

THE ORIGINAL *GOSPEL OF THOMAS*¹

BY

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Interpreters of the *Gospel of Thomas*, for decades now, have been confronted with an enigmatic set of apparently random sayings which contain a wide diversity of religious traditions including Christian-Jewish, encratic, hermetic, and even apocalyptic-mystical traditions.² This gospel is additionally perplexing in that it contains doublets (L. 3 and 113; L. 38 and 92; L. 48 and 106; 55 and 101; 56 and 80; L. 87 and 112) and sayings which seem to contradict themselves. For instance, the gospel lauds the authority and legitimacy of James (L. 12), the first bishop of Jerusalem and leader of conservative Christian-Judaism, while at the same time applauding the “true circumcision in spirit” and rejecting physical circumcision: “If it [physical circumcision] were beneficial, their father would beget them from their mother already circumcised” (L. 53). Sabbath observation is preserved (L. 27) while other Jewish observances like dietary regulations, fasting practices, almsgiving, and even praying are viewed as “harmful to your spirits” (L. 14). References to a present spiritualized “Kingdom” abound (cf. L. 3a, 113). But what about those allusions to an imminent Eschaton, predictions like, “The heavens and earth will be rolled up in your presence” (111a; cf. L. 11a, 16a-b)? How can we account for, how can we explain the presence of these contradictory materials and doublets in one text as well as the presence of so many religious traditions?

¹ A preliminary version of this paper was presented in the Thomas Traditions session at the Society of Biblical Literature annual convention, 2000, under the title “‘Go to James the Righteous’ (*Thomas* 12): A Preliminary Sketch of the Jewish History of the *Gospel of Thomas*.” I would like to express my thanks to the members of the Thomas Traditions Group and those who responded to my presentation (Mitsugu Shinmen, Marianne Aagaard Skovmand, and Petri Luomanen) for their valuable criticisms and insights. I can never thank Gilles Quispel enough for his willingness to read and comment on my work, providing valuable feedback. This project was funded by a grant awarded by Illinois Wesleyan University. I remain indebted to the University’s generosity and support.

² For a complete discussion of the traditions which make up this gospel, see A.D.

I. *Previously Proposed Compositional Models*

Over the decades, two basic forms of the Traditional Model have been developed in order to explain the compilation of the *Gospel of Thomas* and the presence of such a great variety of sayings in one text (Diagram 1). One solution proposes that the author largely used other gospels as sources when composing his own gospel. For instance, Gilles Quispel posited three non-canonical written sources for *Thomas*:³ a Jewish-Christian gospel (possibly the *Gospel of the Nazorees*),⁴ an encratic gospel (probably the *Gospel of the Egyptians*), and a Hermetic gnomology.⁵ An encratic author from Edessa edited this material along with his own occasional comments into the present collection. His religious ideal was “the androgynous man or woman,” the holy people of Syria. Thus: “He did not intend his document to be esoteric, but an exoteric, accessible writing containing divine Sayings whose saving sense could be grasped by spiritual men.”⁶ In his most recent comment on the *Gospel of Thomas*, he states that the “Judaic Christian” sayings were written down in 50 C.E. in Jerusalem and that the encratic source was combined with them by the Edessian author of the gospel around 140 C.E.⁷

Other scholars reacted to Quispel’s theoretical model, arguing for the dependence of the gospel on one or more of the canonical gospels.⁸ Any

DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas*, Supplements to VC 33. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1996.

³ Refer to his articles: “The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament”, *VC* 11 (1957) 189-207; *idem*, “Some Remarks on the Gospel of Thomas”, *NTS* 5 (1958/1959) 276-290; *idem*, “L’Évangile selon Thomas et les Clémentines”, *VC* 12 (1958) 181-196; *idem*, “L’Évangile selon Thomas et le Diatessaron”, *VC* 13 (1959) 87-117; “The ‘Gospel of Thomas’ and the ‘Gospel of the Hebrews’”, *NTS* 12 (1966) 371-382; “The *Gospel of Thomas* Revisited”, *Colloque International sur les Textes de Nag Hammadi. Québec, 22-25 août 1978*, BCNH 1 (ed. B. Barc; Québec, 1981) 218-266.

⁴ Early in his career, G. Quispel identified the source with the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.

⁵ The Hermetic gnomology source was an idea developed later by G. Quispel and represents a modification of his original two-source theory.

⁶ Quispel, “Revisited,” p. 234.

⁷ G. Quispel, “Reincarnation and Magic in the Asclepius,” in R. van den Broek (ed.), *From Pimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition* (Amsterdam: Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica with E.J. Brill, 2000) 214-215.

⁸ R.M. Grant with D.N. Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1960); H.K. McArthur, “The Gospel According to Thomas,” in *New Testament Sidelights: Essays in Honor of Alexander Converse Purdy, Hosner Professor of New Testament, Dean of the Hartford Theological Seminary, the Hartford Seminary Foundation* (Hartford: Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1960) 43-77; J. Munck, “Bemerkungen zum koptischen Thomasevangelium,” *StTh* 14 (1960) 130-147; W.R. Schoedel, “Naassene Themes in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas,” *VC* 14 (1960) 225-234; B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London:

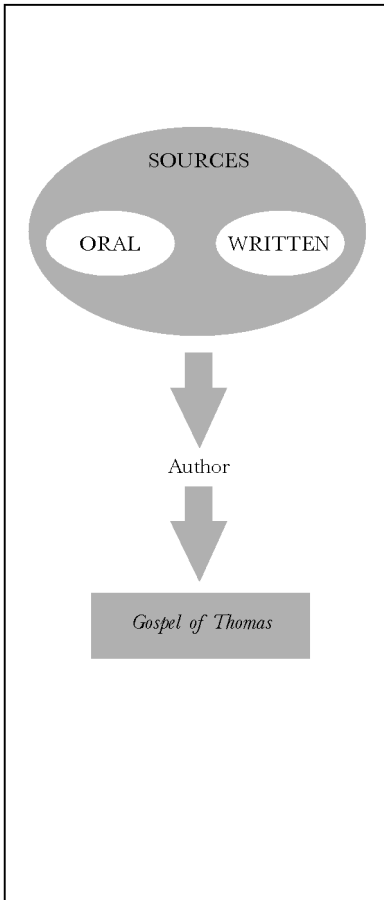


Diagram 1: Traditional Model

additions, deletions, transpositions or conflation were due to the author's freedom with his sources, a freedom typical of the second century Gnostics and even, as Robert Grant and David Noel Freedman admitted, a freedom typical of the early church fathers.⁹ Ernst Haenchen modified this vision of the author as a person who just sat down to write with the canonical texts at his disposal, randomly choosing sayings from them to include in his own gospel. Haenchen believed that the author also drew on a gnostic exegetical tradition with its own memories and used a scheme of verbal association in order to structure his gospel.¹⁰

Critique of this form of the Traditional Model was immediate. In one of R. McL. Wilson's early works on *Thomas*, he remarks about the author: "In some cases we can indeed speak of intentional or unintentional harmonization, words or phrases occurring to the mind of the author by association with what he is writing, but in others it is difficult to

Collins, 1961); E. Haenchen, *Die Botschaft des Thomas-Evangeliums*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 6 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1961); R. Kasser, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, Bibliothèque théologique (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1961); H. Schürmann, "Das Thomas-evangelium und das lukanische Sondergut," *BZ* 7 (1963) 236-260; W. Schrage, *Das Verhältnis des Thomas-Evangeliums zur synoptischen Tradition und zu den koptischen Evangelienübersetzungen*, BANW 29 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964); J. Leipoldt, *Das Evangelium nach Thomas*, TU 101 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967); J.-E. Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 5 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975); A. Lindemann, "Zur Gleichnisinterpretation im Thomas-Evangelium," ANW 71 (1980) 214-243.

⁹ Grant and Freedman, *Secret Sayings*, 141.

¹⁰ E. Haenchen, "Literatur zum Thomasevangelium," *ThR* 27 (1961/1962) 147-178, 306-338.

imagine him selecting a word here, a saying there, and keeping part of another saying for use at a later stage. Explanations which are to be valid must take account of what we can learn of the writer's methods, and free citation from memory would appear nearer the mark than an extensive use of scissors and paste."¹¹ This line of reasoning opened the door to another form of the Traditional model. This second solution proposes that the author of the gospel used one or more collections of Jesus' sayings, rather than entire gospels, as his sources, leaving room for the possibility that oral traditions may have been part of the source pool.¹² According to one of the major proponents of this position, Helmut Koester, the author was "a collector and compiler who used a number of smaller units of collected sayings, some perhaps available in written form, and composed them randomly." He was not an author "who deliberately composed his book according to a general master plan." The point of his collection, rather, was hermeneutical: it was supposed to provide the reader with sayings which could be interpreted individually.¹³ Koester thinks that the author used a very old collection of sayings of Jesus, emphasizing in his gospel "the presence of the kingdom for the believer, rather than its future coming."¹⁴ He understands this development to more likely be "an interpretation and elaboration of Jesus' most original proclamation" than "a later gnostic spiritualization of early Christian apocalyptic expectation."¹⁵

¹¹ R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1960) 100.

