

Introduction to the New Testament History and Literature

Lecture 8: The Gospel of Thomas

Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rfst-152/lecture-8>

Overview

We have known of the existence of the Gospel of Thomas from ancient writers, but it was only after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices that the actual text became available. The Gospel of Thomas is basically a collection of sayings, or *logia*, that sometimes seem similar, perhaps more primitive than sayings found in the canonical Gospels. Sometimes, however, the sayings seem better explained as reflecting a “Gnostic” understanding of the world. This involves a rejection of the material world and a desire for *gnosis*, a secret knowledge, in order to escape the world and return to the divine being.

1. *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Thomasine Literature*

[1] *Professor Dale Martin:* One of the themes of the course, maybe the main theme of the course is the diversities of early Christianity. In fact, a lot of scholars like to talk about not “Christianity” in the first one hundred years but “Christianities.” This is one of the themes also of Bart Ehrman’s textbook, so you should have picked up on this. There’s a lot of different kinds of Christianity and we’re going to talk about those kinds. Today, we get to one of the most interesting differences to most people, because most modern people are not at all familiar with the Gospel of Thomas. The Gospel of Thomas is not in our canon for several reasons, but we can talk about that at some point at the end of the lecture if you want to know. The Gospel of Thomas has become very famous, though, in the last part of the twentieth century because it was rediscovered and published and created something of a sensation.

[2] According to the tradition, according to the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus had a twin brother and his name was Didymus Judas Thomas. Now Didymus is simply the Greek word for “twin,” it’s also used as the Greek word for “testicles” for obvious reasons; there are usually two of them. Didymus is the Greek word for “twin” and Thomas is from a Semitic word, either Hebrew or Aramaic, or Syriac,

which are all three similar languages, “Thomas” would look like in “twin” in those. The guy’s name is Judas, the Hebrew version would be Judah, the Greek word would be Judas, and the English version is Jude, so you sometimes see it in English translations Didymus Jude Thomas but it’s the same word, Judah or Judas. His real name is Judah or Judas and Didymus, and Thomas are his nicknames, one Greek and one Semitic or Aramaic. He was the twin brother of Jesus, according to early Christian tradition, now just one strand of early Christian tradition that is Thomasine Christianity, the forms of Christianity, popular especially in Syria and the east which traced their existence back to the Apostle Thomas. There really was an Apostle Thomas among the 12 of Jesus’ disciples and having the nickname “twin.” Traditional orthodox Christians don’t believe he was Jesus’ twin brother, they just believe that he had the nickname twin because he was somebody else’s twin brother. But in Thomasine Christianity he was connected to Jesus himself as Jesus’ twin.

[3] According to some forms of eastern Christianity therefore, especially the early forms in Syria, Mesopotamia, and India—and yes there was very, very early forms of Christianity in the west coast of India. And if you meet an Indian person who’s from that part of India and who considers themselves Christian, and they’ve been Christian for

generations they will tell you, yes, Thomas was the apostle who brought the Gospel to India the first time. There are ancient traditions about this and modern Indian Christians still trace their church back to the Apostle Thomas.

- [4] There are all kinds of Thomas literature from the ancient world. It's not all alike, it doesn't all represent one kind of Christianity or one church, or even one region. Besides the Gospel of Thomas we know of the infancy Gospel of Thomas, this is a wonderful documentary if you took my historical Jesus class you get to read the fragments of the infancy Gospel of Thomas that we still have. It shows Jesus—everybody wonders, well what was Jesus like as a kid? What games did he play? Did he play cops and robbers? Did he play with dolls? What did Jesus do as a kid? Well Thomas tells you, it tells you for example, that he made a bunch of clay pigeons, and when this Jew—it's kind of anti-Jewish document, this Jew comes up and says, you're not supposed to be doing that on the Sabbath, so Jesus claps his hands and the pigeons all fly off, the clay pigeons fly off. Or when one of his buddies get—when he gets mad at one of his buddies so he strikes the kid dead and then has to raise the kid up again. When one of his teachers criticizes him, he says, what do you know you bimbo? And strikes the teacher dumb and blind or something. Jesus as a little kid in the infancy Gospel of Thomas, is kind of a little rat but that's the way people imagined him as a child.
- [5] There's the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, there's the Acts of Thomas which are very interesting. Thomas comes across as very anti-marriage, anti-family, there's the Hymn of the Pearl or the Hymn, as it's also called, the Hymn of Jude Thomas the Apostle in the Country of the Indians; same document. We tend to call it the Hymn of the Pearl. There's the Book of Thomas the Contender Writing to the Perfect. So all of these different texts sprang up in early Christianity, most of them in the second century. The second century was a time of a lot of Christian literature arising in different places that didn't make it into the Bible. Before the discovery though of the Nag Hammadi codices, and you probably already know how to spell Nag Hammadi because you've seen it in your textbook; it's just the name of a village in modern Egypt. I don't remember how many i's, and d's, and m's and d's it has but it's something like that. Is that

right? Dylan, who is one of our teaching assistants, he's an expert on all this stuff, so he can correct me. Nag Hammadi is a village in Egypt, and in 1945, while they were digging for some clay and that sort of thing, an Egyptian peasant found thirteen large books. Remember, the word codex or codices I've talked about in one of the early lectures means the kind of book that has the—has pages and sewn up on one side to distinguish it from a book that's in a scroll form. By this time, he found these books, they had been buried there probably sometime in the fourth century, so in the 300s, and they had probably been hidden there because that's about the time that certain forms of Christianity were being outlawed and declared heretical.

