NEW SAYINGS OF JESUS IN THE RECENTLY DISCOVERED COPTIC "GOSPEL OF THOMAS" 1

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GNOSTICISM, which is approximately as old as Christianity, was, in the first centuries, a dangerous rival to the young Christian creed. 2 Therefore the Gnostics were persecuted and this was done so effectively that nearly all the Gnostic books were destroyed. The only available information about the ideas of the different Gnostic schools was, for a long time, only to be found in the contemporary books written against them.

The first Gnostic manuscript of which we have knowledge was brought from Egypt to London where it was bought, in the second half of the eighteenth century, by Dr. A. Askew, a London physician whose hobby was collecting manuscripts. After his death it was sold to the British Museum where it still remains. 3 It is called the Codex Askewianus and its language is Coptic, 4 as is that of the rest of the Gnostic manuscripts which have so far come to light.

About A.D. 1769 the famous Scottish traveller James Bruce bought a number of manuscripts in Egypt and among them was another Gnostic manuscript in Coptic, now called the Codex Brucianus. After his death it was sold to the Bodleian Library. 5

Both these manuscripts have been edited and translated more

1 This paper was read to the Manchester University Egyptian and Oriental Society on the 1st of December 1958. It has been altered in some places and notes have been added.


3 B.M. Add. MS. 5114 (parchment).

4 Cf. my article "Coptic and its Value", BULLETIN, xl (1957), 229-58.

5 Bruce MS. 96 (papyrus).
than once. The texts in them are of a comparatively late period when Gnosticism was already near to its decay.

In 1896 another Coptic manuscript with Gnostic texts was bought in Egypt for the Berlin Museum. A series of unfortunate events prevented its being edited until 1955. The second text of this manuscript, the "Apocryphon of John", is of considerable importance because it gives a full account of the system of the Gnostic school.

In 1945 or 1946 some Egyptian farmers found a vessel containing thirteen papyrus manuscripts (books, not rolls) with nearly fifty Gnostic texts in the Coptic language. These manuscripts were found near the ancient Chenoboskion, not far from the modern village Naga Hammâdi in Upper Egypt. They formed the library of a Gnostic community which lived in Upper Egypt in the fourth or fifth century. We may suppose that it was persecution which led to the library being hidden. In view of the fact that these manuscripts are more than fifteen centuries old and are written on extremely brittle material, they are in very good condition. Most of them were in their original leather bindings.


6 Papyrus was produced in the shape of a long roll. But it was not always used in this form. Very often, especially in Coptic times, leaves were cut from the rolls and a book was made of them.

6 Jean Doresse, Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte, Paris, 1958. One of the plates (between pp. 136 and 137) gives a very instructive picture of some of these manuscripts. The next plate shows the place where the manuscripts were found.
The importance of this Gnostic library is in fact not less than that of the Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls. But a number of unfortunate circumstances have prevented the editing of these highly important texts. First of all, the manuscripts were not from the outset in the control of the Egyptian Antiquity Department but came into private hands. Only one manuscript was bought for the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo and that soon after the find. The rest remained in private possession and only after many years' negotiations was it possible to acquire them for the Coptic Museum—with one exception. One of the manuscripts was brought out of Egypt and, after a long journey through the Old and the New World, purchased privately and presented to the C. G. Jung-Institut in Zürich. It is called the Codex Jung in honour of the famous Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung.\(^1\) One of the four texts contained in it has been edited. It is called "the Gospel of the Truth" and was published in 1956 in Zürich under the Latin title "Evangelium veritatis".\(^2\)

This text is the only one so far edited from the Gnostic library found near Naga Hammâdi. In 1956 an international committee was formed in Cairo in order to study and edit these important texts. It is to be hoped that no further difficulties will arise and that they will all be edited in due course.\(^3\)


\(^2\) Michel Malinine, Henry-Charles Puech, Gilles Quispel, *Evangelium veritatis. Studien aus dem C. G. Jung-Institut*, vi, Zürich, 1956. This *editio princeps* contains the Coptic text (with excellent plates of all the pages edited in the book), a French, a German, and an English translation. Cf. Walter C. Till, "Bemerkungen zur Erstausgabe des 'Evangelium veritatis'", *Orientalia*, N.S. xxvii (Rome, 1958), 269-86. The leaves with pp. 33-6 of the "Gospel of the Truth" (*Evangelium veritatis*) are not in Zürich but in the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo. Photographic reproductions have been published by Dr. Pahor Labib in *Coptic Gnostic Papyri in the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo*, vol. i (Cairo 1956), plates 5, 6, 9, and 10. I have prepared an edition of these four pages which will shortly be published in *Orientalia* (Rome) under the title "Die Kairener Seiten des Evangeliums der Wahrheit".