¹² J. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (New York: Viking, 1960) 347; K. Grobel, "How Gnostic is the Gospel of Thomas?" *NTS* 8 (1961/1962) 367-373; O. Cullmann, "The Gospel of Thomas and the Problem of the Age of the Traditions Contained Therein: A Survey," *Int* 16 (1962) 418-438; A. Strobel, "Textgeschichtliches zum Thomas-Logion 86 (Mt 8,20/Luk 9,58)," *VC* 17 (1963) 211-224; W.H.C. Frend, "Is Rehabilitation Possible?" *JTS* 18 (1967) 13-26; H. Koester, H. Koester, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," in J. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) 114-157; *idem*, "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," in J. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) 158-204; *idem*, "Three Thomas Parables," in A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The New Testament and Gnosis, Essays in honour of Robert McLachlan Wilson* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1983) 195-203.

¹³ H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990) 81-82.

¹⁴ Koester, "One Jesus," 172.

¹⁵ Koester, "One Jesus," 172.

Some scholars have left open the possibility for later redaction of the gospel, proposing a revision of the former model: the Traditional Model with Redactor (Diagram 2). The redaction is understood to be very minimal and late by most who have supported this position. Although these suggestions are not very developed in scholarly works, they all seem to be some variation of the process sketched in Diagram 2. For instance, in Tai Akagi's 1965 doctoral dissertation, one of the only analyses of the literary development of the *Gospel of Thomas*, he saw very little change from an

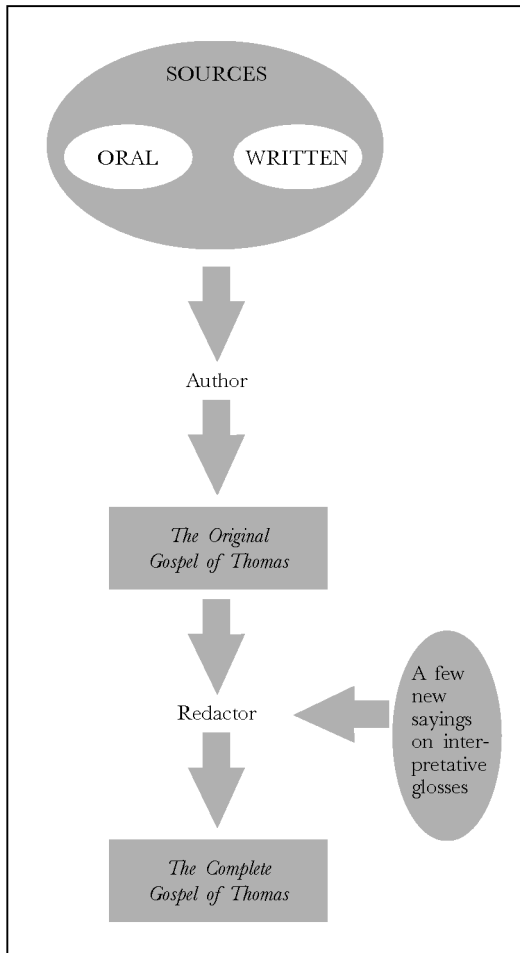


Diagram 2: Traditional Model with Redactor

original gospel to the Coptic text; but he does suggest that five *logia* might be later additions along with some minor alterations.¹⁶ The farthest that scholars have been willing to theorize about the possibility of redaction has been the occasional reference to *Thomas*' alleged "gnostic" character. The first references to this are actually very early in *Thomas* scholarship. In 1959, R. Kasser wrote about the possibility that *Thomas* once existed as a gnostic hymn which he identified as the core gospel.¹⁷ But he does not develop his theory even in his succeeding commentary.¹⁸ It became much more common to see the opposite postulation in scholars' works: that the original version of *Thomas* was at the very least less gnostic than our extant Coptic version.¹⁹ H.-Ch. Puech went so far as to postulate two recensions of the gospel, one an "orthodox" version and another a late gnostic or Manichean version.²⁰

An important step in the development of this model was made in 1991 by J.D. Crossan who suggested that there might be two substantial "layers" of material in the *Gospel of Thomas*. The first layer, he thinks, was composed by the fifties C.E., possibly in Jerusalem. The second layer was added to this in Edessa "possibly as early as the sixties or seventies." Crossan says that the early layer is discernable in "those units with independent attestation elsewhere" while the later layer is made up of "that which is unique to this collection." This layering seems to be based on the assumption that multiply-attested sayings across independent sources are earlier than singly-attested sayings. This assumption, of course, may be the case, but is not certain by any means. It can not be used, as Crossan has done, to successfully reconstruct the oldest layer of the text since it is quite probable that some of the singly-attested sayings are also early but just not preserved in other extant sources. I have to agree with Crossan's own con-

¹⁶ T. Akagi, *The Literary Development of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas* (Ph.D. dissertation; Western Reserve University, 1965) 328, 361-363.

¹⁷ R. Kasser, "Les manuscrits de Nag Hammâdi: faits, documents, problèmes," *RThPh* 9 (1959) 365-367 (357-370).

¹⁸ Kasser, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, 18-19.

¹⁹ Cf. O. Cullmann, "Das Thomasevangelium und die Frage nach dem Alter der in ihm enthaltenen Tradition," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 85 (1960) 330-331 (321-334); Grant with Freedman, *Secret Sayings* 68; A.J.B. Higgins, "Non-Gnostic Sayings in the Gospel of Thomas," *NovT* 4 (1960) 306 (292-306); R. Schippers, *Het Evangelie van Thomas* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1960) 133; Doresse, *Secret Books*, 343-344.

²⁰ H.-Ch. Puech, "The Gospel of Thomas," *New Testament Apocrypha* 1 (ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; Eng. trans. R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia, 1963) 305-306.

fession that his stratification is “rather crude” and “underlines the need for a better one”^{20a}

The Traditional Model with Redactor has been developed substantially by William Arnal in a very insightful article of late (Diagram 3).²¹ Because he makes his starting point the research that has been done on Q and its stratification by his mentor and doctoral advisor, John Kloppenborg, I call his position the Q-like Stratification Model. Due to common features he sees between Q and *Thomas*, Arnal argues that *Thomas* must be a “stratified” document with a “historical complexity” and “social setting” very similar to Q.²² “Both documents,” he writes, “are products of a social history rather than a static social context.”²³

Arnal identifies two main strands of material in *Thomas*, strands which he believes “can be separated from each other on formal and thematic grounds.” Each one of these strands forms “a coherent unity.” The formal and thematic consistency of each of these suggests for Arnal that the gospel has been stratified.²⁴ The earliest of these strands includes wisdom sayings, similar in content and form to Q1 (3, 5, 6, 9, 14, 16, 20, 26, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 42, 45, 47, 54, 55, 57, 58, 63, 64, 65, 68, 67, 69, 74, 76, 86?, 89, 95, 96, 97, 98, 107, 109, 110).²⁵ The content of this material according to Arnal “appears to react to a situation in which the intensification of the rural poor’s exploitation and dispossession through heavy taxation and consequent indebtedness to the urban rich is a primary concern.”²⁶ Arnal concludes that this early *Thomas* very much like Q1 adopts a “countercultural position in response to the increasing exploitation of the countryside by the urban wealthy” which he sees reflected in Antipas’ establishment of Tiberias and Sepphoris as administrative centers.²⁷

^{20a} J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Harper San Francisco: New York, 1991) 427-428.

²¹ W. Arnal, “The Rhetoric of Marginality: Apocalypticism, Gnosticism, and Sayings Gospels,” *HTR* 88 (1995) 471-494. H. Koester seems to have been influenced by Arnal’s position since it is now reflected in his most current discussion of the *Gospel of Thomas* in the second edition of his *Introduction to the New Testament*, v. 2 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000) 154-158.

²² Arnal, “Rhetoric of Marginality,” 472-473.

²³ Arnal, “Rhetoric of Marginality,” 474.

²⁴ Arnal, “Rhetoric of Marginality,” 476.

²⁵ Arnal, “Rhetoric of Marginality,” 476-477.

²⁶ Arnal, “Rhetoric of Marginality,” 491.

²⁷ Arnal, “Rhetoric of Marginality,” 491.

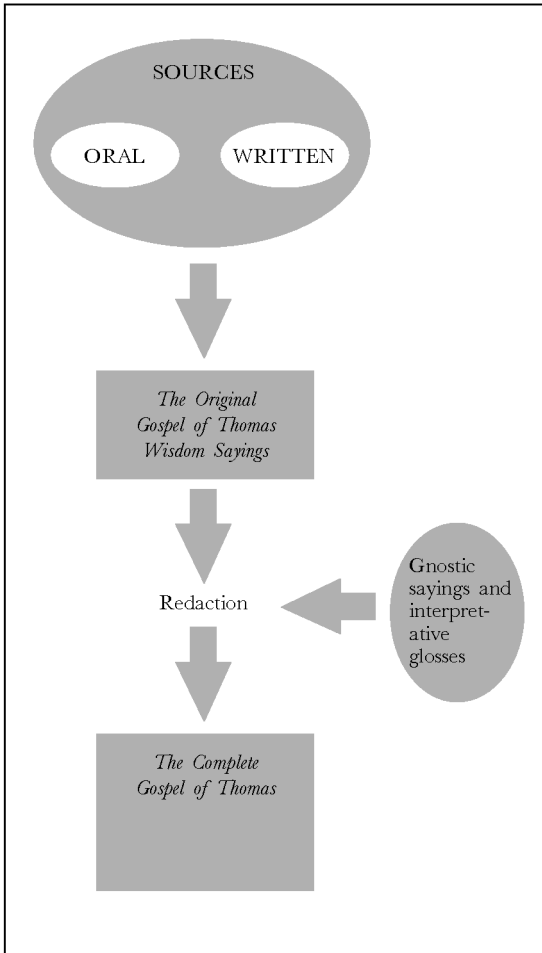


Diagram 3: Q-like Stratification Model

In contradistinction to this sapiential strand, is another body of sayings which Arnal characterizes as “gnostic” in orientation because of their “invocation of gnostic mythological motifs” (11, 13, 15, 18, 21, 22, 27, 28, 48, 49, 50, 51, 60, 61, 83, 84, 101, 105, 108, 111, 114). He concludes that this gnostic strand is secondary to the gospel because of the natural tendency of wisdom sayings to progress in this manner. He also thinks that some of the secondary glosses interpret the wisdom materials in a gnostic

manner.²⁸ Finally, Arnal suggests that Q, unlike *Thomas*, followed a remarkably different route in the later states of its development. Instead of becoming a gnostic gospel, it grew into an apocalyptic document by the time Q2 came into existence.²⁹