- [6] There are thirteen of these big books, and it's right along the Nile River, and we call these the Nag Hammadi Library or the Nag Hammadi Corpus, the Nag Hammadi Text, and that's just because the modern village near where they were found is Nag Hammadi. Before this 1945 discovery, and the Gospel of Thomas is one of many, many different texts that were discovered in this library material. Before this, we knew that there was a Gospel of Thomas because early Christian writers would talk about it, usually to condemn it. We had a few papyrus fragments, three papyrus fragments, that had Greek versions of just parts of the Gospel of Thomas, just pieces of it from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. The Nag Hammadi discovery was really very, very exciting because it greatly increased our knowledge of some forms of Christianity that the only thing we had known about them was by orthodox writers condemning it.
- [7] When one kind of writer is condemning another bunch of people you can't necessarily trust what they say. Orthodox writers, for example, claim that Gnostics, who they took to be these heretics that we—we talk about Gnosticism in this lecture, they said they have these wild sex orgies, and they drink blood, and they have cannibalism. Regular Christians were accused by their enemies of doing precisely the same thing. We don't believe everything, but when we found these Nag Hammadi texts, we had sort of firsthand text from these people who understood Christianity differently than what would come to be orthodox Christianity. Now the modern study of Gnosticism, therefore, has been completely

revolutionized by this study because it brought to light a complete version of the Gospel of Thomas, although it was a Coptic translation of the Greek. It was originally written in Greek, translated into Coptic which is an ancient Egyptian language. It also brought to light all these other texts, not all by the same people, not all reflecting the same views. Some of them, for example, are just pieces of Plato, or parts of the Bible, and that sort of thing.

the canonical gospel writers have edited it up a bit. It's very debatable about that but that's part of the value of the Gospel of Thomas is that for a lot of scholars we believe it takes us back at least close to the time of Jesus in some of its sayings, but necessarily in all of its sayings.

2. *The Sayings of the Gospel of Thomas*

[8] These texts, the texts we actually have, the Nag Hammadi codices, were written around the time 350. And we know this because the cardboard that was used to bind these things was made out of papyrus fragments and paper fragments, they were older. So by dating some of the pieces of paper that were used to make the cardboard that bound these things, we can tell when at least these books were put together. We think that a lot of these texts were actually written in the second century, and the Gospel of Thomas most scholars would say is written before the year 200. Some scholars believe that the Gospel of Thomas goes all the way back to the first century and may even be as early as Mark or Q or even earlier. I think probably the majority of scholars don't believe that. I think the majority of us believe that the Gospel of Thomas was probably first written in Greek in the first half of the second century, so between 100 and 150, but we don't really know. It's just a complete guess.

[9] Some of the sayings in the Gospel of Thomas look actually older. Bart Ehrman talks about why you would think a certain—a saying in one form might be older than a saying in another form. That's debatable but some of us, if we just compare the sayings side by side, those in the Gospel of Thomas to some people would say, well this actually looks like an older version of this saying of Jesus, or an older version of a parable of Jesus that we find in Matthew or Mark. And so some people have said, even if the Gospel of Thomas itself comes from the second century it may well contain what are more ancient versions of sayings of Jesus. This is why when people do historical Jesus research, that is, trying to figure out from the multiple gospels that we have, what did the historical Jesus really say and really do, historically determined, people will use the Gospel of Thomas sometimes to say, well this is actually more likely what Jesus actually—close to what Jesus actually said and

[10] There are 114 sayings, as you by now know, in the Gospel of Thomas, and as I said last time, scholars like to use two-bit words when one-bit words would do just as well. Instead of calling these sayings you will often see them called logia, that's the plural, logion is the singular. Logion is just Greek for a saying, so logia is just Greek for sayings. So often in scholarship and your textbooks sometimes it'll say "logion 114 from the Gospel of Thomas," and that just means "saying 114." There are 114 of them, and in fact, they're introduced—the gospel is introduced by just the words, "These are the obscure" or "the hidden sayings that the living Jesus uttered and which Didymus Jude Thomas wrote down." It gives you sort of this little title right there at the beginning. Notice, there's no passion there, there's no description of the death of Jesus, there's no resurrection, and actually most people think that Jesus speaks as if he's already been resurrected. Does this author intend us to think that this is the post-resurrection Jesus or did he just assume that even before his death Jesus just talks this way? You have to use your imagination because the author doesn't really tell us much.

