

Being and Becoming Children of Light
A Comparison of *Thomas 50* and *John 12:35-36*
And their Respective Gospels

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A Thesis

In

The Department of Theological Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

(Theological Studies) at Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec
Canada

May 9, 2016

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Concordia University
School of graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: *Being and Becoming Children of Light*
A Comparison of *Thomas 50* and *John 12:35-36*
and their Respective Gospels

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Theological Studies)

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Abstract

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Mary Gedeon-Harvan

Scholars have postulated numerous theories about the *Gospel according to Thomas* and the *Gospel according to John* from a diachronic perspective on issues of provenance, dating and authorship. They have argued for the existence of community conflicts centered on bodily resurrection, soteriology and divine light indwelling human beings. Using *Logion 50* and *John 12:35-36* as a springboard, this thesis examines these gospels synchronically comparing how their respective genres and textual nuances unveil the distinct audiences of these ancient writings. It also explores how the texts themselves point to the different ways that the Thomasine and Johannine authors and their audiences related to Jesus and the (living) Father, their views on salvation and the heavenly kingdom, and their self-image as (potential) children of God/Light. The audiences' distinct viewpoints in turn required the texts to present the character of Jesus as executing differently his revelatory mission to each of them. Different views regarding the concepts of oneness and that of light and darkness are also examined. In *Thomas* oneness denotes singularity whereas in *John* it denotes unity. Light and darkness also symbolize different views in these gospels. In *Thomas* they represent gnosis versus ignorance while in *John* they take on a moral sense.

KEY WORDS: Gospel of Thomas; Thomas; Gospel of John; John; Jesus; Children; Kingdom; Revelation; Salvation; Gnosis; Faith, Determinism; Oneness; Unity; Light/Darkness.

Dedication

I dedicate my thesis first to the memory of my maternal grandmother, Mary Jadlovsy Kuruc. Although she remained with me only until I was twelve years old, she planted a tiny seed of faith into my heart and patiently showed me what it would take *to become* a child of God. Although I am now a four-time grandmother myself, I am still working on it.

I also dedicate this work to my thesis supervisor Dr. André Gagné who reawakened my curiosity about the *Gospel according to Thomas* and supported my interest in the *Gospel according to John*. Thank you, Dr. Gagné, for your patience and insights throughout this journey.

About the Author

My life, peppered by curiosity, imagination and aversion to boredom, has propelled me along diverse paths both real and imaginary. The only exceptional aspect of my meanderings has been and continues to be my travelling companion. Appearing in various guises (as a parent, relative, teacher, friend, or in his pure spirit form) he not only accompanies my every step, but encourages me to finish my course; then nudges me toward a new path of exploration and revelation. My maternal grandmother introduced me to Jesus before I could walk or talk. Neither has ever disappointed me.

Growing up, the dangers and punishments attached to heresy were drummed into me by Catholic priests and religious teachers. I dutifully avoided not only “heretical” teachings, but also the Bible which I had been persuaded was better left to *men of the cloth*. When I finally read God’s best seller, cover to cover, it was the *Gospel of John* that resonated with me. A fan of free will, I was thrilled to see Jesus in control of his destiny.

Years ago, a book entitled *The Other Bible* tapped me on the shoulder when it fell from a bookstore shelf. The index drew my eyes to *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and *The Gospel of Thomas*. Hastily skimming their pages, I was amazed at what these “gospels” claimed Jesus had said and done. Despite feeling like a soon-to-be-discovered heretic, I purchased the book. Guilt then led me to leave it on a shelf for several years.

My children grown, I enrolled into Concordia’s Theology Department to study women in the Church and *The Gospel of John*. Moments into the program Dr. André Gagné became my thesis supervisor. He pointed me toward a different path of seeking through the gospel of *Thomas* as well as *John* and so I dusted off *The Other Gospel*.

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Introduction

Being and Becoming Children of Light is my thesis title and theme. The theme takes shape from two sayings attributed to Jesus: *Gospel according to Thomas* 50¹ and *John* 12: 35-36.^{2,3}

In my thesis I (1) examine why in the context of the Greco-Roman world which marginalized children, Jesus singled them out as ideal models of those who populate his father's kingdom; (2) compare the parallel schemes of revelation found in *Thomas* and *John* and how the text itself – the words attributed to Jesus – brings to light the unique perspectives on salvation held by the distinct Christian audiences he addressed in these respective gospels as well as their understanding of Jesus, the living Father and themselves in relation to both; and (3) explore the impact, if any, these ancient texts might have on a modern-day reader.

1. Preamble for Pericopae under Study and their Respective Gospels

An overview of the gospels which contain my chosen pericopae may help situate them in their respective contexts. A gospel per Stephen Harris is a “literary category invented by the early Christian community.”⁴ The term stems from the Greek εὐαγγέλιον meaning good news. Gospel writers (evangelists) used originally oral stories about Jesus to write his biography. Modern research indicates that today's biographers try to compile an unbiased, inclusive and true-life portrait of their subject while evangelists, as Christian believers, put forward in writing

¹ Bentley Layton, ed., *Gos. Thom., Gos. Phil., Hyp. Arch. and Indexes. NHC II, 2-7* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), xiii.

² Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Barbara and Kurt Aland, eds. “ΚΑΤΑ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ,” *Novum Testamentum Graece* (7th ed.; Nördlingen, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001), 292.

³ The italicized words *Thomas* and *John* will refer to the respective gospels throughout this work.

⁴ Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible* (7th ed.; Boston, Mass.: McGraw Hill, 2007), 343.

“doctrinal confessions of faith in Jesus through biographical narratives (*John* 20:31).”⁵ According to Harris, the evangelists not only drew from a wide spectrum of Jesus traditions, they also skilfully mined those traditions to generate unique literary portraits of him that represented their community’s view of his “theological significance.”⁶

Both *John* and *Thomas* have been designated gospels yet each represents a unique genre. *John*, an overall *narrative*, tells Jesus’ life story through a series of sub-narratives shaped by straight narration, symbolic encounters between Jesus and various persons as well as his prayers and self-proclaiming “I am” monologues. *John* is the latest of the canonical gospels estimated to be written circa 100-120 C.E.⁷ *Thomas’ sayings-gospel* genre, likened to the hypothesized *Q* (*Quelle*), uses a *dialogue* format to convey its message. The Coptic version of *Thomas*, an unnumbered compilation of traditional sayings attributed to Jesus,⁸ was unearthed near Nag Hammadi, Upper Egypt, circa December 1945.⁹ A Greek version from which the Coptic is thought to have derived was likely being used in Egypt “as early as the second century.”¹⁰ Helmut Koester categorized the *Thomas* sayings into: “wisdom sayings (proverbs), parables, eschatological sayings (prophecies), and rules for the community.”¹¹ While safeguarding its original sequence, modern scholars divided *Thomas* into 114 *logia* to facilitate textual references.

⁵ Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, 343.

⁶ Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, 347.

⁷ John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler and Anthony D. York, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 217.

⁸ Helmut Koester, Introduction to *Gos. Thom. NHC II, 2 The Definitive Translation of the Gnostic Scriptures* (ed. James M. Robinson; trans. Thomas O. Lambdin; New York: Harper One, 1990), 124.

⁹ Marvin W. Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (rev. and updated trans. with introduction and notes by Marvin W. Meyer; interpretation by Harold Bloom; New York: Harper One, 1992), 1.

¹⁰ Koester, *Gos. Thom., NHC II, 2*, 124.

¹¹ Koester. *Gos. Thom., NHC II, 2*, 124.

At first the *logia* of the second tractate of Codex II of the *Nag Hammadi Library*¹² appear random; closer scrutiny reveals certain *logia* are clustered through concrete catchwords or comparable concepts.¹³ Although *Thomas* is not a narrative, its concept clusters parallel story threads in *John* “which link episodes together in the narrative chain.”¹⁴ The concept clusters and narrative threads tracked in this thesis focus on the Thomasine notion of *being* children of light/(living) Father through ΓNOCIC of self and the Johannine one of *becoming* children of Light/God through $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ in Jesus.

The distinct literary genre of each of these gospels raises the age-old question of how one compares apples and oranges. I propose that just as apples and oranges differ in appearance, flavour and nutritional components each is nonetheless a type of foodstuff which once consumed and digested, nourishes people. So too *Thomas* and *John* are both Christian writings, the words attributed to Jesus in dialogue and in narration respectively, words intended to spiritually nourish those who read and interiorize them.

2. *Status Quaestionis*

Speculating on the origins of the *Gospel according to Thomas* and the *Gospel according to John*, Gregory J. Riley and Elaine Pagels have postulated discord between the Johannine and Thomasine communities, discord they believe set in motion the composition of at least part of the Fourth Gospel. They see *John* as an overt reaction to particular heretical ideas conveyed in *Thomas*. This reaction, according to them, is what shaped *John's* overtly anti-Thomasine

¹² Meyer, *Gos. Thom.: Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, 1.

¹³ Meyer, *Gos. Thom.: Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, 6.

¹⁴ Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories* (trans. John Bowden. London: SCM Press, 1999), 32-33.

theological outlook.¹⁵ The term “heretical” is used here in the context of the evolving “proto-orthodoxy” articulated in *John*.¹⁶ April D. DeConick has also examined the *John–Thomas* connection on the community level. She claims that like other religious texts these gospels “address the particular needs of their respective communities and express special theological and soteriological positions.”¹⁷ The following synopses sketch what each of these researchers has written on this topic.

Riley targets a protracted early Christian debate about bodily resurrection, a concept rooted in the Semitic and Greco-Roman world. He first examines this notion in *Thomas* literature (*Gospel of Thomas*, *Book of Thomas* and *Acts of Thomas*). He then focuses on what he sees as a controversy over this issue between the closely related Christian communities represented in *Thomas* and *John*. For Riley, *John’s* story of Doubting Thomas clearly represents this controversy.¹⁸ Riley holds that although *Thomas* and *John* each articulated its own unique even divergent theology partly by adapting their common Synoptic legacy, the two gospels are nonetheless “much closer to each other in spirit than either is to the Synoptics.”¹⁹ He claims these gospels share certain ideas not found in the Synoptics and that they interpret them in a similar way, albeit dissimilar from the Synoptics. At certain points, Riley says, “*John* is a correction not of a lost Gnosis, but of ideas actually preserved in the *Gospel of Thomas*.”²⁰ He claims *Thomas* and *John* are in a reciprocal relationship highlighted in the Doubting Thomas pericope. He argues

¹⁵ Christopher W. Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?: Johannine Characterization and the Thomas Question*, (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2009), xx.

¹⁶ Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, xx Footnote 6.

¹⁷ April D. DeConick, “John Rivals Thomas: From Community Conflict to Gospel Narrative” in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 303.

¹⁸ Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995), 2.

¹⁹ Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 3.

²⁰ Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 3.

that the author of *John* “fashioned” the character of Doubting Thomas to advance his theological agenda to eliminate doubt about the physical resurrection of Jesus.²¹

In *John*, the apostle Thomas believes only after he has seen and touched Jesus’ wounds. Yet in this gospel Jesus is shown to bless those who believe not because of knowledge gained by means of the physical senses but through faith alone. Riley claims the Church Fathers relied on the Doubting Thomas story in order to support bodily resurrection and Christ’s deity; to fight Docetism; and to preach the spiritual benefits of believing without seeing. Other modern interpreters have also concluded that this pericope was formulated to serve as proof of one or several of these concepts.²² Riley says many have understood the character of Doubting Thomas as an archetype symbolizing aspects of spirituality relevant beyond Jesus’ day. He believes that *John* undoubtedly uses this character to address and reach his own late first-century community, people who had not seen Jesus in person but came to believe in him through a succession of witnesses. By depicting Jesus as having blessed those who did not see but believed; the author of *John* suggests to his audience/community that they stood to receive that very blessing simply by believing in Jesus. Moreover, through the homilies of Jesus’ successors, Jesus’ blessing could be extended to and bestowed upon Christians in other communities and times.

DeConick too postulates a real conflict between the Johannine and Thomasine communities centered, however, on soteriology. In a 1997 article she discusses research of scholars on the *Gospel of John* in relation to early Jewish mysticism. She singles out passages she believes were written to polemicize against mystics claiming knowledge of God apart from Jesus’ revelation, i.e. “Jewish visionaries seeking salvation through heavenly ascent journeys and visual

²¹ Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 102.

²² Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 100.

encounters with God;” or simply to discourage adepts from claiming to have the visionary abilities of Moses.²³ She says this research indicates the author of *John* “was in dispute with mystical pre-mortem ascent theology.”²⁴

For DeConick the gospels of *Thomas* and *John* are community documents. As such, she argues in another article (“John Rivals Thomas”) that each of these gospels has its own *Sitz im Leben*, geographical location, history and religious traditions and that each was written in order to polemicize, persuade and propagate a particular belief system. Using a theoretical model she calls traditio-rhetorical criticism, DeConick endeavours to reconstruct how communities exchanged and modified their religious traditions by discussing, evaluating and textualizing them, thereby creating a new ideology. She proposes that *John’s* author likely developed an ideology intended to resolve an existing conflict with an opposing ideology not unlike that put forth by the author of *Thomas*.²⁵

Pagels also believes *Thomas* and *John* addressed diverse groups which met and thrashed out their respective views as to who Jesus is and what is the “good news” about him.²⁶ Pagels sees similarities in *Thomas* and *John’s* respective accounts of what Jesus taught privately. Unlike the Synoptics which depict Jesus as warning people of the coming *end times*, both *John* and *Thomas* indicate that he directed his disciples toward the beginning of time – *Thomas* 18 and the *Genesis* 1 creation account in *John*. Both gospels identify Jesus with the divine light that came into being “in the beginning” (*Thomas* 50; *John* 1:1-5). Both claim this primordial light links Jesus with the

²³ April D. DeConick, “Blessed Are Those Who Have Not Seen” (JN 20:29): Johannine Dramatization of an Early Christian Discourse” in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 SBL Commemoration* (ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire; NHMS 44, Leiden: Brill, 1997): 381.

²⁴ DeConick, “Blessed Are Those Who Have Not Seen,” 382.

²⁵ DeConick, “John Rivals Thomas,” 305.

²⁶ Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York, Random House, 1998), 38.

entire universe, since everything came into being through φῶς or λογός. The Synoptics represent Jesus as God's human agent, *John* and *Thomas* as God's own light in human shape.

Pagels' research into the *Gospel of John*, and that of other scholars, has unveiled not only the teaching this gospel supports but also that which it opposes. Its author openly admits to having written about Jesus' signs (at least a small portion of them) "so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-1). The teaching which the author of *John* opposes is found in *Thomas*. It asserts "that God's light shines not only in Jesus, but potentially at least, in everyone."²⁷ Pagels claims that *Thomas* to some extent was written to topple the Johannine orthodox view of Jesus' uniqueness in terms of embodying divine light (*John* 8:12, 9:5), a view later upheld by western Christian churches. This view opposes that found in *Thomas* wherein Jesus' sayings suggest that divine light already exists in every individual and that an individual's conscious awareness of that fact grants him/her the potential to know God as his/her Father.²⁸ Rather than urging its audience to believe in Jesus, as does *John*, *Thomas* urges each individual to seek to know God through his/her own divinely given capacity as one created in God's divine image. Pagels claims this Thomasine view expressed what a thousand years later "would become a central theme of Jewish – and later Christian – mysticism: that the 'image of God' is hidden within everyone, although most people remain unaware of its presence."²⁹ Hence, potentially complementary interpretations of God's presence on earth became rival ones.

John's prevailing views shaped Christian thought and provided later Christians with a basis for a unified church. *Thomas's* emphasis on the individual's search for God did not. Once

²⁷ Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 34.

²⁸ Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 34.

²⁹ Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 41.

the New Testament canon was formed, Pagels says, *John's* depiction of Jesus dominated and defined Christian teaching. Adherents to the New Testament Canon denounced the teaching found in *Thomas* as well as numerous other writings they designated “secret and illegitimate” and urged believers to reject such teaching as *heresy*.³⁰ Perhaps the adage of the ancient story-teller Aesop, “united we stand, divided we fall” may be applied respectively to the community-oriented Johannine Christians and Thomasine Christians who focused on the individual’s self-knowledge. The second group eventually disappeared almost entirely.

The preceding three authors have examined *John* and *Thomas* through the lens of community rivalry. Riley focused on the question of bodily resurrection; DeConick on the question of mystical soteriology; and Pagels on the question of humanity possessing the divine *light*. Christopher W. Skinner analyzes what he calls the “community-conflict hypotheses” of these authors in his book, *John and Thomas —Gospels in Conflict?* He pursues the recent trend that claims *John* was written in response to the theology of *Thomas*. Skinner bases his theories about *Thomas* and *John* on the scholarship of Helmut Koester as he explores the work of Riley and Pagels, two of Koester’s former students, as well as that of DeConick. He says all three of these scholars rely on *John's* Doubting Thomas pericope and the negative characterization of the apostle Thomas therein to further their specific arguments. After analyzing in *John* not only the character of Thomas but that of other *uncomprehending* disciples and individuals, Skinner concludes the author consistently uses characterization as a device to expand the plot and provide Jesus with opportunities to speak with authority to his Johannine audience.³¹ He says *John's* author expressly portrays all *uncomprehending* characters as foils for Jesus. These characters drive events in a consistent pattern: “(1) a statement or action by Jesus, (2) a misunderstanding

³⁰ Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 34, 41.

³¹ Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, xxii.

from the character in question, (3) a clarification by Jesus through explanation, action, or both.”³² He adds that the implied reader’s knowledge of the prologue informs and accentuates the given character’s misunderstanding. The theological purpose behind *John’s* uncomprehending characters is to delineate Jesus’ true identity as the Son of God who came from above, his mission to reveal the Father and that on the cross.

Given the literary and theological functions of *John’s* uncomprehending characters, Skinner claims the community-conflict hypothesis fails, first, because of the relative unimportance of Thomas “in the overall narrative scheme” of *John’s* story; and second because the story contains *many* similarly uncomprehending characters.³³ He says the methodology of these three scholars exaggerates the meaning of one minor character which leads to a narrow reading of the Johannine story precluding it from relating “anything affirmative, declarative, or genuinely didactic to the Johannine reader.”³⁴

Skinner opts to study the *Gospel of John* as an independent narrative rather than gleaning its text for elements to expand theories about early intra-Christian relationships. While his study has not solved the larger questions concerning the relationship of these two gospels, Skinner believes “the realization of literary trends and theological emphases in the Fourth Gospel raises serious problems for the community-conflict hypothesis.”³⁵

The crux of Jesus’ revelation in *Thomas* and *John* is that it is children who inherit God’s kingdom. In his article, “‘Becoming a Child’ in the *Gospel of Thomas*” Howard C. Kee says the Synoptic tradition concerning becoming a child so as to enter God’s kingdom is coupled in the

³² Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, 228.

³³ Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, 231.

³⁴ Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, 232.

³⁵ Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, 233.

Gospel of Thomas with the command to become a single one. This prevalent *Thomas* motif has no Synoptic parallel.³⁶ Kee refers to an article by A.F.J. Klijn, wherein he says the notion of becoming a single one comes out of Jewish speculation about Adam.³⁷ According to Klijn, the expression “ΟΥΑ ΟΥΩΤ” or “single one” corresponds to the elect, i.e. the ones who are saved.³⁸ The original man/Adam was a “single one” but became two by splitting into male and female. He must revert to his original state of oneness. Klijn examines this notion in *Logia* 4, 11, 16, 22, 23, 49, 75 and 106.³⁹ The theology of *Thomas* and its soteriological message then is that one must be/become a child, i.e. return to one’s beginning, one’s original state of asexual oneness in order to enter God’s kingdom. According to Jewish scholars, Adam, created in God’s own image, in his original pre-fall state was clothed with light/glory.⁴⁰ After his fall, Adam was stripped of his garment of light/glory and clothed with garments of skin, fleshly garments analogous to the human body.⁴¹ Kee says the link “between becoming as a child and returning to the primordial state of innocence is...clearly implied in *Logion* 37.”⁴² He refers to Clement of Alexandria who attributes a different version of this saying to the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, “When you tread upon the garment of shame, and when the two become one and the male with the female become neither male nor female.”⁴³ Clement used the saying during a dispute with an opponent concerning issues of sexuality.⁴⁴ Kee sees a twofold purpose in such non-canonical sayings that link children and the stripping off of garments. First is the presupposition that children do not experience self-consciousness or guilt with respect to nakedness because they are free from

³⁶ Howard C. Kee, “‘Becoming a Child’ in the *Gospel of Thomas*,” *JBL* 82.3 (September 1963): 307.

