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Brief Studies

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BRIEF STUDIES

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THOMAS.

By A. Guillaumont, Henri-Charles Puech, Gilles Quispel, Walter Till and Yassah 'Abd al-Masih. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959. vii + 62 pages. Cloth. \$2.00.

About the year 1945 some farmers near Nag Hammadi on the east side of the Nile came across a huge collection of manuscripts, mostly Gnostic in origin. Thirteen of these finally made their way into the hands of competent scholars and were found to contain 48 books in varying degrees of preservation. One of these manuscripts is called the Jung Codex, in honor of Carl Gustav Jung, the famous Swiss psychologist. One of the four texts in this codex was published in a sumptuous edition in Zurich (1956), under the title *Evangelium veritatis*, ed. Michel Malinine, Henri-Charles Puech and Gilles Quispel. Portions of two other codices comprising five documents were published in 158 plates in *Coptic Gnostic Papyri in the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo*, I, ed. Pahor Labib (Cairo, 1956). Included in these photographs was a reproduction of the self-styled Gospel of Thomas (GT), not to be confused with the apocryphal infancy gospel.¹ Since experts in Coptic are extremely scarce, the contents of these plates went largely unnoticed in this country.

At first it was planned to publish a detailed commentary along with the Coptic text and translation of GT, but to avoid further delay and, we suspect, to exploit public interest, it was determined to publish the edition under review, consisting only of the Coptic text and a translation. The commentary will follow at a later date.

The contents of this volume are not altogether new to the scholars of the New Testament. Already in 1952 Professor Puech

observed that passages in GT were quite similar to sayings extant in papyri which had been discovered at Oxyrhynchus in 1897 and 1903 by Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt.² Despite the differences between the two sets of sayings, it is quite apparent from a comparison of the Coptic with the Greek of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri that the emendations proposed by scholars for the fragmentary Greek text shot rather wide of the mark.

The title of the newly published work, which is a literal rendering of the last two lines of the Coptic text, is misleading. This "Gospel" is not a gospel in the canonical sense but rather a collection of 114 sayings, allegedly written by Thomas the apostle and introduced almost invariably by the formula "And Jesus said." The ascription to Thomas is evidently a pseudepigraphical device designed to secure apostolic sanction for the Gnostic thoughts advanced in the work. The codex, according to the editors, is probably to be dated in the late fourth or early fifth century A. D. and is a translation of a work which seems to have first been published in Greek about 140 A. D. Johannes Leipoldt, however, thinks that the original text was written in the fourth century, but was based on materials written before the synoptists had assumed canonical status, that is, before 200 A. D.³

Although the text offers little of theological value beyond the material it shares with the New Testament, GT has some significance for the possible light it may shed on Gospel origins. The newly discovered text has, it is

² "The Jung Codex and the Other Documents from Nag Hammadi," in *The Jung Codex: A Newly Recovered Gnostic Papyrus*, trans. and ed. F. L. Cross (London and New York, 1955), pp. 21 f.

³ See "Ein Neues Evangelium? Das koptische Thomasevangelium übersetzt und besprochen," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, LXXXIII, No. 7 (July 1958), col. 494.

¹ See Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 14 to 16; 49-70.

true, much in common with the synoptists, proportionately less with the Fourth Gospel, but if source-critical methodology is to have any validity, the absence of any consistent pattern of verbal or thought correspondence would seem to point to literary independence and to the use of a very early Gospel tradition differing from our canonical gospels.⁴ Thus logion 47 observes that the new wineskins *spoil* the wine and completely alters the patching procedure criticized in Mark 2:21 and parallels. In logion 63 the rich man plans to use his financial resources to increase his production capacity, whereas in Luke 12:16-21 the farmer is in the first hours of retirement. See also the interesting variations in the parable of the disappointed host, logion 64. In logion 107 Jesus says to the lost sheep: "I love thee more than [πενήντα] ninety-nine." Moreover, rarely (see logion 32 and 33) do two or more synoptic sayings appear in the same sequence as they are found in the canonical gospels. Thus logion 47 inverts the order followed by the synoptists by putting the saying on the wineskins first (see also logion 45). Gnostic interests alone do not account for all these variations.

Gilles Quispel, to whom the world is in debt for his pioneering efforts on this and other Gnostic texts, is convinced that GT reflects a Jewish-Christian rather than a Hellenistic milieu. He has sought to trace the line of dependence to the fragmentary and apocryphal Gospel to the Hebrews.⁵ While

this alleged literary dependence is questionable in view of the fact that the Gospel to the Hebrews was designed as a complete Gospel and GT consists merely of sayings, the Jewish-Christian provenance of the text underlying the Gnostic work is indicated in at least 30 logia which, according to Quispel (p. 282), preserve traces of their Aramaic origin. (The Gnostic sect itself displays little affection for the Jews [see logion 43]). In logion 9, the parable of the sower, e.g., it is stated that "some [seeds] fell on the road." Mark's rendering, followed by Matthew and Luke, states that the seed fell alongside the road. An Aramaic phrase *עַל אֲרֻחָא*, suggests Quispel, is behind the variation.⁶ The Aramaic expression can mean either "on" or "beside the road." The Gnostic rendering then may very well take us back to a form of the saying which antedates that in the synoptists. The fact that the explanation of the parable is lacking in GT would tend to encourage such a conclusion.

