period relevant to this study, increasing attention was paid to the body and its concerns or, to use Foucault's words, to the 'cultivation of the self.'⁶ This can be seen in the way in which the Hellenistic philosophical writers emphasized the 'private' aspects of existence.⁷ The medical theorists and philosophers advocated a 'beautifully balanced' body⁸ and Christian theologians the 'suffering body', ready for

¹ E.g., De Conick (1996a; 2000), who argues that *Thomas* is influenced by Jewish mysticism and encratite traditions. Note, however, Uro 1998b.

² Riley 1995.

³ Aspects of *Thomas*' anthropology have been dealt with in Haenchen 1973 and Sellev 1997a.

⁴ Foucault 1986; Rousselle 1988; Annas 1992; note also the many useful articles in Armstrong 1986.

⁵ Recent literature on early Christian interpretations of the human self and body is vast. See, e.g., Brown 1988; Perkins 1995; Martin 1995; Grimm 1996; Shaw 1998; Brakke 2000.

⁶ Foucault 1986, 37–80.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸ Martin 1995, 34–7.

renunciation and death,⁹ to mention a few aspects of this ideological tenor. It is reasonable to assume that the frequent references to the human body in the *Gospel of Thomas* are not totally unaffected by this general shift of the intellectual climate during the first and second centuries CE.

1. *Thomas*' dualism

One way of approaching the problem is to raise the issue of 'dualism'. The term itself is slippery and difficult to define,¹⁰ but it is not uncommon to characterize *Thomas*' religious perspective as radically dualistic.¹¹ This dualism is understood to be both cosmological and anthropological, signifying a sharp distinction between the created world and the supreme God as well as between soul and body or flesh and spirit. The true self, it is assumed, is radically separated from the body, which belongs to the physical world, a source or *locus* of evil. The soul or the divine spark within the human has been entrapped in the material body and the ultimate goal of the soul is to be freed from the prison of the body. As a consequence, the human body ought to be greatly denigrated or hated by the Thomasine Christian.¹²

It is clear to everyone familiar with the Thomasine sayings that the body is understood to be something inferior when compared to the inner spiritual self. The body is described as 'poverty' in which 'great

⁹ Perkins 1995.

¹⁰ Cf. the multiple philosophical definitions of dualism offered in Churchland 1984. The problematic nature of the term with regard to the ancient material is pointed out by Shaw 1998, 32 n. 18. Francis (1995, 29 n. 25) defines: 'To have utility as a concept, "dualism" should require not only a distaste for physical or bodily reality, but also its clear opposition to the intellectual or spiritual. It should also imply a moral distinction: the physical is a source or *locus* of evil, the mind or soul of good.' I do not, however, find it helpful to restrict the use of the term to that kind of *extreme* dualism.

¹¹ Thus especially in early studies on *Thomas*, e.g., Gärtner 1960, 173; Wilson 1960, 14–44 (esp. 21 and 38), but see also Fieger 1991, 285. For a recent comment on the issue, see Brakke (2000, 129), who states that 'Thomas Christianity was highly dualistic'. *Thomas*' dualism mostly merges with the issue of *Thomas*' gnostic character, since Gnosticism is understood to be a radical dualism *par excellence*. Cf. De Conick (1996b, 25), who suggests that the 'classical gnostic system ... is characterized by three types of dualism: cosmological, rheological and anthropological' but that 'there is no theological dualism in *Thomas*' (ibid., 21).

¹² Cf. the characterization of *Thomas*' message in a recent textbook by Ehrman (1997, 178–9). Riley (1995, 178) argues that '[a]ll three of the major *Thomas* documents preserved, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Book of Thomas*, and the *Acts of Thomas*, are consistent in their denigration of the body, and their denial of physical resurrection'.

wealth' has made its home (*Gos. Thom.* 29). People should not worry about the clothing of the body (*Gos. Thom.* 36); neither should they be impressed by the fine garments that kings and great men wear (*Gos. Thom.* 78). What counts is the inner self that saves human persons, if it is 'brought forth' (*Gos. Thom.* 70). This kind of general depreciation of the body is, however, typical of many ideologies of antiquity. The *Gospel of Thomas* may be seen as drawing upon philosophical and religious ideas that were widely held in the Hellenistic cultural world. Yet this appearance of commonplace dualist anthropology or cosmology in the *Gospel of Thomas* does not suggest that the radical dualism described above tells the whole truth about *Thomas*' attitude to the bodily reality. There are several reasons for this.

First, the description is a caricature that does not allow for a more nuanced picture of *Thomas*' relationship to the body and to the physical world. For example, even though there are several sayings in *Thomas* that regard the world as worthless or a threatening reality (e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 56; 80; 21), there are others in which the world can have more positive connotations (e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 12; 28; 113).¹³ For *Thomas*, the physical world is not unequivocally an evil product or the source of evil. The same holds true for sexuality and childbearing. In an earlier essay, I argued that *Thomas*' attitude toward marriage and sexuality is more ambiguous than has usually been assumed and that the gospel does not represent a strictly encratite stance.¹⁴ I focused on sayings reflecting an anti-familial ethos, sayings on 'becoming one/the two becoming one' and on 'solitary'. Even though those sayings reveal an ascetic inclination, I concluded that the *Gospel of Thomas* does not present an unconditional demand for sexual abstinence or rejection of marriage. In this chapter, I will develop and refine the argument of this earlier study and attempt to show that *Thomas* does not reveal such an extreme distaste for the human body as scholars have often suggested.

Secondly, the description of *Thomas*' radical dualism is often associated, either implicitly or explicitly, with a notion that such ('gnostic') dualism stands in stark contrast to the New Testament authors who teach the resurrection of the human body and maintain that the bodily/physical reality was good because it was created by God.

¹³ The positive side of *Thomas*' relation to the world has been emphasized by Davies 1983, 70–2. See also Marjanen 1998a, 118–24.

¹⁴ Uro 1998b.

Such a picture is overly simplistic, however. I will question it by arguing that, for example, the difference between Paul's hierarchy of spirit and body and the dualism of *Thomas* is not as absolute as is often assumed.¹⁵ Michael Williams' criticism of the stereotypes associated with the 'gnostic' understanding of the body is also relevant here.¹⁶ According to Williams, 'abstractions such as "anticosmic hatred of the body" cannot possibly give us a true grasp of either the limitations or the potentialities that actual men and women associated with our so-called gnostic texts perceived in their own bodies'.¹⁷ To be sure, the *Gospel of Thomas* is not among those texts to which Williams refers most frequently in his study. In any case, his discussion demonstrates that the 'hatred of the body' is 'a rather empty and useless cliché'¹⁸ and has little value in the interpretation of *any* literature of antiquity.¹⁹

Thirdly, it is important to distinguish between ideological dualism and the ethical consequences drawn from a dualistic anthropology. Scholars often presume a quite straightforward relation between ideology and praxis. For example, working on the monolithic view of 'gnostic' anthropology criticized above, scholars have felt that such radical dualism was necessarily accompanied by extreme behaviour – either in the form of strict asceticism or licentious libertinism – in the daily life of those who cultivated the dualist ideology, or they have simply equated *Thomas*' dualist body language with the ascetic behaviour of the Thomasine Christians.²⁰ Surely ideology and praxis should not be separated, but it is crucial to realize that mainstream Platonic anthropology or cosmology could generate a wide range of

¹⁵ I am influenced by a study by Daniel Boyarin, who thinks that Paul holds 'an essentially dualist anthropology' (1994, 61). Boyarin argues that 'Paul was motivated by a Hellenistic desire for the One, which among other things produced an ideal of a universal human essence, beyond difference and hierarchy. This universal humanity, however, was predicated (and still is) on the dualism of the flesh and spirit, such that while the body is particular, marked through practice as Jew or Greek, marked through anatomy as male or female, the spirit is universal' (ibid., 7).

¹⁶ Williams 1996, 116–38; see also 137–62.

¹⁷ Ibid. 137.

¹⁸ Ibid. 138.

¹⁹ Several recent studies have demonstrated that the caricature of Greek/Hellenistic dualism often assumed by biblical scholars does not do justice to the variety and complexity of the Greco-Roman culture in general. See, e.g., Martin 1995, 6–7; Shaw 1998, 38 n.18; Miles 1999, 23–6.162–5.

²⁰ Crossan (1998, 268–9). He is one of the few scholars who problematize the relationship between theory and praxis in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Crossan, however, concludes that *Thomas* does advocate celibate asceticism.

practical attitudes toward worldly activities and physical phenomena. Philo, to choose one example, certainly represented Platonic metaphysics and dualist anthropology, but as a member of a rich Jewish family, he did not favour excessive asceticism and, in fact, expressed an explicit distaste for the Cynic-like lifestyle.²¹ What is problematical, therefore, is not only the overly simplistic 'dualism' attributed to *Thomas*, but also the way in which one often connects a dualist ideology with a certain kind of behaviour or ethical ideal.

In the following analysis, I shall concentrate on those sayings in which the dualism between 'body' and 'soul' or 'flesh' and 'spirit' is present. I shall also focus on the metaphor of 'stripping off', which is often seen to be closely related to *Thomas*' view of the human body. At the end, I shall raise the issue of the relationship between the 'body language' and the social location of the gospel.

2. Depended bodies and souls

Two sayings in *Thomas* appear to express a strong antagonism between the body (flesh) and the soul.

Woe to the flesh that depends on the soul; ²woe to the soul that depends on the flesh. (*Gos. Thom.* 112.)

Wretched is the body that is dependent upon a body, ²and wretched is the soul that is dependent on these two. (*Gos. Thom.* 87.)

Gos. Thom. 112:2, warning against the soul's dependence upon the flesh, suggests an idea that can already be found in Plato's *Phaedo*. According to Plato, in contrast to the soul of the wise man, a 'weak' soul has difficulties escaping the body after death and retaining its purity. Every pleasure or pain has something like 'a nail which rivets the soul to the body and fastens (προσπερονᾶ) it and makes it corporeal' (83D).²² The adverse influence of body on soul is described by Plato with great fervour,²³ although elsewhere, especially in the *Republic* and

²¹ *Fug.* 33–5, Dillon 1977, 153.

²² My translation.

²³ Cf., e.g., *Phaed.* 66B,D–E. 'So long as we have the body and the soul contaminated with such an evil, we shall never attain completely what we desire, that is the truth . . . the body is constantly breaking in upon our studies and disturbing us with noise and confusion . . . and in fact we perceive that, if we are ever to know anything absolutely, we *must be free from the body* and must behold the actual realities with eye of the soul alone.' Transl. by Fowler (LCL); italics added.

Timaeus, Plato can also give more positive descriptions about the body-soul relation.²⁴ That the body 'weighs down' the soul became, however, a recurring theme in later Greco-Roman literature,²⁵ and *Gos. Thom.* 112:2 may be taken as reflecting this same attitude. The first part of the Thomasine saying (112:1), however, reveals a concern about the body. The body, too, can become unhappy if it depends upon the soul. Although *Thomas* does not say it, a logical implication is that the reverse can also be true. The body *can* be happy and healthy if no unhealthy relationship between body and soul exists. This kind of statement would have been accepted by most Hellenistic moralists, even though their specific theories about the body-soul relationship varied. Influenced by contemporary medical theories, many Stoic thinkers emphasized the dynamic interaction and mutual dependence between body and soul.²⁶ Such a writer as Plutarch, who represented the Platonic tradition, could also express similar concerns. In his treatise 'Advice on Keeping Well' Plutarch often speaks of the body as a ship which must be kept clean, trim and seaworthy by means of a healthy lifestyle.²⁷ Overloading prevents the ship from sailing smoothly. In the same manner, any kind of overindulgence in food and drink is injurious not only to the body but also to the soul. One's physical behaviour, therefore, can have negative or positive effects on the soul. But the same holds true for the soul's influence on the body. When the soul is bothered by its own passions and desires (such as lust, greed, and jealousy), it becomes neglectful of the body's needs and the body suffers. The body also reacts physically to the soul's passions, for example, when the face reddens from anger.²⁸

This is, of course, not to say that *Thomas* promoted or knew the medical advice or physical theories elaborated by Plutarch. It is, nevertheless, important to notice that a contemporary Platonic thinker²⁹ could advocate an ethos emphasizing an intimate interaction and mutual dependence between soul and body rather than a total

²⁴ For Plato's ambivalence, see Dillon 1995.

²⁵ For the image of the body weighing down the soul, see Plato, *Phaed.* 81C; Philo, *Gig.* 31; Plutarch, *Is. et Os.* 353A; Seneca, *Ep.* 65.16; Josephus, *B.J.* 7.8.7; *Wisd. of Sol.* 9:15.

²⁶ Annas 1992, 20–6.37–70; Shaw 1998, 27–78.

²⁷ See *Tu. san.* 4; 10; 11; 13; 22 (*Mor.* 123E, 127C–D; 128B; 128F; 134C). The image of the body as a ship is found already in Plato, *Tim.* 69C.

²⁸ *Tu. san.* 24 (*Mor.* 135E–F); see also *Quaest. conv.* 5.7 (681D–F). For a summary of Plutarch's view of the body's health, see Shaw 1998, 43–4.

²⁹ Plutarch was borne c. 47 and died c. 120.

separation.³⁰ Platonic metaphysics did not exclude bodily care.³¹ In the same vein, one should not assume that the apparently radical separation between body and soul indicated in *Gos. Thom.* 112 would have necessarily been taken as an exhortation to neglect the body completely or to regard the body and soul as being hostile to each other.³² Most contemporary readers probably understood that the saying refers to an unhealthy dependence or to an inclination that should be resisted. In that reading the body is not, thus, simply devalued or seen as the enemy of the soul.

Gos. Thom. 87 is closely related to saying 112.³³ Both sayings contain woes with reference to the body and the soul and both condemn dependence (Coptic verb $\epsilon\iota\omega\epsilon$). The first part of 87, however, condemns 'the body that is dependent upon a body'. This has been taken as referring to sexual attraction that humans feel toward each other,³⁴ but the second admonition against a soul that depends on both bodies (87:2) does not fit particularly well into this interpretation. The saying has also been explained by Jesus' words in Luke (Q) 9:60 ('Leave the dead to bury their own dead'), which are preceded by the saying on the homelessness of the 'son of man' (Luke/Q 9:58; cf. *Gos. Thom.* 86). In this reading, 'a body that is dependent upon a body' would represent a person wishing to bury a dead person and thus showing unwillingness to break with the earthly ties.³⁵ However, the affinity of *Gos. Thom.* 87 with the synoptic saying on burying one's father is quite meagre and the narrative framework of Luke (Q) 9:57–60 (61–2) is entirely missing in *Thomas*.³⁶

³⁰ Cf. John Dillon's conclusion: 'Plutarch's spirituality, then, is basically optimistic and world-affirming' (1986, 223).

³¹ This was not, of course, the case in Plato's own thinking either. Cf., e.g., *Tim.* 86B–87B, in which Plato argues that the soul's illnesses could be influenced by bodily disorders and that the suffering body can cause pain to the soul as well.

³² Cf., for example, Koester (1990a, 126), who sees body and soul in saying 112 as being 'joined in unholy mix which spells doom for both'. Similarly Patterson 1990, 97. See also Gärtner 1960, 182; Wilson 1960, 39; Haenchen 1961a, 55; Fieger 1991, 275–6. For more nuanced interpretations of *Gos. Thom.* 112, see Valantasis 1997, 192–3 and Zöckler 1999, 122.

³³ Asgeirsson (1998a) takes *Gos. Thom.* 112 as being part of a rhetorical sub-unit consisting of sayings 110–12, which in turn belongs to what he calls a 'Doublet Stratum' of the gospel (sayings 99–112). For a discussion of *Thomas*' stratifications, see pp. 118–26 below.

³⁴ Haenchen 1961a, 54; 1973, 213; Ménard 1975, 188–9.

³⁵ Doresse 1960, 377; Grant and Freedman 1960, 172.

³⁶ There is no cogent argument for the view that *Gos. Thom.* 86 is dependent upon the canonical gospels. See, for example, Patterson (1993a, 61), who argues convincingly against Schrage (1964, 168–70).

Even though the intertextual relation to the synoptic story is not likely, the suggestion that the saying makes an association between the 'body' and the 'world' is arguable. The world is explicitly called a 'body' (CΩΜΑ) in saying 80 and in its otherwise identical parallel (*Gos. Thom.* 56) the world is equated with a 'dead body' (ΠΤΩΜΑ; cf. also *Gos. Thom.* 11). The interplay with these terms (world, body, dead body) is so closely interwoven in the gospel that, as Philip Sellew has observed, they can be 'almost interchangeable'.³⁷ This interchangeability may sound like a strange metaphor to us, but for the ancient reader the equation of the cosmos with the human body was quite natural.³⁸ A famous account of the cosmos as a living body (and conversely the body as a cosmos) is found in Plato's *Timaeus*, but this belief was further developed by Hellenistic Stoic philosophers.³⁹ Dale B. Martin has summarized aptly.

In the modern world we may talk about the 'social body,' but for most of us the phrase is a metaphor; the social body is simply the aggregate of many individual bodies . . . But in the ancient world, the human body was not *like* microcosm; it *was* a microcosm – a small version of the universe at large.⁴⁰

Identifying the latter 'body' as the world seems to give a plausible explanation for the two bodies in saying 87.⁴¹ The saying condemns an individual body which is dependent upon another body, that is, the world-body.⁴² The latter part, then, dooms the (individual) soul that is

³⁷ Sellew 1997a, 530.

³⁸ For characterization of the living body as a corpse, see below.

³⁹ Cf. Annas 1992, 43 (quoting Diogenes Laertius 7.142–3): 'Chrysippus in the first book of his providence says that the world is a living being, rational, animate, and intelligent.' For Stoic cosmology, see Hahn 1977.

⁴⁰ Martin 1995, 15–16 (his italics).

⁴¹ Davies (1983, 74–7) connects the statement about the body being dependent upon a body in saying 87 with the idea of 'eating the dead' appearing in sayings 11 and 60 (cf. also 7), which seems to have an important symbolic meaning in *Thomas*, contrasting the ideas of living by (eating) the Living One (cf. 11 and 111; see also Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 8.32). The body which depends upon a body is thus the human body which depends on the devouring of corpses instead of living on the Living One. According to Davies, the idea may have had eucharistic significance (ibid., 76). The symbolism of 'eating the dead' may well be partly analogous to the idea of dependence in saying 87. Yet, I think, Davies' interpretation is too restrictive and it is better to explain saying 87 by means of those sayings that speak of the body and the world and of the body and the soul.

⁴² The indefinite article before the latter 'body' in *Gos. Thom.* 87 (ΟΥCΩΜΑ) need not be taken as a decisive argument against this interpretation, cf. a similar construction in saying 56 (ΠΕΤΑΨΟΥΝ ΠΚΟCΜΟC ΑΨΕ Ε ΕΥΠΤΩΜΑ, 'Whoever has come to understand the world has found the corpse:').

dependent on both the individual and universal body. But since no clear boundary exists between the individual body and the world-body, the saying seems to elaborate basically the same point as saying 112. The soul should not depend upon the physical world, whether it manifests itself in the form of an individual, society,⁴³ or universal cosmos. The saying immediately preceding *Gos. Thom.* 112 gives the fundamental reason for this rejection of dependence. 'The heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence, but whoever is living from the living one will not see death' (111:1–2). Similarly, *Gos. Thom.* 87 is preceded by a saying that describes the alienation of the son of man in the world, where he has no place to rest (*Gos. Thom.* 86). This may be a body-rejecting or world-rejecting message, but no more so than what one can find in Paul or in the synoptic gospels!⁴⁴

3. Great wealth in poverty

Anthropological dualism also appears in *Gos. Thom.* 29, which contrasts 'spirit' with 'flesh' or 'body'.

If the flesh (CΑΡΞ) came into being because of spirit, that is a marvel, ²but if spirit came into being because of the body (CΩΜΑ), that is a marvel of marvels.
³What I do marvel (ΛΑΛΑ ΔΝΟΚ †ΡΩΠΗΡΕ) is how this great wealth (ΤΕΕΙΝΟΘ ΜΜΝΤΡΜΜΔΟ) has come to dwell in this poverty.⁴⁵

The first two units of the saying offer reversed statements about the possibilities of coming into being, flesh because of spirit and spirit because of the body. The latter surpasses the first in marvel. A terminological difference exists between 29:1 and 29:2, the first one speaking of 'flesh' and the latter one of the 'body'. Are the words simply synonymous here? We have seen that the 'body' in *Thomas* is capable of denoting both the human body and the cosmos. The antithetical parallelism between 29:1 and 29:2 does not, however, support the equation of 'body' with the cosmos here and it is difficult to see how 'flesh' and 'body' in this saying would have different connotations.⁴⁶ A less

⁴³ For *polis* as a body, see Martin 1995, 38–47 and McVay 2000.

⁴⁴ Valantasis (1997, 167) points out correctly that the condemnation of dependence in *Gos. Thom.* 87 'does not necessarily imply that the body is negatively construed'. Davies is even less convinced that *Thomas* denigrates the human body (1983, 77).

⁴⁵ Trans. modified from Miller 1994.

⁴⁶ Cf., however, Zoeckler (1999, 122), who takes the different words as indicating that 29:1

constrained reading is to understand them both as referring to the same kind of (human) 'body'.

A way of approaching this difficult saying is to read it together with the previous one and to take at least part of 29 as referring to Jesus, who appeared 'in flesh' (*Gos. Thom.* 28). Such an interpretative link between these two sayings is not implausible. On the other hand, it is difficult to see which 'marvel' in the saying is actually self-referential⁴⁷ or how the train of thought of all three successive 'marvels' should be fitted into the incarnation story in saying 28. Moreover, taken that *Thomas* does not posit an ontological difference between Jesus and his true followers (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 108), it is not improbable that the thought in the assumed unit of *Gos. Thom.* 28–9 slides from the situation of Jesus to the situation of the addressees.

The first conditional sentence seems to be in harmony with the general Platonic flavour of the gospel. It suggests that the spiritual reality has a priority over the corporeal one in terms of origin. It is more difficult to say whether the second conditional sentence ('if spirit came into being because of the body') represents any specific philosophical stance or religious myth. A possible reference is to the creation account in *Gen.* 2:7, according to which man was first formed from earth, after which 'God breathed into his face a breath of life, and man became a living soul' (LXX).⁴⁸ If this reading is on the right track, the first if-clause would then suggest the origin of the humanity in the order described in *Gen.* 1:26–7, in which man was created as the image of God. The spirit 'coming into being' in *Gos. Thom.* 29:2 would then refer to the ensouling of the body in the creation of man⁴⁹ and would not be in conflict with the cosmological priority of the spiritual reality expressed in 29:1.⁵⁰ The Genesis reading of this saying may find some

and 29:2 are not simply reverse processes. According to Zockler, the first statement possibly refers to creation and the second one to insemination.

⁴⁷ Valantasis (1997, 103–4) suggests that the first statement (29:1) could be self-referential for Jesus and a characterization of his mission as a physical manifestation of physical reality, while the second statement (29:2) could characterize the 'seekers', who because of their bodies dwell in a stupor of this world.

⁴⁸ Note that Philo interprets the divine breath of *Gen.* 2:7 as 'spirit' (*pneuma*); see *Spec.* 4.123 and *L.A.* 1.161.

⁴⁹ Thomas can elsewhere make a distinction between different kinds or stages of 'coming into being' (see *Gos. Thom.* 19).

⁵⁰ Note, however, that Philo sometimes offers conflicting interpretations about the creation of man that are at least partially derived from the different accounts in *Gen.* 1:26–7 and 2:7; see Tobin 1983.

support from the fact that 'great wealth' (cf. 29:3) appears also in *Gos. Thom.* 85 in the context of Adam's creation ('Adam *came into being from a great power and wealth*'). Moreover, such an interpretation is in accordance with some recent studies on *Thomas* which have drawn attention to the importance of Genesis exegesis in the overall theology of the gospel.⁵¹

Yet such a reading of saying 29 remains but one of the alternatives. It is also possible to read 29:1 and 29:2 as logically exclusive statements. In such a reading, the latter statement would be understood in a clearly un-Platonic way, stressing (theoretically or ironically) the priority of the body over the spirit. Be that as it may, the conditional formulation of these sentences seems to imply that the questions of *why* and *how* the dual nature of human existence has come into being remain open in some way or are explained by two divergent creation accounts. The last part of the saying presents a factual statement without a condition. What the speaker wonders is the fact that 'this great wealth has made its home in this poverty'. This final conclusion moves the attention of the reader from 'coming into being' to wondrous *dwelling* of 'this great wealth' in 'this poverty'. The use of the demonstrative pronoun (ΤΕΕΙ) in 29:3 creates a relation between the 'spirit' and the 'great wealth', on the one hand, and the 'body/flesh' and the 'poverty' on the other. Yet the choice of the word 'great wealth' instead of 'spirit' is not insignificant. Unlike, for example, Paul, *Thomas* does not prefer to use 'spirit'⁵² as a primary reference to the divine dimension dwelling in the Christian. Neither does *Thomas* focus merely on the 'soul'.⁵³ The immortal or divine part of the human being is characterized in various ways as 'kingdom inside you' (*Gos. Thom.* 3:3), the 'self' that is to be known (3:5), 'light' (24:3), 'great wealth' (29:3), or 'that which you have' (70).

One may also contrast Paul's emphasis that Christians have *received* the 'spirit' in baptism⁵⁴ with *Thomas*' conviction that human beings must find their divine true 'self'. Yet, when *Thomas* comes to speak of the transformation that leads humans to life, the emphasis on

⁵¹ Davies 1992; De Conick 1996a; Pagels 1999. See also above, p. 44.