³⁷ Kee, “Becoming a Child,” 308.

³⁸ A. J. F. Klijn, “The ‘Single One’ in the *Gospel of Thomas*,” *JBL* 81.3 (September 1962): 272.

³⁹ Klijn, “Single One,” 271.

⁴⁰ Klijn, “Single One,” 273.

⁴¹ Klijn, “Single One,” 274.

⁴² Kee, “‘Becoming a Child’,” 309.

⁴³ Kee, “‘Becoming a Child’,” 309-10.

⁴⁴ Kee, “‘Becoming a Child’,” 310.

sexual urges and thus able to remove their clothing without shame. Second, the idea of garment removal as signifying innocence is a reversal of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve donning clothing when they become aware of their guilt. “The sign of their guilt will be reversed in the moment of redemption, when the disciple, having become a child, strips off his clothing.”⁴⁵

The stripping off of garments is not a literal appeal for nudity, says Kee, nor does it represent mere asceticism or sexual abstinence common among Encratites. It implies a “religious transformation of the individual,” so that he becomes a child of God and heir to God’s kingdom. This transformation is not eschatological, but rather occurs at the moment when the individual-turned-child “knows the kingdom” as per *Logion* 46. Kee analyses other *logia* containing the theme of the child or children. What the child represents, in effect, is the pre-fall Adamic state of asexual innocence.⁴⁶ In a review of *Logion* 22, André Gagné says : “La figure de l’enfant dans la première section du *logion* (22, 1-3) représente, dans ce cas-ci, un retour à la condition prélapsarianiste où l’homme créé à l’image de Dieu était en communion harmonieuse avec le créateur.”⁴⁷ In his research Gagné discovered that while the work of some scholars reveals an influence by the myth of origins that of others indicates that the *Sitz im Leben* of this *logion* is a baptismal liturgy. Gagné claims that the action of “suckling” in *Logion* 22 is very important in that it illustrates the close relationship between Jesus and his disciples. I see in the action of suckling the taking in of Jesus’ teaching, i.e. drinking “from the bubbling spring which I [Jesus] have measured out.” (*Logion* 13) The “milk” which the suckling babes receive will never defile them (Cf. *Logion* 14, “For what goes into your mouth will not defile you, but that which issues

⁴⁵ Kee, “‘Becoming a Child,’” 310.

⁴⁶ Kee, “‘Becoming a Child,’” 311.

⁴⁷ André Gagné. “Lire un apocryphe en synchronie. Analyse structurelle et intratextuelle du *logion* 22 de l’Évangile selon Thomas” in *En marge du canon: Études sur les écrits apocryphes juifs et chrétiens* (eds. André Gagné and Jean-François Racine. Paris, France: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2012), 228.

from your mouth – it is that which will defile you.”). Although the context for these words in *Logion* 14 is a different one, nonetheless, I understand the essence of *Thomas* to be such that nuances of meaning may be found in every part of each saying and may be related to expand the meaning of others. Gagné’s structural analysis of *Logion* 22 reveals the intricate fashioning of this saying and the emphases and meaning created by it.

3. Hypothesis and Methodology

The preceding scholars shed some light on the question of *being/becoming* a child of God and what that meant in Thomasine and Johannine circles. What better humanly comprehensible example of an innocent asexual being is there than a small child who while bearing the outward/physical signs of gender is oblivious to them hence mentally and spiritually asexual and innocent. It is possible that such a “singular” innocence is what prompted Jesus to single out children as models for those who would populate his Father’s kingdom. I examine this theme of innocence (Chapter I) with a historical look at children in antiquity through a review of selected passages from Church Fathers, Greco-Roman philosophers and other early writers. This mosaic depicts the perception of children and their lived reality in Antiquity. The brief montage offers the reader a glimpse into the world behind the text; it provides plausible reasons why the authors of these gospels have Jesus hold little children up as ideal models for citizens of heaven.

I have reviewed briefly how Riley, DeConick, Pagels and Skinner pinpointed community disagreements as the focal point of their research on *John* and *Thomas*. Given the nature of human beings, I have no doubt such differences of opinion occurred. However, as I can provide no proof of disputes occurring in Antiquity nor verify the “real words” of the historical Jesus about children as models of future citizens of heaven, I approach these gospels through the only

thing I do have, the text before me. This synchronic aspect of my research brings to the foreground the unique perspectives and writing styles used by the authors to express their individual points of view.

Using my own schema of inversed triangles as a guide, starting from the bottom and moving upward, I explore briefly the theme of oneness (singularity) in *Thomas* versus unity in *John* (Chapter II). This helps unveil the audiences of these gospels and their self-identity. I glean words, expressions and nuances from *Thomas* and *John* that emphasize the spiritual versus the material in the respective addressees of these gospels (i.e. the [prospective] children); detachment versus responsiveness in Jesus; and the inaccessibility versus the immediacy of the (living) Father. Divergent characterizations of these three characters (children, Jesus, [living] Father) point to different perspectives on how ancient audiences viewed themselves in relation to salvation, to Jesus, to the (living) Father and his kingdom. A textual comparison of my chosen pericopae using a literary lens will expose the tone set by the words of these gospels that brings their characters to life.

Moving up the triangles, I compare Jesus' role as heavenly Revealer in these gospels and the content of his revelation in each. With the help of narrative critical tools I explore the parallel plot structures of *Thomas* and *John* each of which ends in my chosen pericopae each situated approximately mid-way through its gospel. I summarize/illustrate the plot or *program of revelation* in each gospel in a version of the Quinary Scheme. This scheme, which gets its name from the figure five in Latin, illustrates the five stages which typically constitute a plot and according to Daniel Marguerat and Ivan Bourquin, has "become established as the canonical model by which any plot can be measured."⁴⁸ The distinct genres of *John* and *Thomas* require that

⁴⁸ Marguerat and Bourquin, 43.

Jesus execute his role as heavenly Revealer differently in each. *John* as a narrative gospel relates the story of Jesus' ministry, foreshadowing his crucifixion, death and resurrection played out after my chosen pericope in Chapter 12. Its overall focus is on Jesus. *Thomas* contains very little narrative material about Jesus; rather as a sayings gospel it puts forth *logia* wherein Jesus gives short teachings or revelations in answer to overt or subtly implied questions from his disciples. Its focus is on the disciple/seeker/reader, i.e. the individual "one," and takes shape as a dialogue. Despite the dialogue format of *Thomas*, Jesus' revelation and the disciples' reception and understanding of it or lack thereof may still be plotted using the Quinary Scheme. The catchwords which link various *Thomas logia* together can uncover patterns. These correlations clarify not only the *logia* tied together in this way but also serve to present a more composite representation of the gospel as a whole.

There are differences of opinion regarding such linking of ideas. In a 1994 paper, Stevan L. Davies argued that *Thomas*' "scattering of proverbs, parables, metaphysical claims, chreiai, mystagogic obscurities, and enigmatic sentences bound together by their introductory 'Jesus said' ... do not come together to communicate a coherent whole."⁴⁹ André Gagné proposes that the "sequence of statements and groups of statements" in *Thomas* do indeed communicate meaning albeit different from that found in other gospel sayings or wisdom books.⁵⁰ Gagné's arguments and analyses of *Logia* 49-50 help to explain and develop the connections I have detected in *Thomas*. Different inclusions formed by linked *logia* design this gospel in such a way that the following of particular catchwords steer the reader toward different avenues of investigation. This

⁴⁹ Steven L. Davies. A paper delivered to the *Gospel of Thomas* Consultation at the Annual Convention of the Society for Biblical Literature 1994 as reproduced in *The Gospel of Thomas and Early Christian Wisdom*. California: Bardic Press, 2005), 149.

⁵⁰ André Gagné. "Structure and Meaning in *Gos. Thom.* 49-54: An Erotapokritic Teaching on Identity and Eschatology" in *The Apocryphal Gospels with the Context of Early Christian Theology* (ed. Jens Schröter. Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 530-31.

calls to mind the construct of choosing your own ending to a piece of fiction. In *Thomas* only two endings are ultimately possible, being children of light and the elect of the living Father or not, contingent upon one's self-knowledge or lack thereof. The idea of choosing your ending implies audience participation, hence the narrative critical approach of reader-response criticism which I will tackle in Chapter III.

John too employs similar although less overt patterns or threads wherein he links various words or ideas that work to form a narrative sequence. Let us follow a few of the links made through children either explicitly or through inference: children born of flesh and blood who have no faith and reject the φῶς/λόγος are contrasted with children born of God (1:13); birth from above (inferring a new child or childlikeness) through water and Spirit can help one gain access to the kingdom of God (3:5); a child's life is sustained through the faith of his father, a royal official (4:50-51); it is specified that it is a *boy* (i.e. a child) who *possesses and shares* the five barley loaves and two fish used by Jesus to feed the multitude (6:9); unbelieving Jews cling to legitimacy by representing themselves as Abraham's children (8:39) however, Jesus calls those unbelieving Jews children of the devil (8:44); Jesus is to die in order "to gather into one the dispersed children of God" [the crowd/all people] (11:52); Jesus addresses his disciples as "little children" and commands them to love one another (13:33); Jesus' children (his disciples) still have no fish and need the resurrected Jesus to direct them as to where to cast their net (21:5). Through these "child" links alone we can recreate within this text Jesus' entire mission and its outcome.

From the outset of academic study of *Thomas*, various scholars assigned this gospel a Gnostic⁵¹ perspective based mainly “on the fact that *Thomas* was found amongst overtly Gnostic texts.”⁵² While true, this alone does not support the leap to Gnostic provenance. Although modern usage of the term Gnosticism/Gnostic differs within various disciplines and in its connection to various religious and other movements,⁵³ for the most part it is being employed herein in its most basic sense, i.e. as a knowledge-based salvation doctrine (versus a faith-based one). Gnostic threads do emerge in both *Thomas* and *John* albeit from different perspectives that present *Thomas* as assimilating Gnostic notions and *John* as resisting them. According to Bentley Layton, the first of several features, and a distinguishing mark, of a Gnostic scripture is “a complex and distinctive myth of origins.”⁵⁴ Second, Layton claims this myth promotes “a strong sense of group identity” which is supported by “genealogies and by psychological analysis of humanity, gnostic and non-gnostic.”⁵⁵ Third, evidence shows that these in-groups often use “a special jargon or in-group language,” some of which is at times absent from other ancient Christianity writings.⁵⁶ Fourth, a Gnostic baptismal ritual may have served as an initiation right as did non-Gnostic baptism. The Gnostic ritual mentions the sacramental “five seals” and their heavenly prototype” but does not elucidate their meaning.⁵⁷ These various pseudepigraphic writings omit data concerning the sect’s organization and daily life.

⁵¹ There are many ways to understand the terms *Gnostic*, *gnosis* and *Gnosticism*, but for my purposes, I will adopt Antti Marjanen’s typology where one can understand a text to be “Gnostic” if it refers to an “evil or ignorant world creator(s) separate from the highest divinity,” and to the idea that “the human soul or spirit originates from a transcendental world and, having become aware of that has the potential of returning there after life in this world.”; see A. Marjanen, “Gnosticism,” in *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (ed. S.A. Harvey and D.G. Hunter, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 210-11.

⁵² Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, 2.

⁵³ Disciplines such as “philosophy, literary studies, politics, and psychology” and connections “with Buddhism, nihilism, and modern movements such as progressivism, positivism, Hegelianism, and Marxism. Karen L. King. *What is Gnosticism?*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 5.

⁵⁴ Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (The Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 9.

⁵⁵ Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 9.

⁵⁶ Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 12.

⁵⁷ Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 12.

I concede that *Thomas* does not contain the elaborate myths and other characteristics that would qualify it as a fully Gnostic writing nor does it expose special jargon or in-group language. Nonetheless one might glean from its text a “sense of group identity” in its focus on those who come to know themselves thereby becoming known (*Logion 3*), in other words becoming identified as a distinct group; as well as in the “group” one could say is formed by “those who seek” (*Logion 3*) and especially those who attain self-knowledge and the realization that “it is they who “are the children of the living father” (*Logion 3*). Early Christianity clearly is made up of various sects, each with its own variations of oral and written traditions and/or myths as seen in the teachings of diverse Gnostic groups, e.g. Valentinians, Sethians, Cainites, Ophites, to name a few. In my opinion, those traditions and/or myths are the trimmings not the main ingredient of Gnosticism which I believe to be **gnostic**.⁵⁸ It is intriguing that *Thomas*, a text found among a collection of Gnostic writings is now considered by many to be non-Gnostic simply because it lacks the elaborate myth typically associated with Gnostic writings. Even more fascinating is that the canonical *Gospel according to John* comes very close to expressing just such an otherworldly myth in its prologue which speaks of a netherworld located “in the beginning.” This otherworldly location where the Father and Jesus dwell evokes the Gnostic pleroma, the dwelling place of the Gnostic supreme unknowable God. This netherworld (which in *Thomas* houses a virtually unknown and unknowable God, the living Father) houses “in the beginning” a God/Father who becomes known through Jesus.

In these two gospels, a person’s initial state, that of “being” or that of having the potential of “becoming” a child of God distinguishes his/her perspective on salvation. It is important to note that early Christianities, regardless of their viewpoints on salvation were nonetheless

⁵⁸ N. Clayton Croy, *A Primer of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 24, 220.

Christian. Gnostic Christians shared much in common with non-Gnostic Christians, e.g. certain scriptures, common *Christian* in-group language, theological traditions, and an ascetic life style. Orthodox, Gnostic and other early Christian sects generated new scriptures and ascribed them to esteemed religious personages of the past.⁵⁹

Notwithstanding their Christian core, different perspectives on salvation did not go unnoticed in early Christianity. They were spotlighted to prevent people from falling into error. Early Church Fathers labelled people with whom they disagreed. Such labelling was deemed imperative especially between groups that were remarkably similar so that people did not confuse one group with another. In Irenaeus' day the term heresy conveyed a neutral sense not necessarily a derogatory one. The Greek word *haerêsis* means "school of thought."⁶⁰ It was only much later that the expression was used pejoratively. In his commentary on *John*, Raymond E. Brown quotes J. Munck as saying that Gnosticism is "a scientific term that has no generally accepted scientific definition." That being said, he acknowledges distinctly recognizable "common patterns in developed Gnosticism,"⁶¹ such as: "ontological dualism; intermediary beings between God and man; the agency of these beings in producing the evil, material world; the soul as a divine spark imprisoned in matter; the necessity of knowledge gained through revelation in order to free the soul and lead it to light; the numerical limitation of those capable of receiving this revelation; the saving revealer."⁶² While neither *Thomas* nor *John* contain all of these patterns, each gives evidence of at least a few. In *Thomas* we find evidence of ontological dualism⁶³, e.g. above-

⁵⁹ Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 12.

⁶⁰ Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 9.

⁶¹ Raymond E. Brown, S.S., ed. "The Gospel According to John," (i-xii) in *The Anchor Bible* (intro., trans. and notes by Raymond E. Brown, S.S. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), LIII.

⁶² Brown, "The Gospel According to John," (i-xii) LIII.

⁶³ The instances of dualism in *John* are ethical rather than metaphysical, e.g. light-darkness (8:12); spiritual blindness-sight (9:38-39); good-evil (8:42-44); as well as below-above (8:23). In *John*, the path to salvation is to

below; inside-outside; male-female (*Logion 22*) and perhaps even in the “twinship” of the disciple Thomas; the idea of the soul as a divine spark locked away inside a human prison (*Logion 3*); the need to attain revealed knowledge so as to liberate the soul and lead it to the Light (*Logia 3, 21, 37*); the fact that only those who are children or child-like will enter the kingdom (*Logia 21, 22*); and the saving revealer in the person of Jesus. It appears in *Thomas* that the number of those who receive saving divine revelation can be calculated by the number of those who find “the interpretation of these sayings.” (*Logion 1*) Seeking alone is not enough in *Thomas*, the individual is responsible to seek until he/she finds.

The different soteriological perspectives of these gospels indicate that salvation in *Thomas* is knowledge-based and realized in-the-now; while in *John* it is faith-based and realizable in heaven solely through faith in Jesus. PHEME PERKINS says, “The Gospel (*John*) affirms that whatever a person’s understanding of salvation, that expectation is fulfilled (and corrected) by the unique revelation of God in Jesus.”⁶⁴ Jesus is shown to execute differently his role as Revealer in each of these gospels. In *Thomas*, his revelation is person-centered whereas in *John* it is Jesus-centered. In *Thomas*, Jesus reveals to his disciples *their* roots (the kingdom – *Logion 49*), *their* place of origin (the light - *Logion 50*), *their* mission (to know themselves – *Logion 3*), and *their* ultimate destination (the in-the-now kingdom – *Logion 49*). Jesus urges them toward introspection, i.e. turning inward in the interest of gaining self-knowledge. In *John*, Jesus reveals to all people, *his* identity as Son of God – (2:16, 3:17-18) and as Son of Man (1:51, 3:17-18); *his* relationship with his Father who loves Jesus and entrusts him with “all things” (3: 35), *his*

become a child of God by accepting and believing in Jesus (1:12). In *John* too Jesus takes on the role of the heavenly Revealer. *John* proclaims an inclusive salvation scheme as opposed to the exclusive one found in *Thomas*.

⁶⁴ PHEME PERKINS, “The Gospel According to John” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), 944.

mission to testify to his Father (3:12-13) and save the world through that testimony and the cross (3:14) *his* ultimate destination [return to the father (16:5, 28; 20:17)]. In *Thomas* Jesus' mission is to direct his audience to actively seek self-knowledge; in *John* it is to direct his audience to accept and believe his teachings about himself and his relationship to the Father.

Chapter I Children in Antiquity – Real and Symbolic

1.1 Jesus as Son/Child of God/Father in *John* and of living Father in *Thomas*

On an ancient stage which virtually ignored children as it did all those who existed on the fringes of society, Jesus compared the future citizens of heaven to little children. He did this in both the canonical *Gospel according to John* and the apocryphal *Gospel according to Thomas*.

John's author substantiates this notion by informing us Jesus himself is God's son, begotten of the Father. In *John* we hear about Jesus' relationship with his Father (1:14, 18) and by extension the potential father-child relationship of believers with his Father (1:12). Jesus relates how he and the Father work together (5:17, 19, 21; 8:16); how his Father shows Jesus what he himself is doing (5:20); how the Father entrusts Jesus with specific tasks, e.g. executing judgment (5:22, 27); how accepting the Father is contingent on first accepting his Son and emissary, Jesus, (5:23; 15:24); about his oneness with the Father and the believer's oneness with him through Jesus (14:20-24).

In *Thomas*, Jesus makes only three clear references to the living Father. In *Logion 3* he tells his disciples that when they come to know themselves they will realize it is they who are the children/sons⁶⁵ of the living Father. He speaks of their pre-existent (and perhaps dormant) relationship with the Father through self-knowledge. Jesus admits his sonship with the living one in *Logion 37*. *Logion 50* shows Jesus revealing to the disciples their relationship to the living Father as his elect (chosen). There is one other reference to "the living one" in *Logion 111*: "And

⁶⁵ Joaquim Azevedo and Edno José Almeida., eds. *A Simplified Coptic Dictionary: Sahidic Dialect* CePLiB Publication Series: Tools for Exegesis Number 1 (Cachoeira, Brazil: CePLiB, 2001), 132. The Coptic **ⲛⲱⲏⲣⲉ** is also translated as "children."

the one who lives from the living one will not see death.” However, since the Incipit of *Thomas* also refers to Jesus as “the living Jesus”, it is not entirely clear in *Logion* 111 which “living one” is denoted.

It is evident that the emphasis in *Thomas* is not on the living Father but rather on the child – the seeker of **ΓΝΩΣΙΣ**. Before considering Jesus’ esteem for little children, let us review the status and symbolism of children in early Christian families and communities.

