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Know Yourself and You Will Be Known: The Gospel of Thomas and Middle Platonism

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Know Yourself and You Will Be Known: The Gospel of Thomas and Middle Platonism

By

Seth Clark

Claremont Graduate University
2014

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APPROVAL OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

This thesis has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Seth Clark as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Master of Arts in Religion.

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In Memory of Marvin Meyer (1948-2012),
Who Dedicated His Life to
“...Discovering the Interpretation of These Sayings” (GTh 1).

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Introduction

The Gospel of Thomas (GTh) is often referred to as the “fifth gospel” by various parties. GTh is a collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus and is written primarily in the rhetorical form that was used to preserve sayings of Greek philosophers, especially the itinerant philosophers known as Cynic philosophers.¹ Moreover, it is known that these collections were often used to persuade other individuals to join these philosophical schools, much like early adherents of the Jesus movement would use his teachings to persuade others to join them as well.² The genre of GTh is attested in other early Christian literature, namely as the source of Jesus’ sayings that Matthew and Luke used in their narratives, formally known as “Q” by most scholars.³

The discovery of GTh confirmed that this type of genre was used by early Christians and displays several features that date it to the mid first century CE, which means that it was initially composed by an early Christian community that were attempting to preserve the teachings of Jesus as they understood them.⁴ However, the theological background that GTh casts the teachings of Jesus against has proved to be problematic for many scholars and many proposals

¹ The vast majority of these are references to early Christian literature and such nomenclature is common enough as to not need further explanation. The translations of ancient texts in this work are guided by the following principles: If the New Testament is referenced, the translation is mine from the Greek unless noted, in which case it will come from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). The Gospel of Thomas (GTh) is largely drawn from a popular translation by Marvin Meyer. Occasionally, I alter the translation of the GTh and when that occurs, it will be dictated with a footnote. The translations of other ancient works are mine unless otherwise noted.

² Stephen J Patterson and James M Robinson, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998, 36.

³ Stevan Davies, “The Fourth Synoptic Gospel,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 46:1 (Winter 1983), 6-9+12-14; 6

⁴ The citation style that is utilized throughout this work is as follows: it adheres to the Chicago Manual of Style but certain modifications are made using the Society of Biblical Literature’s (SBL) Manual of Style because this work largely deals with biblical literature and related texts. The principle deviation regarding this combination is the usage of the “short citation” and “ibid.” The “short citation” consists of the last name of the author, a shorter form of the title, and relevant page numbers as a manner of citing works previously used. If the “short citation” is provided and the work is referenced again in direct sequence on the same page, then the short term “ibid” is used with the appropriate page numbers.

have been made concerning the background for the text.⁵ The problem with the plethora of these proposals is that they don't account for the esoteric and eclectic nature of Jesus' sayings recorded in the text except for one: the Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism.

The Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism is comprised of a few different philosophers and theologians who shaped the ideological landscape that gave rise to a plurality of religious expressions that made truth claims via a combination of eclectic philosophy and the esoteric claims of divine revelation as manifested in holy writ. The three primary figures that the Alexandrian school consists of are Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria who were active during the first four centuries CE.

While the three afore-mentioned figures composed commentaries on holy writ that reflected the philosophical commitments of Middle Platonism, scripture itself was being composed in a Middle Platonic matrix. GTh and the Gospel of John (GJn) reflect a understanding of the divine as manifested in three persons: namely, the fully transcendent Father, the transcendent but materially involved Mother, and the demiurge/world-soul that is the Son of both higher divine principles who created the world, which made way for the claim that this principle became flesh as Jesus in GJn. While GJn manifests Middle Platonism in a refined fashion over the narrative of Jesus' life, GTh features ten plus explicit themes that are native to Middle Platonism and utilizes the Alexandrian maxim of "likeness unto God as much as possible" as the theological payoff for those who properly understand the teachings of Jesus in the text.

This work is divided into five major chapters with various sections under each chapter. The first chapter covers the importance of GTh, the various theological backgrounds proposed for interpreting the text, and briefly concludes with the significance of Middle Platonism in

⁵ Davies, "The Fourth Synoptic Gospel," 14.

relation to GTh and early Christianity as a whole. The other section of the first chapter is a brief literature review that covers what other scholars have written on Platonism and GTh that concludes with an argument by Stephen Patterson that Middle Platonism exerted a significant influence on GTh.⁶ However, I argue that Patterson does not fully pursue the proposition of Middle Platonism as the theological background for GTh and briefly demonstrate why the text should be fully understood as a Christian Middle Platonic Gospel.

The second chapter is dedicated to fully exploring Middle Platonism as manifested from 80 BCE to 300 CE. The first section is about Plato and the three successors of his Academy as the principal foundation of Middle Platonism. The second section explores Eudorus of Alexandria and Antiochus of Ascalon. These two individuals are responsible for expressing Middle Platonism as a coherent philosophical system with the end of “likeness unto God as far as possible” that was adopted by Philo, Clement, and Origen between 20 BCE and 300 CE. The next section explores the contributions of Philo, Clement, and Origen themselves to their respective religious traditions as paired with Middle Platonism to demonstrate that Judaism, Christianity, and Middle Platonism were fully compatible in the beginning years of Christianity. The final section of this chapter provides a summary of all the material covered in this chapter and how it applies to GTh.

Chapter three explores the various categories of Jesus sayings in the GTh and how they relate to each other in addition to the larger philosophical-religious landscape of the near Mediterranean area. Section six of this piece explore the possible teachings of the historical Jesus as recorded in GTh and maintains that the text does preserve various teachings of Jesus himself that are untainted by later theological orientation. The following section notes which sayings are

⁶ Stephen Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the *Gospel of Thomas* and Middle Platonism,” in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie*, Jorg Frey, et al, (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2008).

explicitly products of the first century CE, from which I argue that the majority of GTh was composed after 55 CE but before the composition of GJn in 90 CE. The subsequent division explores the two principal criteria that establish GTh as a Christian Middle Platonic gospel so that a brief survey of the major Middle Platonic themes in the text can be fleshed out in the final section of chapter three.

The fourth chapter opens with the three dominant Middle Platonic themes that will be shown to be present in GTh and how the genre of the text itself is demonstrative of Hellenistic influence. Section ten is dedicated to exploring the notion of “secret teachings” in Platonism/Middle Platonism with respect to how this concept is found in certain sayings of GTh. The understanding of Christianity as a mystery religion as expressive of Socrates’ teachings in the *Phaedo* and the *sitz im leben* that these sayings were developed in. Section 11 investigates the three logia that are reflective of daemons as guardians of the physical realm in the cosmos. Jesus seems to be imparting the information necessary to the reader that these beings exist in the universe and the knowledge necessary to bypass the entities after death so that the human soul can return to the intelligible realm of the divine. Section 12 explores the Middle Platonic understanding of the divine as two separate principles residing in the realm of pure intellect and a representative of the divine on the edge of the intelligible-sensible realm that interacts with the physical realm.

This is known as the doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad plus the Demiurge/World-Soul that relates to each other as a family: the Monad is the Father, the Dyad is the Mother, and the Demiurge is the Son. The rest of the section is dedicated to the exegesis of select logia and is explored in light of how this doctrine is merged with the life of the historical Jesus. The final section of chapter four is a summary of the work accomplished in this chapter and how it

contributes to the status of the text as a Christian Middle Platonic gospel. The last chapter serves as an overall summary of the work, a few remarks on the identity of Jesus in GTh, potential areas of future research, and closing remarks.

Hence, GTh is reflective of Platonic traditions, views from the Greco-Roman world, and the significant influence of Middle Platonism combined with the Jesus tradition that ultimately reveal it to be a Christian Middle Platonic Gospel. Additionally, it is an early independent Christian source that provides insight as to how Jesus was conceived in the first century by Thomasine Christians. For reasons discussed in the paper, GTh can likely be dated to 60 CE but was certainly composed before the GJn in 90 CE. While the GTh is important for many other reasons, the central importance for my argument is that it represents a combination of a unique philosophical tradition and a Christian worldview that effectively produced a text that has caused many to wonder about the “proper interpretation of these sayings” that comes with the promise of “not tasting death” if discovered and implemented (GTh 1). In short, this is my attempt at supplying the hermeneutical key to the text or at least supplying a valid ideological background on which the Jesus tradition is cast in GTh.

These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas recorded. And he said, "Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death" (GTh Prologue-Saying 1).

I. The Gospel of Thomas: An Interpretation?

It is commonplace to hear the Gospel of Thomas labeled as esoteric, gnostic, enigmatic, and puzzling. It is often placed in the category of texts that have “gone awry” when explicated upon by scholars trained to focus upon the canonical gospels as the true representatives of early Christianity.⁷ However, these views have been combated effectively by modern historians such as Greg Riley and Elaine Pagels. Both of these scholars have argued persuasively that the Gospels of John and Thomas were written in light of competition between the Johannine and Thomasine communities as they followed the traditions established by their respected apostles.⁸ Other scholars have proven that the Gospel of Thomas contains sayings of Jesus that were preserved independently of the synoptic tradition and may even predate our earliest canonical Gospel of Mark.⁹

Another contribution of the GTh is that its discovery proved that the genre of the *LOGOI SOPHON* was used in early Christian writings. *LOGOI SOPHON* translates as “sayings of the wise” and is designated as a collection of such logia. James Robinson established this genre as an oft-used one in antiquity in a contribution to a collection of essays presented as a gift to Rudolf Bultmann on his 80th birthday.¹⁰ In his introduction to his translation of the GTh, Marvin Meyer

⁷ Harold Bloom argues that the only way to interpret the Gospel of Thomas is through a Gnostic lens and on a different note, it is common among some religiously inclined scholars to write off this important work with these descriptors. See Harold Bloom, “A Reading” in Marvin Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, (New York: Harper One, 1992), 125-136 and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 22.

⁸ See Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995) and Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, (New York: Random House, 2003) for more information on the relationship between the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Thomas. These two works, especially the first, contend that the Thomasine and Johannine communities were in contention with each other over the role of Jesus as “master, lord, and savior,” and this struggle manifested itself by caricaturizing the central Apostle of each community respectively.

⁹ Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993) and Stevan L Davies, “On Mark’s Use of the Gospel of Thomas” in *Neotestamentica* 30 (1996), 307.

¹⁰ James Robinson, *LOGOI SOPHON: Zur Gattung der Spruchquelle*, in E. Dinkler, ed., *Zeit und Geschichte. Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964), 77-96. A revised and English translation of this

states that there are well-known “Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Christian” examples of this genre with a few of the Jewish ones being Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Wisdom of Solomon.¹¹ He adds that Greek collections were usually composed of pointed sayings of Cynic philosophers known as *Chreiai*.¹² Stephen Patterson suggests that some Greek collections were used for evangelical purposes such as those collected by the students of Epicurus and Epictetus.¹³

When the Coptic edition of GTh was discovered in 1945, a commonly held hypothesis was that the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke used a common sayings source known as “Q” to inform their construction of Jesus’ teachings. Q most likely resembled another Christian example of the LOGOI SOPHON.¹⁴ Thus, the discovery of the text served as verification of the “sayings of the wise” genre as use in early Christian circles and spurred greater understanding of how the Jesus narrative was variously constructed by different early Christians. The dating of GTh is important too because it is the earliest extra-canonical gospel that scholars possess. Some of the Greek fragments of the text found at Oxyrhynchus date to 200 CE and the date of the Coptic manuscript is dated to the fourth century, thanks to carbon dating and the known scribal activity of the Egyptian monks who preserved the entirety of the Nag Hammadi library.¹⁵ Therefore, the text had to be composed before 200 CE and because of several features that betray

essay can be found in his work with Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 71-113.

¹¹ Marvin Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas*, (New York: Harper One, 1992), 4-5.

¹² Meyer, *Thomas*, 5.

¹³ Patterson and Robinson, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age*, 36.

¹⁴ Ibid. Unlike *G Thom*, Q eventually waxes apocalyptic and feeds the eschatological expectations of Matthew and Luke. This apocalyptic attitude is also found in the authentic writings of Paul. See Burton Mack, *The Lost Gospel: Q and Early Christian Origins*, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1994) and John Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q: The History and Settings of the Sayings Gospel*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Marvin Meyer, “Introduction to the Gospel of Thomas,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, Marvin Meyer, ed., (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 136. While it is true that some contest the preservation of the Nag Hammadi library by Egyptian monks, this hypothesis still stands as a strong contender for the origin of the codices. Ultimately, it may be an impossible task to directly identify the group of people that preserved the texts but if one has to proffer an explanation for the origin, then the monastic hypothesis is as likely as the alternatives provided by other scholars.

concerns expressed in the first century of early Christianity; it is possible to argue that the composition of the Gospel of Thomas occurred in the middle to late first century.¹⁶

While much has been discovered about the GTh, some features of the text remain debated in mainstream scholarship. The question of the theology of the text is a problem that has been puzzling to scholars and many answers have been given: some say it has a Gnostic theology and others state it is primarily based around the Wisdom tradition started in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷ There are even some scholars who suggest that the text is best understood in light of the Silk Road, where Jesus is made to look like an eastern sage much like the Buddha or Mahavira.¹⁸ As with the other first century gospels, the inherent theology of the Jesus movement is present but this isn't a defining factor in determining the theology of the GTh.¹⁹

So very well – what is the primary theological background of the text? It is that of Middle Platonism, a philosophical tradition that includes and influenced a diverse number of thinkers such as Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria, Valentinus of Rome, Plutarch of Chaerona, Cicero, and even the Gospel of John.²⁰ Now it is largely acknowledged that Middle Platonism was part of the Hellenistic matrix that shaped early Christianity.²¹ GTh shares many features of

¹⁶ Some of the features are the mention and praise James the Just who was the brother of Jesus and led the early church in Jerusalem after Jesus' death (logion 12). Also, the primacy of apostleship is awarded to Thomas after he correctly identifies Jesus in logion 13 – much like is done for Peter in the Gospel of Mark. Some of the teachings of Jesus are preserved without allegorical attachments, such as the Parable of the Sower and logion 17 reflects a maxim that Paul uses regarding the Christians in Corinth in the middle of the first century. Overall, there is good textual and thematic evidence for an early dating of *GTh*. See Meyer, "Intro to GTh," 137 and Helmut Koester, "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," *Harvard Theological Review* 70:1/2: 105-130.

¹⁷ Meyer, *Thomas*, 4-5 and Bloom, "A Reading" in Meyer, *Thomas*, 125-136.

¹⁸ This view is rarely ever taken seriously but for a good example of such thought, see Kenneth Arnold, "The Circle of the Way: Reading the Gospel of Thomas as a 'Christzen' Text," in *Cross Currents*, 51:4, Winter 2002, accessed via <http://www.crosscurrents.org/arnoldwinter2002.htm>.

¹⁹ For what I consider as the "inherent theology of the Jesus movement," see chapter III, sections 6 and 7 of this work.

²⁰ Edward Moore, "Middle Platonism" in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Accessed on September 5, 2013 at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>.

²¹ There are many different scholars that acknowledge this position as valid. The efficacy of Middle Platonism on the formation of Early Christianity highlights the role of Greco-Roman culture, religion, and philosophy as a core contributor to the development of Christianity. Greg Riley calls the "Greco-Roman world" the "father" of Christianity and Judaism the "mother" of the same religion. See Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early*

the Middle Platonic tradition – the famous maxim to “know thyself,” tripartite anthropology, the expression of soul as light, and other features are found throughout the text. Only a few works have been written on Platonic doctrine as expressed in the GTh and they will now be briefly discussed.²²

1. Literature Review of GTh and Platonism

The first work to be written on Platonism and the GTh began as a dissertation at Claremont Graduate School in 1983. Under the advisement of James Robinson, Howard M. Jackson wrote *The Lion Becomes Man: The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition*, later published in 1985 under the SBL Dissertation series.²³ In this work, Jackson masterfully traces the image of the “gnostic leontomorphic creator” through the Hebrew Scriptures, Christian Scriptures, Egyptian astrology, and other ancient venues in order to shed light on logion 7 in the GTh. Jackson states that logion 7 is the “among the hardest of the ‘hard sayings’ of the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*.”²⁴ Jackson’s literal translation of the Coptic is:

1. Jesus said:
- 2a. Blessed is the lion
- 2b. whom the man shall eat
- 2c. and the lion becomes man;
- 3a. but foul is the man
- 3b. whom the lion shall eat
- 3c. and the lion shall become man.²⁵

An interesting question to ask about this text is why does it read that the “lion” is blessed when the man eats the lion? Why is not the man blessed, as he cursed in the later half of the

Christianity, 3rd ed, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 387-390 and Gregory J. Riley, *The River of God*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001) 6-8.

²² A dissertation has been written on Middle Platonism and Hebrews at the University of Tübingen. This work will not be reviewed because it is not pertinent to the GTh. See Wilfried Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich: Die mittelplatonische Umformung des Parusiegedankens im Hebräerbrief*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003).

²³ Howard M. Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man: The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

²⁴ Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man*, 1.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

statement? The key lies within in the interpretive axiom that one is admonished to find at the beginning of the GTh and the clear key to this passage lies with a certain understanding of Plato, namely a passage found in the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, one finds a discussion of “wrongdoing and injustice” in comparison to “justice and goodness.” The discussion entails a composite being that is made of three creatures: a human, a lion, and a many-headed creature such as Cereberus, the many headed dog-creature that was guarded the gates of the Greek underworld (*Republic* IX.588). This creature is intended to be a composite of the tripartite anthropology that was found in Plato’s teachings and carried over into Christian and Gnostic traditions.²⁶

However, according to this dialogue, the composite being is human in appearance but is composed of an inner human, a “Cereberus” creature, and a lion. The human represents the “rational” part of the soul; the Cereberus is equated with the “irrational,” and the lion with the “passions.” One situation unrolls to reveal that it rewards the man to let the many-headed beast to do what he wants and the lion to do as he pleases but then they overtake the man and devour each other (589a). The situation that the dialogue promotes is when the man rules over the many-headed beast and makes a friend out of the lion (589b) – thus unifying the three in their aims and goals.²⁷

Jackson also discusses the translation of this passage as it is found in the Nag Hammadi library, Codex VI,5: 48,16-51,23. Jackson notes that this is a poor translation that misunderstands the Greek and also discusses the possibility that the nuances of Plato’s Greek could not be fully carried over into the Coptic translation.²⁸ Another interesting note about this translation and inclusion in the NH library is that the text stops short of where Socrates notes that it a positive thing to make the lion an ally. Jackson suggests that the reasoning indicative here

²⁶ Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man*, 186-87.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 202-203.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 208.

pertains to the idea that no ascetic or monastic could effectively maintain that making a friend of the passions, especially sexual passions, could be effective in any way.²⁹ The reading that this interpretation manifests lends itself to a reading that is favorable to the monks who actually did preserve the entirety of the Nag Hammadi library in the fourth century.³⁰

Jackson indicates that in light of this allegory is how logion 7 should be understood – that is, the lion is made an ally or is “redeemed” when he is “devoured” by the higher man and made subject to the divine quality of the “soul.” The awkward latter half of the saying is explained by Jackson in a similar way, by stating that even when the “lion” consumes the “man,” that the true spiritual man cannot be completely blotted out, even when his physical lusts and desires overcome him.³¹ While Jackson’s understanding may be reflective of a “Gnostic” or “Hermetic” reading of GTh 7, he does not situate the logion within the context of Middle Platonism, which in turns offers an intertextual interpretation in line with the *Republic*. But this desired understanding is elucidated by another piece of scholarship.

In another study, Lautaro Lanzillotta explains that logion 7 can be fully understood in the light of the *Republic* without having to invoke the “Gnostic” desire to preserve the true spiritual man.³² Lanzillotta notes that the “hypotext” of the *Republic* is transformed in the saying found in GTh by placing primary emphasis on the Lion and the Man struggling for dominance – the multi-headed beast is no where to be found in this logion.³³ He also notes that the end result is

²⁹ Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man*, 208.

³⁰ This is the common tale that most scholars subscribe to and further research has only compounded this conclusion. See James M. Robinson, “Introduction to the *Nag Hammadi Library*,” *Nag Hammadi Library*, James Robinson, et al, (New York: HarperCollins, 1990) 18-20 and Frederick Wisse, “Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt,” in B. Aland, ed., *Gnosis: Festschrift Hans Jonas*, (Gottingen: Vandenhock & Ruprecht, 1978) 431-40; 433.

³¹ Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man*, 212.

³² Lautaro Lanzillotta, “Gospel of Thomas Logion 7 Unravelled: An Intertextual Approach to a *Locus Vexatus*” in *Between Text and Text: The Hermeneutics of Intertextuality in Ancient Cultures and their Afterlife in Medieval and Modern Culture*, Michaela Bauks, et al, (Gottingen: Vandenhock & Ruprecht, 2013).

³³ Lanzillotta, “Logion 7 Unraveled,” 122.

the same: whether the lion eats the man or the man eats the lion, the lion always becomes man.³⁴ The reasoning behind this change lies in the fact that GTh is a text influenced by Middle Platonism and this school usually expressed a bipartite anthropology that pitted the rational part (the man) against the desires and passions (irrational or the lion).³⁵ Therefore, the text is in line with its theological background.

The transformation of the parable into a pointed saying, known in Greek thought as a *chreai* is indicative of the charge for the reader to “not experience death” by finding the proper “interpretation of these sayings” (GTh 1).³⁶ Lanzillotta does not mention that the transformation of the saying into a *chreai* is indicative of the genre of GTh as well. The larger connection with the genre is found in the LOGOI SOPHON of Cynic Greek Philosophers, which were also recorded primarily as *chreiai*.³⁷ To his praise, he does connect logion 7 with transformation motifs found in other GTh logia (22&114) so that it is clear that a middle platonic understanding of tripartite anthropology is being expressed in the text.³⁸ The one feature that does not change in the GTh version is the appearance of the man who holds the lion, human, and Cerberus in the *Republic* but only the lion and the human in the GTh version. Herein lies to key to understanding why the lion becomes man either way. He writes that:

We have already mentioned that the Platonic simile insists on the fact that independently of the inner structure of the soul the likeness was always that of a man: his soul may be either governed by reason or by irrationality, but man is nevertheless always called “man.”³⁹

In short, he is trying to communicate that regardless of whether the rational (human) or irrational (lion) part of the soul has control, the body still has the appearance of a human being. This is a

³⁴ Lanzillotta, “Logion 7 Unraveled,” 122.

³⁵ Lanzillotta notes that is found in the work of several Middle Platonists ranging from Antiochus of Ascalon to Philo of Alexandria and others. Ibid, 123.

³⁶ Ibid, 125.

³⁷ Meyer, *Thomas*, 5.

³⁸ Lanzillotta, “Logion 7 Unraveled,” 126.

³⁹ Ibid, 127.

more profound and consequential way of understanding GTh 7 because of the threat it poses to a community of monks and ascetics. In their carefully controlled environment, one can never be too sure who is internally a “lion” or a “human being.”

The final piece of scholarship that relates Middle Platonism and GTh is an article by Stephen Patterson. This is a significant article on Middle Platonism and the Gospel of Thomas which elucidates the connection between Middle Platonic doctrines and how they are expressed in GTh. In this work, he notes that 4 main themes are expressed in this work: the maxim of “Know Thyself,” the tripartite anthropology of Platonic thought, the expression of “light” as the soul, and the soul but not the body being formed in the image of God. These themes correlate to several sayings in the Gospel of Thomas and effectively shape the theology of the text as one where the teachings of Jesus are informed by the more esoteric teachings of Plato, especially as expressed in the writings of Middle Platonists such as Philo and Origen.⁴⁰

According to Patterson, Middle Platonism was dedicated to understanding more obscure passages in the writings of Plato such as *The Republic*, *Alcibades*, and *The Sophist* while they all maintained a special interest in the *Timaeus*.⁴¹ While several texts demonstrate Platonic influence in the Nag Hammadi library, it is the *Gospel of Thomas* that exemplifies the process of Platonic thought being worked into the budding religious systems of the first few centuries in the Common Era. In his work, Patterson effectively illuminates the various logia of GTh in light of quotations and discussion from well-known Middle Platonists such as Philo, Origen, Plutarch, and others under the categories mentioned above. He does a masterful job of demonstrating the

⁴⁰ Karen Torjesen, an expert in the study of Origen and how the Alexandrian tradition transformed the foundations of Christian theology, argues that scripture and philosophy are viewed as mutually compatible sources of truth for the foundations of Christian theology. She writes that “...scriptural language exerts a steady force on philosophical concepts and slowly reshapes them in its own image.” Therefore, it makes sense that a significant philosophical school such as Middle Platonism would affect the formation of early Christian literature. See Karen Torjesen, “The Enscripturation of Philosophy,” in *Biblical Interpretation*, Christine Helmer *et al.* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005) 73-86; 73.

