

The Ethical Teachings of the Gospel of Thomas



Caroline Oosterkamp

Student number: 0954829

Master thesis

University of Groningen

Supervisor: Dr. F.L. Roig Lanzillotta

2nd Assessor: Prof. Dr. G.P. Luttikhuisen

June 2013

Cover illustration:

First page of the Gospel of Thomas (Nag Hammadi Codex II)

For my children

Preface

This thesis has been written in order to obtain a master's degree in Theology from the University of Groningen. It has been supervised by Dr. F.L. Roig Lanzillotta. Prof. Dr. G.P. Luttikhuizen has been assigned as second assessor.

In 2005, at the end of a class on Early Christianity and Gnosticism, Prof. dr. G.P. Luttikhuizen offered a handout for students interested in Gnosticism. It was only a few pages, with the heading 'The Gospel of Thomas'. However, this fascinating text turned out to have a huge impact on my life. I embarked on a long journey into the world of Gnosticism. The Gospel of Thomas eventually inspired me to change my major from Religious Studies to Theology. Whenever I had a chance I wrote papers on texts found in Nag Hammadi, predominantly on the Gospel of Thomas.

Over the past years, I have studied the Gospel of Thomas from many different perspectives, but I had not yet looked at its ethical teachings before. As with every new perspective, gaining new insights always leads to more questions. The Gospel of Thomas is extremely enigmatic, which contributes to my continuing fascination.

I would like to thank Prof. Dr. G.P. Luttikhuizen for introducing me to the Gospel of Thomas. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. F.L. Roig Lanzillotta for teaching me Coptic and supervising my journey into the world of Gnosticism and the Gospel of Thomas over the past few years with so much enthusiasm. His excellent feedback was not only educational, but often also very inspirational. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, especially my husband Mischa, for their encouragement and support.

Caroline Oosterkamp

Zwolle, June 2013

Contents

Introduction: Ethics and the quest for knowledge	6
1. The self: Ethics of self-control	11
1.1 Persecution: the internal struggle	11
1.2 Searching and finding	15
1.3 The relationship with the divine	21
2. The other: Ethics of gender and social interaction	28
2.1 Male and female	28
2.2 Becoming a solitary	35
2.3 Social interaction	39
3. The world: Ethics of world renunciation	44
3.1 Poverty and becoming passers-by	44
3.2 Circumcision	49
3.3 Fasting, almsgiving and dietary regulations	51
Conclusion	54
Bibliography	58

Introduction: Ethics and the quest for knowledge

Since its discovery in 1945, the Nag Hammadi manuscripts have attracted much scholarly attention. These rediscovered texts offered a new and unique perspective on the diversity of early Christianity. Scholars soon agreed that most texts in this collection could be labeled 'Gnostic'. Because it was generally believed that Gnostics were not very interested in ethics, a view inspired by the heresiologists' presentation of Gnostic viewpoints as deterministic, the ethical teachings of the newly found texts were not studied extensively in the first decades after the find. This view was persistent for a long time. Edwin Yamauchi, who did some research in Gnostic ethics, wrote in 1970: 'The Gnostics with their stress on liberty and on the other world more often than not undermined ethics. One does not, for example, find many injunctions against sin in general or against sins in particular in the Nag Hammadi texts.'¹ Slowly, this view began to change. In 1975, Frederik Wisse concluded that the Gnostic texts do not contain clear indications of deterministic ideas.² Yamauchi's earlier viewpoint was also decisively refuted by Michel Desjardins, who showed that sin did play an important role in Valentinianism.³ Finally, in 1992, Winrich Alfried Löhr exposed how Gnostic determinism developed as a cliché in the works of the hereseologists.⁴

One of the most extraordinary finds in Nag Hammadi was an almost complete version of the Gospel of Thomas (GosThom). The background and origin of this gospel have been heavily debated. Different dates of origin

¹ However, Yamauchi does concede that ethics regarding sex and marriage were 'a subject of dominant concern to all Gnostics.' Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Cambridge, 1970) 24.

² Frederik Wisse, 'Die Sextus-Sprüche und das Problem der gnostischen Ethik', in A. Böhlig and F. Wisse (eds), *Zum Hellenismus in den Schriften von Nag Hammadi* (Wiesbaden, 1975) 55-86 at 84-85.

³ Michel R. Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism* (Atlanta, 1990).

⁴ Winrich Alfried Löhr, 'Gnostic Determinism Reconsidered', *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992) 381-390.

have been suggested, as part of divergent views on its relation with the synoptic gospels and the extent to which material in GosThom dates back to the historical Jesus.⁵ Also the nature of the text has been disputed, especially to which extent GosThom is a Gnostic text.⁶ Depending on the characterization of the text, GosThom can provide us with more insights into the proto-Christian community and/or give us a better understanding of the Gnostic reception of Christian ideas.

A close examination of the ethical teachings of GosThom might help us determine the character of the text. Even though several scholars have paid attention to ethical aspects of GosThom, no consensus has been reached regarding the objective and character of its ethical teachings.⁷ The one hundred and fourteen sayings of GosThom offer no clear-cut clues regarding its standpoint on the desired behavior of its readers. GosThom clearly does not contain a comprehensive and coherent ethical system. However, the text does provide us with some hints. The most obvious instructions can be found in sayings 6 and 14:

6. His disciples questioned him and said to him, "Do you want us to fast? How shall we pray? Shall we give alms? What diet shall we observe?"

Jesus said, "Do not tell lies, and do not do what you hate, for all things are plain in the sight of heaven. For nothing hidden will not become manifest, and nothing covered will remain without being uncovered."⁸

⁵ See Nicholas Perrin, 'Recent Trends in *Gospel of Thomas* Research (1991-2006): Part I, The Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels', *Currents in Biblical Research* 5 (2007) 183-206.

⁶ For an overview of opinions on GosThom's genre and theology, see Nicholas Perrin and Christopher W. Skinner, 'Recent Trends in *Gospel of Thomas* Research (1989-2011). Part II: Genre, Theology and Relationship to the Gospel of John', *Currents in Biblical Research* 11 (2012) 65-86 at 66-77.

⁷ For an overview of divergent opinions on ascetic ethics in GosThom, see Richard Valantasis, 'Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical? Revisiting an Old Problem with a New Theory', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999) 55-81 at 56-61.

⁸ 'The Gospel of Thomas', Thomas O. Lambdin (trans.), in: James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, Vol. 2 (Leiden,

Saying 14 seems to provide a more direct answer to the disciples' questions in saying 6:⁹

14. Jesus said to them, "If you fast, you will give rise to sin for yourselves; and if you pray, you will be condemned; and if you give alms, you will do harm to your spirits. When you go into any land and walk about in the districts, if they receive you, eat what they will set before you, and heal the sick among them. For what goes into your mouth will not defile you, but that which issues from your mouth – it is that which will defile you."

How should these instructions be interpreted? Did these sayings emerge from a critical attitude towards a legalistic interpretation of Christianity or did they represent a radically new and different worldview? What kind of ethical teaching does the text present? In order to answer these questions, however, these sayings should not be interpreted out of context. Other sayings in GosThom offer important information on the mindset of the readers that should be taken into account as well.

However, several other sayings in GosThom include numerous implicit ethical advices. A comparative analysis thereof reveals a rather coherent whole, behind which one may discover a common goal. Jesus sayings in GosThom intend to orient its readers in the search of the existential coordinates in which their lives move or should move. It attempts at providing individuals with some clues about what they must do or what they should avoid in their lives, what is good for them, in order to attain the goal that gives fulfillment to human existence. From this perspective, it seems evident that we are very close to the Hellenistic

Boston and Köln, 2000). Unless otherwise specified, all quotations of GosThom originate from this source.

⁹ It has been argued that originally the questions in saying 6 were succeeded by the text in saying 14. See for example April D. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas: A History of the Gospel and its Growth* (London and New York, 2005) 59-60. However, see also Antti Marjanen for several critical remarks on such theories. Antti Marjanen, 'Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices', in: Risto Uro (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh, 1998) 163-182 at 167-168.

concept of what ethics is. As has been pointed out, 'The starting-point of Greek moral philosophy, from the fifth-century sophists until the Hellenistic period, is the question about how a man is to live his life: what is the final human good? What constitutes happiness, *eudaimoniā*?'¹⁰ This *eudaimonia*, happiness, was the main goal of ethics for the ancient Greeks: 'Greek thinkers based their ethical thinking on the ideal of an exemplary human life. They saw the attainment of a good life as the *telos*, the end or goal, of human existence. For most Greek philosophers, this end is *eudaimonia*.'¹¹ It is clear that GosThom is no philosophical text and has no philosophical intentions. However, can we find behind its sayings a clear view of what is good for man and what the means to attain it? What is the *telos* or goal of ethics in GosThom?

We may find a first clue towards the answer in the first saying of GosThom, in which the audience is encouraged to find the interpretation of the text:

1. And he said, "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death."

This is a powerful first saying, strongly encouraging the audience to find the interpretation by promising salvation. This seems to be the ultimate goal of GosThom: finding salvific knowledge. The key to human fulfillment, to salvation, is clearly knowledge. All ethical advices in GosThom seem to aid in this quest for salvific knowledge, mostly by aiming to overcome potential obstacles.

This thesis aims to provide more insights into the ethical worldview of GosThom by examining the meaning of several of the gospel's admonitions. In three chapters, three important potential obstacles in the

¹⁰ Christopher Rowe, *An Introduction to Greek Ethics* (London, 1976) 9.

¹¹ William J. Prior, *Virtue and Knowledge: An Introduction to Ancient Greek Ethics* (London and New York, 1991) 2.

quest for knowledge will be addressed: the self, the social world and the material world. Firstly, ethics of self-control in relation to the imperative to search and find will be discussed, including ethics regarding the relationship with the divine. Secondly, the ethics of gender and social interaction, including the sayings on becoming a solitary, will be dealt with. Thirdly, several sayings revealing ethics of detachment from the physical world will be analyzed. The information thus found on the nature of the ethical teachings will provide us with more insights into the background of the writer and community behind GosThom and shed light on the links, if any, between GosThom and proto-orthodox forms of Christianity.

1. The self: Ethics of self-control

One of the most important themes in GosThom is its recurring theme of finding secret knowledge. What should the seeker do to find that knowledge? What kind of behavior enables a successful search? A closer look at some of GosThom's sayings will enable us to see how the search for knowledge requires self-control and changes the seeker's relationship with the divine.