1.2 Real Children’s Lived Reality in Antiquity

Most children poor and rich alike enjoyed dubious *social status* in the first three centuries. Regarded as devoid of *λόγος* (reason), children had no rights, no say and were usually classed with women, slaves and the aged.

In an article, Judith M. Gundry-Volf points out two divergent attitudes toward children that existed in the first-century Greco-Roman world. She says ancient letters and funerary inscriptions provide evidence that parents, on the whole, loved and enjoyed their children; they valued them as essential contributors to the family’s economic survival and welfare and as heirs who would promulgate their families. The state too regarded children as vital to the economy, to culture and to the military. Nonetheless, both family and state held a negative view of *childhood* as an immature state to be outgrown. Aside from the resurgence of interest in children in Hellenism by poets, painters, sculptors, and the rich – all of whom were fascinated by children and their antics for their own pleasure – people viewed children as deficient and not yet fully human. Their standard of measurement for evaluating children “was the free adult male Roman

citizen.”⁶⁶ This adult standard portrayed children as *physically* small, underdeveloped and vulnerable; and *as mentally* deficient and ignorant, speaking nonsense and failing to think and plan rationally. Their capricious, foolish, and quarrelsome nature indicated they lacked the superlative Roman virtue of reason which precluded their involvement in the rational world of Roman citizens. Similar views were held by thinkers influenced by Stoicism, for example Marcus Aurelius and Seneca saw children as symbols of irrationality because they were incapable of philosophic reasoning and at best, only could learn and repeat proverbs by rote. They too viewed children as mentally weak with respect to lacking λόγος, and as physically weak due to their small stature and their susceptibility to sickness. The Romans saw children as “a symbol of the human person’s physical weakness” and the fact that children were more easily frightened than adults marked them as lacking courage, yet another form of weakness that classed them with women and the aged.⁶⁷ The Roman philosopher Cicero remarked about childhood: “the thing itself cannot be praised, only its potential.”⁶⁸ These views of children did not enhance their chances for survival in an already threatening milieu rife with squalor, disease, abandonment, exposure as well as physical and sexual abuse.⁶⁹

The Greeks too correlated children with foolishness and irrationality. This perception infiltrated even the art of rhetoric wherein it was considered a grave insult to address someone as “boy.” Ancient Athenians ascribed characteristics to childhood and children that reflected the

⁶⁶ Judith M. Gundry-Volf, “The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament” in *The Child in Christian Thought* (ed. Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 31-32.

⁶⁷ O.M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (trans. Brian McNeil. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2005), 17.

⁶⁸ Cicero, *De Republica.*, 157 as quoted in Gundry-Volf, “The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament,” 32.

⁶⁹ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 18-19, 23.

importance of “continuity and change within the course of human life.”⁷⁰ In Plato’s *Symposium* the character of Diotima says “a man is the same from childhood (ἐκ παιδαρίου) to old age. But...he does not retain the same characteristics. He is always becoming a new person (or a young man: νεός), physically and intellectually, in his opinions and in his temperament (Pl. *Symp.* 207D-208A).⁷¹ Certain ancient writers even developed word schemes that refer to particular age groups with seemingly exact definitions attached.⁷²

Despite stressing continuity, ancient Athenians also measured children according to adult criteria, e.g. “physical fitness, moral development, intelligence” and needless to say they found them wanting.⁷³ Like the Romans, however, the people of ancient Athens also perceived children as innocent due to their immaturity and lack of experience. These characteristics linked them to marvels of nature and the gods. Maxims such as “Wine and children tell the truth,” led to crediting children’s chance comments with prophetic force and significance and their advice with special insight.⁷⁴ Hence, while ancient Athenians recognized and perhaps spurned the limitations of *childhood*, they loved and enjoyed the children themselves.

⁷⁰ Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 2-3.

⁷¹ Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 2.

⁷² (1) The Hellenistic scholar Aristophanes of Byzantium provides the most extension list: “Designations for males include *brepheos*, the newborn; *paidion*, the nursling; *paidarion*, the child who can walk and speak; *paidiskos*; *pais*, roughly, the child who can be educated; *pallēks* or *boupais* or *antipais* or *mellephēbos*; *ephēbos* (and its local equivalents); *meirakion*, *meiraks*; *neaniskos*; *neanias*; etc. until old age.” Reprinted from Calhoun (1918), 285-86 in Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 10. (2) Seven Stages of life, each related to a fixed age span are found in an account from Hippocrates; the first four are *paidion/παιδιον* (until age 7, *pais/παις* (7-14); *meirakion/μερακιον* (14-21), *neaniskos/νεανισκος* (21-28) – See Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 14 (3) E.W. Bullinger also writes about seven Greek expressions that depict the seven ages of a man: infancy – *παιδιον*; childhood – *παῖς*; youth – *μειράκιον*; adolescence – *νεανίσκος*; manhood – *ἀνὴρ* (ἄνδρος); decline – *πρεσβύτης*; senility – *γέρων* – See E.W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture: Its Supernatural Design and Spiritual Significance* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Classics, 1967), 9.

⁷³ Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 3.

⁷⁴ Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 10.

Within the home, children, wives, slaves, other family members and household staff came under the authority of the father. As head of the household, he was responsible for those in his care and in his service. The roles and duties of fathers in bringing up their children generally paralleled those of mothers, with the fathers getting more involved as the child grew older. While some sources have assumed fathers were responsible for teaching their children proper virtues and a cultured use of language, others, such as the Roman philosopher Cicero, were disinclined to criticize fathers for the type of adults their children turned out to be. Cicero claimed that while a proper upbringing could aid somewhat in the formation of good character, he for one believed that character germinated from “an internal biological development.”⁷⁵

In the Greco-Roman world, mothers had no real claim or authority over their children, while fathers as the heads of families could treat and dispose of their children as they chose. This hierarchic-patriarchal order was predisposed to an abuse of power by the head of the family. Not to paint a totally dismal picture, however, we must consider two moderating factors. The first was an existing societal ideal of the “good” versus the “bad” father with its implicit code of socially acceptable behaviour pertaining to the upbringing and treatment of children. Secondly, there existed at the time a “traditional family council” which limited the father’s exercise of power. Family members of both sexes were represented at these council meetings depending on who was the subject of the matters under consideration.⁷⁶ Despite these curbing measures the father still had the final say. Everyone in his household – wife, children and slaves – were obliged to submit to his will.

⁷⁵ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 38.

⁷⁶ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 39.

Some scholars have wondered whether parents in the ancient world even cared when their offspring died. M.I. Finley offered the following response:

Any Greek or Roman who reached the age of marriage could look forward to burying one or more children, often very small ones.... I do not suggest Greeks and Romans buried their children and spouses without a sense of loss.... What I do suggest is that in a world in which such early deaths and burials were routine, so to speak, the intensity and duration of the emotional responses were unlike modern reactions, though I confess that I know no way to measure or even to identify the differences.⁷⁷

Finley's remarks are excerpts from an article that outlines ancient demographics and suggests that demography essentially governs emotional reactions. Among other historians alleging demographic determinism are Philippe Ariès, Ivy Pinchbeck, Margaret Hewitt, Edward Shorter and Lawrence Stone all of whom have maintained that high mortality rates⁷⁸ precluded affection and love in preindustrial populations because emotional commitment, especially to children was "too dangerous for individuals and insupportable for their societies."⁷⁹

In the educational system, corporeal punishment of children was widely and openly accepted and as Thomas Wiedemann has noted: "Just as the whip was a symbol of the master's superiority over his slave...so the schoolteacher's rod came to symbolize the master's authority over his irrational child pupils. The association between beating and schooling...remained constant throughout antiquity."⁸⁰ When recalling his school years, early Christian theologian Augustine called his teachers torturers; Roman rhetorician Quintilian also criticized their harsh methods affirming that: "physical violence against pupils was poor pedagogy, which created a

⁷⁷ M.I. Finley as quoted in Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 82.

⁷⁸ Infant mortality rate... estimated at "30-40 percent in the first year of life.... children under the age of two are never (or hardly ever) said to have died *ahōros* [αἰθῆρος], "untimely," on extant epitaphs from all over the Greek world, though the term is so widely used that it can be applied to a woman of seventy-three. Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 83.

⁷⁹ Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, 82.

⁸⁰ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 40.

slave mentality in the children;” and the Roman statesman Cato home schooled his own son to avoid his being beaten on the head by a *Greek slave*, i.e. a professional teacher.⁸¹ Then again approximately ninety percent of the population could not afford schooling for their children. Children not attending school were obliged to labour on family farms or find whatever outside work was available so that they might contribute to the income of their families.

1.3. Idealized Symbolism Ascribed to Children in Antiquity

Despite the debasement of children, early Christian communities nonetheless developed a romanticized notion of them. As regards their temperament and character, all Eastern sources touching on this subject underscore the innocence of small children or at the very least their *moral neutrality* with respect to sexual desire, obedience to parents and lack of interest in material wealth or status. It has been suggested that “it was these qualities in children that led Jesus to put them forward as examples for adult conduct.”⁸²

The Church fathers’ ponderings and discussions over Jesus’ words about children in the Synoptic Gospels “as positive examples for the appropriate attitude of the members of the kingdom,” led to important insights that took into consideration the nature of the child.⁸³ Patristic writer Clement of Alexandria discussed at length this *biblical metaphor of childhood*. In Book I of his *Paedagogus* (whose very title stands for “Christ as the pedagogue who guides the little ones in their steps in the process of spiritual growth”) he used “developmental and educational language” to trace the course of becoming a Christian which he compared with the progression

⁸¹ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 40.

⁸² Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 281.

⁸³ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 9-10.

of “embryonic development, birth, and growth.”⁸⁴ Clement noted that Scripture calls all believers children and that those who follow Christ “are figuratively spoken of as babes.”⁸⁵

1.4. Infant/Child Baptism

Untouched by personal wickedness, sincere, guiltless, worthy to be freed from the stain of inherited sin, honoured before God and inheritors of his kingdom – these are the characteristics and advantages the early Christian community associated with young children. Hence one can only wonder at the extent to which the lived reality and treatment of children belied these noble sentiments. However, early Christian writers who compared adults to children of God were not comparing them to “real children in particular social contexts.”⁸⁶ Their references to children were figurative. The dilemma as to whether or not real children should be baptized conveys the deep symbolic meaning that children evoked in early Christian circles. Devoid of personal sin, those little ones were considered blameless because any stain on their souls was not due to their own fault but was inherited from Adam. Adoption into God’s family through baptism provides a child with roots, with a heavenly heritage to their adoptive Father’s heavenly kingdom.

Early writers such as Tertullian (155-240 C.E.) considered the innocence of infants as reason for precluding their baptism since the children themselves had not sinned. Tertullian was concerned more with the liability of an infant’s sponsors should they neglect their duties toward their godchild. He believed baptism should be administered to those who were old enough to

⁸⁴ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 58.

⁸⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 1.7.53.1, as quoted in Ferguson, Everett. *Early Christians Speak: Faith and Life in the first Three Centuries* (3d ed. Abilene, Tex.: A.C.U., 1999), 54.

⁸⁶ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 57.

understand its meaning and who could request the sacrament themselves.⁸⁷ Cyprian, on the other hand, believed that innocent infants were even more entitled to baptism and the consequent liberation from original sin than were converted sinners.⁸⁸ Origen too supported infant baptism believing it was the only means of eradicating inherited sin: “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit,” he said, “he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.”⁸⁹ Hippolytus (170-235 C.E.) at first considered infant baptism superfluous since its purpose was to remit sins, and infants had done nothing that required forgiveness.⁹⁰ Later he endorsed the Church’s apostolic tradition to baptize even infants because the natural stain of sin present in *all* persons “must be washed away by the water and the Spirit.”⁹¹

The blessings and benefits second-century authors ascribed to baptism included: remission of sins, salvation, illumination, eternal life, new birth or regeneration, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁹² Barnabas compared the forgiveness of sins in baptism to a re-creation through which the sinner’s soul is transformed into that of an innocent child devoid of all sin. He said: “Since he renewed us in the forgiveness of sins, he made us into another image, so as to have the soul of children, as if he were indeed refashioning us.”⁹³ Athenagoras believed that while all deceased human beings are resurrected, not necessarily all who are resurrected will be judged. He added that if human resurrection were tied exclusively to judgment, then justice would demand “that those who have not sinned nor done good, namely quite young children, would not be resurrected.”⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Tertullian. *On Baptism* 18, as quoted in Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 54-55.

⁸⁸ Cyprian. *Epistle* 64 (58), as quoted in Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 55.

⁸⁹ Origen. *Homily on Luke* 14.5, as quoted in Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 55.

⁹⁰ Hippolytus. *Homily on Leviticus* 8.3, from Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 55.

⁹¹ Hippolytus. *Commentary on Romans* 5:19, as quoted in Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 55.

⁹² Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 34.

⁹³ Barnabas. *Barnabas* 6:11, as quoted in Ferguson, *Early Christians*, 53.

⁹⁴ Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection* 14, as quoted in Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 54.

1.5. Why Little Children; Not the Elect, Enlightened, Faithful, Saints or Heirs?

Why then on an ancient stage which virtually ignored children did Jesus hold them up as the ideal future citizens of heaven? Why not compare them to the elect, the enlightened, the faithful, saints or heirs? Why *little children*? It is likely because *little children* as Jesus was depicted as having seen them encompass all these other appellations. They are elect because they are chosen by God/Jesus; they are enlightened because they instinctively recognize, respond to and crave the timeless essentials of love, sincerity and truth; they are faithful because regardless of their treatment they adhere to their families and care givers; they are saints⁹⁵ because their freedom from wilful sin sets them further apart than ordinary believers who certainly still sinned; they are heirs because their creator and father is God himself.

The association of gaining access to God's kingdom with the concept of becoming a child is a tradition found in the Synoptic gospels.⁹⁶ Mark relates how Jesus rebuked his disciples for preventing people from bringing their children to be blessed by him: "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (10:13-15). When Jesus tells the apostles to let the little children come to him (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17), he does not mean literally and only the little children before him, rather he metaphorically calls to him throughout time and into eternity everyone who is childlike – be that

⁹⁵ The word "saints" is used here to indicate those "set apart" by Jesus be that due to their marginal societal status or their innocence (freedom from wilful sin). In antiquity it was used to designate or "set apart" Christian believers from non-believers. "Paul used the word 'saint' to refer to all the Christian faithful (2 Cor. 13:12; Eph 1:1)... In the early Church, however, veneration of the original disciples of Jesus and of martyrs became widespread. Soon, persons who suffered for their faith (confessors) but who were not martyred were also venerated. After the era of persecution subsided, virgins, hermits, and monks were honoured as saints. In time, holy persons who led exemplary Christian lives, especially those who practiced great austerity and penance in the spirit of the martyrs, were added to the list." See: Richard P. McBrien, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 1155-56

⁹⁶ Kee, "'Becoming a Child,'" 307.

in terms of detachment from worldly things; in terms of sexual indifference and purity; in terms of innocence from wilful sin. Only such childlike innocence and purity of spirit is worthy of salvation, of a place in his father's kingdom.

Chapter Two
A Comparison of the Thomasine and Johannine Texts
(Jesus, His Mission, His Audience, the (Living) Father, the Kingdom)

2.1 Translations of *Logion 50* and *John 12:35-36*

(50) πε|ξε ι̅c̅ xε̅ εγ̅ω̅αν̅x̅o̅o̅c̅ n̅h̅t̅n̅ xε̅ n̅t̅a|t̅e̅t̅n̅ω̅ω̅π̅e̅
ε̅β̅o̅λ̅ τ̅ω̅ν̅ x̅o̅o̅c̅ n̅a̅γ̅ | xε̅ n̅t̅a̅n̅e̅i̅ ε̅β̅o̅λ̅ ρ̅m̅ π̅o̅γ̅o̅e̅i̅n̅
π̅m̅a̅ | ε̅n̅t̅a̅ π̅o̅γ̅o̅e̅i̅n̅ ω̅ω̅π̅e̅ m̅m̅a̅γ̅ ε̅β̅o̅λ̅ || ρ̅i̅t̅o̅o̅t̅q̅
o̅γ̅a̅a̅t̅q̅ a̅q̅ω̅z̅[ε̅ ε̅p̅a̅t̅q̅] a̅γ̅ω̅ a̅q̅o̅γ̅ω̅n̅z̅ ε̅[β̅]o̅λ̅ ρ̅n̅
t̅o̅γ̅z̅i̅k̅w̅n̅ ε̅γ̅|ω̅a̅x̅o̅o̅c̅ n̅h̅t̅n̅ xε̅ n̅t̅ω̅t̅n̅ π̅e̅ x̅o̅o̅c̅ | xε̅
a̅n̅o̅n̅ n̅e̅q̅ω̅h̅p̅e̅ a̅γ̅ω̅ a̅n̅o̅n̅ n̅c̅ω̅t̅π̅ | m̅π̅e̅i̅o̅t̅ ε̅t̅o̅n̅z̅
ε̅γ̅ω̅a̅n̅x̅n̅e̅ t̅h̅γ̅t̅n̅ || xε̅ o̅γ̅ π̅e̅ π̅m̅a̅e̅i̅n̅ m̅π̅e̅t̅n̅e̅i̅o̅t̅ ε̅t̅z̅n̅|
t̅h̅γ̅t̅n̅ x̅o̅o̅c̅ ε̅p̅o̅o̅γ̅ xε̅ o̅γ̅k̅i̅m̅ π̅e̅ m̅n̅ | o̅γ̅a̅n̅a̅π̅a̅γ̅c̅i̅c̅⁹⁷

50) Jesus said, “If they say to you, ‘Where did you from?’, say to them, ‘We came out of the light, the place ‘from which light came into being on its own accord and established [itself] and became manifest through their image.’ If they say to you, ‘Is it you?’, say, ‘We are its children, and we are the elect ‘of the living father.’ If they ask you, ‘What is the sign of your father in you’, say to them, ‘It is movement and ‘repose.’”

(35) εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐτι μικρὸν χρόνον τὸ φῶς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστίν. περιπατεῖτε ὡς τὸ φῶς ἔχετε, ἵνα μὴ σκοτία ὑμᾶς καταλάβῃ· καὶ ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει.⁹⁸

(35) *Consequently, Jesus said to them, “The light is still with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. The one walking in (or who walks in) the darkness, does not know where he is going.”*

(36) ὡς τὸ φῶς ἔχετε, πιστεύετε εἰς τὸ φῶς, ἵνα υἱοὶ φωτὸς γένησθε. Ταῦτα ἐλάλησεν Ἰησοῦς, καὶ ἀπελθὼν ἐκρύβη ἀπ’ αὐτῶν.

(36) *While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” After Jesus had said this, and having departed he hid from them.*

⁹⁷ Layton, “Gospel According to Thomas,” 72.

⁹⁸ Nestle, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 292.

A simple plotting of Jesus’ revelatory mission and salvation paths in *Thomas* and *John* respectively indicates that his approach to this task and his audience are inverted in each of these gospels as shown in Figure 1 following.

