

THE DAWN OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

The Second Century

Rev. Karel Coppock

INTRODUCTION

Last week we were able to trace some of the persecution; the amazing speed of the Church's spread; and some of the literature left behind from that era: the Didache—a pre-baptismal document used to instruct candidates at the end of the first century, and the First Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Church in Corinth. These writings allow us to gain a glimpse into what communities of Christians at the turn of the century held dear; how they practiced baptism and the Lord's Supper; how they trained candidates for baptism; and how they chose leaders. We see their theology and their moral earnestness.

Besides these literary glimpses from Church documents themselves, we have seen, that there was also reference made to Christians in the secular world, by the **Roman Historians Tacitus and Suetonius**. We also glimpsed a few historical tidbits from the first century transmitted by Eusebius, the father of Church History, writing in the 320's: how some of the Gospels were written, notably, how Matthew was believed by the early church father **Papias** to have penned his Gospel in Hebrew, and how that Gospel was taken as far as India, either by Thomas or by Bartholomew, both disciples of Jesus. We saw how Eusebius reported that Paul had been beheaded and Peter crucified upside down, both in Rome; how James the Just, the brother of Jesus and the author of the Epistle of James was thrown from the Parapet in Jerusalem, or stoned in either 62 AD or 69 AD.

But, truth be told, much remains obscure. Most of the documents Eusebius himself used have since been lost; and the church, being small and struggling, having left its formative documents in the New Testament, did not leave much else in terms of literature or buildings in the years after the death of the apostles aside from the two documents—1 Clement and the Didache I've mentioned. **But when we leave the first Century and make our way into the second, as a tribute to the growth of the church, writings and names of church leaders begin to multiply.** Here we are on much more concrete ground.

What do we know? Well, we know that with the spread of our faith, once again, we encounter **persecution**.

Jesus said: *“A disciple is not above his master; if they persecuted me, they will persecute you too.”*

So it is here, with persecution, I'd like to begin. And interestingly enough, some of what we know, comes to us from **a secular source: a ruling made by the emperor Trajan** concerning Christians that was to **affect the church in the Roman Empire for many years**. The documents that inform us of this ruling come in the form of correspondence between Trajan and a provincial governor named Pliny. They date to around AD 111, that is, exactly 1900 years ago.

PERSECUTION UNDER TRAJAN

“In A.D. 111, **Pliny the younger** was appointed governor of **Bithynia**, on the northern shore of what today is Turkey. We know from correspondence that Pliny, who appears to want to do a good job as governor was being faced with an unexpected problem. **There were already many Christians in the area, so many that Pliny declared that the pagan temples were almost deserted, and that the sellers of sacrificial victims found few buyers.** When someone sent the new governor a list of Christians, Pliny began inquiries, for he knew that this religion was illegal.”

“The governor had the accused brought before him, and thus began learning of the beliefs and practices of Christians. Many declared that they were not Christians, and others said that, although they had followed the new faith for a time, they had abandoned it. Of these Pliny required only that they pray to the gods, burn incense before the image of the emperor, and curse Christ, something that he had heard true Christians would never do. Once they performed these rites, he simply let them go.

“Those who persisted in their faith posed a different problem. Pliny's practice was to offer them three opportunities to recant, while threatening them with death. If they refused, he had them executed, not so much for being Christians, as for their obstinacy. If they were Roman citizens, he had them sent to Rome, as the law required.” (Justo Gonzales' The Story of Christianity)

But Pliny who considered himself a just man felt obliged to find out what crimes, besides sheer obstinacy, Christians committed. All he could learn about Christians was this: (quoted from Documents of the Christian Church, selected and edited by Henry Bettenson, pages 3-4):

[Refer to hand-out copies of this correspondence. Question: What strikes you here?]

“They declared that the sum of their guilt or error had amounted only to this, that on an appointed day they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak, and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, not for the commission of any crime but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery and breach of faith, and not to deny a deposit when it was claimed. After the conclusion of this ceremony it was their custom to depart and meet again to take food; but it was ordinary and harmless food, and they had ceased this practice after my edict in which, in accordance with your orders, I had forbidden secret societies. I thought it the more necessary, therefore, to find out what truth there was in this by applying torture to two maidservants, who were called deaconesses, (or ministers ministræ). But I found nothing but a depraved and extravagant superstition, and I therefore postponed my examination and had recourse to you for consultation.