⁵² Cf. *Gos. Thom.* 14 ('if you give alms, you will do harm to your spirits'); 44 (blaspheme against the 'Holy Spirit') and 114 (Mary may *become* a 'living spirit' resembling males).

⁵³ In addition to *Gos. Thom.* 87 and 112, see sayings 25 ('love your brother like your own soul') and 28 ('my soul became afflicted for the sons of men').

⁵⁴ E.g., 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:22.

inwardness is balanced with sayings in which the realm of salvation is outside the person. The disciples will 'enter' the kingdom (e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 22), they 'come to dwell in the light' (11:3), what they have will save them only if they 'bring it forth' or they may lack it altogether (70). It is not, therefore, the spirit within the body in itself that saves a person but the *process* in which the spirit is transformed according to the original image.⁵⁵ If this transformation fails, the whole human person, not only the body, turns out to be poverty (*Gos. Thom.* 3).⁵⁶ If it is successful, the body, as well, will be transformed according to the original image (*Gos. Thom.* 22:4–7).

4. Being naked

Two sayings in *Thomas* use the language of 'stripping off', *Gos. Thom.* 21:1–4 and 37. Both may be interpreted to imply the metaphor of the body as a garment, which is a typical Platonic cliché in Greco-Roman literature. The metaphoric language of these sayings is highly complex and difficult to interpret, however. *Gos. Thom.* 21:1–4 presents a saying on the 'children in a field'.

Mary said to Jesus, 'Whom are we disciples like?'

²He said, 'They are like children who have settled in a field which is not theirs.

³When the owners of the field come, they will say, "Let us have back our field."

⁴The children are naked (ΝΤΟΟΥ CΕΚΑΚΑΔΗΥ)⁵⁷ in their presence in order to let the owners have back their field and to give it back to them.⁵⁸

The saying is followed by two more parables, the sayings on the thief breaking into a house (21:5–7; cf. *Gos. Thom.* 103 and 35) and on the harvesting of the ripe crop (21:9) ending with the hearing formula (21:10). The position of 21:8 ('let there be among you a man of understanding') in this sequence is not clear, but the pronominal element of the following sentence ('*he* came quickly') seems to refer to the 'man

⁵⁵ The idea of spiritual growth is not, of course, lacking in Paul either (e.g., Gal. 4:19), but as compared to *Thomas*, Paul puts more stress on a single moment of receiving the spirit. See the discussion on baptism in *Thomas*, below.

⁵⁶ Cf. Davies 1983, 73. 'Poverty is, therefore, the condition of a failure to "find", and wealth is a metaphor for success in finding.' There is, however, no reason for suggesting that *Gos. Thom.* 29:3 is a later gloss (*pace* Davies, *ibid.*).

⁵⁷ The verb should probably be understood as a qualitative form (Emmel 1989, 267), but most translations ignore this (cf., however, Berthge 1997, 525).

⁵⁸ Transl. modified from Lambdin.

of understanding' and thus the parable on the harvest should be taken as explanatory of the preceding statement.⁵⁹

Not all scholars have interpreted the idea of 'stripping off' or 'being naked' in 21:4 as a reference to the removal or renunciation of the mortal body. Stevan Davies, for example, drawing on an influential essay by Jonathan Z. Smith, connects this idea as well as the description of the disciples as 'little children' to the baptismal rite (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 37; see also Col. 2:11).⁶⁰ I will discuss this hypothesis more extensively below. It suffices to say here that there are no strong signs of ritual language in this saying. Even if there were, such an interpretation would not exclude the possibility that the metaphor of the body as a garment would be at work.⁶¹

A reasonable starting-point for an interpretation is to be found in 21:6–7, in which the wakefulness of the householder is explained as an exhortation to be vigilant toward the world. Moreover, the parable of the thief breaking into a house is connected with the preceding parable of the children in the field by means of an explanatory link ('therefore I say') signifying that the householder's vigilance is purported to clarify or develop the meaning of the first parable. The juxtaposition of these two parables creates a somewhat surprising association between the children living in the field that 'is not theirs' and 'the owner of the house'. Nevertheless, both images, that of squatters and that of the owner, demonstrate the right attitude toward the 'world'.⁶² It is apparent that the saying contrasts two kinds of property, one which is not owned and should be given back to its real owners and one which is really owned and valuable (thieves are after it). The peculiar genitive construction ΕΠΕΨΗΕΙ ΝΤΕ ΤΕΨ-ΜΝΤΕΡΟ (literally 'into his house of his kingdom') is best explained as

⁵⁹ Valantasis 1997, 94.

⁶⁰ Davies 1983, 117–37. Davies sees the baptismal references as so crucial that he defines the gospel as 'part of the post-baptismal instruction'. 'To discover the meaning of the sayings ... is to discover the meaning of the rite' (*ibid.*, 136).

⁶¹ Cf. Smith 1978, 16–17. He refers to Jewish exegesis of Gen. 3:21 where 'tunics of skin' were understood as referring to the fleshly body. Davies, however, notes that 'nowhere does Thomas claim that clothing is the human physical body' (1983, 119).

⁶² For a different reading, see Valantasis 1997, 92–4. According to him, the first parable 'infantilizes' the disciples and the whole saying is intended to create a contrast between the 'true disciples' (including Mary) and the 'unworthy disciples'. One should not, however, overlook the fact that 'becoming a child' is a positive image in the following saying and elsewhere in the gospel. For the role of Mary in the gospel, see Marjanen 1996, 32–55 (= 1998c).

an explicative genitive⁶³ and should be translated 'into his house, his domain' (cf. a similar use of 'kingdom' in *Gos. Thom.* 103).⁶⁴ Thus the valuable property ('his goods' or '*chreia*'⁶⁵) belong to the sphere of the householder's 'rule', while the field is not a true domain of the children but belongs to others. Ruling is not an easy task, however, since the householder's property is always under the threat of being lost and demands constant vigilance.

In this interpretation, the 'field' stands for the outside world and the owners of the field and the robbers represent the worldly powers. *Thomas'* language is here too obscure for reconstructing any specific mythology. To be sure, the owners and the robbers have sometimes been understood as Archons, who, according to such writings as the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, contributed to the creation of the world and man.⁶⁶ The idea of lesser gods taking part in the creation of the mortal parts of man is at least as old as Plato and was employed by Philo in his exegesis of Gen. 1:26.⁶⁷ *Thomas* does not, however, show any signs of the *gnostic* demiurgical traditions.⁶⁸ The owners of the field are not described as ignorant or arrogant; they are simply asking to get back something that belongs to them. The robbers, as well, highlight quite another aspect: the constant threat of losing one's most cherished spiritual possession.⁶⁹

5. Reading from the Stoic point of view

The parable of the children living in a field that is not theirs expresses an attitude which later Stoic ethicists would have found sympathetic. Epictetus (c. AD 55–135), in particular, encourages his students

⁶³ Marjanen 1998a, 128 n. 80; Bethge 1997, 525 n. 35. Quecke's (1963, 47–53) attempt to explain the peculiar double possessive article in Coptic as a mistranslation of a Syriac proleptic genitive suffix is ingenious, but presumes a written Syriac *Vorlage* for the Coptic translation.

⁶⁴ The expression is similarly translated in Säve-Söderbergh 1959, 33; Bethge 1997, 525; Zöckler 1999, 207.

⁶⁵ For the arguments that this Greek word should be understood in a positive sense ('profit', 'good'), see Marjanen 1998a, 127–8; Zöckler 1999, 209.

⁶⁶ Leipoldt and Schenke 1960, 14 n. 2; Kee 1963, 311; Ménard 1975, 111.

⁶⁷ Philo speaks of 'powers' (δυνάμεις; *Conf.* 170–3) or 'angels' (*Conf.* 181) as those who assisted God in creation; see Tobin 1983, 47.

⁶⁸ See above, pp. 40–5.

⁶⁹ It is not impossible that the robbers in *Gos. Thom.* 21 and 103 stand for demonic invasion (cf. Q 11:24–6); see Zöckler 1999, 208.

repeatedly to make a distinction between those things in life which are under one's control and those which are not.

Under our control are moral purpose (προαίρεσις) and all the acts of moral purposes; but not under our control are the body, possessions, parents, brothers, children, country – in a word, our partners.⁷⁰

Several times Epictetus emphasizes that those things 'not under control' are things that are 'another's' (ἄλλότριον).⁷¹ In the *Handbook*, Epictetus summons his audience to be always prepared to give such things back and to take care of them as travellers treat their inn.

Never say about anything, 'I have lost it,' but only 'I have given it back.' Is your child dead? It has been given back. 'I have had my farm taken away.' Very well, this too has been given back. 'Yet it was a rascal who took it away.' But what concern is it of yours by whose instrumentality the giver (ὁ δούς) called for its return? So long as he gives it to you, take care of it as of a thing that is not your own, as travellers treat their inn.⁷²

From the Stoic point of view, therefore, it is unnecessary to decide whether the parable speaks of the world or the body. Everything outside the moral purpose belongs to the same category and is something that is not one's own. Nevertheless, the image of the children being naked in the presence of the owners would have readily been understood as a reference to stripping off the physical body.⁷³ The idea that the body was a garment of the soul was widespread in antiquity.⁷⁴ In Philo this metaphor comes up frequently as he speaks of the ascension of the soul to heaven by means of contemplation and learning the holy mysteries of God.⁷⁵ Such connotations make it understandable that in *Gos.*

⁷⁰ *Diatr.* 1.22.10; Translation modified from LCL. I owe the correction of the last words of Oldfather's translation, 'our partners' (οἱ κοινωνοί) rather than 'all that with which we associate' to Troels Engberg-Pedersen.

⁷¹ See *Diatr.* 2.6.8; 2.16.28; 3.24.23.

⁷² *Ench.* 11. Trans. modified from LCL (Oldfather).

⁷³ A possible, alternative interpretation is that clothing signifies social distinction and identity (see Valantasis 1997, 93; cf. *Gos. Thom.* 36 and 78).

⁷⁴ See the numerous parallels given by MacDonald 1987, 23–63 and De Conick and Fossum 1991.

⁷⁵ In *De posteritate Caini*, for example, Rebecca is a type of a wise person who 'is enamoured of spiritual objects' and so 'has learned by use of reason to rid herself completely of the body, which the waterskin represents' (136–7; transl. by Colson and Whitaker; LCL). In Philo's allegory, Rebecca's 'pitcher' is contrasted with the leathern vessel (ἄσκος, i.e., 'body', σῶμα) used by Hagar. When discussing the nature of the 'intellect' in comparison to that of 'sense-perception', Philo says that 'our soul moves often by itself, stripping itself

Thom. 21:1–4 the imagery, although it may ultimately refer to the moment of death, is followed by an exhortation to be vigilant (21:5–7).⁷⁶ To be vigilant is to accept the basic fact that one does not own one's body. It is interesting to observe that Stoic philosophers could teach their students to regard their bodies as if they were dead. Again, examples from Epictetus are illuminating. 'The paltry body, which is not mine, which is by nature dead (τὸ φύσει νεκρὸν).' Furthermore, 'The paltry body is nothing to me; the parts of it are nothing to me.'⁷⁷ Judith Perkins comments on this aspect of Epictetus' teaching:

This denigration of the body was a consequence of Epictetus' efforts to discount its effects, as he discounted everything outside the control of moral purpose. For central to his scheme of self-mastery was the belief that nothing outside of a subject's judgments and attitudes could affect the real self.⁷⁸

For Epictetus, the body is something outside one's control and therefore not part of the real 'self'. The same is true for the outside world, as the citations above demonstrate. *Thomas* phrases a similarly restrained attitude to the culture and society by emphasizing that the world is a 'corpse'. 'Whoever has come to understand the world has found a corpse (ΠΤΩΜΑ), and whoever has found a corpse is superior to the world' (*Gos. Thom.* 56; cf. also 80; see above). The meaning of the saying is debated, but it is not uncommon to take it as an example of an extremely negative attitude to the world.⁷⁹ The pessimistic tone of the saying is undeniable. But in view of the Stoic parallels, it is possible to read the saying as expressing *indifference*, rather than strong hostility with respect to the outside world. The physical body is a corpse or garment, since it is perishable and outside the control of the real self

of the entire encumbrance of the body' (*Somn.* 1.43; transl. by Colson and Whitaker; LCL). For a helpful survey of Philo's use of the 'stripping' imagery, see De Conick and Fossum 1991, 128–30.

⁷⁶ Cf. Patterson (1993a, 127 n. 18), who argues against the view that 21:1–4 refers to the stripping off the body (e.g., Grant and Freedman 1960, 141) with the objection that the interpretative sayings in 21:5–7 do not 'allow for such finality'.

⁷⁷ *Diatr.* 3.10.15; 3.22.21. For the body as a 'corpse', see also Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 2.2; 4.41; Philo, *Leg. All.* 3.72; *Quest. Gen.* 4.77. Philo surely represents a Platonic tradition but, as widely recognized, his ethical conclusions are often Stoic (e.g., Dillon 1977, 148).

⁷⁸ Perkins 1995, 89.

⁷⁹ Haenchen 1961a, 50: 'Rightly understood, it [the world] is nothing but a monstrous, decaying carcass' (the translation from German is taken from Marjanen 1998a, 117).

that inhabits it. In the same sense, the world, the harsh reality of the outside world, is a corpse. Only by accepting this fact can one really become 'superior to the world', that is gain self-mastery (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 2:4) and serenity with respect to those things that are not under one's control.

Using the Stoic concept of *adiaphora* in this interpretation, of course, falls short of noticing the obvious differences between the Stoic view about the soul⁸⁰ and *Thomas*' Platonic-Christian ideas about immortality and afterlife. However, the comparison is helpful in pointing out that the metaphors of 'undressing' or 'the world as a corpse' can be read as encouraging moderate or internalized detachment and not necessarily extreme asceticism.⁸¹

6. Undressing and baptism

The other saying in which the metaphor of undressing appears, *Gos. Thom.* 37, runs as follows:

His disciples said, 'When will you become revealed to us and when shall we see you?' Jesus said, 'When you disrobe without being ashamed and take up your garments and place them under your feet like little children and tread on them, then [will you see] the son of the living one, and you will not be afraid.'

As briefly mentioned above, Jonathan Z. Smith argued that the imagery reflects early Christian baptism.⁸² Smith pointed out that several motifs of the saying, undressing, nudity, treading upon garments and being as little children, indicate that 'the origin of logion 37 is to be found within archaic Christian baptismal practices and attendant interpretation of Genesis 1–3'.⁸³ Stevan Davies accepted the baptismal

⁸⁰ For the Stoic understanding of the soul and body, see, e.g., Long 1982; Long and Sedley 1987 (vols. 1–2), §§ 45 and 53; Annas 1992, 37–70.

⁸¹ For the Stoic attitude toward asceticism, see Francis 1995, 11–19. For Stoics such as Musonius asceticism was an 'internal attitude rather than external practice' (ibid., 12). Francis summarizes: 'Stoic teaching set the norms and the limits of acceptable ascetical practice in the second century. Because of Stoicism's fundamental emphasis on interior disposition, it defined asceticism less as a discipline of the body than that of the mind. Physical practice is certainly required, but gained meaning only as it related to the development of internal discipline. Once such mental discipline was attained, all externals became indifferent and physical exertions, for the most part, lost their significance' (ibid., 19).

⁸² Smith 1978 [orig. 1966], 1–23.

⁸³ Ibid., 2.

interpretation of *Gos. Thom.* 37 and expanded it to several other sayings in *Thomas*⁸⁴ concluding that the *Sitz im Leben* of the whole gospel is post-baptismal instruction.⁸⁵ More recently, however, April De Conick and Jarl Fossum have contested this reading of *Gos. Thom.* 37⁸⁶ and pointed out that the metaphor of 'taking off garments' appears often without baptismal context in early Christian literature and that the (pre-baptismal) exorcist ceremony of 'treading upon garments' 'is only found in very late texts'.⁸⁷ If there is a sacramental reference in the saying, De Conick and Fossum would rather suggest an act of anointing, which they regard as being separate from a baptismal ritual.

The rich documentation offered by De Conick and Fossum indeed posits some difficulties for a baptismal setting for *Gos. Thom.* 37. Interestingly, the imagery of 'stripping off' in the sense of abandoning the mortal body is presented as a precondition of 'seeing' God or the divine hypostasis in some mystical and apocalyptic texts.⁸⁸ In a similar manner, Philo stressed that it is not possible for a person 'whose abode is in the body and the mortal race to attain being with God'.⁸⁹ These ideas do not require a baptismal interpretation. To be sure, death and resurrection could be connected with baptism (e.g., Rom. 6:1–14; Col. 3:12), but such baptismal interpretations always refer to a single moment in the past when the ritual enactment had occurred. *Thomas* does not suggest such a moment but rather seems to refer to the future goal of the disciples.⁹⁰ If *Thomas* would like to emphasize baptism or

⁸⁴ Davies (1983, 117–37) discusses such sayings as *Gos. Thom.* 4: 21; 22; 46; 50; 53; 108.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 136.

⁸⁶ De Conick and Fossum 1991.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 132 with reference to Klijn 1963, 222.

⁸⁸ See especially 2 *Enoch* 22:7–8 (deriving from the first century AD?) and the *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:5; 9:9; cf. also 9:17; 10:1–31 (from the second century?).

⁸⁹ *Leg. all.* 3.42. Transl. by F. H. Olson and G. H. Whitaker (LCL).

⁹⁰ This does not necessarily mean that for *Thomas* 'seeing the son of the living one' was possible *only* after death. On the other hand, De Conick's (1996a; 1996b; 2000) thesis that, in *Thomas*' soteriology, salvation hinges upon journeys to heaven and visionary experiences *before* death is too narrow an interpretation. It is precarious to interpret 'seeing' or 'looking' in *Thomas* as frequently referring to ascension and heavenly journeys which would have been the trademark of the Thomasine community. For example, *Gos. Thom.* 59 ('Take heed of [or: look at] the living one while you are alive, lest you die and seek to see him and be unable to see him') does not elaborate what kind of religious experience or activity is required from the audience in order that after death their seeking would not be vain. Nowhere does *Thomas* describe out-of-the-body experiences (cf. 2 Cor. 12:1–9) or repeated heavenly journeys. A reader who was familiar with the mystical traditions referred to by De Conick could, of course, understand 'stripping off' as an

any other rite as a *rite de passage*, it seems strange the rite itself is never directly mentioned in the gospel. Moreover, the gospel not only lacks direct references to baptism (or unction for that matter), but it also contains several anti-ritual sayings. These sayings are mostly directed against Jewish ritual practices,⁹¹ but one may wonder whether, for example, the rejection of fasting and prayer in *Gos. Thom.* 14⁹² can be reconciled with a type of baptismal process we know from other first- and second-century sources.⁹³ This is not to say that the first readers of the gospel were not baptized or that they rejected all kind of external rituals. But it seems clear enough that the author of the gospel does not make much of such rituals and certainly does not create a theology of baptism. The evidence for the hypothesis that unction is being reflected in *Gos. Thom.* 37 is even more meagre.⁹⁴

Almost all interpreters agree that 'unclothing without shame' reflects the restoration of the paradisiac state described in Genesis, in which

ascension to heaven during his or her lifetime, but *Thomas* itself gives very few clues to this interpretation. For a criticism of De Conick's thesis, see also Dunderberg forthcoming.

⁹¹ See Marjanen 1998b. For *Thomas*' rejection of ritual washing, see also Uro 2000, 317–21.

⁹² Cf. also *Gos. Thom.* 6, 27, and 104. Saying 104, to be sure, seems to allow for the possibility of fasting and prayer, but the formulation in this saying should hardly be read as a strong encouragement for the practices. For analysis of the sayings, see Marjanen 1998b, 166–74. Incidentally, a Stoic-minded reader may have agreed with *Thomas*' emphasis in saying 14. Cf. Seneca's rejection of conventional prayer in his epistle to Lucilius: 'You are doing an excellent thing, one which will be wholesome for you, if, as you write me, you are persisting in your effort to attain sound understanding; it is foolish to pray for this when you can acquire it from yourself. We do not need to uplift our hands towards heaven, or to beg the keeper of the temple to let us approach his idol's ear, 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 (prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est)' (*Ep.* 41.1; translated by R. M. Gummere; LCL). See also Nussbaum 1994, 326.

⁹³ We do not have many detailed early accounts of the baptismal process, but what we have demonstrate that it included the following elements: 1) extended preparation by listening, preaching and teaching, 2) fasting, 3) trinitarian baptism, followed by 4) the celebration of the eucharist for the newly baptized. See, e.g., *Did.* 7:1–4 and Jusrin, *1 Apol.* 61.2–12; 65. For a discussion of these passages, see Finn 1997, 137–62 (esp. 152).

⁹⁴ The pre-baptismal unction played an important role in the initiatory rite of the Syrian churches, but I have problems in following De Conick's and Fossum's argument that in the *Odes of Solomon* two rites are described, the one comprising unction and baptism and the other unction only (1991, 127). The 'seal' or 'sign' in *Odes Sol.* 39:7 and 4:7 most probably refer to the baptismal rite in general (cf., e.g., *Acts Thom.* 49 Syr.). The connection between unction and ascension remains also unclear to me. In *2 Enoch* 22:9, to be sure, Enoch is anointed before he is made like the angels, but this single passage hardly proves that the idea of ascension and unction were always – or frequently – connected in early Christianity.

Adam and Eve were 'naked and were not ashamed' (2:25); the shame came after their fall, when their 'eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked' (3:7). Does this, however, mean that 'shame' is connected with the body itself, not only with nudity? As often noticed, the Coptic expression $\Sigma\text{O}\Sigma\text{AN}\ \text{E}\text{TET}\text{N}\text{O}\text{W}\text{AK}\text{EK}\ \text{T}\text{H}\text{Y}\text{T}\text{N}\ \text{E}\text{Z}\text{H}\text{Y}\ \text{M}\text{P}\text{ET}\text{N}\text{O}\text{W}\text{I}\text{NE}$ is ambivalent and can be translated either 'when you put off your shame' or 'when you unclothe yourselves without being shamed'.⁹⁵ On the other hand, the Greek text is unambiguous in this respect (*P. Oxy.* 655.22–3: $\acute{\omicron}\tau\alpha\upsilon\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\delta\upsilon\sigma\eta\sigma\theta\epsilon\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \mu\grave{\eta}\ \alpha\iota\sigma\chi\upsilon\lambda\theta\eta\tau\epsilon$) and supports the view that at least in the Greek version 'shame' was not directly associated with the body. To be sure, the imagery of 'treading upon the garments' when applied to the human body denotes an act of renunciation.⁹⁶ This renunciation of the body can, however, be understood along the lines I have interpreted *Gos. Thom.* 21. During earthly life, one should renounce the body as something which is not one's own. At death the body is to be put off like an old, worn-out garment.

The absence of shame could evoke the prelapsarian innocence or asexuality. Christian writers greatly exploited this notion. It is not clear how deeply rooted the absence of sex in the Garden was in the pre-Christian Jewish tradition,⁹⁷ but in any case the childlike being of the disciples and the state of asexuality is connected in *Gos. Thom.* 22. Broadly speaking, the view is in agreement with the Christian conviction that there will be no marriage and male–female difference in the resurrection (cf. Luke 20:27–40). Both *Gos. Thom.* 22 and 37 could certainly invite ascetic interpretations, just as Luke 20:27–40 became a central *locus* for later ascetic theologians.⁹⁸ The debates on different versions and combinations of *Gos. Thom.* 22 and 37 in early Christianity demonstrate, however, that the sayings were open to

⁹⁵ E.g., Meyer 1992, 86.

⁹⁶ De Conick and Fossum 1991, 133. A Manichaean Psalm-Book 278 contains a clear allusion to *Gos. Thom.* 37. 'The word of Jesus the Savior came to . . . fitting. The vain garment of this flesh I put off, safe and pure; I caused the clean feet of my soul to trample confidently upon it.' (Allberry 1938, 99).

⁹⁷ See 2 *Bar.* 56:6; *Jub.* 4:1: For the latter, see the clarifying discussion in Anderson 1989, 121–48. Anderson observes that for the writer of *Jubilees*, Eden was the prototype of a temple and for this reason the author restricts sexual relations to the area outside Eden.

⁹⁸ One may compare the different interpretations of a saying from the *Gospel of the Egyptians* ('. . . when you tread upon the garments of shame') by Clement of Alexandria and Julius Cassianus (*Strom.* 3.13.92; for a discussion of this passage, see MacDonald 1987, 30–8).

different readings and were not universally understood as promoting an encratic way of life.⁹⁹

7. *Thomas* and Paul

Scholars have sometimes contrasted *Thomas*' imagery of 'undressing' with Paul's discussion on the 'resurrection body' (cf. 1 Cor. 15) and particularly with his emphasis in 2 Cor. 5:1–10 that the believers will not be 'unclothed' but rather be clothed (2 Cor. 5:3).¹⁰⁰ Such comparisons are not uninfluenced by Bultmann's thesis that Paul, in 2 Cor. 5:1–10, is confronting gnostic ideas according to which the 'naked self soars aloft free of any body'. The Christian 'does not desire, like such Gnostics, to be "unclothed", but desires to be "further clothed"'.¹⁰¹ *Thomas* has then been taken as representing a typically 'gnostic' anthropology dominated by a desire to free the soul from the prison of the body and to become 'naked'.