⁴¹ Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 183.

parallels and obvious influence that Middle Platonism had on the GTh. However, Patterson's conclusion needs expanding and corrected on two points: he doesn't see Middle Platonic doctrines that are clearly incorporated into the text as the interpretive key and he doesn't think that GTh is a Middle Platonist's Gospel. He writes

Was Thomas a Middle Platonists' gospel? It would be difficult to say this without much qualification. It does not dwell on many of the common themes of the Platonic revival: the Ideas and their immanent forms; the concept of the One and the Dyad, or the notion of *Daimones* as mediator figures. There are no extended, sophisticated examinations of these or other metaphysical issues.⁴²

Patterson is mistaken on these matters because these issues are mentioned in the same cryptic fashion that the other matters are brought up. For example, logion 105 reads: "Jesus said, 'Whoever knows the father and the mother will be called the child of a whore.'" This is an explicit reference to the Monad and the Dyad, of which we know that the founder of Middle Platonism, Xenocrates, identified as the Father and the Mother respectively.⁴³ A close reading of Philo's metaphysical account illuminates that some held a third divine principle that was the viewed as the child of the Monad and the Dyad. When paired with accounts about the origins of Jesus, this understanding produces a clear interpretation of the GTh 105 that will be discussed further down. Other sayings that are references to these doctrines in GTh include logia 10, 11, 15, 17, 30, 43, 100 and others. The work of this thesis is twofold: demonstrate that Middle Platonism is the interpretive background for the GTh through the study of Middle Platonism as a whole with a focus on Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria in the first 3 centuries CE. The study of these thinkers will show that the GTh is a Christian Middle Platonic Gospel that

⁴² Patterson, "Jesus Meets Plato," 204.

⁴³ Moore, "Middle Platonism," *IEP*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>

combines the Christian significance of Jesus and his teachings with the essential tenets of Alexandrian Middle Platonism.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ These basic tenets are the means of epistemology and its ultimate goal, ethics, physics, and logic. This delineation is based off of Philo's general division of philosophy. See John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 145.

II. What Is Middle Platonism?

This chapter is dedicated to providing a thorough investigation of Middle Platonism from the Old Academy of Plato and his three successors to the development of the Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism up to 300 CE. This initial section serves as an overview of the whole school of thought, the next section shows how Eudorus of Alexandria and Antiochus of Ascalon systematized the school into a coherent system that provides a foundation for Jewish and Christian Middle Platonism as developed in Alexandria, Egypt. The last section provides a synopsis of the information provided in this chapter as preparation for exploring Middle Platonic themes in the GTh.

Middle Platonism is the form of Platonism that was prominent from 80 BCE to 220 CE. This school of thought has its roots in the Old Academy, which is defined by the philosophical thought of Plato and his three successors, Speusippus, Xenocrates, and Polemo. After Plato died in 347 BCE, his three successors further developed his thought in what is known as the Old Academy. In his study of the Old Academy, John Dillon writes that Xenocrates laid the foundation for Middle Platonism and Speusippus did the same for Neopythagoreanism, which in turn later influenced Neoplatonism as expressed by Plotinus and the inheritors of his thought.⁴⁵ A third disciple of Plato, Polemo, expressed thoughts that would later come to be known as Stoicism, which is of note because the Stoic thinker Posidinus expressed ideas that became central to Middle Platonism as well.⁴⁶ Edward Moore argues that Xenocrates, Speusippus, and Polemo contributed ideas to Middle Platonism but were ultimately expressed first as a system by Antiochus of Ascalon in 80 BCE.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ John Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), v.

⁴⁶ Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato*, vi.

⁴⁷ Moore, "Middle Platonism," *IEP*.

Antiochus argued that Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic philosophies were “fundamentally harmonious” and as such produced a system that reconciled the claims of these systems.⁴⁸ Much like Plato pontificated that the point of philosophy was to arrive at knowledge of the “Good” and the “One” via discourse and contemplation, the primary goal of Middle Platonism was very similar. Eudorus of Alexandria expressed in 25 BCE that the telos of philosophy was to achieve “likeness to God as far as possible.”⁴⁹ The other goal of Middle Platonism was to reconcile the creation myth of Plato’s *Timaeus* with the creation myth of the “Unwritten Doctrines of Plato,” which were the teachings of Plato influenced by Pythagorean philosophy. Edward Moore writes that the “...interpretation of Plato’s so-called Unwritten Doctrines...involving a primordial, generative pair of first principles—the One and the Dyad—and how to square this doctrine with the account of creation given in the *Timaeus* dialogue” is of central concern to most Middle Platonists.⁵⁰ The other issues that the Middle Platonists addressed include the nature of God, the materials from which the universe was created, the manner in which Creation of the universe happened, the composition of humanity, the role of daemons in the management of the universe, and the reconciliation of the human soul to God.

The nature of the Divine in Middle Platonism was expressed in the doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad: the Monad existed first and the infinite Dyad is the single emanation of the Monad. The Monad then acts to limit the Dyad and an ideal Decad comes into existence along with the four basic forms of Geometry: the point, line, plane, and solid which correspond to the first four numbers of the Decad respectively.⁵¹ Below the ideal realm was the World Soul/Demiurge and it organized matter into the four basic elements: water, earth, fire, and air,

⁴⁸ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*

⁴⁹ Eudorus obtained this from Plato’s *Theaetetus* (176b), although there is some disagreement about how to achieved this likeness among different Middle Platonists. *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

which compose the Earth as we know it. In sum, Moore writes that “this basic schema of a first and second principle, and third intellectual and craftsmanly principle responsible for forming the cosmos, was to have an immense influence on the history of Greek philosophy...,”⁵² especially on the thinkers that combined this philosophy with the varieties of Judaism and Christianity. The Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism is the primary group that understands the divine triad personified in terms of their respective religious mythologies.⁵³ This concept will be further discussed in the section on the Alexandrian school and their influence on the early matrices of Christianity, especially as expressed in the GTh.

What follows now is a systematic discussion of the Old Academy as it laid the groundwork for Middle Platonism, the formal expression of Middle Platonism, and how it manifested itself as a combination of religious philosophy, especially in Alexandria. All the themes mentioned above will be discussed in more or less detail as relevant to the selected philosophers. A bifurcation for the discussion of the Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism will be made so that the work of Philo, Clement, and Origen can be discussed as Middle Platonists who defined their worldviews as religious philosophical expressions. This is relevant for my postulate that the GTh was composed during the first century after the work of Philo but before the work of later Christian Middle Platonists.

2. The Old Academy: Plato, Xenocrates, Speusippus, and Polemo

The works of Plato that Middle Platonism builds on are Plato’s *Timaeus* and his “Unwritten Doctrines.” Stephen Patterson writes that while the Middle Platonists did address other works of Plato, it is these two works that the Middle Academy focused on the most.⁵⁴ The

⁵² Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*

⁵³ The discussion found here will focus on three figures: Philo, Clement, and Origen. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 204.

⁵⁴ Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 183.

Timaeus is Plato's account of the creation of the universe and the world by a divine intellect known as the Demiurge. The creation myth is told by the main character in the dialogue who shares the name-sake of the dialogue. The opening part of the dialogue lays out two different worlds: an eternal one which never changes which can be only conceived by reason and a physical world which is subject to opinion and irrational thought (*Timaeus* 29a). He lays out several premises in the opening parts of the work that lead to the conclusion that the physical universe must be a copy of a higher universe. One of the substantive premises that *Timaeus* states is that the account he provides is an approximate account and as such, is not to be taken as the absolute truth (*Timaeus* 29b-29d1).

The Demiurge models the universe after an eternal model by effectively imposing order of a mathematical nature on a "preexistent chaos to generate the ordered universe (kosmos)" (*Timaeus* 29c).⁵⁵ The four elements of fire, earth, water, and air were orchestrated by the Demiurge to make the physical cosmos (Tim 30). However, he chose to differentiate the elements in select ways to make intelligent and unintelligent beings – including the planet Earth itself (Tim 30a). Thus, the planet itself is an intelligent being in which invested with "intelligence and soul" that existed solely as a whole entity (Tim 30b; 31b). The movement that was given to the Earth as a planet in existence was a "circular movement" that rotated without disturbance in relation to those that inhabited it and in a coherent fashion with regards to objects that move in random fashions (Tim 34a). The final action that the Demiurge takes with regard to Earth is he places a world-soul in the center which gives the planet intelligence and balances it out in "every direction" which makes it a good place for inhabitation of other intelligent, ensouled beings.

⁵⁵ The Demiurge is can be translated as "craftsman or one who works for the people," who conceived of physical creation based on the realm of the ideal forms. Donald Zeyl, "Plato's *Timaeus*", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed on March 22nd, 2014 at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/>, Spring, 2013.

The creation of the world-soul involved the combination of other substances: two of sameness, two of difference, and two types of being - each respectively being indivisible and divisible. Each of these substances rotated in different directions and when combined, they made the world-soul and granted the orbital motion to Earth (Tim 34c-36c). In contrast to the Earth, the other planetary bodies rotated to the left and right respectively as they were assigned different aspects of “difference.” These differences equated to different speeds of equal and unequal varieties with respect to the Earth as well as different motions to the left or right in their orbits around the Earth (Tim 36c-d). The animating essence of these physical bodies was connected to the world-soul and when it began its perfect rotation, the rest of the physical universe was animated as such (Tim 36e).

In short, the world-soul communicates a different directional order to all material objects but when it encounters an intellectual/spiritual form, the same rotational stillness of itself is bestowed upon that form (37a-c). In addition to these features, geometrical figures are added as well. The elements of fire, air, water, and earth are represented by the tetrahedron, octahedron, icosahedron, and the cube. Each geometrical figure would be composed of triangles, either of the isosceles or scalene variety, which is reflective of the higher mathematical forms that the physical cosmos reflects. The planet Earth is represented by a fifth figure that is not composed of triangles and closely resembles a sphere. This shape is a dodecahedron and is closer to a perfect sphere that maintains perfect motion with regards to the rest of the physical universe (Tim 53-60).

With regards to the balancing of these shapes, a concept of the “mean” is employed that states that if the first and last items of a set of three are identical, then the collective average of that set will be the same value (Tim 31c-32a). The text itself indicates that if all objects in the

triad are balanced, "...the necessary consequence will be that all the terms are interchangeable, and being interchangeable they all form a unity" (Tim 32a). One might view said concept as an aesthetic appeal to balance and correct proportions that is related to the perfect motion of the sphere is equated with unity or the concept of oneness which is largely indicative of how Plato viewed the Divine as well. The rest of the text is dedicated to the creation of human beings, their plight while on Earth and their fate after they complete their physical existence. Much of what is discussed here in these sections is found in other works of Plato but that material will be discussed at length in the next section of the paper.

Plato's "Unwritten Doctrines" are difficult to discuss because of their very nature as doctrines that were not recorded by the written word. However, from what is known by the successors of Plato, he clearly expressed philosophical commitments that he learned from Pythagoras during his travels. The chief of these doctrines is the concept of the Divine as a duo that existed in a different realm above both the realm of forms and the physical realm in dual cohabitation as the primal principles of ultimate reality. These principles are the Monad and the Dyad which can be effectively translated as the One and the Two but will only be referred to as such when rhetorically effective. Before their functions are discussed, it is important to note that the Monad was viewed as associated with the Good and the Dyad was loosely associated with evil but only because of its potential chaotic function, which could threaten the order of the cosmos once it was established.

The One existed in and of itself but the first emanation of this principle produced the infinitely chaotic Dyad, which produced formless matter without shape or order. The second and final act of the Monad was to limit the activity of the Dyad in such a manner that the form of ideals was produced and inhabited by the famous Platonic principle of the Ten or the Decad as it

is also known. These ten ideal forms are the plans that the Demiurge used to create the physical world and is reflective of the “resting” nature of the Monad and the perfected motion of the limited Dyad as well. The third entity that joins the Monad and the Dyad is the World-Soul or the Demiurge, which is placed between the realm of ideal forms and the material form. The emanation of the Demiurge is where the *Timaeus* and the “Unwritten Doctrines” meet but the activity of the Demiurge is discussed in the above synopsis of the *Timaeus*.

However, the “Unwritten Doctrines” and the *Timaeus* leave several questions unanswered that are taken up by various Middle Platonists during the 300 year period that Middle Platonism develops. One of which is the way in which the creation myth of the *Timaeus* is to be understood: literally or metaphorically? As in, is this the actual account of how the physical universe actually came to be or is to be understood as a teaching tool that is illustrative of Platonic philosophy as a coherent system for all intents and purposes? While this question is never directly answered, what is known is that the character Timaeus himself in the text identifies his account as an “approximate account” because of the epistemological limitations that all human beings have with regards to certain matters. While later thinkers may have fretted over this question, it is largely a point that is moot if one takes into consideration the above statement issued by Timaeus at the beginning of the tale. It is clear that the reader is to heed the advice that is found within as beneficial to the individual who is pursuing the end-goal of philosophical contemplation of unity with the Divine and the extraneous matter of arranging society in a manner that prevents the persecution of said individuals, such as Socrates.

Another question that haunted the initial interpreters of the tradition is one of time and space: did the Demiurge create the physical universe inside or outside of time? Was the Demiurge occupying the space that he was arranging to become the physical universe or did he

occupy another position in a different realm as he was doing his work? The answer to this is found in the “Unwritten Doctrines” and seems to place the Demiurge as occupying the space directly below the realm of ideal mathematical forms. Thus, while these answers might be found in the text itself, Plato’s successors took both the “Unwritten Doctrines” and the creation myth of the *Timaeus* as still presenting these questions as valid issues. Whatever their contestations may be, it is best to discuss the three immediate heads of the Old Academy at Athens after the demise of their leader.

Plato was succeeded by his nephew Speusippus in 347 BCE as head of the Academy and he occupied this role until 339 BCE. According to some sources, Speusippus was an angry young man who was given to losing his temper and demonstrating excessiveness on a regular basis. However, through the example and guiding hand of Plato, he gradually grew to adopt the temperament and moderate lifestyle of a philosopher. The essential issue for him was the ultimate elevation of the Monad above all known principles and wholly setting it apart as a sacred being that is not in contact with the rest of the cosmos. Speusippus established the Monad as the wholly transcendent aspect of the Divine, which left the Dyad as the only source of emanation, from which the rest of the Universe is derived. At the end of the ten-fold emanation of Creation is the principle of the Good and rest, which represents the Divine as both activity and rest.⁵⁶ This was later used to justify the nature of Creation as good and connected to the Divine, which is a partial background for religious Middle Platonists.⁵⁷

The other major point that he held his primary ethical commitment is one of ascetic balance between pleasure and pain – of which he held both extremes to be evil. This is line with the lifestyle of a philosopher as laid out in several of Plato’s works but particularly as delineated

⁵⁶ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*

⁵⁷ This issue is fully discussed in chapter 12.

in the *Phaedo* by Socrates before he is executed. Diogenes Laertius states that his other contributions were that he was able to locate a “common element” in “all forms of studies” and bring them as close together with numerous other minor accomplishments (*Lives* IV.2-3). When he died, Xenocrates took over leadership of the Academy and points it in a different direction that was very conducive to the cultivation of Middle Platonism.⁵⁸

Xenocrates became head of the Academy in 339 BCE and changed the way that the Divine was conceived again. He identified the Monad or the One as the Divine Intellect or Mind and also called it the “Father.” He identified the Dyad as the “Mother” which denotes its significance as the Divine Creative force. In addition to this attribution, Xenocrates considered the Dyad as identical with the matter that the cosmos was created out of in addition to considering it a potentially evil and chaotic entity.⁵⁹ This is a significant difference between the general consideration of the Dyad as the principle that spawned the mathematical ideals and the Demiurge since he identifies the material with the entity itself. Another aspect of his thought on creation is that it was made from the element of fire – something he shares with Stoicism and possibly GTh. Also, a type of divinity is found in Creation but only the lower type that isn’t of the same essence as the divine One, which illuminates the continual distance of the purely divine being from the material world.⁶⁰

His principle division of the physical universe was defined in relation to the moon: the realm above the moon and the realm below the moon. Below the moon was the solar system as the Greeks conceived of it in addition to the gods who were equated with daemons in this system. Of the daemons who were gods, there were two different types: the Olympians and the Titans, which were created out of star-stuff and the material earth respectively. Theophrastus

⁵⁸ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

wrote that Xenocrates authored an expansive account of the cosmos which served as a distinctive feature of his philosophy as the leader of the Academy.⁶¹

In line with the discussion on the types of knowledge necessary for different figures in society found in the *Statesman*, Xenocrates distinguished between practical and scientific wisdom with respect to their various applications. Moore indicates that Xenocrates held that “happiness is found within virtue and the means that are conducive to [that end].”⁶² This is in line with a similar practice laid out by Plato in various works and mirrored in other thinkers, including the author of the *GTh*. As a person, he was a fiercely loyal follower of Plato and was reportedly willing to defend him with his life (*Lives* IV.11). Most of those who reported on his character and philosophy mostly do so with admiration. Xenocrates met his unfortunate death by tripping over an object in the middle of night (*Lives* IV.15). His death marked the end of his leadership over the Academy in 314 BCE.

The third and final successor of the Old Academy of Athens and shaped the foundations of Middle Platonism is Polemo. Polemo inherited the mantle of the institution in 314 BCE and led it for four decades during which he garnered respect from many people.⁶³ The defining mark of Polemo’s philosophy was that it was notably Stoic in nature and he was one of the first philosophers to promote the notion of “personal stoicism” as a way of reacting with calm indifference to the world around oneself. Moore shows that the development of this concept is essential to how Polemo thought the philosopher should react to the world and that regardless of any situation, one could be happy as long one had “achieved virtue.”⁶⁴ Dillon writes that Clement of Alexandria, an early Christian Middle Platonist, felt that Polemo taught that

⁶¹ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Dillon, *Heirs of Plato*, 156.

⁶⁴ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*.

happiness (eudaimonia) is inseparable from virtue (arête) but nothing else in the external world is relevant to the achievement of happiness.⁶⁵

The second major position of Polemo is that he thought that all creatures in the world were constantly striving to achieve “conciliation” with their environment and that for humans that meant the development of a virtuous life.⁶⁶ Thus it is clear that a negotiation with the physical world for humanity in Polemo’s work was primarily the work of developing a philosophical disposition that entails the acquirement of virtue, prepares one to deal with the world one currently finds oneself in, and by implication, this disposition would carry over into the afterlife as well. His character was in line with that of Xenocrates, who tamed him as a young man into philosophical enquiries and Polemo also leaned heavily upon the work of his predecessors for the majority of this philosophy (*Lives* 4.18). Polemo represents the major culmination of the work of the Old Academy and is the major Stoic contribution to the foundation of Middle Platonism.

The Old Academy of Athens as represented by Plato, Speusippus, Xenocrates, and Polemo effectively laid the groundwork for which the school of Middle Platonism would grow out of. Plato, as the founder of the school, was largely responsible for the ideas that grew into other concepts under his three successors and each successor contributed their own works as essentially the first Neopythagorist, Middle Platonist, and Stoic respectively. Significant influence came from Aristotelian philosophy in addition to stated contributions as a part of the system that later Middle Platonists drew upon to construct their philosophies.

⁶⁵ Dillon, *Heirs of Plato*, 161

⁶⁶ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*.

3. Foundations for Religious Middle Platonism: Eudorus and Antiochus

With the exception of Antiochus of Ascalon, most of the work that resulted in the school as it was inherited by Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity was undertaken by individuals in Alexandria.⁶⁷ The first individual that will be discussed in this subsection is Eudorus of Alexandria. As with many individuals in antiquity, the details about Eudorus have to be pieced together from the scant sources that are available to scholars. Dillon notes that since a contemporary of Eudorus was active during the first century BCE and a Middle Platonist teacher was known to be active during the 60's BCE in Alexandria, it is this time frame that the activity of Eudorus is placed.⁶⁸ Eudorus marks the official entry of Neopythagoreanism into Middle Platonism that is only matched by similar contributions of Speusippus in the Old Academy.

The primary focus of Eudorus as a philosopher was the subject of ethics. His ethics was not with regard to the world around him inasmuch it was for the cultivation of a proper philosophical life as a means to achieving the ultimate end that he found in Plato – that is, “likeness to god as far as possible.”⁶⁹ If there is a maxim that stated the goal and purpose of Middle Platonism as a way of doing life, Eudorus expressed with that sentence around 25 BCE. As a brief aside, this is essentially the same thing that one is encouraged towards in GTh, which repeatedly indicates that those who understand the “sayings of the Living Jesus shall not taste death” and the many variations on “becoming One” and/or the “twin of the Living Jesus.” Eudorus put forth the idea that this goal was obtainable while being a mortal through the

⁶⁷ Antiochus taught for a few years in Alexandria and his heritage was carried on there. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 56-7.

⁶⁸ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 116.

⁶⁹ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*.

development of virtue and as such, provided a foundation for the Divine identity of Jesus as he is represented in the GTh.⁷⁰

With regards to the two essential Platonic works of Middle Platonism, Eudorus felt that the creation of the mathematical forms directly corresponded to the creation of the physical world at the same time. As the Decad increased, more and more of physical creation came to be. This could be seen as a reminder that as things are organized in the ideal and divine realms, so are they made in the physical realm from which human beings must live the correct life in order to return to the higher realms.⁷¹ Another contribution of Eudorus is the postulation of the five Platonic causes that correspond to a set of prepositional phrases that describe reality and are later laid out as corresponding to different pantheons such as Zeus and Athena or Jupiter and Juno in later systems. This is a notable formulation that is found in religious formations of Middle Platonism, such as those by the Alexandrian School and Plutarch, of which likely belongs to Eudorus in the first century BCE.⁷²

Eudorus postulated grades of being found throughout the cosmos, which range from the intelligible ideals down to pure physical matter itself in a degree of six.⁷³ These six degrees of being are examples of the progression of Middle Platonist as a philosophical system that incorporates the different schools of thought that compose it. These “grades of being” indicate the different ways in which one can exist and thus may allow for an understanding of being which would make room for a figure like Jesus who is reported to share both human and divine status. Another contribution of Eudorus is with regard to all ideals being thoughts in the mind of God, which corresponds to the five causes that are inevitably anthropomorphized as different

⁷⁰ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 122-3.

⁷¹ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 135-36.

⁷² *Ibid*, 138-39.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 137

deities in the religious systems that adopt Middle Platonism as a philosophical/theological background.⁷⁴

The principal thinker who influenced Eudorus was Antiochus of Ascalon and he is largely imitated in significant ways by Eudorus. Antiochus is the first principle actor who effectively organized Platonic, Stoic, and Aristotelian philosophies into a single, coherent school of thought. To quote Moore, he felt that these systems were “fundamentally harmonious” and based on this conviction, produced a model that reconciled their different claims.⁷⁵ Dillon attributes to Antiochus the turn of the Academy towards developing Stoicism and contributions largely in line with that of Polemo.⁷⁶ It is largely these two thinkers, Antiochus of Ascalon and Eudorus of Alexandria, who formed the first systematic expression of Middle Platonism from its many influences and directly stated the ultimate telos of that system for those who followed it: unity with the divine, both on earth and after death. These two actions laid the groundwork for the Jewish and early Christian thinkers who would adopt such a system to explicate the texts that had inherited, the texts they were reading, and with the GTh, the text that they were writing about the founder of their movement in a way to significantly color the Thomasine tradition as largely different from other early Christianities.

Before this section reaches closure, a brief discussion of Plutarch of Chaeronea is necessary since he preserved a great deal of work from other Middle Platonists.⁷⁷ Plutarch of Chaerona lived in the second century and utilized Middle Platonism with regards to Greco-Egyptian Religion, such as mysteries of Apollo in Greece and the worship of Isis and Osiris in

⁷⁴ Ibid, 138.

⁷⁵ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*.

⁷⁶ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 105.

⁷⁷ Plutarch visited Alexandria in his many travels. See Ibid, 186.

Egypt.⁷⁸ It is evident from his writings that he held an early form of pluralism that held that all religions were different expressions of an eternal truth and thus the central maxim of Middle Platonism, “likeness to God as far as possible” fit in perfectly with his worldview and philosophy. His view of the divine realm consisted of the One which was identical with the Good that co-existed with the Dyad, a chaotic force that the One had to exert great effort to control.

Because of this cosmic struggle at the divine level, the rest of intelligible beings in existence are held by Plutarch to be caught in an eternal struggle between reason and unreason as represented by the Monad and the Dyad. This interpretation of the divine lead to a dualism that is mirrored by the human condition who must struggle to follow their reason and the rational part of their soul while suppressing the passions and desires of the irrational flesh that the higher principle is trapped in.⁷⁹ The dualism of the struggle between the flesh and the soul is found through out the GTh, in which it is contrasted as “poverty” in comparison to the “great wealth” that is the rational soul (GTh 29). Since Plutarch is a second century philosopher, the author of GTh would not have been familiar with Plutarch’s expression of this concept but rather its precursor as found in the *Phaedo*.

According to Moore, Plutarch did contribute to the theological thought of Origen who adopted several ideas proposed by Plutarch. These ideas include the division of the mind and the soul as well as promoting an understanding of free will that involved cooperation of both the “human will” and “divine agency” as concepts capable of working together in the larger forethought of the Divine.⁸⁰ In the larger arc of Middle Platonism, Plutarch is the principle example of Religious Middle Platonism outside of Jewish, Christian, and/or “Gnostic” circles.

⁷⁸ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*.