“The matter seemed to me to justify my consulting you, especially on account of the number of those imperiled; for many persons of all ages and classes and of both sexes are being put in peril by accusation, and this will go on. The contagion of this superstition has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well; yet it seems capable of being checked and set right. There is no shadow of doubt that the temples, which have been almost deserted, are beginning to be frequented once more, that the sacred rites which have been long

neglected are being renewed, and that sacrificial victims are for sale everywhere, whereas, till recently, a buyer was rarely to be found. From this it is easy to imagine what a host of men could be set right, were they given a chance of recantation."

The emperor's response was this, important because it determined a legal precedent for the Empire in dealing with Christians: (Bettenson, page 4):

[Question: What can you glean concerning the church here?]

"You have taken the right line, my dear Pliny, in examining the cases of those denounced to you as Christians, for no hard and fast rule can be laid down, of universal application. They are not to be sought out; if they are informed against, and the charge is proved, they are to be punished, with this reservation—that if any one denies that he is a Christian, and actually proves it, that is by worshiping our gods, he shall be pardoned as a result of his recantation, however suspect he may have been with respect to the past. Pamphlets published anonymously should carry no weight in any charge whatsoever. They constitute a very bad precedent, and are also out of keeping with this age."

This legal ruling was to determine the way the Romans dealt with Christians for well over a hundred years.

- No general rule
- Don't seek them out: their crimes are not of a kind that is worth the time it takes to find and prosecute them.
- If they are accused, and refuse to recant, prosecute them
- If they recant, and worship the gods again, let them go
- Disregard anonymous accusations

What this meant concretely during this period of persecution was that it was largely very public Christians who were persecuted, that is, well known pastors and teachers. And of these, we actually have records of two who died during this persecution: the overseer or pastor of the church of Antioch—Ignatius; and the pastor of Smyrna—Polycarp.

IGNATIUS AND POLYCARP

Ignatius and Polycarp were bishops, that is, over-seers or head pastors, of important Christian communities. The correspondence we have from Ignatius comes to us from around 107 and 108; he was martyred a short time later. Polycarp who also wrote in the first half of the second century was martyred around 155. For centuries Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, because of their early dates and writings, and personal knowledge of the Apostles, have been referred to as *Apostolic Fathers*. We'll talk about Ignatius now, and probably have a brief glance at Polycarp next week. Later today we'll take a look at the Gospel of Thomas.

Ignatius was the third bishop or pastor of that church, that same church from which Paul and Barnabas had been sent out as missionaries in about the year AD 46 in Acts 13:1-3. Antioch was an important church at the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel to non-Jews, and remained for about four centuries one of the most important churches in Christendom. It should be mentioned that, at the time Ignatius was writing, Antioch was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. In Acts 11: 26, we are told that a great multitude believed there, and that it was there in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

Well, Ignatius was the third bishop or pastor of the Church in Antioch, and wrote letters we still possess today. He penned these only 60 years after the episode of Paul and Barnabas's sending out as missionaries in Acts 13. Ignatius claimed to be a student of John the Apostle, who lived to a very old age. And he was martyred in Rome circa 108 A.D. in the Colosseum, killed by lions. **On his way to Rome he wrote six epistles**, one of which he sent to Polycarp; the others he sent to various churches, such as Ephesus, Rome and Smyrna. They are letters which give a good idea of the theology of the period. The nature of this class disallows study in detail of his letters, but I'd like to quote a few of his words to help us understand the era. The first relates to his martyrdom. These words relating to martyrdom he wrote to the Church in Rome, the city to which he was traveling to meet his death.

Question: [Let's read a few excerpts of what he wrote on the papers I've handed out to you. What do you discover here that strikes you?]