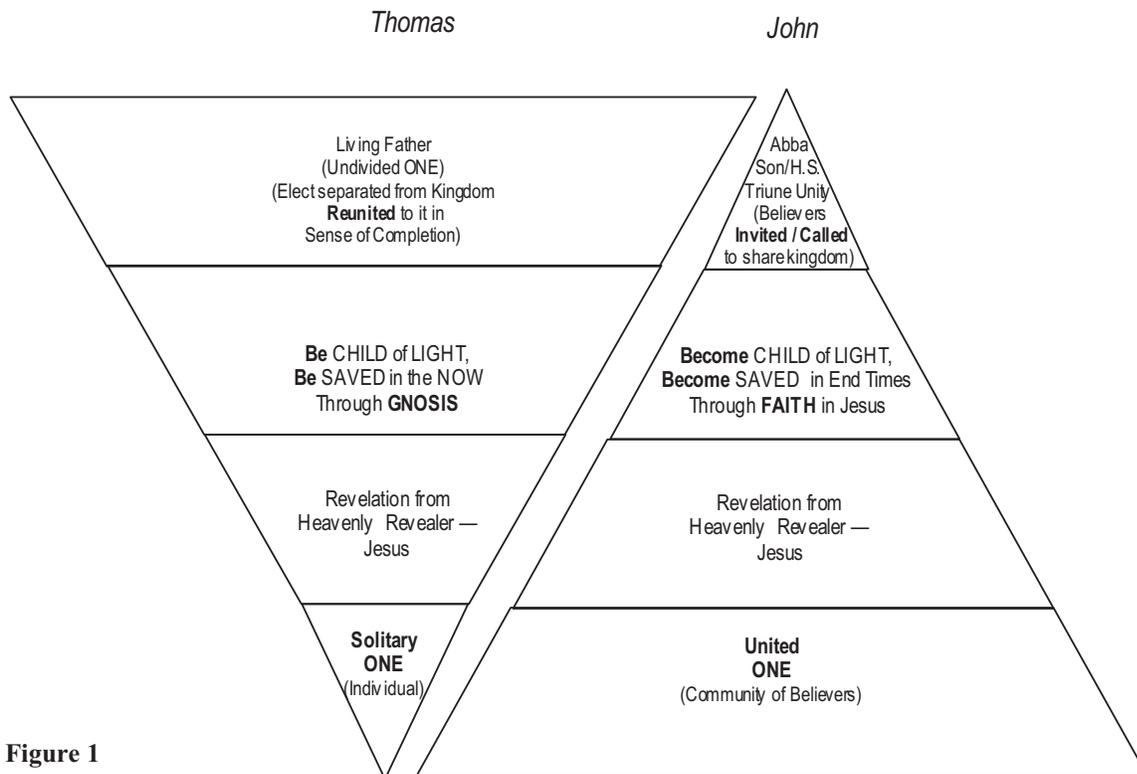


Figure 1

2.2 Level I (Figure 1) – Solitary One versus United One

The bottom of each triangle in Figure 1 represents Jesus’ audience, those to whom he imparts his revelation. An initial look at the text indicates that Jesus’ audience (i.e. receiver of his revelation) in *Thomas* is his disciples (as a group and individually). He addresses his sayings/responses to them. A second glance, however, reveals that this audience also encompasses whoever seeks the interpretation of Jesus’ sayings (*Logion* 1) thereby including *whoever* takes up the challenge to seek to interpret the sayings of this gospel and *he* who (note

the singular) succeeds is promised not only that *he* “will not experience death” (*Logion* 1) but also that “he will rule over the all.” (*Logion* 2) Those (plural versus singular thereby indicating everyone else) who “will not know” themselves and who “dwell in poverty...are that poverty.” (*Logion* 3) *John*, on the other hand, tells us, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath” (*John* 3:36).

In *Thomas*, Jesus instructs the individual to delve inside him/herself to attain self-knowledge (which could be understood as **ΓΝΩΣΤΙΚ**). This process points to a type of spiritual introspection. Even though Jesus’ mission is to aid his audience in this self-discovery, he does not treat everyone equally. He doles out his revelation in proportion to the individual’s readiness to receive it, e.g. in *Logion* 13 he sets the disciple Thomas apart by revealing three things *only to him*. When questioned by his fellows, Thomas tells them if he divulged even one of the things Jesus had told him they would cast stones at him and those stones would emit a fire that would consume them. This casting of stones signifies to me their lack of understanding and/or perhaps unwillingness to receive that part of Jesus’ revelation. Only once they discover their own internal “divine spark” will they be able to come to grips with Jesus’ full revelatory fire. In *Thomas*, individuals are saved one-by-one through introspection and self-realization – realization of their true origins in the Light. (*Logia* 3, 49) This focus on the individual self, I believe, precludes the notion of a like-minded Christian community.

In *John*, on the other hand, Jesus’ revelation centers not on his audience but on himself in relation to the Father. The audience in *John* encompasses various collective characters⁹⁹, i.e. *all people*: the *crowd* (comprised of *the Jews* [who do not believe in Jesus as well as those who do

⁹⁹ A collective character is one comprised of a group of people who as a whole play a part in the narrative plot, e.g. the crowd, the Jews, etc. Marguerat and Bourguin, 60.

believe in him]; the *Greeks* [who represent the collective character of the gentiles]; and the disciples. In this gospel, Jesus calls all these people to believe in him and his message. The textual evidence of his addressing mainly collective characters, suggests that in Johannine circles salvation was not preached as a solitary or individual course to elect individuals, but rather as one to be travelled together in cooperation with one's fellow believers. He imparts his message to "the world" which he (the Light) created but which did not know him, to "his own people" who rejected him (1:10). The language used in *John* directs Jesus' revelatory mission towards a plural rather than singular audience. This language has a sense of inclusiveness rather than the exclusiveness evoked in *Thomas*. In *John*, Jesus is credited with a unifying language. He wants the crowd (**all** people) to get to know and accept *him* (not themselves individually) "so that **all** (my emphasis) may honour the Son just as they honour the Father" (*John* 5:23); because "to **all** (my emphasis) who received him, who believed in his name he gave power to become children of God" (1:12). The unifying language in *John* could point to either a nascent or, perhaps more likely, anticipated Christian *community*.

The concept of an ancient Christian community while widely accepted by most scholars has proved to be problematic for others. Stanley Stowers wrote in a 2009 paper that modern scholarship's usage of the notion of "communities" and "community" thwarts historical research on early Christianity.¹⁰⁰ His abstract for this paper summarizes his thoughts on this issue:

The pervasive assumption that all Christian literature and history in the first one hundred years or so sprang from and mirrored communities inhibits historical explanation by social and psychological theory that is normal for the rest of the academy. A community in this sense is a highly coherent social formation with commonality in thought and practice. The idea that the Christian movement began with these communities derives

¹⁰⁰ Stanley Stowers. "The history of ancient Christianity as the study of religion" (paper presented at the North American Association for the Study of Religion section at the annual national meeting of the SBL, New Orleans, 2009), 239.

from Christianity's own myth of origins, but has been taken as historical reality. The myth can be traced to Paul, Acts and Eusebius.

I agree with Stowers that these gospels were not the product of extant, like-minded communities. However, I believe the author of *John* betrays his own agenda through Jesus' words to realize a nascent notion of precisely such a community. That the said Christian community was not yet formed is evinced in the lack of belief in Jesus' teaching "for not even his brothers believed in him" (7:5); in the lack of understanding even in those drawn to Jesus, e.g. Nicodemus (3:4-11) and the disciples (14:5); and in the open hostility of the Pharisees poised to discredit Jesus at every turn (7:45-51).

Although the notion of singleness, *the one*, is inherent in *Thomas*, the theme of oneness is prevalent throughout both *Thomas* and *John*. Its application, however, is somewhat inversed in each. In my understanding, the word "one" implies singularity in *Thomas*, whereas in *John* it implies unity. In *Thomas* then, salvation is individual since it is the solitary (ΜΟΝΟΧΟC) and the elect (CΩΤῙ) who are blessed and who will return to the kingdom from which they came (*Logion* 49). The incipit of *Thomas* tells us that the sayings in this gospel are secret, implying they are not for everyone's ears but only for those individuals who seek and find their interpretation. Through Jesus' revelation, each individual must come to his own self-realization/gnosis. In *John*, however, salvation is pluralistic. Jesus offers salvation to all "who receive him", to all "who believe in his name," his "own" people (cf. 1:4, 6 & 12) and eventually to all people (10:16; 12:32). He bestows the fullness of his grace on all (1:16). He does not single out one disciple but addresses them as a group. He tells Nicodemus that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that **everyone** (my emphasis) who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (3:16). To the Samaritan woman Jesus says "Those (not he) who drink

of the water that I will give them (not him) will never be thirsty” (4:14). Whenever Jesus calls or speaks to one person, it is always with a view to garnering many as he did with the disciples and as he did with the Samaritan woman who invited the *people* of her city to “Come and see” Jesus (4:28-9). And not only she, but “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him” (4:39). When he healed the royal official’s son, not only the official but “his whole household” (4:53) came to believe in Jesus. Jesus feeds not just one individual with the loaves and fishes but the entire crowd.

Jesus places *himself* on a par with the disciple Thomas in *Logion* 13 when he tells him: “I am not your (sg.) teacher (παῖς).” Because Thomas is ready to receive Jesus’ revelation, Jesus no longer needs to teach him. Instead he treats Thomas as an equal by revealing to him three sayings that the other disciples are not yet ready to receive. When in *Logion* 37, the disciples ask Jesus when he will be revealed to them and when they will see him, he says: When you disrobe without being ashamed and take up your garments and place them under your feet like little children and tread on them, then [will you see] the son of the living one, and you will not be afraid.” Jesus’ mention of his sonship with the father here is very dry and emotionless compared to how he describes his relationship with his father in *John*. Jesus’ different approaches to self-identification in *Thomas* and *John* appear to emphasize in *Thomas* the tendency (even the imperative) to separate the earthly from the divine, the bodily from the spiritual, which may imply a Gnostic nuance; whereas in *John*, even in human form Jesus claims to be in the Father and the Father in him (*John* 10:38). While in *Thomas* it seems as though only that which is already “divine” can re-enter heaven and all outer “clothing” (human body) must be shed; in *John* it seems as though the human and the divine are somehow reconciled (even merged)

through Jesus' human form. This may speak to bodily resurrection as argued by Riley and mentioned in my introduction.

In *John* it is clear that God the Father and God the Son (also known as Word and Light) *are* one – not a singular one but rather a unity. Jesus says as much in 10:30: “The Father and I are one.” This oneness is first suggested in the prologue (1:1): “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God. Later in the gospel, Jesus says: “If you know me, you will know my Father also” (14:7). “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me...” (14:11). Jesus includes not only his disciples into this union but also “those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (*John* 17:20-23). In *John* 11:49-51 the high priest Caiaphas prophesized that “Jesus was about to die for the nation and not for the nation only, but to gather, i.e. unite into **one**, the dispersed children of God. This for me points to the all (the crowd) also becoming a *united one*. And when speaking about his approaching death, Jesus says that “when he himself is lifted up from the earth, he will draw all people to himself (12:32), These different perspectives evoke an inversed trajectory: in *Thomas* it moves from the singular to the plural with each Gnostic Christian joining other individual believers in the Father's kingdom from which they originate (Level IV – Figure 1) and in which they already have had a place; in *John*, it moves from the plural (crowd, all people) to the *united*

all (really the united *one*) who are drawn up by Jesus, through his cross, to the *Triune Unity*¹⁰¹ in the kingdom (Level IV – Figure1).

2.3 Level II (Figure 1) – The Revealer, His Message, His Mission

The next level in Figure 1 indicates Jesus' role as the Heavenly Revealer in these gospels. He is identified as the *living* Jesus in *Thomas* and in his pre-resurrection persona in *John* (at least until Chapter 20 well after my chosen pericope in Chapter 12). Whether the adjective “living”¹⁰² refers to Jesus' life pre- or post-resurrection is not made clear in *Thomas*. The crux of Jesus' message in *Thomas* and *John* (i.e. that it is children who inherit the kingdom) is the same. This message is fundamental for anyone seeking salvation. Yet, the way Jesus explains this message in each of these gospels differs. The difference lies not only in the person-centered knowledge-based perspective Jesus assumes in *Thomas* versus the Jesus-centered faith perspective in *John*, but also in his portrayal of the (living) Father and his own relationship to/with Him in each of these gospels. Given the child imagery applied to salvation, the figure of the (living) Father is important in determining whose children the inheritors of the kingdom are or must become. What then is the gist of Jesus' message in *Thomas* and *John*?

Jesus initiates his revelatory message to his bewildered disciples in *Logion* 3 saying that “the kingdom” is inside of them and outside of them and they must first come to know themselves in order to realize that it is they “who are the children/sons of the living Father.” In *Logion* 50, Jesus' final revelatory words to his disciples affirm that they are the children of the light and “the elect of the living Father.” In the preceding *Logion* 49 he tells them that they, the

¹⁰¹ Although Trinitarian language is not explicit in *John*, there are nonetheless references to the three persons, i.e. the Father, the Son and the Spirit (Cf. *John* 1:32-33; 3:5,8, 34; 7: 38-39.)

¹⁰² Perhaps this attribute was used to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus in opposition to some kind of Docetic beliefs which denied his humanity calling it an illusion.

“solitary and elect,” derive from the kingdom and will return to it. In between *Logia* 3 and 50, Jesus answers (although at times cryptically) various questions posed by his disciples. He offers various teachings concerning fasting not just from foodstuffs (which is what concerns the disciples) but rather from the world; on the question of oneness and its relevance to the state of being a child.

In *Thomas* Jesus reveals virtually nothing about himself, the living Father or his relationship with him; rather, he reveals to the individual seeker who he/she is. The very first *logion* of *Thomas* avers, “Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death.” Jesus then adds in *Logion* 2 that the seeker must “continue seeking until he finds.” This suggests an ongoing process. In *Logion* 3 Jesus reveals this process as one of self-discovery (**FNOCIC**) which once attained will lead to the realization that the seekers indeed “are the children/sons of the living Father.” There is no mention in *Thomas* of Jesus’ life, his ministry or his salvific suffering and self-sacrifice on the cross.

Conversely in *John*, Jesus’ revelation does not centre on the individual’s self discovery. Rather it revolves around himself and his relationship with his Father, a relationship so intimate, so entwining he says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9). He speaks of his salvific mission and how he will be “lifted up from the earth” drawing all people to himself (12:32). He calls the crowd (all people) to exit the darkness into which they have fallen. He implores them that while they “have the light, (to) believe in the light, so that you may become children of light” (12:36).

In the narrative sequence, these verses appear at the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Their tone is beseeching and rightly so since they present Jesus’ final call to the crowd (all people) to

believe in him and his teachings. Although he has fulfilled his mission to reveal the heavenly Father and his own relationship to him, clearly the desired results were not obtained. The end of verse 12:36 tells us: “After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.” His reason for doing this is given in 12:37: “Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him.” The crowd’s unbelief was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that their eyes would be blinded and their hearts hardened (*John* 12:38-41). And even those who did believe, certain authorities among them, were afraid to come forward lest the Pharisees oust them from the synagogue. These, verse 43 tells us, “loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.” In verses 44-50 just following my chosen pericope Jesus recaps his mission from his heavenly father, not as a judge but as a saviour who brings light and rescues from darkness those who believe in him. He re-emphasizes that he speaks not on his own authority but on the authority of his Father: “who sent me (and who) has given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.” The Father had sent Jesus to earth on a mission to make him (the Father) known. His message delivered and his mission fulfilled, in the ensuing chapters Jesus interacts and speaks mainly with his chosen apostles. In *John* too then Jesus is a revealer. It is obvious, however, that the content of his revelation to his disciples in *Thomas* and his revelation to the crowd (all people) in *John* each have their unique perspective.

The elitist stance in *Thomas* (in relation to elect individuals sharing in the divine) set against the somewhat humbling/levelling Johannine stance with Jesus at its centre could have been a point of contention between the respective audiences of these gospels. However, rather than calling one or the other heretical, I think we could well designate this difference not as a doctrinaire one but rather a traditional one. It is not God/living Father or Jesus who are the target

of discrepancy but rather the adherent/believer. If we were to assume that *Thomas*' audience comprised those who Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, described as subscribing to a "falsely called knowledge,"¹⁰³ then it would stand to reason that an author addressing or writing for that group with a view to introducing to them something new, would strive to appeal to their propensity for seeing themselves as custodians of such privileged "knowledge." Rather than presenting such an elitist group with parables or teachings designed for the masses, they would word their gospels to appeal to this group's sense of distinctiveness. We are told throughout the canonical gospels that the masses did not comprehend much of Jesus' teachings, nor for that matter did his disciples. Despite their inability to comprehend Jesus' message (their walking in darkness [12:36]) he required them to believe in him nonetheless. An elitist group which prided itself on a particular brand of salvation knowledge would not be easily convinced to believe blindly. Those trying to reach them would have to appeal to their *rational* sense. The different approaches used in *Thomas* and *John* speak to the different ways in which the Thomasine and Johannine audiences perceived themselves. This self-perception is what prompted the writers of these gospels (whoever they might be) to address their respective audiences so as to appeal to their distinct self-defining sensibilities. In areas where *Thomas* was preached there circulated the notion that certain people possessed something of the divine spark, that they already were the elect children of Light/God/the (living Father). The author(s) of *Thomas* would have to take into consideration this self-knowledge when writing a gospel for an audience with such elitist views. The author(s) of *John* seem to be trying to deter people from such elitist claims and hence appeal to and persuade their audience from a different perspective, first to keep them on par with one another

¹⁰³ Pearson, "Ancient Gnosticism," 9.

(as simply human and not divine) and second to convince them that despite their humanness, they too could become children of Light/God/ Father through faith in Jesus.

No matter how much you speak of a knowledge-based salvation that knowledge is *not inherent* but comes from the same source in both *Thomas* and *John*, i.e. the Heavenly Revealer in the person of Jesus. What other “proof” do the adherents to a knowledge-based salvation have in *Thomas* except the revelatory words of Jesus? Since their “knowledge” is based on Jesus’ words, it means that they had to accept as true, i.e. “believe” Jesus’ revelation that they are the children of the light and the elect of the living Father. The act of believing (faith) then cannot be utterly excluded from this knowledge-based view of salvation. On the other hand, once the Johannine audience accepts Jesus and believes his words, they also *through their faith* come to *realize*, i.e. acquire the knowledge that they will become children of light/God. The salvific ends of these gospels are in essence the same except for the play on words that places the individual at the center in *Thomas* and Jesus at the center in *John*. Both of these modes of (or ways to) salvation are Christian; both have the same goal (that all people [through gnosis or faith] be children of God/light). It is only people’s self-perception in this process that differs.

As discussed above, in *Thomas* we get a sense of the individual’s self-importance as a “divine” being albeit embodied in a disposable human form (wherein Jesus, in human form, places himself on par with the apostle Thomas [Cf. *Logion* 13]) and in divine form places himself above everything (the “all” in *Logion* 77); whereas in *John* we get a sense of a universal levelling of human beings wherein Jesus (despite his own human form) is elevated on par (even intermingled) with his heavenly Father.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Martyrdom would utterly discredit a gnosis-oriented Christian’s self-understanding as being saved in the now. Per Irenaeus, e.g. Basilides believed Simon of Cyrene was crucified, not Jesus. Hence martyrs died for Simon not

2.3.1 Plotting Revelatory Course – Journey of Interpreters (*Thom*); Believers (*John*)

The Quinary Scheme¹⁰⁵ (Figures 2 and 3 below) is a narrative construct that provides a skeletal sketch of the unfolding of the Revelatory Plots in *Thomas* and *John* respectively by outlining an initial situation/exposition, a complication, a transforming action, a denouement and a final situation.¹⁰⁶ As already mentioned, *Thomas* is a sayings gospel with no fluid narrative of Jesus' life or teachings as found in *John*. However, Jesus' revelatory mission and the disciples' understanding and/or acceptance of his revelation (or lack thereof) may still be plotted using this construct. The reason for this, as mentioned earlier, is that regardless of its seemingly disjunctive composition, *Thomas* has its own system of connecting concepts and/or themes through the use of catchwords. These catchwords can cluster certain logia to form inclusions or they can leap across logia to connect ideas in a broader sense, ideas that lead to alternate paths of inquiry.¹⁰⁷

John employs similar though less overt patterns/threads wherein he links words or ideas that form a narrative sequence, e.g. the water changed into wine in Cana (*John*: 2) emerges as the water of true baptism in Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus (*John*: 3); and ultimately becomes the water for the *required* washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus at the last supper (*John*: 13). The series of links I follow are those involving children. The links and leaps made by catchwords follow a subtle sequential order.

The Quinary Schemes below reveal a similar trajectory for Jesus' revelation in each of these gospels: (1) Jesus' initial challenge to the individual to know him/herself (*Thomas*) versus

for Jesus. In contrast, humble believers who might feel unworthy of eternal life would be more apt to take such an extreme measure as a means of proving their faith in Jesus.

¹⁰⁵ Marguerat and Bourquin, 51.