Bultmann, however, observed that in 2 Cor. 5:1–10 Paul himself is influenced by the 'Hellenistic-dualistic depreciation of the body'¹⁰² and may also elsewhere occasionally come quite close to what he calls gnostic dualism.¹⁰³ Some more recent studies have confirmed the view that Paul's position is not as far from Hellenistic anthropological dualism as has been suggested.¹⁰⁴ Admittedly, Paul's discussion in 2 Cor. 5:1–10 is a notoriously difficult passage and its relationship to his other statements about resurrection, especially to that in 1 Cor. 15, is a matter of constant debate.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, a comparison between Paul's aversion to nakedness and *Thomas*' positive use of 'stripping off' imagery does not warrant a strong contrast between a 'monistic' Paul

⁹⁹ See my analysis of *Gos. Thom.* 22 in Uro 1998b, 151–6.

¹⁰⁰ E.g., Grant and Freedman 1960, 134; Wilson 1960, 37.

¹⁰¹ Bultmann 1952, 202; see also 1976, 138–9.

¹⁰² Bultmann, 1952, 202. Some have argued that Paul in 2 Cor 5:6–8 is actually quoting a gnostic argument to drive his own case home; see, e.g., Jewett 1971, 274–7; Murphy-O'Connor 1986.

¹⁰³ To cite Bultmann more fully, Paul 'sees so deep a cleft within man, so great a tension between self and self, and so keenly feels the plight of the man who loses his grip upon himself and falls victim to outside powers, that he comes close to Gnostic dualism' (*ibid.* 199).

¹⁰⁴ See especially Gundry 1976 and Boyarin 1994. Note also the following articles on 2 Cor. 5: Glasson 1989; Aune 1995; Walter 1996.

¹⁰⁵ For comparisons between 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 5, see Gillman 1988 and the further literature cited in that article.

and a 'radically dualist' *Thomas*. The difference is more relative than absolute. It is true that Paul gives a lot of emphasis to the new pneumatic body that the believer will receive at the parousia (1 Cor. 15:35–57) and the language of being 'fully clothed' or 'clothed upon' (ἐπενδύσασθαι) in 2 Cor. 5:4 seems to parallel Paul's imagery in 1 Cor. 15:53–4 of 'perishable being clothed with imperishable'. Scholars have struggled with the problem of how this longing for being clothed at the parousia is reconciled with Paul's desire to leave the body and to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; cf. also Phil. 1:23), since this would imply an intermediate state of nakedness before the parousia, something that Paul does *not* desire in 2 Cor. 5:3–4. Whether or not Paul's eschatological perspective has changed during the period between the writing of 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 5,¹⁰⁶ it is obvious that, even within the limit of the latter passage, he is not able to give a systematic or consistent account of his hope of the afterlife and the eschatological consummation. One should notice that the *Gospel of Thomas* also combines similar ideas as Paul does, although emphases are different. Whereas in Paul the prevailing imagery is that of the transformation (1 Cor. 15:51–2; cf. Phil. 3:21) or replacement (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1 and 4) of the fleshly body into or with a new pneumatic body, *Thomas*' language is rather more dominated by the Platonic dichotomy between flesh and spirit. The gospel is clearly more Platonic in that it appears to assume the idea of the human's divine origin and *return* to divinity (see *Gos. Thom.* 19; 49; 50), which does not appear in Paul (or in the NT in general).¹⁰⁷ *Thomas* can, nonetheless, also conceptualize future salvation in terms of bodily existence and describe the replacement of the earthly body with a new asexual body in saying 22, a Thomasine version of the Christian resurrection belief.¹⁰⁸ Paul, on the other hand, can use strikingly dichotomic language, as is the case in 2 Cor. 5:1–4. If Paul,

¹⁰⁶ For the view that Paul's eschatology became more Hellenistic, see Moule 1965–6 (esp. 107) and the authors discussed in Lang 1973, 64–92.

¹⁰⁷ The pre-existence of the soul has been totally buried under the notion of the pre-existence of Christ both in the New Testament and in modern exegetical discussion. For example, the magisterial discussion by Kuschel (1990), which includes both Jewish and early Christian sources, in no way relates the pre-existence of Christ to that of the individual soul.

¹⁰⁸ Riley (1995, 127–56) gives much emphasis to the fragmentary and ambivalent saying *Gos. Thom.* 71 in his argument that *Thomas* denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus, but strangely enough does not discuss saying 22 at all. For an alternative reading of *Gos. Thom.* 71, see, e.g., Schenke 1994, 28.

therefore, comes near to Platonic dualism in 2 Cor. 5:1–10,¹⁰⁹ *Thomas* comes near to the Pauline view of the resurrected body in *Gos. Thom.* 22.¹¹⁰

There are major differences between Paul's and *Thomas*' eschatology, but those are not aptly described by means of the 'stripping off' and 'putting on' imageries.¹¹¹ Much more crucial is the difference between individualistic and collective eschatologies. Even though Paul may occasionally deal with a personal, death-related eschatology, of which the most conspicuous example is 2 Cor. 5:1–10, ultimately salvation is for him a collective event, when both those 'in sleep' and those alive will 'be caught up together' to meet the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16–17).¹¹² *Thomas* does not envision such a collective event, although the gospel seems to presume some kind of apocalyptic 'end of the world' (*Gos. Thom.* 11 and 111). This 'individualism' (which of course must be separated from modern ideas about individualism) may also explain

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Boyarin (1994, 60), who cogently describes Paul's position in 2 Cor. 5:1–4 in strongly Platonic terms: '... the image of the human being which Paul maintains is of a soul dwelling in or clothed by a body, and however valuable the garment, it is less essential than that which it clothes ... It is "the earthly tent that we live in"; it is not *we*. The body, while necessary and positively valued by Paul, is, as in Philo, not the human being but only his or her house or garment. The verse just preceding this passage [i.e., 2 Cor. 4:18] establishes its platonic context beautifully ... What could possibly be more platonic in spirit than this double hierarchy: on the one hand, the privileging of the invisible over the visible, and on the other hand, the privileging of the eternal over the temporal.'

¹¹⁰ It is also interesting that *Thomas* can also speak of the *topos* of life (*Gos. Thom.* 4; cf. also 24; 50; 60; 67), which may echo the idea of heavenly 'chambers' or 'habitations' preserved for the righteous; see 4 *Ezra* 4:35; 7:100–101; cf. also John 14:1–4.

¹¹¹ The claim that 'the true Gnostic wants to strip off the body' (Grant and Freedman 1960, 134) ignores the fact that the image of 'clothing' or receiving 'new garments' appears often in the texts which have traditionally been regarded as 'gnostic'; see, e.g., *Gos. Truth* 20.30–4; *Gos. Phil.* 70.5–7; 76.75–9; 86.7–8. See also *Dial. Sav.* 51–52 and 84–5; *Acts Thom.* 112–13. The Valentinian *Treatise on the Resurrection* even speaks of the new 'flesh' received in the resurrection (47.4–8; cf. also 45.30–4). Cf. however, Layton 1979. Note also that the Greek version of saying 36 reads: 'He it is who will give you your cloak' (*P. Oxy.* 655. 15–17). This may refer to the new spiritual garment which will be given to the believers (Crossan 1994, 60).

¹¹² There is, however, no need to harmonize Paul's statements by interpreting the heavenly building in 2 Cor. 5:1–2 as a corporate body of Christ (Robinson 1952, 75–83; Ellis 1959–60, 218) or a temple of God (Hanhart 1969, 453–4), since its earthly counterpart in 5:1 ('earthly tent') undoubtedly refers to the individual body of the believer (Gillman 1988, 452). On the other hand, we may ask whether Paul really imagined as much personal identity in the resurrected body as modern interpreters have often suggested (*pace* Moule 1965–6, 111).

why the Pauline idea of the community as the body of Christ does not appear in *Thomas*.¹¹³

8. Body and community

In her famous book, *Natural Symbols*, Mary Douglas argued that 'the human body is always treated as an image of society and that there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension'.¹¹⁴ Following this basic insight of Douglas, it is reasonable to ask whether the above analysis of the 'body language' in the *Gospel of Thomas* provides any information about the gospel's social location and, in particular, about the way in which it defines social boundaries between the community and society at large. By 'community' I mean here the primary 'readers' of the gospel and their reconstructed social situation as distinct from the various later groups and individuals that used the gospel.¹¹⁵

Some aspects of Thomasine language seem to indicate what Douglas and her followers have called a 'weak group', that is, a control system that exerts a low degree of pressure to conform to the group's societal norms.¹¹⁶ One may refer to *Thomas*' relatively little interest in ritual.¹¹⁷ The gospel does not emphasize fixed rituals for determining where the lines and boundaries of the community lie.¹¹⁸ In spite of opinions to

¹¹³ See also pp. 102–5 in this book.

¹¹⁴ Douglas 1973, 98.

¹¹⁵ This is a very rough definition. Methodologically, it would be more appropriate to distinguish between the 'implied' and 'actual' readers of the gospel and also take into account the possibility of subsequent editions and their audiences. For the present purpose, such distinctions are too subtle, however. I simply differentiate between the primary readers of the 'complete' edition (see the discussion on pp. 118–26 below) and later readers, such as Manichaean congregations or Egyptian monks, and try to get as close as possible to those original communities. At the same time I admit that different readings may have existed from the very beginning.

¹¹⁶ For this terminology, see Douglas 1973, 77–92. Her heuristic ideas have been later systematized (and hence dogmatized) by Isenberg and Owen 1977 and Malina 1986. For an application of Douglas' model to Paul's 'body language', see Neyrey 1986.

¹¹⁷ For a similar conclusion, see Valantasis (1997, 82). 'The cultus, although it may be assumed to have existed, holds no particular interest for this community.'

¹¹⁸ It must be remembered that *Thomas*' antiritualism has in all probability grown out of the confrontation with Jewish or Jewish-Christian groups (see Marjanen 1998b, 180–2; Uro 2000, 318–21) and, as Douglas herself has stated, 'every conversion generates some anti-ritual feeling, even if (as is often the case) it is a conversion to ritualist belief' (1973, 180). Nonetheless, *Thomas*' criticism of ritual observances (for example, prayer) goes further than that of most Christian texts and may thus reflect a reserved or privatized attitude to ritual in general.

the contrary, I have not found evidence for the view that *Thomas* lays particular stress on baptism as the entrance rite of the group or defines the border between the community and society at large by means of some other rite of passage. One may also add that there is no strong concern for physical pollution or any other taboos (*Gos. Thom.* 14; 89), and no emphasis on internal classification systems which would foster roles of leadership and hierarchy in the community (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 13; 108).¹¹⁹ Moreover, the personal identity presumed in the gospel is not so much group-oriented but based on the internal true self. The body is not a symbol of the community, but denotes the individual's physical body and the cosmos, which is often seen as a threatening reality against the human self.¹²⁰ All these features would indicate that *Thomas* should be placed closer to 'weak group' than 'strong group' on Douglas' variable.¹²¹ This would mean that the lines between the community and society at large can be seen as being more fluid in *Thomas* than, for example, in Paul's ideal, which lays more stress on ritual, purity and the internal cohesion of the group.¹²²

This conclusion should be treated with great caution, however. The *Gospel of Thomas* provides us with much less information about its

¹¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of leadership in *Thomas*, see Ch. 4 in this book.

¹²⁰ Valantasis (1997, 160) offers an alternative reading of *Gos. Thom.* 80, according to which the 'body' would refer to the corporate body of Christ. I do not find this reading convincing, but I agree with Valantasis' general view of the first readers of the gospel as a 'loosely formed community' (ibid., 69).

¹²¹ Douglas' model also contains another variable, that of 'grid'. By 'grid' she refers to the 'classification system', which moves from the 'private system', of which the extreme example is madness, through the zero of 'total confusion' up to the 'system of shared classifications' (Douglas 1973, 83–4). 'Grid and group' variables produce a chart of four segments representing four ideal types of societies (weak group/high grid; strong group/high grid; weak group/low grid; strong group/low grid), which can be described with different kinds of cosmologies. I have not included Douglas' second variable here, since I do not believe that we have enough data for such a subtle analysis of *Thomas*' societal situation. Closest to the above description of *Thomas*' community is the segment of 'weak group/high grid'. This is defined as having a pragmatic attitude toward purity, using ritual for private and personal ends, fostering individualism, and viewing the body as instrumental as well as self-controlled (Neyrey 1986, 133).

¹²² Cf. Neyrey's analysis of the different attitudes to the body reflected in 1 Corinthians (1986, 163). Neyrey argues that Paul's viewpoint may be described according to the cosmology of a controlled body (in Douglas' model 'strong group/high grid'), whereas the position attributed to Paul's opponents fits the cosmology of a group which is 'weak group/low grid'. Such ideal categories should, however, be supplemented by descriptions on Paul's ambiguous position with respect to the boundaries of the Christian community (Meeks 1983, 97–110).

social circumstances than the Pauline corpus does. The few clues that can be traced in *Thomas* lead only to a conjectural hypothesis about the social location(s) of the gospel. Whatever differences there are between Paul and *Thomas*, they both address men and women who have sectarian self-identities and consider themselves as being 'elected' from a larger crowd of people (*Gos. Thom.* 23; 49; 50; Rom. 8:33 etc.) and being 'children of God' or 'of the Living Father' (*Gos. Thom.* 3; 50; Rom. 8:14 etc.). It is not difficult to find passages in *Thomas* in which the normal life of society at large is regarded with suspicion (cf., for example, the critique of economy in *Gos. Thom.* 63–5).¹²³ However, it may be that an outsider who had received some education in Greek philosophy and was familiar with the most popular ideas of the Platonic and Stoic traditions would have had fewer problems in listening to *Thomas* rather than to Paul's message on the crucified Messiah. For such an observer, *Thomas*' sayings on the human body would hardly have sounded exceptionally austere.

¹²³ For these sayings see pp. 131–2 below.

Authority and autonomy

1. 'Who will be our leader?'

A feature that has often invited comments in Thomasine scholarship is the juxtaposition of sayings on James' leadership in *Gos. Thom.* 12 and on Thomas' 'wordless confession' in *Gos. Thom.* 13.

The disciples said to Jesus, 'We know that you are going to leave us. Who will be our leader?' ²Jesus said to them, 'No matter where you are, you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.' (*Gos. Thom.* 12.)

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Compare me to something and say what I am like.' ²Simon Peter said to him, 'You are like a righteous messenger.' ³Matthew said to him, 'You are like a wise philosopher.' ⁴Thomas said to him, 'Master, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like.' ⁵Jesus said, 'I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended.'

⁶And he took him, and withdrew, and told him three things. ⁷When Thomas came back to his friends, they asked him, 'What did Jesus say to you?' ⁸Thomas said to them: 'If I tell you one of the things he said to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you.' (*Gos. Thom.* 13.)¹

The appearance of the two figures is indeed striking. James and Thomas are highlighted in two sayings which follow each other, but the question of how exactly the authority of these figures should be related does not receive any explanation and is left for the reader to decide. According to one influential interpretation, Thomas' special position in *Gos. Thom.* 13 serves as something of a corrective to the claim about James'

¹ Transl. modified from Miller 1994.

leadership in the previous saying.² This, however, opens up a number of further questions. Why is James' authority retained in the first place if Thomas' position as the recipient of the special revelation and the guarantor of the gospel tradition (cf. Prologue) supersedes that of James?³ Is *Gos. Thom.* 12 a fossilized remnant of an earlier phase of the tradition which still appealed to the authority of James?⁴ Or is the cluster of sayings 12 and 13 an example of a subtle irony used by the author of the gospel to undermine the 'ecclesiastical' authority represented by James?⁵ Or should James' and Thomas' positions be regarded as parallel or complementary rather than competing ones?⁶

2. Apostles as symbols

A common presupposition behind many interpretations of *Gos. Thom.* 12–13 is that they take the figures of James and Thomas in the text as representatives of specific groups or traditions in early Christianity.⁷ Whatever is known of James and Thomas as historical persons, they later became symbols which some early Christian groups could appeal to as the ideal leaders of the heroic beginnings and guarantors of the truth of their traditions. Although many authors used the concept of apostles (e.g., Ephesians; Ignatius; *1 Clement*) or the idea of the 'twelve apostles' (Luke) generally, it has been observed that certain communities claimed a link with a particular apostolic figure ('Johannine Christianity' probably being the clearest example).⁸ Moreover, scholars have not infrequently seen controversies between

² Koester has argued in several publications that James' authority is 'surpassed' or 'superseeded' by that of Thomas in *Gos. Thom.* 13; see Koester 1971, 136 and 1989, 40. In another instance, however, Koester formulated this somewhat differently. The contrast between James and Thomas seeks to strengthen the tradition of Thomas against the authority of James, 'without denying the latter's claim to leadership in ecclesiastical matters'; see Koester 1982, 152–3. See also Marjanen 1996, 40–2; 1998a, 119.

³ Patterson 1993a, 116 n. 13.

⁴ Quispel (1967, 97–8) attributed *Gos. Thom.* 12 to a 'Jewish-Christian' source and saying 13 to an 'encratite' source. Patterson has suggested that sayings 12 and 13 represent subsequent layers in the compositional history of the gospel. See Patterson 1993a, 118–20. Patterson's idea has been followed by Crossan (1991, 427–8; 1998, 247–56). For a discussion of different theories about *Thomas'* stratification, see below, pp. 118–26.

⁵ Valantasis 1997, 73.

⁶ Patterson 1993a, 116 n. 13; see also Koester 1982, 152–3 (above n. 2).

⁷ These alternatives are not, of course, exclusive, since group-identity must have been heavily dependent on the idea of a common tradition.

⁸ Koester 1982, 6–8.

groups which venerated the heritage of *different* apostles and figures of authority in critical stories or remarks of one apostle in some text which is interpreted as an attempt to restrict or decrease the influence of the corresponding group.⁹ Such controversies may be traced back to the conflicts between the actual historical persons (for example, between the historical Paul and Peter or James), but for later Christian generations, the apostolic figures became weapons for both strengthening one's own claim and opposing that of others.

There is no doubt that, for early Christians, figures like James and Thomas were powerful symbols that played an important role in the legitimation of the traditions of various early Christian groups. Both names can be associated with a particular geographical area; James with Jerusalem and 'Judas Thomas' with eastern Syria.¹⁰ In the prologue to the gospel, Thomas is described as a figure of authentication,¹¹ who wrote down the 'secret words' of the 'living Jesus' and who thus has a special position among the disciples as a recipient of Jesus' teaching. In some other early Christian writings, James has a role similar to Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas*.¹² The high status of James in *Gos. Thom.* 12 may be contrasted with the silence or suppression of James in many early Christian writings (see below). This seems to give at least some indirect evidence for the claim that controversies continued to be projected onto the apostolic figures during subsequent Christian generations.

However, reading early Christian history through the images of apostles is not without problems. We do know that *different* groups and authors – both geographically and theologically – could appeal to the authority of the *same* apostle. Paul came to be venerated both in 'gnostic'¹³ and 'ecclesiastical' circles (cf. Pastorals). Peter was honoured

⁹ This approach is, of course, as old as the so-called 'Tübingen school' established by Ferdinand Christian Baur. He interpreted the first two Christian centuries in the light of a bitter conflict between the followers of Peter and those of Paul. A more recent example is Smith 1985, which looks for 'anti-Peter' and 'pro-Peter' traditions in early Christian writings. Smith does not, however, trace a single Petrine group as Baur did, but rather a number of different groups stemming from widely divergent backgrounds (ibid., 211).

¹⁰ For the east Syrian origin of the name 'Judas Thomas', see pp. 10–15 in this book. For recent studies on James see below, note 23.

¹¹ See especially Dunderberg 1998b, 65–88.

¹² Cf. the *Apocryphon of James*, which mentions the 'secret books' revealed to James and Peter (or to James alone) and written down by James.

¹³ For the second-century gnostic interpretation of Paul, see Pagels 1975.

as a foundational figure in the congregations of Rome and Antioch.¹⁴ Moreover, using stories of the apostolic figures as keys to the conflicts between early Christian groups can be very tricky. A good example is the presentation of Peter in the Gospel of Matthew. It is difficult to decide whether Matthew is promoting Peter's authority as one who has been given the power of the keys (Matt. 16:19), or undermining his authority as 'a man of little faith' (14:31) who utters satanic words (16:33) and finally denies his master (26:69–75). In his characterization of Peter, Matthew is surely doing more than simply giving a transparent presentation of a contemporary 'Petrine group'.¹⁵ We should be cautious not to make textual characters into kinds of mirror images¹⁶ which directly reflect their historical counterparts, whether one thinks of factual historical persons or groups that later identified themselves as the true cultivators of these persons' heritage. Instead, I think, we should take seriously the *symbolic* nature of these images and realize that their use may be motivated by several concerns, some of which may deal with the narrative logic, others with ideological or 'church-political' realities.¹⁷ This may, as seems to be the case in *Gos. Thom.* 12–13, result in a rather complicated network of meanings which is not easily deciphered into a clear historical interpretation.

One explicit concern in *Gos. Thom.* 12 is the issue of leadership. The disciples ask who will hold the leading position among them after Jesus' departure, to which Jesus clearly answers that the position belongs to James the Just. The dialogue in *Gos. Thom.* 13 begins as a discussion about the right Christological confession, but the saying deals with the issue of leadership as well. Thomas' answer, 'Master, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like', is qualified by Jesus with the words 'I am not your master.'¹⁸ On the basis of this saying some scholars have suggested that the *Gospel of Thomas* champions a

¹⁴ Rome revered the memory of both Paul and Peter, whereas Peter also came to be revered as a foundational figure in Antioch. For the references, see Bauer 1971, 111–18.

¹⁵ Syreeni's recent narrative-critical analysis of Peter in Matthew from the perspective of his 'three-world model' (1999) demonstrates well the multidimensional nature of Peter's character. According to Syreeni, Matthew's Peter is a 'highly ambivalent ecclesiastical symbol' (*ibid.*, 132).

¹⁶ I owe this metaphor to Syreeni 1999, 109.

¹⁷ Cf. Syreeni's (*ibid.*, 116–20) distinction between character (textual phenomenon), person (historical and social reality) and symbol (ideological dimension).

¹⁸ The Coptic word CΔ2, a derivative from verb C2Δ1 ('write'), can be translated either as 'master' or 'teacher'.

'masterless' ideal of discipleship and opposes hierarchic understanding of community life.¹⁹ This suggestion leads us to intriguing questions. How is *Thomas*' 'masterless' ideal related to the development of leadership roles in other early Christian groups? Is *Thomas* against any kind of ecclesiastical authority? How should one interpret James' leadership from this perspective?

The *Gospel of Thomas* gives only a few and partially contradictory hints of how organizational roles are envisioned in the gospel. We may, however, shed some more light by comparing *Thomas*' few statements with more extensive discussions on leadership in other early Christian documents. In this chapter my primary point of comparison is the Gospel of Matthew. I have several reasons for such a choice. Matthew is among those early Christian documents which foster a highly egalitarian model of community life similar to that in *Thomas*. At the same time, Matthew highlights the ecclesiastical authority of Peter the Rock in Matt 16:18–19, which provides an analogy to the authority of James the Just in *Gos. Thom.* 12.²⁰ Finally, the whole pericope of Matt. 16:13–23 has its closest parallel in *Gos. Thom.* 13, which makes it difficult to escape the question of the relationship between the Matthean and Thomasine traditions.²¹

3. James' leadership

The disciples' question in *Gos. Thom.* 12 (literally 'Who will be great over us?') bears some resemblance to the synoptic stories in which the disciples discuss the issue of who is the 'greatest' among them (cf. Mark 9:33–7 and parallels; see also Mark 10:35–45 and parallels). In these stories Jesus does not designate any of the disciples as having a special position, but rather gives a general lesson on humble leadership by referring to slaves and children. It is hardly possible that *Gos. Thom.* 12 would have been modelled on the pattern of these synoptic stories.²² It

¹⁹ Marjanen 1996, 40–2; 1998a, 120; Valantasis 1997, 73.

²⁰ Hengel 1985, 79.

²¹ A comparison between *Thomas* and Matthew has seldom been made. Koester (1990a, 103–7) typically compares *Thomas* with Matthew only in connection with parables. *Thomas*' relation to Q, Mark, and John receives the major attention.

²² Grant and Freedman (1960, 124–5) argue that the saying is based on John 14:5 as well as on Mark 9:34; 10:43 and the parallels. Yet the parallelism between the Johannine passage and the disciples' question in *Gos. Thom.* 12:1 is remote. As to the synoptic parallels, even Schrage (1964, 51), who generally strongly argues for *Thomas*' dependence on the canonical gospels, concludes that the question must be left open in this case.

is most likely that the saying represents a tradition which belongs to the same category as Jesus' words on Peter's leadership and commission (Matt. 16:17–18; cf. also John 21:15–19).

In the canonical gospels James is mentioned only in passing in a few instances among Jesus' siblings (Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:55). Although in Acts he is depicted as the leader of the Jerusalem church, his role is largely eclipsed by those of Peter and Paul. Recent scholarship on James has become increasingly aware that James played a much more prominent role in the earliest decades of the Jesus movement than one is able to conclude on the basis of the New Testament.²³ The letters of Paul, and Acts, to be sure, contain some important clues supporting the suggestion of James' leading position in the Christian movement from the very beginning.²⁴ Non-canonical sources and Josephus confirm this conclusion and suggest that during the first and second centuries James was venerated among many groups as the most prominent authority next to Jesus.²⁵ Some of the sources, most notably the *Gospel of Hebrews*,²⁶ describe James as being appointed to his position and legitimated by Jesus himself, just like Peter in the canonical texts. With its explicit statement about the position of James as a successor of Jesus, *Gos. Thom.* 12 can be seen as being part of such traditions.

There are further indications that *Gos. Thom.* 12 derives from a group that took James' 'primacy' seriously. The saying uses the epithet 'Just' or 'Righteous' (ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣ), which does not appear in the New Testament but is instead found in many of the sources that seem to preserve traces of James' priority.²⁷ It has sometimes been argued that

²³ See Hengel 1985; Pratscher 1987; Ward 1992; the articles published in Chilton and Evans 1999; and especially Painter 1999.