Clearly, in addition to being grounded in Kloppenborg's understanding of Q as an early "sapiential" sayings gospel,³⁰ Arnal's work also assumes the position that the *Gospel of Thomas* is originally a sapiential gospel which has been gnosticized,³¹ a position first suggested by James Robinson and Helmut Koester in the 1960s.³² Thus, his understanding of the compositional history of *Thomas* is ultimately based on Robinson's suggestion that Q represented a genre of "sayings of the sages" which could be located at the beginning of a "trajectory" which developed in its treatment of the speaker of the sayings. The speaker, over time, became increasingly associated with the voice of Sophia herself, finally becoming identified with the voice of a gnostic revealer figure. Robinson believes that this trajectory

²⁸ Arnal, "Rhetoric of Marginality," 478-479.

²⁹ Arnal, "Rhetoric of Marginality," 492.

³⁰ See especially now, J.S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). In this book, he tries to address the problem that some scholars have identified with the separation of "sapiential" from "apocalyptic" in the works of Koester and others. Kloppenborg says that even though he has characterized the early Q as "sapiential" that neither Koester, nor Robinson, nor himself have ever depicted a formative stratum of Q "devoid of eschatological hopes" (p. 385 n. 45). The crucial question that still remains unresolved for me is this: does Kloppenborg understand the meaning of "eschatological" as some existential experience or as end-of-the-world events? If he understands it in the former sense, then his use of "sapiential" is very much in line with Koester's depiction of a non-apocalyptic wisdom gospel and, in my opinion, the criticism that other scholars have lodged regarding this depiction would not necessarily be the "caricatures" which Kloppenborg says they are (p. 385-388). The criticism which scholars are lodging has to do with the nature of Jesus' message as first recorded by the earliest Christians—whether or not they depict him in the sayings gospels like Q and *Thomas* as teaching about some existential experience of God's Kingdom or the actual end of the world in mythological terms. We know that the early Christians believed very strongly in the end of the world. Did they originate this message when they interpreted Jesus to be the great Judge, the Son of Man, as Koester seems to be suggesting? Or did Jesus himself believe in the imminence of the end of the world and preach accordingly as Dunn seems to be suggesting?

³¹ Cf. J. Kloppenborg, M. Meyer, S. Patterson, and M. Steinhauser, *Q Thomas Reader* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1990) 93-99.

³² In particular, refer to their collection of articles in *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

extended from Proverbs through Q and the *Gospel of Thomas* ending in the *Pistis Sophia*. He finds proof of this in the popularity of sayings and dialogue genres in gnostic circles and their disappearance in orthodox circles.³³

Although Robinson's proposal represents a possible progression of traditions, scholars following Robinson, including Arnal, have been too eager to assume that it is the only or natural one, at least when applied to the *Gospel of Thomas*.³⁴ This eagerness seems to have been fueled by Koester's early work on the *Gospel of Thomas*. He was interested in the text because it provided for him an actual illustration of the sayings gospel genre, representing for him the parallel to Q's original genre.³⁵ Since the *Gospel of Thomas* lacks the traditional passion kerygma, Koester concluded that the purpose of the sayings gospel genre was to promote "belief in Jesus' words, a belief which makes what Jesus proclaimed present and real for the believer."³⁶

Since *Thomas* lacked apocalyptic Son of Man sayings so prevalent in Q, Koester argued that "Thomas presupposes a stage and form of the tradition of eschatological sayings which did not yet contain an apocalyptic expectation of the Son of man."³⁷ This early stage of sayings appeared to be "a direct continuation of the eschatological sayings of Jesus" in which "his message demands that the mysterious presence of the kingdom in his words be recognized."³⁸ Koester seems here to be using the term "eschatological" in the Bultmannian existential sense so that it becomes juxtaposed with the word "apocalyptic." By "apocalyptic," he seems to be referring to traditional mythological thinking about the world actually coming to an end through a series of events initiated by God.

According to Koester, the oldest sayings gospels were therefore "wisdom gospels" which christologically identified Jesus with the "teacher" and "presence" of heavenly Wisdom whose words revealed some kind of existential eschatology, some decisive moment of encounter with the power of God's Kingdom. This christology was understood to be older than that of the

³³ J. Robinson, "LOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q," in J. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) 71-113.

³⁴ See, for instance, the work of S. Patterson who summarizes this position in his, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993) 17-110; cp. Kloppenborg, *et.al.*, *Q Thomas Reader*, 93-99.

³⁵ H. Koester, "One Jesus," 158-204.

³⁶ Koester, "One Jesus," 186.

³⁷ Koester, "One Jesus," 171.

³⁸ Koester, "One Jesus," 175.

apocalyptic Son of Man. From this Koester drew the conclusion that the Son of Man sayings entered the older wisdom book Q secondarily.³⁹

This assessment of Q and *Thomas* has certainly worried more than a few scholars. One of the most poignant, perhaps, has been James Dunn who wrote in response to Koester's position: "I do not think that the apocalyptic elements of Jesus' teachings can be sloughed off quite so readily."⁴⁰ He thinks that "Q is almost certainly earlier and nearer to Jesus' emphasis than any non-apocalyptic version of the Jesus-tradition."⁴¹ More to the point, he argues that "the Thomas material in these logia just mentioned (1, 3, 8, 11, 19, 21, 35, 37, 51, 59, 76, 103, 109, 111, 113) looks much more like *de-eschatologized* tradition rather than pre-apocalyptic tradition."⁴²

II. *Persistent Problems with the Previously Proposed Models*

The Traditional Model of composition assumes that one author brought together a variety of sayings at some historical moment, creating the *Gospel of Thomas* as we know it. Because it assumes single authorship, this model suffers from a couple problems. First, this model has not been able to adequately explain *why* the author would choose to include in his gospel conflicting sayings and doublets from his written or oral sources or such an extreme diversity of religious traditions. Second, the model has not been able to explain *why* the author would choose to structure the gospel so loosely, although there have been a proliferation of unconvincing attempts to explain *how* this structure really is not so loose.⁴³

³⁹ H. Koester, "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," *HTR* 73 (1980) 113 (105-130).

⁴⁰ J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry Into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977) 286.

⁴¹ Dunn, *Unity*, 286.

⁴² Dunn, *Unity*, 286.

⁴³ Structured by forms: H. Puech, "The Gospel of Thomas," in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher (eds.) and R. McL. Wilson (trans.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, volume 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 288-305. Structured by catchwords: Grant with Freedman, *Secret Sayings*, 104; Gärtner, *Thomas*, 28-29; Haenchen, *Botschaft*, 12-13; K. Rudolph, "Gnosis und Gnostizismus, ein Forschungsbericht," *ThR* 34 (1969) 185-187; Koester, *One Jesus*, 166-187. Structured by themes: Y. Janssens, "L'Évangile selon Thomas et son caractère gnostique," *Muséon* 75 (1962) 301-302; S.L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983) 149-155. Structured by the disciples' questions: D.H. Tripp, "The Aim of the Gospel of Thomas," *Exp Tim* 92 (1980/1981) 41-44.

The theory that the *Gospel of Thomas* may have undergone a redaction at some point in its history remains problematic as long as the redaction is regarded as late and minimal. A late minimal redaction still does not adequately explain the presence of the large variety and age of traditions found in the text nor the random structure of the text itself.

It is refreshing, however, to see the redaction model developed as Arnal has done, at least in regard to his insistence on an earlier and substantial redaction of a more ancient gospel. But is this enough? I am not convinced that it is. In my opinion, a *single* redaction is not enough to explain the large variety of traditions that make up this gospel. More importantly, though, Arnal's Q-like Stratification Model does not adequately explain the interpretative problems we encounter in *Thomas*.

For instance, his assumption that this text has affinities with Gnosticism certainly has had its share of press, but is by no means the best interpretative foil for this gospel as I have argued at great length in a previous monograph.⁴⁴ In my view, this interpretative position of scholars has only created a gridlock, hindering our exegetical progress with the *Gospel of Thomas* due to the fact that we have mistaken early Jewish esotericism for gnosticism and have forced gnostic readings on the text. It is time for scholarship to mature in its previously indiscriminate and easy understanding and application of "Gnosticism" and its corollaries.⁴⁵

Most significantly, I question whether it is best to undertake the problem of *Thomas*' compositional model, as Arnal has done, by using, as the model's premises, the problematic conclusions that have been drawn from the studies of Robinson, Koester, and Kloppenborg about the nature of Q and *Thomas*. Like Dunn, I am reluctant to concede an early "sapiential" Q or *Thomas*. I find it impossible to assume, as this theory does, that the *Gospel of Thomas* represents a collection of early sapiential non-apocalyptic sayings and that the earliest stratification of Q must have been similar in content to it. As both Margaretha Lelyveld's monograph and my own previous book have shown, the traditions in *Thomas* are much more complex than this.⁴⁶ Our works have independently suggested that we must be open to the possibility that at least one of the early sources for the *Gospel of*

⁴⁴ DeConick, *Seek to See Him*, especially 3-39.