¹⁰⁶ Marguerat and Bourquin, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Differences of opinion regarding the linking of ideas in *Thomas* were briefly discussed p. 19 above.

his calling out of darkness of the crowd/all people through knowledge and faith respectively (*John*); (2) ignorance of the disciples (*Thomas*) versus unbelief/resistance/hostility from the crowd/all people (*John*); (3) Jesus' imparted knowledge (*Thomas*) and final call to faith (*John*); (4) the disciples' failure to "know" themselves (*Thomas*) and the crowd's failure to believe (*John*); (5) Jesus takes action in "making Mary male" so she may become a living spirit which would in turn make her eligible for the kingdom (*Thomas*) versus his salvific action on the cross (*John*). The final situation indicates the disciples (apart from Salome and Mary) fail to comprehend Jesus' revelation (*Thomas*); the crowd (the Jews) fail to benefit from Jesus' salvific action because of their unbelief (*John*).

These Quinary Schemes summarize Jesus' attempts, via his revelation, to bring people to a state of childlikeness – by seeking self-awareness through his words in *Thomas*, and through faith in him and his words in *John*. His mission in both gospels is successful in that he transmits his Father's message to those for whom it was intended. However, his revelation is met with a dearth of comprehension and self-knowledge in *Thomas* and blindness, resistance and open hostility in *John*. (Not surprising if one takes to heart *Logion* 62 which says: "It is to those [who are worthy of my] mysteries that I tell my mysteries," as well as *John* 6:44; 65: "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me;" and "no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."¹⁰⁸ In both gospels, it seems salvation although preached and offered to all is accessible only to the elect of the living Father (*Thomas* 3; 50) or the chosen (those drawn to Jesus by the Father [*John* 6:44]).

¹⁰⁸ The issue of determinism in John will be discussed in Section 2.4.3, pp. 70-73.

Jesus' revelatory agenda in *Thomas* begins in *Logion* 3 and ends in *Logion* 50. The latter seems to continue or complete the first. The two *logia* are linked by the similar opening formula: "If those who lead you say to you..." and "If they say to you..." respectively. This is one form of the catchwords or concept connections which lead the reader of these sayings through a maze of possible avenues to ΓΝΟCIC. In *Logion* 3 Jesus tells his disciples that "...the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves then you will become known and you will realize it is you who are the sons/children (ἄψῆρε) of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty." A look at the *logia* between three and fifty that mention different words for small child (οὐκοῦει ἄψῆρε ψῆμ – *Logion* 4), children (ἄψῆρε ψῆμ – *Logion* 21), infants (ἄκοῦει – *Logion* 22), little children (ἄνικοῦει ἄψῆρε ψῆμ – *Logion* 37), a child (κοῦει – *Logion* 46), and children (νεψῆρε – *Logion* 50) reveals a sequence of teachings that hint at a different approach to salvation initiated through revelatory knowledge of self and God. This knowledge is intertwined throughout the gospel with the idea of a return not only to the beginning but also to singularity or oneness. *Logion* 4 speaks of a small child and an old man; of the "first" becoming "last" and ultimately "one and the same." This to me signifies the culmination or completion of the full circle of life, i.e. the beginning and the end of which Jesus speaks in *Logion* 18: "For where the beginning is, there will the end be. Blessed is he who will take his place in the beginning; he will know the end and will not experience death." This recalls the self-knowledge associated with Gnostic Christians, i.e. self-identity in terms of one's origins and one's ultimate destination.¹⁰⁹ One who so comes full circle and takes "his place in the beginning" and hence does not

¹⁰⁹ Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 12.

experience death, might be seen as one who has interpreted the sayings of Jesus in *Thomas*, the first of which promises eternal life to those who accomplish this task.

In *Logion 21* Mary asks Jesus “Whom are your disciples like?” Jesus replies: They are like children who have settled in a field which is not theirs. When the owners of the field come, they will say, ‘Let us have back our field.’ They (will) undress in their presence in order to let them have back their field and to give it back to them.” Jesus’ answer indicates the impermanence of the children’s place of settlement which the word field (αὐρα) suggests is earth, i.e. our earthly realm as opposed to the heavenly Father’s spiritual realm. In shedding their clothing, the children divest themselves of the things of this world including their temporary domicile.

In *Logion 22*, Jesus compares “infants being suckled” to “those who enter the kingdom.” His disciples ask: “Shall we then, as children enter the kingdom?” He replies: When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below and when you make the male and female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female; and you fashion eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in the place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then will you enter [the kingdom].” Jesus’ reply reconnects with *Logion 4* where he said: “When you make the two one” and with *Logion 18*: “For where the beginning is, there will the end be.”

Jesus also mentions disrobing in *Logion 37* (Cf. shedding of garments *Logion 21*): “When you disrobe without being ashamed and take up your garments and place them under your feet like little children and tread on them, then [will you see] the son of the living one, and you will not be afraid.” Here the treading on the garments may well relate to baptism which itself

is a ritual renewal that transforms a person into a new creation through water and the Spirit. This link to archaic Christian baptismal practices was made by J.Z. Smith in his article *The Garments of Shame*. He said he found no other parallel or interpretation of this logion that accounts for the four closely related elements within it: “(1) the undressing of the disciples, (2) their being naked and unashamed, (3) their treading upon the garments, and (4) their being as little children.”¹¹⁰ Smith notes that in the context of extreme prudishness within mainstream Judaism, the Qumram community, the Essenes, the Elchasaites and the Mandaeans, it is remarkable to read texts describing Jewish proselyte ‘baptism’ that consistently suggest the proselyte was nude.¹¹¹

In *Logion 46*, by speaking of becoming a child in relation to John the Baptist’s greatness, Jesus may be seen as linking *becoming a child* to the renewal in baptism. This saying would then reflect back to *Logion 37* and the treading on the garments.

Finally, in *Logion 50*, Jesus revealed to his disciples their origins in the Light and told them outright that they *are* (my emphasis) the children of Light and the elect of the living Father. This is a clear culmination of *Logion 3* in which Jesus told them: “when you come to know yourselves then you will become known and you will realize that it is you who are the sons (ⲛⲱⲏⲣⲉ) of the living Father.”¹¹² However, if they rejected Jesus’ revelation and refused to know themselves for who they were, i.e. the children of the light and the elect of the living Father (*Logion 50*) then, Jesus told them, they dwelt in poverty (Cf. Johannine darkness in 3:19) and actually were that poverty (*Logion 3*). Due to Jesus’ revelation, the disciples no longer had to

¹¹⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Garments of Shame.” *History of Religions* 5 (1966): 218.

¹¹¹ Smith, “Garments of Shame,” 219.

¹¹² Wolf-Peter Funk in a discussion held at a meeting of the GRECAT, U Laval, Québec, October 28, 2011: The Coptic word for sons, ⲛⲱⲏⲣⲉ, means children *in a relational sense*, in this case *children of the Father*.

look either “inside” or “all around” themselves (*Logion* 3) to garner this knowledge because in *Logion* 50 he told them all that they needed to know.

The following Actantial Scheme¹¹³ further illustrates the revelatory plots of *Thomas* and *John* from the perspective of “six actantial positions.” These actantial positions are in effect “the typical roles in all stories.”¹¹⁴ They include the sender/dispatcher, i.e. someone who wants a particular task performed and sends an agent to execute it, the object is the task in question, the receiver is the person to whom the task is assigned, the opponent is anyone/anything that interferes with the successful completion of the task, the subject is the actant or agent who will execute the task, and the helper is anyone or anything that aids in the completion of the task.

As seen in the diagram below, in *Thomas*, the sender (dispatcher) is the Living Father who assigns certain revelatory tasks (the object) to be executed by the one he sends (the receiver – Jesus). Jesus, by virtue of receiving the commission, is the agent/actant who realizes the tasks. He accomplishes them on different axes: that of communication whereby “gnosis” is communicated verbally; that of volition whereby Jesus helps the disciples recognize their divine origin; and that of power whereby Jesus’ revelation leads to the disciples’ realization of their election.

In *John*, the sender (dispatcher) is also the (living) Father who mobilizes the receiver (Jesus) for the quest of the object (revelation of the Father through Jesus). Thus, Jesus communicates his revelation (communication); fulfills the Father’s will (volition) and transforms believers into children of God (power).

¹¹³ Marguerat and Bourquin, 63.

¹¹⁴ Marguerat and Bourquin, 63.

2.3.2 Revelatory Plots End Mid-Way through *Thomas* and *John*

My chosen pericopae, *Thomas* 50 and *John* 12:35-36, located roughly mid-way through their respective gospels mark the end of Jesus' revelatory mission in each, to the disciples (Father's elect) in *Thomas* and to the crowd (all people) in *John*. The revelatory process in *Thomas* extends from *Logion* 3 to 50. The *logia* that unfold after *Logion* 50, while important in their own right, do not add to Jesus' revelatory task in *Thomas* which is to help the disciples realize who they are and whence they came. Jesus' teaching in *John* also continues past 12:35-36 but is no longer directed at the crowd (all people). It is instruction intended expressly for Jesus' disciples, the twelve. In *John* Jesus' revelation of the Father, himself and his relationship with the Father, begins with verses 9 and 12 of the prologue and ends with 12:35-36.

In *Logion* 50 Jesus presents his disciples with three eventualities instructing them how to respond to hypothetical **if** questions posed by the unidentified *they*. The identity of this cryptic *they* becomes clearer through *Thomas*' use of catchwords which in this case draw one back to *Logion* 3, where *they* was expanded into "those who lead you." Jesus prepared his disciples not only by forewarning them of these potential questions but also by providing them with the answers with which they were to respond to them. Jesus instructed them that **if** anyone inquired about their origin they were to say that they came from the place where light originated. And **if** asked whether they themselves were the Light, they were to say they were "its children" and "the elect of the living Father." By referring to them as "*the elect* of the living Father," Jesus set his disciples apart *for* himself and the living Father. Such elitism was common among Gnostics who "claimed to have a 'higher, spiritual' interpretation of what Christians believed" and what they

read in scripture.¹¹⁵ Finally, he said **if** they were required to provide a sign as proof that the living Father was indeed in them, Jesus told them to say: “It is movement and repose.”

Jesus plainly told his disciples in *Logion 50* *who they were* and *whence they came*. The Gnostic’s knowledge of God and of self went hand-in-hand because Gnostics believed the true human self originated from divinity and journeyed back to those divine origins.¹¹⁶ The propagator of such revelation varied from one Gnostic system to another, e.g. the manifestations of Sophia or Wisdom, biblical characters such as Adam or Seth or other well-known personages such as Zoroaster or Zostrianos.¹¹⁷ Jesus’ revelation in *Logion 50* confirmed his disciples’ identity and origins. His affirmation of their parentage and heritage through a sign that confirmed the presence of the living Father in them bolstered the disciples’ knowledge of and confidence in their own true identity and relationship with God. *John’s* Jesus did no such thing.

Although *John’s* Jesus does not designate movement as a sign/proof that through faith God dwells within them, he does require “movement” from them when he instructs them: περιπατεῖτε¹¹⁸ and continue walking in the light (Jesus) so as not to be overcome by darkness and become lost (not know where they are going). The verb περιπατεῖτε obviously relates to *following Jesus* in *John* 8:12: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” The movement implied by the verbs *following* and *walking* with Jesus (the Light) clearly indicates that such movement of believers is a sign of the presence of the Son in them in *John*, just as movement and repose was a sign of the presence of

¹¹⁵ PHEME PERKINS. *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 12.

¹¹⁶ Self-knowledge as concerned knowing one’s true nature and origins was one of the *essential* conditions for salvation in what is understood by certain scholars as Gnostic systems; see PEARSON, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 12.

¹¹⁷ PEARSON, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 12.

¹¹⁸ In his commentary on *John*, C.K. BARRETT notes that whenever the verb περιπατεῖτε appears in *John* in a “not strictly literal” sense it is used in relation to light and darkness; see *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1958), 357.

the living Father in *Thomas*.¹¹⁹ A notable difference between *John* and *Thomas* is that in *John* Jesus does not mention “repose” in this context. This is because in *Thomas* having the kingdom inside you leads to some measure of repose as there is no longer a need to seek it. In *John* the kingdom is yet to be attained therefore the faithful must continue to work (*walk*) toward it.

In *John*, people do not possess inherent divine light but may walk in Jesus’ light through faith in him. In 12:35-36, Jesus makes his final appeal to the crowd (all people) to “believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” By inviting the crowd (his disciples included) to walk with him (the Light) Jesus set them apart also – not *for* himself as the elect of the living Father (cf. *Logion* 50) and already part of his inner circle. Rather he set them apart *from* himself. In *John*, Jesus’ efforts to divert the crowd (all people) out of darkness into light delineated the gap that still existed between them. If they had already been in the same camp as it were, he need neither have invited them nor cautioned them. However, Jesus perseveringly and patiently alerted the crowd that the time for making their rapprochement was not only limited but also that bridging that gap was crucial to their *becoming* children of the light. He encouraged everyone who heard his words to believe in the light – *in him* – while he was still with them.

Jesus’ *cautionary urging* in *John* resonated quite differently from his *revealing directives* in *Thomas*. *Thomas*’ Jesus exhibited confidence and authority when instructing his disciples, telling them what to say and even providing them with a sign to satisfy the doubters of a sceptical time. *John*’s Jesus, on the other hand, was more tentative in the face of human weakness and resistance. (It is important to keep in mind that *Thomas*’ gospel is one of sayings. *John*’s gospel, however, follows a time line leading inexorably to Jesus’ crucifixion and physical

¹¹⁹ *John*: 5:17 clearly illustrates the sign of movement as one representing not only the Father but also Jesus when he says: “My Father is still working, and I also am working.”

death, no mention of which is made in *Thomas*¹²⁰ hence the beseeching tone of verses 12:35-36). In the verses following the ones I have chosen for my thesis, Jesus recaps his mission from his heavenly Father, not as a judge but as a saviour who brings light to those who believe in him and rescues them from darkness. He makes it clear that he speaks not on his own authority but on the authority of his Father: “who sent me (and who) has given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me” (12:49-50). The Father sent Jesus to earth on a revelatory mission which he accomplished in Chapter 12.

The plot strategy of ending Jesus’ revelatory mission mid-way through these gospels indicates that although Jesus’ work as Revealer is completed, the work of perfecting/increasing gnosis in *Thomas* and that of living one’s *faith* in *John* must be continued by his disciples. The questions the disciples ask in *Thomas* even after having been told they are children of the Light and the elect of the living Father, indicate they are still “seeking” along wrong paths, i.e. they are immersed in the things of this physical world instead of those of the divine realm. They should be seeking the “interpretation” of Jesus’ “sayings” (*Logion* 2) and not reading earthly signs (*Logion* 91). The Thomasine Jesus continues to teach his apostles because as God’s children who have been made aware of being so in *Logion* 50, they should be “worthy of my (Jesus’) mysteries (*Logion* 62). Yet, it is only Mary, deemed unworthy of life by Peter, who is found worthy by Jesus to hear his “mysteries” (*Logion* 62). Jesus is willing to “lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males” (*Logion* 114).

¹²⁰ Jesus’ identification in *Thomas’ incipit* as “the living Jesus” does not tell us if the author of this gospel was referring to the resurrected Jesus or not.

Becoming male will entitle Mary to “enter the kingdom of heaven” (*Logion* 114). The footnote below provides some insight into what it meant to *become/be made* male.¹²¹

Having issued his final appeal to the crowd in *John* to walk in the light so as to avoid darkness, Jesus turns his attention to preparing his disciples for his ultimate salvific mission and also to executing that mission. The mid-gospel end to Jesus’ revelation in both *Thomas* and *John* concludes Jesus’ revelatory mission, its salvific fruits can only be realized by those who receive his revelation.

2.3.3 Circular Plot (*Thomas*) Versus Linear Plot (*John*)

John’s linear plot walks the reader through Jesus’ revelatory mission which leads inexorably to his salvific self-sacrifice on the cross; *Thomas*’ circular plot appears to move

¹²¹ (1) In the second century, *making oneself male* could well have been understood in a practical way. Women who chose to lead an ascetic life renounced traditional female roles (wife/mother) as well as all sexual activity. They expressed their choice by physically impersonating a male, e.g. by cutting their hair and donning male clothing – See Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1996) 48. (2) Another view links *becoming male* to the *Genesis* account in which Eve issued from Adam’s side. This view suggests the woman must re-enter Adam so as to *become male* thereby effecting a return to Adam’s prelapsarian state prior to gender division. See April DeConick *Seek to See Him* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 18. (3) The fourth century text, *Acts of Philip* casts Μαριάμνη [deduced to be Mary Magdalene] as the apostle Philip’s sister. Philip’s apprehension about a dangerous mission to the Greeks, prompts the Saviour to ask Μαριάμνη to journey with Philip and take care of him. The request indicates a role reversal (an ancient concept known to Plato) whereby “Philip as a man has a female faith and attitude, and spiritually, Μαριάμνη expresses herself like a male facing the hostile world.” This role reversal is articulated in the Saviour’s words to Μαριάμνη: “I know that you are good and brave in your soul and blessed among women. A feminine spirit has entered Philip while the male and courageous spirit is in you.” (*Acts Phil.* 8.3 [G]). Specially called by the Saviour, Μαριάμνη owes these attributes to him. The apostolic mission and Μαριάμνη’s heroic role in it involve no less than “the sufferings of martyrdom and the redemption of the whole world.” The Saviour advises Μαριάμνη to: “change your gown and your outward appearance. Put off all that in your form resembles a woman, in particular your summer dress [a rare word is used here: τὸ θῆριστρον]. Do not let your fringe be dragged on the ground, do not twist it, but cut it; then walk together with your brother Philip to the city called Ophiorymos, which is understood as the ‘promenade of the snakes’” (*Acts Phil.* 8.4 [G]). The theological reason for this required change is the hostility since the beginning of the world between Adam and Eve (not Eve and the Serpent). This hostility enabled the Serpent to revolt against Adam and to befriend Eve which resulted in Eve deceiving Adam. By altering her feminine form Μαριάμνη casts off Eve’s appearance. This is proves helpful for when Μαριάμνη enters into the city, the snakes will see her transformed (*Acts Phil.* 8.4). An obscure paragraph suggests the skin of the Serpent must be identified with its venom – which polluted Eve – and that this type of original sin was then passed on from generation to generation beginning with Cain. The author ends with the directive: “Therefore Μαριάμνη, flee away from Eve’s poverty and be rich in yourself” (*Acts Phil.* 8.4 [G]). – See François Bovon, *New Testament and Christian Apocrypha* (ed. Glenn E. Snyder; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 268.

seekers *forward* in search of self-gnosis, only to redirect them toward their divine origins, origins *up above* from which they hale and to which they will return from *down below* here on earth.

In *Thomas*, the disciples' initial *being* (i.e. "are its [the Light's] children" – *Logion* 50) must go through a life-long process of self-recognition, adaption to and fulfillment of their status as elect children of the Father with a mission to continue Jesus' revelatory mission. Jesus hinted at this process when he told the disciples that when they find the beginning they will know their end (*Logion* 18).¹²² This circular trajectory suggests a completion of the circle of life (represented in *Thomas* by seeking and finding) wherein humans begin and end at the same point. Once they reach their end, in effect the beginning, they will simply *be* for eternity as per Jesus' own words: "Blessed is he who will take his place in the beginning; he will know the end and will not experience death" (*Logion* 18). In *John*, the crowd also goes through a life-long process of adaption to and fulfillment of their status as soon-to-be children of the Father through faith in Jesus, with a mission to follow in Jesus' footsteps and make the Father known. Those who already are children of the Father/Light through *gnosis* (*Thomas*) and those who will become children of God/Light through faith in Jesus (*John*) reflect not only the growth, self-adjustment and development of the individual Christian (*Thomas*) and that of the Christian community of believers (*John*), but also the growth, adjustment and development of Jesus' teachings which feed their lives.¹²³

2.4 Level III (Figure 1) – Be/Become Children of Light/God/Father

Moving up Figure 1, we encounter another difference in perspective, this time vis-à-vis extant and prospective "children" of God (in *John*) or the Light/Father (in *Thomas*). As early as

¹²² Layton, "Gos. Thom." *NHC* II, 2, *Logion* 18, 128.