“I enjoin all, that I am dying willingly for God's sake, if only you do not prevent it. I beg you, do not do me an untimely kindness. Allow me to be eaten by the beasts, which is my way of reaching to God. I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become the pure bread of Christ.”— Letter to the Romans

Again: *“Avoid divisions as the beginning of evils. All of you follow the bishop as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and follow the presbytery (or elders) as the Apostles; and respect the deacons as the commandment of God. Let no man perform anything pertaining to the church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Lord's Supper over which the bishop (or pastor) presides, or **one to whom he commits it**. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is **the universal (or catholic) church**. It is not lawful to baptize or give communion without the consent of the bishop (or pastor). On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God. Thus, whatever is done will be safe and valid”* (page 63-4, Bettenson, Documents).

[Discussion]

This is a glimpse of the attitude prevalent in the church regarding martyrdom; and this attitude toward martyrdom, which reflects Paul's words in Acts 21: 13 to the disciples in Caesarea when he says: *“Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus,”* these words of Paul and Ignatius will have an **interesting afterlife**. They will become a pattern, not only for martyrdom, but also in some countries, for self-exile in monasticism. But more of that later. In other words, to die for Christ became an honor.

Ignatius says a few other things that give an early glimpse of what is to come in the second century. One relates to a term he uses: the term is **“katholicos”**.

You'll recognize this as the word from which **the term “catholic” arises**. Ignatius used the term *“katholicos”* (in Greek) to refer to that theology and practice which were universally recognized among the churches. The word means “complete” or “according to the whole”. He was using the term in such a way, that it seems to reflect a usage current already among the churches of his day to distinguish between that which was widely taught in churches

throughout the empire and beyond as accepted doctrine, and that which was heterodox, new, or unfamiliar teaching. This has led many to believe that the term “catholic” for those churches which were faithful to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles was already in use in the late first century.

We're reminded of a line from the Epistle to the Hebrews (13:17): *“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden.”*

So, why were Ignatius and other churches finding it necessary to use this term *Katholicos*? Because, even as there were false teachers arising in Paul and John's day of whom they warned in epistle after epistle, false teachings were arising in Ignatius' day, at the turn of the century. Ignatius already had to inveigh against a heresy called “**Docetism**” from the Greek meaning to appear or seem. It was a teaching that Christ only appeared to have a body and suffer on the cross, but in reality did not.

Here is a problem: in an environment where there is no recognized book of church order—though the *Didache* functioned in some fashions like this--where four gospels and various epistles are still floating around from church to church without yet having been formed into a recognized canon of scripture in a single book, where spurious documents were also arising purporting to come from the apostles, and where there was no over arching ecclesiastical authority in the Mediterranean world to which churches could appeal, **how do you know what is true?** Moreover, in an environment where the work and power of the Spirit were accepted as part of the church's heritage, a church might find among its members people who felt “inspired” to say or teach any kind of nonsense and gather a following for themselves. Not only this, but illustrious pagan teaching as well as mystery cults of all kinds surrounded the fledgling community. The temptation was to pull that teaching into the church in order to make the church more palatable to the cultured world.

QUESTION: So what do you do when a new teaching arises which its advocates claim to be a revelation from God to the Church? Perhaps a secret teaching of Jesus or one of the apostles which is claimed to have been hidden from the mass of church members, but which God intended for those who were truly enlightened? What do you do when someone pulls a writing out and says that it has recently come to light and reveals secret teachings of Jesus or the apostles unknown till this point? Especially if there is no “Pope” or over-arching ecclesiastical authority. How do you discern whether it should have full place as a governing writing of the church?

[Discussion]

How to discern truth?

1. Well, one way was to recognize truth by what was already widely being taught in other churches planted by the apostles. In other words, **does it square with what the majority of churches teach that were founded by the apostles? (*Katholicos*).**
2. Moreover, to guarantee some semblance of theological order in this tender sprout that is the young church, you exhort Christians **to submit to and obey the pastors and leaders of the churches who have themselves been disciplined by the apostles. You**

establish lineage and tradition.

3. John 16:13 “When the Holy Spirit comes He will guide you into all Truth.” There is something that rings true when we have submitted to Christ and received his Spirit. People who've tried reading the Bible for years, but who finally come to the end of themselves and receive Christ, suddenly find the Word of God opening up to them. The Church is the community of the Spirit, of those who've received Christ. As such, there was an intuitive recognition of what was truly of Him and what was not. This was shared by Christians and by Churches around the Mediterranean world. And by this what was false was rejected.