⁷⁹ George Karamonolis, “Plutarch,” *SEP*, accessed March 23, 2014 at <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/plutarch>, (Fall 2010).

⁸⁰ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*.

4. Jewish and Christian Middle Platonism: Philo, Clement, and Origen.

From 76 BCE until 300 CE, Middle Platonism manifested itself heavily in Alexandria and found plenty of religious thinkers to readily engage it as a way of understanding their theological traditions, especially the texts they were bent on interpreting for their respective inquiries with regards to their contemporary surroundings. Alexandria, Egypt seemed to be a hotspot for these types of thinkers and it is largely no coincidence that the early Christian and Sethian Gnostic texts were preserved by individuals in Egypt as well.⁸¹ The three major representatives of Jewish and Christian Middle Platonism draw upon two primary sources as a means to producing their work: the one of philosophical contemplation and the other of divine revelation. Robert Berchman has conducted an official study on these individuals in Alexandria and argues that the viewpoint from which the thinkers should be understood is one “of the Middle Platonist who views himself as the repository of philosophical culture, and the Jew and the Christian who values the biblical revelation he holds as the ἀρχή [beginning] and τέλος [end] of this culture.”⁸² The combination of both epistemologies result in two genres of works by these three thinkers: monographs defending philosophical positions and commentaries on biblical works used for exegesis of the text.⁸³

Berchman proposes that each of these men held three central questions in their investigations: “What is the relation of God to the universe, how are both known, to what extent [do] biblical revelation and philosophical wisdom agree, and how is a reality system deduced from sacred scripture?”⁸⁴ By utilizing the tools of Middle Platonism, each author arrives at a tentative answer for each of these questions that respect both commitments to which they are all

⁸¹ It seems that the epicenter of Middle Platonism moved from Athens to Alexandria with the establishment of Heraclitus of Tyre in 76 BCE. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 61.

⁸² Robert Berchman, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition*, (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), 11.

⁸³ Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 17.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

bound. Another issue that arises here is what is the relation of the GTh to these thinkers? Philo is clearly earlier than the text because he lived during the late first century BCE and was active during the first half of first century CE. As the first chronological example of this combination, Philo probably completed his work and died before the GTh was authored. As such, it sets a standard for which other monotheistic traditions that choose to engage with Middle Platonism will be influenced by if they are familiar with his work.

The two Christian philosophers, Clement and Origen, live a few centuries after both Philo and when the GTh was initially penned but still serve as examples of how Middle Platonism could be used to better understand the Jesus tradition and the various theological traditions that developed around it. Better yet, Clement and Origen clearly share different Middle Platonic doctrines and occasionally very similar language with the GTh so it is clear that some Christians were taking this approach pretty early after Jesus died and it was inherited by those Christians were inclined to a philosophical manner of discourse. Another reason that Alexandrian School is important to this work is because they essentially formulated the foundation for the understanding of Jesus as both a man and invested with the Divine essence.

Each of these figures effectively personified the Dyad as being present with the Monad and present as the force in the physical realm. Specifically, the World-Soul and the “positive aspect of matter” as found in the *Timaeus* are connected with the Dyad in addition to being personified as religious entities such as Sophia and Dike by Philo.⁸⁵ This tendency made it an easy move for certain early Christians to postulate Jesus as the divine creative principle who incarnates as a human being in order to guide human souls back to God and provide access to the One held by Xenocrates to be unknowable by humans.

⁸⁵ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 204.

Philo of Alexandria was born in 20 BCE and died in 50 CE at Alexandria, Egypt. He was a heavily educated Hellenistic Jew who spent most of his life investigating the Septuagint (LXX), which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, through a philosophical lens. His efforts seamlessly combine the “Unwritten Doctrines,” the *Timaeus*, and the larger Platonic canon as filtered through Middle Platonism with Moses and the Torah in addition to other sections.⁸⁶ As a form of respect and/or authority, Philo places Moses as the first of the Greek philosophers and begins to unpack Genesis in light of said tradition. The result is one that renders the LXX as a philosophical work that contains the cosmos of the *Timaeus* and many other Middle Platonic doctrines in which the Hebrew Deity is above all the universe, including the Monad and the Dyad.⁸⁷

One of the substantial contributions that Philo makes in his work is identifying the creative force of the Divine as an entity found within the text, which is Sophia (Wisdom) as found in Proverbs 8. This lays the path for later Christians to understand Jesus as a divine principle that both serves as the creator of the universe in his transcendent form but as the humble teacher from Galilee in his immanent, human form (See GJn 1:1-3). Also, Philo uses the Greek pantheon to lay out the manner in which creation occurred but quickly replaces this scheme with the appropriate figures as found in Hellenistic Judaism.

Another way in which Philo laid the ground for understanding Jesus and the Christian tradition through philosophy is that he understood Judaism in the context of the Greco-Roman Mystery Religions. The idea that Jesus was a hierophant of certain teachings and revealing his mysteries is found throughout the canonical gospels and the GTh is a position held by Clement

⁸⁶ For an explication of how Philo shaped the concept of mystical union with God as the basis for religious authority by combining the Hebrew Bible and Middle Platonism, see Adam Afterman, “From Philo to Plotinus: The Emergence of Mystical Union,” *The Journal of Religion* 93:2 (April 2013), 177-196.

⁸⁷ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*.

and Origen as well. This means of expressing the Christian religion is hypothetically one of the factors that allowed it to spread so quickly and become so popular in the few centuries that it did. This transmutation made possible by Philo was essential to the understanding of the true adherent of the Platonic tradition, that when combined with Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity, produced a way of being religious and a monotheist that most educated Greeks and Romans would find hard-pressed not to acknowledge as a legitimate expression of religious commitment.⁸⁸

The first Christian intellectual to engage the Christian tradition through this perspective is Clement of Alexandria. Clement was born in 150 CE and died around 215 CE but during his life, he produced many works on Christianity and Greek philosophy.⁸⁹ Clement was the teacher of Origen and passed on many concepts to his pupil that was saturated with Hellenistic leanings. Clement is one of the earliest Christians to acknowledge that there is some spiritual “gnosis” (knowledge) that is available to some Christians but not all Christians. In relation to the Mystery religions, Clement could be seen as appealing to those who were in various levels of initiation into the mystery – while all involved know at least the basic premise of the mystery, it is known that there are others who more fully know the meanings of the mystery as they have gone through higher levels that revealed more divine gnosis to them.⁹⁰

Clement penned three main monographs in his life, which are the *Protrepticus* (Exhortation), *Paedagogus* (Tutor), and the *Stromata* (Miscellaneous). The title of the first one can be translated as “Exhortation” and is letter to non-Christians in Greece to give up their pagan ways and convert to Christianity. In this letter, Clement attempts to effectively debunk all

⁸⁸ Marian Hillar, “Philo of Alexandria,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002. Accessed on September 15th, 2013. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth A. Clark, “Clement of Alexandria,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 3, (Detroit: Macmillian Reference USA, 2005), 1822-24; 1822.

⁹⁰ Clark, “Clement of Alexandria,” 1823.

Grecian ways of being religious, even attempting to argue that some Greek deities are demons and that the true teaching is held only in Jesus Christ. In this work, he also supports Plato's understanding of "art as imitation," which because of its many removed condition from the ideal form and the lies that poets generate in their work, recommends that artistic pursuits are detrimental to individuals seeking the truth. He understands Plato as promoting an apophatic understanding of God and Clement finds this commendable, especially since God the Father is only known through God the Son as Jesus Christ in Clement's thought.⁹¹ At the end of this monograph, he draws a noticeable difference between the sad case of Orpheus in Greek lore and his song of lamentation as contrasted with the victory of Christ as the Creative Divine principle, known as the Logos as a final means of demonstrating the inferior nature of the Greco-Roman Mysteries when compared to the "Christian Mysteries."⁹²

His second work can be translated as "Tutor" or "Teacher" and in this work; he sets Jesus as the moral example that all Christians are to follow in their actions. Relying on the triadic understanding of life found in the *Republic*, he explains that each of his works is solely dedicated to each facet: "Exhortation" pertains to character, "Tutor" pertains to actions, and although he never got to it, a third work known as the *Didasculus*, which would correspond to the passions. The essence of Clement's prescription in the Tutor is to live a simple life of plain food and moderate alcohol use in pursuit of the monotheistic concept of God.⁹³

Also, he argues for the equality of both sexes, prohibits all sexual activities not conducive to reproduction, and demonstrates an understanding of God the Father as possessing both male and female characteristics. In an opposing balance to the Father, God the Son is presented as

⁹¹ Elizabeth Clark relates that Origen is the chief executor of Clement's theological contributions to Christianity. Clark, "Clement of Alexandria," 1823.

⁹² Marvin Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 247-251.

⁹³ Clark, "Clement of Alexandria," 1823.

androgynous, being a unification of both sexes as is encouraged to obtain in the GTh and certain understandings of the original form of humanity as one being in the Creation myths found in Genesis. Some might say this is a very similar understanding of humanity as it is found in the *Symposium* but the over-sexualized nature of that passage with its emphasis on homosexuality would not make it a good fit for most early Christians.⁹⁴

His last major work is an assorted collection of essays on different subjects and is a discussion of it would not helpful here except to note that he draws heavily upon Socrates, Plato, and entertained the idea postulated by Philo that Moses was the first Greek philosopher but takes a step further to argue that Moses might have possibly influenced Plato. This is a large effort on his behalf to displace Greek culture by demonstrating that it was drawn from other places and replace it with Jewish culture as the dominant force in shaping the majority of civilization and culture up to that time. In addition to this work, Clement produced several commentaries on biblical texts that are demonstrative of a Middle Platonic worldview as informed by divine revelation.⁹⁵

Overall, one can see Clement's attempts at committing himself to the Jewish matrix that Christianity is comprised of but he can not escape the Hellenistic education he was given on top of the given fact that he mostly operates in that paradigm informed by Middle Platonism. An explicit demonstration of this influence is found in one of his fragments on the cosmos in which a variety of creatures including human beings are present in a descending order before the "face of God." In a similar fashion that a human may become a daemon (which is essentially a god limited by irrational urges) and/or the human soul itself is viewed as a daemon in Middle Platonism, Clement proposed that select humans have the ability to become angels due to an

⁹⁴ Ivan Miroshnikov pointed this out to me when I brought up as a possible source for the Androgyne imagery in GTh. I mention it here to give my colleague his due credit for this contribution to the discussion.

⁹⁵ Berchman, *Philo to Origen*, 17-18.

elevation in status that occurs for said groups every thousand years.⁹⁶ This is very similar to the idea that one could become divine while on Earth in human form that Eudorus of Alexandria held as a possibility in his thought and an esoteric analogue of transformation that is also found in the GTh.⁹⁷

Origen of Alexandria is the other Christian Middle Platonist that will be discussed. He was born in 184 CE and died in 254 CE, of which he obtained most of his education under Clement of Alexandria. In a number of turns, Origen found himself to formulate theological commitments that were later rejected as heresy and is not recognized by any modern church as a saint or significant figure in early church history. However, he is important for the philosophical commitments that drove him to his theological formulations as they were largely based around Middle Platonism and influence from non-canonical early Christian texts. In this sense, one could view Origen as fully committed to the philosophical pursuit of truth that was not limited by his religious commitments to Christianity but rather saw the latter as being shaped by Middle Platonism which resulted in theological ideas that lied outside of “orthodox Christianity” as initially established in the fifth century CE and developed further with time. The principle theological ideas that Origen asserted were the pre-existence of souls, the ultimate redemption of all beings to the Divine, and the notion that God the Son was subordinated to God the Father, thus suggesting a slight inequality between the two divinities.⁹⁸

According to Berchman, Origen continued the successful exegetical blending of both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies that resembles Middle Platonism with the added factor of

⁹⁶ Clark, “Clement of Alexandria,” 1822-24.

⁹⁷ A mystical transformation to a state of divine being is described in the *Gospel of Phillip* as the “bridal chamber” ritual and the text is located in the same codex as the GTh, which suggests that the compiler of that codex read the *Gospel of Phillip* and the GTh in close proximity to each other. See Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 235-242.

⁹⁸ Mark J. Edwards, "Origen", *SEP*, Accessed March 25th, 2014 at <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/origen>, (Spring 2014).

biblical exegesis that resulted in a unique philosophical Christian theology.⁹⁹ A necessary factor for his work is that both philosophy and divine revelation are sponsored by the same source but philosophy serves as the hand-maiden of understanding Scripture.¹⁰⁰ Origen seems to be fascinated by questions that many Greek philosophers attempted to address such as “being and existence and the nature of God” with the added resources of the Hebrew Bible and many different early Christian writings.¹⁰¹

Origen took great effort to defend his position against certain Stoic philosophers and “Gnostic Christians” who seemingly misunderstood both Platonic philosophy and the recorded tradition of sacred writ that was essential to his efforts.¹⁰² These groups asserted fatal errors according to Origen and he accused certain Stoics who functioned in the school of Middle Platonism as being “un-Platonic” and reserved the other condemnation for the “Gnostic Christians,” which was one of being non-Apostolic and not sponsored by the disciples that were authorized by Jesus to carry on the movement he started.¹⁰³ For Origen, the same God inspired both the Bible and ancient Greek philosophy in the truest sense, so he is the purest Christian Middle Platonist who relied upon both to produce his various doctrines that were later declared as heresy by the Church. Ultimately what mattered to Origen was not how closely his thought aligned with the theology of the Orthodox but how it corresponded to the truth as he sought and found it through out his life. Origen understood the world around him through Middle Platonic philosophy and developed a complex system reflective of these leanings while using holy writ to disprove those who infringed on his religious leanings. His understanding of God the Father as

⁹⁹ Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 116.

¹⁰⁰ Torjesen, “The Enscripturation of Philosophy,” 73-74.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 118.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

being wholly inaccessible and separate from the material world is reflective of Speusippus' understanding of these principles and proved to be a crucial point for Christian theology.

It was the influence of Middle Platonism that promoted Origen's controversial theological position that God the Son was subordinated to God the Father as a wholly separate being but shared all of the characteristics of God the Father. Like Speusippus, Origen held that the highest divine being was wholly separate from everything else and like Xenocrates, that the Monad could be referred as the "Father," a unified principle set apart from everything else. Any other being was automatically subject to and lower than the Monad, including the Dyad. The Dyad is the creative divine principle that shares the characteristics of God and is present in the physical realm through her representative the World-Soul/Demiurge, which matches the description of the Logos of God in GJn 1. It follows that since the Logos of God is referred to as the Son of God in GJn that the Son is automatically subordinated to the Father while also a separate being that is identical in every other manner to the Father (GJn 8:19).

The doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad dictates that the Dyad is emanated by the Monad, which makes it the 2nd Divine principle and by necessity, lower in rank to the Monad. The chaotic nature of the Dyad that had to be limited by the Monad in order to be pure is another factor that subjugates the Dyad to the Monad. Since the Dyad has to directly interact with matter in some form, it cannot be purely transcendent like the removed One at all times. In GJn, Jesus as God the Son is the representative of the Dyad incarnate and constantly refers to his life led not of his volition but in complete reflection of the Father (GJn 5:19-20), which indicative of Jesus as God the Son being subordinate to God the Father as dictated by logical necessity in Middle Platonism. If all of this is accounted for, the position that Origen held can be defended by the

understanding of the Divine as found in GJn, which is heavily influenced by Middle Platonism, especially as held by those in Alexandria.

5. Middle Platonism – A Summary

The purpose of the first part of this chapter is to provide a brief synopsis of Plato and the three successors of his Academy who laid the groundwork for Middle Platonism. The second section is dedicated to those who formulated the eclectic philosophical influences of Middle Platonism into a system, expressed the main goal of the philosophy, and a principle figure that preserved the teachings of many Middle Platonists while also expressing this philosophy as compatible with different religious formations other than monotheistic religions. The third section discusses the contributions of Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria as the primary examples of combining philosophical inquiry with divine revelation to produce unique versions of Judaism and Christianity that often stood in contrast to their non-philosophical contemporaries. If one includes Eudorus and Plutarch in this group then they collectively represent the Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism. All of this is done in order to demonstrate the larger atmosphere in which the Jesus tradition was combined with Middle Platonism in order to produce the Gospel of Thomas. This text contains a Middle Platonist worldview yet presents Jesus who is unified with the Divine and provides his teachings as the way in which one obtains the ultimate goal of “likeness unto God.”

III. Categories in the GTh: Jesus, Early Christianity, and Middle Platonic

The principle objective of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the sayings found in GTh and utilize this knowledge to demonstrate that the text is an early Christian Middle Platonic gospel. Sections six and seven shed light on the GTh logia that are either sayings of the historical Jesus and/or sayings concerned with the particular matters unique to first century Christian communities. This chapter continues to establish criteria that will provide evidence that the text is an early Christian Middle Platonic gospel. Section nine provides a brief assessment of ten Middle Platonic themes as developed by different thinkers and briefly demonstrate how these themes are theologically involved in GTh. Finally, a conclusion that sums up the material covered in this chapter and why it is relevant to my claim about the text being representative of the Jesus tradition combined with the theological background of Middle Platonism.

The 114 sayings in the Gospel of Thomas can be divided up into three primary categories. These three primary categories are: 1) Teachings of the Historical Jesus, 2) sayings relevant to the Itinerant practices followed by the Thomasine Community and concerns with other Early Christian communities, and 3) sayings of Jesus combined with a Middle Platonic theme. Since the logia found in the Gospel of Thomas are usually in multiple parts and can be parsed as such, it is the case that often parts of sayings fall into more than one of these categories and thus some sayings may be cross-listed between categories.¹⁰⁴

6. Teachings of the Historical Jesus

The first category is one that has been feuded over by scholars over the past few hundred years and many have come to different conclusions regarding the teachings of Jesus as found in the Gospel of Thomas. According to my count, there are 21 putatively historical teachings of

¹⁰⁴ The usage of these categories has been primarily informed by the work of Stephen Patterson. See Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 9-16; 113-96, and Patterson, *Jesus Meets Plato*, 183.

Jesus found in part or whole throughout the text and one of which is very notable to those interested in Historical Jesus studies, namely the Parable of the Sower (GTh 9). The reason the presence of the Parable of the Sower is so significant in the Gospel of Thomas is because it appears on its own as a teaching of Jesus and is without an interpretation, as it is found in the canonical gospels.¹⁰⁵ While many complex criteria have been developed for discovering the authentic sayings of the Historical Jesus, I am convinced the Thomasine version of the Parable of the Sower passes the simplest criterion imaginable for this process. That criterion is namely the question of which comes first in a sayings tradition: the saying or the interpretation? The answer is that the saying comes first and since it stands alone in the Gospel of Thomas, then the author of the text clearly knew the teaching separate from the synoptic tradition.¹⁰⁶

The second saying that I would argue that convincingly belongs to the Historical Jesus is Logion 14:3. It reads: “After all, what goes into your mouth will not defile you; rather, it's what comes out of your mouth that will defile you.” Like the Parable of the Sower, this saying is shared by the Synoptic Gospels and seems to defy both Jewish teachings concerning cleanliness and kosher as well as defying certain standards that the Hellenistic system held as crucial to the well-functioning of society. The most convincing aspect of this saying is that it cannot be traced back to either Jewish or Greek traditions and therefore, it is likely to have come out of the mouth of Jesus himself. The implications of this teaching are radical enough because it values the purity of the inner-self over the blind practice and/or belief of certain religious aspects that one may do

¹⁰⁵ John Horman argues that the Parable of the Sower in GTh represents the earliest version of the saying available to scholars. See John Horman, “The Source of the Version of the Parable of the Sower in the Gospel of Thomas,” *Novum Testamentum* 21:4 (October 1979), 326-343; 342-43.

¹⁰⁶ Patterson argues that if the author of GTh knew the interpretation and/or allegorical portion found in the canonical version of the parable, he sees no reason why it wouldn't be included in the text. See Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 22-23.

blindly and without much thought. Logion 14:3 stands as an invitation for introspection and the development of the spiritual self before one blindly follows any religious traditions.

The other 19 sayings that seem to be putatively historical teachings of Jesus are found in various forms throughout the canonical gospels and the Gospel of Thomas. Scholars seem to think that some of these teachings can be attributed to Jesus while others are clearly invented by a community or an author to serve a specific purpose for the audience. It is usually the case that the theological spins put on these sayings reveal more about the author/community who attributed it to Jesus than about Jesus himself. Some of these sayings include maxims such as a “No prophet is welcome on his home turf; doctors don't cure those who know them” (GTh 31) and “If a blind person leads a blind person, both of them will fall into a hole” (GTh 34). These seem to be simple teachings of Jesus that tend to have both practical advice and theological ramifications for those who included these teachings of Jesus in their gospel accounts.

There are also 18 additional sayings concerning the “Kingdom of Heaven” or my “Father’s Kingdom,” which is recognized as a chief theme of the Historical Jesus. Some of these sayings found in the Gospel of Thomas are found in the canonical gospels and some are not. It is a solid possibility that the authors of Thomas, Mark, and Q probably attained these sayings from the Jesus teachings tradition as it was passed on by his closest followers and those who came after them.¹⁰⁷

7. Teachings Relevant to 1st Century CE Christianities

The second category is one that addresses the lifestyle and practice of the Thomasine Christians who read the Gospel of Thomas and other concerns with early Christian communities in the first century. If one draws upon the general collection of Thomasine literature, which

¹⁰⁷ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to further discuss which sayings can be traced back to the historical Jesus and which can not – the only consensus argued here is that these sayings are found in multiple sources and are well-attested in the Jesus sayings tradition.

includes the Acts of Thomas and the Book of Thomas the Ascetic, one can find a theme of renouncing the world and wandering from place to place as a means of doing so. This seemed to be the lifestyle of Jesus himself, since it is reported that he never stayed in one place for very long and tended to travel from location to location to teach and perform miracles/healings.

It seems to be an agreement that the earliest followers of Jesus were exhorted to adopt this lifestyle and the Thomasine Christians were committed to this wandering way of life. The Cynic philosophers who were famous for teaching in chreiai, the principle literary form that the Thomasine Jesus teaches in, were also itinerant philosophers and did not stay in one place for very long. Therefore, the teachings concerning the itinerant and ascetic lifestyle found in the Gospel of Thomas reflect the way of the Cynic philosophers and Jesus of Nazareth as guidance to those Thomasine Christians who subscribed to it. The preservation of the GTh by the Egyptian Monks is likely tied to the advice regarding asceticism that was utilized by the Monks as well. One of the sayings that address the behavior of the Thomasine community is part of GTh 14 and it reads: "When you go into any region and walk about in the countryside, when people take you in, eat what they serve you and heal the sick among them" (GTh 14.2). This saying admonishes the reader of this text to practice a humble and itinerant lifestyle that exchanges a ministry of healing for the fulfillment of basic needs.

A saying that addresses more of the asceticism that was relevant to both Thomasine Christians and Monks reads: "Jesus said, 'Congratulations to the person who has toiled and has found life'" (GTh 58). The toil here referred to is the labor put in by any ascetic who invested his or her life into understanding the teachings of the Thomasine Jesus and practiced the necessary renunciation of the world to realize the divine wisdom manifested within oneself. There are 8 sayings that concern themselves strictly with the lifestyle of the Thomasine community and 16

teachings concerning asceticism/anti-world matters. The teachings concerning asceticism/anti-world contain logia that are influenced by Middle Platonism as well.

The later half of this category concerns sayings that are addressed to matters that would seemingly only be important to first century Christians looking to continue Jesus' ministry after he had died. An example of this is found in logion 12, where Jesus answers that his disciples will be led by "James the Just" after he leaves them. It is known that James was the brother of Jesus and led the early Christian church at Jerusalem after the death of Jesus thanks to the Acts of the Apostles, the writings of Paul, and later testimony by Josephus.¹⁰⁸ In logion 13, we find that the primacy of the Apostle Thomas is established as truly understanding Jesus and thus being worthy of leading the Thomasine community. This is in direct contrast to Peter being qualified to lead the church after his right identification of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. These two logia show concern of leadership after Jesus' death that was usually expressed in the first century via the process of correctly understanding the nature of Jesus or being appointed by blood relation to continue Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem.

There are also sayings that seem to be in stark contrast to Second Temple Period Judaism as it was practiced in Jesus' day and while some may see these sayings as anti-Semitic, it is more likely the case that early Thomasine Christianity was trying to separate itself from mainstream Judaism.¹⁰⁹ An example of this is logion 53, in which Jesus is asked if circumcision of the body is useful and he replies that only spiritual circumcision is beneficial. A similar situation is found in Colossians 2:11, in which Paul advocates for spiritual circumcision as well. Therefore, we can

¹⁰⁸ Koester, "Gospels," 17.