¹²³ April D. DeConick, "The Original Gospel of Thomas." *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (2002): 180, 184-85, 189-90.

Logion 3 in *Thomas*, Jesus infers that his disciples, although they themselves are as yet unaware of it, already are children of the living Father. They are sons/children of the light (Jesus) and the elect/chosen of the living Father (*Logia* 3; 50). Throughout his revelatory mission in *John*, Jesus does not call anyone his child or the child of God but only promises this title or more precisely this state of being to any who believe in him as we see in the words of the narrator in the gospel’s Prologue: “But to those who received him, who believed in his name, he gave *power to become children of God* (my emphasis)” (*John* 1:12). Jesus refers to Nathanael as “an Israelite in whom there is no deceit” (1:47); he addresses Nicodemus as a teacher of Israel (3:10); he addresses certain women (including his mother) with the generic “woman” (2:4); he refers to the 5,000 he fed on the mountain as “these people and the people” (6:5 and 6:10), etc. Only after completing his revelatory mission and after Judas Iscariot left the Passover table to betray him did Jesus address the remaining disciples as “Little children” giving them a new commandment to love one another (13:33).¹²⁴

2.4.1 Gnostic/Other Implications of Present and Future Tenses of Verb *To Be*

In *Thomas*, Jesus uses the present tense of the verb *to be* both when he urges the disciples toward self-gnosis [ἄνθρωποι πε – it is you who **are** (*Logion* 3)]; and when he overtly reveals this gnosis to them [ἄνθρωποι νεφωρηε – we are its children (*Logion* 50)]. The condition for being a child of the Father/Light is realizing one already *is* a child of the Father. *John*’s author has both the gospel’s narrator and Jesus use γενέσθαι – the deponent future of γίνομαι [John 1:12]; γένεσθε [12:36]) when either speaks of this state, i.e. child/children. In *John*, *becoming* a child of God is contingent upon one’s belief in/acceptance of Jesus and his teachings. Once a person

¹²⁴ Jesus’ command to his disciples to love one another has symbolic meaning as he proclaims it as the sign by which they will be recognized as his disciples.

comes to believe he/she still must be born through water and Spirit in order to enter God's kingdom (*John* 3:5). Such birth implies sacramental ritual. In *Thomas*, sacramental ritual could also be seen as referring to new birth through the shedding of garments as in *Logion* 37 (equated to shedding the human body, the things of the world, i.e. that which is dead).

In *Thomas* 50, it is the individual disciples who form Jesus' audience along with individual seekers of the interpretation of the gospel's sayings; while in *John* 12:35-36 it is the crowd (all people, including the disciples) whom Jesus addresses. In *Thomas* 50, Jesus tells the disciples that they "came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord and established [itself] and became manifest through their image. He also told them that they are [ΑΝΘΡΩΠΩΝ ΝΕΦΕΛΗ] "its (the light's) children and... the elect of the living father." In *John*, Jesus urged the crowd to "Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overtake you" and also to "believe in the light, so that you may become [γένεσθε] children of light. The use of different tenses of the verb *to be* in these respective gospels points to different views of Christianity. The first present-tense verb in *Thomas* indicates that the disciples already are children of the light; that they carry that light within themselves and that they were chosen (elected) by the living Father himself. In other words, a divine spark already exists in them. Conversely, the Johannine view maintains that Jesus is unique in embodying divine light (*John* 8:12, 9:5). The Johannine view was the one later supported by western Christian churches. As noted above, Pagels believes *Thomas* was written in part to contradict this view because its sayings intimate that divine light exists in every individual, and that the individual's conscious awareness of that fact grants him/her the potential to know God as his/her Father. Rather than

urging all people *to believe in Jesus*, as does *John*, *Thomas* urges each individual to *seek to know* him/herself as embodying God and his kingdom.¹²⁵

2.4.2 Notion of Children/Kingdom; Light/Darkness in *John/Thomas*

The “kingdom of God” is mentioned only twice in *John* in Chapter 3. Both references are made by Jesus to Nicodemus, a Pharisee and leader of the Jews who visits Jesus by night. Nicodemus confesses his budding faith based on the signs Jesus has performed, signs Nicodemus believes could only be accomplished by someone who comes from God. However, he is seeking further illumination. Jesus answers Nicodemus by revealing to him the conditions required to see [ἰδεῖν] (3:3) and to enter [εἰσεθεῖν] (3:5) the kingdom of God. Those prerequisites entail being “born from above” (3:3) and “born of water and Spirit” (3:5) The verb γεννηθῆ infer a child for what comes from birth/begetting other than an offspring or child. Hence, if only, by inference, the kingdom is related to children in *John*. By acting on his curiosity and interest Nicodemus receives χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος from Jesus’ πληρώματος in the form of his revelation. Whether or not he benefits from that grace and becomes a child born from above, i.e. of Light/God depends on Nicodemus.

The scant mention of the kingdom in *John* conceivably may be explained by a major goal of this gospel, i.e. to unite all people in God through faith in his only Son, “that they [not only the disciples but also those brought to faith in Jesus through their teaching (17:20)] may all be one. As you Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us... so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one” (17:21-23). Unifying language such as this evokes the body of Christ, with him as its head and believers as

¹²⁵ Pagels’ view on this issue reviewed in the *Status Quaestionis* above (pp. 11-12).

its members. It is almost as if believers will be absorbed into this mystical body. Believers in *John* are not told that they originate from God's kingdom, and while they might well desire to attain it one day, they do not identify with it as do the seekers in *Thomas*.

Those in *Thomas*, who seek the kingdom through ΓΝΟCIC, are not only portrayed as originating from that divine realm (*Logion* 49) but are told outright that the kingdom is both inside (ΝΖΟΥΝ) and outside (ΕΒΟΛ) of them by virtue of the divine spark (*Logion* 3) which indwells them. The fact that each of them possesses a piece of the kingdom, it stands to reason, that the kingdom (pleroma) itself is in some way diminished by these missing pieces. This calls to mind an enormous jigsaw puzzle representing the pleroma with holes or empty spaces caused by the missing pieces of divinity encased in human bodies and milling around on earth. The word *kingdom* appears in seventeen *Thomas Logia* in four different ways: *the kingdom* (seven instances), *the kingdom of heaven* (three instances), *the kingdom of the father* (six instances) and *the kingdom of my father* (once).

The seven instances of *the kingdom* are used in relation to different verbs, i.e. words denoting movement toward the kingdom. Movement, we are told in *Logion* 50, is one of two signs of the presence of the living Father in his elect children. The verb you *will enter* the kingdom (ΤΕΤΝΑΒΩΚ – *Logion* 22) relates to seeking within oneself; he *will be acquainted* with the kingdom (ΦΝΑCΩΥΝ – *Logion* 46) relates to the realization of ΓΝΟCIC; you *will find* the kingdom (ΤΕΤΝΑΖΕ) and to it you *will return* (ΕΤΕΤΝΑΒΩΚ – *Logion* 49) relates to the seeker's divine origins and his return there; he *looked* (ΑΦΥΙΝΕ) *until* he *found* (ΥΑΝΤΕΦΖΕ) [lost sheep] relates to reconnecting with one's temporarily hidden innate divinity; I *care* (†ΟΥΟΥΚ) for you [sg.] *more than* (ΠΑΡΑ) the ninety-nine [lost sheep] (*Logion* 107) relates to the seeker's need to

return to a state of oneness which in turn is related to the state of being a child in *Thomas* (it can also mean relinquishing the many in favour of the treasured one (Cf. *Logion* 76); and finally the new owner *ploughing* the field (εγχεαει) who *found* the treasure (αφθ – *Logion* 109) emphasizes the need for action, e.g. continued seeking (*Logion* 2) and movement, the sign of the living Father's presence in his children (*Logion* 50) in order to unearth the divine treasure buried within the self.

Paradox is detected in the three uses of the expression *the kingdom of heaven*. First we see that the tiniest of seeds ends up growing into a large plant that supports the birds (*Logion* 20). Next it is the poor who inherit the kingdom of heaven not the rich (*Logion* 54). And finally, we are told that every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom (*Logion* 114). These paradoxical parables point to the greatest paradox of all in *Thomas*, i.e. that *the kingdom of heaven*, a supposed other-worldly kingdom is not some far-off place in an unknown pleroma, but rather right here (and now) inside and outside of every person who seeks and finds ΓΝΟΙC. These three kingdom parables confirm the notion that all is not what it seems on the surface in *Thomas* and one must plough deeply to find the true treasure of ΓΝΟΙC.

Five of the six instances of the expression *the kingdom of the father* are used to compare the kingdom to a certain type of a person. The first relates the kingdom to a man who waits for the harvest to pull and burn weeds maliciously planted by an enemy among his good seed (*Logion* 57). This seems to imply a place of judgement. It could also mean that through patience and perseverance the seeker of ΓΝΟΙC eventually weeds out and separates the worldly and the divine within him or herself. The seed in this case could be the divine spark and the weeds the poverty of ignorance. The second instance of this expression evaluates the kingdom through the

choice of a merchant who discovers a pearl among much merchandise. He sells the merchandise and buys the pearl for himself. Jesus advises his disciples to seek “unfailing and enduring treasure where no moth comes near to devour and no worm destroys,” in other words, to relinquish materialistic goods in favour of spiritual treasure (*Logion 76*). The third instance measures the kingdom *vis-à-vis* a woman who makes large loaves by adding a little leaven to her dough (*Logion 96*). The leaven may be equated to **ἄνομιον** which bears fruit. The fourth assesses the kingdom in light of a woman who does not notice the jar of meal she is carrying has broken and finds it empty on arriving home (*Logion 97*). This likely implies the poverty that results from a lack of **ἄνομιον** and the need to stay alert so as not to lose its benefits due to inaction. The fifth weighs the kingdom in relation to a man who sticks a sword into the wall of *his own house* to see if he can kill a powerful man (*Logion 98*). In antiquity the concept of house could be taken to mean the human body. It is only by shedding or destroying this human body that one can combat the powerful man (perhaps an archon). The sixth and final use of the expression *the kingdom of the father* summarizes what we have deduced from the preceding five, i.e. “the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth and men do not see it.” (*Logion 113*) These comparisons of *the kingdom of the father* to human beings performing for the most part everyday human tasks (except perhaps the man who thrusts a sword into a wall of his house) indicates to me that the author is demonstrating through Jesus’ metaphoric anecdotes the necessity of relating the kingdom of the father to his elect children in order to help them discover their own divine connection to him. The person of the father plays a role in accomplishing this.

In *Logion 99* Jesus affirms his father in a more personal way than we are used to in *Thomas*. He claims “those who do the will of my father will enter the kingdom of my father.” By accentuating his heavenly parentage through the use of the possessive pronoun *my*, Jesus in

effect spurns his earthly mother and brothers, thereby symbolically spurning earthly relationships in favour of divine ones. However, he also extends those divine relationships to those who do his father's will.

The notion of being a child through **ΓΝΟCIC** in order to gain access to the kingdom permeates *Thomas*. That kingdom is said to be actually present in the child of God and **ΓΝΟCIC** is the key that provides access to it. Gnosis can only be attained through active seeking, i.e. the movement mentioned in *Logion 50* and offered as a sign of the presence of the living father in his elect children. The solitary and elect are told in *Logion 49* that they are from the kingdom and will return to it. The various descriptions of the kingdom and how to attain it provided in *Thomas* indicate that Jesus is taking every measure to ensure that his audience understands his revelatory message and takes up the search for **ΓΝΟCIC** in order to repopulate the kingdom from which they came.

Light in *John* is often juxtaposed to darkness. We learn in the prologue to this gospel that: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." Earlier the evangelist intertwined **λόγος** with life and "the light of men" (1:4). "The self-predication formula and exclusive claim: 'I am the light of the world,' is found only in John's Gospel."¹²⁶ In 8:12 Jesus again interweaves **λόγος**, **φῶς** and **ζωῆς** when he tells the sceptical Pharisees: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Jesus impresses upon his disciples that together they must do the works of God in the light of day – before darkness comes (9:4), adding "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:5; 12:35-36, 46).

¹²⁶ Shirbaum, G.F., "Light," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*. (ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall; Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 473.

Light also communicates other facets of Johannine theology, such as revelation, sin, faith, judgment and ethics.¹²⁷ In order to reveal God's salvation, the light pervaded two types of darkness. The first type was that which existed prior to the arrival of the true light. It is expressed in the following passages: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (1:5). "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (8:12). "I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness" (12:46). The second type of darkness covered or overcame those who chose it over light: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed." (3:19-20) Choosing darkness over light conveys the Johannine perception of sin. Believing in the light, on the other hand, reflects Christian faith. The exposure of those who adopt or repudiate the illumination brought by the Light reveals the Johannine understanding of judgment.¹²⁸ Light and darkness are also indicators of human character, e.g. in his encounter with Nicodemus Jesus said: "But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God" (3:21). His meeting with Nicodemus under cover of night demonstrates Jesus' willingness to step out of his world of light into the human world of darkness to help anyone who seeks to know and understand him better. (In *Thomas*, Jesus was more wont to give **gnosis** to those ready to receive it [Cf. *Logion* 13]) *Walking* in the light symbolizes Johannine ethics (8:12; 12:35), i.e. fulfilling "Jesus' commandment to love one

¹²⁷ Shirbaum, "Light," 473.

¹²⁸ Shirbaum, "Light," 473.

another.”¹²⁹ Jesus told the disciples that it is by their love for one another that they would be *recognized as his* disciples. (13:35)

In *Thomas*, light stemmed from the same source – Jesus. Once on earth, however, it took a slightly different path, or more precisely, traveled in different vehicles than it did in *John*. It existed *not only in the self-established Jesus*, but *also in the children of the light*. In *Logion 77*, “Jesus said: ‘It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. From me did the all come forth, and unto me did the all extend...’” This echoes what we saw in the prologue of *John*. Jesus is the source of *all* life and he is the light of *all* people. In *Logion 50*, however, Jesus also told his disciples that if asked they were to say that their place of origin was *in the light* and that *they were* the light’s “children, and the elect of the living father.” The disciples in *Thomas* already possessed the light within themselves: Jesus told them in *Logion 24*: “...There is light within a man of light, and he lights up the whole world. If he does not shine, he is darkness.” This evokes a sense of inherited light possessed by the elect of God, which they are responsible to shine forth into the world. Those who do not shine are darkness and hence not elect which Jesus intimates in *Logion 3* when he said those who do not know themselves as “the sons of the living father...dwell in poverty and...are that poverty.” Failure to seek out and recognize one’s inner light leads not only to its being extinguished but also to a state of utter deficiency (*Logion 67*). So the work (movement) required in *Thomas* is to find one’s inner light and to live it and do whatever it takes to make it shine.

Unlike the already light-filled children of the Light in *Thomas*, in *John* people had to attain the light through belief in Jesus: “Jesus cried aloud: ‘Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light

¹²⁹ Shirbaum, “Light,” 473.

into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness” (12:44-46). Discord created by people’s responses to Jesus (belief or unbelief) is what drives the plot of *John*. The significance of this is born out by the fact that about one-third (98 of 239) of the occurrences of the verb πιστεύω in the entire New Testament are found in *John*.¹³⁰ Jesus said outright that the sin of the world is unbelief: “And when he (the Advocate) comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin because they do not believe in me...” (16:8-9). In *John* 8:51, Jesus declared: “Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” Those who believe in Jesus are the children of God.¹³¹ And when Jesus begins to speak plainly to the disciples about his own origin and his return to that origin, the disciples acknowledge their belief by saying: “Now we know that you know all things and do not need to have anyone question you; by this πιστεύμεν (my emphasis) that you came from God.” (16:30) The belief of the disciples implies various benefits and/or responsibilities. First of all, God is the source of life for all believers (1:12-13; 3:3-16).¹³² Secondly, believing Jews are no longer considered children of the devil which Jesus accused them of being in 8:39-47.¹³³ Thirdly, salvation is available to everyone who is “born anew/from above (1:12-13; 3:4-16).”¹³⁴ Fourthly, believers must obey Jesus so that he, God’s Son, may act as their go-between with the Father (14:6-17). Finally, the children of God are expected to love one another (13:33-35). When Jesus gave his disciples the commandment to love one another, it is noteworthy that he addressed them as “Little children” (13:33). By so identifying his disciples, Jesus indicated they had *achieved* the status of *children of God* – a status he had strived to help them achieve by

¹³⁰ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 97.

¹³¹ S. C. Barton. “Child, Children” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshal. Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 104.

¹³² Barton, “Child, Children,” 104.

¹³³ There is nothing in *John* which so labels non-Jews who do not believe in Jesus.

¹³⁴ Barton, “Child, Children,” 104.

revealing himself to them in order that they would believe in him. In other words, they were no longer in the process of *becoming* children of God they *already were* his “little children” through their belief in Jesus. Furthermore, the adjective “little” used here hints at their return to a state of innocence and rebirth necessary for entering God’s kingdom.

Logion 50 puts forth light as both a place and a self-created entity (Jesus) observable through or reflected in the human image (persona). This light elicits both citizenship and birthright – a sense of origins, belonging and entitlement. *John 12:35-36* represents light as a moral condition (or state) as well as personifying it as a person (Jesus). In *John*, Jesus exacts certain conditions for the right to claim birthright and to qualify for citizenship in heaven. Those conditions entail new birth through water and Spirit. This presupposes faith in Jesus (3:3, 5). Jesus actively works to bring Nicodemus out of darkness by revealing to him the conditions for claiming one’s birthright and citizenship in heaven by cover of night. Jesus does his best to illuminate Children of light (his disciples and seekers of **ϩΝΟCIC**) who in *Logion 50* **are** the elect beings of the living Father; in *John 12:35-36*, all people through faith in Jesus are children-in-the-making. They are in the process of *becoming*, of achieving through faith the *aspired-to state of being* children of light/God.

What I find striking between these two ways of looking at salvation is that in *John*, salvation is offered and available (at least seemingly) to *all people* through faith in Jesus. Jesus is the light of all people. It is up to the people to choose or reject him. In *Thomas*, on the other hand, salvation seems to be offered to or reserved only for the chosen, the Father’s elect. I sense in *Thomas 50* that not all people “came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord and established [itself] and became manifest through their image,” but only

“its children...the elect of the living Father.” This sense of some having been born through or created by another source alerts me to possible Gnostic nuances. These approaches to salvation might well have to do with the demographics of the respective Thomasine and Johannine communities and the types of Christians who comprised those communities. I have already noted that Gnostic Christian groups tended to keep unto themselves and held an elitist view of salvation whereby only the elect (a limited number) were saved. If the Thomasine Christians were mainly Gnostic it stands to reason that their views concerning salvation were exclusive. *John’s* audience, however, comprised not only believing Jews, but also converted Samaritans (4:4-42)¹³⁵ and other Gentiles (12:20-26),¹³⁶ hence extending salvation through faith to include all people makes sense in this context. Yet, even in *John*, we are told through the words of John the Baptizer that “No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven” (3:27); and through Jesus’ words: “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me...” (6:44)

2.4.3 Notions Concerning Determinism in the *Gospel According to John*

Are people then chosen/elected by God in *John* as well as in *Thomas*? Andreas J. Köstenberger believes they are. He understands *John* as proclaiming salvation and eternal life only through divine election which occurs prior to the individual’s decision to believe. The chosen, he says, can hear God’s voice and thus are able to become fruitful, i.e. believe in God. Those who are not chosen cannot hear God’s voice and remain unfruitful, i.e. unbelieving. Köstenberger examines divine sovereignty and human responsibility in passages worded in a

¹³⁵ Pheme Perkins, “The Gospel According to John,” pages 942-85 in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. (emeritus) and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (emeritus); Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), 945-46.