1.1 Persecution: the internal struggle

Several sayings in GosThom refer to persecution. First of all, in saying 55 the seeker is told that 'whoever does not (...) take up his cross in my way will not be worthy of me.'¹² Apparently, the seeker is encouraged to follow in Jesus' footsteps. But what does this mean? As has been pointed out, its meaning may have shifted over time: originally, the imitation of Jesus' death was performed by severing one's family ties, in time, however, taking up the cross came to refer to gaining control over one's body and passions.¹³ If this is the right interpretation, the seeker is encouraged to develop self-control, which is symbolized as taking up one's cross.

This might also be concluded from those sayings that emphasize the suffering that characterizes the seeker. So, for example, saying 58 establishes a close relationship between suffering and 'life':

58. Jesus said, "Blessed is the man who has suffered and found life."

¹² Complete saying: 55. Jesus said, "Whoever does not hate his father and his mother cannot become a disciple to me. And whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and take up his cross in my way will not be worthy of me." See also chapter 2.3 for the interpretation of this saying.

¹³ April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation* (London and New York, 2006) 189.

What is the relationship between suffering and life? Is the text talking about suffering as a precondition in order to attain life? Does life only achieve its special contours by means of suffering? Or do we rather have to think of suffering as the concomitant element appearing in a life worth living? Is suffering then the cause of a good life or is it rather the consequence of following the right path towards the goal?

According to April DeConick, this saying may originally have referred to physical persecution, but over time 'this logion came to reference the internal struggle of the soul against the body and its passions, the internal persecution of the demons.'¹⁴ Apparently, the soul needs to overcome the bodily passions. The passions may have been dangerous obstacles in the attainment of knowledge. Only by an internal struggle can these passions be fought and overcome, which entails a process of suffering.

There are some passages in GosThom that might provide us with additional material to understand what persecution is about. Two consecutive sayings, 68 and 69, speak directly about this. Again, the seeker who is persecuted is considered blessed:

68. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when you are hated and persecuted. Wherever you have been persecuted they will find no place."

69. Jesus said, "Blessed are they who have been persecuted within themselves. It is they who have truly come to know the father. Blessed are the hungry, for the belly of him who desires will be filled."

A plethora of interpretations have been proposed by scholars to understand the meaning of these texts. According to Bruce Lincoln, who has tried to reconstruct the community behind GosThom, these sayings

¹⁴ DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 196.

'give reassurance in the face of failure or oppression.'¹⁵ However, contrary to saying 68, in saying 69 the persecution does not seem to refer to persecution by others, but refers to persecution 'within themselves'. What does this mean? Based on similarities with Matt 5:8, it has been suggested that the text may be corrupt, due to someone incorrectly entering the verb 'to persecute'.¹⁶ The first part of the saying may originally have been: 'Blessed are those who are (truly) pure of heart. They are the ones who (already) have come to know the Father.'¹⁷

However, could we find a plausible interpretation without altering the text? To begin with, one might consider a Gnostic interpretation: 'Die Welt ist es, die den gnostischen Jünger in seinem "Herzen" treffen und bedrohen kann. Nur im andauernden Prozeß der Weltablehnung kann sich der Gnostiker für die Erkenntnis des eigenen Lichtfunkens entscheiden. Diese ständige innere Spannung, die die Negation der Welt hervorruft, gleicht einer Verfolgung.'¹⁸ However, we have to keep in mind that GosThom contains no indisputable references to inner light sparks and Gnostic mythology. Still, persecution may be symbolic for the internal conflict in the seeker, which results from world renunciation. The world and more specifically a lack of control of one's reactions to the world may be considered potential obstacles in the quest for knowledge. Again, GosThom seems to admonish the seeker to develop self-control.

But the meaning of the saying does not necessarily derive from Gnosticism. The saying might promise freedom from mental afflictions.¹⁹ This is a possible interpretation, but DeConick on the other hand notes

¹⁵ Bruce Lincoln, 'Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community: A New Approach to a Familiar Text', *Novum Testamentum* 19 (1977) 65-76 at 72.

¹⁶ Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary* (Stuttgart, 2008) 168.

¹⁷ Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 168.

¹⁸ Michael Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik* (Münster, 1991) 200.

¹⁹ Reinhard Nordsieck, *Das Thomas-Evangelium: Einleitung – Zur Frage des historischen Jesus – Kommentierung aller 114 Logien* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2004) 266.

resemblance with Alexandrian traditions and states that “Persecution within the heart” was probably understood to be the fight of the soul against the pleasures, passions and desires, the true enemy. Once these were overcome, knowledge of the Father was possible.’²⁰ In this interpretation, again it seems that the soul is considered to be in some state of struggle, which is necessary to overcome the obstacles in attaining knowledge of God.

From a different perspective,²¹ Patrick Hartin has analyzed these two sayings as follows: ‘In effect, Logia 68-69 bear witness to a perspective where Thomas Christians experience themselves as besieged from every quarter. This experience has positive results because it leads to a deeper self-awareness. Starting with the experience of opposition that emanates from the world around them, they experience an interior struggle to discover themselves. They escape the world by concentrating upon themselves. The world may be able to harm their bodies, but the inner being is the place where they encounter the Father.’²² Hartin clearly sees a connection between the search for self-knowledge and persecution, which can be succinctly put: ‘Through suffering one discovers oneself.’²³ Whatever its precise nature, whether it functioned to overcome bodily passions or acquire self-knowledge, or perhaps both, inner persecution can obviously be considered a vital and integral part of the quest for knowledge. It clearly symbolizes the seeker’s internal struggle, which is required to attain the salvific knowledge. This persecution is a defining characteristic of the seeker.

²⁰ DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 223.

²¹ As part of an article describing ‘the search for the true self’; a search Hartin claims to fit in the context of the Syrian church. Patrick J. Hartin, ‘The Search for the True Self in the Gospel of Thomas, the Book of Thomas and the Hymn of the Pearl’, *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 55 (1999) 1001-1021.

²² Hartin, ‘The search for the true self’, 1003.

²³ Hartin, ‘The search for the true self’, 1013.

1.2 Searching and finding

The inner persecution is clearly a prerequisite for the quest for knowledge. Now let us examine the nature of the quest itself. The imperative to search and find is by far the most important exhortation GosThom contains. After the first saying of GosThom, which encourages the audience to find the interpretation of the text,²⁴ seeking and finding remain important and recurring themes throughout the text. The audience is again encouraged to engage in seeking in saying 2:

2. Jesus said, "Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the all."

In this saying, seeking results in a sequence of activities, ending with ruling 'over the all'. This saying shows the importance of seeking and finding: it results in some kind of power. The Greek version of this saying, found among the fragments in Oxyrhynchus, is slightly different:

2. [Jesus said], "Let him who seeks continue [seeking until] he finds. When he finds, [he will be amazed. And] when he becomes [amazed], he will rule. And [once he has ruled], he will [attain rest]."²⁵

The ultimate goal here is to find rest. However, the intermediate steps, equivalent in the Greek and Coptic versions, are surprising: after finding, one 'becomes troubled' and 'will be astonished' in the Coptic version, or 'will be amazed' in the Greek fragment. It has been suggested that we might have here a reference to 'various levels of initiation within the *Thomas-community*'.²⁶ However, this seems highly speculative to me, since

²⁴ See Introduction for full quotation of saying 1.

²⁵ Translation by Harold W. Attridge, 'The Greek Fragments', appendix to: 'The Gospel of Thomas', Thomas O. Lambdin (trans.), in: James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, Vol. 2 (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 2000) 95-128 at 126.

²⁶ Lincoln, 'Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community', 69.

we do not even know if such a community ever existed. Therefore, I prefer the interpretation that sees behind the logion the description of a process. Uwe-Karsten Plisch, who translates the Greek fragment slightly differently,²⁷ explains the stages of that process as follows: 'The successful search for truth leads first to dismay, since true cognition does not bring to light what the seeker had expected. Via the astonishment that could be understood as the overcoming of the dismay, cognition leads to dominion, that is, the conquest of being at the mercy of the matters of the world; finally, this victory leads to rest, which is the ultimate goal of knowledge and wisdom.'²⁸ This is a key point: the found knowledge frees one from worldly matters and provides rest. We see a clear connection here with the inner struggle to overcome the soul's passions and worldly attachments. As we saw, the struggle is a prerequisite for attaining salvific knowledge, but as it now turns out, the knowledge itself helps to sever the bonds with worldly matters. It seems these two processes, the inner struggle and the finding of knowledge, are closely intertwined and mutually beneficial.

What kind of knowledge is capable of freeing one from worldly matters and providing rest? A possible answer can be found in the third saying of GosThom:

3. Jesus said, "If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, 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 that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty."

²⁷ Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 40, "[Jesus says], 'He who seeks should not cease [seeking until] he finds. And when he finds, [he will be dismayed. And when he] is dismayed, he will rule. And [when he rules], he will rest'."

²⁸ Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 41.

The salvific knowledge turns out to be self-knowledge. Without this self-knowledge, people can be equated with poverty. As has been pointed out, 'Inability to break loose from ignorance means that the lost man remains "poor" without the least chance of uniting himself with the heavenly world. And it is precisely this state of affairs which means that he identifies himself with the material world and shares its conditions.'²⁹ It seems that a lack of knowledge ties the seeker to the material world, whereas self-knowledge can have a liberating effect. If self-knowledge is the key to salvation, the imperative to search is focused on the self. It becomes a kind of soul searching, which explains its interdependent relation with the inner struggle of the soul to overcome the passions and worldly involvement.

But how does one obtain this self-knowledge? The third saying indicates that the seeker should not listen to his leaders, as they misdirect their followers. As has been pointed out, 'The seeker guides the self into knowledge, requiring no external guidance other than the saying of Jesus that directs seekers to themselves.'³⁰ This is an interesting point, emphasizing the seeker's own responsibility for attaining the salvific self-knowledge. The quest cannot be guided by anyone other than the seeker himself, although Jesus' sayings are a source of inspiration.

Apparently, Jesus does play an important part in aiding the seekers in their quest. However, in saying 24 the disciples seem to misunderstand the nature of his guidance.

24. His disciples said, "Show us the place where you are, since it is necessary for us to seek it."

He said to them, "Whoever has ears, let him hear. There is light within a man of light, and he lights up the whole world. If he does not shine, he is darkness."

²⁹ Bertil Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London, 1961) 197; see his positioning of GosThom amongst Gnostic texts on 272.

³⁰ Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London and New York, 1997) 58.

The disciples apparently think they need to find the place where Jesus is. However, Jesus' answer seems to rebuke them. It refers to 'light within a man of light', perhaps encouraging the disciples to search within themselves. Again, self-knowledge seems to be the key and the only person who can engage in self-examination to attain such knowledge, is the seeker himself.