The implications of such findings for synoptic source criticism should require no further elucidation. In the event that GT's independence of the synoptists should be conclusively demonstrated, form historians will be certainly forced to reappraise their reconstruction of Gospel origins, for we find "hellenized" synoptic sayings in a strongly independent and very early Jewish-Christian tradition. The likelihood that the Christian community is responsible for the creation of

⁴ This is the conclusion reached by Claus-Hunno Hunzinger (SBLE meeting, December 1959); cf. Leipoldt, col. 494. Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman, in *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Garden City, N. Y., 1960), on the other hand, are inclined "to hold that Thomas made use of our gospels, selecting from them what he liked," but they grant the possibility that he made use also of traditions underlying the gospels, pp. 107 f.

⁵ "Some Remarks on the Gospel of Thomas," *New Testament Studies*, V, 4 (July 1959),

276—290; see p. 278. For the extant remains of the Gospel to the Hebrews see James, pp. 1—8.

⁶ Pages 277 f. Charles Cutler Torrey's observation (*The Four Gospels: A New Translation*, 2d ed. [New York and London, 1947], p. 298) thus finds external support. The use of the word "throw" instead of "sow" in both GT and I Clement 24:5 not only suggests GT's independence of the synoptists, but in conjunction with other phenomena we have noted, also points to a strongly entrenched primitive tradition.

many of the sayings is greatly diminished in direct ratio to the narrowing of the time span required for the development of such "form."

Secondly, the role of Q as a common source for Matthew and Luke's non-Markan material is more complex and ambiguous than ever before. Conflation, editorial modification, and free concatenation of materials circulating in either oral or written collections of varying length must in future studies of the synoptic problem be given greater consideration.

Additions in GT to the tradition underlying the synoptic accounts are in many cases readily identifiable because of their Gnostic cast. Thus in logion 8, corresponding to Matt. 13:47-50, the reference to the "large (and) good fish" appears to be an allusion to the perfect Gnostic. Opposition to Jewish legalism is apparent in logion 14, which reads in part (bracketed portions are retained):

If you fast (νηστεύειν), you will beget sin for yourselves, and if you pray, you will be condemned (κατακρίνειν), and if you give alms (ἐλεημοσύνη), you will do evil (κακόν) to your spirits (πνεῦμα).

Logion 21 reads like Gnostic polemic against the flesh:

Mary said to Jesus: Whom are thy disciples (μαθητῆς) like? He said: They are like little children who have installed themselves in a field which is not theirs. When (ὅταν) the owners of the field come, they will say: "Release to us our field." They take off their clothes before them to release it (the field) to them and to give back their field to them.

See also logia 80 and 87. The Gnostic union of opposites accounts for such logia as 22 and 114, which speak of the inner becoming as the outer, and vice versa, and female becoming male.

The questionable morality of the finder of buried treasure in Matt. 13:34 is altered as follows:

The Kingdom is like a man who had a treasure [hidden] in his field, without knowing it. And [after] he died, he left it to his [son. The] son did not know (about it), he accepted that field, he sold [it]. And he who bought it, he went, while he was plowing [he found] the treasure. He began (ἀρχεσθαι) to lend money to whomever he wished. (Logion 109)

Occasionally fresh light is shed on the meaning of a synoptic parallel. The Christological accent of Luke 12:56 is enunciated more crisply in the addition, "and him who is before your face you have not known," logion 91. In a similar vein logion 100 has Jesus' answer in the story of the tribute money as follows: "Give the things of Caesar to Caesar, give the things of God to God *and give Me what is Mine*" [italics ours]. The Gnostic orientation is, of course, evident.

The word ἀπελιζω in Luke 6:35 has undergone various explanations in commentaries. The Gnostic text reads: "If you have money, do not lend at interest, but (ἀλλά) give [them] to him from whom you will not receive them (back)" (logion 95), supporting not only the translation of the Vulgate, *nihil inde sperantes*, but also confirming the reading μηδέν instead of the form μηδένα, read by W Ξ Π (prima manu), 489, and the Syriac versions.

The parallel to Luke 6:35 suggests the importance of correctly assessing the contributions which GT can make to our textual-critical studies of the New Testament. To cite but one other example, Papyrus 45 has raised the question of a transposition in Luke 12:53. The papyrus puts the phrase for "son against father" ahead of the words "father against son." Logion 16, also from Egypt, confirms the traditional reading.

In this review and appraisal of the significance of this publication we have emphasized its importance for New Testament studies. Of even greater significance will be its contribution to the history of Gnosticism.

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