²⁴ See Gal. 1:17–19; 2:1–14; 1 Cor. 15:7; Acts 1:14; 12:17; 15; 21:17–26.

²⁵ Crossan (1998, 463) makes this point succinctly: 'If you read a non-Christian source such as Josephus . . . you would know only two individuals in earliest Christianity: one is Jesus himself and the other is his brother James.'

²⁶ The *Gospel of Hebrews* reported James' participation in the last supper and Jesus' appearance to him after the resurrection; see Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 2 (= *Gos. Hebr.* 7). Also some traditions preserved by Eusebius seem to presuppose the direct appointment of James by Jesus, and James' leading position in Jerusalem right after the resurrection; see the quotation from *Outlines* Book VIII of Clement of Alexandria in *Hist. eccl.* 2.1 and 7.19.1 (but compare with the quotation from Book VII of Clement's work and *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.1); for an analysis, see Painter 1999, 105–58, esp. 114.

²⁷ *Gos. Hebr.* 7; 1 *Apoc. Jas.* 32.2–3; 2 *Apoc. Jas.* 44.14; 59.22; 60.12; 61.14; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.7.

the epithet was given to him because of his martyrdom,²⁸ but it is possible that the name was already used during James' lifetime because of his exemplary and pious lifestyle.²⁹ The peculiar characterization of James as the one 'for whose sake heaven and earth came into being' is often noted as a typical Jewish expression which is used of such exemplary righteous persons as Abraham, Moses, David, Hanina ben Dosa or the Messiah.³⁰ These features strongly support the view that *Gos. Thom.* 12 goes back ultimately to the circles who venerated James as the most important leader of the Christian movement after Jesus.³¹ It is natural to think that these circles were in some way connected with, or rooted in, the Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem.

There are, on the other hand, signs that in the present context the meaning of the saying is modified with several intratextual references. There is a catchword connection with the statement in the previous saying that 'this heaven (ΤΕΕΙΠΕ) will pass away, and the one above it will pass away' (11:1). The statement may be seen as relativizing James' authority as something which is temporary and will pass away. A variant of this saying is found in *Gos. Thom.* 111 ('The heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence'), which is glossed with an editor's comment: 'Does not Jesus say, "Those who have found themselves, of them the world is not worthy"?'³² The latter part of this comment repeats the phrase which is also found in *Gos. Thom.* 56 and 80, two closely parallel sayings on the world as a 'body' or 'corpse'. As I have argued, these sayings may be seen as characterizing the world and the human body as something external to a person's true domain.³³ A

²⁸ Ward 1992, 801, with references to *Wisd. of Sol.* 2:17f; *Matt.* 23:29,35; *James* 5:6 and *Isa.* 3:10 (Hegesippus quoted the last one in his description of James' death; see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.15); see also Painter 1999, 157.

²⁹ Hengel 1985, 80. This does not mean, however, that Hegesippus' description of James (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23) as a Nazirite and extreme ascetic is historically accurate.

³⁰ Scholars usually refer to Ginzberg 1925. Ménard (1975, 97) states that the expression makes *Gos. Thom.* 12 'juif d'apparence, mais antijuif dans son interprétation,' since it elevates James to the same position as the Torah, Abraham, Moses, and the Messiah. It is much more probable, however, that the characterization of James merely underscores his exemplary piety without any 'anti-Jewish' overtones.

³¹ Similar language is used of James in the *Second Apocalypse of James* 55.24–5 ('You are whom the heavens bless') and 56.2–5 ('For your sake they will be told [these things], and will come to rest. For your sake they will reign [and will] become kings ...'). Transl. C. W. Hedrick in Parrott 1979.

³² Transl. from Miller 1994. Schenke (1994, 19–20) sees here a trace of a commentary from which *Thomas'* sayings have been extracted (see below, pp. 127–9).

³³ See pp. 69–70 in this book.

careful reader of Jesus' sayings in the gospel is thus able to gather that James' leadership, praised in saying 12, belongs ultimately to the sphere of the temporary and the external. Those who understand and 'have found themselves' are superior to the world ('the world is not worthy of them')³⁴ and are therefore also superior to their leaders, while the latter are seen as part of the transient structures of this world. Moreover, it should be noted that, already at the beginning of the gospel, *Thomas'* audience had been encouraged to take a critical attitude toward religious leaders who naïvely teach that the kingdom is in heaven or in the underworld (*Gos. Thom.* 3). It is somewhat unclear whether the saying refers to the teachers or leaders who were recognized as such by *Thomas'* audience,³⁵ but in the light of what is said about their teaching, it seems obvious enough that they were *Christian* leaders.

Another trait of saying 12, which is modified by its context within the collection as a whole, is the localization of James' authority. It is possible that originally the somewhat surprising exhortation 'wherever you are, you are to go to James' could be explained by the fact that, in the tradition, James' leadership was firmly placed in the 'mother church' of Jerusalem.³⁶ However, in the Thomasine perspective, such localization of authority may be contrasted with the rejection of any attempt to localize the kingdom or Jesus' presence (e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 3; 24; 77:2; 91; 97; 113). When the disciples ask Jesus to show 'the place' where he is, Jesus turns their attention to the 'light within a person of light' (24).³⁷ James, in contrast, does have a place where he is, and the disciples are asked to go to him. This creates a tension between the basic thrust of *Gos. Thom.* 12 and some central theological emphases of *Thomas* found elsewhere in the gospel. These considerations lead us to a closer examination of *Gos. Thom.* 13 since this saying is commonly

³⁴ Cf. also Heb. 11:38. The expression is also found in rabbinic literature (e.g., *Mek.* 5a; *Sanh.* 11:1).

³⁵ The Coptic version uses the expression ΝΕΤΣΩΚ ΖΗΤ ΘΥΤῆΝ, which is best translated as 'those who lead you', the verb ΣΩΚ ΖΗΤ being an equivalent of the Greek ἡγέομαι; see Crum 1939, 327. The Greek form (οἱ ἔλκοντες; 'those who attract' or 'draw you on') may also be understood as referring to outside leaders or propagators; see Uro 1990, 15 n. 38, 18 (cf. the synoptic parallels in Mark 13:21–3; Matt. 24:23–6; Luke 17: 20–3).

³⁶ Cf. Patterson (1993a, 151), who sees here an indication that Thomasine Christians are dispersed and itinerant.

³⁷ The 'the place of life' in *Gos. Thom.* 4, though seemingly local, is in essence a 'non-place', a primordial place beyond time and space (cf. also 50:1).

seen as functioning as a redefinition or modification of James' leadership in the preceding saying.

4) Thomas and Peter

The form of *Gos. Thom.* 13 is closely related to the synoptic accounts of Peter's confession in Mark 8:27–33 and parallels (cf. also John 6:66–71). Each of the synoptic versions has Jesus asking the disciples about their opinions of him, with a number of different characterizations of Jesus' identity given, culminating in the final confession of one of the disciples and Jesus' response. Except in Luke, a private discussion follows the scene of the confession in each gospel, although in Mark (8:32) and Matthew (16:22) it is Peter who takes Jesus aside to rebuke him, whereas in *Thomas*, Jesus tells Thomas 'three things' or 'words' (ΝΩΟΜΤ ΝΩΔΛΧΕ) in private (*Gos. Thom.* 13:6–8). Only in Matthew and *Thomas* does Jesus' response contain a reference to the divine source of the confession (cf. the blessing in Matt. 16:17 and Thomas' intoxication in *Gos. Thom.* 13:5) which is affirmed with the unique role that Jesus assigns to the disciple who has given the appropriate answer. Mark has only the command to keep Jesus' identity a secret (cf. also Matt. 16:20; Luke 9:21). The closeness between the Matthean and Thomasine versions is reinforced by the fact that the previous saying on James' leadership (*Gos. Thom.* 12) can be seen, as argued above, as an analogy to the 'investiture' of Peter in Matt. 16:17–19.

In spite of these affinities between Matt. 16:13–20 and *Gos. Thom.* 13, it is not likely that *Thomas* is directly dependent on the Gospel of Matthew (or Matthew on *Thomas*, for that matter).³⁸ The similarities between the Matthean and Thomasine accounts lie more in the general structure of the account than in details that would indicate scribal reworking.³⁹ To be sure, one could argue that this structure has resulted from Matthew's redactional composition, because he added the blessing and the appointment of Peter to Mark's story, where they are absent. In that case one could consider the possibility of 'secondary orality', that is, the influence of Matthew's literary redaction on the oral tradition

³⁸ Pace Smith (1985, 115), who argues that logion 13 is 'a Gnostic version of the *Matthean* Caesarea Philippi event' (Smith's italics). Cf. Gärtner (1960, 114), who held that *Gos. Thom.* 13 is 'evidently an edited and expanded form of Mark 8:29'; see also Wilson 1960, 112.

³⁹ For scribal and oral cultures, see below, pp. 109–15.

drawn upon by *Thomas*.⁴⁰ On the other hand, it is not at all clear that the abrupt silencing command in Mark 8:30 was the only way in which the story was traditionally told until Matthew's pen reformulated it. Most scholars are unwilling to regard all of Matt. 16:17–19 as Matthew's creation. One solution to the problem is to place these verses in some other pre-Matthean setting, for example, in a post-resurrection appearance story⁴¹ or in the context of the Last Supper (cf. Luke 22:31–4),⁴² but these assumptions can rightly be contested.⁴³ While many scholars have sought to trace a separate pre-Matthean tradition⁴⁴ or individual sayings behind Matt. 16:17–19,⁴⁵ some have argued that there is no better setting for Matt. 16:17–19 in the gospel history than the confession at Caesarea Philippi.⁴⁶ The former view leaves us with an isolated tradition or traditions (the 'rock saying' v. 18,⁴⁷ and 'binding and loosing' v. 19bc⁴⁸), but it must be admitted that the latter argument has some force. It is natural to think that the appointment of Peter as the foundational 'rock' in v. 18 was preceded by some kind of positive initiative on Peter's part. The 'confession' is the best context we can imagine. This argument could be used to support the view that all

⁴⁰ Uro 1993. Cf. also Saunders 1963, 59.

⁴¹ E.g., Bultmann 1968, 259. Some scholars limit the post-resurrection tradition to verses 16:18–19, while 16:17 is taken basically as Matthew's composition or creation; see Vögtle 1973; Brown *et al.* 1973, 86–91.

⁴² Cullmann 1967, 205–7.

⁴³ Cullmann's suggestion has not gained much following (Brown *et al.* 1973, 85). Much more common is the claim that Matt. 16:17–19 (or part of it) was originally a post-resurrection tradition. Bultmann (1968, 259) referred to 'a clear parallel' in the post-resurrection episode in John 21:15–19 (cf. also 20:22–3) and argued that this tradition derived ultimately from the first appearance of the risen Christ to Peter (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5). Yet the parallelism with John 21:15–19 is not as 'clear' as Bultmann suggests; for criticism, see Robinson 1984, 87–8; Davies and Allison 1991, 608–9. Moreover, in whatever context Peter's confession was originally told, the confession, the blessing and the investiture make a good story. The suggestion that a lost account of the first appearance to Peter was later replaced with stories like Matt. 16:13–20 and John 21:15–19 is strained.

⁴⁴ E.g., Künzel 1978, 180–93.

⁴⁵ E.g., Robinson 1984; Luz 1990, 453–9.

⁴⁶ Davies and Allison 1991, 606–7. They also argue that 'many of the arguments against a dominical origin are not as persuasive as often thought, and there are weighty points to be made on the other side' (*ibid.*, 615). See also the arguments for the authenticity of Matt. 16:17–19 in Meyer 1979, 185–97. In my opinion, however, a much more natural setting for the origin of the tradition is a later time when the issues of legitimation and leadership had become acute.

⁴⁷ Cf. John 1:42; Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14.

⁴⁸ Cf. Matt. 18:18 and John 20:23.

of Matt. 16:17–19 is more or less Matthew's creation. Yet one cannot exclude the possibility that Matthew used an existing story in which not only an abrupt command to silence but also an affirmation and Peter's appointment followed the confession. Perhaps the most weighty point in support of the latter conclusion is Matthew's ambivalent attitude toward Peter's ecclesiastical authority. Would Matthew have created the sayings on Peter's investiture just to be able to formulate an ironic contrast between Peter as a 'rock' and as a 'stumbling block' (Matt. 16:23)?⁴⁹

Should one then regard *Gos. Thom.* 13 as a polemical response to the tradition behind (or born of) Matt. 16:13–20, elevating Thomas' authority and undermining that of Peter?⁵⁰ In *Thomas* it is Peter who, together with Matthew, gives an inadequate answer, whereas in the synoptic accounts the inadequate answers are presented as popular opinions and not as opinions of particular disciples. *Thomas*' formulation can thus be seen as accentuating Peter's (and Matthew's) inadequacy.⁵¹ It has been also noted that in *Gos. Thom.* 114 Peter similarly gives an opinion that Jesus corrects.

On the other hand one should not overemphasize Peter's lack of understanding in the *Gospel of Thomas*. The incomprehension of the disciples is a well-known theme in the gospel tradition, the most striking example being the Gospel of Mark,⁵² but this theme is in no way restricted to Mark. For example, just before Peter's confession, Matthew can depict the disciples as complete fools who are not able to understand a simple figure of speech, i.e., the 'leaven' of Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:5–12; cf. Mark 8:14–21). *Thomas* elaborates the traditional theme of incomprehension in several sayings in which the disciples' (or the audience's) failure has an important rhetorical function in contrasting the human situation to Jesus' divine revelation.⁵³ Thus, if *Thomas* were to be described as 'anti-Petrine' it should also be

⁴⁹ Cf. Mark 8:33, in which the 'stumbling block' is lacking. Some scholars have emphasized the irony in Matthew's presentation; see, e.g., Srock 1987. The ambivalence of Matthew has made the pericope an easy target of a deconstructionist analysis; see Bubar 1995.

⁵⁰ Smith (1985, 116) sees an 'anti-Peter stance' in sayings 12 and 13. Note also that scholars have often interpreted Matt 16:17–19 as being polemical; e.g., Manson 1957, 203–4 (against Paul) and Davies 1964, 338–9 (against James).

⁵¹ It has sometimes been suggested that Matthew and Peter stand as representative figures for the apostolic tradition contained in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, the latter gospel being guaranteed by the authority of Peter; see Walls 1960–1, 267; Smith 1985, 115.

⁵² Räisänen 1990, 195–222.

⁵³ Typically *Gos. Thom.* 43; see also *Gos. Thom.* 22; 24; 51; 52; 53; 91; 92; 99; 104; 113; 114.

characterized as showing antipathy toward the (male)⁵⁴ disciples in general (except for Thomas, of course). More consistently than in Mark, which is the most striking example of the synoptics in this respect, the disciples in *Thomas* never explicitly say that they understand Jesus' teaching.⁵⁵ *Thomas*' description of Peter must therefore be put into a broader context than that of specifically anti-Petrine polemics. Peter is a rank-and-file disciple just like Matthew, but there is no strong case for the view that *Gos. Thom.* 13 should be read as a deliberate attack against Peter's leadership or against a group that venerated Peter's authority.⁵⁶ A far more probable explanation is that the saying uses the motif of the disciples' incomprehension as a foil to elevate one particular disciple, that is Thomas, as a recipient of special revelation. The inability of the other disciples to deal with such deeper enlightenment becomes evident at the end of the saying, where it is said that, had the other disciples been told one of the things revealed to Thomas, they would 'pick up stones and throw them' at Thomas.⁵⁷

Even though it may be difficult to describe the precise relationship between *Gos. Thom.* 13 and its synoptic parallels in terms of tradition history, some differences and similarities can be observed in the gospels' use of the secrecy motif. In Mark 8:27–30, Peter utters the messianic confession as the *spokesman* of the disciples: Jesus addresses and responds to all of them. There is no indication that Peter has reached understanding or received a revelation beyond those of the other disciples. In Matthew's version, Peter clearly occupies a unique position, even though in the context of the whole gospel his confession

⁵⁴ It seems that the female disciples are not depicted as ones who completely lack understanding; see Marjanen 1996, 41 (1998c, 92).

⁵⁵ The incomprehension of the disciples as one of the main themes of *Thomas* was pointed out by Sellew 1997b, 339–46. Can the Thomasine Jesus, then, be seen as speaking over the head of the disciples to the elect and solitary? Cf. sayings 19 and 21, which seem to make a distinction between the audience and the 'true disciples'.

⁵⁶ Cf. Berger 1981. Berger points out that the role of Peter in *Gos. Thom.* 13 is not merely connected with Peter's person: 'Was nach der Mehrzahl der Texte von Petrus gilt, kann in anderen Texten auch von Johannes, Jacobus, Thomas oder anderen gesagt werden' (ibid., 282).

⁵⁷ Many speculations have been presented about the 'three secret words' told to Thomas by Jesus. There is no way of knowing whether there ever was a fixed tradition about the content of these words, but the reader of the gospel could hardly have missed the connection between the 'secret words' written down by Thomas (prologue) and the 'three words' uttered to Thomas in *Gos. Thom.* 13:6. For the issue and further references, see Dunderberg 1998b, 72–3.

or the power given to him are not as unique as one would expect on the basis of the episode in Matt. 16:13–20 (cf. 14:33; 18:18).⁵⁸ Compared with other gospels, *Thomas* is most consistent in its emphasis on the incomprehension of the other disciples and in its description of Thomas' unique position as the recipient of a special revelation. In *Thomas* only one chosen disciple fully understands that Jesus' identity is unutterable. Yet there is an interesting similarity between the Markan secrecy motif and the *Gospel of Thomas*: both gospels emphasize the esoteric nature of Jesus' teaching (cf. the *mysterion* of the kingdom in Mark 4:11 and, for example, in *Gos. Thom.* 62) and, at the same time, both gospels suggest that even the closest circle of Jesus' followers did not comprehend much or any of his teaching.⁵⁹

In *Thomas* there is not, of course, any 'Messianic Secret' in the proper sense, since Jesus' identity is not understood in terms of messiahship or of any other Christological title. As a matter of fact, *Gos. Thom.* 13 can be seen as opposing such Christological categorizations as Peter's confession in the synoptic accounts represents. It should be noted, however, that the inadequate characterizations of Jesus ('a righteous messenger'; cf. *Gos. Thom.* 88; 'wise philosopher') are not polemically formulated against messianic interpretations or any other synoptic type of Christologies, but rather change the culturally particular and historical figures (John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah) into more general categorizations. In this respect, *Gos. Thom.* 13 may be described as a cultural translation⁶⁰ of a story like the one in Matt. 16:13–20, with Thomas taking the role of the perceptive disciple and providing a model for an alternative interpretation of Jesus' teaching.

⁵⁸ It is a much-debated question whether Peter in Matt. 16:13–20 is exalted to a place above the other disciples or whether he continues to act as the spokesman of other disciples. However one interprets Matthew's overall view of Peter, it seems obvious that in this particular passage Peter is clearly singled out from the other disciples and given a unique position. For the issue, see Schweizer 1974, 138–70 (an English translation of this chapter is Schweizer 1983); Brown *et al.* 1973, 87; Kingsbury 1979; Wilkins 1988; Overman 1990, 136–40.

⁵⁹ Would it be possible to see the social situations of Mark and *Thomas* having anything in common, as they both combine the esoteric mystery and incomprehension? It is interesting that scholars have often sensed an *inner-Christian conflict* behind Mark's messianic secret; see for example, Räisänen (1990, 242–58), who suggests that Mark was engaged in a debate with 'Q-type' Christians. Some features in *Thomas* seem likewise to reflect an inner-Christian conflict (see below).

⁶⁰ Cf. Walls 1960–1, 267. Walls speaks of 'transmutation'.

4.) Thomas and James

Even though *Gos. Thom.* 13 was probably not formulated specifically against *Peter's* authority, one cannot avoid the impression that in the present context the model of Thomas seems in some way to modify *James's* leadership in the previous saying. As noted above, there is a striking contrast between the 'masterless' ideal connected with Thomas in *Gos. Thom.* 13:5 and *James's* leadership position that is entrusted to him by Jesus in *Gos. Thom.* 12. Scholars have often referred to saying 108 as an indication that the model of Thomas in saying 13 is paradigmatic⁶¹ and that the 'masterless' ideal can be achieved by anyone who drinks from the mouth of Jesus and becomes one with him. Becoming one and the same person with Jesus logically means that there can no longer exist any master–disciple relationship. The idea has no full New Testament equivalent, even though an 'ideological parallel' has sometimes been seen in John 15:15, in which Jesus no longer calls his disciples 'servants' but 'friends'.⁶² This intimacy does not, however, blur the hierarchy between Jesus and his followers in the same radical manner as is the case in *Gos. Thom.* 108 (cf. John 15:1–6).⁶³ In the Thomasine saying the relationship is expressed in strongly symmetrical terms; not only does the one who drinks from the mouth of Jesus become like Jesus (ΝΤΑΞΕ), but Jesus himself 'becomes that person' (ΑΝΟΚ ΖΩ ΤΝΑΨΩΠΕ ΕΝΤΟΨ ΠΕ). In view of *Gos. Thom.* 2, this state could be described as the most advanced level of seeking, when, after having found, been disturbed, and marvelled, one finally rules over all (cf. also *Gos. Thom.* 19). The hierarchical model of *James's* leadership does not seem to apply to those who have reached this level of spiritual perfection.

Is this then a sign of religious élitism? Do the disciples in logion 12 represent those Christians who are less advanced in their seeking and therefore in need of the ecclesiastical authority symbolized by *James*? In the same vein, the motif of the incomprehension of the disciples (cf. above) could be understood as directed against Christians whose

⁶¹ Patterson 1993a, 206; Marjanen 1996, 42–3; Dunderberg 1998b, 77–8.

⁶² Brown 1962–3, 162. Cf. also Q 6:40.

⁶³ This also holds true for the other NT passages in which Jesus identifies himself with his disciples; cf. Matt. 10:40–2; 25:31–46; 1 Cor. 8:12; Acts 9:4–5; 22:8; 26:15. Perhaps closest to *Thomas's* idea comes Paul's statements about his union with Christ (e.g., Gal. 2:20). For parallels in the Syrian Christian tradition, see above, p. 29. in this book.

perception is defective. Even so, the idea of élitism is not emphatic. Nowhere in the gospel is there evidence for the view that *Thomas* makes a clear-cut distinction between levels of spiritual maturity⁶⁴ (let alone the 'Valentinian' distinction between three classes of the human race; i.e., the 'fleshly', 'pneumatic' and 'psychic'⁶⁵). Time after time the reader is encouraged constantly to watch, seek and find. The language is provisional and contingent, and there is no reason to think that *Thomas* suggests fixed stages in spiritual growth or any kind of 'class system'.⁶⁶ For most of the gospel a dualistic model between insiders ('the elect') and the outsiders prevails, characteristic of most other early Christian writings.⁶⁷

Thus it seems that the best explanation for the appearance of James and Thomas in *Gos. Thom.* 12–13 is not the suggestion that *Thomas* divides the believers into two distinct and irreconcilable categories, between those in need of ecclesiastical authority and those who 'rule over all' and are under no authority. *Thomas* places much emphasis on the idea of spiritual growth, which necessarily presupposes some sort of religious élitism, but this élitism does not mean that the gospel elaborates a theory of fixed stages or levels symbolized by the figures of James and Thomas. Other reasons must be sought for the juxtaposition of the two sayings.

A clue may be found in the fact that, in the Syrian tradition 'Judas Thomas' was believed to be the twin brother of Jesus, and Thomas may thus be understood as a counterpart to James, the brother to Jesus.⁶⁸ The *Gospel of Thomas* does not spell out the belief that Judas Thomas is the twin brother of Jesus and does not give an explanation for Judas' nickname 'Twin'.⁶⁹ The belief has, however, often been presupposed by

⁶⁴ Pace Lincoln (1977), who argues that, in the Thomasine community, there existed three levels of initiation identified in *Gos. Thom.* 2 as 'those who seek' (the first level), 'those who find and are troubled' (the second level), and those who have initiated into deeper mysteries (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 62) and 'marvel and reign over the all' (the ultimate level).

⁶⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.7.5. For a recent discussion on determinism and the three-class division of the human race among the Gnostics, see Williams 1996, 189–212. Williams demonstrates how the caricature presented by Irenaeus does not match the picture inferred from the sources that were produced by Gnostics themselves.

⁶⁶ Note also that, contrary to the common interpretation, the 'eschatological reservation' has not disappeared in *Thomas*; Uro 1997, 223–4.

⁶⁷ This seems to be the case in the Valentinian writings as well. See Desjardins 1990.

⁶⁸ See also pp. 10–15 in this book.

⁶⁹ Scholars have often imagined a real disciple of Jesus whose name was Judas and who was at some point nicknamed 'the Twin'. Gunther (1980, 124) offers three possibilities why

Thomasine scholars on the basis of the explicit references that are made in the *Book of Thomas* (138.1–21) and especially in the *Acts of Thomas*.⁷⁰ It is, therefore, possible to argue that the twin motif is later than the *Gospel of Thomas*, and sayings such as 13 and 108 contributed to the emergence of the tradition.⁷¹ Yet, it is also possible that the combination of sayings 12 and 13 reveals knowledge of the twin symbolism. According to such an interpretation, *Gos. Thom.* 12–13 puts two brothers of Jesus side by side, James the Just and (Judas) the Twin, since the name of the latter was, in some circles, understood to mean that he was a twin brother of Jesus.⁷² To develop this hypothesis further, one could argue that the *Gospel of Thomas* gives a glimpse of how this peculiar tradition on ‘Judas Thomas’ came into being. It has been assumed that the occurrence of James in logion 12 is a strong indication that the Thomasine trajectory emerged from and then confronted the Jewish Christianity which looked to the authority of James.⁷³ If, as the evidence above suggests, there was a branch of early

the proper name Judas was dropped in the canonical gospel tradition: 1) ‘If his proper name were “Jesus (Joshua)”, this would have been suppressed, as was “Jesus (Barabbas)” in most mss. of Mt 27:16 (cf. Col. 4:11).’ 2) ‘Thomas was the one who resembled him in appearance, as the Acts of Thomas relates.’ 3) ‘[H]is name was dropped because there were two others among the twelve so named.’ De Conick (1997, 389) surmises that the ‘name “Judas” fell out of favour because it was so closely linked to the man who betrayed Jesus’. See also Darr 1986, 188. The evidence for reconstructing the historical ‘Judas/Thomas’ is extremely meagre, however.