¹⁰⁹ It is not my intention to convey Judaism as a singular entity during the time of Jesus but rather to place focus on the type of Orthodox Judaism found in Jerusalem at that time as representative of the sect that the Thomasine community was reacting to. The varieties of Judaism found at this time include the Essenes, Zealots (the "Fourth Philosophy"), Pharisees, Sadducees, and other sects such as those that followed John the Baptist in the desert. See Michael Swartz, "Judaism: An Overview," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 7, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005): 4973-76.

conclude that the process of Christians distancing themselves from Judaism ritualistically was an active practice in the first century.¹¹⁰ This process of separation from Judaism was a common occurrence that other Christian communities were doing in the first century as well. It is not a matter of hatred insomuch as it is an establishment of a different religious tradition and spiritual path lead by Jesus and his earliest followers. In total, there are three sayings addressed to leadership matters for the Early Thomasine Christian community and four sayings concerning negation of second temple era Judaism.

Another logion, saying 17, seems to have its root in the first century early Christian communities as well. The logion reads: “Jesus said: ‘I will give you what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no hand has touched, what has not arisen in the human heart.’” A version of this saying is also found in the writings of Paul, who writes “But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’” (1 Cor 2:9). It seems that Paul was loosely quoting Isaiah 64:4 and modifying it according to his means in addressing the church at Corinth.

So what is the significance of the Thomasine Jesus quoting a nearly identical version of the Pauline verse in a different setting all together? The most probable conclusion is that the author of the GTh was familiar with the writings of Paul and modified it to apply to the wisdom that Jesus is revealing in GTh.¹¹¹ This understanding is logical because Paul is writing to Christians at Corinth about true spiritual wisdom and since the author of the Gospel of Thomas

¹¹⁰ Joshua Jipp and Michael Thate argue that a rejection of physical circumcision as a necessary part of conversion to Christianity would have developed around 50 CE when the Gentile movement was expanding and argued with Jewish Christians about such a practice in various texts. Since GTh is part of this conversation, the text would have to be composed after 50 CE. See Joshua W. Jipp and Michael J. Tate, “Dating Thomas: Logion 53 as a Test Case for Dating the Gospel of Thomas within an Early Christian Trajectory,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20:2 (2010): 247-8.

¹¹¹ Simon Gathercole defends the perspective that Paul’s work was influential on GTh 17 and 53. See Simon Gathercole, “The Influence of Paul on the Gospel of Thomas 53.3 and 17,” *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung – Rezeption – Theologie*, Jorg Frey, *et al.*, (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2008), 72-94.

felt that the true spiritual wisdom was found in the teachings of Jesus, it makes sense for this teaching to be placed upon his lips.¹¹² The dating of 1 Corinthians is ideal for the saying to be known as well because it is commonly held that the letter was written in the mid-50's CE, which would place the GTh sometime after that but still before the composition of the Gospel of John.

Thus, it is likely that GTh was not composed before 55 CE based on the analysis of this saying alone. Most importantly, this expresses that the Thomasine Christian community was actively engaged with other early Christian communities, including the Pauline in addition to the Johannine community.¹¹³ In short, saying 17 is important because it reveals the engagement of the Thomasine community with other early Christian communities and also helps limit the date range for GTh by a few years on the earlier side. The logia in this category solidly place the GTh in the first century and show that the author of this text was concerned with matters important to the lifestyle of the Thomasine community as well as logia that were relevant to the monastic community that translated and preserved this gospel in Coptic.

8. GTh as a Christian Middle Platonic Gospel

The third primary category that the rest of the logia in the GTh belong to is the theological background that provides the interpretative context and spiritual depth for the Gospel of Thomas, namely that of Alexandrian Middle Platonism. This category can be divided into a few different sub-categories, each of which represents a common theme in Middle Platonism, a

¹¹² Helmut Koester argues that logion 17 is a part of a larger tradition that understood Jesus as spreading a Wisdom tradition that held Jesus as the incarnation of Divine Wisdom (Sophia). This understanding is in line with the Jewish Middle Platonist Philo's representation of the second principle of the Divine as represented in Plato's "Unwritten Doctrines." It is possible that one of the earliest understandings of Jesus' identity is as the Wisdom/Creativity of God that walked among people and taught them how to achieve "likeness with God" as well. See Koester, *Gospels*, 14-16 and Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 204-205.

¹¹³ Stephen Patterson argues that these similarities between Paul and GTh shows that while different varieties of early Christianity manifested themselves in the 1st century, it is possible that they utilized similar material about Jesus and the importance of his life for their different audiences. A theological exchange of sorts is found between both parties and if Paul encountered these sayings of Jesus in the context of GTh, he certainly would not have utilized them in the same way. See Stephen Patterson, "Paul and the Jesus Tradition: It's Time for Another Look," *Harvard Theological Review* 84:1, (Jan 1991): 23-41.

few of which were established by and argued for by Stephen Patterson in his article on Middle Platonism and the Gospel of Thomas.¹¹⁴ However, there are themes in Middle Platonism that Patterson does not see as treated in the Gospel of Thomas, such as the doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad, the Daemons as guardians of the cosmos, and the notion that Plato had secret teachings that were not written down or otherwise known by anyone outside of the Academy in Athens.¹¹⁵

On a similar note, Patterson does not feel that the Gospel of Thomas is a Middle Platonist's Gospel, but I contest this claim because one could easily consider Philo or Clement and Origen as a Middle Platonist and a Jew/Christian respectively at the same time.¹¹⁶ Their commentaries and monographs could be considered as Middle Platonic works, with their heavy reliance on this specific philosophical tradition. If Philo goes so far as to identify Moses as the first Greek philosopher and uses the *Timaeus* as a reference point to understand Genesis, then Philo is definitely a Jew and a Middle Platonist.¹¹⁷ Hence, why couldn't Middle Platonic scripture be produced as well? Berchman appropriately expresses a relevant point here:

Jewish and Christian Middle Platonism, in the formative age of Judaism and Christianity, reflects the deepest premises of Hellenistic culture. Hence, when we study the works of Philo, Clement, and Origen not only do we encounter Judaic and Christian Platonists, thinkers who translated biblical revelation into Platonic wisdom, we also meet varieties of Judaism and Christianity which are wholly Platonic, and fully in accord with the philosophical culture of late antiquity.¹¹⁸

Hence, if an early Christian group existed that conceived of their world in terms of Middle Platonism, then they would likely produce scripture that mirrored these philosophical commitments as theological priorities, including the teachings of Jesus. For this reason and two criterion discussed below, it makes sense that GTh is a Middle Platonic Christian gospel.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Patterson, "Jesus Meets Plato," 184-204.

¹¹⁵ Patterson, "Jesus Meets Plato," 204-5.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ This point was maintained by early Christian apologists as well. See Torjesen, "The Enscripturation of Philosophy," 74.

¹¹⁸ Berchman, *Philo to Origen*, 11.

¹¹⁹ Karen Torjesen relates that in the Alexandrian tradition, the roles of prophet, teacher, and exegete were intimately connected inasmuch that one individual treated the scripture as an oracular authority and appealed to divine

The first criterion concerns the heavy use of Middle Platonic themes in the text: is an understanding of humanity, the world, and other matters imbued by Middle Platonism present in the text? The author of the Gospel of Thomas uses at least 10 different themes relevant to understanding the end-goal of Middle Platonism. These 10 themes are the admonition to “know yourself,” pursue “likeness unto God as far as possible,” the emphasis on “rest and motion,” the doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad, the tradition of unwritten/secret teachings of Plato, the notion of the spiritual androgyne as the ideal state of being, asceticism as practice to obtain spiritual perfection, the notion of the divine/soul as light, the idea that the material world was spawned by fire, and the understanding of daemons as guardians of the physical cosmos. All of these themes are present in the Gospel of Thomas in some frequency, with Jesus portrayed as the revealer of these themes.

The second criterion concerns the modeling of the central figure of the text: are they generally reflective of individuals who started and/or shaped the Middle Platonic tradition? The author of the GTh styles Jesus’ teachings in the same form that was used to preserve teachings of famous Greek philosophers for evangelical purposes. Also, the notion that Jesus has secret teachings that are not written down and only available to certain individuals is reflective of the secret teachings that Plato delivered to his disciples. Since these two criteria are fulfilled in the Gospel of Thomas, it is safe to consider it a Christian Middle Platonic gospel. If the work of Philo is where Moses meets Plato, then as Stephen Patterson asserted, the Gospel of Thomas is where “Jesus meets Plato.”¹²⁰

inspiration based on their own authority. According to her work, divine inspiration was dually involved in the writing and interpretation of scripture in addition to the expounding of Christian doctrine based on scripture. Thus, if divine inspiration and philosophical inquiry is used in the exegesis of scripture, then it follows that philosophical concepts as shaped by divine inspiration is a valid option in the composition of scripture as well. See Karen Torjesen, “The Alexandrian Tradition of the Inspired Interpreter,” *Origeniana Octava*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 287-300; 290-94.

¹²⁰ Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 186.

9. Middle Platonic Themes in the GTh: A Brief Survey

Before the analysis of the Gospel of Thomas can continue, the Middle Platonic themes in the Gospel of Thomas must be further examined. Each of these themes point to the end goal of Middle Platonism, which was adopted by Thomasine Christianity: “likeness to God as far as possible.” The first theme that will be discussed is the Platonic admonition to “know yourself” and capitalize on the ultimate benefits that this knowledge rewards the seeker with. This maxim is well known throughout western philosophy and is recorded by Plutarch to be inscribed above the Oracle at Delphi, which proclaimed Socrates to be the “wisest of all men” (*E at Delphi 2*).¹²¹

It seems that the oracle delivered to Socrates and the maxim were not separate pursuits, especially since by setting out to disprove this oracle, Socrates set in motion the movement that would spawn the Academy at Athens and the entire philosophical/theological tradition that would become Middle Platonism. Stephen Patterson writes that the maxim in question has two different meanings: the first is to remember that you are mortal and the second is to know your “true self,” that is the rational part of your soul that is capable of returning to the Divine.¹²² One could see how the first understanding would be important to the common people, namely those not inclined to philosophical reflection and spiritual pursuits, because it would be reflective of their limited capabilities in their mortal coil.¹²³

However, the second understanding is more reflective of the pursuit common to those in the Academy at Athens and adopted by Thomasine Christians, namely the pursuit of knowledge

¹²¹ Another interesting aspect about the “E at Delphi” that Plutarch writes about is that it could be demonstration that the number of truly wise men is 5 as it denoted the number of original Sophists and excluded 2 later individuals who were not part of that original group (E at Delphi 3). As such, it became associated with all who are truly wise men, which may have some significance in GTh 19.4-5.

¹²² Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 184. For examples, see GTh 3, 5, 29, 34, 67, and 111.

¹²³ For Plato, the “as far as possible” part of *Theaetetus* 176B served as a reminder of the limitation of “human capabilities” to achieve “likeness unto God” but it becomes more of a focus on the development of intellect and wisdom to achieve this “likeness” in the eyes of more religious Middle Platonists. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 123.

that will allow one to return to God or the One, as Plato commonly referred to the Divine as. However, how does one gain the knowledge of one's spiritual self? This knowledge is gained through the correct understanding of Middle Platonic teachings and the knowledge that it reveals about the nature of reality and the end goal of the spiritual pursuit: to return to the Divine realm from which all of humanity came and follow the correct path by which one may obtain this telos.

The second Middle Platonic theme to be discussed is the idea that not all teachings are available to the common people and should not be written down for public consumption. One of the principle concerns of most Middle Platonists was the reconciliation of Plato's "Unwritten Doctrines" and the creation myth that he sets forth in the *Timaeus*. It is said that Plato only delivered one public lecture and when the audience realized that he was teaching on matters strictly concerned with returning to the One/Good, they quickly mocked him and left.¹²⁴ Thus, the majority of Plato's teaching was restricted to the Academy and even there, he probably only taught certain doctrines to certain individuals he deemed worthy of this understanding.

In GTh, the teachings of Jesus are seen as in need of "interpretation," much like the Platonic teachings made available in his writings, especially the *Timaeus*. Much like Plato, the Thomasine Jesus is set to utter secret, unwritten teachings to the author of the document, Thomas, such as in logion 13. Furthermore, when the other disciples ask Thomas to reveal these teachings to them, he says: "If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you" (GTh 13:7). It is implied in the text that since Thomas has been the only one to understand Jesus and the nature of the Divine, that he was the only one who can handle these teachings. If the others even heard one of these sayings, that would be provoked to anger by their misunderstanding and "devoured" by the foundational element of fire in their carnal anger. Thus, the goal of reconciling the recorded

¹²⁴ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 9.

teachings of Jesus and Plato with their unwritten teachings only revealed to certain individuals is a Middle Platonic theme directly imported into the Gospel of Thomas with Jesus being the revealer of public sayings to interest the right individuals and hierophant of secret teachings that allowed one the knowledge necessary to return to the Divine.

The third Middle Platonic theme explored here is the notion of the spiritual self as fundamentally a sexless “one” or a spiritual androgyne.¹²⁵ This is a constant theme found throughout the *Republic*, Middle Platonic teachings, and other Early Christian literature, especially texts found in the same codex as the Gospel of Thomas, including the *Gospel of Phillip*, *Exegesis on the Soul*, and in the same Thomasine tradition, the *Book of Thomas the Ascetic*.¹²⁶ The theme as it is described here includes teachings on the Bridal Chamber, the understanding of the soul as a tri/bipartite entity in Middle Platonism, and the idea of the spiritual ideal as the genderless one (androgyne) as expressed in the *Republic* and some interpretations, such as those of Rashi and Philo, of the creation of humanity as an androgyne in Genesis.¹²⁷ The division of the androgyne into male and female into the flesh as expressed in separate genders represents the entrapment of the spiritual, rational self in the flesh that bogs the rational side into sexual pursuits and bodily desires of food, housing, and general care for the flesh that is invested in the physical world. There are several allegories in the *Republic* that reflect the desire for the rational aspect of the soul to dominate the irrational parts (passion and desire) of the soul in order for the spiritual self to be unified in thought and goal of returning to the Divine.

¹²⁵ There are approximately 29 examples of this theme in GTh. See GTh 3,4,7,22,23,36,37,41,46-49,56-61,70,72,75,76,84,87,89,104,106,108,111,112, and 114.

¹²⁶ I disagree with Drijvers’ dating of the GTh but his comments regarding the aspects of the androgyne are in line with the majority of scholarship on the matter. See Han J. W. Drijvers, “Virginity,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 14, (Detroit: Macmillian Reference USA, 2005), 9606-9609; 9607-08 and Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 243-253.

¹²⁷ See David M. Carr, “Introduction and Notes on Genesis” in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed., Michael D. Coogan, *et al*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 12 HB and Julia Iwersen, “Virgin Goddess,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 14, (Detroit: Macmillian Reference USA, 2005), 9601-9606; 9604-05.

Some of these allegories are the Allegory of the Man, Lion, and Multi-headed beast in addition to the chariot being pulled by multiple horses in different directions. The notion of the true human as an androgyne is found in the *Republic* as well. The overall assessment of this emphasis on the true spiritual person as undivided in gender and rational control of the soul is reflective of the highest divine reality, which is called the Good, the Monad, and most importantly the “One” in Platonic and Middle Platonic thought. The androgyne is the form of the human that will be able to bypass the entire material universe and the rest of the cosmos to ultimately return to the divine One through his representative in the Dyad. But what does the Monad and the Dyad have to do with the highest human form that is able to access the Divine? The doctrine of the Monad and Dyad in the creation of the universe has to be unpacked in order for the importance of the Androgyne to be understood.

The doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad is fundamental to understanding the role of the Divine in the cosmology of the Middle Platonists. In the *Timaeus*, the Monad is the first principle that exists by itself before anything else is formed. The first thought of the Monad emanates the Dyad, which is a limitless form among the void that is the universe before it was organized. The only other act of the Monad is to limit the Dyad so that it can organize the formless material of the universe before it. The first products of the Dyad organizing the universe are the ideal Decad – which represents the principle of ten that the cosmos is organized upon. There is an additional being that organized the rest of the universe in the material world based upon what it sees in the Divine realm above, which is the demiurge.

The demiurge or “plan-reader” organizes the remaining matter into the four elements of earth, fire, water, and air. The demiurge is also identified as the world-soul because it is responsible for the formation of the material world as we know it, namely the physical planet called Earth

that humans and other creatures inhabit. The humans that inhabit Earth have the capacity and opportunity to return to the Divine, if they understand the organizing principles of the universe and the knowledge of the spiritual self that is necessary to return to the Divine.

An important note that needs to be made is that the Monad or One is wholly inaccessible itself but the androgyne or undivided self can know the Dyad, which is the only entity that truly knows the nature of the Monad. As such, one can see that the Dyad is the mediator between God (the Monad) and the rest of creation, which means that knowledge of the Dyad, is, as the crux of Middle Platonism states, the possible closest position one can be to God. The third principle, the World-Soul/Demiurge, is the representative of the Dyad in the material realm. By becoming a reflection of this principle, one is connected to the Dyad and ultimately, the Monad. This concept will be further expounded later but in the Gospel of Thomas, the representative of the Dyad can be seen as manifested in the text as Jesus himself. There are several logia that communicate this idea in different ways in the text and are attested by other early Christian thinkers such as the author of the Gospel of John and Basilides, who asserted that Jesus was the creative force (logos) through which God created the universe.¹²⁸

Hence, the idea that Jesus was a manifestation of the Divine is not an idea exclusively held by those who came to support the proto-orthodox understanding of the triune God. The idea that God utilized a creative force to create the universe, including the material world, is also found in the thought of Philo. Philo found this creative force expressed as Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible, notably in Proverbs 8:22 and identified it as the “logos,” by which all creation is organized.¹²⁹ This is the same language that the author of the Gospel of John uses to describe the creative force that was used to create the cosmos: “In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos

¹²⁸ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*. For the relation to Basilides and Valentinus to “orthodox Christianity,” see Clark, “Clement of Alexandria,” 1823.

¹²⁹ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 163-6.

was with God, and the Logos was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (Jn 1:1-3a). This passage later attests that the Logos becomes flesh in the person of Jesus.

In the same vein, Jesus makes indirect claims to be a manifestation of this principle in the Gospel of Thomas, such as in logia 77, 100, and 105.¹³⁰ One may understand the fact that Thomas couldn’t look Jesus in the eye right before he receives the three secret teachings of Jesus in logion 13 as proof that he recognizes a principle in Jesus that is beyond beings in their mortal coil. That principle is the divine creative force that reveals the teachings necessary to fully know Jesus’ full essence and thus return to the source from which all rational beings came. But since most of the divine principle is enclosed in flesh, including the representation of the Dyad manifested as Jesus, what is the true form of the divine after it was freed from the passions and desires of the flesh?

The answer is that the divine form is fundamentally light. Both the Divine and the spiritual form of humanity are manifested as light as well. In the *Republic*, three tales are used to illustrate the structure of obtaining knowledge and ultimately knowing the Good or the One. Since the first analogy does not deal with light but rather the structure and types of knowledge, it will be discussed later on. In the “Analogy of the Sun,” Plato writes that the Sun is the source that supports all living things and gives eyes the ability to see the world by the light it emits. In a similar fashion, the Good is ultimately the source of all creation and gives the human soul the ability to obtain knowledge necessary for return to the One (*Republic* VI.507b-509c).

In the “Allegory of the Cave,” Plato writes that there are two sources of light: the fire that casts the shadows of the figures on the wall and the greater source of light, the Sun, which

¹³⁰ There are approximately 23 references to the Monad and Dyad in GTh. See GTh 11,13,15,18,19,24,28,30,40,43,59-61,77,84,91-94,100,101,105, and 107.

indirectly caused all things and directly illuminates the true nature of reality (Republic VII.514a-521b). Patterson notes that Philo records that the “creative agency of God” (logos) is represented as light.¹³¹ In other Middle Platonic thought, the Dyad is viewed as the divine “creative agency” and it is inferred that Jesus is the dyad incarnate in GTh. Jesus as the illuminative logos is also found in the beginning of GJn (Jn 1:4-5). The metaphor of “light” used for spiritual agency is found throughout the Gospel of Thomas, particularly in logion 24 and logion 33. In logion 50, the place of the Divine is established as one marked by light and from which all spiritual ones are created and to which they return. Logion 61 claims that the “one who is not divided” is the one who will be “filled with light” and as such, is the true representative of spiritual fulfillment. Overall, the metaphor of “light” is used in Platonic thought to express the highest principle, those who will return to said principle, and the means by which the knowledge necessary to return is revealed. This imagery is directly imported into the Gospel of Thomas and used extensively to reference the Divine.¹³²

The next Middle Platonic theme found in the Gospel of Thomas is the use of daemons as directly influential on the created world and as guardians of the physical universe. Another understanding of the daemons in this system is either daemons are souls condemned to cosmic exile for a time because of their spiritual ignorance before being embodied again or enlightened souls headed to the sun in order to be purified before returning back to the Divine. John Dillon writes that both possibilities are found in Middle Platonic thought and that Plutarch seems to hold that both kinds of daemons are present in the universe.¹³³ On the other hand, Xenocrates posited that daemons were static agents fixed in the universe and primarily served as mediators between God and humans. There were both good and evil daemons because like humans they

¹³¹ Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 196-99.

¹³² There are approximately 7 references to the “Divine as light” in GTh. See GTh 11,24,33,50,61,77, and 83.

¹³³ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 46-7

were subject to irrational passions but like God, they were immortal.¹³⁴ They were also said to be located below the moon in the cosmological scheme and as such, were closer to the material world than would be possible for the purely divine.

Plutarch's idea is that some daemons are traveling souls is a view held by Apuleius as well. Since Plutarch maintains that daemons are either static or dynamic entities, it is more parsimonious to discuss Apuleius' understanding of daemons as traveling souls in the universe. Dillon writes that Apuleius provides the fullest account of Platonic demonology and it is recorded in his work, *De Deo Socratis*.¹³⁵ Apuleius writes that there are three categories of daemons that inhabit the universe. The first type of daemon is the human soul itself – which when embodied acts as a guide to rational acts that are beneficiary to the human being. Dillon mentions that Apuleius derives this definition from Xenocrates' philological analysis of eudaemon, which is usually translated as “happy.” The literal translation of eu-daemon is “having a good daemon,” which is supported by Plato himself in the *Timaeus* 90c.¹³⁶ This type of daemon is separate from the “guardian daemon” which will be discussed below.

Apuleius' second category of daemons consists of souls that have left their bodies and are serving certain functions in the universe. In this category, the daemon can be good and is usually appointed with caring for certain parts of the earth and “even individual households.”¹³⁷ The evil daemons in this category are condemned to wander the earth and cause trouble for human souls that are in the flesh. Occasionally they are appointed to trouble certain human souls but never good souls. These daemons inevitably end up returning to the divine realm via the sun or are

¹³⁴ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 32.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 320.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 319.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

reincarnated in a human body via the moon. Dillon notes that in this manner, Apuleius' understanding of daemons is not much from different than that of Plutarch.

The third type of daemon that Apuleius lists is the type of daemon that never inhabits a body such as Eros and Hypnos.¹³⁸ Apuleius lists the guardian daemons under this category and gives as example the one that followed and advised Socrates during his life. He taught that this type of daemon knows everything about a human that he knows about himself and acts as an advocate and/or accuser of his soul on judgment day after he dies. This understanding of a daemon is based on a certain interpretation of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, which has significant influence on philosophers such as Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius, and Seneca.¹³⁹ Significant influence from the Myth of Er found at the end of the *Republic* is reflected in the third type of daemon, which could be seen as the equivalent of the guardian spirit assigned to each soul before it is reincarnated into a body. The concept of one's soul being judged then rewarded or punished accordingly is also found in the Myth of Er. Therefore, it is probable that a conflation of these two parts of the story resulted in the understanding of Apuleius' third daemon.

The final function that daemons serve in the universe is that they are the many gods served by human beings. According to Apuleius, the variety of religious practices and worship is traceable to the fickle nature of these daemons who desire different rituals and offerings when moved by their irrational natures. The various rituals that the ancients used to please the various gods in their respective pantheons differed greatly in song, dance, sacrifice, and practice – some preferred cheerful ceremonies which ended in a feast and others required dark ceremonies in which an animal was holocausted in a pit in the middle of the night. Pleasing these daemons was important because they were granted dominion over the Earth and as such, needed to be satiated

¹³⁸ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 320.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

through various means so that human beings could generally live a successful life without being disturbed by the “gods.”¹⁴⁰

If there is no standard understanding of daemons in Middle Platonic thought then what do they agree upon regarding daemons? The answer is that God cannot come in close contact with the material world and needs mediators to deal with humans on Earth. Therefore, since daemons are composed of both godlike and material qualities, they are appointed guardianship over the material universe and serve that function in the Middle Platonic cosmos. It seems that this understanding of the daemons is held in the Gospel of Thomas, namely sayings 21 and 50 but other sayings are reflective of this sentiment as well.¹⁴¹

Another Middle Platonic theme found in the Gospel of Thomas is the reflection of ascetical tendencies as represented by Plato and his emphasis on the discipline of the physical body for the sake of philosophy. While a myriad of ascetic practices are reflected in classical Greek philosophy, the one that Plato learned from Pythagoras after the death of Socrates and modified for his own means at the Academy is largely the one found as taught and practiced by Plato himself. One can find the import of disciplining the body all through out the written works of Plato, especially the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedo*. It is clear that Plato felt that this practice was necessary with regards to the end-goal of returning to the realm of the Divine after death.¹⁴²

The other purpose of ascetic practice for Plato and his successors was to successfully submit the physical body, which represents the irrational aspects of a human, to the higher will of the rational soul so that the true work of philosophy could be done. According to the *Phaedo*, the

¹⁴⁰ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 318

¹⁴¹ There are only 3 references to daemons in GTh. See main discussion in chapter 11.