Pharisees and scribes will also not aid in finding the required knowledge. In saying 39 they are accused of obstructing the search:

39. Jesus said, "The pharisees and the scribes have taken the keys of knowledge (gnosis) and hidden them. They themselves have not entered, nor have they allowed to enter those who wish to. You, however, be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves."

However, this saying does imply that either the Pharisees and scribes were not aware of having the keys or they deliberately chose to hide them. Since they did not enter themselves, it seems more likely that they were unaware of having received these keys of knowledge. This could mean that the Pharisees and scribes had access to the right source, but discarded that source or did not access it. As Richard Valantasis puts it: 'Jesus acknowledges that these Pharisees have knowledge which they have kept secret, and that acknowledgment places their knowledge on a parallel track to the knowledge and understanding promulgated in these sayings. The sayings do not define the nature of the knowledge that the scholars and Pharisees withhold, but their stance contrasts with the relatively open access to knowledge in this Gospel, which is open to anyone who seeks to find the interpretation of the sayings.'³¹ Clearly, the seeker should not turn to the Pharisees and scribes for assistance in his quest, but focus on the interpretation of GosThom instead.

GosThom is optimistic both about the seeker and about the

³¹ Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 115-116.

possibility of finding what he is looking for. In two sayings, 92 and 94, Jesus reassures the seekers that their search will eventually be fruitful:

92. Jesus said, "Seek and you will find. Yet, what you asked me about in former times and which I did not tell you then, now I do desire to tell, but you do not inquire after it."

94. Jesus [said], "He who seeks will find, and [he who knocks] will be let in."

However, finding does clearly require a self-conscious, continuous and strenuous search. What his followers do not inquire after, Jesus cannot provide them with. These sayings may have functioned as encouragement to continue seeking. With the internal struggle to overcome one's passions and worldly attachment as an integral part of it, the quest must have been difficult to complete.

Towards the end of GosThom, we find another encouragement to find oneself in saying 111:

111. Jesus said, "The heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence. And the one who lives from the living one will not see death." Does not Jesus say, "Whoever finds himself is superior to the world"?

Several previously mentioned aspects are combined in this saying. Again, we see that self-knowledge somehow frees oneself from the world, even making the seeker 'superior to the world.' Because of the sequence of the second and third sentence, there seems to be an implicit connection in this saying between finding oneself and not seeing death.

In conclusion, the seeker who finds the interpretation of GosThom and thereby manages to find himself, will rule the all, become superior to the world and will not die. The exhortation to find the interpretation of GosThom, as is expressed in its first saying, must somehow be related to the Gospel's encouragements to find self-knowledge. Perhaps the right interpretation of the sayings facilitates such a quest. As we saw, the sayings

on persecution may have inspired the seeker to overcome his passions and worldly matters, thus facilitating him to focus on the quest for knowledge. This quest for knowledge is clearly the key to salvation. In this respect, GosThom's soteriology is fundamentally different from the New Testament's idea of salvation: salvation is not achieved by the death and resurrection of Christ, but attained by learning from Jesus' sayings and developing self-knowledge.³² This makes the seeker fully responsible for his salvation. How does this affect the seeker's relation to God?

³² See also Stephen J. Patterson and James M. Robinson, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg, 1998) 56-57.

1.3 The relationship with the divine

If searching for self-knowledge leads to salvation, does that mean that prayer has become obsolete? Which instructions does GosThom provide regarding the seeker's relationship with God? In the introduction, we already saw sayings 6 and 14, which seem to denounce the traditional practices of fasting, praying, almsgiving and observing dietary regulations.

It has been argued that these sayings do not really denounce such traditional practices. Some believe, for example, that the command not to lie and not to do what you hate in saying 6 should be explained as a condemnation of hypocritical, egotistic acts of piety, and the negative comments on fasting, praying and almsgiving in saying 14 can 'be understood a comment on the damage one causes one's soul by fasting, praying, and giving alms, if these traditional forms of piety arise from hypocritical efforts at self-exaltation.'³³

Other scholars do believe that sayings 6 and 14 contain a negative view on the traditional practices of fasting, praying and almsgiving: the negative view of these practices is linked to the quest for self-knowledge, as finding salvific insights cannot be replaced by fasting and praying.³⁴ This seems to be a valid point. As we saw, self-knowledge is the key to salvation. If prayer does not result in self-knowledge, it becomes obsolete.

However, saying 104 also refers to praying (ψληλ):

³³ Christopher M. Hays, 'Resumptions of Radicalism: Christian Wealth Ethics in the Second and Third Centuries', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 102 (2011) 261–282 at 275–276.

³⁴ Milan Vukomanović, 'Ascesis, Symbol and Baptismal Rite in the Gospel of Thomas', *ARCHAEUS. Studies in the History of Religions* IX (2005) 41–55 at 45, 'I believe that such an exception from the (ascetic) rule may be explained by another, unusually emphasized aspect of the Thomazine asceticism – the asceticism of (self)-examination. In the same way in which the expectation of the future, apocalyptic, events does not aid in the search for the Kingdom, fasting and prayer may not substitute for an esoteric *hermeneia* of Jesus' words which has programmatically been announced, at the very beginning of the gospel, as the matter of life and death.'

104. They said to Jesus, "Come, let us pray today and let us fast."

Jesus said, "What is the sin that I have committed, or wherein have I been defeated? But when the bridegroom leaves the bridal chamber, then let them fast and pray."

Although Jesus does not accept the invitation to pray and fast, his answer does imply that praying and fasting might be useful in some situations. It seems that praying and fasting might function as atonement for sin. However, we saw in saying 14 that 'if you pray, you will be condemned'. Are we facing a seeming contradiction in the text? If so, one could explain it as the result of different textual layers present in the text. In my view, however, this is not necessary, since the last sentence of the saying provides the key: apparently, at some point in time, intriguingly referred to as 'when the bridegroom leaves the bridal chamber', it becomes necessary to fast and pray.

However, Jesus probably does not refer to his disciples here, which can be concluded from his use of the third instead of the second person pronoun: 'let them fast and pray'.³⁵ In that case, apparently his disciples are not urged to pray, perhaps because prayer leads to condemnation for them, as we saw in saying 14. If self-examination makes prayer obsolete, it seems clear that Jesus must be referring to other people, not yet so advanced in their search for self-knowledge. As Valantasis concludes, the rejection of the traditional ascetical acts, such as praying, is essential since 'the renunciation of pious acts becomes part of the construction of a new identity no longer requiring the traditional pious acts.'³⁶

Even though prayer may no longer be required, God still needs to be worshipped:

³⁵ This was also noted by Antti Marjanen. Antti Marjanen, *Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices*, 171.

³⁶ Valantasis, 'Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical? Revisiting an Old Problem with a New Theory', 64.

15. Jesus said, "When you see one who was not born of woman, prostrate yourselves on your faces and worship him. That one is your father."

In itself the phrase 'one who was not born of woman' could refer to God, Jesus or even Adam. Since the end of the saying calls the one in question here 'your father', this saying most likely refers to God. Even though it has been argued that the term 'Father' was not uncommon as a reference to Jesus in early Christianity,³⁷ the epithet 'father' is used elsewhere in GosThom to refer to God. So the 'one who was not born of woman' in this saying probably refers to God. In that case, the seeker is told to worship Him when he sees Him.

However, when and, especially, how does the seeker see the father? According to DeConick this happened during a mystical vision.³⁸ She believes saying 15 was part of a speech characterized by eschatological urgency: 'So imminent is the end, that they, even now, have direct access to God's throne where they can bow down before God in worship.'³⁹ The problem of this interpretation is, however, that GosThom does not contain any indisputable references to either eschatological events or mystical visions. This is the reason why we should find an alternative explanation. Reinhard Nordsieck believes this saying refers to people seeing God 'wenn sie ihn erkennen und ihm glaubend vertrauen.'⁴⁰ Admittedly, this explanation appears to be more plausible, but it still does not explain why, while prayer is obsolete, worship remains necessary.

Stevan Davies offers a more complicated explanation of this saying: 'If in saying 15 "one who was not born of woman" refers to the original creation of humanity, then people reborn in God's image will not have

³⁷ Gilles Quispel, *Het Evangelie van Thomas* (Amsterdam, 2004) 91.

³⁸ DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 6.

³⁹ DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 117-118.

⁴⁰ Nordsieck, *Das Thomas-Evangelium*, 82.

been born of woman. They will exist in the condition of the image of God (saying 22) and in that sense may be considered images of their divine Father. They will not, of course, worship themselves but the divine Father whose image they are.⁴¹ This is not the only interpretation in which a connection is assumed between this saying and the creation of humanity. Risto Uro believes this saying refers to a heavenly origin of Jesus and his disciples.⁴² If this saying somehow refers to human creation, this origin might be part of the self-knowledge the seeker needs to obtain.

This would explain why prayer becomes obsolete while worship is still relevant. Worship apparently aids in the quest for self-knowledge. The realization that God is his father may help the seeker to understand his own identity better. Worshipping God may provide the seeker insights into his own origin or potential.

No other sayings in GosThom tell the seeker to worship God, but there seem to be two warnings against blasphemy. The first may be found in saying 14, already quoted in the introduction, where Jesus said 'that which issues from your mouth – it is that which will defile you.' This does not necessarily have to refer to blaspheming though. In a text so preoccupied with finding knowledge, ignorant utterances may also have been considered defiling. A clearer warning against blasphemy, however, can be found in saying 44:

44. Jesus said, "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."

⁴¹ Stevan Davies, 'The Christology and Protology of the "Gospel of Thomas"', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992) 663-682 at 667-668.

⁴² Risto Uro, 'Asceticism and Anti-Familial Language in the Gospel of Thomas', in: Halvor Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (London and New York, 1997) 216-234 at 220.

It is striking that whoever blasphemes the father or the son will be forgiven, since we may safely assume that father and son refer to God and Jesus. However, this does not mean that blaspheming is not a big issue: blaspheming the holy spirit is beyond forgiveness.

As has been pointed out, the holy spirit was apparently more important than the father and the son: 'it is a clear hierarchy and ordering of levels.'⁴³ Unfortunately, there is no scholarly consensus on the interpretation of this saying. It may mean that heathens who do not know God and Jews who do not recognize Jesus as Messiah will be forgiven, but those blaspheming the holy spirit will not.⁴⁴ On the other hand, a Gnostic interpretation also sounds very plausible: 'Sowohl der Vater als auch der Sohn sind nur Bilder für das Licht. Wer wider den Vater und den Sohn lästert, lehnt das christlich-gnostische System des ThEv ab. Dagegen gilt derjenige, der den verborgenen Lichtfunken in sich nicht erkennt, als verdammt. Der heilige Geist stellt gerade dieses Licht dar.'⁴⁵ If this is the case, acknowledging the light particle within might be part of the advocated self-examination in GosThom. If the holy spirit does represent the inner light and the aim of the quest for knowledge is to become aware of that light, it makes sense that blaspheming the holy spirit hampers the quest. However, that is also the case if the holy spirit somehow facilitates or inspires the quest, so a Gnostic interpretation is possible but not necessary.