[11] Now comparisons with other gospels; get out your text, your Gospel of Thomas and read with me through some of these things. Look at logion 9, this is the parable of the sower:

Jesus said, "Listen, a sower came forth, took a handful, and cast. Now some fell upon the pathway and the birds came and picked them out. Others fell on a rock but they did not root in the soil and did not send up ears. Others fell upon the thorns, and they choked the seed; and the grubs devoured them. And others fell upon good soil, and it sent up good crops and yielded sixty per measure and a hundred and twenty per measure.

[12] That's actually an example of when you have a saying that sounds more primitive, perhaps, in this gospel because notice how that saying is shorter and a bit simpler than the same parable would be in either Matthew or Luke, an example of why some people say well maybe it's more primitive. That one sounds very, very much like what you've got already in the canonical Gospels so it should sound familiar to you.

[13] Look at number eight right above that:

What human beings resemble is an intelligent fisherman, who having cast his net into the sea, pulled up the net out of the sea full of little fish. The intelligent fisherman, upon finding among them a fine large fish, threw all the little fish back into the sea, choosing without any effort the big fish. Whoever has ears to hear should listen!

[14] Now this translation, I'm reading from Bentley Layton's translation, he's a professor in our department, he's very famous as one of the top Coptologists in the world, and so I'm using his translation of this. But that "whoever has ears to hear should listen!" even though the translation makes it sound slightly different that's just exactly the same thing as you see in the Gospels, "Let him who have ears to hear, hear." Layton just decided to translate it in a big more colloquial English version. That's just like what you would, practically, in the other Gospels. Look in 30, saying 30:

Jesus said, "Where there are three divine beings they are divine. Where there are two or one, I myself dwell with that person."

[15] That sounds a bit more odd, doesn't it? It sounds a bit like a saying of Jesus in the Gospels that says, "Wherever two or three are gathered together I am there in the midst of them." What is this about divine beings? "Where there are three divine beings they are divine. Where there are two or one, I myself dwell with that person." It's a puzzle. You can tell how it's similar but not exactly like the synoptic Gospels. Look at saying 48:

Jesus said, "If two make peace with one another within a single house, they will say

to a mountain, 'go elsewhere,' and it will go elsewhere."

[16] Does anybody remember what the synoptic version of that saying says? Anybody know your Bible well enough? Yes sir.

[17] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[18] *Professor Dale Martin:* That's right. If you have faith the size of a mustard seed you can tell a mountain to remove itself and it'll go. It's—in this thing about two making peace, again with one another within a house, so it's the peacemaking that seems to give the power. Look at 86:

Jesus said, "Foxes have their dens and birds have their nests. But the son of man has nowhere to lay his head and gain repose."

[19] Now that sounds funny. Up until the last couple of words it sounded just like the synoptic Gospels but this—at least Layton has translated it doesn't just say "and get rest"—"lay his head and rest." Professor Layton has for some reason translated to sound a bit odd: "and gain repose." I think what that means is he's trying to signal that these last two words have some kind of special meaning for this author in this text. What kind of special meaning would that be? Then 113, these are just examples of sayings that look very much like what we already have seen in the Bible, "

His disciples said to him, "When is the kingdom going to come?" [Now we've got this in Gospels also in the Bible] Jesus said, "It is not by being waited for that it is going to come. They are not going to say, "Here it is," or "There it is." Rather, the kingdom of the Father is spread out over the earth and people do not see it.

[20] This is not the kingdom coming in the future as we've seen it in Mark, and Matthew, and Luke, this is the kingdom is already here on the earth, and if you don't know that it's just because you aren't recognizing it.

[21] There are really interesting peculiarities of the Gospel of Thomas, and let's look at some of those. First look at 13, these are some sayings that look more odd to us.

Jesus said to his disciples, “Compare me to something and tell me what I resemble.” [This is starting off sounding like what we’ve seen already.] Simon Peter said, “A just angel is whom you resemble.” Matthew said to him, “An intelligent philosopher is what you resemble.” Thomas said to him, “Teacher, my mouth utterly will not let me say what you resemble.” Jesus said “I am not your teacher, for you ... “

- [22] Now notice Layton’s letting you know—are you using the same translation that I am? That’s right, I thought I gave you the same translation. Layton let’s you know, because you can’t tell in English whether that “your teacher” is singular “you” or plural “you,” and he tells you it’s singular in the Coptic. “‘I am not your teacher,’” so Jesus is directing this not to all the apostles but to Thomas in particular right here.

“For you have drunk and become intoxicated from the bubbling wellspring that I have personally measured out.” [Well what the hell does that mean?] He took him, [that is took Thomas,] withdrew, and said three things to him. Now when Thomas came to his companions they asked him, “What did Jesus say to you?” Thomas said to them, “If I say to you [plural] one of the things that he said to me, you will take stones and stone me, and fire will come out of the stones and burn you up.