⁴⁵ See my own detailed comments in *Seek to See Him*, especially pp. 3-27. See also, M. William's most recent discussion of the problem of "Gnosticism" in his *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁴⁶ See especially, M. Lelyveld, *Les Logia de la Vie dans L'Évangile selon Thomas*, NHS 34 (Leiden, 1987); A.D. DeConick, *Seek to See Him*.

Thomas was based in Jewish apocalyptic traditions. We can not assume that the *Gospel of Thomas* was *originally* or *entirely* a sapiential gospel. This also means that we can not assume that an early form of Q was sapiential because *Thomas* was sapiential.

Moreover, I think it is safe to say that, *even if* Q existed as a written document, because we are working with a minimal reconstruction, we can not really know much about Q's genre or content. Was it comparable to the genre and content of the *Gospel of Thomas*? Q certainly seems to have been more than a sayings gospel since, unlike *Thomas*, it does contain some substantial narrative material *even in its minimal reconstruction*. Did it lack a passion narrative or a traditional kerygma? Who knows. It is very possible that these were part of Q and that they were incorporated into either Matthew or Luke. So, although, at the moment, I think that Q and the two-source hypothesis is our best explanation for the literary history of the synoptic gospels, I am very reluctant to theorize about the nature of particular stratifications of Q and their alleged ramifications for understanding the composition of the *Gospel of Thomas*.

III. Searching for a New Compositional Model

The time has come to develop a new compositional model for the *Gospel of Thomas*, one which will explain the persistent problems that other models have not, one that does not have as its premises the conclusions of problematic theories such as Q's stratification and the like.

To begin with, we must develop a compositional model for the *Gospel of Thomas* that will adequately explain the presence of the diverse traditions in the text. These traditions include early Christian-Jewish materials (*i.e.*, L. 6, 12, 27b), encratic sayings (*i.e.*, L. 27a, 49, 110), hermetic wisdom traditions (*i.e.*, 3b, 56, 67), and Jewish apocalyptic oracles with both eschatological (*i.e.*, L. 11a, 16, 111a) and mystical emphases (*i.e.*, L. 15, 37, 59).⁴⁷ The presence of these diverse traditions can be explained as the combination of several oral and/or written sources. I think this must be a given. The question which remains for us to investigate is by whom, when, where, and why these various traditions were brought together.

Our investigation must also be able to explain the presence of conflicting content across various sayings (*i.e.*, L. 12 and 53; L. 113 and 111a) as well as the presence of those troublesome doublets (*i.e.*, L. 3 and 113; L. 38 and 92; L. 48 and 106; 55 and 101; 56 and 80; L. 87 and 112). I think

⁴⁷ For a fuller discussion of each of these traditions, see *Seek to See Him*.

that this is not only more evidence for multi-sources, but is also evidence for multi-authors who layered the text with new source materials over a lengthy period of time. The notion of a single author must be suspended because it is too difficult to explain *why* a single author would choose to include in his composition conflicting sayings and doublets from his oral and written sources, without resorting to theories of schizophrenia or the like. Even the proposal that such conflicts were a deliberate hermeneutic seems to me to be problematic. Certainly the sayings of Thomas were meant to be interpreted by the reader, and this interpretation was believed to be somehow redemptive. But nothing in the text indicates that an author was deliberately setting up contrary ideas that were supposed to function as riddles.^{47a} This seems to me to be more of an imposition on the text than a deduction from it.

The contradictions are more easily explained if we opt for multi-authorship—several people modifying the gospel as time progressed to fit the needs of their changing community and their developing theologies. Could one of the sayings in the doublet, for instance, be understood as an “updated” version of the saying already present in *Thomas*, perhaps originating from a new source of Jesus sayings that came into the community’s possession? If so, the materials that were added to the text could then be understood as additions meant by the later author to reinterpret the older gospel sayings for the new reader. The text would then be a collection of sayings that grew over time and represented developments in theology, rather than a book of sayings written down at one moment in history representing a consistent theology. It is left for us to explore the how, when, and why of the former.

Multi-authorship finds additional support when we try to account for the plethora of interpretative glosses found tacked on to certain sayings (*i.e.*, L. 16c, 21c, 100c). This is certainly evidence for a later author or authors layering the older presumably authoritative sayings with new interpretations.

How do we explain the apparent random structure of the sayings tied together by catchwords? This compositional structure seems to be common for texts consisting of oracles of a prophet. There has been some discussion over the past ten years about this type of genre in Jewish literature. William McKane, in his commentary on Jeremiah, explains the compositional history of Jeremiah in terms of a “rolling *corpus*.”⁴⁸ According to his study, a

^{47a} See n. 13 above.

⁴⁸ W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, The International Critical Commentary, volume 1 (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1986) xlix-xcix. Such a view of com-

rolling corpus is a book that begins with the *ipsissima verba* of a prophet (or at least what the author understands to be the words of the prophet). Over time, additional material becomes aggregated and organized in relation to the core. These new materials often serve to interpret, explain, or update the kernel. In the case of prophetic words, prose generates prose: old and new words of the prophet are strung together by a reservoir of vocabulary that has “triggered” or “generated” the new material. Thus the kernel can function as a “reservoir” for the additional material.

Furthermore, McKane argues that in Jeremiah we are dealing with “a complicated, untidy accumulation of material, extending over a very long period and to which many people have contributed.”^{48a} He warns that scholars too often invest the so-called editor with an editorial policy that is thoughtful and systematic, wanting to determine “the contours of his mind.”^{48b} When they do this, they only force their own interpretations of the prose to be amendable to their hypothesis.^{48c} I might add that McKane in his earlier commentary on Proverbs (a text that he understands to be “a reinterpretation of the vocabulary of old wisdom”) concludes that collections of sentence literature do not show a “coherence of theme or consistency of artistic intention” because of the manner in which sentence literature is compiled over time.^{48d} He notes that in Proverbs bribery is both recommended (17:8; 18:16; 21:14) and condemned (15:27; 17:23) in different sentences. “If this is not evidence of reinterpretation,” he states, “it is at least irreconcilable with the view that all of the material in Proverbs can be accommodated within a single theological structure or unitary ethos.”^{48e} Certainly, *Thomas*

position is gaining favor for other types of Jewish literature as well, literature not necessarily based on prophetic words. For instance, the literary analysis of *The Manual of Discipline* (1QS) suggests that it is a composite document that was created through a complex compositional process beginning with a nucleus of material that was modified and appended since it contains duplicate passages explaining the goals of the community (1QS 1.1-15; 5.1-7a; 8.1-4c), two lists of punishments (6.24-7.25; 8.16b-9.2), two sets of admission rules (5.20b-23; 6.13b-23), and several contradictory statements about leadership (9.7; 5.2b-3a). Refer especially to J. Murry-O’Connor, “La genèse littéraire de la *Règle de la Communauté*,” *RB* (1969) 528-549; J. Pouilly, *La Règle de la communauté de Qumrân. Son évolution littéraire*, Cahiers de la Revue biblique 17 (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1976); M. Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 77; D. Allison, “The Authorship of 1QS III,13-IV,14,” *RevQ* 10 (1980) 257-268.

^{48a} McKane, *Jeremiah*, xlvii.

^{48b} McKane, *Jeremiah*, xlix.

^{48c} McKane, *Jeremiah*, xlix.

^{48d} W. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977) 19 and 10 respectively.

^{48e} McKane, *Proverbs*, 18.

fits this oracular paradigm; it is an aggregate corpus of Jesus sayings organized loosely by catchwords.

Finally, the compositional model must be historically probable and align with what we know about the composition of other early Christian texts from the same period. I think that it is fair to say that the early Christians were not only collectors of materials who believed that they were invested with the accurate transmission of their traditions, but they were avid redactors and exegetes of these materials. Texts that fell into the hands of the Christians were constantly modified both by expunging or altering materials that did not compliment developments in their theologies, or by adding new explanatory items to the older text. How can we forget the great pains that Marcion took to excise what he understood to be corrupt additions that had been made to Paul's letters and the Gospel of Luke? Or the care that the Ebionites took when they used the Jewish Scriptures, acknowledging only certain parts of the Pentateuch since they considered other portions of it to be later human corruptions of God's original Law (*Hom.* 1.18; 3.47; *Rec.* 1.15; *Epiph., Pan.* 30.18.7), a position quite similar to Ptolemy's understanding of biblical composition (*Epistle to Flora*)?