¹³⁶ Perkins, “The Gospel According to John,” 946.

way that evokes notions of *appointing*, *belonging* or the *divine rejection* of certain persons (8:47; 10:25b-26; 12:37-40; 14:17 and 15:16).¹³⁷

When considering Köstenberger's arguments, Riku Tuppurainen cautions readers against interpreting *John* in a modern context, in other words, to bear in mind that the author of *John* was neither a *Reformed* nor a *Wesleyan* theologian. Tuppurainen notes that *John's* author makes statements in support of both God's sovereignty and human responsibility with regard to salvation and that he is not troubled by the tension this creates. He mentions that aspects of predestination influenced early Judaic thought and suggests the author of *John* may have "adopted the Graeco-Roman rhetorical style of antinomies (known to Jewish writers) which juxtaposed opposing views."¹³⁸

While Köstenberger highlights God's sovereignty in support of his right to choose those who will be saved and those who will not be saved, Tuppurainen argues that God's sovereignty in *John* is used instead to validate Jesus' role and identity since the gospel credits him with the same fundamental qualities as the Father. Tuppurainen refers to the notion of patronage which was common in first century Mediterranean society. Jesus' commission from the Father and the revelatory message he was sent to deliver depict him as the Father's agent. As such, Jesus had full authority from the Father and in his Father's name therefore could grant access to the Father's kingdom. Tuppurainen argues that at least "some of the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility may be understood in light of this framework."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 458-464.

¹³⁸ Riku Tuppurainen, "Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in the Gospel of John: An Alternative Interpretation to Andreas J. Köstenberger's 'Divine Election' Reading of John's Soteriology (*JEPTA* 32.1, 2012), 31

¹³⁹ Tuppurainen, "Divine Sovereignty," 31-32.

Despite John's explicit claims of universal salvation, Köstenberger interprets verses 12:20, 32 which indicate that Jews and Gentiles attain salvation through Christ's work, as referring to *people groups* (my emphasis) rather than all people. He uses this interpretation to support the notion of God's sovereign election. Tuppurainen interprets 12:32 to mean that through his lifting up on the cross, Jesus draws up with him "all men/people *including* (my emphasis) Jews and Gentiles" and that by extending the message of the cross to all people, he thereby demonstrates God's sovereignty. The author of *John*, however, emphasizes the condition for receiving salvation and eternal life, i.e. faith/belief in Jesus (3:14-16; 12:36; 20:30-31).¹⁴⁰

Tuppurainen further points out that the evangelist's comment in 12:33 on 12:32 does not specify *who* will be drawn up by/with Jesus but rather explicates the words "lifted up" as indicating the manner in which Jesus was to die. Tuppurainen adds that the function of "lifting up" in *John* points to the unveiling of the Son's glory. This, he says, relates not to those who will be drawn to/by Jesus, but rather to the judgment and expulsion of "the ruler of this world" (12:31). He further claims that regardless of one's reading of $\pi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\varsigma$ in 12:32, the crux of the matter lies in Jesus' final public statement concerning the dualistic theme of darkness and light, i.e. that light will overcome darkness and draw those in darkness to Jesus.¹⁴¹

Tuppurainen refers to "choosing" as "a tensional term" and claims that in terms of "bearing fruit," it might well be interpreted to denote "the individual's willingness to accept the condition" for salvation and eternal life. He cites as example, Judas Iscariot, hand-picked by Jesus, who himself chose to betray Jesus and the other apostles hence proving unfruitful. (However, did Judas *really choose* or did God predestine him to make that decision to fulfil his

¹⁴⁰ Tuppurainen, "Divine Sovereignty," 32.

¹⁴¹ Tupperainen, "Divine Sovereignty," 32-33.

overall plan of salvation?) Many questions remain concerning determinism in *John*, questions which may never be answered in this life.

2.5 Level IV (Figure 1) – (Living) Father and His Kingdom in *Thomas* and *John*

The triangle tops in Figure 1 represent God, i.e. the (living) Father in (dis)similar ways. *Thomas* reveals few details about the living Father other than he indeed is *living* (*Logion* 3); he has elected certain beings (*Logion* 50); he is undivided; if the disciples (seekers) do not observe the Sabbath as a Sabbath they “will not see the father,” (*Logion* 27); and that Jesus *came from* him (*Logion* 61). Just as in Level I the word “one” portrayed Jesus’ audience differently in *Thomas* and *John* so too it colors our understanding of God in each of these gospels. In *Thomas*, Jesus, the living Father and the Spirit are treated individually or referred to independently. Only one catchword (living) links Jesus to the living father. In the incipit it refers to “the living Jesus” (Ἦ̅ϵ̅ΤΟΝ̅) and in *Logia* 3 and 50 (the *logia* which begin and end the revelatory plot in *Thomas*) it refers to “the living Father” (Π̅ϵ̅Ι̅Ω̅Τ̅ ϵ̅ΤΟΝ̅). *Logia* 3 and 50 also identify “children/sons” of the living Father with the “elect” of the living Father. In *Logion* 3, Jesus tells his disciples that by attaining self-gnosis, they will realize that it is they “who are the children/sons of the living Father. Since in *Logion* 50 the disciples are told they are children of “light”, then one could also associate light with the living Father.) Jesus also adds that the Father is not born of woman (*Logion* 15); that those who come to know themselves are his children/sons and his elect (*Logia* 3, 50). The lack of input about him not only sets the living Father apart but also sets him up as an aloof, separate and solitary figure. He is self-contained - the Undivided One. Due to Jesus’ function as Heavenly Revealer in *Thomas*, one assumes that he came or was sent from/by the Undivided One. Jesus impersonally claims sonship with “the living one” in *Logion* 37.

John's recounting of the relationship between Jesus and the Father, on the other hand, impresses the reader with the closeness between them wherein Jesus is not only the Father's emissary but also his μονογενοῦς. (1:14) Jesus makes several references to his intimate relationship with the Father: "The Father and I are one" (10:30); "...so that you may know and understand that the Father is *in* me and I am *in* (my emphasis) the Father" (10:38); "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9); "Believe me that I am *in* the Father and the Father is *in* (my emphasis) me" (14:11). He later expands this relationship to include his disciples: This evokes a sense of intimacy and would likely inspire confidence in the believer.

The living Father is depicted in *Thomas* as an indivisible singularity. In *John*, God – although in substance One – is plural in persons (the Father and Jesus we are told are *in* each other (10:38) and *one*, but there are also allusions to the Holy Spirit whom Jesus says he will send to his disciples after his own departure to the Father). At his crucifixion, once Jesus fulfilled Scripture by receiving the wine he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his *spirit*." (19:30) This might be understood to suggest that *his Spirit* (my emphasis) was in some way with/in Jesus and was not merely a reference to surrendering his life. In 16:7-8 Jesus says he must leave in order for the Spirit to come. This indicates to me that the Spirit is a third and separate entity integrated within the relationship between the Father and Jesus. On the evening of the morning of his resurrection Jesus appears to his disciples in the locked room and says to them, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" The Holy Spirit came forth from Jesus under the guise of Jesus' own breath. Although the closeness between the Spirit and the

Father or the Spirit and Jesus is not as clearly explicated as the closeness between Jesus and the Father, there is nonetheless a sense that the Spirit somehow complements their union.

In *Thomas*, Jesus is referred to as the light but not as Father nor as being one with the Father [*John* 10:30] nor as being *in* the Father and the Father *in* him [*John* 14:11]). Jesus proclaims himself to be “the light who is above them all (all the divinely imbued Gnostics), but also as the all (creator of the pleroma and everything in it) from which the all (the pleroma and everything in it) came forth (*Logion* 77). In *Logion* 15, he tells them that when they “see one who is not born of woman, prostrate yourselves on your faces and worship him. That one is your father. Now in *Logion* 50, Jesus (who self-identifies as the Light) tells his disciples that they came from the Light and are its children. He clearly seems to imply that he is their father. However, he is not the *living Father*¹⁴² whose elect they are (*Logion* 50). Jesus may be their creator, but their Father *and his* is another entity. Jesus is (as the apostle Thomas is shown to be) a child/son of the living Father by virtue of “knowing” who he is, whence he came and where he is going. Ironically, Jesus’ self-knowledge must be inferred by the reader in *Thomas* whereas in *John* 8:14 Jesus freely articulates his self-knowledge. The narrator confirms Jesus’ self-knowledge in 13:3. *Logion* 44 says: “Whoever blasphemes against the father will be forgiven, and whoever blasphemes against the son will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either on earth or in heaven.”¹⁴³ This *logion* does not specify that the Father, the Son *and* the Holy Spirit are “God.” The best one can argue from the text is that Jesus acknowledges the Holy Spirit’s existence and magnitude when he avers that blasphemy

¹⁴² The incipit of *Thomas* refers to Jesus as the living Jesus. Some have argued that the living Jesus and the living Father are interchangeable. I disagree. I believe the adjective *living* highlights their relatedness as father and son by pointing out similar qualities they share, e.g. light as well as living.

¹⁴³ This *logion* is reminiscent of Mt. 12:30-32; Mk. 3:28-30 and Lk. 12:8-10.

“against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven on earth or in heaven” when the same affront against Jesus and even the Father will be forgiven.

Also in *John* we see this plural unity draw up through one of its members/persons (his Son Jesus) yet another plurality, i.e. all believers. The drawing up to the Father of all believers neither adds to nor detracts from his Communal Unity, i.e. those who are drawn up do not complete or diminish him or his kingdom. In *Thomas*, however, we get the sense that the elect of the living Father who we are told by Jesus were at one time part of the living Father’s kingdom of Light and are now separated from it are somehow co-dependent with some aspect of the divine realm, and that without them the kingdom is incomplete. In *John* all people are utterly dependent on God. On a basic level the end result is the same – *each* self-knower (Gnostic?) in *Thomas* will be merged into the *single one* whose divine substance they already share; whereas *all* believers in *John* as a communal unity will be joined to their communal (Triune) united God in *John*.

2.5.1 Words about the (living) Father Attributed to Jesus in *Thomas* and *John*

Even though both Jesus and the Father are designated as “living” in *Thomas*, and Jesus calls himself “the son of the living one” [ΕΝΩΨΗΡΕ ΜΠΕΤΟΝΩ] in *Logion* 37, the words attributed to Jesus in this gospel create a sense of disconnectedness or separateness between them. The words attributed to Jesus in *John*, on the other hand, emphasize the interconnectedness of Jesus and the Father throughout the gospel. One noticeable and prevalent difference in referring to “the (living) Father” or “the undivided one” is the definite article “*the*.”¹⁴⁴ In the roughly 24 *logia* which make reference to the (living) Father, or the undivided one, Jesus deviates from using the very impersonal definite article only four times. Jesus says to his disciples in *Logion* 50: “If they

¹⁴⁴ The use of *italics* for the definite article and personal pronouns in this section are my own.

ask you, ‘What is the sign of your father [ΜΠΕΤΝΕΙΩΤ] in you?’” I believe he is emphasizing that they are not only the living Father’s elect, but also his children. In *Logion* 61, Jesus claims to have come from the “undivided one” and that “I was given some of the things of my father.” This is somewhat reminiscent of the narrator’s claims in *John* 3:35 wherein he says: “The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.” There is no mention of the Father’s love for the Son in *Thomas* and in this gospel the Son gets only *some* of the things of his Father, *not all*. Jesus also uses the possessive pronoun in *Logion* 99 where he says, “Those here who do the will of my father [ΠΑΕΙΩΤ] are my brothers [ΝΑCΝΗΥ] and my mother [ΤΑΜΑΑΥ]. It is they who will enter the kingdom of my father [ΠΑΕΙΩΤ].” In this instance, the use of the possessive personal pronoun *my* [πα, να, τα, and again πα] is in direct response to disciples’ news that *his* (Jesus’) human mother and brothers were waiting outside to see him. The possessive personal pronoun is used here to emphasize who Jesus’ true mother and brothers are, i.e. those who do the will of *his true* Father. He attempts in this one instance to connect these “true” relations to his Father by means of the possessive pronoun *my*. In *Logion* 15 Jesus is again shown to use a possessive personal pronoun with respect to the Father, this time in the second plural when tells his disciples that when they see “one who was not born of woman,” to prostrate themselves because, “That one is your (pl.) [ΠΕΤΝΕΙΩΤ] Father,” rather than simply *the* Father. This highlights the idea that they too originate from this divine being. In every other reference to the (living) Father or undivided one throughout *Thomas*, Jesus uses the definite article. This word choice feels impersonal and creates a sense of distance or dissociation from the Father not just with respect to Jesus but for the readers of this gospel as well.

Throughout *John* Jesus alternates between using the definite article and the possessive pronouns *my* and *your*¹⁴⁵ when referring to the Father. Here too Jesus' word choice appears to serve a different purpose in different contexts. When speaking with or preaching to the Jews, Jesus uses the definite article almost exclusively, producing the same distancing effect found in *Thomas*. He uses the possessive personal pronouns (my, your) mainly when speaking emphatically, i.e. to make a point or a distinction between his audience's (be that the Jews'; Samaritan woman's, etc.) relationship to the Father or lack thereof and his own. The use of the possessive pronoun establishes and develops a textual tone and elicits a feeling of intimacy between λογος/Jesus and the Father. This intimacy extends to his apostles when Jesus speaks to them, about “*my* Father (τὸν πατέρα μου) and *your* Father (καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν)” (20:17).

In his first reference to the Father (2:16), Jesus uses the possessive: “Stop making *my* Father's house [τοῦ πατρός μου οἶκον] a marketplace.” Given the scene, Jesus' words are emotive as he exacts respect for his Father's house. His use of the possessive establishes early in his ministry the close relationship between himself and *his* Father. His outrage would make no sense without a close tie between them.

Still early in his ministry, Jesus uses the definite article when speaking about the Father to a foreigner, the Samaritan woman at the well: “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship *the* Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem ...true worshipers will worship *the* Father in spirit and truth, for *the* Father seeks such as these to worship him.” (John 4:21, 23) Since the Samaritan woman is not directly connected to Jesus he adopts this teaching formula. Yet after Jesus' third sign, his healing at the pool of Beth-zatha of a man ailing for 38

¹⁴⁵ “The most common way of expressing possession in biblical Greek is by the genitive case of the personal pronouns”: τὸν πατέρα μου; πατέρα ὑμῶν.

years, Jesus defends himself against the accusations of the Jews for performing works on the Sabbath with this reply: “*My* Father is still working, and I also am working” (5:17). The Jewish law is clear about abstaining from work on the Sabbath, hence Jesus needs a figure of authority to justify his doing so. In this instance, then, Jesus uses the possessive personal pronoun when addressing his oppressors to impress upon them his relationship with and authority from *his* Father alongside whom he claims to be working (another sign of movement in *John*). Jesus succeeds on some level because the Jews actually grasp that he is “calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God” (5:18).

Jesus reverts to the definite article while addressing the Jews about the authority of the Son (his authority) in 5:19-29 and when defending himself before them. They hope to discredit Jesus by saying that he cannot testify in his own behalf. Jesus claims not his Father but the very works that Jesus himself has been performing to witness to him, i.e. “to testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me” (5:36). Use of the personal possessive pronoun is not needed here as Jesus’ focus is on his works not on the Father.

Jesus again claims authority from the Father by the possessive: “I have come in *my* Father’s name...” (5:43), and reverts to the definite article when resuming his dialogue with the Jews, “Do not think that I will accuse you before *the* Father, your accuser is Moses...” (5:45). Urging the crowd to accept him (Jesus) on whom ‘God *the* Father has set his seal’ [6:27]), Jesus again uses the definite article.

The possessive pronoun serves to make clear distinctions when Jesus preaches to the Jews, e.g.: “it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is *my* Father who gives you the true bread from heaven” (6:32), Jesus again claims his relationship to his Father with the

possessive pronoun to witness to himself as being “the true bread from heaven” (6:32). then reverts to his less emotive teaching voice in (6:46, 57, 65).

Speaking to the Jews: “Yet if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” Then they said to him, “Where is *your* Father?” (The Jews dissociate themselves from the Father using the second person personal pronoun thereby [perhaps sarcastically] making him Jesus’ father, not theirs.) Jesus claims his relationship with his father by replying, ‘You know neither me nor *my* father. If you knew me, you would know *my* father also’ (8:16-19).

When discussing with the crowd the manner in which he was to die, “They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me...’ (8:27-28) ‘as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.’ (8:38) ‘We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.... If God were your Father, you would love me.... (Jesus gets personal here by juxtaposing “If” with “your” thereby disavowing their claim to the Father). You are from *your* father the devil and you choose to do *your* father’s desires...he is a liar and the father of lies’ (8:41, 42, 44). ‘It is *my* Father who glorifies me’ (8:54). The possessive pronoun here emphasises the different fathers: God, Father of Jesus and the devil, the father of the Jews.

Jesus claims that the Father’s love for him stems from his (Jesus’) obedience to the Father’s commands (10:17-18). He uses the formal definite article here as this is in effect a teaching that those who obey the Father’s commandments will earn his love. Jesus claims his

Father's authority when claiming to work *in his name* (10:25). "If I am not doing the works of *my* Father, then do not believe me" (10:37). [Here again, I suspect Jesus uses the possessive to oppose his Father's works and those of the devil which the Jews have chosen to do.] He appeals to the Jews who do not believe in him to at least "believe the works... so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (10:36-39). [Jesus addresses the Father as "Father" when he prays or talks to him 11:41; 12:27-28.] Jesus speaks officially, hence formally about his mission when says: "...but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me" (12:49-50).

The narrator of *John* also uses the more formal and detached definite article when speaking about Jesus in reference to the Father: "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to *the* Father." "And during supper Jesus, knowing that *the* Father had given all things into his hands..." (13:1, 3).

Note Jesus' use of the personal pronoun versus and definite article when responding to Thomas' question as to where Jesus was going: "No one comes to *the* Father except through me. If you know me, you know *my* Father also" (14:6). Jesus uses the definite article when referring to "No one" as opposed to the personal pronoun when he associates knowing him (Jesus) with *my* father. In verses 14:8-11 which expose Philip's misunderstanding, likely in frustration, Jesus takes up his teaching voice, using once again the definite article. He steps back from his disciples because of their lack of understanding just as he steps back from the unbelief of the Jews. Still, Jesus promises, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in

the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I (using the emphatic ἐγὼ) will do it.” This emphatic ἐγὼ calls attention to Jesus’ ability to glorify the Father through his actions.

Regarding the promise of the Holy Spirit Jesus said: ‘On that day you will know that I am in *my* Father, and you in me, and I in you...those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them’ (14:20-21). His words become more intimate as he speaks not only of his reciprocal relationship with *his* father and that with his disciples but also promises that those who love him (Jesus) will share a similar reciprocal relationship with his Father who loves those who love Jesus. “Those who love me will keep my word and *my* Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me” (14:23-24). The use of the possessive once again created the sense of intimacy in the preceding verses, an intimacy based on love and fidelity whereas a lack of love and fidelity in the following verse reverts to the use of the impersonal definite article for the Father. “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom *the* Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14:26); “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as *the* Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love *the* Father” (14:30-31).

The following lines provide additional intimate possessives that emphasize the intertwining of Jesus, his Father and his Father and the believer (15:1, 7-11, 15-17). There is also a powerful reminder that the only way to the Father is through Jesus, when he says, “Whoever hates me hates *my* Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and *my* Father” (15:23-25).

More intimacy is created with the possessive “my” Father in the face of rejection. Jesus seems to take their disdain personally.

Jesus reassumes his teaching voice when he tells his disciples about the coming Advocate, and informs them about the Jews who persecute and kill them because they believe it is a means to offer God worship (15:26; 16:1-3, 15, 24-28). “...I am not alone because the Father is with me” (16:32). Jesus addresses God as Father (17:1, 5) when he speaks to him directly; and variously as “Holy Father”, “Father” and “Righteous Father” when praying for protection for his disciples (17:11, 20-21, 24-25). Jesus sounds aloof when he addresses Mary Magdalene in the garden: “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.” Then he becomes more personal, “But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (20:17). When Jesus appeared to the disciples and *officially* sent them on their mission he said, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (20:21).

I trust this lengthy foray into *John’s* gospel has shed some light on how the author used the definite article and the personal pronoun to illustrate Jesus’ frame of mind throughout the gospel.