¹⁴² Riley writes that Plato’s understanding of the body-soul relation originates in the ancient Orphic tradition that maintains that the body is a prison for the soul that has to be escaped in order to return to God. See Gregory J. Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 143-44. GTh reflects this sentiment by labeling physical existence as poverty and a carcass (GTh 3, 29, and 56). Also, Jesus condemns symbiosis between the body and soul in addition to predicting the destruction of the sensible realm (GTh 11 & 111-112).

cultivation of the rational soul is to be pursued over the satisfaction of the irrational body since the soul is immortal but the body is subject to decay and death. But one should not destroy the body by means of suicide because the body is part of the material world and the material world belongs to the gods. One finds that Plato is expressing through the character of Socrates that since “men are chattel of the gods,” it is not wise for human beings to destroy property that is not theirs and thus risk the wrath of the gods upon the rational soul at the time of death (62b-62d). This is the idea developed in Middle Platonism, in which the various gods of different pantheons are actually a type of daemon that will require the body back after physical death and since they possess the ability to condemn the rational human soul to another cycle of transmigration in the physical realm, it is best not to commit suicide or seek physical death prematurely in any way. This concept is reflected in GTh 21, where one need only to return the property (material body) back to its owners (guardian daemons/gods) when they return to claim it (the moment of material death).

Therefore, while one should not physically destroy the body, it is clear in the *Phaedo* that the body need not be entertained with the usual indulgences of fancy food, drink, clothing, and the “pleasures of love” (64c-64e). The practice of asceticism is one of the chief ways in which the philosopher is notably different than the rest of society. The philosopher denies the demands of the flesh unlike the majority of those who do not have the ability to cultivate the knowledge necessary to contemplate the highest principles of the universe and develop the character necessary in order to return to the Divine source of the human soul after death (65e-66a). In short, the best way to accomplish the goal of Middle Platonism is through the denial of irrational passions and desires of the flesh in favor of a contemplative lifestyle that is conducive to the betterment of society and the return of the soul to God.

This chapter is crucial to multiple aspects of my argument concerning the text. Sections six and seven are dedicated to plausibly demonstrating that GTh is an early account of Jesus' teachings and that the community represented by the text was actively involved with concerns solely expressed in the first century CE by early Christian groups. This places the date of the text at circa 60 CE but almost certainly before 90 CE since GJn actively impugns the apostle Thomas in his account of Jesus' life. Section eight demonstrates that the GTh is representative of a form of Christianity "... [that is] wholly Platonic, and fully in accord with the philosophical culture of late antiquity" and heavily utilizes these commitments throughout the text.¹⁴³ The last section examines ten Middle Platonic themes and how they are combined with the teachings of Jesus in the text. This serves as more evidence to support my claim that the theological background is the philosophical doctrines of Middle Platonism that was particularly prevalent in the first century CE.

¹⁴³ Berchman, *Philo to Origen*, 11.

IV. Three Middle Platonic Themes in GTh

As I discussed in the previous section, GTh has been influenced in many ways by Plato and his successors who developed his thought in the school of Middle Platonism. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully address all the sayings that reflect the influence of Middle Platonism in the text, so I will limit my discussion to three of the major topics that have not been covered by other scholars who address Middle Platonism and the Gospel of Thomas. With this in mind, the three themes to be discussed are: the nature of secret teachings and sayings in the text as related to Middle Platonism and its respective influences, the proposed influence and rhetoric of daemons as guardians of the physical universe as found in both sources, and the Middle Platonic understanding of the Divine as combined with the Jesus tradition.

The Gospel of Thomas and the larger Thomasine tradition demonstrate an understanding of Jesus that was influenced by Middle Platonic philosophy, Greco-Roman Mystery Religions, and other Hellenistic elements. As Stephen Patterson writes, “[the Gospel of Thomas]...stands near the beginning of what would become a long tradition of Platonic Christian theology, and is probably our earliest exemplar of such effort.”¹⁴⁴ This is the primary idea that inspired and promotes a Greek philosophical understanding of the Jesus tradition as recorded in the Thomasine tradition.

The manners in which the GTh logia are recorded do not reflect the writing style of Plato or the work composed by Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria. As established above, GTh is a Christian Middle Platonic Gospel that understands the Christian significance of Jesus in a Middle Platonic fashion. GTh effectively serves as scripture for the communities that engage it and resembles the larger genre of “Sayings of the Wise,” that was used to primarily record the work of Greek philosophers. The logia largely reflect the pointed sharp sayings of Diogenes,

¹⁴⁴ Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 205.

Epicurus, and Epictetus known as chreiai. Most of the work on chreiai has been done by Ronald Hock and Edward O’Neil, who published 2 volumes concerning the different usage of chreiai in Greek philosophy, Greco-Roman rhetorical education, and the collection of such sayings for different purposes ranging from evangelical purposes to educational and/or persuasive arguments for students of classical rhetoric.¹⁴⁵

According to Jerome H. Neyrey, we have evidence of chreiai being used by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark and this indicates that the author of the Gospel of Thomas was not the only early Christian author who viewed Jesus as a master of Hellenistic rhetoric. The forms of well-attested chreiai used in the Gospel of Mark are also used in the Gospel of Thomas. Neyrey notes that Aelius Theon, the author of the only ancient work regarding these sayings, identified three major forms of such sayings: 1) sayings chreiai, 2) action chreiai, and 3) mixed chreiai, with the third being a combination of the first two forms of chreiai.¹⁴⁶ Sayings chreiai were divided into two types: a general saying of a sage and a response to a question posed to a sage.¹⁴⁷ In the GTh, one finds both types of sayings chreiai with the initial promise that the proper interpretation of these sayings would essentially allow one some form of life beyond death or as a popular translation of the first saying reads: “...one will not taste death” (GTh 1b).

10. Secret Teachings in Platonism, Middle Platonism, and GTh

The prologue and first saying of the GTh state that: “These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas recorded. And he said, ‘Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death’” (GTh Prologue-Lg 1). There are a few notable elements in these opening sentences of the text and the first of these is that what the

¹⁴⁵ Ronald F. Hock and Edward N. O’Neil, *The Chreiai in Ancient Rhetoric*, Vol. 1-3, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1986, 2012.

¹⁴⁶ Jerome H. Neyrey, “Questions, Chreiai, and Honor Challenges: The Interface of Rhetoric and Culture in Mark’s Gospel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60 (1998): 657-81, 658.

¹⁴⁷ Neyrey, “Questions, Chreiai, and Honor Challenges,” 660.

reader is about to engage are “secret sayings,” as in they are not readily available to all parties and that these teachings are not meant for everyone. The second notable feature of this opening is that these “secret sayings” are spoken by the “living Jesus,” which infers a certain status about the speaker of these recorded sayings. The type of life that Jesus is ascribed is ζωή which is used to refer to a spiritual life as it is found throughout the New Testament, especially with regards to John 3:16, in which ζωή αἰώνιος (eternal life) is promised to the believer of the claims made in the text. This type of life is opposed to βίος, which is used to denote external life and usually one’s vocational pursuits during the time one lived on Earth. Therefore, the status of Jesus is already elevated in the prologue as he is inferred to be living a life beyond the concerns of the flesh and vocational pursuits.

The next aspect of the prologue that is worth mentioning concerns the author of the text as “Didymos Judas Thomas.” Judas is the only proper name in the text and the other two words are titles that both mean “twin.” Didymos is the Greek word for “twin” and Thomas is related to the Semitic roots of this title, as expressed in Aramaic and Syriac. Therefore, it is likely that the audience of this text were both Greek and Semitic groups with the addition of the Egyptians who read and translated this text into Sahidic Coptic. Moreover, the inference that Judas is the “twin” and author of this text denotes that Judas is privy to special knowledge about these sayings – which is the proper “interpretation” that will lead to the reward that the text offers those who discover it.

The final element of the text is that one is exhorted to “find the interpretations of these sayings” in order “not to taste death.” This exhortation is an interesting one because instead of placing emphasis on the death of Jesus as the saving act or good works as a means to achieving salvation, the onus is placed on the proper understanding of these teachings within the text. The

Coptic word that is used to denote “interpretation” is a loan-word from the Greek: ἑρμηνεία (hermenia), which is derived from the messenger god Hermes who delivered messages from the Greek gods in Homer’s Epics and other Greek tales. In essence, the work that is laid before the reader of this text is to decipher the teachings contained within because they contain a divine message which will lead one to spiritual life after the physical existence is over. It is clear that in the New Testament that the antithesis of ζωή is θάνατος but the Coptic text has only one word for death, which is ΜΟΥ. However, the majority of editors for the Greek manuscript of the GTh agree that θάνατος is the appropriate word that should fill the space occupied by the lacuna in the Greek manuscript and as such, the implied promise of “spiritual life” (ζωή) represents a great promise for those who seek to understand and apply this text to their lives.¹⁴⁸

But what does any of this have to do with Platonism, Middle Platonism, and other factors that may have influenced these philosophical schools? To begin with, Plato only taught in private at the Academy in Athens after he witnessed the untimely death of his mentor Socrates at the hands of the state. It seems that after Socrates was convicted and executed by the Athenian State for practicing his philosophy publicly, Plato decided to continue his mentor’s work in private as to avoid such a fate.¹⁴⁹

After the death of Socrates, Plato traveled to many destinations with the most pertinent location being the institution led by Pythagoras. While he was there, he picked up the practices of asceticism and ideas communicated to him regarding the mathematical nature of the universe and other propositions that influenced his writings and oral teachings. After returning from his time with Pythagoras, he established the Academy at Athens and taught his students privately

¹⁴⁸ Crum confirms that ΜΟΥ corresponds to the Greek word θάνατος. See W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 159.

¹⁴⁹ See both accounts of Socrates’ trial, defense, and punishment in Plato’s *Ἀπολογία Σωκράτους* (Apology of Socrates) and Xenophon’s *Ἀπολογία Σωκράτους πρὸς τοὺς Δικαστάς* (Socrates’ Apology to the Jury).

away from the public. One of the marked features of the Academy is that Plato taught things to his students that he didn't write down, known as the "Unwritten Doctrines." In these doctrines, later Platonists communicate that Plato believed in the existence of the divine as a Monad and Dyad from which the rest of creation sprang and that the universe was divided into a tripartite division of the physical realm, realm of mathematical ideals, and finally the realm in which the Monad and Dyad resided. It was a goal of most Middle Platonists to reconcile these claims with the ones found in the *Timaeus*, which is Plato's written account of the order of the universe but does not address the matters that he taught privately and did not allow to be preserved in formal written form.

Also, with regards to the general public, Plato only delivered one lecture – the lecture famously known as "On the Good." In this lecture, Plato laid out how he thought the cosmos was organized and that the Divine was known as the One, from which it can be inferred that he conflated the Good with the One. Plato's lecture was not well received by the public because it did not pertain to their every day lives of health, wealth, and other mundane concerns so they stopped listening to him and may have even heckled him for making such an effort.¹⁵⁰

If this report about Plato's public lecture is true then one could see why he would not make an effort to teach his philosophy to those who were not interested in such matters. It is not a matter of elitism but rather a rational decision to teach privately which required involvement in the Academy as a method of keeping those who were not suited to study philosophy at bay. Since not everyone was fit to study philosophy, it was up to those who were suited for such a task to do so in private with Plato and with respect to what he revealed in his lectures. For further detail, one must turn to the *Phaedo* and examine the reasoning that Socrates provides for why only certain individuals are fit for the task and ends of philosophy.

¹⁵⁰ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 9.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates argues for the existence of certain teachings that yielded special knowledge to their recipients and that their interpretation was not to be discovered by all people. When Socrates is speaking in the *Phaedo* regarding philosophy and those fit for it, he refers to the mystery religions and what they teach regarding those preparing for death:

And I fancy that those men who established the mysteries were not unenlightened, but in reality had a hidden meaning when they said long ago that whoever goes uninitiated and unsanctified to the other world will lie in the mire, but he who arrives there initiated and purified will dwell with the gods. For as they say in the mysteries, 'the thyrsus-bearers are many, but the mystics few'; and these mystics are, I believe, those who have been true philosophers (*Phaedo* 69c-69d).¹⁵¹

In this passage, Socrates notes that those who prepare for the afterlife are not those who are simply participants in the rites and ceremonies of the mystery religions but those who truly understand what is happening in this world and the next – that is, the “true mystics” are equated with those who are dedicated to the ends of philosophy in the pursuit of wisdom via contemplative means, asceticism, and the ultimate goal of “likeness unto God.” Earlier in the *Phaedo*, Socrates notes that the only true way to accomplish the goals of philosophy is by denying the body the cravings of the sexual passions and fleshly desires for fancy food and wine. This is because if they are indulged, the rational part of the mind will be clouded and overcome by the irrational flesh that demands more of what it desires. Only philosophers set out to discipline the body in an appropriate manner and because of such endeavors, only those few are fit for the accomplishing the end goals of philosophy in this life and the next – which infers that these few possess knowledge that others do not.

In relation to the Mystery Religions, the philosopher Cicero praises their existence as “divine institutions” and he among other ancient authors warn that the penalty for revealing the knowledge learned during initiation into the Mystery Religions was death by the state. In his

¹⁵¹ Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Volume 1, Harold North Fowler, trans., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

work, *On the Laws*, Cicero praises the mystery religions by writing that: "...in all fact we have learned from them the fundamentals of life, and have grasped the basis not only for living with joy but also for dying with a better hope" (*On the Laws* 2.14.36).¹⁵² Hence, while those who participated in the rites were seemingly given a knowledge that helped them live better and even expect a better afterlife, that sacred knowledge was protected with the threat of death because it was not to be known by all people. One can see the correlation between the secret teachings of Plato, the information divulged in the Mystery Religions, and a similar theme in the Gospel of Thomas that proper understanding of said teachings paid off in immediate and eternal dividends with respect to returning to the Divine.

In another work by Plato, a character argues that the proper leader of the Athenian government would have to possess certain knowledge that not all were capable of comprehending. In the *Statesmen*, the Stranger and Young Socrates are discussing the different types of knowledge needed for different careers in life and are making the appropriate divisions as they arise in conversation. Regarding the King or Statesman, it is determined that a certain type of knowledge is needed for this position: "τὴ γνωστικὴ ἐπιστήμη" (*Statesman* 260a). The "gnostike episteme" translates as "the intellectual science" and defines the one who will lead the people in a state to their best interests.¹⁵³ As clearly referenced in the *Republic*, the Philosopher-King is the equivalent of the Statesman in this work and as such, would possess the knowledge necessary to fulfill the position. It is highly likely that Plato and the Old Academy viewed themselves as possessing this knowledge because of their philosophical contemplation and moderate lifestyle. Thus, they possibly referred to themselves as the "gnostikoi epistemones,"

¹⁵² The translation of Cicero belongs to Marvin Meyer. See Marvin Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), vii.

¹⁵³ An alternate translation is the "gnostic knowledge." Clement of Alexandria held that certain Christians who possessed certain knowledge via spiritual growth possessed a certain type of "gnostic knowledge," of which the roots for this language is found in the *Statesman*. See Clark, "Clement of Alexandria," 1823.

who are the ones capable of possessing, understanding, and applying such knowledge to become Kings and guide others to this path as well.¹⁵⁴

In the Gospel of Thomas, one finds six references to secret teachings and the various elements that go along with such logia.¹⁵⁵ In the opening of GTh, the message is clear to the reader: these sayings are not for the general public but they are “secret,” they were allegedly recorded by Judas the Twin, they were spoken by the “living Jesus,” and the proper interpretation will grant the interpreter the status of “life” that Jesus manifests, since the word used for “life” is directly opposed to the word used for “death” in the text that the correct interpreter “will not taste.” The status of immortality is usually restricted to the Divine in Greek thought, so the promise requires a secret status so that it will not be achieved by those not worthy of immortality through deification.

Marvin Meyer writes that another text in the Nag Hammadi library, the Book of Thomas the Ascetic, opens in a similar fashion to the Gospel of Thomas. He records that Jesus is speaking “hidden sayings” to Judas Thomas and that Matthias, who is the author of the text, is recording their conversation to produce his work.¹⁵⁶ Meyer also notes that the notion of “secret sayings” is found in the Secret Book of James, in which the twelve closest followers of Jesus are writing down what Jesus told them and some were doing so in a “hidden manner” while others were doing so in an “open manner” (Book of James 2, 7-16).¹⁵⁷ It is interesting that other early Christians had notions of Jesus communicating “secret teachings” in addition to the Thomasine

¹⁵⁴ In one of the letters of Plato, the Monad is presented as the “King” that all things depend upon for proper existence. If the “gnostikoi epistemonos” felt that their knowledge allowed them to be Kings, then this is an early reference to being able to become like the Divine One. Once this is accomplished, one shares in the reign and “rest” that the One exemplifies. This could possibly be the context for a Jesus saying that lists the last two rewards for “seeking and finding” is that one “will reign over all. [And after they have reigned, they will rest]” (GTh 2). See Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*.

¹⁵⁵ GTh 1, 13, 17, 38, 52, and 62.

¹⁵⁶ Meyer, *Thomas*, 77.

¹⁵⁷ Meyer, *Thomas*, 77.

tradition but this seems to be in line with the way certain teachers functioned in the milieu that early Christianities was developing in. If Plato kept most of his teaching inside the academy and didn't write some things down, then it is likely that a new religion like Christianity might reflect this practice as gleaned from the Hellenistic and Middle Platonic matrix from which it partially blossomed.

Also, one cannot neglect the role of the hierophant in the Greco-Roman Mystery religions and the notion that Jesus effectively replaced such a figure as the “revealer of his mysteries.” The hierophant was essentially the high priest who led the various initiates through the respective rites and “revealed” (phant) the “sacred nature” (hier) of each aspect of the mystery. Curiously enough, texts were issued by the mysteries intended to interest the right individuals on the exoteric level and the esoteric meaning of such texts were provided by the hierophant during the initiation of the correct individuals. One finds Jesus serving this function in the Gospel of Mark, where he provides an interpretation of the Parable of the Sower after his followers inquire about it. But before he provides the interpretation, he utters a line that places him exactly in the role of a hierophant: “καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· Ὑμῖν τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ· ἐκεῖνοις δὲ τοῖς ἔξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα γίνεται” (Mk 4:11). This text translates as: “And he said to them, ‘The mystery of the Kingdom of God has been delivered to you. But to those who are outside, all comes in parables.’”

Since it is well known that Jesus taught quite a bit about the Kingdom of God and was significantly influenced by Greek culture, it is possible that Jesus felt the “Mystery of the Kingdom of God” expressed knowledge that only those who were privy enough to be initiated into could interpret, understand, and benefit from. It is clear that the Thomasine Christians and several of his close followers felt that he did and it is recorded as such in the earliest canonical

gospel with Jesus as the Hierophant and revealer of the mystery of the Kingdom of God. Clement of Alexandria, a Middle Platonist and Christian who is active in the third century CE, wrote that Jesus replaced the Greco-Roman Mystery religions with his own mystery and effectively replaced any Greco-Roman hierophant with himself serving as the revealer of the mysteries of the Logos (Protrepticus 2.21.1; 12.120.1). In later Thomasine literature, Judas is greeted as a “fellow initiate into the hidden word of Christ, who receives his hidden sayings...”(Acts of Thomas 39).¹⁵⁸ The reoccurring use of language reserved for mystery religions further serves as proof that some adherents of the early Jesus cult felt that their leader was actively preaching and revealing his mysteries in competition with other mystery religions. But what else does Jesus say in the GTh that relates to his mystery cult?

In saying 13, Jesus asks his disciples questions about his identity and what role they see him in via a comparison he asks them to make. The saying reads:

Jesus said to his disciples, "Compare me to something and tell me what I am like."
Simon Peter said to him, "You are like a just angel."
Matthew said to him, "You are like a wise philosopher."
Thomas said to him, "Teacher, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like."
Jesus said, "I am not your teacher. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended."
And he took him, and withdrew, and spoke three sayings to him. When Thomas came back to his friends they asked him, "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas said to them, "If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you."¹⁵⁹

In this passage, Jesus is placed in one of the most recognizable tropes in the early Christian gospels and it is found throughout the canonical gospels as well. The task of

¹⁵⁸ Meyer, *Thomas*, 78. Meyer also indicates that Jesus makes a similar claim in John 8:51, in which Jesus promises the “one who keeps my word will never see death” (NRSV).

¹⁵⁹ I modified the usual translation of “messenger” to “angel” in order to provide another possible early Christian perspective on Christology. The Coptic word is a Greek loan-word that can refer to a human messenger and/or a divine being bearing a message from God.

identifying Jesus properly is a sign that the follower who provides the correct answer in the text is most likely revered as the head and/or founder of the community who is using the text.¹⁶⁰ In this logion, Peter doesn't get it quite right but does manage to express a possibly dual understanding of Jesus as a "divine being with a message" and while Matthew is correct about Jesus being presented as a philosopher in the text, Jesus is much more than that as Thomas correctly identifies.¹⁶¹ Since we know from the incipit of the text and other Thomasine literature that Judas Thomas is the spiritual twin of Jesus, it is no surprise that he guesses correctly and Jesus takes him to the side to tell him three secret sayings that were not written down in the Gospel of Thomas!

This means that like Plato, Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas has secret teachings that only select pupils hear. Since Thomas correctly identified that the identity of Jesus was too great for the human tongue to express, he was rewarded with three additional sayings that seem to be invested with power to provoke those who hear them without guidance to anger and then the ability to destroy those who attacked the bearer of the three sayings. There has been much speculation regarding what three sayings Jesus told to Thomas but no one really knows because the text doesn't reveal what they are – only that they may cause anger among those who are not ready for them and unleash destruction on those who oppose it. While other texts in the Nag Hammadi library make references to such statements as reflective of the trinity and allusions to

¹⁶⁰ Koester notes that this "confession and reward" motif as a way of identifying the respected founder of an early Christian community is found in Mk 8:27-30 and Mt 16:18-19 as well. See Koester, *Gospels*, 117.

¹⁶¹ The errors that Peter and Matthew make in identifying Jesus are two different Christologies held by other early Christian groups. By identifying Jesus as a "just angel," Peter represents certain Jewish-Christian groups who felt that Jesus was the "Angel of the Lord" but not a deity himself and Matthew represents a low Christology that holds that Jesus was a human philosopher but this was too-limited of a view of Jesus for the GTh and GJn. When Thomas averts his eyes because of Jesus' divine qualities and is unable to describe Jesus because he is representative of a divine element that is "wholly other" from the world, this is indicative of Jesus as a deity who is dwelling in a human body. See Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, 2000: 115-16; 129-131.

these three sayings are found in the Acts of Thomas and certain Manichean works, there is never a direct conferral of what was being transmitted in this passage.¹⁶²

Since this information is never revealed to the general audience, then only speculation can be made regarding the phrases Thomas learned from Jesus. But it can be asserted that this general stance is reflective of the Unwritten Doctrines of Plato and secret nature of the mystery religions that the Gospel of Thomas grew out of. Also, Jesus is shown to be a true hierophant in the logion because the reader does not know what was said to Thomas when Jesus takes him aside and thus, true to the name of this activity, it still remains a mystery to the reader! If one takes Cicero's report of being given "hope for an afterlife" after his initiation into the mysteries and the information about divine immortals into account, then it is likely that the information needed to achieve immortality through deification is being communicated here. Whatever is actually communicated, the other main issue is that Judas Thomas is the chosen follower of Jesus who is revered by the community that produced and utilized this text in the first century. While relevant to the discussion on secret teachings, this logion is better off viewed as proof that the Thomasine community was vying for respect and power among the other early Christian communities.

In saying 17, Jesus is recorded as making a statement similar to ones found in other early Christian sources, such as 1 Corinthians. However, in the context of the Gospel of Thomas, this saying might be seen in a different light – namely, the one of Jesus as revealer and hierophant of the Mystery of the Kingdom of God. The saying reads, "Jesus said, 'I will give you what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no hand has touched, what has not arisen in the human heart'" (GTh 17). This seems to be an additional bonus that comes with "not tasting death" as offered at the beginning of the GTh. Meyer notes that a very similar teaching is found in the

¹⁶² Meyer, *Thomas*, 86.

writings of Plutarch, a very famous and dedicated Middle Platonist, where he states that Plutarch admonishes young men to keep the following words of Empedocles nearby: “Thus these things are not to be seen by men, nor heard, nor comprehended with the mind...” (*How the Young Person Should Study Poetry* 17E).¹⁶³

The topic that Plutarch is discussing when he quotes Empedocles is the vivid nature of poetry and how poets tend to address higher matters than most human beings, including philosophers, can address with respect to what they actually can epistemologically ascertain about the subject of the gods, afterlife, and other matters that poets exaggerate the supposed truth about. Plutarch ends the passage with a nod to Socrates in the *Phaedo* (69d), in which the great philosopher acknowledges that he will only know that he has done well with his life’s work of philosophical inquiry after he leaves the physical realm. So while one could read the rendering of this passage in the GTh as a promise of a vivid afterlife, it seems to serve as a stern warning to not speculate on matters that one cannot truly grasp while still in the flesh. It seems similar to the remarks that Timaeus makes about his account being an “approximate attempt” at outlining the creation and order of the cosmos insomuch that humans are allowed limited knowledge with regards to such matters.