It becomes clear that the central admonition in GosThom, to find knowledge, affects the guidelines for the seeker's relationship with the divine. We have seen that prayer becomes obsolete, but worshipping the divine is still required and blaspheming the holy spirit is detrimental. What about Sabbath observance? At first glance, saying 27 seems to indicate that

⁴³ Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 121.

⁴⁴ Quispel, *Het Evangelie van Thomas*, 159.

⁴⁵ Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium*, 143.

respect for the divine also includes honoring the Sabbath:

27. <Jesus said,> “If you do not fast as regards the world, you will not find the kingdom. If you do not observe the Sabbath as a Sabbath, you will not see the father.”

It has been maintained that this saying contains a strong encouragement to observe the Sabbath.⁴⁶ However, it is questionable whether we should take this saying so literally, especially because of its parallelism with the previous sentence. As Antti Marjanen put it, ‘there is no indication in the text that the parallelism between the two parts of the logion means that the first part refers to fasting in metaphorical terms but the second part presents the keeping of the Sabbath as a concrete, ritual act.’⁴⁷ Marjanen also observes that if one assumes, on the basis of parallelism between the two sentences, the accusative in both sentences to be an accusative of respect, the saying may be translated as follows: ‘<Jesus said,> “If you do not fast as regards the world, you will not find the kingdom. If you do not rest (sabbatize) as regards the Sabbath, you will not see the Father.”’⁴⁸ Further, a correspondence may be assumed between the world and the Sabbath.⁴⁹ These observations lead to the conclusion that “sabbatizing the sabbath” in logion 27 no longer has anything to do with concrete sabbath observance. Rather, it symbolizes abstinence from the world and from worldly values.⁵⁰

Marjanen based his conclusions partly on the work of Tjitze Baarda, who believes that this saying ‘should be interpreted not as an ascetical or encratic directive, certainly not as a Jewish-Christian device with respect

⁴⁶ April D. DeConick, *Seek to See Him. Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden, New York and Köln, 1996) 129.

⁴⁷ Marjanen, ‘*Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices*’, 176.

⁴⁸ Marjanen, ‘*Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices*’, 177.

⁴⁹ Marjanen, ‘*Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices*’, 177.

⁵⁰ Marjanen, ‘*Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices*’, 177-178.

to fasting and keeping the Sabbath, but in a cosmological sense as the denial of creation and/or its Creator.⁵¹ If these interpretations are correct, the seekers were probably not obliged to keep the Sabbath. However, this saying did instruct them. It told them to distantiate themselves from the world. Just like the sayings on persecution, this admonition then facilitates the quest for self-knowledge.

As we have seen, the relationship with the divine has been severely altered. Traditional religious observances are no longer defining the relationship. All admonitions regarding the relationship with the divine can be explained from the viewpoint of the quest for self-knowledge. Only those practices that aid the seeker in his quest are maintained. Anything that does not help, such as prayer or traditional Sabbath observance, has become obsolete.

⁵¹ T. Baarda, "'If you do not sabbatize the Sabbath ...': The Sabbath as God or World in Gnostic Understanding (Ev. Thom. Log. 27)", in: R. van den Broek, T. Baarda and J. Mansfeld (eds), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden, New York etc., 1988) 178-201 at 197.

2. The other: Ethics of gender and social interaction

In the previous chapter, the way GosThom advocates a personal quest for knowledge and the ethics of self-control required for such a quest came to the fore. How does this quest affect the differences between male and female? GosThom repeatedly encourages the seeker to become a 'solitary', what does that mean? What does GosThom say about social interaction? Is the seeker supposed to give up his friends and family, or not? Those are the questions that will be dealt with in this chapter.

2.1 Male and female

Saying 22 seems to advocate some sort of unification of male and female, as part of a larger transformation process:

22. Jesus saw infants being suckled. He said to his disciples, "These infants being suckled are like those who enter the kingdom."

They said to him, "Shall we then, as children, enter the kingdom?"

Jesus said to them, "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 the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female; and you fashion eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in 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]."

Scholars have offered many different interpretations of the reference to male and female in this saying, referring to various possible backgrounds. Divergent interpretations of this saying have also lead to diverse views regarding its ethical advice.

Quispel refers to Plato for the explanation of this saying. In Plato's *Symposium*, original mankind became divided into the sexes, which after

the separation kept longing for a restoration of the original unity.⁵² This is a possible explanation, although the idea of original unity can also have been derived from other sources.

Several scholars have instead pointed at Philo of Alexandria for the explanation of this saying. Uro, for example, believes saying 22 is one of the sayings in GosThom that 'reflect the image of the asexual Primordial Man based on Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of Gen 1-2, which can be found in Philo and later rabbinic literature.'⁵³ Of course, we have to keep in mind that Philo may have been influenced by his knowledge of Plato. Also, as has been pointed out, this view does not necessarily mean this saying inspired ascetic practices.⁵⁴ Saying 22 clearly describes the process of becoming a new being, but 'It is difficult to say how much of this new being could be seen as being realized in the present situation of the Thomasine Christian.'⁵⁵

This is a valid point. When we consider the transformation process in relation to the previously discussed quest for knowledge, it is difficult to assess the underlying hierarchy. Is the transformation process described in saying 22 a prerequisite for attaining salvific knowledge? Or does the seeker have to complete the quest for knowledge in order to undergo the transformation? Or, alternatively, is the seeker slowly transformed while the process of gaining knowledge continues? Unfortunately, these questions are difficult to answer with any certainty. Yet they are of crucial importance, because of their ethical implications. If saying 22 encouraged some sort of asceticism as part of the transformation, and this transformation in turn was regarded necessary in order to gain salvific knowledge, the seekers must have been very motivated to adopt an ascetic

⁵² Plato, *Symposion* 191c-d, in: Quispel, *Het evangelie van Thomas*, 108-109.

⁵³ Risto Uro, 'Is Thomas an Encratite Gospel?', in: Risto Uro (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh, 1998) 140-162 at 150.

⁵⁴ Uro, 'Is Thomas an Encratite Gospel?', 150.

⁵⁵ Uro, 'Is Thomas an Encratite Gospel?', 153.

lifestyle. However, does saying 22 clearly promote asceticism?

Several scholars are convinced that it does. Marvin Meyer, also referring to Philo of Alexandria, thinks saying 22 'proclaims a salvific oneness and unity.'⁵⁶ He believes that this unified state is best characterized as asexual:⁵⁷ 'the *Gospel of Thomas* announces that the properly spiritual person is one who transcends sexuality and renounces the enslaving life and divisive categories of sexuality, as a part of his or her renunciation of this world of darkness and acceptance of the world of freedom and light.'⁵⁸ This interpretation fits in well with our previously discussed ethics of self-control. It seems plausible that sexuality might deter the seeker from his quest.

Asceticism as a background to the saying might be plausible if it refers to the myth of the androgynous Adam, according to which 'Adam's perfection included androgyny as part of his ontological completeness, and his loss of perfection involved sexual differentiation, (...).'⁵⁹ The return to this androgynous state may have required ascetic rigor and chastity.⁶⁰ It has even been suggested that some members of the community practiced self-castration, but the argument remains highly speculative.⁶¹

These are just some examples of the divergent interpretations of this saying and its ethical implications.⁶² Unfortunately, there is no way of

⁵⁶ Marvin Meyer, 'Making Mary Male: The Categories Male and Female in the Gospel of Thomas', *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985) 554-570 at 561.

⁵⁷ Meyer, 'Making Mary Male', 561.

⁵⁸ Meyer, 'Making Mary Male', 561.

⁵⁹ Lincoln, 'Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community', 74.

⁶⁰ Lincoln, 'Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community', 75.

⁶¹ Lincoln points out that self-castration took place in Syria, dating back to a pagan cult, and then refers to saying 21 of GosThom. Lincoln, 'Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community', 75. However, there is no reason to assume the ripened fruit in saying 21 refers to male genitalia.

⁶² To offer a few more: Fieger believes that the main themes of the second part of this saying are: 'Die Rückkehr zu einer ontologischen Einheit und die Ablehnung der Ehe und der Sexualität (...)' Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium*, 101. DeConick also believes this saying advocates celibacy. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 115-116. Nordsieck, however, has a different theory: 'Es bedeutet im einzelnen, dass Frauen und

knowing whether the interpretation of saying 22 indeed caused ethically inspired radical practices such as celibacy, but it seems likely. Two other sayings might shed more light on this issue. First, let us take a look at saying 79:

79. A woman from the crowd said to him, "Blessed are the womb which bore you and the breasts which nourished you."

He said to [her], "Blessed are those who have heard the word of the father and have truly kept it. For there will be days when you (pl.) will say, 'Blessed are the womb which has not conceived and the breasts which have not given milk.'"

At first sight, this saying seems to advocate celibacy. As some have remarked, 'an ascetic hermeneutic characterizes the passage'⁶³ and 'the ascetic renunciation of sexual reproduction is almost certainly presupposed here.'⁶⁴ However, we do not know to what the future tense in this saying refers. Does it announce an apocalypse, a war or something else? Therefore, Uro has rightly pointed out that 'the reference to a future situation at least leaves a possibility that marriage and childbearing may be part of the present experience of *Thomas*' audience. Even if the saying predicts that there will be a time when the disciples understand the preciousness of ascetic life, it is not an explicit exhortation to abolish marriage.'⁶⁵ Be that as it may, this saying does seem to value celibacy. Even if this is nothing but a reference to the future, celibacy still seems to be regarded positively.

Männer ihre Fixierung auf soziale Rollen überwinden. Der Mann muss seine innere Weiblichkeit, die Frau ihre Männlichkeit annehmen.' Nordsieck, *Das Thomas-Evangelium*, 112.

⁶³ DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 242.

⁶⁴ A.D. Jacobson, 'Jesus against the Family: The Dissolution of Family Ties in the Gospel Tradition', in: Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, Kristin de Troyer and Marvin W. Meyer (eds), *From Quest to Q: Festschrift James M. Robinson* (Leuven, 1999) 189-218 at 215.