\(^3\) There is little hope that these texts will be published in rapid sequence unless the present idea that a detailed commentary ought to be given in the *editio princeps* is abandoned. I think that publishing first the texts with a short introduction, a translation and wordlists, and then giving the commentary later in a separate volume would yield much more satisfactory results.
One of them, "the Gospel of Thomas", has received repeated mention in newspapers throughout the world. Like some other texts before it, it has been called "the Fifth Gospel". This is, to say the least, misleading. However it may be judged, there is no question that it cannot be added to the four canonical Gospels as an equal, which is apparently suggested by those who call it "the Fifth Gospel".

The "Gospel of Thomas" is a collection of sayings of Jesus which is not entirely unknown. In 1897 and 1903 a few Greek papyrus fragments were found at Oxyrhynchos (Egypt). The texts of these fragments are known as *Logia Jesu* and have been dealt with in many books and articles. The "Gospel of Thomas" is the Coptic translation of the complete text of the Greek *Logia Jesu* but not exactly of the version we know from the fragments. The text of the Greek fragments must now be re-edited in accordance with the Coptic text. We know now how to fill the gaps.

In the "Gospel of Thomas" there are 114 logia according to the official edition. Not all are merely sayings of Jesus. There are, for instance, some short conversations between Jesus and other persons. They follow each other without any connection between them and obviously without any method. We find some of them repeated in the collection, the second time slightly altered. Sometimes we notice that one word, e.g. brother, children, woman, flesh, etc., is found in two logia following each other, the meaning of the two logia with the same word being quite different. If we regard the collection as a unit we

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1 There is another "Gospel of Thomas" dealing with the childhood of Christ. It has nothing in common with our text but the title. Cf. M. R. James, *The apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, reprint 1955), pp. 14-16 and 49-70. In the following notes this book is referred to as "James".

2 Cf. James, pp. 25-9. In the following notes these Oxyrhynchos Papyri are referred to as "Oxy" with the number.

3 It will be published under the Latin title *Evangeliwn secundum Thomam* by E. J. Brill, Leiden (Holland). The editors are Antoin Guillaumont, Henri-Charles Puech, Gilles Quispel, Yassa Abdal-Masih, and myself. It is intended to publish it in an English, a French, and a German edition so that everyone may choose the language he understands best. It is hoped that the edition will be issued in the course of 1959.
find inconsistencies, which indicates clearly that the logia were taken from different sources.

The title of the text, as given at its beginning, is: "These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus said and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down".1 The title at the end of the text is simply: "The Gospel according to Thomas".2

Approximately half of the logia brought together in the "Gospel of Thomas" are known from the canonical Gospels. But they are always changed in some way—amplified, combined with something else, or, at least, differently worded. Therefore they are of importance and interest for the textual criticism of the New Testament.

As an example of the divergencies we may compare the parable of the Feast as it is told in the New Testament (Matt. xxii. 2-10; Luke xiv. 16-24) with logion 64 of the "Gospel of Thomas" which expresses the same ideas in quite a different way. It reads: "Jesus said: A man had guests and when he had prepared the meal, he sent his servant to summon the guests. He went to the first and said to him: My master summons thee. He said: Some traders owe me money; they will come to me in the evening. I shall go and give them my orders. I pray to be excused from the feast. He went to another and said to him: My master has summoned thee. He said to him: I have bought a house and I am asked for an appointed day. I shall not be at leisure. He came to another and said to him: My master summons thee. He said to him: My friend is to marry and I am to give a feast. I shall not be able to come. I pray to be excused from the feast. He went to another and said to him: My master summons thee. He said to him: I have bought a village. I must go to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. I pray to be excused. The servant came and said to his master: Those whom thou badest to the dinner have excused themselves. The master said to the servant: Go out into the

1 Cf. Oxy 654; James, p. 26, Prologue.
roads. Those whom thou shalt find, bring them, that they may dine. The buyers and merchants will not come into the places of my Father.” This logion and some others are of interest from the point of view of folklore.

My task in the team of editors is to edit the Coptic text and to produce a proper translation. I must leave it to more competent scholars to go deeper into the question of the origin of the logia. Professors H.-Ch. Puech (Paris), G. Quispel (Utrecht), and Leipoldt (Leipzig) have already given their opinions in recently published articles.¹

Quispel thinks that the “Gospel of Thomas” was compiled in the second century, and not before 130 or 140. Leipoldt supposes that the collection was compiled during the fourth century, but that its sources go back into the second century.