- [23] Sort of an ancient version of I’d tell you but then I’d have to kill you.

- [24] Look at 29:

Jesus said, “It is amazing if it was for the spirit that flesh came into existence. And it is amazing indeed if spirit (came into existence) for the sake of the body. But as for me I am amazed at how this great wealth has come to dwell in this poverty.”

- [25] What does that mean? Look at the very last saying. I hope some of you noticed this when you were reading over this before you came to class.

Simon Peter said to them, “Mary should leave us,” [he’s talking about Mary Magdalene probably] for females are not

worthy of life.” Jesus said, “See, I am going to attract her to make her male so that she too might become a living spirit that resembles you males. For every female that makes itself male will enter the kingdom of heavens.”

- [26] Okay ... Look at 24; I’m just picking out some sayings that are rather mysterious.

His disciples said, “Show us the place where you are, for we must seek it.” He said to them, “Whoever has ears should listen! There is light existing within a person of light. And it enlightens the whole world: if it does not enlighten, that person is darkness.”

- [27] The previous saying had this duality of male and female that was somehow significant in some mysterious way. This one shows us there’s also a duality, of concern to this author, of light and darkness. There’s dualisms, and especially a light/darkness dualism male/female dualism and a soul/body dualism; we’ve already seen that. There’s also this word that Layton translates as the “entirety” and some modern translations will just leave it—they’ll just transliterate the Greek that it’s from, pleroma. Pleroma is a Greek word that becomes important in some philosophy in the ancient world and some intellectual, and it just means “the all” or “the fullness.” It’s an abstract word meaning “full” or “fullness,” but it comes to be some kind of technical term that refers to, all of existence, or the fullness of being or think of German philosophy with fullness with—Being with a capital “B” or Existence with a capital “E.” So that word often occurs here, and when you see the word “entirety” in Layton’s translation he’s translated that word pleroma. Jesus said, and this is 67, “If anyone should become acquainted with the entirety [the pleroma] and should fall short, at all that person falls short utterly.” Several other places, saying 77 has another reference to that.

- [28] Notice we’ve already seen that this text does not take the kingdom of God as something existing in the future. In fact, this text is not at all eschatological. Remember we encountered this word in a previous lecture which just means something having to do with the end, eschaton in Greek meaning the end. This author is not eschatological. He doesn’t think

Christianity, he doesn't think Jesus' teachings are about the future at all, they're about now, they're about the present. There are several sayings in Thomas, unlike the sayings in the Gospels and the canon, that are not eschatological, they very much point to the present. There's also something else one of these—this author is concerned about something like integration.

[29] Look at saying 61:

Jesus said, "Two will repose on a couch: one will die, one will live." Salome said, "Who are you, O man? Like a stranger you have gotten up on my couch and you have eaten from my table." Jesus said to her, "It is I who come from that which is integrated [I come from that which is one; I come from that which is not divided] I was given some of the things of my Father."

[30] She is apparently—there's a lot of holes in the text where you see these dot-dot-dot's and that's showing that there are lacunae, that is, just holes in the actual document that we get this from, so there are gaps in the text. "I am your female disciple," she seems to say to him at some point and then eventually he seems to answer,

"Therefore I say that such a person once integrated will become full of light, but such a person once divided will become full of darkness."

[31] So there's a divided integrated dualism that's going on in this text also. The kingdom is invisible; I think I've already pointed this out. The idea is that the kingdom is not something you say, look it's over there, or look it's here.

[32] Look at 113, I've already read that, "The kingdom of the Father is spread out over the earth, but most people don't see it." Then look at saying 3, right at the very beginning:

Jesus said, "If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in heaven, then the birds of heaven will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. But the kingdom is inside of you and it is outside of you. When you become acquainted with yourselves ..."

[33] Now the word "acquainted" here means when you become really knowledgeable and it comes from—the Greek word here is *gnosis*, where we get the term Gnostics. That Greek word means *gnosis* but it doesn't—it means *gnosis* in some kinds—a technical way in these documents which is, it's not something you just know with your head, it's something you really, really know. To express that Professor Layton usually translates this word as "acquaintance" or "becoming acquainted with it."

When you become acquainted with yourselves, then you will be recognized. And you will understand that it is you who are children of the living father. But if you do not become acquainted with yourself [if you don't have *gnosis* of yourself] then you are in poverty, and it is you who are the poverty.

[34] What is all this going on? These things are things that sound a bit familiar, and we might be able to figure them out because these are themes. You can tell that they are themes of light and darkness, poor and riches, inside and out, soul and body, spirit and body, male and female, but there are some sayings that are just really inscrutable.

[35] Look at saying 7:

Jesus said. "Blessed is the lion that the human being will devour so that the lion becomes human. And cursed is the human being that the lion devours and the lion will become human."

[36] What does that mean? I have no clue, and that's really honest. Look at 15:

Jesus said, "When you [and here's a plural "you,"] see one who has not been born of woman, fall upon your faces and prostrate yourselves before that one: it is that one who is your father."