Chapter Three Author-Reader Interaction and Reader Response to These Gospels

3.1 Role and Effect of the Text and the Narrator on the Reader

No text is complete until a reader brings it to life by reading and deciphering it. “Reading is first of all an act of communication in which a given set of written signs is decoded; as such it is always an act of response to a prior act of writing.”¹⁴⁶ *Thomas* expressly exacts this process of decoding from its readers in the very first *logion*, luring them with a remarkable promise: “Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death.”

There are different approaches to decoding a text. One leans towards seeking the determinate sense of it while another favours the pluralistic interpretations obtained by applying critical imagination to it.¹⁴⁷ The text’s narrator aids the reader in the process of decoding its meaning. A narrator can be extradiegetic, i.e. “external to the story (primary narrator)” or intradiegetic, i.e. “internal to the story (secondary narrator)”¹⁴⁸ depending on whether or not he plays the part of a character within the piece of writing. The narrator of *Thomas* is inferred in its incipit which indicates that the secret sayings spoken by Jesus were written down by Judas Didymus Thomas.

The incipit or short preamble is not part of the gospel itself but rather its peritext. The peritext is basically any commentary (preface, prologue, conclusion) preceding or following the actual text which orients the reader in a particular way.¹⁴⁹ The narrator suggests several things in the incipit of *Thomas*: first, Thomas’ proximity to Jesus in that he had to be in his presence to

¹⁴⁶ W.G. Jeanrond, “The Transformative Power of Reading,” in *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (New York: Crossroads, 1991), 93.

¹⁴⁷ Jeanrond, “The Transformative Power of Reading,” 97.

¹⁴⁸ Marguerat and Bourquin, 27.

¹⁴⁹ Marguerat and Bourquin, 127.

hear and record his words (this proximity suggests some sort of relationship between them); second, this relationship foreshadows Thomas as a character who plays a role in this gospel (hence intradiegetic); and third, that Jesus' sayings were no ordinary words meant for everyone's ears, rather they were secret sayings. Their secrecy may suggest either their mysterious nature, or that they were intended for a select few, or both.

Using the introductory, "Jesus said" before the sayings the narrator impresses upon the reader that what he/she is about to read¹⁵⁰ are the very words of Jesus. The narrator drums this notion into the reader's mind. He uses this repetitive scheme of referring to the authoritative figure of Jesus to validate the truth of what is written in this gospel – the truth and validity of Jesus' promise that, "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death." (*Logion 1*); the truth and validity of Jesus' revelation that, "the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves then you will become known and you will realize it is you who are the children/sons of the living Father." (*Logion 3* – the start of Jesus' revelatory plot in *Thomas*); the truth and validity that his disciples (the solitary and elect) "are from it (the kingdom) and to it you (the disciples) will return," (*Logion 49*); and the truth and validity that his disciples "came from the light" and that they "are its children and...the elect of the living Father," (*Logion 50* – the end of Jesus' revelatory plot in *Thomas*). The notions of salvation through self-knowledge and the presence of the divine (the kingdom) within human beings are contrary to the teaching we find in *John*.

In *John*, the nudge toward decoding the text is more subtle than that in *Thomas*. *John's* narrator is extradiegetic as he not cast as a character in the gospel, nor is he immediately identified. Unlike the narrator in *Thomas*, he assumes an omniscient role. It is from this all-

knowing stance that he opens *John's* Prologue (part of the gospel's peritext) onto a vague and other-worldly *setting*¹⁵¹ located, "In the beginning..." He insinuates rather than describes this place where God and the Word reside, allowing the implied reader to infer a sense of it by filling in the *gap*¹⁵² that the narrator has left: it is God's eternal dwelling place; a place remote from temporal earth; a place of origins; a fruitful place that sprouts creation; a place of light so powerful it overcomes all darkness. On the other hand, in the final line of *John's* first chapter, the narrator concretises the place where the priests and Levites interrogated John (the baptizer) by *telling*, the reader its name – Bethany, and with a hint of *showing*,¹⁵³ pinpointing the spot to "across the Jordan where John was baptizing." These opposite settings presented at the beginning and end of Chapter 1 of *John* create contrast between the vague world of God above and man's concrete world here below. Throughout the Prologue, the narrator suggests a gradual descent from God's eternal world to his temporary earthly one, with the Word *existing* in the first, *creating* the second, and then *visiting* his creation. Communicating with a sense of authority and self-assurance, the omniscient narrator substantiates nothing – as if he too had been present "In the beginning..." He *tells* us through the skilful use of the verb "to be" that "In the beginning..." not only did the Word have *independent* existence; the Word existed (was) *alongside* God – evoking a sense of relationship later revealed to be that of a father and son (1:14; 18); and finally that the Word indeed *was* God – he who created all things. His first mention of "In the beginning..." refers to the opening setting – God's realm; the second refers to our earthly realm. This incidence of overt intertextuality¹⁵⁴ recalls creation in *Genesis*. It is also a means through

¹⁵¹ Setting is "the totality of facts constituting the circumstances of the story. It can have a factual value and/or a metaphorical tone. Its elements are the time, the place and the social environment." Marguerat and Bourquin, 177.

¹⁵² Marguerat and Bourquin, 129-30.

¹⁵³ *Telling* is a "mode of presentation in which a narrator says rather than shows (i.e. dramatizes in a scene), and uses the indirect style for spoken words." Marguerat and Bourquin, 70.

¹⁵⁴ "Intertextuality is a phenomenon by which a text refers to other texts by quotation, allusion or echo." Marguerat and Bourquin, 119.

which the narrator links these two realms. All of this accentuates both the Word's divinity and his humanity.

In describing the Word's negative reception by the very world he created the narrator calls up the reader's *sympathy* (a positive relationship between the reader and a character in the story¹⁵⁵). He does this by emphasizing his benevolence toward any who believe in the Word's name (a name as yet unrevealed). This withholding of the Word's name calls to mind the apostle Thomas. He *withheld his belief* until he could see and touch. Jesus told him: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (20:29). Here, the narrator *withholds the Word's name* as if asking the reader to believe in the Word without really "seeing" his identity. The narrator *tells* us, the Word gave to believers the power to become God's children (1:12) – likely the blessing Jesus later spoke of to the apostle Thomas (20:29). These believers, the narrator adds, "were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (1:13). If then believers are born of God they could logically claim a share in his divinity through faith in the Word. However, immediately following, the narrator *tells* us that the Word who *is* God's child, his *only* (my emphasis) son, born of God, takes on flesh to live among *us* (1:14). What caught my eye here is not so much that the Word took on flesh, but that he is God's child, his only son. (1:14) The narrator affirms the father-son relationship hinted at in verse one where he *told* us the Word was "with God" (1:14). He describes the Word not as a perceivable flesh and blood human being, but rather speaks of the glory of his *inner grace* and *truth* – both

¹⁵⁵ Marguerat and Bourquin, 70.

attributes evocative of his divine nature. Jesus' closeness to the Father is further emphasized in 1:18: "The one and only God, being in the bosom¹⁵⁶ of the father expounds him."

In the Prologue, it is mainly through the narrator that the reader learns about the Word. Two of the remaining three *explicit* characters are God and Moses neither of which speaks. The third is John (who we suppose is the baptizer). Following then is what the implied reader learns about the Word from what the narrator *tells* us in the Prologue alone: the Word is eternal (1:1-2); he resides with his father, God, (1:1); he is divine (1:1); he is the creator of all things (1:3); he possess and shares a font of life (1:4); he lights people's lives (1:4); he embodies light that overpowers darkness (1:5); he visited and lived in the world he created (1:10); he was not recognized (known) by the *world* he created (1:10); *what was his own* and *his own people* did not accept him (1:11); he empowered those who did accept him and believed in his name to become children of God (1:12); he become flesh (incarnated into human form) (1:14); he lived among us in human form (1:14); he shone forth for all to see his own glory and that of his Father as his only son (1:14); he was full of grace and truth (1:14); he was generous with his abounding grace (1:16); he is beloved of God, his Father (1:18); unlike Moses through whom God sent the law, he brought grace and truth (1:17); he is Jesus Christ (1:17); he is God, the Father's only son (μονογενῆς); he has made his Father known (1:18). The narrator continues to reveal bits and pieces of the Word's identity and essence throughout the gospel. The opposite is found in *Thomas* wherein the incipit merely introduces the verbal (Jesus) and written (the disciple Thomas) suppliers of the words of the text. The first *logion* challenges the reader to "interpret" those words. The text slowly reveals to those who accept the challenge to read and interpret

¹⁵⁶ "'Being in someone's bosom' denotes the closest association" (cp. Plut. Pericl. 1, 1, Demosth. 31, 6) in Frederick William Danker. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 557, Column 1.

Jesus' sayings their own divine identity. The Word's/Jesus' revelatory mission in *John* is to make the Father known (1:18) and he accomplishes this mission through his own self-revelation; Jesus' revelatory mission in *Thomas* is to lead the disciples to self-knowledge. A certain image of the character of the Father emerges through Jesus' words in *John* whereas the Father in *Thomas* remains elusive.

3.2 Real versus Implied Authors and Readers

The real-life authors of *Thomas* and *John* may never become known to modern readers and even if they should, their identity would not necessarily aid in unravelling the meaning of these gospels. Similarly, knowing the real/intended audiences for whom the real authors wrote would not necessarily help today's readers decipher these texts. It is the implied authors and readers and their interaction through the text which is important.

The implied author emerges from the text like a force that advances the narrative in the direction in which the real author wants to direct it. This implied author is created by the choices that the real author makes concerning his writing style, his character manipulation and the value system he imposes on his text.¹⁵⁷ The implied reader corresponds to either the readership for whom the real author originally wrote the text (first readers), or everyone who reads the text.

Going back to DeConick's traditio-rhetorical model mentioned in my preamble above, this model operates in different contexts, for example: "a) the broad religious environment of the Greco-Roman world in which the Johannine Community lived; b) the specific heritage and faith traditions of the Fourth Evangelist (FE); and c) the specific heritage and faith traditions of FE

¹⁵⁷ Marguerat and Bourquin, 13.

opponents, for example, the ‘Antichrists’ of *1 John* 2:18-19.”¹⁵⁸ These three perspectives meet at what DeConick calls the “point of discourse,” i.e. whatever problem the two communities are faced with solving. The actual point of discourse may not be specified in the extant texts but may be expressed “as symbolic acts and events.”¹⁵⁹ According to DeConick, the ways in which an author responded to such intercommunity dialogue ranged from defending his own stance to attacking his opponent, amassing evidence to maintain *status quo* or hiding evidence that supported his opponent, or working to create a new ideology that resolved the conflict. She claims that since real conflicts between religious communities in antiquity were frequently fictionalized and chronicled as dramas rather than word-for-word dialogue, this technique might also have been used in writing gospel stories. DeConick calls for thoughtful examination of religious texts with a view to discerning whether they contain characters and situations that reflect the author’s own ideological conflict rather than real historical incidents involving those players. I believe DeConick makes a good point and I believe the plot trajectories of *Thomas* and *John* are evocative of the different perspectives taken by their respective authors as well as of the different perspectives and self-image of their respective audiences. The authors and their respective audiences may have different views of themselves in relation to God; however, their main and ultimate objective is that in the end *one* and *all* end up in God’s kingdom.

Even though the original real author may have written for a specific audience with a specific purpose, the signs he has left throughout the text whether expressed by the narrator or the characters of these gospels nonetheless lead us, modern-day readers, along the same trajectory. However, it is impossible for that trajectory to recreate for and in us the same response the real author sought from his real audience; just as it is impossible for us to truly

¹⁵⁸ DeConick, “John Rivals Thomas,” 304.

¹⁵⁹ DeConick, “John Rivals Thomas,” 304.

experience the feelings and thoughts of people who once lived in an ancient town. We can walk along its cracked cobblestone roads and peer into its deserted buildings and imagine what may have transpired there, but we cannot truly experience the life that once animated the place. What we can do is learn from the stories that keep that place and that time and those people alive in a kind of fabricated memory that alerts us and teaches us and inspires us to modify the negative and emulate the positive lessons they teach us.

Conclusion

I trust my efforts to demonstrate the similarities and differences in my chosen pericopae and their gospels have shed some light on them, their respective authors and the audiences for which they wrote these gospels. *John* emerges as a more dogmatic piece of writing intended for a community linked to a religious group, or even the church at large; as opposed to the individual person-focused message in *Thomas*. The following table provides a snapshot overview of these similarities and differences.

Table of Comparisons

<i>Gospel according to Thomas</i>	<i>Gospel according to John</i>
<i>AUDIENCE</i>	<i>AUDIENCE</i>
Author appeals to audience’s privilege as children of Light, elite of the living Father	Author appeals to audience’s humility as prospective children of Light/God
Audience is unaware, in poverty	Audience is ignorant, in darkness
Jesus evokes monastic life via individual seeking and return to single one, as well as the shedding of the material world	Jesus evokes community life through the uniting of the crowd (all people) into one in this world and the next
<i>REVELATION/SALVATION</i>	<i>REVELATION/SALVATION</i>
Revelation is person-centered	Revelation is Jesus- and Father-centered
Salvation is ἰσχυρισμ -based; Jesus promises eternal life to interpreters of <i>Thomas logia</i>	Salvation is πίστις -based; Jesus promises eternal life to believers in his word
<i>KINGDOM</i>	<i>KINGDOM</i>
Jesus mentions <i>kingdom</i> 17 times by using verbs referring to attaining it; alluding to its paradoxical nature; comparing it to various people and to it being <i>his</i> father’s kingdom	Jesus mentions only the expression <i>the kingdom of God</i> twice in relation to being born from above and to being born through water and Spirit
<i>WORD, LIGHT, JESUS/LIVING FATHER</i>	<i>(LIVING) JESUS/LIVING FATHER</i>
Jesus denies relationship with disciples: I am not your teacher; am I a divider?	Jesus desires relationship with disciples, so “we may be one as Father and I are one”
Jesus is distant from the Living Father	Jesus is intimate with the Living Father
Living Father remains incomprehensible, inaccessible	Living Father becomes approachable and familiar through Son, Jesus
<i>CHILDREN</i>	<i>CHILDREN</i>
Jesus claims this cherished state is already held by those who seek it	Jesus promises this cherished state to believers
It is children who inherit the kingdom	It is children who inherit the kingdom

Figure 5

In summary noted how the more inclusive approach in *John* likely led to the survival of that community and its growth into a universal Church as opposed to the exclusive approach in *Thomas* which eventually likely led to the disappearance of most Gnostic sects. The darkness in each of these gospels differs because in *John* it is linked to morality whereas in *Thomas* it is linked to self-awareness. In *John* the people Jesus created (his own) revelled in the darkness because the light would expose their sinfulness. In *Thomas* the darkness represents the elite children of God's ignorance/unawareness of the divine spark (Kingdom) that dwells within them. Only **gnostic** would eradicate this darkness. The inclusive language in *John* evokes a sense of community and Jesus as trying to establish that community. The language in *Thomas* brings to mind an ascetic monastic community wherein people keep to themselves and turn away from the world. Philip Sellew has approached certain sayings ascribed to Jesus in *Thomas* with respect to how they deal with, or comment, on "traditional pious behavior."¹⁶⁰ He says these sayings point to issues within the Thomasine community when it was coming to grips with its status and role in the developing Jesus movements both inside Judaism and outside it. Sellew argues that questions surrounding pious practices also pertain to and affect social formation as groups struggle to redefine themselves.¹⁶¹ The focus in the Thomasine circle on the individual versus the community (crowd in *John*) may have led to their extinction as a formalized religious movement. Where organizations are concerned, numbers count. As the Thomasine group slowly turned inward and self-ward, the proto-orthodox Johannine community grew in numbers and power not just as a Christian movement but as a religious institution in the Greco-roman world. One wonders which of the two really understood Jesus' message, which were or became God's children?

¹⁶⁰ Philip Sellew, "Pious Practice and Social Formation in the *Gospel of Thomas*" (Foundations & Facets Forum 10, 1-2 (March/June 1994): 47.

¹⁶¹ Sellew, "Pious Practice and Social Formation," 47.

Soteriology in *Thomas* is person-centered whereas in *John* it is Jesus-centered. In *Thomas*, the one who *seeks and finds* **ϩNOCIC** realizes the living Father's kingdom in the here and now and as being *in* and *all around* him/her. In *John*, the Father's kingdom is yet to come, yet to be attained through faith in Jesus. In *Thomas*, poverty is equated with lack of gnosis as is darkness with lack of faith in *John*. In both gospels Jesus is the heavenly Revealer, the Light who helps to draw people out of poverty and out of darkness respectively through his revelation. *John* reveals to its readers Jesus' identity and the crux of his revelatory and soteriological messages with an underlying ultimatum to believe in his teaching or perish for eternity (3:36). It endorses community and salvation within the confines of that community. It proclaims faith-based salvation. Jesus promises eternal life to those who believe in his word, in him. *Thomas*, on the other hand, promotes a more open, exploratory approach that allows the individual to investigate his/her own spirituality. In *Thomas*, Jesus' role as saviour is not mentioned because according to this gospel the individual is already saved through **ϩNOCIC** and already possesses the divine spark within him/her. In *John*, divinity is restricted to Jesus. Even those who believe in him and his teachings and who become *children* entitled to share in the Father's kingdom are not characterized as being divine. *Thomas* seems to oppose bodily resurrection by advocating the shedding of all that is physical and material while *John* seems to support it, as evidenced in the post-resurrection scenes wherein the resurrected Jesus does all that a "living" human would do, i.e. speak, walk, cook fish, eat, etc.; and also in the doubting Thomas pericope, wherein post-resurrection he shows his wounds to his disciples.

The two mentions of the kingdom in *John*, both in a discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus, equally infer *becoming children* by being born from above, (i.e. "of God" (Cf. 1:12) and of water and Spirit (*John* 3:3, 5). The kingdom is not explicitly central to *John's* theology,

what is central is that all people might become children of Light/God through faith in Jesus, thereby uniting as one people, one community. The kingdom is a central theme in *Thomas*. Jesus informs individuals that the kingdom is inside and outside of them. However, in order to access it, they must come to know themselves through introspection and by seeking until they find the interpretation of the gospel's *logia*. Jesus reveals the kingdom to seekers (readers of *Thomas*) using different narrative approaches: verbs that represent access to and knowledge of the kingdom; parables that evoke the paradoxical nature and location of the kingdom; comparisons of the kingdom to various people, parabolic characters who through their encapsulated human life situations reveal aspects of the divine kingdom; and the prominent possessive pronoun to emphasize that the kingdom is indeed his father's

In *John*, Jesus' primordial and intimate relationship with his Father, his loving relationship with his disciples and his anticipated relationship with all people portray him as being approachable as is the Father *through* Jesus and his teachings about him. The living Father in *Thomas*, on the other hand, is aloof and unknowable. The gospel barely mentions him especially as concerns his relationship to/with with Jesus. Although Jesus is shown to interact with his disciples in *Thomas*, he appears to keep separate his worldly role (as teacher/revealer) through which he gets down to their level (at least as concerns the apostle Thomas) and his divine (creator) role through which he proclaims himself above (the) All and as being the All (*Logion 77*).

Twenty-first century media echoes the appalling mistreatment of children in antiquity adding ever-rising statistics on the delinquency of fatherless children. If Jesus, who according to the tenets of Christianity is the God-man at the center of a 2000-plus-year system of beliefs, so

highly esteemed these little ones, what does their continued mistreatment say about our world? And could not faith/belief in a loving heavenly father bring solace and hope to those who have been mistreated and abandoned?

Both physically and spiritually little children are God's seeds of humanity created in his own image (*Gen.* 1:27). They are the seeds of his light and life placed in this world to grow and learn and find their way back to their divine origin (*Logia* 9; 20; 49; 50; 57; 73; *John* 1:12-13; 11:52; 12:36; 13:33; 21:5). Little children are the root elements of human society and humanity itself. They are not only the core of the nuclear family, the extended family, the community and the world, but also of Jesus' Church on earth and by extension the Father's heavenly kingdom. The concept of "little children" is a universal and timeless one. If only on a rhetorical level, since God's Word is intended for all people throughout time, his most important message regarding salvation could only have been presented by means of such a universal and timeless image to which every human being can relate at some level regardless of their race, religion or situation in history.

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