When John writes in his 2nd epistle: *“Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, (that is docetism) have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the anti-Christ. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. **Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him,**”* he is talking about a real problem.

Paul wrote already to the Galatians: *“As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”* (1:9).

The reason this is important is that the inner vitality of our faith is at stake. Just anything that, as Paul says in 2 Timothy, tickles peoples fancies, won't do. We want the truth as we find it laid out by Jesus' life, death, resurrection, teaching, and the teaching of his apostles. **We want what really happened, what Jesus really said,** and what God really intended us to believe. We want a reliable testimony. This is where life, where vitality lies. To deny its essential core, is to destroy the Church and the way to Salvation. It is the work of the enemy.

And here we have it: false teaching was an attempt to destroy the Gospel, the Good News, and the path God has opened for us, the only one, to Salvation. False teaching was to be the bugaboo of the church for another three hundred fifty years. And so it is to this we must now turn. **Two major threats** of false teaching both assailed the church in the second century. Both built schools of thought that lasted for centuries. Paul, John, and Ignatius in his turn, were already fighting against the first: **Gnosticism**. The second, **Marcionism**, we'll turn to in a minute. Let's begin then, with a look at **Gnosticism**.

Gnosticism, is a rather vague term defining what was nevertheless a very real attack on the Christian faith. It came both from within the church and from without inasmuch as Gnosticism, as a religious thought form, already flourished in Greek and Roman culture. Two Gnostic teachers stand out in the second century who brought Gnostic teaching from the surrounding culture into the church : the first, **Basilides**, who taught in Egypt from **117-138**, wrote commentaries on the Gospels and letters. He, in a fashion similar to the Greek philosopher **Pythagoras**, imposed a five year silence on his disciples. The second, more important, was a man who, though he founded a school in Egypt, also taught in Rome and Cyprus. His name was **Valentinus, and he was roughly a contemporary of Basilides**. Both these men seemed to wish to reconcile Greek Platonic philosophy with Christianity. Valentinus

wrote a gospel called the Gospel of Truth. Basilides a gospel called, the Gospel of Basilides.

How do we know what they and other Gnostics taught? We know this teaching in two ways: first, we find it quoted in refutations by Christian teachers, and second we actually possess some of their writings. In 1945 a cache of Gnostic writings in a sealed jar was unearthed in **Nag Hammadi** on the west bank of the Nile in upper Egypt by two farmers digging for natural fertilizer. There were in this jar, some 52 Gnostic treatises by various writers, found in 13 codices, or leather bound books, one book of which was burned by the farmers. They all date to the second century. They were all written in Coptic, or Egyptian probably translations from the Greek. All these writings are available online.

What did the Gnostics teach? Though the outlines of the teaching are relatively amorphous, there are a few characteristics that we might summarize as follows (Gonzales, pages 58-60):

GNOSTIC TEACHING

- Gnosticism comes from the word gnosis, in Greek, meaning “knowledge”. Gnostics taught that the **key to salvation** was mystical understanding, reserved for people with a special enlightened knowledge.
- All matter is evil or at best unreal.
- Humans are eternal spirits that have been trapped in material bodies.
- The Gnostic's goal is to escape from the body and this material world in which we've been exiled. The world is not our true home, but rather an obstacle to salvation.
- Originally, all reality was spiritual. The supreme being had no intention of creating a material world, but only a spiritual one. The supreme being in the beginning generated a number of spiritual beings (some said as many as 365), called “eons”. One of them, far removed from the supreme being, fell into error and created the abortion that is the material world.
- Since this world was nevertheless made by a spiritual being, there are still 'sparks' or 'bits' of spirit in it. It is these that have been imprisoned in human bodies and must be liberated through gnosis, or divine knowledge.
- In order to achieve that liberation, a spiritual messenger must come to this world, to waken us from our 'dream', to remind us who we really are, and to call us to struggle against our imprisonment in our bodies where we are driven by impulses and passions.
- Above us are heavenly spheres ruled by evil powers whose aim is to prevent us from reaching the spiritual realm.
- In order to reach the spiritual “fullness,” we must break through each of those spheres.
- The only way to do this is to have the secret knowledge that opens the way—much like a spiritual password.
- The heavenly messenger, sent to give us that knowledge, without which there is no salvation, is Christ. He reminds us of our heavenly origin, and gives us the secret knowledge which allows us to return to the spiritual mansions.
- Since the body is evil, Christ did not have a body like ours: it was only an appearance, like a ghost that seemed real. This doctrine we call “**Docetism**”, from the verb, to appear or seem.
- Others taught that the material Jesus and the Spiritual Christ were separate beings, the one just indwelling the other.
- Most denied that Jesus was born as an infant because that would have put him under the

power of the material world.