[37] Someone not born of women is your father. Look at 97, now you see aren't you glad that I didn't make you do an exegesis paper of these sayings?

Jesus said, "What the kingdom of the father resembles is a woman who is conveying a jar

full of meal. When she had traveled far along the road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled out after her along the road. She was not aware of the fact; she had not understood how to toil. When she reached home she put down the jar and found it empty.”

- [38] How profound, Jesus, she lost her meal and she found her jar empty when she got home. Look at 98 right below that:

Jesus said, “What the kingdom of the father resembles is a man who wanted to assassinate a member of court. At home he drew the dagger and stabbed it into the wall in order to know whether his hand would be firm. Next he murdered the member of court.”

- [39] That’s what the kingdom is like. Now you know exactly what the kingdom is like, right? Look at 105:

Jesus said, “Whoever is acquainted with the father and the mother will be called the offspring a prostitute.”

- [40] What’s going on here? This document has caused, and still causes, all kinds of debate among scholars. You could go online right now and you will see tons and tons, and tons of stuff written about the Gospel of Thomas. Some by real scholars and intelligent, wise people like me, although I’ve actually never written about the Gospel of Thomas because I don’t want to go get in that mess, but I have good scholarly friends who have published on the Gospel of Thomas and argue their theories, others by just absolute kooks who are using the Gospel of Thomas for all kind of experimental, spirituality, and religion, and mind stuff. I’m trying to watch my language. Then you’ll also have, even if you took very reputable scholars, you will have wide differences of opinion, and one of the big differences of opinion right now—when the Gospel of Thomas first became published people sort of talked about it as though this is a Gnostic gospel. It represents a form of Gnosticism, which I’ll explain in a moment. Other people have said, no, it’s not Gnostic, it doesn’t have all the main things that we look for; in fact, they’ve even said we shouldn’t even use this term Gnosticism anymore because it doesn’t refer to anything

we can actually locate in the ancient world. It refers to a whole bunch of different things, and nobody could come up with a good definition of Gnosticism or the Gnostic church. Scholars right now, some scholars will say, let’s get rid of the term entirely and call it something else, whatever it is that this thing is, others continue to use the term. Bart Ehrman, wrote your textbook, if you all noticed, he goes ahead and sort of takes the Gospel of Thomas as representing some kind of Gnosticism but maybe not all of whatever we call Gnosticism, and he admits that there is a big debate.

3. *Proto-orthodoxy and “Gnosticism”*

- [41] Now I’m going to—a little bit of terminology. I’ve already told you what the term Gnostic comes from this word gnosis, and the word gnostikos was used by some people in the ancient world to refer to themselves, but they didn’t necessarily mean by that they were in some kind of sect called Gnosticism. For example, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote around the year 200, a very famous early Christian scholar considered by later Christianity to be perfectly orthodox, he talked about Gnostic Christians and thought he was himself a “Gnostic Christian.” What he meant by that apparently was just that he was one of the more knowledgeable, he was one of the more wise Christians, he was in the know, and he seems also to have had an idea that there were two kinds of Christian knowledge. There’s public knowledge that all Christians have and then there’s a special kind of hidden knowledge, esoteric knowledge that only certain kinds of Christians have. This idea that you have esoteric knowledge would be called a Gnostic kind of notion. There are even orthodox Christians who might use the term Gnostic in the second century to refer even to themselves. That’s just what that word Gnostic often meant. They would have looked at weird to an ancient Greek speaker but it would have been understandable as simply “a knowing person.”

- [42] There are other terms though that I want to talk about. I’ve already I mentioned I believe the term proto-Orthodox. The word “orthodox” of course just means “right thinking,” “right opinion.” Ortho from Greek “right,” or “true,” or “correct,” or “straight,” doxa meaning “opinion,” or “thoughts”—and it comes to mean

“doctrine” too. The problem with using the word orthodox is that the opposite of orthodox is usually heresy. Eventually through different church councils in the fourth, and fifth, and sixth centuries what counted as Orthodox Christianity became more clearly defined, and then anything that wasn’t that could be labeled heretical Christianity, and it was even outlawed at different times in late antiquity. For example, the Nicene Creed, that proclaims that the doctrine of the Trinity becomes orthodox. Doctrines that say that the Trinity is not true or that there’s not the Holy Spirit and Jesus, and the Father are not orthodox, they’re heretical or sometimes you’ll see the term heterodox. Hetero just means “other,” so it’s not ortho, it’s other. Orthodox though—the problem is we can’t retroject that term easily back into the second century because in the second century there are tons of different Christians and tons of different churches that had many different views and they didn’t all agree.