⁶⁵ Uro, 'Is Thomas an Encratite Gospel?', 149.

However, the reason why celibacy may be championed one day does not have to be a positive one. Quispel, referring to passages in Mark and Luke, believes this saying announces upcoming wars. In wartime, pregnant and nursing women are to be pitied, especially when people are on the run.⁶⁶ This is a plausible explanation of this saying. But if it changes the motivation for ethical behavior, it does not change the ethical implications. Whether for religious reasons or because of upcoming wars, this saying clearly promotes a celibate lifestyle.

There is one more saying in GosThom that deals with the distinction between male and female:

114. Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life."

Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."

This saying can be interpreted in several ways.⁶⁷ First of all, it might refer to an outward transformation, not unheard of in antiquity, resulting in the woman appearing as male: 'This took place by means of cutting one's hair short and accepting male dress. The act signified an extremely radical ascetic choice.'⁶⁸ Women may also have had a practical reason to do this. Stephen Patterson, who assumes Thomas Christians to have been wanderers, has pointed out that looking male may have enabled women to take up an itinerant lifestyle, as it may have protected them from assault and rape.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Quispel, *Het Evangelie van Thomas*, 257.

⁶⁷ Antti Marjanen, 'Women Disciples in the *Gospel of Thomas*', in: Risto Uro (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh, 1998) 89-106 at 99-104.

⁶⁸ Marjanen, 'Women Disciples in the *Gospel of Thomas*', 99.

⁶⁹ Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, 1993) 155.

Secondly, this saying could refer to the same kind of unity between male and female as was advocated in saying 22. In that case, both sayings 'speak about a return to the pristine state of the androgynous prelapsarian man. The only difference is that while in the case of logion 114 the prelapsarian androgynous state is understood in terms of the situation when woman was still concealed in man (Gen 2), in logion 22 it is seen in light of the time before the gender differentiation had taken place in Gen 1.27.⁷⁰

Thirdly, male and female might refer to different qualities. As Meyer put it: 'Often the transformation of the female into the male involves the transformation of all that is earthly, perishable, passive, and sense-perceptible into what is heavenly, imperishable, active, and rational.'⁷¹ Both men and women may have been encouraged to undergo this transformation.⁷²

After listing these three possible explanations, Marjanen claims that 'Common to them all is the ascetic connotation of the phrase.'⁷³ However, what kind of ascetic practices it might have inspired remains obscure. Did it make women cut their hair and wear man's clothes? In that case, it may have helped the women to focus on their quest for knowledge instead of being distracted by hairstyles and fashion. Or did it inspire men and women somehow to try to return to the androgynous state and if so, what kind of ethical behavior was considered necessary to achieve that? This kind of interpretation may have led to a celibate lifestyle, again facilitating the quest for knowledge by avoiding the distractions involved in sexuality and relationships. Or did it encourage men and women to overcome earthly pleasures and emotions and instead focus on heavenly matters and

⁷⁰ Marjanen, 'Women Disciples in the *Gospel of Thomas*', 101.

⁷¹ Marvin Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (New York, 1992) 109.

⁷² Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 109-110.

⁷³ Marjanen, 'Women Disciples in the *Gospel of Thomas*', 101.

rationality? Again, the quest for knowledge might greatly benefit from such behavior, as we have seen before. Apparently, the quest for knowledge may benefit from all three of these interpretations. Therefore, this saying may certainly have inspired some kind of ascetic behavior that facilitated the quest. Unfortunately, the exact nature of that behavior cannot be deduced from the text.

2.2 Becoming a solitary

Closely related to the theme of unification of male and female, is the concept of the 'solitary' (ΜΟΝΑΧΟC). Three sayings refer to the solitary:

16. Jesus said: "Men think, perhaps, that it is peace which I have come to cast upon the world. They do not know that it is dissension which I have come to cast upon the earth: fire, sword, and war. For there will be five in a house: three will be against two, and two against three, the father against the son, and the son against the father. And they will stand solitary."

49. Jesus said, "Blessed are the solitary and elect, for you will find the kingdom. For you are from it, and to it you will return."

75. Jesus said, "Many are standing at the door, but it is the solitary who will enter the bridal chamber."

In saying 16, the solitary seems to be somehow connected with strife. In saying 49, however, the solitary is promised a return to the kingdom and saying 75 states that the solitary will access the bridal chamber. Because in both cases it is the solitary who will enter, the bridal chamber may be some sort of equivalent of the kingdom. Since becoming a solitary provides the seeker with access to the kingdom, this may very well be the end result of attaining salvific knowledge. The transformation process of male and female, as discussed in the previous section, may be a part of the process of becoming a solitary.

This process may eventually be completed in the bridal chamber. According to Enno Edzard Popkes, the bridal chamber is the place where original androgyny is regained: 'Im Sinne gnostischen Denkens kann das Brautgemach nämlich als Zielpunkt des eschatologischen Vollendung verstanden werden, in welchem die geschlechtliche Entzweiung menschlicher Existenz überwunden wird und der Mensch in die Androgynie

zurückkehrt, aus welcher er ursprünglich stammt.⁷⁴ However, with this interpretation we are left with a puzzling contradiction. If the original androgyny is restored in the bridal chamber, why is it the solitary that will enter the bridal chamber? It seems more likely that the bridal chamber is an equivalent of the kingdom, in which perhaps some sort of reunion with the divine is completed. As we have seen in saying 49, the solitary is originally from the kingdom. The restoration of androgyny, or becoming a solitary, may be required to enter the bridal chamber, instead of taking place in the bridal chamber itself. The bridal chamber may then be a different metaphor for the kingdom, with the kingdom referring to the power of God and the bridal chamber to His loving affection for the seeker. Both metaphors could then be considered complementary, each focusing on a different aspect of God.

But what does it mean to enter the bridal chamber as a solitary? Is becoming a solitary something the seeker should try to achieve by following daily guidelines? As has been pointed out, 'These sayings have played an important role in the argument that the *Gospel of Thomas* derives from strictly encratite Christianity.'⁷⁵ Uro however arrives at a different conclusion: '*monachos* has indisputable anti-familial overtones, but a clear-cut encratite interpretation does not do justice to the multi-dimensional imagery of the gospel.'⁷⁶ In a similar vein, *monachos* has been considered 'to be a technical term for one who has renounced family ties.'⁷⁷ However, is giving up one's family all that is necessary to become a *monachos*?

It seems plausible that more is required to achieve this end. I agree

⁷⁴ Enno Edzard Popkes, *Das Menschenbild des Thomasevangeliums: Untersuchungen zu seiner religionsgeschichtlichen und chronologischen Einordnung* (Tübingen, 2007) 160.

⁷⁵ Uro, 'Is Thomas an Encratite Gospel?', 156.

⁷⁶ Uro, 'Is Thomas an Encratite Gospel?', 159.

⁷⁷ Jacobson, 'Jesus against the Family', 212.

with the view that 'Through separation from all worldly connections, Thomas Christians become *monachoi*.'⁷⁸ A direct connection between the ideal of the *monachos* and ethics may be assumed: 'the ideal of "singleness," expressed in the Coptic phrase *oua ouōt* or the Greek loan word *monachos*, has a double significance: celibacy and asocial isolation.'⁷⁹ It seems that becoming a *monachos* entails more than just severing family ties. This is probably the better interpretation, since it is plausible that the quest for knowledge would greatly benefit from a celibate lifestyle and avoiding social interaction. Also, the unification process of male and female may somehow be established through celibacy.

Milan Vukomanović, who believes that GosThom was originally written by the Naassenes,⁸⁰ also claims that the ideal of the *monachos* inspired some sort of ascetism: '*Monachos* appears here as an ideal state of purity, virginity, celibacy and perfection, but, at the same time, does not refer to any institutional form of asceticism, such as the cenobitism or monasticism of the desert fathers. The community of the *Gospel of Thomas* tends to express some sort of proto-monastic ideology, that is, an ascetic system in which the notions of solitude, male/female unity, androgyny and celibacy play an unusually important role.'⁸¹ This is probably an accurate description. However, it remains a bit vague.

It seems safe to assume that the audience of GosThom did value some kind of ascetic life, although we have to keep in mind that the text does not provide unambiguous clues for this. A purely symbolic reading is also possible. However, usually religious symbolism to some extent correlates with daily life. In addition, an ascetic lifestyle may have played an important role in enabling the quest for knowledge and the unification

⁷⁸ Hartin, 'The Search for the True Self', 1007.

⁷⁹ Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity', *History of Religions* 13 (1974) 165-208 at 194.

⁸⁰ Vukomanović, 'Ascesis, Symbol and Baptismal Rite in the Gospel of Thomas', 51-52.

⁸¹ Vukomanović, 'Ascesis, Symbol and Baptismal Rite in the Gospel of Thomas', 44.

process of male and female, which perhaps resulted in becoming a solitary. If GosThom does advocate some kind of ascetic lifestyle, one may expect to find information on the implications on social life. This will be discussed in the next section.

2.3 Social interaction

How did the seekers interact with others? We find our first clue in saying 14: 'When you go into any land and walk about in the districts, if they receive you, eat what they will set before you, and heal the sick among them.'⁸² Apparently, the seekers were encouraged to visit people and heal their sick. This might refer to people who are physically ill, but we have to keep in mind that other texts found in Nag Hammadi also speak of healing the soul.⁸³ Whatever kind of healing was involved, the seekers were clearly instructed to help others.

This instruction to help others may also form the background to saying 24, in which it is stated that 'There is light within a man of light, and he lights up the whole world.'⁸⁴ It has been suggested that this saying encouraged the seekers to consider the world as their mission ground.⁸⁵ In a Gnostic interpretation, the seekers may have considered it their mission to point out the existence of inner light particles to others.⁸⁶ Whatever the precise interpretation of this saying, it appears that enlightened seekers were encouraged to help others to find the light within.

A similar benevolence is also displayed in two sayings referring to desired behavior regarding one's brother:

25. Jesus said, "Love your (sg.) brother like your (sg.) soul, guard him like the pupil of your (sg.) eye."

26. Jesus said, "You (sg., passim) see the mote in your brother's eye, but you do not see the beam in your own eye. When you cast the beam out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to cast the mote from your brother's eye."

⁸² See the introduction for full quotation of saying 14.

⁸³ Ismo Dunderberg, 'Moral Progress in Early Christian Stories of the Soul', *New Testament Studies* 59 (2013) 247-267 at 253-254.

⁸⁴ See chapter 1.2 for full quotation of saying 24.

⁸⁵ Antti Marjanen, 'Is Thomas a Gnostic Gospel?', in: Risto Uro (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh, 1998) 107-139 at 125.