⁷⁰ *Acts Thom.* 11; 31 (Gr.); and 39 (Gr. and Syr.); see also 34; 57 (Syr.); and 151–3.

⁷¹ Dunderberg 1998b, 78. Cf. also Poirier 1997, 302. Poirier argues that the *Acts of Thomas* developed a fully fledged twin symbolism, which is based on – but not found in – the *Gospel of Thomas*.

⁷² Several scholars have suggested that the figure ‘Judas Thomas’ was early identified with Judas/Jude, brother of James and Jesus (Mark 6:3; Jude 1); see Koester 1971, 134; Drijvers 1984a, 15; Darr 1986, 188. There is no direct evidence for this identification. It is quite uncertain that the apostle called Ἰούδας Ἰακώβου in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 would refer to ‘Judas, the brother of James (and Jesus)’, and in any case ‘Judas (Thomas)’ is not identified in *Acts Thom.* I with this apostle. For the latter, however, Klijn (1962, 158–9) has argued that the list in the beginning of the Acts, being a quotation from some written gospel, may go back to some gospel harmony and to Greek traditions and therefore does not represent the Syrian Thomas tradition. Be that as it may, it seems that the ‘Judas Thomas’ tradition did not so much emphasize the physical brotherhood as the spiritual one. Cf. also *Thom. Cont.* 138.8–13: ‘Now since it *has been said* that you are my twin and true companion, examine yourself and learn who you are, in what way you exist, and how you will come to be. Since you are to be called my brother, it is not fitting that you be ignorant of yourself’ (transl. by Turner in Layton 1989; my emphasis).

⁷³ Saying 12 is usually taken as a strong argument for the view that at least some part of the Thomasine sayings derive from a Jewish-Christian tradition or trajectory; see, e.g., Gärtner 1960, 47; Quispel 1967, 19. De Conick (1996b, 129) argues that

Christianity that took its legitimacy from Jesus' family,⁷⁴ and the roots of *Thomas* are in that kind of Christianity, the emergence of the religious symbolism exploiting kinship language, such as the idea of Thomas' being the spiritual twin of the Lord, is easy to explain.⁷⁵ It may also be relevant to note at this point that *Thomas* seems to be familiar with the idea of a heavenly double (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 84), which is readily associated with the twin symbolism.⁷⁶

It is worth noting that there are traditions in which James' kinship to Jesus is similarly used to demonstrate the unique relationship between Jesus and the apostle (James). The so-called *First Apocalypse of James* opens with the Lord's words to James, whose brotherhood to Jesus is understood in spiritual rather than in physical terms.

See now the completion of my redemption. I have given you a sign of these things, James, my brother. For not without reason have I called you my brother, although you are not my brother materially. And I am not ignorant concerning you; so that when I give you a sign – know and hear. Nothing existed except Him-who is. He is unnameable and ineffable. I myself also am unnameable, from He-who is, just as I have been [given a] number of names – two from Him-who-is. (*1 Apoc. Jas.* 24.12–25).⁷⁷

A little later in the text, James is told that he will finally reach Him-who-is in a mysterious union: 'You will no longer be James; rather you are the One-who-is' (27.8–10). The identification here is similar to that expressed in *Gos. Thom.* 108, even though the latter does not refer to Thomas alone; James is a prototype of the Christian who ascends to the

'[J]ogion 12 indicates that the Thomasites were tied closely to the law-abiding "Hebrews" of the primitive Jerusalem organization of which James was the leader'. For an argument that *Thomas* is engaged in a conflict with Jewish-Christian groups, see Uro 2000, 319–20.

⁷⁴ There is no need to push the argument to the claim that there existed an early Christian caliphate, a dynastic form of successive leaders, who legitimated their position by their belonging to the family of the Lord. Arguments against this view were presented by von Campenhausen (1950–1). It seems, nonetheless, clear enough that members of the Lord's family were influential in Jerusalem and in Jewish-Christian circles after Jesus' death, probably also after James' death (cf. the traditions on Simeon, who was said to be Jesus' cousin and the second bishop of Jerusalem; see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.32.1–6; 4.5.1–4; 4.22.4; for an analysis, see Painter 1999, 105–58). It should be noted that von Campenhausen did not have the Nag Hammadi traditions on James at his disposal.

⁷⁵ Note also that the idea of spiritual family is strongly emphasized in *Thomas*; see Uro 1997.

⁷⁶ Layton 1987, 359–60.

⁷⁷ Transl. by Schoedel in Parrott 1979.

heavenly realm (cf. *1 Apoc. Jas.* 28.20–7).⁷⁸ These passages on James demonstrate that the notion of the ideal brother of Jesus who resembles him or becomes one with him in the divine mystery was used for both James and Thomas in early Christianity. This gives a reason to suggest that the juxtaposition of James and Thomas in *Gos. Thom.* 12–13 was motivated by their belonging to the Lord's family. In this respect it is also interesting that the Johannine 'Beloved Disciple', who functionally resembles Thomas and James,⁷⁹ is also connected with Jesus' family by his guardianship of Jesus' mother (John 19:25–7). By this 'adoption', the Beloved Disciple replaces the other brothers and in effect becomes a brother of Jesus.⁸⁰

The hypothesis suggested above is at best conjectural. However, given the popularity of the traditions in which various 'hereditary' claims were made, it is not implausible that the redactor responsible for the combination of sayings 12–13, and probably for the prologue as well, associated traditions about the figures of James and Thomas. The reason for this link was the redactor's belief that Thomas was the twin brother of Jesus and thus had more intimate knowledge of Jesus' identity than any other human being, including James the Just. Even though this hypothesis may shed some light on the origin of the mysterious figure of 'Judas the Twin', it does not yet provide a fully satisfactory answer to the question of how James' leadership and the model of Thomas should be compared in *Gos. Thom.* 12–13. To be able to provide an answer we have to locate these sayings in the wider context of organizational debates in early Christian communities which transmitted Jesus' teachings.

6. Thomas and Matthew on leadership

Matthew has often been described as the most 'ecclesiastical' of the New Testament gospels, since the gospel alone uses the term *ekklesia*

⁷⁸ A striking parallel of applying the 'twin' motif to James can be found in the pseudepigraphic *Letter of Ignatius to John*, in which James is said to resemble Christ 'in life and manner of conversation, as if he were his twin brother from the same womb; whom they say, he is like seeing Jesus himself in respect to all the contours of his body'. See Gunther 1980, 146 (transl. from Harris 1927, 57–8). This letter is, however, relatively late (see Funk – Bihlmeyer 1970, xxxiii).

⁷⁹ Dunderberg 1998b; 2002.

⁸⁰ Schenke 1986, 119; see also Dunderberg 2002, 253.

(16:18; 18:17), and it often deals with issues of Matthew's contemporary community very transparently, the most conspicuous example being the 'church order' of Matt. 18.⁸¹ Yet by no means is it obvious how Matthew sees the various leadership roles and how far the institutional structures had been developed in his community.⁸² The much-discussed question of Matthew's 'church' is closely intertwined with other issues of Matthean scholarship, such as Matthew's view of discipleship, his relation to contemporary Jewish leaders and formative Judaism. Obviously all these cannot be discussed in detail in this chapter. There are, however, a number of features in Matthew's 'ecclesiastical' concern that are relevant to our discussion on *Thomas*' view of leadership.

Matthew's ideal is an egalitarian community in which 'all are brothers' or 'children' (Matt. 23:8–12; 18:1–6; 19:13–15).⁸³ Honorary titles, such as 'father', 'rabbi' and 'instructor', are specifically condemned (23:8–10). It is also worth noting that the disciplinary regulations concerning the erring brother in 18:15–20 mention no council of elders or other leaders.⁸⁴ In 18:17–18, the power of 'binding and loosing' is entrusted to all members of the *ekklesia*. This ideal egalitarianism notwithstanding, Matthew does show some signs of institutionalization and the emergence of various leadership roles.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Post-World War II studies on Matthew's church until 1980 are summarized by Stanton 1985, 1925–9. For more recent studies relevant to the issue, see White 1986; Krentz 1987; Overman 1990; Balch 1991; Maisch 1991; Stanton 1992a; Carter 1994; Saldarini 1994; Luomanen 1998.

⁸² For discussion on leadership roles in Matthew, see von Campenhausen 1969, 124–48; Künzel 1978, 167–79; Viviano 1990; Overman 1990, 113–24; Bartlett 1993, 58–88; Saldarini 1994, 102–7; Duling 1995; Stanton 1996.

⁸³ For Matthew's use of 'children' as a metaphor of discipleship, see Carter 1994, 90–114. Cf. also the much-discussed expressions 'little ones' (Matt. 10:42; 18:10, 14) and 'one of the least of these' (25:40, 45); see Gray 1989.

⁸⁴ It may be wise not to use this silence as a positive argument for the view that the system of elders did not exist in Matthew's environment; von Campenhausen 1969, 128; Davies and Allison 1991, 786. Cf. Schweizer (1983, 140), who argues that the Matthean community 'seems to know neither elders nor bishops nor deacons'.

⁸⁵ Overman 1990, 113–24; see also Bartlett 1993, 76–82 and Duling 1995. Some have also laid stress on the charismatic and prophetic authority in Matthew's church. Schweizer, for example, believes that one can trace a trajectory from the Matthean community of 'little ones' to an anti-hierarchical 'ascetic Judeo-Christian group', which produced the *Apocalypse of Peter* (NHC VII, 3); Schweizer 1983; cf. also Stanton 1992b. White (1986, 75) suggests that Matt. 18 'reflects a pattern of organization that places minimal reliance on formally distinguished roles', but also admits that it would be 'theologically naive' to 'conclude that the community's self-definition fundamentally agrees with its actual composition, character, and circumstances' (ibid., 85).

There are, for example, several positive allusions and references to 'prophets', 'scribes', and 'sages' (e.g., 10:40–2; 13:52; 23:34), and it is obvious that the ideal brotherhood of the Matthean ethos does not warrant the conclusion that the Matthean community lacked any kind of established leadership structures. Given the careful attention that the gospel gives to scriptural and legal interpretation, it seems obvious that teachers were important figures in the Matthean group.⁸⁶ Matthew's strong emphasis on humility and his denial of honorary titles may be taken as indirect evidence for the view that the gospel resists some expressions of an emerging hierarchy in his community or environment. Many scholars have seen in the denial of the 'synagogue titles' in Matt. 23:8–11 a sign that some Christian leaders inside or outside Matthew's group were, in fact, using these titles⁸⁷ or at least emphasizing their authority in a manner that aroused Matthew's criticism.⁸⁸ One could also argue that Matthew's ambivalent presentation of Peter as a figure who is *both* the 'rock' on which the church is built, *and* the 'stumbling block' (16:13–23) similarly reflects Matthew's reserved attitude toward emerging Christian leadership and legitimization of power in his environment. By democratizing Peter's authority (cf. 18:18) and holding only to 'archaizing' and undifferentiated types of leadership roles ('prophets', 'scribes' or 'sages'),⁸⁹ Matthew tries to maintain the ideal of a small house-church assembly,⁹⁰ in which every member has a special charisma and all the important decisions, such as the excommunication of a sinning member (18:15–20; cf. 1 Cor. 5;

⁸⁶ Saldarini 1994, 105.

⁸⁷ Schweizer, 1983, 139; Gatland 1979, 57–63; Duling 1995, 166.

⁸⁸ Viviano 1990, 16.

⁸⁹ Viviano 1990, 14 characterizes Matthew's list of 'offices' as being 'conservative or archaizing'.

⁹⁰ Cf. Stanton (1992c, 50–1), who estimates that 'it would have been difficult for many more than 50 or so people to crowd into even quite a substantial house'; see also id., 1992a, 388 and Luomanen 1998, 272. Stanton concludes from this that Matthew must have written for a larger audience than just one small house-church. The estimation of the amount of people who could assemble in one 'substantial' house (including courtyard) may be difficult (for archeological evidence, see Guijjarro 1997; Osiek and Balch 1997, 5–35, esp. n. 132;), but the idea that Matthew is writing for a network of house churches is worthy of consideration. This type of social location would explain some of Matthew's peculiarities, for example, his teaching concerning itinerant teachers (false and good) and contradictions with respect to Jewish heritage. Matthew's 'imprecision' with respect to his audience could be explained by the fact that the assemblies Matthew is writing for are diverse. This kind of situation also creates a need for more centralized leadership (cf. Luomanen, *ibid.*), a development which Matthew can be seen to be resisting.

6:1–11), are made collectively. Perhaps this ‘conservative’ attitude on the part of Matthew explains why he grants supreme religious and judicial power to the non-Christian Jewish leaders (Matt. 23:2–3; 5:21–6) rather than to some specific authority or body of authorities in his own group.

The *Gospel of Thomas* shares Matthew’s egalitarianism in that it problematizes Christian leadership and the master–pupil relationship (*Gos. Thom.* 3 and 12–13; cf. also 88). Matthew’s utopia seems to be based on such biblical promises as Isa. 54:13 and Jer. 31:33, according to which, at the end of days, the children of God will be taught directly, without any human intermediary.⁹¹ *Thomas*’ vision is more radical and fundamental since it plays down the role of Jesus himself as the supreme teacher. Jesus words to Thomas ‘I am not your master’ are almost antithetical to Matthew’s ‘you have one instructor, Christ’ (Matt. 23:10). Whereas Matthew emphasizes equality under the overarching symbol of Jesus as the final and absolute interpreter of God’s law, in *Thomas* the anti-authoritarian model is extended to the symbolic presentation of the equality between the ideal disciple, Thomas, and Jesus himself. Regardless of all his emphasis on brotherhood and service, Matthew’s symbolic world is ultimately a hierarchical one: the heavenly Father and the Son of Man rule at the top, next in order come the twelve disciples (Matt. 19:28).⁹² The hierarchy is not destroyed, but strongly conditioned by the warning that, as far as human beings are concerned, ‘many who are first will be last, and the last first’ (19:30). The symbolic world of *Thomas* is based on the idea that there is no essential difference between humanity and divinity, and thus there is no heavenly court and hierarchy.⁹³ Every person is part of God and will eventually return to God, at least if trained to realize his or her divine nature. In this respect *Thomas* represents a totally different conceptual world compared with Matthew and derives its basic ideological tenor from the ideology widely accepted in the Hellenistic world. In a sense

⁹¹ Dertett 1981; Krentz 1987, 566.

⁹² This ethos can aptly be compared to what Theissen (1982, 107) has called ‘love-patriarchalism’ encountered in Paul and especially in the deutero-Pauline and Pastoral epistles. ‘This love-patriarchalism takes social differences for granted but ameliorates them through an obligation of respect and love, an obligation imposed upon those who are socially stronger.’

⁹³ *Gos. Thom.* 15 may be understood as criticizing cultic adoration of anyone ‘born of a woman’ (cf. Gal. 4:4; Q 7:28; *Gos. Thom.* 46) rather than as fostering hierarchic symbolism. See Valantasis 1997, 81–2.

the Thomasine Jesus resembles the Stoic teacher, who encourages his pupils to become their own teachers.⁹⁴

It is, however, obvious that a radical symbolic egalitarianism does not automatically generate actions that would aim at removing all social distinctions and patriarchal structures. Most Stoics, for example, did not understand their radically antihierarchical theory as a direct recipe for social and political action.⁹⁵ It would be an oversimplification to draw the conclusion that the Matthean church was considerably more patriarchal than the Thomasine circles or that *Thomas* envisioned a fundamentally more egalitarian model of a Christian community than Matthew. In spite of their ideological differences, both gospels are suspicious of the Christian leadership structures that were developing in their environments under the auspices of the symbols of Peter and James. Both understand Jesus' role ultimately as that of a teacher, and it is therefore highly probable that the activity of teaching was of vital importance in both communities.

It is possible, though, that the role that the female disciples Mary Magdalene and Salome occasionally have in *Thomas* (*Gos. Thom.* 21; 61; 114) signals a difference between the social worlds of these two gospels.⁹⁶ One could argue that women were encouraged to have a more active role in the Thomasine community than in the Matthean church, which may be seen as a community of *brothers* rather than that of siblings.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Cf. Epictetus, who exhorts his students to abandon other people's opinions: 'Will you not, then, let other men alone, and become your own pupil and your own teacher?' (*Diarr.* 4.6.11; Oldfather, LCL). See also Nussbaum 1994, 345.

⁹⁵ Engberg-Pedersen 1995, 267. This does not mean that the egalitarian and universalist ideal was simply an empty theory without any practical consequences. Epictetus' teaching on the slave–master relationship illustrates well the Stoic attitude (I owe this example to Huttunen 2000). A gentle reaction to the disobedient behaviour of a slave at dinner is a thing that is 'acceptable to the gods' since one has to remember that slaves are 'kinsmen, brothers by nature, that they are the offspring of Zeus' (Oldfather LCL). Epictetus does not challenge the institution of slavery or the patriarchal rule in general, but teaches his students to look beyond 'these wretched laws of ours' to 'the laws of gods' (*Diarr.* 1.13.5) and to act gently and without anger. This comes close to what Theissen means by 'love-patriarchalism' (see above, note 92). As a matter of fact, it was a widespread ethical ideal in the Hellenistic world; cf. the ideology of 'benevolent patriarchalism' described in Martini 1995, 39–47.

⁹⁶ For the female disciples in *Thomas*, see Marjanen 1998c.

⁹⁷ This is not to say that Matthew ignores the role of the female followers of Jesus (see, e.g., *Matt.* 27:55–6). They may not be named among Jesus' 'disciples' (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 61:4), but it would be against the evidence to argue that Matthew aims at diminishing the communal and prophetic activity of women. See D'Angelo 1999; Mattila 1999; 2002.

The role that the women disciples have in *Thomas* may reflect the same Hellenistic universalism described above, which could sometimes create surprisingly non-patriarchal views on the role of women in society. According to Musonius Rufus, for example, everyone who possesses the five senses, including women, should study philosophy.⁹⁸ Against such an interpretation one can, of course, refer to saying 114, in which *Thomas*' symmetrical gender language (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 22) is suddenly changed to an asymmetrical statement about 'making Mary male'.⁹⁹ Most contemporary people, both male and female, were, however, so restricted to the concept of patriarchy that they did not see the contradiction. As noted above, similar conflicting ideas can be found in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, in which Mary is praised as 'a woman who had understood completely'¹⁰⁰ and Jesus tells the disciples to 'pray in the place where there is no woman'.¹⁰¹ To take another example, Paul can also write conflicting things about women. He presents the relationship between husband and wife in a highly symmetrical manner in 1 Cor. 7:3–4; yet he immediately resorts to patriarchal order when discussing the liberties some women took in the community (1 Cor. 11:3–16).

7. *Thomas* and emerging church hierarchy

There is one saying in which differences between the Matthean and Thomasine community ideal are clearly visible. The first part of the Greek form of *Gos. Thom.* 30 (*P. Oxy.* 1.23–7) is virtually an antithesis of Matt. 18:20 (the Coptic version, I believe, is corrupt¹⁰²). The Greek version combines this saying with the words found in the Coptic version at 77:2 (*P. Oxy.* 1.27–30). My translation is based on Attridge's reconstruction of the Greek text:¹⁰³

[Jesus said], 'Where there are [three], they are without God, and where there is

⁹⁸ See his treatise on 'That Women Too Should Study Philosophy'; transl. and ed. by Lutz 1957, 39–43.

⁹⁹ For the discussion, see Marjanen 1996, 43–55 (=1998c, 94–106) and McGuire 1999, 278–82 and the literature referred to in these studies.

¹⁰⁰ *Dial. Sav.* 53.

¹⁰¹ *Dial. Sav.* 91.

¹⁰² 'Jesus said, "Where there are three gods, they are gods. Where there are two or one, I am with him."'

¹⁰³ Attridge 1979; 1989. The translation modified from Attridge's translation.

[one] alone, I say that I am with [him]. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there. Split the piece of wood, and I am there.' (*Gos. Thom.* 30 + 77:2.)

Compare this to the Matthean form of the saying:

Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (*Matt.* 18:20.)

If the reconstruction above is correct, *Thomas* does not encourage seeking Jesus' presence in a community of believers, and, as a result, Matthew's tradition is turned upside down. It is not the community of brothers, minimally consisting of two or three disciples of Jesus, to which the individual Christian's life is anchored, but rather the 'aloneness' of a single person, which may be directly linked to the universal cosmos ('lift the stone, etc.'). In *Thomas* there is no corporate 'body of Christ' which would signify the unity and harmony of the Christian community. The self-sufficiency emphasized in *Thomas* is in this respect more 'individualistic' than Matthew's ecclesiastical theology (or that of the Pauline letters). This self-sufficiency should not be confused with an individualism that is based on the idea that becoming a unique and distinctive individual is regarded as inherently valuable.¹⁰⁴ *Thomas* does not emphasize uniqueness, but rather 'sameness' of the true self with divinity and the realm of light.

From the viewpoint of saying 30 it thus seems obvious that *Thomas* envisions looser and less group-oriented communal interaction than Matthew.¹⁰⁵ Another question is whether this means that the gospel is advocating radical isolation or itinerancy. *Gos. Thom.* 30 has often been connected with the sayings which praise the *monachoi*, the 'solitary ones' (*Gos. Thom.* 16; 39; 75).¹⁰⁶ I have elsewhere argued against reading too much 'wandering' into Thomasine sayings¹⁰⁷ since, in fact, they say very little about itinerancy or about a Cynic-like lifestyle. It is likewise problematic to take the reconstructed Greek form of saying 30 as pointing to some sort of 'anchoritic' solitariness. Although *Thomas*

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the helpful considerations on the idea of 'being yourself' in Hellenistic ethics by Gill 1993, 351–2. For the wide range of meanings that 'individualism' has carried in Western thought, see Lukes 1973.

¹⁰⁵ Similarly Patterson 1993a, 151 (although emphasizing that Thomasine Christianity was 'a loosely structured movement of wanderers'); Valantasis 1997, 69 ('a loosely formed community').

¹⁰⁶ E.g., Patterson 1993a, 152–3.

¹⁰⁷ Uro 1997, 218–9.

does not promote tightly organized assemblies, the internal logic of the gospel seems to presuppose some sort of loosely structured school in which the sayings of Jesus were read and meditated upon. Moreover, one may raise the question whether the emphasis on 'aleness' in saying 30 should be set against *Thomas'* confrontation with a clearly defined Christian church which celebrated Jesus' presence in its cult meetings and deemed the Thomasine Christians more or less outsiders. If this assumption is on the right track, then we have one more important difference between the Thomasine and the Matthean critiques of leadership. Whereas Matthew still largely defines the ideal communal structure against non-Christian formative Judaism, *Thomas* is engaged in the criticism of Christian leadership and hierarchical formation *within* Christian communities. However, given Matthew's reserved attitude toward the hierarchical structures that were emerging inside and outside his community, one may also see both gospels as resisting the church hierarchy developing at the turn of the second century. Ironically, it was Matthew who left in Peter's 'investiture' one of the strongest weapons for the legitimation of episcopal power. *Thomas'* radical model of teaching authority could hardly have been accepted by those who championed moniscopacy in Christian communities from the early second century onwards.¹⁰⁸

The comparison between the Matthean and Thomasine views on leadership shows that, in spite of the different ideological frameworks, both gospels share an antihierarchical stance which may be set against the background of emerging church offices in their time. This can especially be seen in the ways in which both gospels deal with the major figures of ecclesiastical power, Peter and James. Yet a fundamental difference exists between their criticisms of church hierarchy. Whereas

¹⁰⁸ The criticism of church offices continued among the second and third century gnostic groups; see Pagels 1976; Koschorke 1978, 67–71. At the end of the second century, however, school and episcopacy still constituted two distinct institutions in Alexandria represented by Clement and Bishop Demetrius. Kyrtatas (1987, 141–2) stresses the social integration and the economic basis of the latter institution: The school 'tended to become, in a manner of speaking, secular. It divided Christianity into sects using intellectual criteria; it had no hierarchy in the strict sense and was in need of no special funds: a member became a teacher because of his learning ... The monarchical episcopate, by contrast, can be termed more religious. It struggled to integrate all local communities into one church, it had a rigid hierarchy which depended on fixed salaries and organized charity – hence the prime importance of finance; its members were promoted to successive grades through internal mechanisms inaccessible to outsiders.'

Matthew ultimately accepts the power of the keys, although strongly conditioning it with demands for humility, *Thomas* adds to James' leadership a different kind of model, one based on self-sufficiency and independence. Thomas exemplifies this model and, through the prologue of the gospel, becomes the guarantor of the tradition which promulgates this understanding of discipleship. Matthew's view became *the* Christian pattern whereas Thomas' model was pushed to the margin of Christian life and culture until its resurgence in postmodern religious mentality.