[43] Some people had started experimenting with the doctrine of the Trinity but a lot of Christians wouldn’t have recognized the doctrine of the Trinity in the second century. Some people believe that Jesus was fully divine, other people believed, no, he was fully human but not divine, some people believed he was both, some people believed he was a mixture of both, some believed sometimes he was one, sometimes he was the other. We’ll come back to this issue of what did people believe Jesus was and that’s the doctrine of Christology. What do you believe about Christ? Right now I’m just going to tell you that we call Christians in the second century and the first century proto-orthodox because we know that calling them orthodox is an anachronistic in this time because there wasn’t two clearly delineable orthodox and heretical groups or churches. Proto just means “early” then or the “first,” so a lot of scholars, Bart Ehrman is one of them, uses this term proto-orthodox, and all it means is those Christians living in the first or second century whose views happen to win out eventually. They happen to hold views that would eventually be the winners in the fight between orthodoxy and heresy and be declared orthodox or correct Christianity. Proto-orthodox, there was no Christian running around in the second century calling himself a proto-orthodox Christian,

they didn’t know they were proto-Orthodox yet but their views eventually won out. These different terms will come over and over again, proto-orthodox just means someone who sort of had correct christological views, that is correct by later standards, but they held them before these standards had won out in the debate.

[44] Ancient Gnosticism, if you want to call it that, does not seem to have been one church. What I’m going to call Gnosticism is an intellectual movement that seems to have been around beginning in the second century certainly and becomes important through the second, third, and fourth centuries. It’s not a church or an institution in the sense that we doubt that you could have walked into say the town of Antioch and looked for the Gnostic church. It seems like the people who wrote these documents and collected these materials that we find in the Nag Hammadi text in the Gospel of Thomas, they seem to have been intellectuals who were impressed with Jesus, impressed with the Jewish scripture in a lot of cases, impressed with a lot of the teachings of Christianity, but they interpreted them through the eyes of a certain popular Platonism at the time. That is, they seemed to have been influenced by different philosophical views and also just different intellectual views.

[45] When they read the book of Genesis, for example, they would read the book of Genesis but read it as if they were reading it through the eyes of Plato’s Timaeus, the great platonic dialogue in which Plato puts forth his own sort of cosmology and his own view of the gods and the world. So some of their writings sound like they were reading basically good scripture but reading it through the eyes of certain kinds of philosophy. What we have come to call Gnosticism in the ancient world is a range of ideas that may have been actually embodied in particular people, or it may have been that some of these intellectuals were just playing around with ideas and writing about the books and having reading clubs, where they got together every Monday night and drank some beer and talked about their Gnostic ideas.

[46] Platonism itself might be called proto-Gnostic, that is, Gnosticism before Gnosticism. For example, in Platonism, especially of this time, you have a strong emphasis of a dualism of body and soul or body and spirit. In that

dualism, often the body or the materiality, the fleshly existence that harder matter of things becomes less good, sometimes even probably borderline evil in some people's thoughts, and spirit or the soul or the mind is the good thing. So you have a mind/body dualism, a body and soul dualism and often there's the deprecation of the body and a deprecation of matter as morally inferior. Now why would matter be considered inferior to non-material substance? Because what happens to your body eventually? You all have gorgeous bodies now, but eventually you're going to look like me, your hair's going to fall out, your ear's are going to get too big, your nose won't stop growing, and then eventually you'll even get beyond me and you'll die, and you'll rot, and you'll disappear. The body is material and the ancient thinkers all knew that matter passes away. Anything that is material is going to pass away and be destroyed and be gone, but things that are not material like ideas—the great thing about an idea is that it never need die. The spirit or the soul in platonic theory was superior to material stuff because—and it was the only thing that could live forever, be infinite.

[47] They also sometimes you see, especially in later Platonism, the idea that not only is the body temporary, not eternal and passing away, but the body is also a prison because your spirit, they believed, wants to get out of the body. Aren't you frustrated that you can't just escape your body and go off and go someplace else for a while and zoom out of your body and go to Argentina for the weekend? Not have to pay for airfare—the idea was that the body imprisons your spirit and your soul, and this comes to be a part of Platonism at the time. What scholars will call basic Gnosticism includes some basic themes that they hold in common.

[48] First, the world itself which is material is evil. Salvation, therefore, from the world, must be escaped from this physical world into something else. Gross materiality is not only temporary in some texts but even bad, it's evil. Salvation, therefore, must be the knowledge of how you, that is the real you, your brain—not your brain, your mind or your soul, or your spirit, not your body, that real you is this thing in this material body but salvation will be if it can learn how to escape the body and escape materiality. Salvation will come by knowledge

and that knowledge is a secret, not everybody knows it, so only a few people know it. The content of this knowledge is related to human origins and destination. So sometimes you get these elaborate myths developed in some of these texts. Let's say that the supreme, supreme, supreme, supreme god is in fact has no name, is not a particular thing, it's this thought, it's just thinking, it's just abstract thinking. That thinking thinks, well what does a thinking thing think? The thinking thinks thoughts. Those thoughts start becoming emanations out of the thinking, and then those emanations think and emanate, and those become lesser beings still. The different divine beings, there are lots of divine beings in the existing universe, and by thinking and being they emanate inferior forms of being after themselves. Eventually what happened is those inferior forms of being get less good and less like the most ultimate being.