⁸⁶ Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium*, 103.

The 'brother' in these saying can be understood in different ways. It could mean a biological brother, but this is unlikely as we will see when we examine the other sayings on family next. Therefore, it probably refers to one's 'neighbor' as a fellow-creature in general or to a 'brother' as a fellow member of the same community. Regardless of the exact meaning, the seeker is clearly instructed to take good care of one's brother: to love and guard him.

This is quite the contrary of the behavior advised towards one's biological family. GosThom contains several apparently anti-familial sayings, such as saying 55:

55. Jesus said, "Whoever does not hate his father and his mother cannot become a disciple to me. And whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and take up his cross in my way will not be worthy of me."

But what do these instructions to hate one's family entail? Of course, one might interpret them in line with several other sayings that instruct novices to abandon their families.⁸⁷ However, as a gesture, this abandoning of one's father and mother can refer to many things.⁸⁸ At the very least, 'hating' one's family must have caused a distance between the seeker and his next of kin. Since hatred is a strong emotion, this distance was most likely an emotional one at least, perhaps accompanied by a physical

⁸⁷ Lincoln, 'Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community', 71.

⁸⁸ See Risto Uro, 'The Social World of the Gospel of Thomas', in: Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick and Risto Uro (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden and Boston, 2006) 19-38 at 26-27, 'Hating one's father and mother can mean many things from challenging the parental will to abandoning the family inheritance and disgracing the family honor. It is by no means obvious that obedience to Jesus' command to dispense with the family would have resulted in a vagabond life, even though it certainly created severe problems and suffering in societies which were strongly oriented towards maintaining the descent group and family honor'.

distance if the seeker left his family.

Saying 99 also seems to devalue biological family:

99. The disciples said to him, "Your brothers and your mother are standing outside."

He said to them, "Those here who do the will of my father are my brothers and my mother. It is they who will enter the kingdom of my father."

Does this saying imply that the members of the community behind GosThom formed a surrogate family? This is in any case the opinion of Jacobson, who stated that 'The group itself is "mother" to its members; its father is God.'⁸⁹ A close scrutiny of the saying, however, clearly shows in my view that the saying does not implicitly refer to the substitution of a family based on blood ties by the member's immediate community. Rather the saying seems to be pointing to the future, since the familial ties will be shared by those who share the future destiny: 'It is they who will enter the kingdom of my father.' In GosThom, the kingdom is often referred to as 'the kingdom of the father.'⁹⁰ This phrase describes the kingdom in familial language, thereby vaguely suggesting that the kingdom houses a family or at least a father and his offspring. Therefore, saying 99 might indicate that those who will share this kingdom are to be considered family.

Saying 101 strongly resembles saying 55:

101. <Jesus said,> "Whoever does not hate his [father] and his mother as I do cannot become a [disciple] to me. And whoever does [not] love his [father and] his mother as I do cannot become a [disciple to] me. For my mother [...], but [my] true [mother] gave me life."

⁸⁹ Jacobson, 'Jesus against the Family', 216-217.

⁹⁰ Sayings 57, 76, 96, 97, 98 and 113.

In this saying the seeker is not only instructed to hate his father and mother, as he was in saying 55, but also to love them. At first glance, this may seem contradictory. However, in the final sentence of the saying a distinction is made between 'my mother' and 'my true mother'. Therefore, we may assume that the seeker is told to hate his mother, but love his true mother. If 'mother' refers to a biological mother, who is the 'true' mother? According to Jacobson, 'it is quite clear that we have a contrast between a physical mother and a spiritual "mother," who may in fact be the group itself.'⁹¹ Jacobson may be right about the distinction between a physical and spiritual mother, but for two reasons it seems odd to consider the group as spiritual mother. First of all, as we see in the middle of this saying, one needs to love this mother in order to become a disciple of Jesus. If the true mother is the community, then the seeker needs to love the community to become part of it. However, it seems difficult to love a group that one is not yet part of. Secondly, and even less convincing, '[my] true [mother] gave me life' would then mean that Jesus' has received life from his group of followers. This does not make sense.

Instead, the spiritual mother, as Jacobson called the 'true mother', might actually be just that: the Holy Spirit conceived as mother.⁹² If this is true, it makes sense that those who do not love the Holy Spirit cannot become a disciple of Jesus. We already saw in chapter 1.2 that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is deemed beyond forgiveness. It also makes perfect sense that Jesus would say that the Holy Spirit gave him life, especially as we saw in chapter 1.2 that the Holy Spirit is clearly considered higher in hierarchy than the father and in a Gnostic interpretation may have referred to the light within the seeker.

⁹¹ Jacobson, 'Jesus against the Family', 213.

⁹² DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 278, 'The final clause develops the early Jewish Christian tradition that the Holy Spirit was Jesus' mother, (...).'

Be that as it may, it seems clear that biological family ties are devaluated in GosThom.⁹³ The seeker was admonished to abandon his family, perhaps because family members could hamper the quest for knowledge, as they remind the seeker of his earthly bonds. Instead, the seeker may have been encouraged to divert his attention to fellow seekers, who were engaged in the same quest and would therefore pose less of a distraction risk.

Did these anti-familial sayings also encourage celibacy? Uro has rightly pointed out that '*Thomas*, although rich in material dealing with social conflicts in the family household, has surprisingly little interest in the marital relationship itself. The dissension within families anticipated in the Gospel of Thomas is never that between married couples.'⁹⁴ There is therefore no reason to assume that these anti-familial sayings promoted a celibate lifestyle. However, we have already discussed several other sayings in the previous section that may have advocated celibacy and it seems likely that a spouse would have hampered the quest for knowledge.

It is plausible that 'the contrast between "my mother" and "[my] true mother", rather than being a direct statement against marriage, reflects the idea of Jesus' (and the disciples') heavenly origin.'⁹⁵ A heavenly origin and/or a shared destiny in the kingdom of the father, as we saw in saying 99, may have been the defining characteristic(s) of this new family. The seeker seems to be admonished to focus his attention on this family of fellow seekers who may aid him, or at least not deter him, in his quest.

⁹³ Jacobson, 'Jesus against the Family', 213-214, 'That one's relationship to one's biological family is being devaluated is obvious.'

⁹⁴ Uro, 'Is Thomas an Encratite Gospel?', 144.

⁹⁵ Risto Uro, 'Asceticism and Anti-Familial Language in the Gospel of Thomas', in: Halvor Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (London and New York, 1997) 216-234 at 220.

3. The world: Ethics of world renunciation

In the first chapter we saw how GosThom encouraged its audience to embark on a quest for self-knowledge which required ethics of self-control and in the second we saw how this quest may have involved asceticism and probably required, or lead to, a devaluation of biological family ties.

Besides these social issues, how were the seekers supposed to handle worldly matters, such as wealth and food? Were the seekers supposed to be poor? Should they be circumcised? Were they supposed to fast, give alms and adhere to dietary laws?

3.1 Poverty and becoming passers-by

GosThom clearly uses the word 'poverty' in different ways. Firstly, poverty seems to be equated with ignorance:

3. "(...) But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty."⁹⁶

Apparently, not knowing oneself is regarded a specific kind of poverty, which fits in with the importance of the quest for knowledge.

Secondly, poverty is also used as a metaphor for the body:

29. Jesus said, "If the flesh came into being because of spirit, it is a wonder. But if spirit came into being because of the body, it is a wonder of wonders. Indeed, I am amazed at how this great wealth has made its home in this poverty."

In this saying, 'great wealth' probably refers to the spirit, which has somehow ended up in 'this poverty', the body. This saying is in line with other sayings in GosThom that devalue the body.⁹⁷ In both this and the

⁹⁶ For full quotation of this saying, see chapter 1.2.

⁹⁷ See for example sayings 87 and 112: 87. Jesus said, "Adam came into being from a great power and a great wealth, but he did not become worthy of you. For had he been worthy,

previously discussed saying, poverty is obviously viewed as something negative. It has received a symbolic meaning, referring to things (ignorance, the body) the seeker somehow needs to transcend.

However, elsewhere in GosThom, the poor are promised entrance into the kingdom:

54. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven."

How to explain this seeming contradiction? It is evident that the poor in this saying cannot be equated with the ignorant in saying 3. In fact, in order to achieve the kingdom and with it salvation, they must first possess salvific knowledge. A possible explanation could be that the poor in saying 54 refer to 'the solitary situation of the new proselytizers' as they have abandoned their previous religion.⁹⁸ In such a case, by means of the reference to material poverty, the saying might implicitly point at the internal poverty of individuals moving in such a situation.⁹⁹

Admittedly, a reference to proselytizers seems to be far-fetched, as GosThom provides no information on such matters, but it is interesting to interpret saying 54 as combining the reference to material poverty with the internal one. Since it is the poor that enter the kingdom, this internal poverty has to be considered beneficial. In that case, it could be a poverty resulting from the internal persecution.¹⁰⁰ The poor might then be called poor, because they have been able to get rid of something, perhaps

[he would] not [have experienced] death." 112. Jesus said, "Woe to the flesh that depends on the soul; woe to the soul that depends on the flesh."

⁹⁸ D.W. Kim, 'What Shall We Do? The Community Rules of Thomas in the "Fifth Gospel"', *Biblical Studies on the Web* 88 (2007) 393-414. Online: <http://bsw.org/Biblica/Vol-88-2007/What-Should-We-Do-The-Community-Rules-Of-Thomas-In-The-Fifth-Gospel/79/article-p393.html>, 409.

⁹⁹ Kim, 'What Shall We Do?', 409, 'This destitution refers to material poverty, but the connotation of internal penury should not be disregarded in these Thomasine beatitudes.'

¹⁰⁰ See chapter 1.1 on persecution.

thoughts or emotions that would have prevented them from entering the kingdom.

However, it seems far more likely that the author and audience understood the poor in this saying to refer solely to the literally poor: people lacking money or valuable possessions. It seems plausible that those who have attained the salvific knowledge may no longer experience a need for material goods. At the same time, the other way around is probably also true: being without possessions facilitates the quest for knowledge, as it reduces distractions.