If we accept Markan priority, then we have two cases where the Christians drastically edited the Gospel of Mark and added new materials to it at a later date. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke are explained by scholars as new revised and expanded versions of Mark, versions which took into account the growing and changing needs of the communities for which they were written.⁴⁹ As new sayings of Jesus became available (*i.e.*, Q), peculiar geographical traditions developed (*i.e.*, sources M and L), and fresh interpretations of Jesus and his words were made, the older Markan gospel was drastically revised rather than discarded.⁵⁰ Moreover, in order to explain the synoptic problem, some scholars have theorized (probably correctly) that the versions of Mark which the authors of Matthew and Luke used were either different or that there existed a Proto- or Deutero-Mark which has not survived.⁵¹ Revisions of Mark seem to have gone on well into the second century since Clement of Alexandria knows of three versions of the Gospel of Mark: the novice, spiritual, and Carpocratian versions.⁵² The

⁴⁹ For an overview of the arguments, see E.P. Sanders and M. Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989) 51-66.

⁵⁰ Sanders and Davies, *Studying*, 51-119.

⁵¹ Sanders and Davies, *Studying*, 67-83.

⁵² M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); C. Hedrick with N. Olympiou, "Secret Mark: New Photographs, New Witnesses," *The Fourth R* 13.5 (2000) 3-16.

manuscript evidence of four endings of the Gospel of Mark suggests that the continued fate of this gospel was anything but stable.⁵³

The Gospel of John is an example of a gospel with at least one later addendum. It is generally accepted that the "original" Johannine gospel concluded with the statement: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31). The final chapter is an addendum, written and placed after 20:31 at a later date, most likely immediately following the death of the so-called Beloved Disciple. It seems that people in the Johannine circle had believed that the Beloved Disciple would never die. So his actual death caused a community crisis resulting in a great amount of cognitive dissonance. An explanation had to be made. The last chapter of John serves this purpose, especially 21:20-23, while also reinforcing the authority of the Beloved Disciple which seems to have been threatened too (21:24).

Just a cursory glance at second and early third century Christian literature reveals that this type of Christian text modification was the rule rather than the exception. It is plainly visible in the *Didache* which contains sections with not only different styles and content, but also doublets and interpolations. Analysis of this text has suggested that it began as a rather haphazard collection similar to the *Epistle of Barnabas* 18-20, was reorganized within a source familiar to the *Doctrina apostolorum* and the *Apostolic Church Order*, and finally supplemented with some sapiential and apocalyptic materials.^{53a} Mention should also be made of the four extant versions of the *Apocryphon of John* (II,1; III,1; IV,1; and BG 8502,2) and the two versions of *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* (III,4 and BG 8502,3), a Christian-Sethian rewriting of the pagan text *Eugnostos the Blessed* (III,3 and V,1). The literature from Nag Hammadi shows us that occasionally smaller pagan texts, like Isis aretalogies, were incorporated and adapted into Jewish and Christian works (*i.e.*, *Trimorphic Protennoia* 35.1-36.27, 40.29-41.1, etc.; *On the Origin of the World* 114.7-15; *Thunder Perfect Mind*). We also have many examples of Christians modifying earlier Jewish-Sethian literature as they

⁵³ See B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1975) 122-124.

^{53a} J. Kloppenborg, "The Transformation of Moral Exhortation in *Didache* 1-5," in C. Jefford (ed.), *The Didache in Context: Essays on Its Text, History and Transmission*, Supplements to *NT 77* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) 88-109; J. Kloppenborg, "Didache 16,6-8 and Special Matthean Tradition," *ZNW* 70 (1979) 54-67.

incorporated alien Christian features into the myth (i.e., *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Apocryphon of John*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*).⁵⁴ Put simply, the early Christians, well into the third century, were quite confident continually revising, adapting, and modifying their own texts, as well as texts from other religious traditions, as new needs and theologies developed in their communities.

Even the manuscript remains of the *Gospel of Thomas* support this conclusion. When we compare the extant manuscripts of *Thomas* (P.Oxy. 1, P.Oxy. 654, P.Oxy. 655, and NHC II,2), we discover that the text exhibits signs of instability on several levels. As in all biblical manuscripts, the Greek and Coptic of *Thomas* exhibit differences in wording in some sayings, differences probably due to scribal error and loose translations (L. 2, 3, 6, 24, 26, 30, 31, 32, 37, and 39). On another level, we find different combinations of elements, particularly in P.Oxy. 1 (L. 30a and 77b).⁵⁵

The greek fragments also contain significant elements which are not found in the Coptic text. Of particular interest for our study is P.Oxy. 654 which has several sayings or parts of sayings not present in the Coptic text: “[whoever] knows [himself] will discover this” (lines 16-17); “[and] the last will be first” (lines 25-26); and “nor buried that [will not be raised]” (line 31). Equally important is the fact that the Coptic contains several sayings or parts of sayings not found in the Greek fragments: “he will be astonished, and” (L. 2 but not P.Oxy. 654.7-8); “then you will become known” (L. 3 but not P.Oxy. 654.18); “and nothing covered will remain without being uncovered” (L. 6 but not P.Oxy. 654.40).

We should also mention the textual problems within the Coptic version itself. For instance, it is clear from the content of Logion 6a and 14a that 6a (the disciples’ questions about certain Jewish practices) originally was succeeded by 14a (Jesus’ poignant answer to their questions). At a certain point in *Thomas’* history, Logia 6b-13 could have been inserted between the question and answer, breaking up the original unit, or the question could have been separated from the answer during the process of writing and transmitting the text.

⁵⁴ For a good summary, see J. Turner, “Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History,” in C. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (eds.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986) 55-86.

⁵⁵ Cf. K.H. Kuhn, “Some Observations on the Coptic Gospel According to Thomas,” *Muséon* 73 (1960) 317-318 (317-323).

There is also a *testimonium* from Hippolytus about *Thomas* that suggests that the text was continually being revised as it fell into the hands of different Christian groups. The Naasenes seem to have transmitted a saying similar to Logion 4 which they attributed to “the Gospel entitled According to Thomas”: “The one who seeks me will find me in children from seven years of age and onwards. For there, hiding in the fourteenth aeon, I am revealed” (Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 5.7.20). Clearly, this is a very different version of the Logion we find in the Coptic manuscript (L. 4): “The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a small child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live. For many who are first will become last, and they will become one and the same.”

So what if the compositional history of the *Gospel of Thomas* was that of a rolling corpus rather than a statically-authored or singly-redacted document? What if this gospel is not a book of sayings written down at one moment in history and does not represent a consistent theology from the authored-moment? What if the *Gospel of Thomas* is a collection of sayings that grew over time, beginning as a simple gospel containing oracles of the prophet Jesus? Is it not most historically likely that as new needs arose in the community, additional sayings were added to the collection in order to address these needs? Is it not reasonable to assume that as new converts joined the community, they brought with them new ideas, interpretations, traditions and even Jesus sayings which they might have heard from Christians in other communities or from wandering prophets who happened to stop and teach in their village one day? Such a new paradigm of reading *Thomas* would mean that the sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* represent different moments in its history and might be read as memoirs of practices and conflicts which arose over time *within* the community (Diagram 4).

But is it possible to read the *Gospel of Thomas* in this manner? How do we distinguish between earlier and later sayings? How do we determine the various conflicts that this community endured and the responses that it might have made to these conflicts? How do we map any theological developments or interpretative shifts? All of these are tough questions, but not impossible to answer, I would wager, if we are willing to reassess this gospel.

IV. Reassessing *Thomas*' Compositional History

Any discussion of the compositional history of a text certainly is the purview of Traditio-historical Criticism. In the past, Traditio-historical