[49] One of them, according to one myth, Sophia which means wisdom, it's a female name but it also means "wisdom." Sophia decides she wants to emanate, and she supposed to do that with a male consort because by this these beings have male and female versions of themselves, she's supposed to only emanate or procreate by doing so with her male consort. She decides she wants to be like the supreme god and be able to emanate on her own, so she puts out a being on her own. In other words, she sort of gives birth without needing a man, just to be on principle. Well, of course when you do that you end up with a monster. The being that came out of Sophia ended up being a clumsy, maybe evil god, all of these are divine beings, that god decided at some point he wanted to create things and so he didn't really do it very well, so he made our earth, he made the world as we know it.

[50] He made little human beings like you just out of dirt and clay, and that's why—we were all creation, not of the supreme God who would do nothing imperfect, but of some stumbling or evil, at least clumsy god, who made us. That explains why things go wrong. Why is it that my arthritis acts up all the time? Couldn't God have made a human body that didn't have arthritis? Well, that's because the supreme God didn't make this body, the evil clumsy god made the body. This happened—and so the world that we created, when you read in Genesis, it says God created the world, that's

not the highest God, that's some clumsy god down further on the hierarchy of divine beings in the universe. That god created what we are. Now what happened was at some point, either Sophia or some other beings, they got sorry for all us claylike mud people and somehow a little spark of the divine itself either fell down, or got cut up or put in our bodies, or God placed in our bodies, or blew it into our bodies, but at least some human beings, not all human beings, in fact human beings are in different categories. There's the really low human beings like undergraduates, then there are beings who are a little bit higher like graduate students, and then you have the supreme beings, Gnostics, like professors.

[51] The true Gnostics, it's not really like undergraduates and graduates, because some of you could be Gnostics. You would be the ones who really have a real spark in you, a spark of the divine. That spark of the divine wants to escape the mud body that it's trapped in, but you probably don't even know that you're really a spark trapped in a mud body until somebody comes along and tells you, and that's the job of the redeemer. That's what Jesus did: Jesus was a redeemer from the supreme God who comes in to find those people who have a spark of the divine in them, to blow on that spark, to get it going, and to get you to remember where you came from. You're not a mud body after all. The real you came from Godself, God's very self, the supreme God. The true message of Christianity, according to these guys, is to learn who you are, where you came from, to see if you're going to escape the body and get back to your true origin, that is, you will become one with God again. This was expressed in a poem by Theodotus, it went like this:

Who we were,
 what we have become,
 where we were,
 whither we were thrown,
 whither we are hastening,
 from what we are redeemed,
 what birth is,
 what rebirth is.

- [52] You answer the riddle, the poem riddle. "Who we were?" If you're a Gnostic who were you? Answer?
- [53] *Student:* Divine being.
- [54] *Professor Dale Martin:* Divine being, thank you. See, it's not hard. I'm not asking questions—I'm just trying—you will remember this better if you answer. What have you become? Mud, entrapped in a dead body, trapped in materiality. Where were you? Heaven, with the divine Father, with God?
- [55] *Professor Dale Martin:* "Whither we were thrown," where have you been thrown?
- [56] *Student:* Into the earth.
- [57] *Professor Dale Martin:* Into the earth, into the world, into materiality. Where are you hastening, where are you going in a hurry—in such a hurry?
- [58] *Student:* Back to the divine.
- [59] *Professor Dale Martin:* Back to the divine God. What are you redeemed from?
- [60] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [61] *Professor Dale Martin:* You're redeemed from Jesus?
- [62] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [63] *Professor Dale Martin:* The material world. You're redeemed from being embodied. "What is birth?" In this system what is birth?
- [64] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [65] *Professor Dale Martin:* Damnation, death. When you're born, your spark is entrapped in your body, that's not a good thing. You shouldn't be celebrating your birthday for crying out loud, that's like celebrating when you were thrown in prison. "What is rebirth?"
- [66] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [67] *Professor Dale Martin:* Death or learning your true self, learning that the true self won't die at all, so this learning is your rebirth. So the little poem is a riddle that contains these doctrines within itself. Here's a true self, the spark of life is trapped in an alien body with all its sensual

passions. Sex, therefore, sensual desire, erotic desire is a bad thing; it's an evil thing because that—you're just trying to trap more sparks into more mud bodies. You're just creating more sparks trapped in mud bodies when you have sex. Evil powers exist—all the different gods that were emanated, a bunch of those are evil, and they fly around the sky in the heavens and they try to keep the true self asleep or drunk in order to keep the evil world together. In other words, they don't want you to learn and they don't want your spark to be able to fly through. But really wise guys like me, we have the secrets and I can give you words, clues, secrets that if you know those things you can use these secrets to unlock the gates that lead back to God.