Dating an early Coptic literary manuscript is extremely difficult because we have no dated manuscripts of these early times. Moreover, the scribes of books with biblical or related texts appear to imitate older manuscripts. Therefore to give an opinion regarding the date of an early Coptic manuscript cannot be, in the present state of our knowledge, much more than guess work. So we must not be surprised to find many diverging opinions regarding the time when the Coptic manuscript of the “Gospel of Thomas” was written. The extremes would appear to be the third century A.D., as some think, and about 500 (Leipoldt, loc. cit.). My own guess would be about 400.

The principal sources of the “Gospel of Thomas” were two apocryphal Gospels, “The Gospel according to the Egyptians” and “The Gospel according to the Hebrews”, of which we already know some parts as quotations.²

In the “Gospel of Thomas” there are some logia completely unknown hitherto. Quispel thinks that those logia which are in the style of the canonical Gospels may be authentic sayings.


² James, pp. 1-8 and 10-12 respectively. In the following notes the Gospel according to the Egyptians is indicated by G. Egy, the Gospel according to the Hebrews by G. Hebr.
But, of course, it is impossible to reach any certainty on the question of authenticity.

The Apostle Thomas himself is quite innocent and cannot be held responsible for "the Gospel of Thomas". It was a wide-spread practice in ancient times to attribute a book or a doctrine to some famous person in order to give it more authority.

Thomas plays a prominent rôle among the Apostles in our text. He is obviously considered as the most enlightened and advanced of the disciples. This is shown clearly in logion 13: "Jesus said to his disciples: Tell me whom I am like. Simon Peter said to him: Thou art like a righteous angel. Matthew said to him: Thou art like a wise philosopher. Thomas said to him: Master, truly, my mouth will not bring itself to say to whom thou art like. Jesus said: I am not thy master, for thou hast drunk from the bubbling fountain and hast been inebriated. And he took him aside and told him three words. Now, when Thomas came to his companions, they asked him what Jesus had said to him. Thomas said to them: If I tell you one of the words he has told me you will take up stones and throw them at me and fire will come out of the stones and burn you up."

All the disciples and those who accept the doctrine taught by Jesus are a higher sort of men. I think we may suppose that they were considered to be those whom the Gnostics called πνευματικός, the spirituals.¹

In logion 85 Jesus says: "Adam came forth from a great power and a great wealth and yet he was not worthy of you. For if he had been worthy he would not have tasted death". Logion 49 reads: "Jesus said: Blessed are the solitaries² and the elect, for you will find the kingdom because you come from it and you will return to it". By the change from the third person to the second it becomes obvious that Jesus is speaking to the solitaries.

¹ πνευματικός is a person whose πνεῦμα (spirit) is most fully developed, in contrast to the ἐλκός, the materialist (ὅλη = matter) and the ψυχικός whose soul (ψυχή) is predominant.

² "Solitary" translates here μοναχός, which cannot have its usual meaning "monk" in this early text, but seems rather to mean "the lonely one"—not so much in the sense of a hermit or an anchorite but of a person standing alone with the advanced development of his knowledge (gnosis) who, therefore, is not one of the mass.
The "Gospel of Thomas" does not contain any discussion of doctrine but the very choice of the logia gives us some idea of the views held by the compiler or redactor of this text.

It becomes obvious from the title, "The secret sayings", that the text was considered to be esoteric. We may even suppose that there were different degrees of esotericism, for in logion 13 already mentioned we see that Jesus took Thomas aside and told him three words which Thomas could not repeat to his fellow Apostles.

The very first logion of the collection suggests that there is a secret meaning in the sayings. It reads: "He who will find out the interpretation of these words will not taste death". This, too, seems to me to point to a text of an esoteric character.

Another hint as to the esoteric character of the doctrine to which the Gospel of Thomas belonged might be seen in some logia stating that only very few will be able to reach the highest plane, e.g. logion 75 reads: "Jesus said: Many are standing at the door but the solitaries are they who will enter the bridal chamber".

For him who wants to be saved it is necessary above all to recognize the vanity of the material world. Logion 56 reads: "He who has known the world has found a corpse and then the world is not worthy of him". We even find this logion twice in the collection (logion 80).

Moreover, Jesus says in logion 27: "If you do not abstain from the world you will not find the kingdom". There are some other logia with the same tendency. Thus we see Jesus wondering, in logion 29, "that this great wealth [i.e. the spirit] has settled down in this poverty [i.e. the flesh, the human body]".