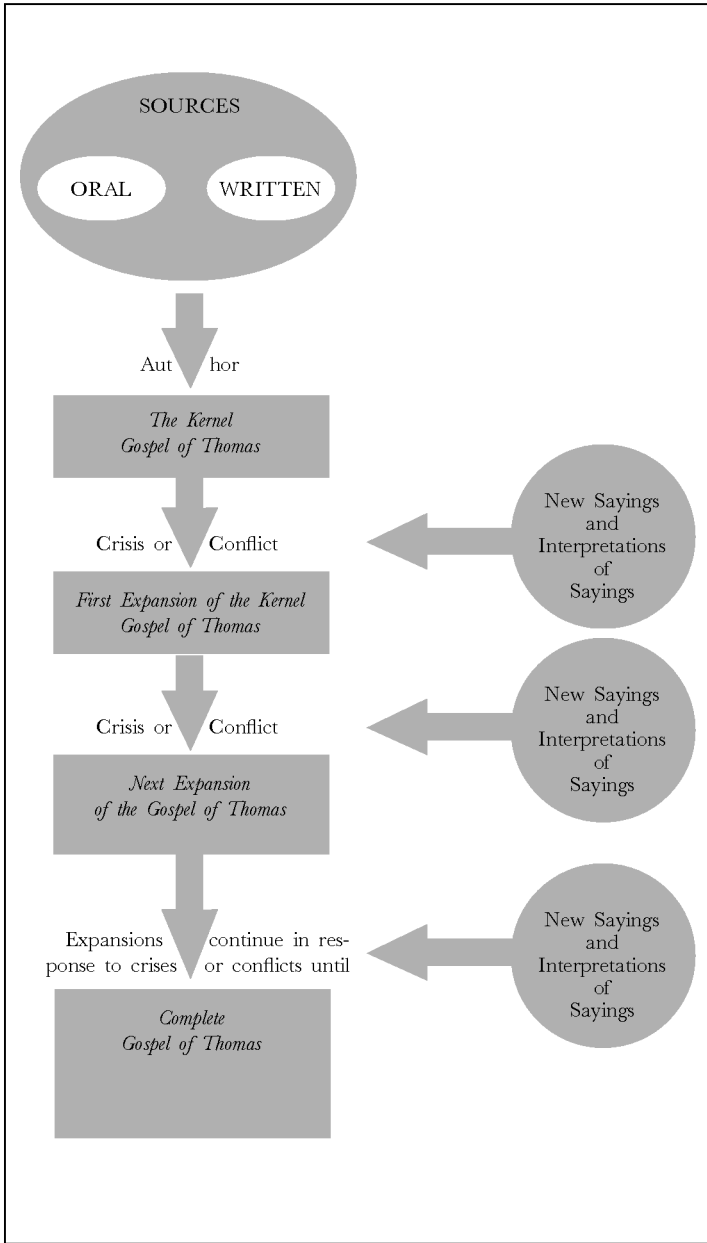


Diagram 4: Rolling Corpus Model

Criticism has solely utilized the results of Source-, Form-, and Redaction-critical studies in order to reconstruct the history of the transmission of various traditions or complexes of traditions through particular historical periods.⁵⁶ In my previous work on the relationship between the gospels of John and *Thomas*, I found that more attention needed to be given to the fact that texts *are a means of communicating among people* and that this communication can occur not only within a particular text (a matter of intra-traditions) but also can be heard between different texts (a matter of inter-traditions). This is a particularly important insight because it compels us to move beyond the old parameters that have confined our previous discussion to literary dependence: Is the Gospel of John dependent on *Thomas* or *vice versa*? I have tried to move out of these parameters to explore how certain *religious traditions* develop in response to each other and in dialogue with each other, to explore how these dialogues become textualized. So, when studying the traditions shared by these two gospels, the inter-traditions, I found it useful to develop Traditio-historical Criticism by welding into my discussions foci highlighted in Socio-rhetorical criticism and other new methodologies.⁵⁷ The application of this method has led me to conclude that the religious ideology textualized in the Gospel of John is largely a response to the religious traditions of a mystical form of Christianity emerging in some areas of Syria, traditions which we find textualized in the *Gospel of Thomas* and other Syrian literature. As I now turn to the task of reassessing the traditions within *Thomas*, I have found it necessary to continue to develop Traditio-historical Criticism by creating a set of principles based on both the older and newer methodologies, principles which will help us discern the intra-traditions that make up this text.

⁵⁶ Cf. K. Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition* (trans. By S.M. Cupitt; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969); W.E. Rast, *Tradition History and the Old Testament*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); R.S. Barbour, *Tradition-Historical Criticism of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1972); D.A. Knight, *Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 9 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975); D.R. Catchpole, "Tradition History," in I.H. Marshall (ed.), *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977) 165-180.

⁵⁷ April D. DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 157 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) 9-18.

A. *Principles for Discerning Intra-traditions*

1. *Principle of Development*

The text probably developed along the lines consistent with the principles of Source, Form, and Redaction Criticisms.⁵⁸ The author of the kernel gospel is regarded as a creative editor, bringing together small units of materials into a catalogue of the sayings of the prophet Jesus. Thus, simple sayings and apothegms, unless representing anachronistic material, belong to the earliest layer. These units became secondarily developed once they were textualized in order to instruct the members of the community or to polemicize against an opposing view.

a. *Literary Development*

Secondary embellishments are very obvious when allegories and interpretative clauses were added to sayings, especially clauses that represent ideological positions common to later Christianity (*i.e.*, L. 16c). Sayings also were developed contextually through the creation of dialogues (*i.e.*, L. 52 and 60) and question-answer units (*i.e.*, L. 6a/14a and 51). In these cases, the saying is interpreted by focusing or extending its discussion to a particular topic, a topic which may have had little to do with the kernel saying. The questions, usually introduced by the disciples, most often represent concerns or issues from the later part of the first century (*i.e.*, L. 53). The saying following the question most probably entered the kernel simultaneous with the question since they seem to function as units of explanatory material. It is less likely that a question alone was inserted before a kernel saying, especially in cases where the saying reflects the interests of later Christian discussions.

The material that can be removed because it shows signs of secondary literary development includes that which has been shaped into dialogues (L. 13, 60), material which has been introduced into the collection by ques-

⁵⁸ Cf. R. Bultmann, "The Study of the Synoptic Gospels," in R. Bultmann and K. Kundsin (eds.) *Form Criticism* (trans. F.C. Grant; New York: Harper & Row, 1934) 7-78; M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (New York: Scribner's, 1934, second edition); V. Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1953); R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. J. Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1968, revised edition); E.V. McKnight, *What is Form Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969); N. Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969); H. Koester, "Formgeschichte/Formenkritik II. Neues Testament," *TRE* 11 (1983) 286-299.

tions from the disciples (6a/14a, 12, 18, 37, 51, 53, and 113) and material which has been added to a Logion in order to provide an interpretation of that saying (16c, 21c, 23b, 30a, 64b, 68b, 100c, 111b-c).

b. *Ideological Development*

When applying this principle to the *Gospel of Thomas*, sayings that show signs of secondary development in the interest of explaining or promoting a later ideology are removed from the kernel as well. So entire sayings which explicitly refer to later developments of christologies (L. 28, 30a, 37, 52, 59, 61b, 77a-b, 101) and soteriologies (L. 1, 4, 18, 19, 37, 70, 108, 111b), more likely belong to later layers of the text than earlier. It is possible that an earlier version of a saying may have been original to the kernel gospel and that it was significantly modified at a later date (L. 30, 44, 60). In these cases, it should be recognized that an earlier version of these sayings probably belonged to the kernel gospel. Whenever possible, the reconstruction of the earlier version should be attempted.

2. *Principle of Responsiveness*

This principle is based, in large part, on the insights of Social-Scientific Criticism⁵⁹ and Socio-rhetorical Criticism.⁶⁰ As V. Robbins has emphasized, ideology “concerns people’s relationship to other people. But, ideology does not just concern people; it concerns the discourse of people”.⁶¹ Early Christian ideology is fundamentally dialectical in nature. This means that ideology is responsive to other ideological positions and to community crises: it can be the consequence of polemics, it can be the attempt to resolve cognitive dissonance, and it can be the result of crisis management. Therefore, it is most probable that new sayings did not dribble into the text, one here, one there. On the contrary, they entered the collection *en masse* at particular moments as answers to questions about ideology or responses to crises situations.

⁵⁹ Cf. J. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975); J.H. Elliott, *Social-Scientific Criticism of the New Testament and Its Social World*, *Semeia* 35 (1986); C. Osiek, “The New Handmaid: The Bible and the Social Sciences,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 260-278.

⁶⁰ Cf. V. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1996); *idem*, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996); *idem*, “Socio-rhetorical Interpretation from its Beginnings to the Present,” *SNTS*, Pretoria, 3-6 August 1999.

⁶¹ Robbins, *Texture*, 110.

a. *Responses Reflecting General Christian Experiences*

Some of these crises may have been commonly experienced by other Christian communities, crises such as the Delay of the Parousia or the influx of Gentile converts into the communities. Sayings in *Thomas* that reflect the crises within the broader Christian community probably entered the collection contemporaneous to the time when other communities were also experiencing the crises. This claim is based on the assumption that certain discussions or problems seemed to have occurred at particular times in the broader early Christian experience. For instance, communities were concerned about circumcision for the Gentiles during a specific window of time: when the conversion of non-Jews became increasingly popular. It simply was not an issue previous to this, nor was it an issue at the beginning of the second century. Therefore, if a saying in *Thomas* echoes concerns about circumcision, it should be attributed to the mid- to late-first century.

This principle is concerned with understanding the gospel as a text that makes sense within the broader Christian experience of its time. Any reconstruction should be historically probable and coherent with what we know about early Christianity from other contemporaneous texts. This means that it is vital to compare the sayings in *Thomas* with other ancient Christian documents even in those cases where we are not dealing with direct literary dependence or intertextuality. The sayings in *Thomas* ultimately reflect the traditions and conflicts familiar to us from other gospel and epistolary literature even though the community of *Thomas* may have responded to the traditions and conflicts in ways distinct from these other Christians. Therefore, the history of *Thomas* must be reconstructed contextually rather than in a vacuum.

The Thomase community seems to have had much in common with the experiences of other Christian communities. First, it was impacted by an influx of Gentiles into the community, resulting in a new understanding of how Torah is observed (L. 6a/14a, 27, 53) and a gradual separation from Judaism (6a/14a & c, 27, 43, 52, 53, 68b). Second, the delay of the Eschaton, reflected in L. 3a, 18, 37, 38b, 51, 59, 111b, and 113 seems to have caused a critical rethinking and severe overhaul of their theology, pushing them to return to the Jewish scripture (in particular Genesis 1-3) and develop an exegetical tradition.⁶² The result of this exegesis is reflected in many of their sayings which focus on the salvific model of the primordial androgynous Adam (cf. L. 2, 18, 19, 28, 50, 60, 61b, 77, 83, 84, 85, 111b). According to this exegetical tradition, in order achieve sal-

⁶² For detailed analysis of this exegetical tradition, see DeConick, *Seek to See Him*.

vation, one had to return to the “beginning” and the sinless state of the prelapsarian Man. This process would involve encounter with one’s heavenly image, the image which had been lost when Adam sinned. This encounter was equivocated with the process of seeking and finding knowledge of one’s divine Self whose origin was the Light. The delay of the Eschaton also forced them to develop a soteriology centered around Jewish mystical traditions⁶³ rather than hopes of an imminent End (L. 19, 24a, 37, 38b, 50, 59, 83, 84, 108) and fostered the beginnings of a more stationary lifestyle (L. 88).

b. *Responses Reflecting Particular Community Experiences*

Other responses, however, reflect crises or dialogues within a particular community. These may be uniquely experienced and not reflected by the majority of other Christianities. They may be intra-community conflicts rather than inter-community crises. The community responsible for the *Gospel of Thomas* seems to have experienced a couple of these crises, crises which illicited the addition of new material to the gospel. First, the leadership of James seems to have been threatened. The community responded by promoting the maintenance of that connection (L. 12). Also, the authority of the community’s hero, Thomas, seems to have been challenged at some point in their history so they responded by adding the introductory saying and Logion 13.