[68] This is kind of a common storyline or myth, there's the Hymn of the Pearl, that I mentioned before, which basically tells this—that a king of the east sends a royal prince, by way of the region of Mycenae, to Egypt in order to get a precious pearl, which is being guarded by a fierce dragon, it's like a videogame. The prince is poisoned, or actually drugged would be a better accurate translation, and made intoxicated by the Egyptians. But he, the prince, is awakened by a message from the king. He, the prince, takes the pearl by defeating the dragon with the name of his father and returns to the east where he puts on a robe of knowledge, gnosis, and ascends to the king's palace, entering the realm of peace and living happily forever after. It's a nice little fable about a prince who goes to a foreign land, finds the thing of value, defeats the evil purposes and goes back. So some people, therefore, have read the Gospel of Thomas as being precisely this kind of—that some of the sayings of the Gospel of Thomas makes sense if you presuppose these mythological structures and ideas.

[69] Again, some scholars would say, well you're just putting together as a modern scholar a bunch of disparate kind of text and ideas, and putting them in a system. Well, yes, that's where I disagree with some people because I want to say I believe that there's enough commonalities between enough documents that we can say that there were people who had these kinds of common ideas, and this basic structure that I've called the Gnostic structure, the Gnostic myth, certainly influenced ancient writings of some sort and there was some kinds

of Christianity that were heavily influenced by this.

[70] For example, look at—back to Thomas for our last closing minutes and let's read some of these sayings that sound puzzling to us, and if we assume this myth maybe we'll read them differently. Look at 21:

Mary said to Jesus, "What do your disciples resemble? He said, "What they resemble is children living in a plot of land that is not theirs. When the owners of the land come they will say, 'Surrender our land to us.' They, for their part stripped naked in their presence, in order to give it back to them, and they give them back their land."

[71] It could be an allegory. Who are the owners of the land? The evil powers that rule the earth. Who are the children, who are the real disciples of Jesus? Those people who know enough to say, when the earth is demanded of you, when your body is demanded of you by these evil powers, give it up, just give it up, it's not valuable anyway. Look at 24:

His disciples said, "Show us the place where you are, for we must seek it." He said to them, "Whoever has ears should listen! There is a light existing within a person of light, that it enlightens the whole world. If it does not enlighten, that person is darkness."

[72] Remember how I said some people are just dark people, they're just mud people, but some people have a light in them, and what it means to become a true Gnostic is to learn that you are one who has that light.

[73] Look at 37:

His disciples said, "When will you be shown forth to us, and when shall we behold you?" Jesus said, "When you strip naked without being ashamed and take your garments and put them under your feet like little children and tread upon them. Then you will see the child of the living and you will not be afraid."

[74] What's the Gnostic interpretation of that?

[75] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[76] *Professor Dale Martin:* Stripping the material world off yourself. When you strip your soul,

your spark of the body, when you realize that it's not the real you and you come to know the real you, that's what's going to happen. Look at 56:

Jesus said, "Whoever has become acquainted with the world has found a corpse, and the world is not worthy of the one who has found the corpse."

[77] The world is just a dead body, so several of these sayings, if you go back through the Gospel of Thomas with some of this background information I've given you of these ancient myths and ideas, some of these sayings seem to fit that myth and fit that notion.

[78] There are other things though about what I've just told you that you don't find in the Gospel of Thomas, and those are the things emphasized by people who say the Gospel of Thomas shouldn't be called Gnostic. For example, there's no mention in here of an evil god that creates the world, like you find in some of these Nag Hammadi texts. You have the Father, you have apparently the good guy, you have Jesus, but there's no emphasis on creation here as being a bad thing. Some people said that's one of the fundamental things about the Gnostic myths and it's not in the Gospel of Thomas, therefore the Gospel of Thomas is not Gnostic. There are also simply no strings of myths and evil gods' names which

you often find in the texts of Nag Hammadi. Some scholars would say the Gospel of Thomas may have some things in common with Platonism of the time, maybe something in common with certain Gnostics, but that itself is not. If you take the Gospel of Thomas as representing those ideas, then Jesus comes across—the Christology of the Gospel of Thomas becomes something different from the Christology of the other texts, or at least Matthew, Mark and Luke.

[79] As we'll see, the Gospel of John looks a lot more like this than the Synoptic Gospels did. Jesus becomes this redeemer figure, this Gnostic redeemer figure who comes into the world of materiality in order to find those who have sparks of life, to blow on their sparks of life, to transmit hidden knowledge to them, so they can get back. If you'll stay with me the rest of the semester, maybe I can give you those secrets and you can escape your mud bodies too. You have your sections this week, by tomorrow they'll be up online at the classes server, and the different instructions for the rest of the sections, and you'll need to look at that because at your section on Thursday or Friday you'll need to choose which day and which topic you'll do your paper for, so that will be online by tomorrow morning. Thank you, see you next time.

[80] [end of transcript]