However, Jesus seems to promise that he will give the knowledge of these matters in addition to “not tasting death” after one obtains the necessary knowledge to return to the Divine after death. Just as the maxim of “know yourself” serves as a reminder to remember one’s limitation as a mortal but realize the unlimited potential of the “spiritual/rational self,” GTh 17 serves a similar purpose. It reminds the reader of two fundamental assertions: 1) Know the limits of your knowledge as a human being and don’t entertain those who vainly speculate on such matters because they will only inflame the irrational aspects of your soul and 2) if you focus on

¹⁶³ Meyer, *Thomas*, 87. Translation of Plutarch belongs to Meyer.

knowing your “spiritual/rational self” through philosophical means to the end of unity with the Divine, then the knowledge not readily available to human beings will be revealed to you at the appropriate time. With this in mind, logion 17 serves as both a warning and a promise to those who seek knowledge of themselves and the universe. The warning is to stay away from those who claim to provide knowledge about matters human beings cannot know with certainty.¹⁶⁴ It serves a promise to those who seek what can be known through philosophical contemplation that all things will be revealed to them when they achieve unity with the Divine.¹⁶⁵

In logion 38, Jesus says: “Often you have desired to hear these sayings that I am speaking to you, and you have no one else from whom to hear them. There will be days when you will seek me and you will not find me.” This saying fits in the theme of secret teachings because it intones that while the need for the teachings contained in the GTh was present in the world, Jesus is the only one presently capable and available to provide the information necessary to those who desire it. The notion that Jesus will not be available at certain times to provide his followers with the appropriate teachings and guidance to the proper understanding of such teachings rendered is meaningful in primarily a historical fashion. The historical understanding of logion 38 concerns the limitations that all human existence is subject to inasmuch that all humans are born into the world and must physically die in order to exit it. The circumstances that surround each human life are unique to the historical circumstances that one is thrust into and human beings tend to be

¹⁶⁴ For Plato, such people would be represented by poets, sophists, and the Athenians who condemned Socrates to death for revealing the fact that they actually knew nothing (see Republic, 10:595-608b and *Apology of Socrates*). For early Christians, such people would probably be misleading teachers such as magicians like Simon Magus, false prophets, and the archetypal “scribes and Pharisees” that are vilified throughout various gospel accounts (see Didache, GTh 39; 102, and Acts 8:9-24).

¹⁶⁵ Further support of this interpretation is found by comparing GTh 17 with a parallel in *Letter 58* of Seneca, where he discusses a platonic sixfold division of reality. The first division is the “intelligible” and is “not grasped by vision, by touch, or by any sense” (58,16). This realm is said to be accessible only by the Divine and thus access can only be given by said authority, therefore the offer presented in this saying is possibly deification. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 136.

a product of these circumstances. Therefore, a brief discussion of the historical situation of Jesus may be beneficial to assessing the meaning behind this logion.

The historical Jesus was a first century Hellenistic Jew who was born in the small village of Nazareth in the Galilee and worked as a wood craftsman (Mk 6:3). John Dominic Crossan lays out the principal geography of the Galilee as consisting of the major city Bethshan/Scythopolis, “Sepphoris and Tiberias as its smaller cities, Capernaum and Magdala as its towns.”¹⁶⁶ Crossan mentions that Nazareth is geographically closest to Sepphoris and located near a major trade route that likely stimulated cultural exchange as well.¹⁶⁷

Crossan proposes that Jesus probably traveled on foot to surrounding cities for extra work to help support his family, which seems to primarily consist of his mother and numerous siblings mentioned several times through out Mark (1:32-33; 6:30). The same text mentions that Jesus essentially went all throughout the various towns and cities in the Galilee, where he was “proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons” (Mk 1:39 NRSV). Since Jesus successfully completed his tour in the Galilee and eventually returned to his hometown of Nazareth in Mark (6:1), it is probably safe to assume that Jesus traveled this circuit while he was working as a craftsman in nearby Sepphoris. In Sepphoris, he was influenced by the various interactions he had with different individuals who shared different philosophical and religious ideas that were not readily available to him in Nazareth.¹⁶⁸

The gained knowledge and confidence that Jesus expresses as an exegete of the Torah and healing power that Jesus expresses in all the locations he visits are met with incredulity and disbelief in Nazareth by the people he grew up with and interacted with for most of his life. Essentially, the message of Jesus is one that he prepared for through out his life and during his

¹⁶⁶ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, 1992, 17.

¹⁶⁷ Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 18.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 3-19.

wood-working job that was sharpened with every sermon he delivered in his local tour of Galilee and his ability to heal provided to him at his Baptism/anointment as the Christ by presumably God himself after he arises from the water (Mark 1:10-11).

This is why Jesus is rejected by his family and friends in his hometown who do not know him as the wandering prophet with seemingly divine healing power and an ordained message that persuades those who understand it. The local wood-worker cannot occupy the position of Prophet and “son of God” (Messiah), as made clear by his teachings and works so his hometown rejects him and he moves on to those who will accept him. Jesus says that, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household,” (Mk 6:4) and is also known to the GTh, where he says, “No prophet is welcome on his home turf; doctors don't cure those who know them” (GTh 31). In short, Jesus is rejected by those who know his origins but revered by those who only know him in his role as teacher and miracle-worker.¹⁶⁹ But if Jesus is rejected in his hometown, what does he do and how is he received in other parts of the Galilee, such as Capernaum and Magdala?

Jesus is said to perform a notable miracle in Capernaum during his ministry in the synoptic gospels that hints at the idea that Jesus has access to both divine authority and healing power (Mk 2:1-12). When a paralyzed man is laid before him, he forgives the sins of the man. When his authority to forgive sins is challenged by the Jewish scribes, Jesus heals him completely of his physical paralysis in order to show that his divine ability is rooted in the authority of God and not one of human origins. In response, those present at the time “...were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’” (Mk 2:12b). Capernaum serves as a ministry home for Jesus and his closest disciples before and after his tour

¹⁶⁹ Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 18-9.

of the Galilee (Mk 1:21; 2:1). Essentially, Capernaum serves as the place where Jesus makes his home and establishes his ministry as testament to his identity granted to him at his baptism.

The town of Magdala is significant to Jesus because Mary Magdalene is from this town and several gospel accounts testify that Mary Magdalene was possibly Jesus' closest female follower.¹⁷⁰ After Jesus is buried, Mary Magdalene is one of the women who go to the grave to anoint his body and in the Longer Ending of Mark, the first person Jesus reveals himself to after his resurrection is Mary Magdalene (Mk 16:1-2; 9-11). In the *Gospel of Phillip*, Jesus is said to "kiss Mary on the [blank] often" and is the chosen disciple of Jesus' secret teachings in the *Gospel of Mary*. At the end of the GTh, Mary is chosen by Jesus as an example of one who can transform themselves into a "living spirit" because she resembles the female half of the spiritual androgyne denoted in Plato's *Symposium* and Genesis 1 (GTh 114). Mary Magdalene is proof that followers were endeared to Jesus' teachings during his ministry in spite of his humble beginnings.¹⁷¹

During his time in these cities working as a wood craftsman, Jesus likely encountered individuals who were highly familiar with subjects that clearly influenced Jesus' message and exercise of miraculous power in ways that were clearly not the Jewish expectation of the divinely-chosen Messiah. The "son of God" and rightful king who most of the Jewish people expected to free them their gentile oppression would do so using physical force and by taking earthly power. However, the Greco-Roman world that Jesus was exposed to his formative years probably influenced Jesus' understanding of himself, his religion, and the world around him. With these premises in mind, the "living Jesus" as presented in the Thomasine tradition decides to warn his listeners/readers that he is the only source of teachings that fulfill the promises made

¹⁷⁰ Diane Treacy-Cole, "Mary Magdalene," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 9, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 5756-5758.

¹⁷¹ Cole, "Mary Magdalene," 5757.

at the beginning of the text and that a time will come that Jesus' followers will not be able to locate him and listen to his teachings, especially with regards to his violent end at the hands of the Roman state.

Logion 38 communicates a sense of urgency and limited opportunity to receive the foundational knowledge necessary to return to the Divine after the physical body dies. One almost expects to find the famous refrain of Jesus after his saying in which he admonishes that those “with two good ears had better listen” because of the gravity of the situation Jesus is reminding his followers about.¹⁷² Most modern commentaries on the GTh mention that variations of logion 38 is found in various other sources, including the canonical gospels, the *Acts of John*, and the *Manichaean Psalm Book*.¹⁷³ In comparison with the discussion of the historical Jesus where some receive his teachings and other reject it, including in a violent manner that ends in his death, only some are fit to receive his teachings and there is a limited window in which Jesus is available to provide them.

In logion 62, Jesus explicitly lays out his intentions with regards to who he reveals his teachings and the interpretation to. It reads: “Jesus said, ‘I disclose my mysteries to those [who are worthy] of [my] mysteries. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.’” With a sentiment that is reflective of Jesus' meaning in Mark 4:11, when he teaches his disciples the meaning of the Parable of the Sower and reminds them they are recipients of the “mystery of the Kingdom of God” and that the parables are intended to confuse those outside the group. In a similar vein, Jesus states in the GTh that he chooses who to “disclose his mysteries” to and who not to disclose them to.

¹⁷² This refrain is found several times throughout the Gospel of Thomas and scattered throughout the canonical gospels as well. It seems to be a rhetorical device that Jesus used to draw attention to his teachings that deserved immediate and obvious consideration by his audience.

¹⁷³ Meyer, *Thomas*, 98.

In relation to this theme, Matteo Grosso has argued that Origen uses a similar phrase in his commentary on Matthew 19:1 with regards to the mysteries that Jesus served as the hierophant who revealed those secrets to initiates.¹⁷⁴ As Grosso aptly notes, we do not have the Greek version of GTh 62:1 in order to compare to Origen's work. But enough of the Greek *vorlage* of the GTh can be recovered from the Coptic text that one can see that Origen was familiar with this saying of Jesus as recorded in the GTh and available to those early Christians who viewed Jesus from a more philosophical lens.¹⁷⁵ Thus Grosso argues that the comment that Origen makes in his Greek commentary on Matthew would be identical to the one expressed in the Coptic manuscript of the GTh if the Greek version of this saying was still extant.¹⁷⁶ Meyer notes that a similar idea is expressed in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 19.20.1 and by Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 5.10.63.7, which share a similar statement expressing that "my mystery is for me and the sons of my house."¹⁷⁷

It is telling that Origen would prefer the version of this saying as recorded in the GTh as opposed to the version expressed in these latter two works. This is of great significance because it implies that the understanding of Jesus as the effective hierophant of the "mysteries of the Kingdom of God" as expressed in GTh was found in other Christian circles that may or may not have been familiar with the Thomasine tradition. The second half of the saying regarding the "left hand" and the "right hand" has been proposed as a reminder to not disseminate the secret teachings and mystery that Jesus communicates to his chosen followers.¹⁷⁸ F.F. Bruce states that while this sentence concerns secrecy while giving alms in the canonical gospels (Mt 6:3), the

¹⁷⁴ Matteo Grosso, "A New Link Between Origen and the Gospel of Thomas: Commentary on Matthew 14,14," *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011): 249-265.

¹⁷⁵ Grosso, "A New Link Between Origen and the Gospel of Thomas," 255-6.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁷⁷ Meyer, *Thomas*, 107.

¹⁷⁸ F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 137-8.

usage of it in the GTh is a reminder to not reveal what is secret and sacred to those who are not part of the “Mysteries of the Kingdom of God.” Again, the similarity between a saying of the Thomasine Jesus, Clement of Alexandria, and more saliently, the seemingly direct quotation of the GTh 62:1 by Origen of Alexandria points to the idea this understanding of Jesus as a hierophant was commonly accepted by those who heavily used Middle Platonic philosophy as a means to understanding the importance of Jesus’ life on Earth.

In logion 93, Jesus warns his listeners with this teaching: “Do not give what is holy to dogs, or they might throw it upon the manure pile. Do not throw pearls [to] swine, or they might make [mud] of it.” Like some logia in the GTh, logion 93 contains a lacuna in the edited manuscript which indicates that the parts noted in brackets in the translation are provided by the translator. Meyer indicates that “or they might make [mud] of it” is one of three possibilities available for a sensible reading of the text.¹⁷⁹ However, this is not an important point since any of the three textual possibilities communicate the idea that the “pigs” will destroy or render valueless the “pearls” that are set before by them by a careless individual.

The primary reason that the restoration and intention of this saying is clear to scholars is because it is used through out various early Christian sources, including a canonical parallel found in Matthew. The parallel found in that source reads: “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you” (Mt 7:6 NRSV). Since both occurrences of the logion in the gospel tradition are so similar in language and intent, it is safe to infer that logion 93 can be restored with great confidence and that it resembles the original form as it was transmitted in the early Jesus tradition. Additionally, the warning to “not give what is holy to dogs” is found in Didache 9:5 with a command against letting those who were not “baptized in the Lord’s name” participate in

¹⁷⁹ Meyer, *Thomas*, 117.

the holy rite of the Eucharist. This can be seen as another similarity between the Christian mysteries and the Greco-Roman Mysteries, in which one was not allowed to participate in the rites unless one was undergoing the initiation or already a member of the mystery.¹⁸⁰ Another reference relevant to the Eucharist as a sacred rite only intended for the proper individuals is found in Paul's discussion of the ritual in his first letter to the Corinthians. He warns that certain Christians in Corinth have taken the Eucharist without personal reflection and/or regard for their fellow Christians in need so they were punished by sickness and/or death (1 Cor 11: 27-31). Just like those who revealed the content of the mysteries to the uninitiated were executed by the state, those who unworthily partook of the meal intended to remember Jesus' death at the hands of the state were divinely punished with physical maladies.

In the context of this discussion, it is clear that the appearance of the saying in the GTh is addressing the "secret teachings" and corresponding "interpretations" that will grant one the promise of "not tasting death." R. McL. Wilson relates that this "saying of Jesus" was used "...by both Gnostics and Christians alike...and it was applied to secret doctrines, to Baptism, and to the Eucharist."¹⁸¹ It seems that in early Christian and related literature this saying has taken a life of its own with respect to whatever context it originated in. But in the GTh, it is best located within the theme of "secret teachings" and "unwritten doctrines" as found in Middle Platonism and Greco-Roman Mystery Religions. All of this is implied in the orientation of the audience to the "living Jesus" as hierophant, revealer, and much more as indicated by Thomas' reaction to the challenge of finding an appropriate comparison for Jesus in saying 13.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ The preferred word used to indicate those who are eligible to participate in the Christian Mysteries is typically translated as "worthy/deserving" and is used 8 times in the text (GTh 55,56,62,80,85,111,114). The Greek word is ἄξιος and the Coptic word is ⲙⲡⲱⲛ.

¹⁸¹ R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, (R. Mowbray & Co., London, 1960), 67.

¹⁸² The understanding of Christianity as a mystery religion that was revealed to his followers by Jesus himself is a consistent theme found throughout the gospels and other early Christian literature. See Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, 144-150.

11. Daemons in Middle Platonism and GTh

In Middle Platonism, daemons are understood in a number of different ways. The primary function of daemons in Middle Platonism is that they serve as intermediaries between the material world/sensible realm and the divine/highest intelligible realm. The GTh contains 3 sayings that indicate a Middle Platonic understanding of daemons: logia 21, 37, and 50. These three sayings can be categorized as question chreiai and involve Jesus providing an answer to each inquisitor that is symbolically reflective of more than it literally reads. Each of these logia seems to reflect the understanding of daemons as guardians of the physical realm and the physical body/irrational faculties of the soul as belonging to those daemons. As mentioned in the previous discussion of daemons in Middle Platonism, the guardians of the physical realm and owner of material entities is one role occupied by daemons in the cosmos. According to the “Myth of Er,” daemons are assigned to guide each human being after their soul has successfully transmigrated from one life to another according to an individual’s deeds and choices in the previous life (Rep. 10: 617E). It is safe to assess that each soul must report to the daemon that oversees life in the body and after proving oneself worthy, move onto the realm where the “living one” is integrated with the Divine.

The first saying in GTh that is indicative of the activity of daemons is logion 21: 1-4 and it reads:

Mary said to Jesus, "What are your disciples like?" He said, "They are like little children living in a field that is not theirs. When the owners of the field come, they will say, 'Give us back our field.' They take off their clothes in front of them in order to give it back to them, and they return their field to them."¹⁸³

¹⁸³ It is suggested that the words translated as “little children” in the Coptic should more closely reflect the Greek word for “servant” found in Matthew 14:2. Meyer suggests that this is because the word used in the Greek vorlage of GTh was “pais” and has the double meaning of “child/servant.” However, this is problematic primarily because while servants are logically the ones in charge of a field, “little children” is reflective of the phrase as it is translated in the rest of the text, including GTh 37. A deference of the originality of the GTh to the canonical gospels seems to be the primary reasoning behind this suggestion and that stance is rejected out right in this paper. See Meyer, *Thomas*, 89.

In a similar fashion to the way that Jesus asks his disciples to “compare him to something and tell him what he is like,” Mary inquires of Jesus what his disciples are like. His response is telling because it draws on imagery used to describe Jesus’ followers throughout early Christian literature, including the New Testament and other places in the GTh.¹⁸⁴ The “field” and the “clothes” symbolically represent the physical earth and bodies that the disciples are utilizing while in their physical forms and the “owners of the field” reflect the respective daemons who manage and own the material realm. It is most likely that all of this occurs at the point of physical death, where the soul is freed from the physical body and is accountable for what one did while in the physical body in the material realm.

A great deal of scholars seem to think that this is indicative of a gnostic hatred of the body but as discussed in detail, the parallels with Middle Platonic thought about how one escapes reincarnation and moves onto the Divine is closer to the understanding found here. A close reading of the Myth of Er and the *Phaedo* in light of Plutarch and Apuleius is indicative of the return of the soul to the Divine realm as one that involves brief negotiations with daemons. In order to successfully negotiate with the guardians, one must possess the correct virtues and answers to be allowed to pass by which is indicated by the next two sayings in GTh that deals with disciples of the Living Jesus and daemons. GTh 21 utilizes imagery that is wholly reliant on sources found in Middle Platonism and effectively casts Jesus’ followers as those who will return to the Divine after they discard their flesh and irrational side of their nature for the daemons to manage in the cycle of transmigration.

¹⁸⁴ Meyer, *Thomas*, 89. One need only think of the many times the author of 1 John addresses his audience as “children” and the exhortation to be “child-like” in the canonical gospels. It is clear that children represent a position that is more reflective of spiritual innocence as opposed to complications and hesitancy that an adult brings to the “spiritual table.”

If logion 21 sets up the premise for what followers of the Living Jesus are like then logion 37 sets up the attitude and actions that his followers are to take in order to achieve spiritual life. The logion reads:

His disciples said, "When will you appear to us, and when will we see you?"
Jesus said, "When you strip without being ashamed, and you take your clothes and put them under your feet like little children and trample them, then [you] will see the child of the living one and you will not be afraid."

The question that Jesus' disciples ask seems to be a rhetorical question because if they can ask Jesus this question then can clearly see him in order to be able to do so.¹⁸⁵ However, the answer that Jesus gives to his disciples implies that what they are seeking is going to occur on a spiritual level for all parties involved, including the Thomasine Christian community reading this text. Much like the discussion on the *Timaeus*, the answer seems to indicate an event outside of temporality even if the disciples seemed to think that this appearance would take place in temporality. In effect, the sayings format of the GTh betrays the historical framework that is implied by a narrative gospel such as the Gospel of Mark. While the GTh is a work bound by historical limitations as several contained logia denote first century concerns and Jesus of Nazareth is the historical character that the Thomasine Jesus is based off of, the "Living Jesus" represented in the Thomasine tradition ultimately functions outside of space and time in the Divine realm.¹⁸⁶

The first portion of the answer that Jesus provides that deserves attention is the phrase "When you strip without being ashamed...." The act of stripping could denote two possibilities in early Christian thought: 1) A reference to the act of getting naked for Christian Baptism and thus symbolically stripping oneself of old, sinful ways engrained in human nature or 2) the act of

¹⁸⁵ It is not implied in the GTh that this conversation with Jesus is taking place as an epiphany, such as Saul's vision of Jesus on the road in Galatians/Acts or the apocalyptic vision of John of Patmos in Revelation.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Funk, *et al The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 494

gradually abandoning the flesh through ascetic activity and eventually returning it to the daemons who own as part of their domain in the physical realm. In light of the larger Nag Hammadi library and the shared interest that certain groups demonstrated in properly understanding Genesis, the act of stripping likely refers to the latter understanding.¹⁸⁷

Meyer notes that the Coptic phrase that he translated as “strip without being ashamed” can be translated as “strip off your shame” but the Greek fragment of GTh reads, “When you strip...and are not ashamed.”¹⁸⁸ Therefore, the present translation is the correct one and closely preserves the original saying as it was authored in the text. F.F. Bruce notes that the importance of not being “ashamed” lies in the understanding of the feeling of shame at their nakedness that Adam and Eve felt after acquiring the “knowledge of good and evil” in Eden. The reversal of feeling ashamed is part of achieving spiritual purity and innocence in the same way that children are pure, innocent, and without shame.¹⁸⁹ A similar motif is found throughout the text with the reversal of the division between the sexes into a pure spiritual androgyne and/or “living one” is inferred throughout the GTh.¹⁹⁰

There are also the motifs of “trampling the clothes” and “becoming like little children” found within logion 37. April De Conick and Jarl Fossum argued that the “trampling” motif is found in Genesis and denotes the denial of the flesh through ascetic practice which is essentially a denial of the power of those who rule over the physical realm and own all material entities.¹⁹¹ Thus, it seems that Deconick and Fossum are in agreement that daemons are the implied agencies that are being overcome through the “trampling of the clothes,” i.e. negation of the flesh

¹⁸⁷ Meyer, *Thomas*, 97-98.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 98.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins*, 128.

¹⁹⁰ See GTh 7, 22, 108, and 114. See Marvin W. Meyer, “Review of the Lion Becomes Man: The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition by Howard M. Jackson,” *JBL* 107.1 (March 1988): 161.

¹⁹¹ April D. De Conick and Jarl Fossum, “Stripped Before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the *Gospel of Thomas*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991): 123-50.

through certain behaviors and philosophical/religious contemplation. The “child of the living one” that is viewed after the “clothes are trampled” is clearly a modified reference to the “living Jesus” in his atemporal form in the Divine realm where those who have left behind the flesh and daemons will be rewarded with this vision and become part of the Divine existence.

In accordance with the triad schema, if logion 21 delivers the premise of what Jesus’ followers are like and logion 37 delivers the proper attitude then logion 50 delivers the actions and knowledge necessary to bypass the daemons in order to reach the Divine realm. Since it is commonly held that sayings 49 and 50 should be examined together, I will list them here as such:

49. Jesus said, "Congratulations to those who are alone and chosen, for you will find the kingdom. For you have come from it, and you will return there again."

50. Jesus said, "If they say to you, 'Where have you come from?' say to them, 'We have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself, established [itself], and appeared in their image.' If they say to you, 'Is it you?' say, 'We are its children, and we are the chosen of the living Father.' If they ask you, 'What is the evidence of your Father in you?' say to them, 'It is motion and rest.'"

Saying 49 lays out the necessary unity of the soul with the usage of the word *μοναχός* to designate the “solitary/alone one” who is eligible to return to God. The importance of being a “solitary one” is rooted in the understanding of God as the Monad, who is set apart from everything else. The inevitable aim of the text is to become a “twin of Jesus” and if Jesus is a reflection of the divine Monad, then only those who are unified and stand alone will be blessed enough to “find the Kingdom,” which means to share the presence of God. The second part of the saying indicates the descent and ascent of the soul as found in the Hymn of the Pearl, which describes the journey of the soul as found in the *Acts of Thomas* (108-113).¹⁹² Saying 49 serves as a designation of the one who is able to return to God and then alludes to the process by which

¹⁹² See A.F.J. Klijn, “The So-Called Hymn of the Pearl (Acts of Thomas ch. 108-113), *Vigiliae Christianae* 14:3 (Sept 1960),:154-64 for a description and examination of this text.

this soul became embodied, the mission it has to accomplish on Earth, and then return to its divine home.¹⁹³

Saying 50 refers to the identity and answers the “one” will provide in order to escape the daemons and return home. In the first exchange, Jesus denotes that the first question will be one of origins and tells his disciples to respond: “We have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself, established [itself], and appeared in their image.” The askers denoted in this passage are the daemons or other entities as implied by the transmigration of the soul as found in the Myth of Er, namely that certain knowledge is needed to successfully negotiate the rebirth process and not consume too much of the “water of forgetfulness” that made souls forget their past lives. Patterson notes that Jesus’ response is evocative of the role light played in the cosmos of Middle Platonism and that since the Divine is light, so are those descend from the Divine according to the *Timaeus* and other Platonic writings.¹⁹⁴ He critically notes that the journey of the soul that is indicated in GTh 49-50 is common in the Nag Hammadi literature, especially Sethian Gnostic texts, and that an understanding of a journey is reflected in the thought of Philo and Plutarch. Therefore, while the GTh should not be read on the same terms as the Secret Book of John or other “Gnostic” literature, the involvement of this tale with daemons present places it well within the tradition of Middle Platonism as it was developing into religious-philosophical movements such as represented by Hellenistic Judaism, Thomasine Christianity, and Christian traditions present in Egypt as clearly shown by Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Alexandria.