3. *Principle of Constituency*

This principle is largely dependent upon the insights of Socio-rhetorical Criticism and the Reader-Response approach. According to the Principle of Constituency, early gospel texts probably developed within the context of more than one *interpretative* community. We might talk about the Thomase community or the Johannine community, for instance, but we can not assume that over its lifetime the community associated with a particular gospel consisted of the same *interpretative* community.

a. *Shifts in Writing*

As new groups of people joined the community, new types of sayings would have been incorporated into the text, sayings which would have reflected the needs, desires, beliefs, and interpretations of the shifting constituency. So the encratic sayings (L. 4a and c, 11b, 16c, 21a and c, 22,

⁶³ DeConick, *Seek to See Him*.

23b, 27a, 49, 64b, 75, 85, 101, 105, 106, 110, 114) probably entered the collection later once the community started to experience an influx of Gentiles who championed the value of self-control and heralded the need for the mind to rule over the passions of the body. Additionally, the Hermetic wisdom sayings (L. 3b, 7, 18b, 28, 29, 56, 60, 61b, 67, 69a, 70, 77, 80, 87, 111c, 112) entered the collection later once the community largely consisted of Gentiles to whom the Hermetic lore was familiar and for whom Jesus probably was the new voice of Hermes. Since the encratic and Hermetic materials belong to later layers of the gospel and do not represent early kernel material, they are the final set of sayings that can be removed from the collection.

b. *Shifts in Reading*

Not only would changes in the membership of the community have resulted in new material entering the gospel but also it would have resulted in interpretative shifts within the interpretative reading of the gospel. One of the consequences of the shift in communities is that as the interpretative community changed, so did the interpretation of the sayings because different readers would have brought to the text different world-views and different conceptions of reality. The gospel would have been read and sense would have been made of its contents within the reader's complex world, a fore-structure including the reader's "preunderstanding" or presuppositions as well as his purpose for making the interpretation in the first place. The reader's world would have intruded into the "process of actualizing meaning."⁶⁴ In the poetic words of M. Heidegger, "If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, one likes to appeal to what 'stands there,' then one finds that what 'stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption of the person who does the interpreting."⁶⁵ S. Fish, a major proponent of the Reader-Response approach to exegesis, has gone as far as stating that "it is the reader who 'makes' the literature." He notes, however, that readers belong to interpretative communities that determine the kind of literature "made" by the reader and the attention the reader gives to certain aspects of the text.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997, revised edition) 158.

⁶⁵ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson; New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 192.

⁶⁶ S. Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) 67.

So it is likely that static historical interpretations do not exist for most sayings in the gospel. Instead, the accepted meaning of most sayings would have varied over time as the interpretative community changed. This suggests, of course, that over the course of history, most sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* had numerous meanings depending upon the identity of the community responsible for reading and interpreting the text.

B. Application of These Principles to the Gospel of Thomas

The following chart of the sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* shows the results of the application of the Principles of Development, Responsiveness, and Constituency. If the saying has been determined to be a later addition, it is marked according to the Principle or set of Principles upon which this determination was made. Those sayings that remain can be attributed most probably to the kernel *Gospel of Thomas*.

Intr	Responsiveness, Constituency	20	Kernel Saying
1	Development	21a	Constituency
2	Kernel Saying	21b,d	Kernel Saying
3a	Responsiveness	21c	Development, Constituency
3b	Constituency	21e	Kernel Saying
4a	Development, Constituency	22	Constituency
4b	Kernel Saying	23a	Kernel Saying
5	Kernel Saying	23b	Constituency
6a	Development, Responsiveness	24a	Responsiveness
6b	Kernel Saying	24b	Kernel Saying
6c	Kernel Saying	25	Kernel Saying
6d-e	Development	26	Kernel Saying
7	Constituency	27	Responsiveness
8	Kernel Saying	28	Development, Responsiveness, Constituency
9	Kernel Saying	29	Constituency
10	Kernel Saying	30	Kernel Saying (earlier version)
11a	Kernel Saying	31	Kernel Saying
11b	Constituency	32	Kernel Saying
12	Development, Responsiveness	33a	Kernel Saying
13	Development, Responsiveness	33b	Kernel Saying
14a	Development, Responsiveness	34	Kernel Saying
14b	Kernel Saying	35	Kernel Saying
14c	Responsiveness	36	Kernel Saying
15	Kernel Saying	37	Development, Responsiveness
16a	Kernel Saying	38a	Kernel Saying
16b	Kernel Saying	38b	Responsiveness
16c	Development, Constituency	39	Kernel Saying
17	Kernel Saying	40	Kernel Saying
18	Development, Responsiveness, Constituency	41	Kernel Saying
19	Development, Responsiveness	42	Kernel Saying

43	Responsiveness	76	Kernel Saying
44	Kernel Saying (earlier version)	77	Development, Responsiveness, Constituency
45	Kernel Saying	78	Kernel Saying
46	Kernel Saying	79	Kernel Saying
47a	Kernel Saying	80	Constituency
47b	Kernel Saying	81	Kernel Saying
47c	Kernel Saying	82	Kernel Saying
48	Kernel Saying	83	Responsiveness
49	Constituency	84	Responsiveness
50	Responsiveness, Constituency	85	Responsiveness, Constituency
51	Development, Responsiveness	86	Kernel Saying
52	Development, Responsiveness	87	Constituency
53	Development, Responsiveness	88	Responsiveness
54	Kernel Saying	89	Kernel Saying
55	Kernel Saying	90	Kernel Saying
56	Constituency	91	Kernel Saying
57	Kernel Saying	92	Kernel Saying
58	Kernel Saying	93	Kernel Saying
59	Development, Responsiveness	94	Kernel Saying
60a	Kernel Saying (earlier version)	95	Kernel Saying
60b	Development, Responsiveness, Constituency	96	Kernel Saying
61a	Kernel Sayings	97	Kernel Saying
61b	Development, Responsiveness, Constituency	98	Kernel Saying
62a	Kernel Saying	99	Kernel Saying
62b	Kernel Saying	100a-b	Kernel Saying
63	Kernel Saying	100c	Development
64a	Kernel Saying	101	Development, Constituency
64b	Development, Constituency	102	Kernel Saying
65	Kernel Saying	103	Kernel Saying
66	Kernel Saying	104	Kernel Saying
67	Constituency	105	Constituency
68a	Kernel Saying	106	Constituency
68b	Development,	107	Kernel Saying
69a	Kernel Saying	108	Development, Responsiveness
69b	Constituency	109	Kernel Saying
69c	Kernel Saying	110	Constituency
70	Development, Constituency	111a	Kernel Saying
71	Kernel Saying	111b	Development, Responsiveness, Constituency
72	Kernel Saying	111c	Development
73	Kernel Saying	112	Constituency
74	Kernel Saying	113	Development, Responsiveness
75	Constituency	114	Constituency

C. *Implications for the Study of the Gospel of Thomas*

Certainly any reconstruction of the various layers of the *Gospel of Thomas* must be tentative. The “original” gospel version is a minimal text; its reconstruction can not allow for the possibility that over the course of time say-

ings may have fallen out of the tradition nor can it determine the sequence of sayings in the original version. Moreover, even though the placement of sayings into various layers is credible and historically plausible, it remains speculative. This means that the reconstruction of the original kernel can provide us with insights into some very ancient ideologies of this community, but should not be read as if it were a complete coherent document. My reason for reconstructing it is not to recover some pure original form of early Christianity or the like, but to provide information about the earliest ideological discussions and struggles in which this group was engaged.

My detailed analysis of the kernel gospel as well as the later layers will be taken up in future publications. My preliminary analysis of this kernel gospel and the various later layers, however, suggests a “probable” scenario that begins with a very old gospel of sayings of Jesus that likely originated from the Jerusalem church. This gospel was carried to eastern Syria, seemingly the result of the missionary activity of the Jerusalem church. It originally was apocalyptic in orientation, anticipating the imminent judgment of God and the end of the world since, by and large, it consists of eschatological sayings warning about the impending destruction and the need to prepare for the battle (*i.e.*, L. 11a, 16a-b, 35, 64, 65, 68a, 69b, 71, 74, 79, 81, 82, 98, 103, 111a). It seems that the original community believed that it was living in a very late stage in history that was characterized by general chaos and the reversal of normalcy. The day of Judgment and the coming Kingdom were imminent (*i.e.*, L. 8, 15, 20, 23a, 40, 61a, 57, 76, 96, 97, 107, 109). The end time conditions were severe and chaotic; relief would only come to those who persevered, maintaining their commitment to the coming Kingdom and to the hope of their election.