Orality and textuality

1. The old debate and new approaches

Although the debate over *Thomas'* relationship to the New Testament gospels still divides scholars into different camps, one can to some degree recognize decreasing polarization in scholarly opinions. Most of those who have taken a stand on the issue in recent years have formulated their views rather carefully and avoided exclusive conclusions.¹ It has almost become a commonplace to emphasize that each saying or unit must be examined individually and, therefore, dependence in one case does not exclude independence in the other or vice versa.² Of course, scholars' views of *Thomas'* dependence upon the canonical gospels affect their assessments of the age of the Thomasine traditions and their value as a source for the historical Jesus. Here the polarization of opinions among scholars is strong. Nonetheless, at least two factors are influential in current discussion that are changing the status of the question. First, one major trend in the study of early Christian texts has been a shift from source-oriented research to the analysis of texts themselves as a network of references to other texts (intertextuality) and to the analysis of the role of the reader (reader-response). This shift has resulted in many Thomasine scholars supporting an approach in which *Thomas* is examined in its own right as a literary composition or religious document, not because of its earlier sources or parallels with the canonical gospels.³ Most of the analyses in the preceding chapters

¹ Robinson (1999a, 152) observes that '[a]ny one-sided claim that the *Gospel of Thomas* was, or was not, dependent on the canonical Gospels has come to seem doctrinaire'.

² See Tuckett 1988, 157; Hedrick 1989–90, 56; Neller 1989–90, 18; Snodgrass 1989–90, 19; Schröter 1997, 137; Robinson 1999a, 153; De Conick 2002, 198.

³ Sellw (1997b, 238) notes that 'for the most part we have failed to address *Thomas* in its own terms' and encourages us to read *Thomas* 'with a more literary sensibility' (ibid., 335). Valantasis' commentary on the *Gospel of Thomas* (1997, 26) similarly aims at presenting a literary analysis of the gospel and constructing 'a world within the text and its sayings'.

of this book have followed this strategy. Secondly, studies on orality and literacy have challenged many basic assumptions that have dominated the traditional quest for early gospel traditions and the historical Jesus. Such concepts as the 'original form' or *ipsissima verba* as well as the idea of 'growing tradition' have proved to be highly problematic in the light of new approaches. Studies on orality and literacy are beginning to exert their influence on Thomasine studies and to create new perspectives and approaches to the issues of *Thomas*' sources and relationship to the canonical gospels.⁴

It is this latter point that is the special focus of this chapter. I will ask in what manner the issue of orality and textuality has come up in Thomasine studies and how to meet the new challenges these studies have presented. As will be shown, this issue cannot be separated from the questions about *Thomas*' composition and sources. This is why theories about *Thomas*' compositional history, layers and redaction will also be assessed in this chapter. The main goal of this chapter, however, is to continue the discussion on orality and textuality in the *Gospel of Thomas*, which is still very much in its initial stage, not to develop a new theory about *Thomas*' composition and sources. At the end, some methodological suggestions for future research will be offered.

2. From the 'Great Divide' to interaction

It is very common to speak of 'oral sources' in connection with the material used by the author of *Thomas*. Yet the concept itself has become problematic. It has become difficult to argue that *Thomas* in some places copied and edited written sources and in some other places used oral sources available to him which both, although belonging to different categories of sources, could still be identified behind the text of the gospel using traditional exegetical tools. This form-critical model of oral traditions has been vigorously challenged by Werner H. Kelber and others who have argued against the typographic models that dominated much of twentieth-century biblical scholarship.⁵ These

Asgerirsson's rhetorical analysis of *Thomas* (1997; 1998a; 1998b) looks for the inner logic of the units in the gospel, which is taken as a *chriai* collection. Cameron (1996; 1997) seeks to explore *Thomas* from the perspective of 'mythmaking and intertextuality'.

⁴ Uro 1993; Schröter 1997; Robbins 1997.

⁵ Kelber 1983; Silberman 1987; Wansbrough 1991; Dewey 1994; Schröter 1997, 40–60; Dunn 2000. What has proved to be long-standing in Kelber's work is not his distinctive

studies have made it clear that there is no returning to the traditional methodology in which oral sources were understood as a kind of 'text', having gone through a series of successive editorial changes quite analogous to literary editing.⁶ But what are the alternative ways of imagining orality and textuality in the *Gospel of Thomas*? Has the 'living voice' of the Christians who composed, delivered and recited the Thomasine sayings been lost to us forever? Is all that we have the 'textual still life',⁷ the fossilized remnants in the form of a few Greek papyrus fragments and the Coptic translation of the Nag Hammadi codices found in the sand of Egypt?

While pioneering works on orality and literacy were often dominated by a sharp polarity between the oral and literary forms of communication,⁸ recent studies have largely emphasized the thoroughgoing interaction between oral and written composition in cultures which, in spite of their use of writing, have retained strong residual orality, such as the culture which dominated Mediterranean society at the beginning of the common era.⁹ The so-called Great Divide model has outlived its usefulness, as John Miles Foley has forcibly stated.¹⁰ The interaction between the oral and literary modes of transmission can be illustrated in several ways. For example,

theories about Mark as a counterform to oral tradition, to which Q and sayings gospels stand close (for criticism, see, e.g., Halverson 1994) but it is rather Kelber's critique of form criticism and the fact he forcefully brought modern discussion on orality and literacy to New Testament studies that should be assessed as a breakthrough.

⁶ Cf. Dunn (2000, 296): '[In oral transmission] ... the paradigm of literary editing is confirmed as wholly inappropriate: one telling of a story is in no sense an editing of a previous telling ... each telling is a performance of the tradition itself, not of the first, third, or twenty-third "edition" of the tradition.' See also Andersen 1991, 38 and Schröter 1997, 57–9.

⁷ Cf. Kelber 1983, 91.

⁸ Kelber's study (1983) was influenced by the so-called oral formulaic school, most brilliantly presented in Lord 1960, and by the works of Eric A. Havelock (1963) and Walter J. Ong (e.g., 1982). These studies often emphasized the polarity between orality and literacy. Note, however, Kelber's self-defence in 1994, 159: 'The concept of tradition as a biosphere suggests that the great divide thesis, which pits oral tradition vis-à-vis gospel text, can in the end not supply the answer to the questions concerning tradition and gospel. If the emphasis in OWG [= *The Oral and Written Gospel*] fell on that division, it was because a novel approach requires a strong thesis.'

⁹ The interplay between orality and literacy is emphasized by anthropologists and folklorists as well as by classical and biblical scholars; see Goody 1968; 1987; Street 1984; Graham 1987, 17; Finnegan 1988, 110–22; Lentz 1989; 1992, 160–8; Andersen 1991, 45–7; Hénaut 1993, 117; Uro 1993, and several articles in Dewey 1994.

¹⁰ Foley 1994, 169.

scholars have taken note of the fact that written texts were normally read aloud, often before audiences, and that manuscripts themselves were regarded more as aids to oral performances than as an autonomous and independent mode of communication.¹¹ The books were meant for ears more than for eyes.¹² This oral-aural nature of ancient writings poses serious difficulties for the traditional understanding of oral traditions in biblical studies. Whereas the form-critical method visualized two phases in the transmission of the gospel traditions, one of the oral traditions *behind* the written gospels and one of literary redaction, we should now learn to see orality as being present at *all stages* of transmission, whether one thinks of pre-gospel traditions, the composition of the written gospels or their influence on other writings.¹³

3. Writing in a rhetorical culture

Contributors to orality/literacy studies have emphasized that our experience of print culture is so persuasive and basic that we have difficulties in understanding different kinds of media cultures.¹⁴ In antiquity, 'text', 'authorship', and 'reading' were all understood quite differently from what those words designate in our culture.¹⁵ In addition to the great dividing line between the manuscript and printing cultures, however, further distinctions and taxonomies can be made that may prove to be helpful in analysing early Christian literature. One is Vernon K. Robbins' distinction between 'scribal' and 'rhetorical'

¹¹ Achtemeier 1990, 5; see also Ong 1982, 119. For silent reading in antiquity, see Lentz 1989, 147; Slusser 1992; Gilliard 1993.

¹² Graham 1987, 38.

¹³ I made an attempt to apply the last point to the issue of *Thomas'* sources by drawing attention to the possibility of 'secondary orality', that is, the influence of written gospels on the oral traditions available in *Thomas'* environment (Uro 1993). This idea was not new (it was already suggested in Haenchen 1961b, 178), but I thought the more recent insights achieved in the study of oral traditions had given additional force and better grounds for this argument which had been largely ignored in the discussion on *Thomas'* sources. However, 'secondary orality' is hardly a once-and-for-all solution to the long-lived debate over *Thomas'* relationship to the canonical gospels, not to speak of the relationship between the canonical and non-canonical writings in general: *pace* Schröter 1998, 183–4.

¹⁴ On the other hand, the development of media technologies has been so rapid during recent years that it may have become easier to see the print culture as a relative and changing phenomenon.

¹⁵ For the effects of the print culture, see Ong 1982, 117–38.

culture.¹⁶ Robbins argues that ‘scribal culture’ did not begin to dominate the transmission of early Christian literature until the last half of the second century.¹⁷ The traditional source-critical method presumes a culture in which scribes are expected

... to move their eyes back and forth from manuscripts as they copy word for word, intentionally modifying wording only for editorial purposes; or to write down what they hear as another person reads from a manuscript or performs a speech. This approach envisions the relation of texts to one another and to non-extant sources in an environment of accurate copying of texts ...¹⁸

According to Robbins, the prevailing literary-historical methods are informative for the stage of transmission in which this kind of copying and editing dominated. But ‘to impose such a scribal environment on the contexts in which New Testament gospels initially were written and re-written is a fundamental error’.¹⁹

To illustrate what he calls ‘rhetorical culture’, Robbins refers to the chria exercises in the beginners’ textbooks, *Progymnasmata* (Preliminary Exercises), such as that ascribed to Aelius Theon of Alexandria (late first century CE), which were used in rhetorical training in antiquity.²⁰ These instructions exhibit an approach to the tradition that is fundamentally different from slavish copying activity. Students were trained in various ways to use their own words when transmitting chriae, that is speech and actions attributed to specific personages in their own culture. The techniques of chria elaboration taught in the manuals vary from simple recitation (which need not be verbatim repetition) to different kinds of modifications, such as expansions, abbreviations, and manipulations in the form of a ‘complete argument’.²¹ This kind of education encourages and, in fact, requires continual reformulation in transmitting traditions, and writing and speaking are closely intertwined. In the words of Robbins,

¹⁶ Robbins 1993. See also further taxonomies offered by Robbins in 1994, 77–82: 1) oral culture; 2) scribal culture; 3) rhetorical culture; 4) reading culture (authorizes spoken statement through verbatim reading of written text); 5) literary culture (presupposes that people read texts regularly and can recite extensive passages from memory); 6) print culture (distributes multiple copies of written text in verbatim form); 7) hypertext culture (features non-sequential writing).

¹⁷ Robbins 1993, 116; with reference to Koester 1957; 1990a, 31–43.

¹⁸ Robbins 1993, 116.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ A selection of texts and English translations are found in Hock and O’Neil 1986.

²¹ See Theon’s exercises in Hock and O’Neil 1986, 82–107.

Performing oral and scribal traditions in this way creates a rhetorical culture – one in which speech is influenced by writing and writing is influenced by speaking. Recitation, then, is the base of a rhetorical culture. People know that certain traditions exist in writing. They also know that all traditions, oral and written, need to be composed anew to meet the needs of the day. Each day as they spoke, they were interacting with oral traditions. This interaction characterized their thinking, their speaking, and their writing.²²

Scribal and rhetorical/oral cultures should not be taken as mutually exclusive phenomena. It is not reasonable to suggest that people did not do ‘word for word’ copying before the middle of the second century²³ or that the rhetorical culture ceased to be influential in the textual transmission of early Christian literature after that point in time. Once some early Christian writings began to be regarded as holy scriptures, the rhetorical elaboration of their contents naturally had less influence on the process of their copying. But not all writings were frozen as scriptures. One needs only to refer to the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*²⁴ or many of the Nag Hammadi writings where the same stories and mythologies were freely elaborated and recycled.

Thus, even if Robbins’ distinction between oral and scribal culture should not be understood in terms of opposite categories, it may serve as a helpful heuristic tool in examining the composition of the *Gospel of Thomas*. In the following, I shall seek signs of both cultures in the gospel.

4. *Thomas* and oral culture

Thomas’ closeness to oral traditions has often been emphasized by those who see the gospel as being basically independent of the canonical gospels. James M. Robinson, for example, argued that ‘the *Gospel of Thomas*, like Q, depends primarily on the living oral tradition, even though smaller collections, perhaps even written collections, may have been incorporated in either or both . . .’²⁵ The oral origins of *Thomas* have been used to support the view that many of the Thomasine traditions are independent and early.²⁶ However, the vitality or

²² Robbins 1993, 120–1.

²³ The scribal error in Q identified by Robinson and Heil would be an example of ‘word for word’ copying at an early stage. See below, n. 74.

²⁴ For intertextuality in the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, see Stroops 1997.

²⁵ Robinson 1986, 167.

²⁶ See Cameron 1986, 34 and Sieber 1990, 66.

dominance of the oral traditions in *Thomas*' environment does not as such guarantee the great age of Thomasine sayings, even though one may argue so for other reasons.²⁷

In several works Kelber has emphasized that the sayings collections, such as Q and *Thomas*, reveal 'an essentially oral state of mind'.²⁸ Thus *Thomas* does not only have access to living oral traditions but its very genre is closely bound up with oral hermeneutics. In Kelber's view, there is a sharp contrast between the canonical, narrative gospels and *Thomas*. Whereas the narrative gospels operate within a spatio-temporal framework, *Thomas* 'lacks a sense of history and pastness which the progressively textual culture in the West has increasingly been able to evoke'.²⁹ The characterization of the speaker as the 'living Jesus' underlines his continual present authority and 'seeks to elude the entrapment in the past'.³⁰

One may question, however, whether the narrative world of *Thomas* consistently creates such an ahistorical space without any emphasis on the past. There are several sayings in *Thomas* which explicitly or implicitly refer to Jesus' departure and, therefore, show that the speaker is not just a timeless figure with no past or future (*Gos. Thom.* 12; 24; 37; 38; 92). There are also other sayings which refer to certain incidents during the earthly ministry of Jesus (*Gos. Thom.* 13; 22; 60; 72; 78; 79; 99; 100).³¹ It seems that a sharp dichotomy between the narrative gospels and sayings gospels in terms of textuality versus orality is not a very fruitful perspective.³² Kelber himself has later toned down his original strong thesis,³³ and his concluding characterization of *Thomas* as 'an interface between orality and writing, rapprochement with both worlds'³⁴ is quite balanced.

In a paper presented to the SBL Thomasine traditions group in 1997, Robbins discussed the issue of orality and literacy extensively.³⁵ For him, the *Gospel of Thomas* is surprisingly free of any scribal

²⁷ See my discussion in Uro 1993.

²⁸ Kelber 1983, 23 (for Q). *Thomas*' oral disposition is stressed in Kelber 1989; 1990, 78–80; 1994, 157–8.

²⁹ Kelber 1989, 222.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Schenke 1994, 16.

³² See also Uro 1993.

³³ See above, n. 8.

³⁴ Kelber 1989, 223.

³⁵ Robbins 1997; cf. also 1998.

influence. *Thomas* does not appeal to written text, in contrast to the canonical gospels.³⁶ Jesus never says anything like 'As it is written in Isaiah the prophet' (Mark 1:1) or 'For these things took place that the writing might be fulfilled' (John 19:36). The only relation that *Thomas* has to the Old Testament text is an oral relation. For example, *Gos. Thom. 66* ('Show me the stone that the builders rejected; that is the cornerstone') exhibits 'an oral proverbial manner of transmission',³⁷ not a recitation of a written text as Mark does (Mark 12:10–11: 'Have you not read this writing: ...').

The main focus of Robbins' paper is the comparison of sayings in *Thomas* presenting questions with questions in the Q tradition and in the Gospel of John. According to Robbins, the relationship among these materials is oral or, to use Robbins' own terminology, a relation of 'oral texture'. A considerable amount of the question-material of Q can also be found in *Thomas*, but verbal agreements between the sayings vary greatly. Sometimes only one small item is present in *Thomas*' performance of the saying; sometimes virtually the entire content is present. This kind of relationship strongly supports the conclusion that the mode of transmission is oral.³⁸ The overlap between the Gospel of John and *Thomas* is much smaller, but the questions that are in some relation to each other reveal important topics both in *Thomas* and John. Some of them may indicate that 'the *Thomas* tradition stands in an intermediate position between the Q tradition and the Gospel of John'.³⁹ *Thomas* may be seen as developing Q themes (e.g., 'seeking and finding' in Q 11:9), and, on the other hand, the 'Gospel of John exhibits a step in the tradition where Jesus' rhetorical questions have become a vehicle for believing that Jesus speaks the truth about himself'.⁴⁰ *Thomas* does not speak of believing in Jesus. John also reveals a mode of 'scribalizing the gospel tradition' which appears neither in early Q traditions nor *Thomas*. In John, Jesus insists that written tradition verifies the truth of what he says (e.g., John 5:47; 10:34), whereas in *Thomas*, Jesus' sayings are 'a vehicle for eternal life "on their own terms"'.⁴¹

³⁶ Robbins 1997, 88.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 101–2.

Is *Thomas* as free of scribal tendency as Robbins suggests? The whole gospel is, after all, introduced as a collection of sayings which the 'living Jesus' spoke and Judas Thomas *wrote down*.⁴² The prologue's imagery is that of a teacher (Jesus) speaking and a scribe (Thomas) committing the words of the teacher to writing, either simultaneously or later.⁴³ This kind of authorial fiction is comparable to many other 'authentication figures' by means of which authors of later Christian generations emphasized the authenticity of the traditions included in their writings.⁴⁴ The Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John is such a figure and not altogether different from Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas*.⁴⁵ Thus, even though *Thomas* does not contain direct scriptural references,⁴⁶ it is not at all clear whether *Thomas* is apart from the process of scribalizing the Jesus tradition. Collecting wisdom sayings (or any other lists)⁴⁷ was one of the oldest scribal activities in the ancient world. Instead of placing John and *Thomas* in a linear development from oral hermeneutics to more 'scribal' gospels, I would see these gospels as representing parallel developments and alternative hermeneutical strategies in early Christianity.⁴⁸

It seems to me that Robbins does not fully utilize the potential of his distinction between 'scribal' and 'rhetorical' culture in his analysis of *Thomas*. More attention is paid to the presence or absence of references

⁴² Cf. also Kelber (1994, 157), who notes that in the incipit 'the *Gospel of Thomas* is further characterized by a certain amount of tension between its chirographic existence and Jesus' speaking posture.'

⁴³ The prologue of the *Gospel of Thomas* does not indicate whether Jesus is dictating his words to Thomas or whether the writing down is supposed to have happened at some later point. Some of *Thomas*' sayings (e.g., 60), however, do not fit very well into the dictation imagery. The *Book of Thomas*, however, seems to presuppose a situation in which Mathaias is making notes 'while walking' and listening to Jesus and Thomas speaking with one other (138.1–4).

⁴⁴ Dunderberg 1998b.

⁴⁵ For 'beloved disciples' in early Christian writings, see Dunderberg 2002.

⁴⁶ Note that this is in accord with the negative attitude of the gospel toward the Jewish religious tradition in general; see Marjanen 1998b.

⁴⁷ Lists have often been taken as one of the most archaic literary genres, something that does not exist in pure oral culture; see Goody 1977, 74–111 and Ong 1982, 98–9. For a different emphasis see Kelber 1989, 222. For *Thomas* and Q as lists see Crossan 1998, 240–1.

⁴⁸ The relationship between John and *Thomas* has been a subject of vivid interest in recent years. Some have argued that there was a conflict or controversy between the Johannine and Thomasine communities (Riley 1995; De Conick 1996b, 72–3; 2000), but note the serious criticism presented by Dunderberg in 1997. For John and *Thomas*, see also Dunderberg 1998a; 1998b; Pagels 1999; Attridge 2000.

to written testimonies than to the issue of rhetorical versus scribal culture. Importantly, however, Robbins points out that *Thomas* does not show a 'scribal relationship' to other early Christian gospels, but rather reveals 'a status of orally transmitted resources'.⁴⁹ One has to imagine the composition of *Thomas* as a process in which literally and orally transmitted traditions were continually performed, either from memory or by reading aloud, and composed anew.

5. Doublets as rhetorical elaborations

It was Jon Ma. Asgeirsson who, taking his cue from Robbins, undertook the task of a rhetorical analysis of *Thomas*.⁵⁰ For Asgeirsson, the *Gospel of Thomas* is a chriae collection, a genre which was flexible enough to be labelled as 'sayings' (cf. the incipit of *Thomas*), or 'gospel' (cf. the colophon of *Thomas*) or 'Lives' (cf., e.g., Lucian's *Demonax*).⁵¹ In terms of ancient definitions the Thomasine sayings can indeed be understood as chriae, since according to Theon's definition, a chria is 'a concise statement or action which is attributed with aptness to some specified character'.⁵² The *Gospel of Thomas* is thus not only a collection containing chriae; it is a collection of chriae which has conceivably been composed according to the methods similar to those taught in the Hellenistic rhetorical manuals.

The main focus of Asgeirsson's study is a phenomenon that has long occupied scholars, i.e., the doublets in *Thomas*. While previous studies took the doublets as indications of different written (or oral) sources behind the gospel or lack of conscious effort or caution in the compilation, Asgeirsson argues that the existence of doublets in *Thomas* reveals a rhetorical process in which the sayings of Jesus were modified in the manner of chria elaboration. This process challenges both the search for definite sources behind the text as well as the view that the text is a result of a unified redactional

⁴⁹ Robbins 1997, 102.

⁵⁰ Asgeirsson 1997; 1998a; 1998b.

⁵¹ Asgeirsson 1997, 58; For *Thomas* as a chriae collection, see also Kloppenborg 1987, 291 and Patterson 1992, 63. For 'Lives' of philosophers as parallels to the genre of Q (but not so much for that of *Thomas*), see Downing 1988. For the genre of chria and chriae collections, see Kloppenborg 1987, 306–16; Robbins 1988 and Hock 1992.

⁵² Hock and O'Neil 1986, 82–3; see also Asgeirsson 1997, 76; 1998b, 96–7. Similarly, Aphthonius of Antioch (late 4th century) defines chria as 'a concise reminiscence aptly attributed to some character' (Hock and O'Neil 1986, 224–5).

effort.⁵³ After a careful discussion of what constitutes a doublet in *Thomas*, Asgeirsson arrives at the list of the five 'real doublets' (*Gos. Thom.* 21:5–7 and 103; 22:4–7 and 106; 55 and 101; 56 and 80; 87 and 112).⁵⁴ Notably, four of these five doublets have the second component towards the end of the gospel. While saying 80 ('He who has recognized the world has found the body') is a simple 'recitation' of 56, the other pairs of the doublets appearing towards the end of the gospel can be explained as more elaborated versions of their earlier counterparts, following the methods of elaboration taught by Theon.⁵⁵ Building on these observations Asgeirsson goes on to argue that these more elaborated halves of the doublets reveal a stratum in the traditions of *Thomas* and that these sayings serve as a clue to identifying a rhetorical unit beginning with saying 99 and ending with saying 112; a unit that can be further divided into several sub-units (*Gos. Thom.* 99–101; 102–4; 105–109; 110–12). According to Asgeirsson, the rhetorical analysis of such units in *Thomas* demonstrates that the gospel is not a random collection of sayings without an argumentative structure, but rather a 'product of sophisticated learning typical of educated men and women in Late Antiquity'.⁵⁶

However one assesses the stratigraphic model suggested by Asgeirsson (see below), his analysis of the doublets hits the nail on the head by illustrating the rhetorical culture influential in the composition of *Thomas*. By focusing on the doublets we can see how the community responsible for the composition of the gospel did not look for a single authoritative and 'correct' reading of each saying which was then included in the collection. They did not think in terms of 'originality' or 'duplication' of the original, ideas which may be seen as products of the print culture.⁵⁷ They were not dominated by the scribal mind-set which would have resisted the plurality of authentic versions of sayings, being content with copying and correcting the received sayings. The

⁵³ Asgeirsson 1997, 77.

⁵⁴ Asgeirsson 1997, 53–75; 1998b, 138–61.

⁵⁵ Asgeirsson 1997, 75–81; 1998a, 327–9; 1998b, 165–7.179–85.

⁵⁶ Asgeirsson 1997, 65.

⁵⁷ Kelber 1994, 150. Richter argues similarly in 1994, 97: '... the question of authenticity, of verbatim repetition, is one which betrays the literate mind of the person who raises this issue. To check verbatim repetition or variations requires the existence of standard texts against which this check can be made. It is a technical issue which is not relevant in the context of non-literate cultures.'

fact that they perpetuated 'rival' versions of sayings, from simple recitation to more manipulated forms, does not only reveal that they tolerated repetitions and inconsistencies, perhaps resulting from different sources and/or careless copying. Rather, it reveals that they still participated in a rhetorical culture which did not shun variation, reformulation and recontextualization, typical of oral transmission of traditions. A comparison between *Gos. Thom.* 55 and 101 illustrates well the method of elaboration used by the compiler of the Thomasine sayings:

Jesus said, 'Whoever does not hate his father and his mother cannot become a disciple to me. ²And whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and take up his cross in my way (NTA2E) will not be worthy of me.' (*Gos. Thom.* 55.)

<Jesus said,> 'Whoever does not hate his [father] and his mother as I do (NTA2E) cannot become a [disciple] to me. ²And whoever does [not] love his [father and] his mother as I do (NTA2E) cannot become a [disciple to] me. ³For my mother [...], but [my] true mother gave me life. (*Gos. Thom.* 101.)