There is a logion (no. 2) mentioning the stages of progressive knowledge: "He who seeks must not stop seeking till he finds. When he finds he will be bewildered. When he is bewildered he will marvel and he will reign over the universe." 2

It is by no means sufficient to know the worthlessness of the material world. The indispensable perfection of knowledge is knowing oneself. For even "he who knows all the universe

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1 Cf. Oxy 654; James, p. 26, Prologue.
but does not know himself has missed everything” (logion 67). On the other hand he who knows himself has reached a standard high above the material world. “Jesus said: He who finds himself, the world is not worthy of him” (logion 111).

We find also some hints in the text as to what knowledge of oneself consists. “When you know yourselves you will be known and you will know that you are the sons of the living Father” (logion 3). In logion 50 we read: “If you are asked who you are, answer: We are the sons and the elect of the living Father”.

I think we may suppose that “to be sons of the living Father” means that there is a divine spark in man, that man has taken his origin from the divine world of light whither the right knowledge (= Gnosis) will lead him back again.

But the great majority of men are not yet open to this knowledge. “Jesus said: I stood in the midst of the world and I appeared in the flesh to them. I found them all drunk and none among them thirsty. My soul was afflicted for the sons of men because they are blind in their heart and do not see that they have come empty into the world and want to go empty out of the world. Now they are drunk. But when they have cast off their wine they will change their minds” (logion 28). It is a miserable condition not to know one’s sonship to the Father: “If you do not know yourselves you are in poverty and you are poverty” (logion 3).

The reverse of the material world is the divine light. Jesus says in logion 50 to his disciples: “If you are asked where you have come from, answer: We have come out of the light where light has come into being by itself.” Jesus says in logion 24: “There is light in a man of light and he gives light to the whole world. If he does not give light there is darkness.” Logion 61 reads: “If he [i.e. anyone] is connected [with the Father] he will be filled with light. If he is separated, he will be filled with darkness.”

We may suppose that “the beginning”, i.e. the starting point of being, is to be understood as the divine light or the

1 Cf. Oxy 654; James, p. 26, ii.
2 Cf. Oxy 1; James, p. 27, viii.
living Father. Logion 18 reads: "The disciples said to Jesus: Tell us how our end will be. Jesus said: Have you already ascertained the beginning that you are looking for the end? For where the beginning is, there will be the end. Blessed is he who stands in the beginning and knows the end. He will not taste death." Jesus says in logion 77: "I am the light that is above all of them. I am the universe. The universe came forth from me and the universe reached to me. Cleave wood: I am there. Lift up the stone and you will find me there." 

This logion may seem somewhat inconsistent. But we must keep in mind that people then did not always think in the way to which we are accustomed.

These are the main points we can glean from the text. But there are some details which may be of interest.

The expression "dog in the manger" is well known. Until now I have failed to find anyone who could point to its origin. And yet we find this comparison in logion 102 of our old text. From that we see that it was already quite common at that time. "Jesus said: Woe to the Pharisees for they are like a dog lying in a manger of cattle. Neither does he eat nor does he allow the cattle to eat."

If the reader of the "Gospel of Thomas" should happen not to understand clearly what this means he will find a variant of the saying in logion 39 which reads: "Jesus said: The Pharisees and the Scribes have received the keys of knowledge and have hidden them. They neither did enter themselves nor did they allow those to enter who wished."

The difference between the sexes does not play any rôle in Coptic Gnostic texts hitherto known. We may understand it as being in accordance with that question when we read in logion 22 that all the differences, including that of the sexes, must disappear. This is expressed thus: "Jesus saw babies taking suck. He said to his disciples: These babies taking suck are like those who enter the Kingdom. They said to him: Shall we then enter the Kingdom as children? Jesus said to them:

1 Cf. Oxy 1; James, p. 27, x, for the two last sentences, which are preceded by a different text.

2 Cf. Matt. xxiii. 13; Luke xi. 52; Oxy 655; James, p. 29.
When you make the two one and when you make what is within like what is without, and what is without like what is within, and what is above like what is below, and when you make the male and the female one only, so that the male will not be male and the female will not be female, when you make eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in the place of a hand, and a foot in the place of a foot, an image in the place of an image, then you will enter the Kingdom.

In some Gnostic texts Mary Magdalen plays a predominant part among the disciples and some passages show Peter as her adversary. We find this in our text but Jesus' answer to Peter gives the male sex a distinct predominance.