- Since the body is the prison of the spirit, gnostic teachers recommended basically two ways to deal with it: either, to control the body and its passions through rigorous **asceticism** and thus weaken its power over the spirit...or, simply leave it to its passions, since the body is unimportant anyway and will die, whereas the spirit is by nature good and cannot be destroyed.

QUESTION: What does all this deny? Creation, the goodness of our Creator, the reality of the material world, the truth of the Old Testament; the connection between the Old Testament God and the New; the incarnation, the resurrection; the goodness of marital love; the true nature of sin, faith, and especially, the work of Christ for us on the cross: a gift to be accepted by faith.

GNOSTIC WRITINGS

At this point I think it would be good to actually look at a few Gnostic writings, of which we have many. It is important to know something about them, because such writers of fiction as Dan Brown, have contended in The Da Vinci Code that these writings were just as valid as the original documents of the church, competing with them for attention in the Church. And that the four Gospels in our NT today were simply imposed by the guys who got their preferences adopted in the Church councils, a kind of political game that could have gone any number of different directions. (cf. Walter Bauer, Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity (1934). However, there were never any other than four Gospels in the first century, and lest any of you be fascinated by the teaching of the Gnostic Gospels which were written in the 2nd, and some of which rediscovered at Nag Hammadi, **I'd like to look at excerpts, from several such Gospels and Epistles this week and next** so that you can see for yourselves how different these were from the Gospels which we honor and which bear testimony to that which Jesus actually said and did.

Let's begin by taking a look at the Gospel of Thomas, which of all the 52 tractates discovered at Nag Hammadi made the biggest splash. This Gospel, of all the treatises discovered, has the most claim to have been composed near the time of the apostles. I have photocopied the entire book for you.

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

For a number of reasons, this Gospel is still very much in the public eye. It has come up in at least two conversations with Alpha guests—one just recently again--in which guests have wondered among other things, why it was not included in the New Testament considering its reputed early age and its attribution to one of Jesus' own apostles—Thomas the twin. Several things can be said about this before we look at the text itself.

This book was known only by name for centuries, being known by such figures as the Church historian Eusebius in the early 4th century. It was lost to civilization and finally, in 1945 re-discovered in Egypt, in the cache of Gnostic tractates or treatises of Nag Hammadi I have already mentioned. What is important for our purposes today is that none of the short treatises

found at Nag Hammadi has attracted more attention than the Gospel of Thomas.

CONTENT

So what is this gospel? The book is a collection of “secret sayings” (this is how the book introduces itself) of Jesus. There are 114 of these secret sayings of Jesus. There is no narrative; there are no miracles; no death of Jesus; no resurrection—just sayings. And what is interesting is that many of these sayings are similar to sayings we have in the New Testament. They have a familiar ring. The rest were unknown to us until their discovery in 1945. But the unknown sayings of Jesus are mixed in with the known sayings.

QUESTION: So what about that might have fascinated scholars? Let's look at the Gospel and discover what we can, then let's talk about it. [Hand out the Gospel of Thomas]

This Gospel has some similar characteristics to what we know about Jesus already and thus gives the impression it might be authentic. It is laid out without any narrative of deeds of Jesus or his disciples, as being Jesus' sayings. There are 114 sayings. Each one starts with “Jesus said” or “The disciples questioned Jesus and said to him”, etc. with a response from Jesus. What is fascinating, is that many of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas are very similar to ones we already have in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So, we might wonder, if so many of the sayings are similar, if not identical to the known sayings of Jesus, might not the other, unknown teachings of Jesus in this Gospel really be authentic sayings of Jesus as well? *If so many of these sayings are known to be of Jesus, might not the rest be too?*

What else?