Gos. Thom. 55 is closer to the versions found in the synoptic gospels (cf. Matt. 10:37–8 and Luke 14:26–7, which go back to a Q saying).⁵⁸ One cannot exclude the possibility that the saying, as it now reads in *Thomas*, echoes Matthew's redaction. 'Worthy of' is often regarded as Matthew's alteration to Q's 'be my disciple'.⁵⁹ One can hardly think of scribal copying of Matthew's text, but the version in *Gos. Thom.* 55 may be an oral rendition of the tradition which was influenced by Matthew's text in 10:37–8. On the other hand, the basic thought of the saying does not differ much from the Q and Lukan forms, which have retained the offensive idea of hating one's kin,⁶⁰ except for the qualifying words 'in my way' in 55:2.

Gos. Thom. 101 is clearly the more elaborated version of the doublet. It seems to answer the question of what Jesus' 'way' mentioned in 55:2

⁵⁸ Cf. also Mark 8:34, the parallels of which are found in Matt. 16:24 and Luke 9:23.

⁵⁹ The expression appears several times in Matt. 10 (vv. 10; 11; 13 [*bis*]; 37 [*bis*]; 38), and its use in Matt. 10:37 may thus be influenced by Matthew's literary context. See Luz 1990, 134; Davies and Allison 1991, 221. *The Critical Edition of Q* takes the parallelism as deriving from Q but follows Luke's 'cannot be my disciple' (Robinson, Hoffmann and Kloppenborg 2000, 450–3). Patterson argues that Q read both 'cannot be my disciple' and 'is not worthy of me' and was thus similar to the Thomasine version (1993a, 44).

⁶⁰ Patterson (1993a, 45) sees a possible connection with Luke's redaction in *Thomas*' listing 'brothers and sisters' among those who must be hated (so also in Luke 14:26). Yet the variation of different members of the family must have been great in oral transmission and need not be restricted to a redaction of a particular evangelist.

means by adding an aspect of love to the saying. Unfortunately, the saying is partly damaged and the content of 101:3 remains unclear. For Asgeirsson the saying addresses 'the absurd and immoral demand that followers of Jesus must turn away from their close ones in a hateful fashion by adding the stich about loving the same in his very fashion'.⁶¹ The saying could, thus, be understood as playing down the harshness of the traditional saying on family relationships. However, the contrast between 'my mother' and '[my] true mother' in 101:3 seems to indicate that hating and loving in 101:1–2 are not both directed to the physical parents.⁶² In this interpretation, Jesus is presented as the son of the 'true mother', and loving one's father and mother would mean recognizing one's true heavenly parents.⁶³ However one interprets the saying, it is notable that both the traditional saying and the elaborated version were preserved in the same collection (cf. also *Gos. Thom.* 105). The new version of the earlier saying does not overwrite the earlier version. What has been seen as an 'overwhelming problem'⁶⁴ becomes more understandable if it is set against the background of the rhetorical culture described by Robbins. This culture encouraged early Christians engaged in writing to produce different, socially accepted versions of the traditional sayings rather than sustained accurate copying and reciting.

6. Different layers in *Thomas*?

Asgeirsson's analysis raises the issue of stratification. Is it possible to discern different layers in *Thomas*? The interpretation that *Gos. Thom.* 101 would tone down the offence generated by Jesus' saying on family (*Gos. Thom.* 55) would support Asgeirsson's argument that saying 101 has been added to the collection at a later stage. In a different reading, however, no such toning down from the earlier perspective is

⁶¹ Asgeirsson 1997, 80; cf. also 1998a, 340.

⁶² Thus Jacobson 2000, 213.

⁶³ Arnal (1995, 478 n. 18) interprets the 'true mother' as a reference to Sophia, God's divine consort. This is a plausible reading, but his interpretation that there is 'a gnostic mythological motif' (*ibid.*, 478) behind the expression is not convincing. There is nothing in the saying which would reflect the myth of Sophia's fall, and the main point of the saying is to highlight the heavenly origin of Jesus and the disciples (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 105; see Uro 1998b, 146–7).

⁶⁴ The expression is taken from Patterson 1993a, 45. De Conick (2002, 179) speaks of 'troublesome' doublets.

discernible. One may ask whether Asgeirsson has been successful in identifying a 'secondary stratum' in the section from *Gos. Thom.* 99 to 112 that would be different enough from the rest of the gospel to reveal a change or development in terms of ideology or social formation.⁶⁵ For example, it is difficult to see how the last rhetorical sub-unit in the structure outlined by Asgeirsson (*Gos. Thom.* 110–112) would signal such changes as compared to other sayings speaking of world renunciation (cf. 110 and 81), the transitory nature of the heavens (and earth) (cf. 111 and 11) and harmful dependence between the body and the soul (cf. 112 and 87).⁶⁶

Different layers or redactional strata have occasionally been suggested for *Thomas*, although scholars have seldom proposed detailed stratifications.⁶⁷ Some crude sketches for layers in *Thomas* have been outlined,⁶⁸ and some individual sayings, such as 114⁶⁹ or 111:3,⁷⁰ have been suspected of being added later to the collection, but no widely recognized stratification, such as in the case of Q,⁷¹ has emerged.

⁶⁵ Of course, it is theoretically possible that the cluster of doublets and other sayings was added to the end of the document soon after the earlier redaction so that no considerable development in religious perspective or social formation had occurred between the redactions.

⁶⁶ For *Thomas*' 'body sayings', see Ch. 3 in this book.

⁶⁷ For example, Crossan (1991, 427–8) sees two separate layers in *Thomas*. One was composed by the fifties, possibly in Jerusalem, under the aegis of James' authority. The second layer was added in Edessa, in the latter part of the first century. The earlier James layer is discernible 'in those units with independent attestation elsewhere' (ibid., 428). Cf. also Quispel 2000, 214–15. In Crossan's later work (1998, 247–56), this 'crude stratification' is replaced with Patterson's (1993b) more detailed stratification.

⁶⁸ Attempts at layering were made in a few early works on *Thomas*. Kasser (1959, 365–7) suggested that the gospel is based on a gnostic hymn. Wilson (1960, 147–8) separates four layers: 1) 'a few authentic sayings'; 2) 'an element parallel, but perhaps independent of our Gospels'; 3) 'the influence of the canonical Gospels'; and 4) a 'Gnostic redaction of the material as whole'. Puech (1963, 305–6) distinguished two versions of *Thomas*, 'orthodox' and 'heterodox'.

⁶⁹ For 114 as a later addition see Davies 1983, 152–5 and Marjanen 1998c, 102–3.

⁷⁰ E.g., Meyer 1992, 70.

⁷¹ I am not claiming that there is a universally accepted model for Q's stratification, but there is a large agreement on at least two points (Kloppenborg 1996, 55). The widest consensus exists on the polemic against 'this generation' and the announcement of judgement forming a major redactional level in Q (e.g., Lührmann 1969; Kloppenborg 1987; Uro 1987; Sato 1988; Jacobson 1992; Tuckett 1996). Many Q researchers have also recognized an earlier level consisting of blocks of sapiential sayings which exhibit a similar structure and argumentative intention (Zeller 1977; Kloppenborg 1987; Piper 1988). Kloppenborg's model of two major redactions, labelled as 'sapiential' and 'announcement of judgment', has been supported by many authoritative scholars (e.g., Koester 1990a, 133–49; Crossan 1991, 229–30; 1998, 250–2; Robinson 1991; 1993; Mack 1993).

During the last ten years, however, three models for Thomas' layers have been proposed with some precision. Two of them are based on the comparison between Q and *Thomas*. The overlapping material between Q and *Thomas* is indeed striking. About one third of Q has parallels in *Thomas*, and the reversed ratio is almost as high.⁷² If one assumes that not all of these sayings have ended up in *Thomas* via the route of the canonical gospels, it is natural to assume another kind of relationship between the two sayings gospels. The assumption that *Thomas* would have known Q in the form and in the manner Matthew and Luke used it seems to run into insurmountable difficulties and is hence widely rejected.⁷³ *Thomas* does not reveal any of the literary structure or theological hallmarks which have been largely identified as being characteristic of the Q gospel (neither does Q show any special traits of *Thomas*). It is tempting, therefore, to move backwards in time and to explain the common materials as deriving from an earlier version of *Thomas*, an oral or written source of Jesus' sayings, which had its impact on both gospels. Q would thus help in revealing the oldest traditional layer in *Thomas*.⁷⁴

Stephen J. Patterson has suggested that this foundational source was oral.⁷⁵ Following Kloppenborg's stratification of Q, Patterson argues that the common oral tradition was redacted by Q¹ (the initial 'sapiential' version of Q)⁷⁶ into a programme of 'seeking the reign of God'⁷⁷ and later by Q² to serve the 'new apocalyptic paradigm' of the

⁷² These ratios are based on Crossan's calculations (1998, 248–59, 587–91).

⁷³ E.g., Koester 1990b, 55–6; Patterson 1993b, 196.

⁷⁴ If Robinson's and Heil's argument will hold, the Greek version of *Gos. Thom.* 36 contains a stunning piece of evidence for the view that *Thomas* has preserved a reading that is older than the version of Q used by Matthew and Luke. According to them, *P. Oxy.* 655.9–10 has preserved a reading (οὐ ξάτνει, 'not carding') that provided the basis for misconstruing it as αὐξάνει, 'growing' (so probably in Q; cf. Matt 6:28 and Luke 12:27); see Robinson and Heil 1998; Robinson 1999a; 1999b; cf., however, Schröter 1999 responded to by Robinson and Heil (2001).

⁷⁵ Patterson 1993b, 197, 208.

⁷⁶ Q 6:20b–23b, 27–35, 36–45, 46–9; Q 9:57–60(61–2); 10:2–11, 16; Q 11:2–4, 9–13; Q 12:2–7, 11–12; Q 12:22b–31, 33–4; and probably Q 13:24; 14:26–7; 17:33; 14:34–5. See Kloppenborg 1987, 171–245. More recently Kloppenborg has suggested that Q 13:18–21 was perhaps attached to Q 12:22b–31, 33–4 and that Q 15:4–7, 8–10; 16:13, 16, 18; 17:1–2, 3–4, 6 belong to the earliest level of Q (see Kloppenborg 2000a, 146 and the individual studies listed there). Note that the term 'sapiential' in Kloppenborg's layering does not primarily refer to content, but to the form of the sayings (Kloppenborg 1996, 51–2).

⁷⁷ Patterson 1993b, 210.

later redactor.⁷⁸ In *Thomas*' redaction, the common material⁷⁹ has been adapted to the context of a privatizing and mystifying theology which, according to Patterson, lends itself to Gnosticism. Irrespective of that gnosticizing redaction, *Thomas* lies closer to the oral context of the original common tradition than Q. This is indicated by the fact that most of the sayings from the common tradition taken up by *Thomas* have not been given a specifically Thomasine interpretation. In some cases *Thomas* has preserved both the earlier form (close to the common tradition) and the form that has been recast in the service of *Thomas*' own theology. Thus, for example, the above-mentioned doublet in *Gos. Thom.* 101 reflects *Thomas*' gnostic perspective, while its counterpart in saying 55 reads more or less the same as Q and thus belongs to the common tradition.⁸⁰

Patterson's model is liable to at least four objections. First, the presumption that there was an early, rather fixed oral source of Jesus' sayings, from which both Q and *Thomas* drew much of their materials, does not receive any external support. It is universally argued that the synoptic gospels did not utilize such a source, but received their common materials by means of textual communication (according to the Two-Source Theory, from Mark and the 'Q Gospel').⁸¹ Paul,

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 212–14. According to Kloppenborg, the second edition added to the earlier collection the following sayings: Q 3:7–9, 16b–17; Q 6:23c; Q 7:1–10, 18–23, 31–5; Q 10:12, 13–15; Q 11:14–15, 16, 17–26, (27–8), 29–32, 33–6, 39b–44, 46–52; Q 12:39–40, 42b–6, 49, 50–3, 54–9; Q 17:23–4, 37b, 26–30, 34–5; 19:12–27; 22:28–30. In addition to these two major redactions Kloppenborg has suggested a third redactional layer in which Q 4:1–13 and also Q 11:42c and 16:17 were added. See Kloppenborg 1987, 102–70, 256–62 and 1990.

⁷⁹ Patterson (1993b, 194–6) divides the common material into four groups: 1) Sayings which have not been recast by Q's apocalypticism or *Thomas*' Gnosticism: *Gos. Thom.* 6:3; 14:4; 20:2–4; 26:1–2; 32; 33:1; 33:2–3; 34; 36; 45:1; 45:2–3; 47:2; 54; 55; 58; 63; 68:1–2; 69:2; 72:1–2; 73; 76:3; 86:1–2; 94; 96:1–2; 107; 113; 2) Parallels with Kloppenborg's Q², which do not, however, connote an apocalyptic understanding of the world in *Thomas*: *Gos. Thom.* 10; 16:1–4; 24; 35:1–2; 39:1–2; 41:1–2; 44:1–3; 46:1, 2b; 64:1–12; 78:1–3; 89:1–2; 91; 103. 3) Sayings which have been gnosticized in *Thomas*, but which also survive in a non-gnostic form: *Gos. Thom.* 2; 92 (cf. 94); 3 (cf. 113); 5:2 (cf. 6:3); 69:1 (cf. 68:1–2); 101 (cf. 55). 4) Sayings which have been transformed into an apocalyptic form in Q and a gnostic form in *Thomas*: 4:2; 21:3; 61:1; 61:3.

⁸⁰ For other examples, see group 3 in n. 79.

⁸¹ If Mark did not know a written Q document (for the opposite view, see Catchpole 1991 and Fleddermann 1995), the overlaps between Mark and Q might support the view that there were some relatively fixed oral collections of Jesus' sayings used by the authors of Q and Mark. However, we cannot be sure that Mark received these traditions in oral form. Mark may have been familiar with traditions which derived from written collections used

on the other hand, does evince an oral tradition of the Lord's sayings in a few instances, but only Jesus' words at the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11:23–5) are fully quoted, so that one can argue for a fixed oral liturgical tradition.⁸² What is probably the most striking parallel between Paul and *Thomas*, namely 1 Cor. 2:9 (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 17), is a scriptural quotation, not a saying of the Lord from an oral tradition. Besides *Thomas*, there is no extracanonical writing that would give additional support to the view that a relatively solid body of sayings⁸³ attributed to Jesus was stored up orally and used independently by two or more early Christian gospels.⁸⁴ Secondly, Patterson relies on the form-critical model according to which the tradition process is divided into two sequential phases, one of oral transmission and one of written redaction. This model is open to criticism, as has been argued above. Thirdly, in Patterson's stratification, whenever one identifies a feature in *Thomas* which is suspected of being a trace of the synoptic redaction (cf., for example, the expression 'worthy of' in *Gos. Thom.*

by the Q people. Note that the Q/Mark overlaps reveal much more clustering (cf., e.g., Mark 6:8–13/Q 10:2–12; Mark 3:22–7/Q 11:14–23) than Q/*Thomas* overlaps. For Mark's possible connections with the Q people, see Räisänen 1990, 242–52.

⁸² In 1 Cor. 7:10–11 and 9:14, Paul does not quote the saying he is referring to, and it is therefore difficult to say in what form Paul knew these sayings. In some instances, Paul is using language which comes quite close to Jesus' sayings in the synoptic gospels (cf. Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12–13 and Q 6:27–8; Rom. 13:7 and Mark 12:17; Rom. 14:14 and Mark 7:15; Rom. 13:8–10 and Mark 12:29–31), but there is no certainty that Paul is aware of any connection between these words and Jesus, or even that they were circulating as Jesus' sayings by the time Paul was writing. For a recent intriguing discussion on the matter, see Hollander 2000. Hollander arrives at a rather sceptical attitude towards recovering the oral teaching of the historical Jesus. A different view is offered by Dunn in a recent article (2000). Dunn, with reliance on Bailey (1991), argues for the idea of an 'informal controlled tradition' as the best explanation for the oral transmission of the Jesus tradition. Bailey's idea is based on the study of oral traditions in contemporary Middle East village life. The manner in which a *single* village controls and preserves its oral traditions cannot, however, be directly compared to the manner in which the traditions about Jesus were transmitted in early Christian *communities*. Early Christianity was sociologically and geographically much more incoherent than the 'village' analogy would require. It would be more appropriate to apply the analogy to one early Christian community only (for example, the 'Q people'; cf. Mark's possible knowledge of the Q traditions discussed in the previous note).

⁸³ At the same time we have to presume that the sayings for the most part were 'wandering logia' since very few common clusters are recognized in *Thomas* and Q.

⁸⁴ It has sometimes been suggested that such writings as the *Apocryphon of James* or the *Dialogue of the Saviour* were written at the time when independent oral collections of Jesus' sayings still circulated among early Christian groups, but nothing in their content supports the idea of fixed oral traditions.

55), one is forced to explain it in terms of later textual corruption.⁸⁵ Patterson's model simply does not leave any other option in such cases. Finally, the stratification based on the shared material in Q and *Thomas* does not explain other synoptic or synoptic-type material in *Thomas* which does not reveal signs of what Patterson calls 'gnosticizing redaction'.

William E. Arnal has proposed a model for the stratification of *Thomas* that is similar to that of Patterson but differs from it on several significant points.⁸⁶ Both scholars divide the gospel into a gnostic-leaning and sapiential stratum. For both, Q plays an important role in discerning the different strata in *Thomas*. But whereas Patterson uses Q to identify a common oral source behind the gospels, Arnal uses Kloppenborg's stratification of Q as a model for reconstructing a similar stratification for *Thomas*. According to Arnal, the common source hypothesis as well as other documentary hypotheses are insufficient to explain the development within the Thomasine tradition itself and, most importantly, tend to ignore an area of 'comparative inquiry that focuses more on the issue of social setting and stance of the documents'.⁸⁷

The earlier redactional stratum in *Thomas* identified by Arnal contains wisdom material similar to Q in form and content but it is not restricted to the overlapping material.⁸⁸ Unlike Patterson's oral 'common tradition', this stratum is a result of a single, coherent redaction which reveals itself in the same stylistic and thematic characteristics identified in several sayings.⁸⁹ The social setting of this redaction is very similar to that of Q¹. Both documents reflect village or town life and 'were composed in a context in which increased exploitation of the country-side and peasantry by the urban elites contributed to considerable social integration and economic distress'.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ All affinities with the synoptic redaction are explained in this way by Patterson; see 1993a, 91–3.

⁸⁶ Arnal 1995.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 473.

⁸⁸ According to Arnal, the following sayings can be ascribed to this redactional layer with some confidence: *Gos. Thom.* 3; 5; 6; 9; 14; 16; 20; 26; 31; 32; 34–6; 42; 45; 47; 54; 55; 57; 63–5; 71; 74; 76; 86; 89; 95–8; 107; 109, 110 (*ibid.*, 478 n. 17). Many of these sayings appear in Patterson's list of the 'common tradition' (compare above n. 79), but such sayings as 9; 31; 42; 57; 65; 71; 74; 76; 97; 109, and 110 are not listed by Patterson since they do not have a Q parallel.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 477–8.

⁹⁰ Further common features are literacy and a scribal mentality, a group organization that

In contrast to the sapiential stratum the later stratum in *Thomas* is characterized by a gnostic orientation which is revealed, for example, by deliberate obscurity and corollary use of extratextual points of reference, the presence of named disciples, a tendency toward the dialogue form, common thematic dimensions, such as 'becoming one' and 'single one', and reference to primordial unity and to androgyny.⁹¹ In contrast to Q's stronger emphasis on community formation (fostered by an apocalyptic worldview), the gnostic redaction leans toward a more individualistic theology and reflects a less organized group life.⁹²

Arnal's view about the social setting of *Thomas*' final redaction concurs with some of my own results presented in Chapter 3, where I argued that *Thomas*' community did not rigidly separate itself from society at large. His approach avoids the problems involved in Patterson's limitation to the shared material in Q and *Thomas*, and does not show unfounded confidence in an early oral source behind both gospels. Furthermore, Arnal's concentration on changing social settings in Q and *Thomas* leaves room for different documentary explanations and is not bound to one source-critical solution only.

Can the Thomasine sayings, then, be divided into two main layers, sapiential and 'gnostic', as neatly as Arnal suggests? Most of the sayings listed in Arnal's secondary stratum reveal features that are widely recognized as reflecting typically Thomasine theology, and their belonging to a later development in the process of transmission can hardly be contested. My hesitation about Arnal's stratification concerns his claim that *Thomas* shows 'a considerable degree of inconsistency'⁹³ which is best explained by splitting the gospel into two strata.⁹⁴ According to Arnal, the earlier wisdom-oriented stratum is determined by 'the theme of disclosing the true nature of things through penetrating discernment and the refusal to accept conventional interpretations'.⁹⁵ However, this

did not entirely withdraw from the larger world, and a group mentality characterized by the adoption of a particular understanding of the world and a corresponding ethic. *Ibid.*, 491-2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 478-9. Arnal ascribes the following sayings to the gnostic stratum: *Gos. Thom.* 11; 13; 15; 18; 21-2; 27-8; 49-50; 51; 60; 61; 83; 84; 101; 105; 108; 111; 114. The list does not include such sayings from the earlier stratum in which, according to Arnal, emendations were made from the gnostic perspective.

⁹² This can already be recognized, according to Arnal, in the earlier stratum; see *ibid.*, 490.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 475.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 475-6.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 477.

theme is also present in many of those sayings which Arnal considers to manifest 'a gnostic orientation'.⁹⁶ Compare, for example, the reversal of the teacher/pupil relationship (*Gos. Thom.* 13 and 108); the end is, in fact, a return to the beginning (*Gos. Thom.* 18); the disciples are little children (*Gos. Thom.* 21–2); the solitary are blessed (*Gos. Thom.* 49); the eschatological great moment has already come in contrast to all evidence (*Gos. Thom.* 51); the disciples should discern their true images behind the visible reality (*Gos. Thom.* 84); the conventional kinship values are completely reversed (*Gos. Thom.* 101; 105).⁹⁷ Moreover, it is difficult to see how the radical rejection of conventional religious obligations (e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 6; 14; 89; sapiential stratum in Arnal's stratification) would reflect a different social setting than those belonging to the secondary stratum.⁹⁸ Thus, even if Arnal's stratification has obvious advantages when compared to that of Patterson, the clear-cut division into two strata with respective social settings is not easily substantiated.

Finally, De Conick has argued for a quite different solution: *Thomas* developed as a rolling corpus which was layered by several authors with new materials over a lengthy period of time (c. 50–150 CE).⁹⁹ De Conick explicitly rejects the models based on Q/*Thomas* comparison and the assumption that there existed an early sapiential collection of Jesus' sayings.¹⁰⁰ According to De Conick, the 'original *Thomas*' was a very old gospel which probably originated from the Jerusalem church and was apocalyptic in orientation.¹⁰¹ This kernel material¹⁰² is revealed

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 478.

⁹⁷ My point is not to argue that some of these sayings are *not* later than some others. For example, *Gos. Thom.* 101 is clearly a more elaborated version of saying 55, as argued above. I am, however, questioning whether there exists such a deep ideological gulf between the sayings 'disclosing the true nature of the world' and sayings revealing typically Thomasine features. One problem in Arnal's stratification is his unreflective use of the term 'gnostic mythology'; see n. 63 and my discussion on *Thomas*' gnosticism in Ch. 2.

⁹⁸ See my analyses on *Gos. Thom.* 14, 89 and *Thomas*' antiritualism (Uro 1993, 2000, and pp. 77–8 in this book, respectively).

⁹⁹ De Conick 2002.

¹⁰⁰ De Conick's model of a 'rolling corpus' has, however, some affinities with Sato's theory of Q as a 'Ringbuch' (Sato 1988).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Quispel, who has recently stated that the 'Judaic Christian sayings' of *Thomas* were written down in 50 CE in Jerusalem (2000, 214–15).

¹⁰² De Conick (2002, 193–4) ascribes a surprisingly large number of sayings to the (Jerusalem?) kernel gospel: *Gos. Thom.* 2, 4b; 5; 6b; 6c; 8; 9; 10; 11a; 14b; 15; 16a; 16b; 17; 20; 21b,d; 21e; 24b; 25; 26; 30; 31; 32; 33a; 33b; 34; 35; 36; 38a; 39; 40; 41; 42; 44; 45; 46; 47a; 47b; 47c; 48; 54; 55; 57; 58; 60a; 61a; 62a; 62b; 64; 65; 66; 68a; 69a; 69c; 71; 72; 73; 74; 76; 78; 79; 81; 82; 86; 89; 90; 91; 92; 93; 94; 95; 96; 97; 98; 99; 100a,b; 102; 103; 104; 107; 109; 111a.

when later developments and sayings which reflect responses to various crises and questions about ideology that arose among those who received the original gospel are peeled off. De Conick's multilayer model presumes 'that certain discussions or problems seemed to have occurred at particular times in the broader early Christian experience.' Thus, for example, *Thomas'* concern about circumcision (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 53) reflects a period during which the conversion of non-Jews became increasingly popular, that is mid- to late-first century.

This kind of criterion for identifying and dating layers is open to criticism, however. The discussion on 'true' circumcision continued in early Christianity well into the second century within anti-Jewish polemic, and the closest Christian parallel to *Gos. Thom.* 53 is found in Justin's *Dialogue with Tryphon* (19.3), a mid-second-century text.¹⁰³ Similar objections can also be loaded against other layers identified by De Conick. There is no compelling reason to date sayings which she labels 'Hermetic' and 'encratite' to the period in which the influx of Gentiles was for the first time visible in some Christian groups. If the gospel reached its final form by the mid-second century, as De Conick argues, and some of *Thomas'* sayings really are influenced by Alexandrian exegesis, which is not impossible, in theory we can suggest any time from the mid-first¹⁰⁴ to the mid-second century for this influence. De Conick's attempt to reconstruct a series of redactional impulses which would reflect regularly developing crises or issues in the Christian movement at large does not take into account the geographical and cultural differences and presumes that certain experiences were current only in certain periods among early Christian groups.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, her study demonstrates the need to rethink the compositional history of *Thomas* and the binary model dominating the theories that build on current studies on Q.