This latter point can easily be confirmed, since in addition to saying 54, several other sayings indicate that material wealth does not aid in entering the kingdom or finding truth.¹⁰¹ Especially saying 110 is very clear in its encouragement of those who become wealthy to distance themselves from the world:

110. Jesus said, "Whoever finds the world and becomes rich, let him renounce the world."

The negative approach to the tangible world is more than clear, since only forsaking it may help seekers to achieve genuine discovery and true fortune.¹⁰² This negative view of the world is also clearly expressed in other sayings in GosThom.¹⁰³

This is in my view the background of GosThom's famous saying 42:

¹⁰¹ Saying 36: Jesus said, "Do not be concerned from morning until evening and from evening until morning about what you will wear." The end of saying 64: "(...) Businessmen and merchants [will] not enter the places of my father." Saying 78: Jesus said, "Why have you come out into the desert? To see a reed shaken by the wind? And to see a man clothed in fine garments [like your] kings and your great men? Upon them are the fine garments, and they are unable to discern the truth." Saying 81: Jesus said, "Let him who has grown rich be king, and let him who possesses power renounce it."

¹⁰² Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 190, 'Only renunciation of the world and its wealth can lead the seeker to true discovery and to true wealth.'

¹⁰³ Saying 56: Jesus said, "Whoever has come to understand the world has found (only) a corpse, and whoever has found a corpse is superior to the world." Saying 80: Jesus said,

42. Jesus said, "Become passers-by."

Of course, the typically open character of the saying has produced a plethora of interpretations of what the expression "passers-by" may mean. For example, it has been suggested that 'Jesus commands the hearer to "pass by" the teaching of the Pharisees and others'¹⁰⁴ or, based on a different translation, that this saying summons the audience to 'be Hebrews'.¹⁰⁵ Other scholars, however, have taken saying 42 more literally: it has been considered as one of several sayings promoting an itinerant lifestyle,¹⁰⁶ although it has been pointed out that nor the saying nor its immediate context allows us to affirm that it includes a clear exhortation to follow a wandering ascetic life.¹⁰⁷

Differently, Philip Sellew has claimed that we should place the saying in the context of funerary epigraphy. In his view, it tells the readers that 'They must not pause on their journeys, they must pass by and through this life and this world, to escape the limits of material bodies, their true graves or tombs, to reach their heavenly home above in the realm of light.'¹⁰⁸ This interpretation fits in with the negative view of the

"He who has recognized the world has found the body, but he who has found the body is superior to the world."

¹⁰⁴ DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 119.

¹⁰⁵ T. Baarda, 'Jesus said: Be Passers-by. On the meaning and origin of Logion 42 of the Gospel of Thomas', in: T. Baarda, *Early Transmission of Words of Jesus: Thomas, Tatian and the Text of the New Testament* (Amsterdam, 1983) 179-205.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen J. Patterson, 'The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Beginnings', in: Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick and Risto Uro (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden and Boston, 2006) 1-18 at 4-5.

¹⁰⁷ Uro, 'The Social World of the Gospel of Thomas', 24, 'The wandering life of ascetics is an imaginable context, but the saying itself or its immediate surroundings in the gospel give very little guidance on whether it should read literally as a concrete exhortation to become itinerant or in some other less concrete way.'

¹⁰⁸ Philip H. Sellew, 'Jesus and the Voice from beyond the Grave: *Gospel of Thomas* 42 in the Context of Funerary Epigraphy', in: Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick and Risto Uro (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden and Boston, 2006) 39-73, quote at 73.

world elsewhere in GosThom, as does the view that the saying revolves around 'a radical separation from the world.'¹⁰⁹

Whatever its exact interpretation, what interests us here is that saying 42 apparently intends to induce readers to follow a clear way of life; a life that may facilitate the reader's quest to unravel the secret meaning of the words. It seems clear that this instruction probably implied some kind of ascetic life, whether it promoted itinerancy or simply a renunciation from worldly affairs in some other way. Based on the positive saying on poverty, the negative sayings on wealth and the negative view of the world in GosThom, we may assume that the text encouraged its audience to renounce affluence and other worldly matters, since these could be insurmountable obstacles in the individual's path to self-knowledge.

¹⁰⁹ Hartin, 'The Search for the True Self', 1006.

3.2 Circumcision

In the previous section, we saw that the body is viewed quite negatively in GosThom. If that is the case, is there still a point in making physical alterations of that body, such as circumcision? Let's take a look at saying 53, the only saying in GosThom that deals with circumcision:

53. His disciples said to him, "Is circumcision beneficial or not?"

He said to them, "If it were beneficial, their father would beget them already circumcised from their mother. Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become completely profitable."

This saying clearly rejects physical circumcision, but what does the 'true circumcision in spirit' actually mean? Saying 53 does not provide much information on this point; it only states that this circumcision 'has become completely profitable.'

As a matter of fact, the idea is not unique to GosThom and appears in a number of early Christian texts, such as Romans 2.28-29 and Colossians 2.11, and also in the Old Testament, for example in Deuteronomy 10.16.¹¹⁰ Due to its parallels in early Christian sources, Marjanen claims that GosThom and its intriguing expression regarding the spiritual circumcision should be understood as 'part of that tradition in which the "circumcision of heart" brought about by the Spirit is considered the prerequisite for hearing the word, awakening faith, faithful service of God, and putting off the body of flesh.'¹¹¹

There are, however, some problems with this interpretation. Is circumcision in GosThom really 'brought about by the Spirit', as Marjanen assumes? Is the circumcision something seekers receive or rather something they should attain for themselves? I agree with the view that it

¹¹⁰ See a complete list of the passages in DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 186-187.

¹¹¹ Marjanen, *Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices*, 179.

is in the hands of the believers: 'That spiritualized circumcision, reflective of the sort of interpretative strategies of the sayings, benefits the individual and it is controlled by the seekers, not by any external force, and it expresses their spiritual values.'¹¹² Since in GosThom the audience is repeatedly encouraged to seek and find meaning which will enable self-transformation, the spiritual circumcision might be the end result of the transformation process so vehemently advocated. The seekers who have attained this circumcision of the heart may in fact be the same as those 'who have been persecuted within themselves.'¹¹³ This connection becomes even clearer when we translate the phrase in saying 69 more literally with 'who have been persecuted in their heart.'¹¹⁴

¹¹² Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 131.

¹¹³ See chapter 1.1 on persecution.

¹¹⁴ Literal translation by DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 223.

3.3 Fasting, almsgiving and dietary regulations

If physical circumcision is not considered useful in GosThom, what about other outward manifestations of religion, such as fasting, almsgiving and dietary regulations? We already saw how sayings 6 and 14 seem to denounce such actions sharply.¹¹⁵ However, other sayings also refer to these activities.

Let us start with fasting. In saying 104, discussed previously because of its reference to praying, fasting seems to be considered beneficial in case of sin or defeat.¹¹⁶ However, as we have seen, the seekers are not directly instructed to pray and fast. Saying 27, also previously quoted because of its reference to the Sabbath, clearly states 'If you do not fast as regards the world, you will not find the kingdom.'¹¹⁷ Keeping the Sabbath and fasting both seemed to have received a new, symbolic meaning. 'Fasting as regards the world' can be clearly distinguished from traditional fasting. It probably refers to the same distantiation from worldly matters that so many other sayings seem to encourage. As has been pointed out, 'Logion 27 in its present setting cannot be a device for ascetic or ceremonial fasting, but must necessarily be understood as a metaphor of a total and radical abstention from the material reality of this Cosmos.'¹¹⁸

Regarding almsgiving, the situation is basically the same, although almsgiving has not received a symbolic meaning. It is clearly disapproved of in saying 14: 'if you give alms, you will do harm to your spirits'. However, the seeker is also not encouraged to keep his money to himself, as the poor will enter the kingdom. Saying 95 gives a very clear instruction on what to do with money:

¹¹⁵ See introduction for full quotations of sayings 6 and 14.

¹¹⁶ See chapter 1.3 for full quotation of saying 104.

¹¹⁷ See chapter 1.3 for full quotation of saying 27.

¹¹⁸ Baarda, 'If you do not Sabbatize the Sabbath...', 199.

95. [Jesus said], "If you have money, do not lend it at interest, but give [it] to one from whom you will not get it back."

As almsgiving is disapproved of, we may assume that this giving away of money is not primarily an act of charity. I therefore agree with the view that 'Nicht auf der mitmenschlichen Fürsorge liegt die Betonung der Aussage, sondern allein auf der materiellen Armut.'¹¹⁹ This view can be combined with a Gnostic interpretation, in which poverty is required to gain access to the divine light spark inside the Gnostic.¹²⁰ At the very least, it seems likely that the seeker is encouraged to give away his money as part of the larger encouragement to renounce worldly matters. If one were to lend money out at interest, one may expect it back and even more. However, as we have seen before, wealth is considered to hamper one's quest for knowledge.

By viewing this saying as an analogy, DeConick offers a slightly different interpretation: 'because the hearer is receiving the truth freely, he must now freely give it to others, (...).'¹²¹ However, she also states that 'In the complete Gospel, this ethic would have been particularly meaningful to the encratic Christian and represented to him or her Jesus' endorsement of the rejection of worldly goods.'¹²² Whatever the precise motivation, this saying probably encouraged seekers to renounce wealth.

The seeker should also not be concerned about dietary regulations. Besides the clear instruction in saying 14, 'eat what they will set before you', the Greek version of saying 36 also tells the seeker not to worry about food:

¹¹⁹ Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium*, 244.

¹²⁰ Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium*, 244.

¹²¹ DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 267

¹²² DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 267.

36. [Jesus said, "Do not be concerned] from morning [until evening and] from evening [until] morning, neither [about] your [food] and what [you will] eat, [nor] about [your clothing] and what you [will] wear. [You are far] better than the [lilies] which [neither] card nor [spin]. As for you, when you have no garment, what [will you put on]? Who might add to your stature? He it is who will give you your cloak."¹²³

This saying can be interpreted in several ways. It may have been part of an eschatological speech, expressing that 'The situation that the disciples face is so urgent that they cannot be concerned about even the most essential daily matters like clothing or food.'¹²⁴ However, whether GosThom contains eschatological aspects is debatable. As saying 36 clearly displays an admonishment not to worry about such worldly issues as food and clothing, it can also be regarded as one of the sayings advocating world renunciation.

Apparently, traditional acts of piety, such as fasting, almsgiving and keeping the right diet, are not considered valuable in GosThom. As a matter of fact, these acts are clearly described as harmful. This harmfulness is probably not caused by doing these things hypocritically, as some scholars have suggested on the basis of saying 6,¹²⁵ but simply because matters like these do not aid in the quest for knowledge. As we have seen, knowledge is the key to salvation. So anything that does not contribute to gaining that salvific knowledge may distract one from seeking and is therefore considered harmful.

¹²³ Translation by Attridge, 'The Greek Fragments', 127.

¹²⁴ DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 118-119.

¹²⁵ For example Hays, 'Resumptions of Radicalism', 275-276. His ideas are discussed in chapter 1.3.