In the last logion (114) we read: "Simon Peter said to them: Let Mary (Magdalen) go away from us, for women are not worthy of the Life". The answer does not reject this view as we should expect, but rather agrees, for Jesus says: "I shall lead her so that I may make her male, that she also may be a living spirit like you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

It is doubtful how the reader is to understand how a female can be made male. We may suppose that changing a woman into a man was thought possible by way of reincarnation after death. Reincarnation is an essential feature in the Gnostic doctrine. But on the other hand it is not mentioned in the "Gospel of Thomas." Moreover, there are other possible ways of understanding this logion. Many passages of our text are obscure for various reasons or may be understood in different ways. As soon as the text is published and generally available comparisons will be possible which will shed more light on these passages.

The compiler of the "Gospel of Thomas" did not think much of fasting, giving alms, observing a diet, or even praying. There are some sayings which show that clearly. E.g. logion 6: "His disciples asked him, they said to him: Do you wish us to fast, and how shall we pray? Are we to give alms? And which

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1 Cf. G. Egy, James, p. 11.
2 Salome, Christ's midwife, mentioned in some apocryphal texts, says in logion 61 that she is a disciple of Jesus.
3 Cf. my edition of the Berlin gnostic manuscript 8502 (mentioned in note 3 of page 447), p. 31, Coptic text: 17, 15 ff.
diet shall we observe? Jesus said: Do not tell lies and do not do what you hate because everything is manifest before Heaven. For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and there is nothing covered that will remain without being uncovered."¹ This certainly means that, in the opinion of the writer, to be true in words and deeds is much better than all "good deeds".

The same idea is expressed in a much stronger way in logion 14: "Jesus said to them: If you fast you will acquire sin, and if you pray you will be condemned, and if you give alms you will do evil to your spirits. When you go to any land, and when you walk in those countries, eat what they will set before you when they receive you, and heal the sick among them. For what will enter your mouth will not defile you. But what comes out of your mouth, that will defile you."

In logion 104 we see fasting and praying reserved for special occasions only. "They said to him: Come, let us pray to-day and fast. Jesus said: What is the sin that I have committed or in what have I been vanquished? But when the bridegroom comes out of the bridal chamber, then let them fast and pray."²

What is eaten takes on the nature of the eater. This is said in a drastic way in logion 7: "Jesus said: Blessed is the lion which the man eats and the lion becomes man. But abominable is the man whom the lion eats and the man becomes lion." The same idea is expressed in logion 11 where we read: "When you ate the dead you made it living".

Among the logia brought together in the "Gospel of Thomas" there are some parables relating to the Kingdom of Heaven.³ Most of them are known from the canonical Gospels, although not all are used there as parables of the Kingdom, e.g. the parable of the lost sheep of Matt. xviii. 12 and Luke xv. 4. We find the same parable in a slightly changed form in logion 107 where it is introduced in this way: "Jesus said: The Kingdom is like a shepherd who has one hundred sheep, etc."

Like all the logia which we find in both the canonical Gospels

¹ For the end of this logion cf. Oxy 654, James, p. 26, iv.
² Cf. G. Hebr, James, p. 6.
and the "Gospel of Thomas", the parables of the Kingdom are
changed in some way in our text. As an example we may cite
the parable of the treasure hidden in the field.

In Matt. xiii. 44 it reads: "Again the Kingdom of Heaven is
like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has
found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that
he hath and buyeth that field".

We find a short story made of this in logion 109: "Jesus
said: The Kingdom is like a man who had a treasure hidden in his
field without knowing it. After his death he left it to his son.
The son did not know it. He took that field and sold it. He who
bought it came to plough and found the treasure. He began
to lend money at interest to those he wished."

There are some parables in the "Gospel of Thomas"
which are not found in the canonical Gospels, e.g. logion 97:
"Jesus said: The Kingdom of the Father is like a woman carry­
ing a jar full of flour, walking a long way. The handle of the
jar broke and the flour flowed out behind her on the road. She
did not know it, she had not noticed the accident. When she
arrived at her house she put the jar down and found it empty."

The next logion (98) reads: "The Kingdom of the Father is
like a man who wishes to kill a nobleman. He drew the sword in
his house and thrust it into the wall that he might see if his hand
would be strong enough. Then he slew the nobleman."

I have only been able to show glimpses of this remarkable
text, but I think that the fundamental ideas which we can gather
from this collection of sayings of Jesus fit very well into the
Gnostic doctrine. Undoubtedly the Egyptian Gnostics were of
the same opinion, for they included the text in their library.
But I am not qualified to give a final verdict on the matter.
That I leave to more competent scholars.