¹⁰³ See also *Barn.* 9:1–5 and *Ptolemy's Letter to Flora* (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 33.5.11). The same argument is found in *Tanhumna* B 7 (18a). For an analysis of *Gos. Thom.* 53, see Matjanič 1998b, 178–80.

¹⁰⁴ One may refer to the activity of Apollos in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4–6; Acts 18:27).

¹⁰⁵ De Conick is not specific about the number of the redactions, but the reader's impression is that she basically assumes one redaction per issue or crisis.

7. A catena of excerpts?

There are still other ways of explaining the composition of *Thomas*. Hans-Martin Schenke has recently marshalled piles of 'aporiae' in *Thomas* which, according to him, demonstrate that the gospel originated as a catena of excerpts from a book similar to (or even identical with) Papias' lost work entitled *Exegesis of the Sayings of the Lord*.¹⁰⁶ His theory does not presume two or more successive redactions, as the stratifications surveyed above, but a single, not very skillful or strong redaction.¹⁰⁷ His approach can also be contrasted with those seeking argumentative structures or 'sophisticated learning' (cf. Asgeirsson) in the gospel. In several sayings, Schenke finds signs of 'missing' narrative elements (e.g., *Gos. Thom.* 60; 61) and antecedents (8:1; 74; 76:3), artificial questions that seem to be 'sham settings' (e.g., 21:1; 22:3), shortening of texts (21:9; 57; 75), and dislocated sayings (6:2–6 is answered in 14; cf. also 24:1 and 77:2–3). All these peculiarities are best explained if *Thomas* was originally a collection of excerpts. The cornerstone of Schenke's argument is built on the sayings in which a new speaker belonging to a quite different level of narrative unexpectedly appears. Thus, for him the narrative-breaking comment in *Gos. Thom.* 111 ('Does not Jesus say . . .?') is not a later gloss incorporated into the text, as many scholars have argued, but a voice of the hermeneutic of the commentary from which the sayings have been extracted.¹⁰⁸ Such places indicate that the author of the gospel failed to eliminate some commentary-like elements of the source book and, thus, they betray the process through which the gospel came into being (Schenke finds this voice also in 61:5; 21:5; 29:3).

Not all of Schenke's 'aporiae' support his thesis with equal force. What can, for example, be inferred from the 'sham settings' in 21:1 and 22:3? Many dialogue gospels use the same stylistic technique, presenting questions which convey very little meaning in themselves and which only elicit the expected answer, but there is no need to explain this feature as being due to the 'cut and paste' redaction

¹⁰⁶ Schenke 1994.

¹⁰⁷ Many Thomasine scholars work on the single redactor model. Quispel's theory about three written sources (a Jewish-Christian gospel, an encratite gospel, and a Hermetic gnomology) used by the author of *Thomas* belongs to this category (see, e.g., Quispel 1981).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 24–6.

proposed by Schenke. There are textual problems in such notoriously difficult sayings as 60 and 61, but it is not necessary to suggest a considerable amount of 'missing' information because of these difficulties. The fact that scholars, including Schenke himself,¹⁰⁹ have been able to create plausible conjectures, which do not require larger narrative frameworks, points to the possibility of textual corruption rather than to an unsuccessful 'pasting' technique. Schenke does not discuss the alternative that at least some of his 'aporiae' could be explained by textual corruptions (that the transmission of the text sometimes produced quite peculiar readings is clear, for example, in *Gos. Thom.* 30:1–2; cf. *P. Oxy.* 1,23–30)¹¹⁰ or disarrangement in the writing process.¹¹¹

On the other hand there are places in *Thomas* where it is hard to avoid the impression that something indeed is missing. The third person pronoun in *Gos. Thom.* 74 ('He said . . .') has no antecedent in the text. 'The man' in saying 8:1 and 'his treasure' in 76:3 are equally mysterious. What is 'this house' in which two can make peace with each other (*Gos. Thom.* 48)? The plots of the parables in sayings 21:9 (The Man with Sickle) and 57 (The Seed Growing Secretly) are not easy to follow.

Can we exclude the possibility that at least some of these peculiarities have resulted from the process through which the gospel came into being, and not only from its later textual transmission? People did write excerpts, abbreviations and anthologies for various reasons in antiquity.¹¹² They did not always put everything they performed orally into writing, and, as recent studies on orality and literacy have pointed out, the performance was the 'real thing', not the written text.¹¹³ A good interpreter could avoid the problems created by some obscure places in the text by giving the missing information in the performance or correcting the mistakes in the manuscript. It is not reasonable to

¹⁰⁹ See *ibid.*, 14 n. 12 and 13.

¹¹⁰ For *Gos. Thom.* 30, see pp. 102–3 in this volume.

¹¹¹ Cf. Marjanen's discussion on the possible disarrangement of sayings 6 and 14 (1998b, 167–8), albeit he himself regards such theories as conjectural.

¹¹² Snyder (2000) offers examples of the use of excerpts and anthologies in Hellenistic philosophical schools (Seneca and the Elder Pliny; *ibid.*, 31–2), Qumran (e.g., *4Q Testimonia*; *ibid.*, 148–50) and Christian groups (e.g., *PMich.* 3689; *ibid.*, 204). Examples of abbreviated notes are also Clement's *Excerpta ex Theodoto* and probably the *Gospel of Philip* (for the latter, see the careful discussion and comparative materials in Turner 1996).

¹¹³ The expression is taken from Downing 1996, 32 n. 14.

suggest that the whole gospel is a collection of excerpts from a single book, as Schenke proposes. The evidence he offers points in too many different directions. His study serves, nevertheless, as a reminder of the various options we have in explaining the composition of the gospel. It is possible that the author(s) of the *Gospel of Thomas* used a number of sources which were not complete 'published' texts but informal notes, extracts from other writings or oral information given by some authoritative person. The origin of such sources may have been diverse,¹¹⁴ which would explain the mixed evidence that has fuelled the continual debate over *Thomas*' sources. Moreover, the earlier draft versions of the gospel, possibly on waxed tablets or other reusable writing materials, may have functioned as sources for new performances¹¹⁵ which ended up being part of the complete text¹¹⁶ written on a scroll or codex.¹¹⁷ The existence of the doublets could in fact indicate this kind of process.¹¹⁸

These hypothetical thoughts about the compositional history of *Thomas* only stress the complexity of the issue. They do not provide a persuasive case against the view that *Thomas* went through two or more editions. However, they show that the line between the single main redaction and multiple redactions is not absolute if we allow for the possibility that *Thomas* partially grew out from or is based on earlier notes or drafts.

¹¹⁴ Thus also Schröter 1997, 137; see also Baarda 1991, 390.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Downing (1996, 36), who suggests this kind of writing process for Q. Downing notes the widespread use of reusable writing materials in antiquity.

¹¹⁶ Even though it may be problematic to speak of a 'complete' text in the sense of modern printed books, the comparison between the Coptic translation and Greek fragments shows that at some point the text of *Thomas* reached a relatively fixed form. There is fluidity in details and some substantial differences (e.g., the the Greek and Coptic versions of saying 36), but no saying is completely missing in one version and the order of the sayings is the same, except for the combination of 30:1 and 77:2 in *P. Oxy.* 1.

¹¹⁷ It is impossible to say whether *Thomas* was originally copied on a scroll or codex. One could argue that the capacity of the codex for random access, as distinct from the sequential access offered by the roll, was more convenient for sayings collections (cf. the similar argument by Gamble 1995, 63, for early collections of Paul's letters). On the other hand, we know that later in Egypt *Thomas* was also copied on a scroll (*P. Oxy.* 655), even though the great majority of the surviving Christian books from the second and third centuries are in the form of codices. For the Christian adoption of the codex, see Gamble 1995, 49–66 and Millard 2000, 74–83.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Asgeirsson 1998a, 340.

8. Towards more complex theories

None of the theories reviewed above regarding *Thomas*' composition is without problems. My critical comments are not meant to be a prelude to a new model of *Thomas*' layers or sources. Such would require a much more comprehensive analysis of the Thomasine sayings than has been possible in this chapter, and even then the results would need to be treated with great caution. The chief aim of my discussion is to underscore a few issues which I think should be taken more seriously in future research.

The rhetorical culture that was dominant in the world where early Christian gospels were written should not be ignored. Most of the traditional source-critical analyses have been based on the assumption that early Christian authors worked with other texts (or oral sources) either accurately copying or consciously changing the source text for theological and other purposes. The possibility that scribes thought that they were producing or transcribing new rhetorical variations of the received traditions, not making 'critical revisions', is seldom fully recognized in source-critical and redaction-critical analyses. The doublets of *Thomas* are a model example of how these 'troubling' sayings can be seen as shedding new light on the process through which the gospel came into being. Whereas a modern exegetical mind would assume that only a 'schizophrenic author' would include conflicting sayings and doublets from various sources,¹¹⁹ the ancient author, who lived in a rhetorical culture, was more open to accepting and to creating variation and reformulation. For the ancient author, the saying in *Gos. Thom.* 101 would not necessarily appear as a conflicting version of *Gos. Thom.* 55, but rather as another version of the same saying that exhibits its true meaning in a more elaborated manner. This insight also has implications for assessing the single author versus multiple redactors as explanations for *Thomas*' compositional history. 'Conflicting' sayings cannot be easily used as an argument against the single author model, at least not without a careful analysis of the rhetorical function and social implications of each saying.

Moreover, a cogent theory about *Thomas*' composition should be able to explain the complexity of evidence and avoid giving overly simplified answers. One of the most perplexing things in the gospel is its mixture of

¹¹⁹ Cf. De Conick 2002, 180.

early-looking traditions with features that very probably derive from the canonical gospels. For example, *Gos. Thom.* 65 provides a version of the Parable of the Tenants which is strikingly free of any theological influences from the synoptic gospels¹²⁰ and is much more plausible both in terms of story-telling¹²¹ and ancient viticulture.¹²² Yet the use of Psalm 118:22 in *Gos. Thom.* 66 indicates that at some point *Thomas* was influenced by the content of at least one of the synoptics (cf. Mark 12:10; Matt. 21:42; Luke 20:17),¹²³ most probably by Matthew's text, where the parables of the Tenants (Matt. 21:33–44) and Feast (22:1–14) appear together (cf. *Gos. Thom.* 64–5). This influence is not best explained as 'a late scribal alteration'¹²⁴ since the arrangement of the unit in *Gos. Thom.* 63–5 (66) that focuses on the display of wealth and status is more appropriately described as an editorial activity than as a late harmonizing alteration.¹²⁵ This redaction did not understand *Gos. Thom.* 66 as a Christological key to the

¹²⁰ *Thomas* lacks the identification of the owner as God by means of Isa. 5:1–5 and the son as Jesus, who is vindicated after his death (cf. Ps. 117:22–3 LXX), and the deuteronomistic theological pattern expressed in the killing of all servants sent by the owner. The more primitive nature of the Thomasine version is often endorsed (e.g., Montefiori 1960–61, 236–7; Jeremias 1963, 70–7; Crossan 1971; Zockler 1999, 49–52; but compare Snodgrass 1975), and such a non-allegorical version was even postulated before the discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas* (Dodd 1936, 126–30). For Ménard (1988, 10), *Gos. Thom.* 65 is one of the few early and independent sayings in the gospel. Of course, we cannot *a priori* exclude the possibility that *Thomas* de-allegorized and compressed the synoptic tradition. Recent studies on the parable by Kloppenborg Verbin (2000b; 2001) have, however, added considerable credibility to the view that there existed another, early trajectory of interpretation in which the owner or the son are not vindicated and wealth and status displays are criticized. This interpretation would be in accord with restoring the lacuna of the opening line in *Gos. Thom.* 65 with the words ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΝΧΡΗ[CTH]C 'a creditor' or 'a userer' (so Dehandschutter 1974, 218; Bethge 1997, 536) and not ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΝΧΡΗ[CTO]C 'a good man' (so in Layton 1989).

¹²¹ For example, the murderous activities of the tenants before the sending of the son in Mark, based on the deuteronomistic theological pattern, render the father's action implausible and unbelievable within the conventions of a realistic narrative (Crossan 1985, 57; see also 1971).

¹²² The scriptural quotation of Isa. 5:1–7 in Mark and Matthew (abbreviated in Luke) creates a legal and horticultural incoherence in the story, confusing the situation of a newly planted vineyard, where *wages* are normally paid to workers, with that of a producing vineyard, where *rent* was due, usually in the form of crop-shares (Kloppenborg Verbin 2000b; 2001).

¹²³ It does not seem probable that *Gos. Thom.* 65 and 66 were already juxtaposed in the pre-synoptic tradition without any interpretative link between the 'son' and the 'stone' and that this tradition would have been a step toward the more allegorical interpretation found in the synoptic gospels (*pace* Crossan 1985, 60; Zockler 1999, 52).

¹²⁴ *Pace* Patterson 1993a, 51.

¹²⁵ Cf. Luomanen (1995, 128), who argues with respect to *Gos. Thom.* 43–5 that 'redaction' influenced by Matthew's text is a better term than 'a later harmonization'.

parable of the Tenants, but rather as a concluding statement¹²⁶ to the whole section in 63–5 emphasizing the true wisdom which has been rejected by those who are seeking after wealth and status. The theory of the composition should, thus, be able to combine both the influence of the canonical gospels and *Thomas*' access to traditions that are clearly independent of the canonical gospels.¹²⁷ At this particular point one could postulate an independent source and a major redaction which was familiar with at least the Matthean order and traditions. What has been said above about the possibility of diverse sources, however, prevents us from making any sweeping generalizations.

Finally, if the ultimate theories about *Thomas*' composition and sources are anticipated to be more complex than the usual graphical presentations of the synoptic gospels with their relatively simple arrows and boxes, one is forced to ask whether the study of the Thomasine sayings has any implications for the study of the Jesus traditions in general. The complexities we face in the study of *Thomas* may lead us to rethink some of the conventional ways of understanding the writing process through which the synoptic gospels came into being. The 'scribal' model that has dominated synoptic research should be replaced by a model in which the activity of early Christian authors is set against the background of the rhetorical/oral culture. Indeed, many of the synoptic variants of Jesus' sayings and stories about Jesus can be seen as oral retelling or rhetorical variations.¹²⁸ According to the conventions of the dominant culture, the sayings of Jesus were continually performed anew to meet the needs of the community, and some of the new versions were acceptable for transcription. This does not mean, however, that we should resort to some obscure theories about 'oral Q' or any other oral gospels.¹²⁹ Scribal and oral cultures were intertwined,

¹²⁶ I owe this observation to Dunderberg (oral communication).

¹²⁷ I believe that Wilson (1960) was basically right in claiming that some of the Thomasine sayings are independent of the synoptic gospels while others are not.

¹²⁸ This is well demonstrated in Dunn 2000.

¹²⁹ There is a problem in Dunn's (2000) division between 'Q' (passages where the wording is close) and 'q' materials (passages which should be explained in terms of flexibility of oral tradition). Dunn states that the 'working assumption that Q = q is one of the major weaknesses in all Q research' (298 n. 69). However, Q researchers do not automatically presume that all non-Markan parallels between Matthew and Luke derive from the written Q document (cf. the variant zero in the International Q Project's formatting). Moreover, the degree of common wording is not the only criterion used in deciding whether a particular passage derives from Q or not. The common order and thematic structures are equally important factors when the text of Q is reconstructed.

as has been argued throughout this chapter. The work of the Christian scribes was conditioned by the oral and rhetorical culture of their time.

The study of the Thomasine sayings breaks the patterns in which the relation among early Christian gospels is seen merely in 'scribal' terms. This methodological challenge may prove to be more important for the study of the historical Jesus than the information the *Gospel of Thomas* gives about the teaching of Jesus.

Epilogue:

Does Thomas make a difference?

How much does our view of the origins of early Christianity change if *Thomas* is taken seriously? Is the gospel *the* text that helps us to 'break the spell of the gospel paradigm',¹ or just one of the 'apocryphal' texts which does not add to the picture of the earliest Christian religion and movements to any considerable degree? The comparative analyses carried out in this book allow a few comments on the issue.

The date of *Thomas* is, of course, a crucial issue when the value of the gospel as a source for the earliest Jesus movements is assessed. The above analyses do not support the date of 50–70 CE either for *Thomas*² or for an alleged first edition of the gospel.³ Although *Thomas* certainly incorporates earlier traditions and extracts from earlier writings, I was not able to identify a larger 'James layer' or any other 'original gospel' which could be dated to an early period of the gospel traditions. The comparison between Matthew and *Thomas* gave indications that the gospel, in the form we know it, belongs to a later period when the issues of organization and church hierarchy had become acute. In a recent commentary, Richard Valantasis has argued along similar lines, noting that the writings of Ignatius could be viewed as reflecting the same 'watershed period of Christian living' as the gospels of John and *Thomas*, a period when organizational debates and the question of Jesus' presence were current.⁴ Ismo Dunderberg's study on the use of 'authorial fiction' in the Gospel of John and *Thomas* points in the same direction. Dunderberg argues that, in their own ways, 'both gospels indicate awareness of the existence of other Jesus traditions which, in turn, could have required that they use Jesus' disciples as authenticating

¹ Cameron 1999, 239.

² Such a date is advocated by Davies (1983, 146–7).

³ Crossan (1991, 427) argues that the 'James layer' was composed by the fifties. Cf. also Patterson 1993a, 120.

⁴ Valantasis 1997, 19.

figures'.⁵ According to Dunderberg, it is this 'broadly attested tendency of claiming apostolic authority, taking place above all during later generations of early Christianity, that offers the most plausible setting for using the authenticating figures such as the Beloved Disciple in John and Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas*'.⁶

Some echoes of Matthew's redaction, which cannot easily be explained as later textual harmonizations,⁷ indicate that the writing of that gospel should be taken as a *terminus a quo* for *Thomas*. The combination of *both* traditions which more or less directly derive from the synoptic gospels *and* independent traditions recalls a situation reflected in the Papias' fragment.⁸ Copies and versions of Matthew's and Mark's gospels were circulating, although their apostolic authority was not necessarily accepted without reservations (Mark did not write down Peter's memories 'in order' and he knew about the Lord's teachings only indirectly; the original text of Matthew, who was a follower of Jesus, was variously translated). In his *Exegesis of the Sayings of the Lord*, Papias himself preferred traditions and sources which he claimed to represent the 'living and abiding voice'.⁹ In a similar manner, the author of *Thomas* wanted to present the sayings of the 'living Jesus'.

In *Thomas*, there are no signs of the demiurgical systems which gained popularity in early Christianity from the middle of the second century onwards. This fact and the above considerations seem to indicate that the best conjecture for *Thomas*' date is the early second century (c. 100–140 CE).¹⁰

Dating *Thomas* to the second century CE could be seen as diminishing the value of the gospel as a source for the first-century Jesus movements. Admittedly, it makes it harder to push *Thomas*' central theological ideas back to a very early period, but this is fatal only if we intend to show that many of these ideas derive from the historical Jesus

⁵ Dunderberg 1998b, 87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷ See Uro 1993 and pp. 117, 131–2 in this book. Note also that, according to Patterson's analysis, at least three of the four places in which *Thomas*' order may have been influenced by the canonical gospels have parallels only in Matthew (*Gos. Thom.* 32 + 33:1–2; cf. *Matt.* 5:14b–15; *Gos. Thom.* 43–5; cf. *Matt.* 12:31–5; *Gos. Thom.* 92–4; cf. *Matt.* 7:6–7). See Patterson 1993a, 92. Also the fourth, *Gos. Thom.* 64–6, probably reflects Matthew's order, as I have argued above (pp. 131–2).

⁸ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15–16.

⁹ *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4.

¹⁰ Cf. Valantasis (1997, 19), who dates *Thomas* to the period of 100–110 CE.

or from his first followers. If we are, however, interested in examining the diverse forms of Christianity at the turn of the first century, this date for *Thomas* creates a specific setting in which the gospel can be studied. For such an approach, the second-century date does not serve to 'render implausible the notion of (contaminating, gnostic) "influence" on the first century Christianities'.¹¹ Rather, *Thomas* serves as a counterbalance against the one-sided picture that the writings of the New Testament or the *Apostolic Fathers* give about the various teachings and the groups of the period. To mention a well-known example, the author of 2 Timothy presents heavy and probably unfair charges against 'godless' people, among whom Hymenaeus and Philetus, who hold 'that the resurrection has already taken place' (2 Tim. 2:16–18). Had we not documents like the *Gospel of Thomas*, our picture of these teachers would totally depend on such negative accusations. With *Thomas*, however, we can get a fuller and more authentic teaching deriving from a group who firmly believed that 'the repose of the dead' had already come (*Gos. Thom.* 51).¹² This and similar examples have, of course, been offered countless times in scholarly literature ever since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi writings. For some reason, however, Thomasine scholars have often forgotten where the real value of the discovery lies, i.e., in the opportunity to hear voices of 'the other side', not in deciding which side has the strongest claim for some 'authentic' teaching. The issue of the date of *Thomas* should not, therefore, be mixed with any kind of apologetic motifs, whether they arise from the myth of pristine origins or from the aspiration to preserve first-century Christianity from the 'contamination' of Thomasine theology.

However, it would be quite misleading to argue that *Thomas* has no relevance to the analysis of first-century Christian groups and religious developments. The examination of individual sayings and clusters will doubtless lead back to earlier decades and reveal ideas that are older than the final composition of the gospel. Even some of *Thomas*' central religious ideas, for example, the belief in the soul's divine origin, are such that they can scarcely have been introduced to Christian thinking by the author of the gospel. The comparison between *Thomas*' and

¹¹ Cameron 1999, 238 (paraphrasing Smith 1990, 69).

¹² One can, of course, find present eschatology also in the New Testament (cf. John and Colossians), but not in such a radical form as in *Thomas*.

Paul's anthropological language showed that the gospel represents views of the body and soul which were standard or widely believed in the Hellenistic world. It was Paul who advocated ideas that were more difficult to digest for the average pagan audience. I find it highly unlikely that the author of *Thomas* was the first Christian thinker to promulgate the 'uncomplicated Hellenistic myth of the divine origins of the self',¹³ which was current in many pre-Christian Jewish groups as well. Much more probable is the conclusion that our sources do not give a correct picture of the situation (except, perhaps, for some uncertain inferences which can be drawn from Paul's critique of his opponents) and that *Thomas* was continuing a tradition which had its roots deep in the first century.

It has been almost universally acknowledged that *Thomas* should be seen as a product of east Syrian Christianity. The gospel is thus very early; perhaps the earliest known representative of Syrian Christianity.¹⁴ I see no reason to reject the hypothesis offered by Helmut Koester almost forty years ago that 'the Thomas tradition was the oldest form of Christianity in Edessa, antedating the beginning of both Marcionite and orthodox Christianity in that area'.¹⁵ Although Koester made a highly significant opening concerning *Thomas*' location in that cultural context,¹⁶ he and those who have accepted his views have not followed this lead as far as they have been following another lead, based on James M. Robinson's idea that *Thomas* 'continues ... the most original gattung of the Jesus tradition – the *logoi sophon* ...'¹⁷ The consequence of this was that the Q-*Thomas* trajectory became the dominant approach and scholars have worked intensively at tracing this trajectory and individual sayings within it. The approach has produced significant results, but also has its downside. While looking back to earlier sources behind Q and *Thomas* and to the earliest collections of Jesus' sayings, scholars building on that paradigm have left the contemporary context of *Thomas* in the background or have been content with referring to the

¹³ Layton 1987, 360.

¹⁴ Other early writings which may derive from east Syria are the *Odes of Solomon* (mid-second century? See Vielhauer 1975, 751, but compare Drijvers 1996, 167) and the *Dialogue of the Saviour* (for a date and possible Syrian provenance, see above, pp. 50–1). Drijvers appears to think that the earliest writings of Syrian Christianity all date back to 'round about the end of the second century' (*ibid.*, 173).

¹⁵ Koester 1971 [originally 1965], 129.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 126–43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 135. Cf. Robinson 1971.

well-known facts about the role of 'Judas Thomas' in East Christian sources or to some stereotypical views on Syrian asceticism. Specialists in Syrian literature, on the other hand, have recognized the value of *Thomas* as a source for the history of Syrian Christianity, but scholars are far from having created a synthesis of *Thomas*' place in that context.¹⁸ There are a number of intriguing issues that are awaiting their full treatment, such as *Thomas*' relation to the eastern branch of Valentianism (cf. the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*) and the analysis of distinctively Syrian symbolism and traditions in *Thomas*.¹⁹ The completion of the task initiated by Walter Bauer²⁰ and called for by Koester after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices still lies in the future.

To answer the initial question, *Thomas* does make a difference. It is one of the earliest extra-canonical writings that has survived and perhaps the earliest writing deriving from east Syrian Christianity. It is a priceless document for both its age and contents. It has already changed our view of early Christian religion and history and will certainly continue to do so in the years to come.

¹⁸ The *Gospel of Thomas* is used as a source for the history of Edessene Christianity in studies of Drijvers (e.g., 1984b; 1994) and Klijn (e.g., 1965; 1972). See also Barnard 1968.

¹⁹ See my tentative suggestions in Ch. 1.

²⁰ Bauer 1971.

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