¹⁹³ John Dillon notes that the reason the soul comes into the world is because it has a task to complete is found throughout the work of Plutarch, Philo, and some second-century Middle Platonists such as Calvenus Taurus. Dillon writes that Taurus takes it farther and notes that the journey of the soul is for the glory of God. Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 246.

¹⁹⁴ Patterson, “Jesus Meets Plato,” 198.

The second question and answer in saying 50 plays on the fact that the living Jesus' disciples are "children" of the "living Father." This shows that they are fully aware of their divine origin and reflect the awareness that their source is awaiting their return. Meyer notes the inquiry "Is it you?" could also be translated as "Who are you?"¹⁹⁵ Regardless of how the Coptic is translated in this case, the sentiment of the inquiry remains the same in relation to the answers provided regarding the identity of the ones being cross-examined before they are allowed to pass by the guardian daemons. The final question and answer session regards the "sign of the Father" and it is "movement and repose."

While the answer is somewhat esoteric, according to Patterson, it does make sense in light of Middle Platonism and how the mark of the Divine is reflected in the activity of those with that status. Patterson unpacks this complicated statement to reveal that while the physical body jostles about in many different directions, the rational part of the soul rotates in a perfect circle that allows it balance with the cosmos. So while the Divine and those in touch with that source are still in movement, they are seemingly resting compared to the myriad of other ways in which everything else moves in erratic directions.¹⁹⁶ Also, in the Alexandrian school, the Father is the divine principle that is constantly at rest after his emanation and ordering of the Dyad as Mother. The Dyad is the active principle that is both a reflection of the Father and constantly at a rotational movement to maintain creation.

This is why the "sign of the Father" is "movement and rest" because one divine principle is constantly at rest and the other is constantly moving. Since access to both principles are granted when one achieves divine status through the Dyad, that individual is constantly rotating

¹⁹⁵ Meyer, *Thomas*, 102.

¹⁹⁶ Patterson, "Plato Meets Jesus," 203. The adjustment of the rational soul to the erratic movements of the physical body is a key theme of discussion in the *Timaeus* and as a constant reminder to the reader that the discipline of the body is necessary in order for the rational soul to escape these movements and return home.

in a balanced fashion but appears to be resting with relation to chaos, thus “movement and rest” is the “sign” of the one who is a reflection of the Divine. GTh 49-50 reflect the nature of those who are eligible to share in the Kingdom of God, the information necessary to bypass the daemon mediators of the intelligible realm, and ultimately, the “sign” that the follower has achieved full reflection of God: calm and consistent rotational motion while seemingly being at rest on the rotating axis – the paradox of “movement and rest.”

In conclusion for this section, the role of daemons in the GTh is the most prominent possibility for interpreting the various ambiguous figures in the three sayings above. The knowledge that the Thomasine Jesus communicates to his followers in the GTh is necessary to bypass the ambiguous figures listed as the “owners of the field,” those who own the “clothes that are trampled,” and the mysterious “they” directly correlates to the prerequisites necessary for the rational soul to successfully negotiate the daemons who own the physical body, guide the soul through transmigration, and represent the various pantheons of gods in the cosmos of Middle Platonism. The responses that the Thomasine Jesus gives his followers mirrors the right attitude, actions, and knowledge that will grant the followers of the “living Jesus” the ability “not to taste death” in order to become the “twin of Jesus,” which is equivalent of achieving the “likeness unto God as far as possible” in Christian Middle Platonism.

12. The Doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad in GTh

One of the more complex and intriguing doctrines of Middle Platonism is that the highest realm of existence contains the Monad and the Dyad as the dual manifestation of the Divine. This discussion was produced in Middle Platonism by the comparison of Plato’s so-called “Unwritten Doctrines” and the creation myth that he lays out in the *Timaeus*. In the “Unwritten Doctrines,” Plato set forth a dual set of divine principles from whence the rest of the universe is

created: the monad and the dyad. The monad can be seen as synonymous with the One in Plato's written dialogues and serves as the figure of God that cannot be known on any other terms except through the Dyad.

According to Pythagorean philosophy as adopted by Plato and transmitted by his successors, the Dyad possesses infinite capability to create and sustain other beings. The Monad or the One reaches out and limits the capability of the Dyad so that the universe is created in a mathematical order. The realm between the Divine and the physical realm is filled with the Decad, a set of ten principles of which the first four principles correspond to the geometrical figures of the point, the line, the plane, and the solid respectively. The demiurge or world-soul exists between the ideal realm of the Decad and the material realm in which the physical world is composed of the moon, sun, stars, daemons, and other entities that are composed in some way of physical matter.

In the "Unwritten Doctrines," the Demiurge serves as the mediator between the ideal realm and the physical realm, in which he organizes the physical realm according to the way the higher two tiers are laid out. It is in this manner that Middle Platonism as manifested in the GTh and Sethian Gnosticism is similar with regard to the *Timaeus*, where the Demiurge designs the physical tier according to the ideal and divine tiers of the Universe. Where they differ is in regards to the nature of the Demiurge, the number of daemons in the physical realm, and the role of Jesus in the different mythos. Jesus exhorts his followers in the GTh to become his "spiritual twin," a "living spirit," and a "unified one" given the correct discipline of the body and the right cultivation of philosophical insight that grants rise to the ultimate end. In Sethian Gnosticism, Seth and/or Jesus is seen as a divine messenger that came from God to reveal a certain knowledge (gnosis) and possession of this knowledge will allow one to follow the divine

messenger back to God. The primary difference is that the GTh exhorts one to find “likeness to God” as stated in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (176b) and expressed by Eudorus of Alexandria in 25 BCE whereas only a select few with the right knowledge can find their way back to the Divine in Sethian texts.¹⁹⁷ All of this is said in order to illuminate the nature of Jesus as reflective of the creative principle of the divine that is interactive with the material world, which seems to be held as the Dyad by Plato and is expressed in different ways by other Middle Platonists such as Philo and Plutarch (Sophia, Isis, Dike, etc).¹⁹⁸

The doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad as represented by certain Middle Platonists, especially the religious few in Alexandria, is crucial to understanding how Jesus could be seen as the Dyad or identified with the second divine principle in the GTh.¹⁹⁹ In the development of the organization of the Divine, Plutarch proposes that the Egyptian Goddess, Isis, represents both the Dyad and World-Soul/Demiurge which means that the Divine Creative principle is effectively a bridge between the divine realm and the material realm in the individuals who approached Middle Platonism with a religious orientation. Dillon notes that in Plutarch’s myth, the Dyad and the World-Soul/Demiurge are represented by Isis and her son, Horus.²⁰⁰ The early so-called “Gnostic” Christian Valentinus of Rome understood the Dyad as Sophia and the Demiurge from the *Timaeus* as her ignorant son who creates the physical realm. Philo makes a similar move when he conflates the identity of Sophia with both the Dyad and the World-Soul/Demiurge in addition to representing the same structure with Greek mythology, where he identifies both entities as Dike and/or Rhea.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Moore, “Middle Platonism,” *IEP*.

¹⁹⁸ Dillion, *Middle Platonists*, 204.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

This representation is identical to the prologue of GJn, where the Logos of God is both the only other Divine principle and the creative force of the Divine that brought the entire physical cosmos into being who incarnates as a human to illuminate the path for human beings back to God. For Plutarch, the creation of the physical realm is reflective of the essence of the dualistic divine principles and the orderly realm of the ideal mathematical forms. Sophia both loves the divine principle of the Monad/Good and the physical realm that is capable of containing her likeness as her children.²⁰² However, the essential problem with the part of Isis that is responsible for creating the physical universe (World-Soul/Demiurge) is that it occasionally falls asleep, which causes chaos of random directions to ensue in the physical realm, but is corrected by its higher principle, “the direction of the Same” and forced to view the One, who reminds this entity that it contains a divine principle and serves as the guiding principle of the physical realm. Dillon notes that Plutarch suggested that this is a metaphor for the One’s limiting of the chaotic divine Dyad by balancing it out and a process that must be repeated for all souls but can only be initiated by the One. At the center of this matter, Plutarch is being a strong Middle Platonist when he suggests that unity, balance, and orderly movement are the necessary means that grants access to the Divine through imitation.

Similar language is present in Christian Middle Platonism, such as in the GJn. In that text, the Word of God shares equality with God and is the principle through which all the physical world is created. The Word incarnates into a human form so that humans can come know God and those that “...did accept him and trust in his identity, he authorized to become “children of God” who are “not generated by blood, the will of the flesh, or the will of man but generated by God” (Jn 1:13). This text is promising those that receive Jesus as the Logos of God and trust in that identity will become “children of God” who will share in the “divine life and

²⁰² Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 204.

light” that constitute the essence of the divine. Also, the text posits: “No one has perceived God. But the single-emanation of God, who shares the presence of the Father, has made that same God perceivable” (Jn 1:18).²⁰³

The author of this text, like Xenocrates, believes that the highest divine principle is unknowable to human beings. But, like Plutarch, the essence of this principle can be known through the secondary divine principle that shares in the divine essence and illuminates the path by shaping all souls as imitations of the Divine realm that directs contemplative souls towards it. Like the GJn, Plutarch states that the Monad takes the initiative in generating and maintaining the Dyad as the creative principle of the universe from which all of creation is produced. In a similar fashion as the Monad is known through the divine creative function of the Dyad as represented by the World-Soul/Demiurge in the physical realm for Plutarch, God the Father is known in the GJn through the physical incarnation of the Word of God, who is responsible for all physical creation, and provides the path back to God through his example. Like the doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad plus the World-Soul/Demiurge, the Word of God is the only emanation reflective of the Divine and interactive with the world so that a bridge can be provided for rational souls to know God.

Since Plutarch lived in the 2nd century, he wasn’t influential on the theology found in the GJn. But since Philo lived before the chief establishment of Christianity and contains a similar idea about the relation between God and the World in personified terms found in the Hebrew Bible and Greek traditions, it is clear that this is an understanding developed by certain religious worldviews meeting Middle Platonic philosophy. Dillon notes that this move “...produces an entity which on the one hand fallen and imperfect, though filled with longing for the *logos* of

²⁰³ My translation is a bit anachronistic in order to illuminate the Middle Platonic influence on the author of GJn. A simpler translation is “No one has seen God. But the only-creation of God, who resides in the lap of the Father, has made the same God known” (Jn 1:18).

God, while on the other being the cause of our creation and the vehicle by which we can come to know God.”²⁰⁴ Based on this evidence, the foundation for understanding Jesus as God Incarnate in GJn and as sharing divine identity with the Dyad in GTh was laid when the creation myth of the *Timaeus* and the doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad were combined with certain religious experiences, worldviews, and scriptures. Thus, it seems apparent to me that Middle Platonism not only provided the background for which the identity of Jesus as Divine in GTh is best understood but also for other early Christian groups such as those represented by the GJn. Another interesting aspect of this discussion is that it could contribute to how the theology of the Incarnation developed as it is understood by the majority of Orthodox Christians today.²⁰⁵

By my count, there are 23 different references to the concept of the Divine as Monad and Dyad in the Gospel of Thomas.²⁰⁶ However, only a few of the more explicit references to the Monad and Dyad will be discussed but they require a small amount of exegesis to illuminate the doctrine that is being expressed in the different logia. I will discuss, in whole or in part, 8 logia that seem to strongly convey an understanding of this Middle Platonic doctrine as essential to their interpretation. These sayings are GTh 15, 19, 30, 61.2-5, 100-101, and 105. They seem to be the most important references to the Thomasine understanding of God, Creation, and the role of Jesus in the text.

²⁰⁴ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 204.

²⁰⁵ The triadic metaphysical scheme of “God, Matter, and the Ideas/Logos” found throughout Middle Platonism may be one of the philosophical foundations for the doctrine of the Trinity as it is found in Orthodox Christianity. In order to avoid confusion, it should be clear that the Monad and Dyad are always the dual primary divine principles in this scheme. The emphasis on essence and emanation found in the thought of some Middle Platonists are certainly conducive grounds for the development of such ideas. It may also explain why a triune formulation is suggested in the Coptic edition of GTh (30; 44) and a third divine principle known as the Paraclete (Advocate) is found in GJn (14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7). If GJn 14:16 is taken literally as this third principle being is another, permanent divine “advocate” from the “Father,” then one could understand Jesus as the first and primary divine advocate, which lends itself to the Trinity as well. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 206 for more on the triadic metaphysical scheme found throughout Middle Platonism.

²⁰⁶ The majority of which are: GTh 11, 15, 19, 24, 27, 30, 40, 43, 59, 61, 91-94, 100,101, and 105.

GTh 15 states: “Jesus said, ‘When you see one who was not born of woman, fall on your faces and worship. That one is your Father.’” There is a significant phrase in this saying that indicates the nature of God and those who shall behold the Divine: “one who was not born of woman.” This indicates an immortal being and an existence that was not subjected to being conceived and born of a woman, which is greater than both humans in nature and demigods in Greek thought. Another tier above this conception in Middle Platonism lie certain daemons but as they are not fully Divine, they are not worthy of full worship and thus would not be referenced as such in the text. The final indication in the text is that the “one who was not born of woman” and is worthy of worship “is your Father.”

In Middle Platonism and the GTh, the disciples are said to be “children of the living Father” and the ability to become a twin of the “living Jesus” is granted to those who properly understand the sayings recorded in the text. While the demiurge in the *Timaeus* is the one who ordered the physical universe, Plato’s Unwritten Doctrines encourage one to understand the Divine as the Monad and the Dyad as the Ultimate Divine principles and that which was throttled in order to initiate the Creation of the ideal realm for the mathematical and geometrical forms which is followed by the creation of the demiurge, an entity that has access to both intelligible and sensible realms, who creates the physical cosmos. In other words, the “living Father” is clearly the Monad who has not “been born of woman” that will be worshipped by the disciples of the “living Jesus.” In turn the “living Jesus” is the representative of the Dyad as the single-emanation of the One and yields access to the unknowable Monad²⁰⁷

The second saying that will be discussed is GTh 19 and only the first section of this logion contains a reference to the Monad and Dyad. The entirety of the saying reads:

²⁰⁷ Meyer states that “one not born of a woman” means a “person not of human birth.” He references Manichaean Psalm Book 121,25-33 which states that Jesus is not born of a human womb, is one with the “Father” and draws a direct parallel to John 10:30 (ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἐσμεν). See Meyer, *Thomas*, 86-87.

Jesus said, "Congratulations to the one who came into being before coming into being. If you become my disciples and pay attention to my sayings, these stones will serve you. For there are five trees in Paradise for you; they do not change, summer or winter, and their leaves do not fall. Whoever knows them will not taste death."²⁰⁸

The first sentence of this saying applies to a figure that came into being twice. The only being that qualifies in the Christian Middle Platonist tradition is the creative principle of the divine who was the first-emanation of the Monad and then experienced a form of “coming into being” through being born into the physical realm.²⁰⁹ In the larger early Christian Middle Platonic tradition, Jesus would fit this description because he was considered to be the “Logos of God,” which is representative as the single-emanation of the Divine through which creation came to be organized and as the same principle that came into human existence through being born in the physical realm. This is in line with the Alexandrian School who felt that the “logos of God” was the combined forces of both divine principles who worked together to produce the ideal forms and physical creation through this agent.²¹⁰ When combined with Philo of Alexandria’s understanding of “likeness unto God as far as possible” which meant both the Stoic reconciliation with Nature and the religious pursuit of the Divine, it is easy to understand how the Christian understanding of the Divine made incarnate in Jesus is expressed in the GTh and GJn.²¹¹ Hence, the “Living Jesus” is the “one who came into being” in the Divine realm before “coming into being” in the physical realm on Earth.

The second sentence of this saying is reflective of the rocks that will consume the other disciples with fire if Judas Thomas reveals any of the secret sayings that Jesus told him in private

²⁰⁸ The word for “congratulations” is the Greek loan-word that is usually translated as “blessed” or “blessings” but either translation conveys the same meaning.

²⁰⁹ Meyer, *Thomas*, 88.

²¹⁰ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 204.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

when they question him (GTh 13).²¹² Also, GTh 77.3 states: “Lift up the stone, and you will find me there” about Jesus, which indicates that the Divine force that animates Jesus is the same one that generated the physical world.²¹³ The ability to become a “twin” of Jesus is given to those who understand his sayings and since Jesus is representative of the divine creative principle who formed the physical world, then he has power over creation. Effectively this sentence is stating that the same power is available to those become identified with the divine, which is done through the proper understanding of Jesus’ teachings. In the Alexandrian school, the creative divine principle was also identified with the “positive” aspect of matter, which indicates that living in accord with both Nature and the Divine is part of the same means of accomplishing *ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν*.

The third sentence in saying 19 is an esoteric reference to the “five trees in Paradise” which does not line with up most causal readings of the Garden of Eden found in the opening chapters of Genesis or any readily available source to most biblical scholars. However, since the GTh lends itself to enigmatic features, this reference will not dismay the inquiry at hand about how it relates to the Divine, followers of the Thomasine Jesus, and the larger Middle Platonic goal of achieving the Alexandrian maxim. Meyer states that these “five trees” are often referenced in “gnostic” and esoteric religious literature without explanation or notable excitement: the only relevant reference in the Bible to “trees in paradise” is Genesis 2:9, which indicates the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”²¹⁴

²¹² Meyer notes that a late ancient reference to the same concept can be found in the *Gospel of Bartholomew*, in which a much greater consequence will be rendered if Mary reveals the “mysteries” that Jesus revealed to her in private. See Meyer, *Thomas*, 86.

²¹³ Perhaps this is a reference to pantheism and/or panentheism as it was understood in Greek thought. The overreaching thought is that physical creation is not all bad but rather a step in returning to the Divine, such as the Middle Platonist Calvenus Taurus thought. See Meyer, *Thomas*, 112.

²¹⁴ Meyer, *Thomas*, 88-9. Meyer also notes that a Manichean reference that groups “various features of faith and life together in groups of five.”

However, some have offered conjectures as to understanding these “five trees” and a particularly interesting one is made by an independent scholar of Thomasine Christianity and later esoteric sources influenced by the Thomasine tradition, Herbert Christian Merillat. Merillat wrote in his book on the Apostle Thomas as represented in the Thomasine Literature that the concept of five (pentad) was important to the Manicheans and to Southeastern Buddhists, in which the self was largely held to be composed of five different elements. Merillat lists that the five elements are “mind, thought, reflection, consideration, [and] reason.”²¹⁵ This seems in line with the exhortation found in the *Phaedo* to “contemplate the highest forms and pursue the divine,” in which the forms that compose the self would be of ultimate concern for the first half of the refrain. While it may not reveal much information for the reference about the “five trees in paradise,” this understanding proffers an explanation that is coherent with the exegesis of GTh 19 as it is provided here. It is beyond the exploration of this paper to investigate Merillat’s claims further but it seems that since Thomas references the Holy Spirit as “messenger of the five members” in the *Acts of Thomas*, it is likely that this particular Pentad was an important concept to the Thomasine community as well.²¹⁶

The 2nd century Middle Platonist, Plutarch, writes that the number five is represented by the ingrained “E at Delphi” as a dedication by five Greek Wise Men to the Greek god Apollo. In the text, Plutarch notes that these men were called Sophists by some and the accusation of being a Sophist was made against Socrates, who was effectively commissioned by the Oracle at Delphi. If these two factors are combined with the fact that “know yourself” and “avoid extremes” are engraved at Delphi, which are two maxims that are central to Middle Platonism, then the “five trees” mentioned in GTh might be a reminder to constantly practice those maxims

²¹⁵ Herbert Christian Merillat, “Land of Five Rivers,” in *The Gnostic Apostle Thomas*, 1997, accessed on April 10th, 2014 at www.gnosis.org.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

as “wise men.” The conclusion of saying 19 is the ultimate reward for pursuing the Divine using the five capacities listed above: one “will not taste death,” or experience the bitter fate of those who do not achieve unity with the Divine and are faced with transmigration of the soul back into another fleshly form.²¹⁷

Saying 30 in the GTh seems to be both an early concept of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity and hinting towards an understanding of the Divine as the Monad and Dyad. The translation of the Nag Hammadi manuscript reads: “Jesus said, ‘Where there are three deities, they are divine. Where there are two or one, I am with that one’” (GTh 30). It seems that the partial Greek manuscript of this saying is a conflation of it and part of saying 77, which reads:

[Jesus sa]id, [“Wh]ere there are [th]r[ee] t[hey ar]e [without] God. And [w]here there is only o[ne], I say, I am with hi[m]. Li[f]t the stone and there you will find me. Split the wood and I am there.”²¹⁸

A comparison of both editions of this saying reveals coherence in thought regarding the subjects of these sayings which means that the author of the Greek vorlage of GTh most likely felt that they belonged together. The slight variation in the reconstruction of the Greek text is probably a knock against the proto-orthodox understanding of the Holy Trinity but the variation in the second sentence is most likely a reference to the “solitary one/one who stands alone” as the prime example of he who resembles the divine “One.” Since the rest of the saying reflects part of GTh 77, it is not necessary to discuss it further with the only exception being that this reinforces the understanding that the Divine is found in Creation by those who look for it. In light of sayings 11, 16, 22, 23, 49, 75, and 106, which places emphasis on the “solitary one” (monachos) and the Middle Platonic understanding of the Divine ultimately being the One at the beginning

²¹⁷ In addition to this report, Plutarch organizes his metaphysical scheme as a pentad as opposed to the usual Middle Platonic triad. However, he is unusual in this decision but is representative of a religious Middle Platonist for whom a pentad is important. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 206.

²¹⁸ Translation by Thomas Lambdin. Saying 30 + 77b (pOxy. 1.23-30). Accessed on April 11th, 2014 at http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/thomas_poxy.htm

reflected in the GTh, Crossan understands the Greek edition to be intoning that the divine “One” is only available to the “solitary one.”²¹⁹ Therefore, logion 30 is not so much an attack against the Holy Trinity insomuch as it an understanding of the divine communicated by Plato, developed by others, and passed on through to its unique understanding found in the Thomasine tradition.

As the GTh progresses, the doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad becomes more explicit as Jesus directly references it in a lucid fashion in the later logia. In a dialogue between Jesus and Salome, the following is expressed:

Salome said, "Who are you mister? You have climbed onto my couch and eaten from my table as if you are from someone." Jesus said to her, "I am the one who comes from what is whole. I was granted from the things of my Father." "I am your disciple." "For this reason I say, if one is whole, one will be filled with light, but if one is divided, one will be filled with darkness" (GTh 61.2-5).

The starting question is regarding the origins of Jesus and as to why he has the authority to recline and dine in Salome’s house as if he is an important person. Jesus’ response reveals that he is indeed an important person – that is, a person so important that he comes from the undivided divine One and his Father is this very being. The next sentence, “I am your disciple,” is likely an indication of Salome that she recognizes his importance and dedicates herself to become his follower.²²⁰ The last part of this logion indicates the concept of the “solitary one” as one who is “whole” and filled with the spiritual symbol of the Divine in GTh: “light.” As discussed earlier, the goal of the Thomasine Christian in GTh is to become a “single one” in a myriad of ways in order to reflect the Monad. The adherent of the Thomasine tradition has to reflect the spiritual unity of the One before they are eligible to return to God and once this is achieved in various ways, the goal of those driven towards that end are rewarded.

²¹⁹ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 78.

²²⁰ Meyer agrees with this assessment about the “disciple” phrase. Meyer, *Thomas*, 106.

There are three sayings at the very end of the text that indicate the doctrine being discussed in this section: sayings 100, 101, and 105. GTh 100 will be discussed first and then the last two logia will be discussed together since they are similar in the manner that they discuss the doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad with parental overtones. The first saying at hand reads:

They showed Jesus a gold coin and said to him, "The Roman emperor's people demand taxes from us." He said to them, "Give the emperor what belongs to the emperor, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine" (GTH 100).

This was a popular saying attributed to Jesus by the synoptic gospels with minor variances in wording and narrative qualifications but the intention of the question remains the same.²²¹ It is an effort in to trick Jesus into either resisting Jewish law by saying one should use the coins stamped by the image of Caesar to pay the taxes or refuse the taxes which would be tantamount to sedition in the eyes of the Roman authorities. Regardless, Jesus states that the coins should be given to Caesar because they bear his image but the rest of creation should be given to God because it bears the Divine image (Genesis 1-2).