Of course, this understanding of the original community as a thoroughly apocalyptic community is quite the opposite of the accepted scholarly hypothesis that the Thomasine gospel and community was non-apocalyptic. We discover with the application of this new model that it is not until the later layers of *Thomas* that we find the non-apocalyptic (or better: “de-apocalypticizing”) materials introduced into the kernel in order to reinterpret the strong eschatological hopes. As time progressed and the needs, theology and constituency of the group changed, the gospel had to be modified—new sources were used to update the older gospel, new sayings entered the text and new interpretations were layered on the older gospel sayings.

Some of the events or conditions that sparked the modification of the text can be seen in the sayings and their interpretations. It seems that this community questioned its connection with Jerusalem’s authority early on

but chose to maintain that connection at first (*i.e.*, L. 12). As more and more Gentiles converted, however, interpretations shifted so that views on observation of Jewish laws shifted to a more accommodating position such as we also find in the Pauline churches (*i.e.*, L. 6a/14a & c, 27, 53). As the judgment and eschaton were delayed, the text reflects the theological repositioning of the group as they began to focus more and more on the mystical axis of apocalypticism rather than the eschatological (*i.e.*, L. 3a, 18, 19, 37, 38b, 51, 59, 83, 84, 108, 111b, 113).

By the mid- to late- first century, this group seems to have developed close connections with Christians in Alexandria, again, probably as a direct result of the missionary activity of the Jerusalem church.⁶⁷ These missionaries would have carried information, texts and ideas from one geographical location to another, from Alexandria to Jerusalem to eastern Syria and back again. This connection seems to have brought with it knowledge of a more encratic and hermetic form of Christianity that had been developing in Alexandria. This Alexandrian form of Christianity now appealed to these Christians of eastern Syria who were struggling to reinterpret their theology under the pressure of Gentile conversion and dashed hopes of an imminent end. So they modified their gospel to reflect their new understanding of Jesus as the voice of Hermes (*i.e.*, L. 3b, 7, 18, 28, 29, 56, 60, 61b, 67, 69b, 70, 77, 80, 87, 111c, 112) as well as the encratic nature of Christianity that was common in Alexandria (*i.e.*, L. 4, 11b, 16c, 21a and c, 22, 23b, 49, 50, 64b, 75, 85, 101, 105, 106, 110, 114). They also seem to have become involved in a manner of exegeting Jewish scripture, especially Genesis 1-3, that was quite popular among Alexandrian Christians, and that helped them address some of their concerns about salvation in light of the delayed apocalypse (*i.e.*, L. 2, 18, 19, 28, 50, 60, 61b, 77, 83, 84, 85, 111b).

According to my previous research on John and Thomas, I think that the form of Christianity that was developing in eastern Syria was particularly at odds with Johannine Christianity⁶⁸ and there may have been a need at the end of the first century for them to legitimate the authority of their traditional hero, Judas Thomas (*i.e.*, introductory clause and L.

⁶⁷ There is an ancient tradition that Barnabas from the Jerusalem church was the first to missionize Alexandria (*i.e.*, *Hom.* 1.8-11, 13-14). I think it quite likely that this particular tradition reflects the historical memory that the Jerusalem church had missionized Alexandria very early.

⁶⁸ DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics*.

13). By the mid-second century, this gospel had come into more or less the form that we now have it and was taken to Alexandria and seems to have become part of the early Christian landscape there at this time.

When the sayings that make up the original kernel gospel are compared to other ancient sources, a couple of fascinating connections emerge. First, when aligned with both Quispel's and Baarda's work on Tatian's *Diatessaron*, in every case that Tatian's version parallels Thomas' version, the saying is located in the kernel gospel rather than in any of the later layers with the exception of 113 (Quispel: 6, 8, 9, 16, 21, 25, 32, 33, 35, 36, 39, 40, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 55, 57, 63, 64, 66, 68, 74, 79, 86, 89, 90, 91, 94, 95, 96, 98, 100, 104, 109, 113; Baarda: 4, 8, 9, 10, 16, 20, 21, 26, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 40, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 54, 55, 56, 57, 61, 63, 64, 65, 68, 69, 72, 73, 76, 78, 79, 86, 89, 91, 93, 94, 96, 99, 100, 104, 107, 113).⁶⁹ The parallel between Tatian and *Thomas* 113 may be explained as the result of the influence of the Western Text on Tatian rather than any other connection since both Codex Bezae and Vetus Latina have the same variant. At any rate, this striking agreement between Tatian and the kernel *Thomas* cannot be coincidence especially since other Syrian witnesses seem to be aware of many of the sayings found in the later layers of *Thomas*. For instance, the *Liber Graduum* seems to be familiar with Logia 6a, 18, 19, 22, 27, 37, 75, 85, 105, 106⁷⁰ while Macarius with Logia 3, 11, 22, 27, 37, 51, 112, 113.⁷¹ This may provide some evidence that an early form of the *Gospel of Thomas* similar to the one I have reconstructed was known to Tatian. Or could the kernel *Thomas* be related to the common "Jewish Christian" gospel source which Quispel long ago postulated was used by Tatian and the compilers of the old Syriac gospels? It is certainly tempting to regard it as such.

⁶⁹ Both Quispel and Baarda have included L. 1 which they indicate parallels John 8:52. I do not find this parallel to be convincing so I have not included it in my discussion. See, G. Quispel "L'Évangile selon Thomas et le Diatessaron", *VC* 13 (1959) 87-117; *Tatian and the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden, 1975); T. Baarda, "Thomas and Tatian," in his *Early Transmission of Words of Jesus: Thomas, Tatian and the Text of the New Testament* (VU Boekhandel: Uitgeverij, 1983) 37-49.

⁷⁰ D.A. Baker, "'The Gospel of Thomas' and the Syriac 'Liber Graduum,'" *NTS* 12 (1965/1966) 49-55.

⁷¹ G. Quispel, "The Syrian Thomas and the Syrian Macarius", *Gnostic Studies* 2, Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 34,2 (Leiden, 1975) 113-121; *Makarius, das Thomasevangelium, und das Lied von der Perle*, *NTSup* 15 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967); and A. Baker, "Pseudo-Macarius and the Gospel of Thomas", *VC* 18 (1964) 215-225.

Second, just over fifty percent of the sayings in the kernel gospel are paralleled in Q. Not even one saying with a Q parallel, however, can be found in the later layers. This also cannot be coincidence. It suggests to me that the sayings in the kernel gospel of *Thomas* are some of our oldest witnesses to the Jesus traditions. Additionally, my initial analysis of the kernel gospel seems to indicate that neither Q nor the kernel *Thomas* were literarily dependent upon the other. The sequence, language, and use of the parallel sayings suggests that Q and *Thomas* were familiar with sayings that were largely apocalyptic in nature and which each text developed in its own way—the apocalyptic expectations were intensified in Q while they were de-intensified by the addition of the later layers of *Thomas*. Could the sayings parallels in Q and the *Gospel of Thomas* be independent witnesses to a very ancient sayings tradition which was developing in theologically diverse directions among Christians living in Palestine and Syria? It certainly appears so.

This view, however, must be qualified because the rolling corpus model has severe implications for the issue of literary dependence on other early Christian literature, in particular dependence on the synoptic gospels. In my opinion, we can no longer make the case for the literary independence of the whole *Gospel of Thomas* because it is quite possible that sayings found in the later layers of *Thomas* may reflect knowledge of one or more of the synoptic gospels. In fact, dependence is especially likely at this stage in the development of *Thomas* given the fact that these communities created their ideologies in response to the opinions and stances of other Christians.⁷² Certainly I am not suggesting that the entire gospel is dependent on the synoptics. Rather, I think the time has come for us to temper the arguments for independence. We must now embark on the difficult and time-consuming task of asking questions of literary dependence or independence on a case by case basis.

The perspective of the rolling corpus certainly solves the persistent problem of the existence of sayings within *Thomas* which promote contradictory ideologies, such as in the case of sayings favoring early Christian-Jewish perspectives (*i.e.*, L. 12) and those clearly promulgating later Gentile views (*i.e.*, L. 53). Since the text reflects decades of ideological struggles and shifting constituencies, we would expect to see just what we find in the gospel: sayings of contradictory natures along with attempts to reinterpret them. The process of recontextualization might include creating dialogues out of

⁷² DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics*, 9-18.

older sayings, adding interpretative glosses to problematic sayings, framing difficult sayings with a new saying or group of sayings, or inserting question and answer pericopes. In all of these cases, the recontextualization forces new meaning onto the older problematic sayings. In addition, the reinterpretation might take place on the level of the reader himself. He might belong to a new interpretative community which joined the Thomase community at some point in its history. This shifting constituency might have provided alternative ways to read and exegete the gospel.

Does this shifting constituency and remodeling of ancient Jesus traditions mean that the later layers represent less “historical” Jesus material? Only if we forget that our understanding of the “historical Jesus” is a product of our era. The Christians responsible for the *Gospel of Thomas* were a charismatic community, believing that Jesus, through his spirit, continued to communicate with its members. One must imagine that, for them, not only were all of the sayings in the original gospel sayings of the prophet himself, but every saying that was added to the gospel over the course of time as well. The “historical” Jesus for them was the “living” Jesus who was ever-present in their community. As he continued to guide them and teach them as their community grew and encountered problems and changing needs, they continued to update their gospel with new sayings which they believed were answers from Jesus himself.

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