There is probably something here that is related to pride. Re-discovering these secret sayings—which is how the document introduces its content--might lead us into a select group of people who know more than the average person in the pew about Jesus—one of the attractions of Gnosticism to begin with. This can also affect scholarship.

Which brings us to another point which is actually hinged to contemporary Biblical scholarship. For many years now among some N.T. Scholars a theory has been making the rounds concerning the writing of the first three Gospels of the New Testament. As you know, these three Gospels are very similar: they report many of the same miracles, parables, sayings, and doings of Jesus. Nearly all of the Gospel of Mark is contained in the Gospel of Matthew. And 41% of Mark is contained in Luke. That is why they are called “Synoptic Gospels” from the Greek roots, “see” and “together”. In addition to this, Matthew and Luke share some materials that are not in Mark. So, scholars began a process of speculating about how the Gospels were written and in what order. Some scholars posited the existence of a hypothetical document consisting of sayings of Jesus pre-dating the composition of the N.T. Gospels from which Luke and Matthew drew to create the sections they had in common. This document which would have been a collection of Jesus' sayings drifting around in the early church was given the name “Q”, by these scholars, from the German, “Quelle or Source”. According to this theory, some early Christian in Galilee and Judea who remembered what Jesus had taught,

wrote Jesus' sayings down in a lost document scholars called "Q". Then, Matthew and Luke, using this document, took from it what they wanted, added what they wanted of the Gospel of Mark material, took some more from Q, and a bit original to them, and composed their Gospels, tossing out the Q materials they didn't want. If this were true, this hypothetical document Q would pre-date the Gospels themselves. Maybe there was some document named "Q" with nothing more than Jesus' sayings circulating from which Matthew and Luke drew material? and maybe this was it! This Gospel of Thomas! It would provide convincing evidence for the truth of these scholarly speculations.

Why not? Well, there are several reasons this is disputed, among other reasons because **no scholar in the early church ever mentioned any such mysterious document** running around; no Gospel of Thomas; no written document pre-dating the four Gospels. **Jerome, one of the greatest scholars of the first 4 centuries who traveled far and wide collecting documents in many different languages, never mentioned it.** Eusebius and Papias are very clear concerning how the Gospels were written. And they never referred to an original source document pre-dating the composition of the four Gospels. (see further below italics).

But the main reason we don't believe that the so-called Gospel of Thomas pre-dated the other Gospels as a mysterious "Q" document is in the reading itself. Let's take a look at that now.

QUESTION: What do you see? Why don't you peruse it, any page. What do you pick up on? What do you think?

Excerpts from the Gospel of Thomas

"These are reputed secret sayings that Jesus spoke and Thomas the Twin recorded:"

(Sayings 11 and 12): " Jesus said,

This heaven will pass away, and the heaven above it will pass away.

The dead are not alive, and the living will not die.

During the days when you ate what is dead, you made it alive.

...

On the day when you were one, you became two. But when you become two, what will you do?

The disciples said to Jesus, 'We know you will leave us. Who is going to be our leader then?'

Jesus said to them, 'No matter where you reside, you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.'" (pages 20-21)

Saying 103: "Whoever recognizes father or mother will be called the child of a whore."

Saying 113: "Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, because women are not worthy of life." Jesus said, 'Behold, I shall guide her so as to make her male, that she too may become a living spirit like you men. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

Scholarly judgment:

What we see here is that nearly everything that is not a quote or a paraphrase from the original

September 25, 2011

Gospels is clearly Gnostic. As though, whoever composed this Gospel and attributed it to Thomas, was cleverly trying to pass it off as Jesus' words by mixing in Gnostic sayings with known words of Jesus'.

As Eusebius says of this Gospel: *“Nothing could be farther from apostolic usage than the type of phraseology employed, while the ideas and implications of their contents are so irreconcilable with true orthodoxy that they stand revealed as the forgeries of heretics”* (Eusebius, Book 3:25, page 89).

It is why most scholars today agree in dating the composition of the document, not to a date earlier than the first three of our Gospels, but in fact to a date considerably later: To the early 2nd century or even the 3rd. The copy we have is composed in Coptic, that is, native Egyptian and is a translation of an original in Greek.