The difference between this saying in the synoptic gospels and the GTh is the 4th section: "Give me what is mine." What could this addition to the saying mean? Marvin Meyer writes that this addition "elevates the place of Jesus" but does not explicate what this exactly means for the audience of GTh.²²² This sentence places Jesus in a special place relative to the other two parties of God and the emperor, but what is this place? Once again, it is best understood in light of Middle Platonism. As noted before, the Creative force of God is seen as the Logos made incarnate as Jesus in the Gospel of John, Sophia in Philo's understanding of the Hebrew Bible, and Isis in Plutarch's account are expressed as the Dyad in Middle Platonism. If the Emperor gets what belongs to him and God gets what belongs to him, then what belongs to Jesus? The

²²¹ Mark 12:13-17; Matthew 22:15-22; Luke 20:20-26.

²²² Meyer, *Thomas*, 118.

answer is that since the God the Father is not accessible since he is separate from everything, it is up to God the Son to collect all that bears the divine image since he is the creative principle responsible for all that exists and that is active outside the realm of God the Father.

The parental imagery that is used in GTh 101 and 105 centers around “mothers and fathers” of different kinds, namely physical and divine parents, with the Monad and Dyad being equated as the father and mother of the universe – with the transcendent figure of God being the Father and Jesus as the Logos of God representing the aspect of the Mother as the active creative principle that is involved with the physical realm. These two sayings will be the last discussed in this section and will be followed with a brief conclusion that relates the triad of the Middle Platonic themes in the GTh as significant keys to understanding the theological underpinnings of the text. The first saying reads:

"Whoever does not hate [father] and mother as I do cannot be a [follower] of me, and whoever does [not] love [father and] mother as I do cannot be a [follower of] me. For my mother [gave me falsehood], but my true [mother] gave me life” (GTh 101).²²³

If this saying is read literally, it seems contradictory at worst and the product of a confused scribe at best. However, since GTh functions both on a physical realm and spiritual realm, it is best to read this seeming contradiction as a manifestation of these realities. The first half of the opening sentence regards the hatred of one’s physical parents and abandonment of their protection in order to follow Jesus: this is a typical maxim found all throughout the earliest gospel accounts and is in line with Jesus’ itinerant lifestyle. The second half of the first sentence denotes that one must love “father and mother” but clearly this entails a love of the Monad and Dyad as established by Xenocrates and inherited by the school of Middle Platonism. In line with Meyer’s

²²³ The Coptic manuscript contains lacunas in several places during this saying. Therefore, a moderate amount of this logion had to be reconstructed but both renderings communicate the same idea: the physical mother of Jesus is not as important as his spiritual one.

comment, Jesus is seen as having two different sets of parents and it is the spiritual ones that matter the most since physical parents are usually only concerned with matters of the family, work, and upkeep of the home that gets in the way of those motivated to becoming like the Divine.²²⁴

The other part of saying 101 means that the mother who bore Jesus into a physical form filled with irrational passions and desires is the one who exposed him to the “falsehood” of the flesh that hinders the goal of becoming like God. Jesus’ true mother, which is the one that created his rational side, “gave him life” and since Jesus has obtained this “life,” he has been teaching others how to do obtain this goal as well. The Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism cast the Father as a name for the Monad and the Mother as a name for the Dyad in addition to having a representative in the physical realm in the World-Soul/Demiurge. Philo lays out this triad as “He Who Is” as the Father, “Sophia” as the Mother and the “Logos” as the representative of the Dyad who is cast as her son in the physical realm.²²⁵ Essentially, Jesus is affirming his identity as the “son of the Divine” who is from the divine realm and denouncing his physical heritage. In terms of Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism, Jesus is denouncing his human identity in the sensible world and embracing his divine identity in the intelligible world while encouraging his followers to do the same.²²⁶ Ultimately, logion 101 represents dual worlds, of which Jesus chooses his divine identity over his earthly existence as a matter of choosing divine life over the limitations of embodied subsistence as an example to be imitated by his followers.²²⁷

²²⁴ Meyer, *Thomas*, 119.

²²⁵ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 164.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, 158.

²²⁷ A common motif of “choosing life over death” is found in 2nd Temple Jewish literature and early Christian writings which each end (telos) being represented by two paths as means to these ends. It seems that this is implicitly present in the GTh where divine life is offered as opposed to death for the one who becomes the twin of

In addition to saying 101, GTh 105 has additional imagery about the Mother and the Father. The text reads: “Jesus said, ‘Whoever knows the father and the mother will be called the child of a whore’” (GTh 105). A possible context for the ending of this saying is a response to Celsus by Origen of Alexandria concerning the conception of Jesus. Origen refutes Celsus’ view that Jesus was born because Mary had intercourse with a common soldier, which resulted in the birth of Jesus as a bastard child (*Contra Celsum* 1.32). Origen refutes this argument by using a combination of Middle Platonic philosophy and scripture to indicate that it is impossible that God would incarnate through the means of adultery.²²⁸

If this rumor is combined with the understanding of Jesus as the divine son that is a product of the Father and the Mother as the context for GTh 105, then the correct interpretation is clear.²²⁹ This saying represents a forked-response to a historical claim leveled against the legitimacy of Jesus as the incarnate divine by stating that he was “the son of a whore” and as confirmation of his divine identity as one who knows the divine parents of the universe. These two logia serve as a pair that admonishes one to wholly pursue spiritual life in the divine realm as opposed to physical death in the material realm and demonstrates the consequences if one does not wholly commit to the pursuit of “likeness unto God,” which essentially amounts to a soiled reputation and a stained soul.

the living Jesus. Life and death are contrasted constantly through out GTh but the life that is being offered means becoming One with the Divine. See GTh Prologue, 1, 11, 52, 59, 111, 114.

²²⁸ Origen explains the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit by utilizing the Middle Platonic doctrine of transmigration and physiognomy that dictates the quality of the body one is born in is oriented to the quality of their soul, which is a great soul that is indicated by the fact that he “taught moderation, justice, and overall excellence” may need a body “strong enough to prevent the soul from tasting sin...” to be conceived through adultery? Then he uses the “prophecy” from Isaiah regarding the virgin birth as proof that God will dwell among his people and that would require the pure vessel of a virgin that conceived this being through miraculous means and certainly not adultery!

²²⁹ The assumption made here is that the story of Jesus’ illegitimate conception arose in the first century CE as an attempt to rebut the claims of divine origins made in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Origen is simply one of the first Christians to directly address this claim in the written word. Since GTh seems to be involved with the early Jesus tradition and Middle Platonism that is in line with the theology that Origen developed, then it makes sense for this claim to be inherently assumed in the GTh at a relatively early date in the preservation of Jesus’ work.

GTh 101 contrasts the sensible and intelligible worlds as reflective realities in which one has a set of physical parents and a set of divine parents that produces a demand to fully acknowledge one and abandon the other in the pursuit of divine life. GTh 105 is a warning to those followers who won't commit to the pursuit of either realm: if the divine incarnate has a damaged reputation because of his involvement with both worlds, then the path of straddling both worlds is especially dangerous for individuals who don't possess the "great-soul" of the son of the divine.²³⁰ Since the criticism is leveled by a Pagan Middle Platonist and refuted by a Christian Middle Platonist that utilizes the multiple Middle Platonic doctrines, it is highly probable that this story about Jesus was circulated in these circles and explains why it would be included in a Middle Platonist's account of Jesus' teachings such as the GTh.

13. Secret Teachings, Daemons, and Divine Principles

The goal of this section is to summarize the above discussion of three major themes that prove that Middle Platonism is the theological and philosophical background for GTh. This is demonstrative of the text being a Christian Middle Platonic gospel as well. An additional point is that it seems a certain amount of Christian Middle Platonism runs through the Thomasine tradition and the Johannine tradition. In review, the first theme discussed in the text is the role of early Christianity as a mystery religion, Jesus as the hierophant, and how this significantly has its roots in Plato's thought and his successors. It is of note that Philo, Clement, and Origen conceived of their respective traditions as mystery religions in addition to the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Thomas.

²³⁰ It is telling that one way of translating the language Origen uses in his passage regarding protecting God Incarnate from the harmful elements of physical creation is "not taste ill-repute." This mirrors the language of "not tasting Death" found through out the GTh and the concern for not having a "damaged reputation" by those who demonstrate and teach "temperance, justice, and overall excellence." Therefore, if even Jesus obtains a slight mark against his reputation by involvement in the physical world, then GTh 105 should serve as a strong warning to the followers of the Living Jesus.

This discussion revealed that Origen used language likely found in the Greek vorlage of the GTh and serves as another indication that Jesus was bringing new mysteries to replace the old Greco-Roman mystery religions. In addition, the type of person who truly understands the mysteries they are initiated into is the same type of person who will benefit from philosophy and reap the rewards of divine life. This understanding is found within the text, where one is encouraged to find the interpretation of the living Jesus' sayings and benefit by "not tasting death." It is likely that the mysteries of the living Jesus is the ability to understand his teachings and become his spiritual twin, which is essentially tantamount to obtaining divinity, knowing the divine principles, and not experiencing physical death that results in physical rebirth.

The second theme discussed is the role of daemons in cosmos as represented in GTh. The role of daemons is primarily one of guardianship and intermediary between the Divine and the physical realm but GTh seems to cast them as beings that need to be interacted with after physical death but before the soul can return to the Divine. Once the physical body that they own is returned to them and the right answers concerning the origins of the soul are provided, the soul of the "solitary one" can bypass their authority and become one with the Divine. The information that is necessary to provide to the daemons is provided by the Thomasine Jesus to his followers in the text and with proper understanding, illuminates the Christian Middle Platonic path back to God. The third and final theme covered concerns the nature of the Divine as expressed in an Alexandrian personification of Jesus as the divine son of the Monad and the Dyad combined with historical elements of Jesus' itinerant lifestyle and a rumor about his conception that is rooted in a discussion by two Middle Platonic philosophers situated on opposite sides of a religious debate in the 2nd century CE. This section attempts to demonstrate that the GTh is an early example of how the Jesus tradition and Middle Platonism was combined to produce a

worldview that is motivated by the pursuit of the “divine likeness,” a moderate lifestyle, and an understanding of the cosmology explicated by the Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism. The Alexandrian school represents the right mixture of religion and philosophy that provides a creation myth and soteriology based on certain interpretations of the Platonic canon and his “Unwritten Doctrines.” That process represents the environment conducive to the composition of GTh as a Christian Middle Platonic gospel that was used by Thomasine Christians to obtain knowledge of and union with the Divine.

V. Conclusion – Summary of the Work

In summary, the analysis of the material presented in this thesis is two-fold: demonstrate Middle Platonism as the philosophical-theological background for the GTh and by doing so, argue that the GTh is a Christian Middle Platonic Gospel. The first component essential to this end was to establish the Gospel of Thomas as an ancient genre that was in line with a larger group of works, such as Proverbs of the Hebrew Bible and collected sayings of Greek philosophers such as Diogenes the Cynic, Epicurus, and Epictetus.²³¹ This genre was known as the “Sayings of the Wise” and the Greek versions usually recorded these teachings in pointed, rhetorical statements known as “chreiai.” As discussed earlier, chreiai served multiple purposes in ancient Greek society but functioned primarily as elements of guidance in different areas, including philosophical and rhetorical instruction.

The collections of philosophical chreiai were intended to persuade and convert other educated individuals to subscribing to the worldview and way of life prescribed by such systems. In a similar fashion, the GTh serves as a text intended to win over individuals to an understanding of Jesus’ teachings as filtered through Middle Platonism as a philosophical-theological means of establishing a meaningful life that is united with the divine. The message of GTh is the good news that one can achieve such an end as demonstrated by the cosmopolitan wood-worker of Galilee who realized his identity as part of the divine and can pass this same understanding to those who dedicate themselves to understanding his teachings contained within the text. The other intention of the introduction is to briefly review other scholarship that

²³¹ Gregory Riley states that Christians were the ones able to uphold the highest virtues of the Greco-Roman soldier, philosopher, and athlete while those who held those titles could not. Also, he notes that Jesus was being represented as a Greek philosopher, such as GTh, and that Christianity was being represented a philosophy in the 2nd century CE. See Gregory J. Riley, “Words and Deeds: Jesus as Teacher and Jesus as Pattern of Life,” *Harvard Theological Review* 90:4, (October 1997): 427-436; 428, 433.

addresses the relevant topics in an effort to briefly establish Middle Platonism as a valid hermeneutical background for GTh and identify the text as a Christian Middle Platonic Gospel.

The first part of the second chapter in this paper serves to establish the basis of Middle Platonism as an influential school of thought from 80 BCE to 220 CE with regards to its foundation by Plato and his successors. The second half of this section was to demonstrate how it was established as a philosophical system with the ultimate goal of “likeness unto God” and how it became conducive to usage by different religious individuals. After this foundation is laid, special attention is paid to the Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism that actively combined Middle Platonism with different theological perspectives and produced the ideological grounds for the development of Middle Platonic scriptures such as the GTh and other works such as the commentary on GJn by Origen.

The third chapter of this paper was dedicated to two different goals. The first provides an understanding of the three primary categories of sayings in the text as they pertained to the historical Jesus and how it applied to the community who first received this text. The purpose of this first goal was to demonstrate how the GTh is a product of the first century that simultaneously preserved a few original teachings of Jesus, some teachings that seem to be widespread in early Christian circles, and how certain logion are given to providing direct guidance to the Thomasine community who first received this text. It ultimately provides a historical context in which the text arose from the Jesus tradition and how it formed in the first century in relation to other early Christian communities such as the Pauline, Johannine, Jamesian and Petrine communities represented in the New Testament. The sharing of elements in the GTh with different early Christian texts that were important to a majority of first century Christian communities is strong evidence that the community represented by the text was involved with

this conversation but the theological spin that is found in the text sets the Thomasine community apart in their understanding of Jesus and the formation of respective theology dependent upon on these distinctive features.

The second goal of the third chapter was dedicated to establish the variety of Middle Platonic doctrines that are found throughout the GTh. Some of these themes are discussed by Stephen Patterson in his work on the same subject but I contest that some of these themes he does not see in the text: such as the doctrine of the Monad and the Dyad as well as the existence of Daemons are present in addition to others that are explicated. This specific exploration provides a general synopsis of the Middle Platonic themes that I find in the text since a detailed exploration of all that is covered is too lengthy for this current avenue. In addition to the discussion of Middle Platonist's thought on these matters and how they relate to GTh, I discuss the various premises that are found throughout the Platonic canon as they serve as the foundation for any thought afterwards. Where it is appropriate, these themes are connected to the relevant logia in the text and tentative support is drawn from the appropriate sources to illustrate the influence of the Platonic canon and Middle Platonism on GTh. The twofold intention of this section serves as a connection between the larger school of Middle Platonism and how it is largely connected to the GTh and the Thomasine tradition.

The fourth chapter is a detailed exploration of a triad of themes found throughout the Gospel of Thomas. The three themes that are selected to be discussed are initially contested by Stephen Patterson as not being in GTh so they represent a lack of scholarship on the subject. Secondly these themes are chosen because they demonstrate esoteric and eclectic elements in GTh that are fully illuminated by their explication as part of Middle Platonism, especially as it is formed during its first 200 years. Modern commentaries and ancient sources are consulted in the

exegesis of each saying in addition to the appropriate textual variants and linguistic differences that are present in the various textual witnesses to the GTh. Overall, this portion of the thesis is intended to serve as a limited demonstration of the main argument: that GTh represents an early Christian Middle Platonic Gospel that conceives of the significance of Jesus and his teachings in terms of Middle Platonic philosophy.

14. The Identity of Jesus in GTh

The next part of this conclusion pertains to the identity of Jesus in the GTh and potential avenues of research related to the text and its interpretation. The identity of Jesus in GTh is manifestly different from the numerous gospel accounts that were produced in the first five centuries CE. In the canon, each gospel presents a different understanding of who Jesus is: Mark presents him as a man who is invested with the spirit of God at his Baptism in order to carry out a sacrificial mission; Matthew presents him as the fulfillment of the Hebrew Bible and as the Messiah for the Jews who has to die and be resurrected as fulfillment of both King and Savior of his people; Luke presents him in a similar fashion as Matthew does except Jesus' mission includes willing Gentiles; and John presents Jesus as the Logos of God (Divine Creativity) who became flesh to teach that the way to God is through him, his lifestyle, and his sacrifice for all who trust his identity as such. One can find later accounts in the Nag Hammadi that are labeled as gospels, such as the Gospel of the Egyptians, the Gospel of Phillip, and the Gospel of Truth but they hardly mention Jesus as at all, which means they are clearly not in the same category as the canonical gospels and GTh.²³²

²³² While nuanced disagreements could be made with this general assessment of the canonical gospels, this represents my collective understanding of said representations as a product of both early religious devotion and later critical study/reflection on the texts. The synoptic gospels are presented as rough hagiographies of Jesus' life and GTh is closer to a collection of Jesus' sayings that is not directly concerned with the larger narrative of Jesus' physical activity.

If examined closely, the identity of Jesus as found in GTh is similar to his identity as found in the Gospel of John. A significant piece of evidence is the opening passage of each work because they reveal an epithet about Jesus and a promise regarding that epithet. In GTh, he is identified as the “Living Jesus” and the promise is made to those who properly understand his teachings in the text will “not taste death.” In the GJn, Jesus is identified as the “Word (Logos)” who is identical with God and serves as the creative principle that “all things were made through.” These things came into existence through the Word became “life and the life was the light of all people” (GJn 1:3-4). After that, the “Word” becomes “flesh” and the promise is made that all who believe he is such will become “children of God.”

The linguistic similarities between these two openings revolve around the fact that they both identify Jesus as “living” or as “life” itself.²³³ In both texts, the Greek word used for this description is ζωή which denotes an eternal form of life and those who possess it are not subject to the limitations of physical death and in antiquity, this quality was only held by the divine or those who obtained divinity. Later in GTh, Jesus states that “I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all came forth, and to me all attained” (GTh 77.1). This correlates to the opening of GJn insomuch that it testifies that the Thomasine Christians must have understood Jesus’ divine status in a similar fashion.²³⁴

The identification of Jesus as the “logos,” which is the principle of “Divine Creativity” in the GJn is directly in line with the way that two different major religious Middle Platonists, Philo

²³³ The other metaphors found in the GJn opening are found else where throughout the GTh in addition to the promises of Jesus’ adherents being “children of God.” Jesus is identified as the “creative divine principle” in GTh but is not referred to such in direct language but strongly suggests this throughout the text.

²³⁴ The shared understanding of Jesus’ divinity found in both texts is clearly sponsored by Middle Platonism as expounded by Philo of Alexandria and Plutarch of Chaerona regarding divine creativity as instrumental in creating the universe and actively involved in revealing the path for humans back to God. However, due to the multiple direct assaults against Thomas in GJn, it is clear that the author of that text knew about the Thomasine community and possibly GTh itself. As discussed in Chapter 3, GTh has many features that certainly place it in the mid-first century CE. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 204.

and Plutarch expressed it and also paired with the understanding of the Monad and the Dyad as found in the “Unwritten Doctrines.” These features combined with an understanding that this principle could be anthropomorphized and the proposition that divine status could be obtained while still in the flesh by certain Middle Platonists, render it highly possible that the Thomasine Jesus is a man who obtained divine status endowed by the Dyad, which was represented by her offspring, the “son” identified as the Logos by Philo and the GJn.

However Jesus came to achieve his divine status in GTh, it is clear that he is identical with the Divine in various fashions and can provide information for others to obtain this status. The fact that Thomas is “utterly unable to say what you are like” (GTh 13) serves the philosophical imperative of “revealing his mysteries” to those who are worthy so that they can “obtain likeness to the Divine.” The principle difference between the soteriologies of GJn and GTh are based around two contrasting sets of means and ends. The GJn offers “eternal life” and the ability to “become children of God” through faith in the identity of Jesus as God who reconciles those who believe him as he presented in the text. In stark contrast, GTh encourages the readers of the text to understand the meanings of Jesus’ teaching properly and when this is accomplished, the spiritual reward is much greater: one becomes a twin of the living Jesus who represents the wholly divine principle through which all of creation came into being.

This path requires a lifestyle of asceticism, contemplation, and intellectual maintenance that is only available to those who have the desire and means to pursue it to the final end of deification. This clearly represented a threat to the Orthodox Christian church when it began emerging around the fourth to fifth centuries CE and was excluded in favor of the GJn. The fourth canonical gospel was chosen because it supported a high Christology, emphasized that faith in this Christology was essential to being a Christian, and used the Apostle Thomas as a foil

to prove these points while concurrently demeaning the Thomasine Christians who revered the Apostle Thomas and followed the Thomasine Jesus.

15. Potential Areas of Future Research

Finally, this work is not an exhaustive exploration of the Middle Platonic influence that is found throughout the GTh. Ten themes are briefly discussed in the relevant section and three themes are covered in detail with relation to the text. However, seven themes and a large amount of GTh logia are still in need of exegesis in light of Middle Platonism. An added layer to the philosophical investigation of GTh is a reconstruction of Middle Platonic doctrines and cosmology from the perspective of the text after a full exegesis is completed. This task would illuminate the role of GTh as a Christian Middle Platonic text and how it is oriented to other Middle Platonic philosophers. Possible connections and contributions to the thought of Origen, Clement, and Plutarch could be established on accomplishment of said task as well as a demonstrative attempt to show how the GTh influenced other thinkers, such as Valentinus of Rome, the Sethian Gnostics, and Plotinus.²³⁵

Another direction that could be explored is a full examination of the numerous ways that GTh and GJn are related with regard to the Jesus tradition, the New Testament canon, and early Christian theological commitments and/or lifestyles in light of their scriptures. An investigation of the authorship of each text with emphasis on linguistics, geography, and ideological influence would be helpful in regards to the origins of both texts. The aspect of entertaining the contributions of the Alexandrian School of Middle Platonism to the development of the Incarnation and Trinity doctrines interests me as well. Lastly, all of these possibilities point

²³⁵ Bentley Layton argues that Basilides was an active Christian philosopher heavily influenced by Middle Platonism that was producing commentaries on 1 Peter, a gospel account very similar to GMk, and a letter to a Christian community in Rome around 135 CE. This would make him one of the earliest Christian commentators on Scripture who was line with Philo, Clement, and Origen. See Bentley Layton, "The Significance of Basilides in Ancient Christian Thought," *Representations* 28, (Autumn 1989): 135-151; 150-51.

towards understanding the significance and relevance of the Thomasine tradition to the formation of early Christianities and their modern counterparts.

16. Concluding Reflections

In the summer of 2011 before I started graduate school, my friend Rebecca stood up in a Unitarian Universalist congregation and read the 2nd saying of the Gospel of Thomas from my tired copy of the Nag Hammadi library. She enthusiastically read,

Jesus said, "Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find. When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will reign over all. [And after they have reigned they will rest.]"

Little did either of us know that I would begin “seeking” for the proper interpretation of GTh and not “rest” until I produced a work that satisfied my curiosity with regards to the enigmatic and esoteric teachings of Jesus in the text. What started out as a blessing and pronouncement turned out to be the capstone of my degree, of which I can honestly say I’ve found out information that has “disturbed” me but I have been lead to “marvel” of how easily it made sense of the text during the exegetical process. This quest has placed me in a position to “reign over all” my projects for the foreseeable future. As regards to “rest,” I will pursue that at the suitable time after my quest is finished.

This work represents a few years of direct reading of the Nag Hammadi library and learning Coptic, a year of reading the Middle Platonists, especially the modern monographs that summarize their work, and a solid foundation in the Greek language, the New Testament, and the Platonic canon. It is no way intended as an absolutely authoritative stance on the matter nor is it the last time I intend to engage this subject. The Gospel of Thomas is a treasure trove for those interested in Plato and his many successors, the Jesus tradition, and as representing a potential source for numerous other esoteric traditions such as Manichaeism. In addition to these remarks, the dating of GTh has been solidified in my mind as post-Philo (50 CE) and the earliest letter of

Paul, which means that the text could be dated at the earliest to 55-60 CE but was certainly composed before the GJn (c. 90 CE).

This is significant because it suggests a high Christology was held by some followers as soon as three decades after Jesus' death and within a very Hellenized religio-social-cultural context. The significant involvement of language borrowed from the mystery religions is found both within the GMk (c.70 CE) and the GTh that view Jesus as the hierophant of said tradition, which indicates that Jesus was not always understood in a common fashion. All of these factors may lend themselves to a different understanding of Jesus, his life, teachings, and how his first followers understood all of these matters in relation to all aspects of their life, since the promise of deification to select ones are involved in GTh. After all, if it can be substantially indicated that the first followers of Jesus understood him as primarily a philosopher and hierophant with Divine status who could provide the means of becoming his "divine twin," then this would cause a significant paradigm shift in how modern scholars and their readers view the historical Jesus.

Jesus said, "Show me the stone that the builders *rejected*: that is the *cornerstone*" (GTh 66).

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