Conclusion

Which ethical teachings does GosThom contain? It turns out this is not an easy question to answer, as scholars have offered many interpretations of GosThom, resulting in different perspectives on its ethical views. These different perspectives may to some extent actually represent the historical situation of GosThom. As Uro has said: 'we have to accept that there may not have been one "original" hermeneutical key by means of which Thomas was read, one "social world" shared by all of its primary hearers, nor a uniform response to its ethical demands.'¹²⁶

Be that as it may, a closer look at GosThom's admonitions has provided us with more insights into its ethical outlook. In the first chapter, we have seen how a quest for knowledge is vehemently advocated in GosThom and requires ethics of self-control. Most importantly, the responsibility for salvation is placed in the hands of the seeker. The necessary inner struggle of the soul to overcome the obstacles in the quest for knowledge is represented as a persecution. Self-knowledge is the key to salvation. In this situation, the relationship with the divine is different than in the New Testament texts. Seeking and finding knowledge seems to have replaced traditional religious practices, such as praying. All exhortations concerning the relationship with the divine can be explained in terms of the advocated quest for self-knowledge. Only those practices that assist the seeker in his quest are maintained.

The ethics of gender and social relations are clearly affected by this quest. The sayings on male and female obviously hint at some sort of transformation, which must be intimately linked with knowledge of oneself. The distinction between male and female needs to be transcended; the female has to become male; and the seeker needs to

¹²⁶ Uro, 'The Social World of the Gospel of Thomas', 37.

become a 'solitary'. To what extent such instructions have resulted in actual behavior, such as celibacy, remains obscure. However, the anti-familial sayings suggest that at least some distantiation between the seeker and his biological family occurred. It seems likely that family members may deter the seeker from his quest. This would explain why the seeker seems to be advised to focus his attention on his fellow seekers instead.

The quest for self-knowledge clearly also requires world renunciation. The seeker is encouraged to give up his wealth and to 'pass-by' the world. Physical circumcision is not considered useful, but seems to be replaced by circumcision of the heart. This spiritual circumcision may in fact be an equivalent of the inner persecution. Since salvation is obtained by gaining knowledge, religious practices such as fasting, almsgiving and dietary regulations have become obsolete.

Even though GosThom is not a philosophical text and does not provide us with a complete ethical system, its ethical outlook is surprisingly consistent. All admonitions in GosThom can be explained in light of the advocated quest for self-knowledge, which is clearly the *telos* or goal of ethics in GosThom. At every level, regarding the self, others and the world, the advocated ethics clearly support this quest for knowledge. Although GosThom provides ethics regarding social behavior, the emphasis is clearly on the individual quest for knowledge and the related process of self-transformation. The text evidently promotes a mode of life, explaining how to live in this world and how to achieve one's goal.

The ethics seem to pertain both to the goal as well as to the path to reach that goal. For example, the text inspires the seeker to become a solitary, which may simultaneously refer to ascetic behavior as a prerequisite to attain salvific knowledge, as well as to the resulting state of such knowledge. The same is true for wealth: it may hamper the seeker in his quest, but at the same time someone who is enlightened may no longer

require material goods. It all comes down to some kind of personal transformation based on the quest for self-knowledge.

What does this tell us about the character of the text? According to Hartin, 'The quest for a knowledge of oneself, which lies at the heart of the final form of this Gospel, is one that also lies at the heart of the Gnostic search for knowledge.'¹²⁷ Hartin subsequently points out that GosThom does not contain Gnostic redeemer mythology, which leads him to conclude that GosThom may represent 'an intermediary stage in the development of the religious thought world that lies somewhere between the Jewish wisdom traditions and a later fully developed Gnosticism as found in the gnostic dialogues.'¹²⁸ If GosThom is indeed to some extent a Gnostic text, the quest for self-knowledge can be equated with the quest for knowledge of God, since in the Gnostic view the seeker contains a divine spark inside. In that case, much more could be said about this quest and the subsequent search results. However, despite the fact that a quest for knowledge is obviously an important characteristic of many Gnostic texts, this does not necessarily mean that GosThom must be considered Gnostic. Seeking knowledge was also an important aim in Jewish wisdom literature and Greek philosophical texts. Again, GosThom contains no clear-cut references to Gnostic mythology, such as the Sophia myth, so it seems we have no compelling reasons to label this text as Gnostic.

On the other hand, GosThom's soteriology is fundamentally different from the New Testament's ideas of salvation. Especially its abandonment of religious practices signifies a radical turn away from tradition. So how should we characterize this text? It could be labeled proto-orthodox Christian, as an alternative approach in early Christianity,

¹²⁷ Hartin, 'The Search for the True Self', 1007.

¹²⁸ Hartin, 'The Search for the True Self', 1007-1008.

or proto-Gnostic, as a forerunner of fully-fledged Gnosticism. It might even be both. However, more research remains necessary regarding this matter.

Bibliography

- Attridge, Harold W. (trans.), 'The Greek Fragments', appendix to: 'The Gospel of Thomas', Thomas O. Lambdin (trans.), in: James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, Vol. 2 (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 2000) 95-128.
- Baarda, T., "'If you do not sabbatize the Sabbath ...": The Sabbath as God or World in Gnostic Understanding (Ev. Thom. Log. 27)', in: R. van den Broek, T. Baarda and J. Mansfeld (eds), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden, New York etc.: E.J. Brill, 1988) 178-201.
- Baarda, T., 'Jesus said: Be Passers-by. On the meaning and origin of Logion 42 of the Gospel of Thomas', in: T. Baarda, *Early Transmission of Words of Jesus: Thomas, Tatian and the Text of the New Testament* (Amsterdam: VU Boekhandel/Uitgeverij, 1983) 179-205.
- Davies, Stevan, 'The Christology and Protology of the "Gospel of Thomas"', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992) 663-682.
- DeConick, April D., *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas: A History of the Gospel and its Growth* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005).
- DeConick, April D., *Seek to See Him. Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1996).

- DeConick, April D., *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006).
- Desjardins, Michel R., *Sin in Valentinianism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).
- Dunderberg, Ismo, 'Moral Progress in Early Christian Stories of the Soul', *New Testament Studies* 59 (2013) 247-267.
- Fieger, Michael, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991).
- Gärtner, Bertil, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins, 1961).
- Hartin, Patrick J., 'The search for the true self in the Gospel of Thomas, the Book of Thomas and the Hymn of the Pearl', *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 55 (1999), 1001-1021.
- Hays, Christopher M., 'Resumptions of Radicalism: Christian Wealth Ethics in the Second and Third Centuries', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 102 (2011) 261–282.
- Jacobson, A.D., 'Jesus against the Family: The Dissolution of Family Ties in the Gospel Tradition', in: Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, Kristin de Troyer and Marvin W. Meyer (eds), *From Quest to Q: Festschrift James M. Robinson* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999) 189-218.

Kim, D.W., 'What Shall We Do? The Community Rules of Thomas in the "Fifth Gospel"', *Biblical Studies on the Web* 88 (2007) 393-414.
Online: <http://bsw.org/Biblica/Vol-88-2007/What-Shall-We-Do-The-Community-Rules-Of-Thomas-In-The-Fifth-Gospel/79/article-p393.html>.

Lincoln, Bruce, 'Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community: A New Approach to a Familiar Text', *Novum Testamentum* 19 (1977) 65-76.

Löhr, Winrich Alfried, 'Gnostic Determinism Reconsidered', *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992) 381-390.

Marjanen, Antti, 'Is *Thomas* a Gnostic Gospel?', in: Risto Uro (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) 107-139.

Marjanen, Antti, 'Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices', in: Risto Uro (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) 163-182.

Marjanen, Antti, 'Women Disciples in the *Gospel of Thomas*', in: Risto Uro (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) 89-106.

Meeks, Wayne A., 'The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity', *History of Religions* 13 (1974) 165-208.

- Meyer, Marvin, 'Making Mary Male: The Categories Male and Female in the Gospel of Thomas', *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985) 554-570.
- Meyer, Marvin, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
- Nordsieck, Reinhard, *Das Thomas-Evangelium: Einleitung – Zur Frage des historischen Jesus – Kommentierung aller 114 Logien* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004).
- Patterson, Stephen J. and James M. Robinson, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998).
- Patterson, Stephen J., 'The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Beginnings', in: Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick and Risto Uro (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006) 1-18.
- Patterson, Stephen J., *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993).
- Perrin, Nicholas and Christopher W. Skinner, 'Recent Trends in *Gospel of Thomas* Research (1989-2011). Part II: Genre, Theology and Relationship to the Gospel of John', *Currents in Biblical Research* 11 (2012) 65-86.

- Perrin, Nicholas, 'Recent Trends in *Gospel of Thomas* Research (1991-2006): Part I, The Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels', *Currents in Biblical Research* 5 (2007) 183-206.
- Plisch, Uwe-Karsten, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008).
- Popkes, Enno Edzard, *Das Menschenbild des Thomasevangeliums: Untersuchungen zu seiner religionsgeschichtlichen und chronologischen Einordnung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).
- Prior, William J., *Virtue and Knowledge: An Introduction to Ancient Greek Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).
- Quispel, Gilles, *Het Evangelie van Thomas* (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2004).
- Rowe, Christopher, *An Introduction to Greek Ethics* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1976).
- Sellew, Philip H., 'Jesus and the Voice from beyond the Grave: *Gospel of Thomas* 42 in the Context of Funerary Epigraphy', in: Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick and Risto Uro (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006) 39-73.

- 'The Gospel of Thomas', Thomas O. Lambdin (trans.), in: James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, Vol. 2 (Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill, 2000).
- Uro, Risto, 'Asceticism and Anti-Familial Language in the Gospel of Thomas', in: Halvor Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 216-234.
- Uro, Risto, 'Is Thomas an Encratite Gospel?' in: Risto Uro (ed.), *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) 140-162.
- Uro, Risto, 'The Social World of the Gospel of Thomas', in: Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick and Risto Uro (eds.), *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006) 19-38.
- Valantasis, Richard, 'Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical? Revisiting an Old Problem with a New Theory', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999) 55-81.
- Valantasis, Richard, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).
- Vukomanović, Milan, 'Ascesis, Symbol and Baptismal Rite in the Gospel of Thomas', *ARCHAEOUS. Studies in the History of Religions* IX (2005) 41-55.

Wisse, Frederik, 'Die Sextus-Sprüche und das Problem der gnostischen Ethik', in A. Böhlig and F. Wisse (eds), *Zum Hellenismus in den Schriften von Nag Hammadi* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975) 55-86.

Yamauchi, Edwin M., *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).