

The Gospel of Thomas

A Fusion of Horizons

By
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Abstract

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The ancient texts found at Nag Hammadi have been studied by the leading scholars in the field of textual analysis. Included in Nag Hammadi was *The Gospel of Thomas*, which has also undergone significant critical and historical analysis. Research focussing on how the text was meaningful within wider social structures and Christian communities is seemingly sparse. Therefore, I propose this study to undertake a hermeneutical analysis of *The Gospel of Thomas* for meaning by first constructing an analysis of a horizon of the ancient communities in which the text may have been read and a modern horizon. Using Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons, this study will ultimately fuse the horizons to find meaning.

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Introduction

Jesus said, "Now the sower went out, took a handful (of seeds), and scattered them. Some fell on the road; the birds came and gathered them up. Others fell on rock, did not take root in the soil, and did not produce ears. And others fell on thorns; they choked the seed(s) and worms ate them. And others fell on the good soil and it produced good fruit: it bore sixty per measure and a hundred and twenty per measure".¹

In an old bookshop, the kind where hardbound books sit in piles on the floor and dust hangs thick in the air, I came across Marvin Meyer's essays on *The Gospel of Mary* and the findings in the Nag Hammadi library. Amongst the pages was a historical critique on the recent speculation of an ancient intimate relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus of Nazareth. I was interested in the historical potential of what may have been a great romance² so I bought the little book and squirrelled it away home.

Meyer argues that *Mary* illuminates Mary Magdalene from the shadows of early Christian traditions and speculates that she was Jesus intimate companion.

Nestled deep into the book was a section on the *The Gospel of Thomas*. The real intrigue, I thought, was found in *Thomas* and the 'hidden' sayings. Hidden sayings? Secret relationships? What exactly was going on in this ancient culture?

Meyers' introduction to *Thomas* was brief, but it did provide a translation of the 114 sayings, many starting with 'Jesus said'. I read each saying and understood none. That is the beauty of *Thomas*. There is no narrative, nor are there any parables or lessons and very few characters. That said, it does open with one of the greatest literary

¹ *The Gospel of Thomas*. Logion 9. as found in Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures. Books that Did Not Make it into the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2003), 21.

² This is in reference to what I will discuss further in Chapter Four in the section about *The Da Vinci Code*. One of the plot lines in Brown's novel concerned speculation that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were bound in a relationship that produced a child. I would argue that the impact of this plot line on readers and subsequent success of the novel is due in part to a welcome reimagining of Mary Magdalene. Brown has cast Mary Magdalene outside of the typical patriarchal roles for women, as either 'mother' or 'prostitute', by imagining her in the position of independent woman and intimate companion to Jesus. One who experienced a great romance. See Marvin Meyer, *The Gospels of Mary, The Secret Traditions of Mary Magdalene. The Companion of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2004), vii-xxi.

hooks of all time.... “these are the *secret sayings* which the living Jesus spoke, and which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down.”³ I wanted to know what the secret sayings meant. I wanted to understand these 114 logia and what they could mean to my own spiritual journey.

Thomas, I initially thought, should be read like a puzzle. The sayings should fit together in a meaningful way. I reveled in the mystery. I imagined an interpretation from a different perspective than what is offered by Christian church tradition. Why? *Thomas* seemingly belongs to the Christian tradition yet does not play an active role in modern church traditions. Therefore, my initial scope for this project is to uncover the meaning of the sayings and invite a new relationship with the Christian tradition; however, the sayings in *Thomas* do not fit together into a concise narrative rather seemingly stand alone. Ancient Christian texts were written for a reason. The puzzle therefore, is to seek the meaning of each sayings by understanding why the text was written. What purpose was served by collecting these sayings into a text. What did the text provide for the ancient Christian communities into which it was read and what meaning may I discern into my own community? In order to ascertain answers, I need a method in which to explore these questions. And will look to Hans-Georg Gadamer and his concept of horizon for a framework.

Chapter One - Method

The first step is to recognize that an ancient Christian text is from an ancient Christian community. Gadamer tells us that horizon holds a unique worldview. Therefore, to analyse a horizon, one must ascertain how knowledge was understood within that worldview. Moreover, Gadamer tells us that horizon is the parts and the sum total of where one lives - the physical space in which one embodies, and how, from the space

³ Ehrman. *Lost Scriptures*. 20. Emphasis added.

one engages with the world – thoughts, feelings and experiences, past and present - influences one's worldview. Knowledge, therefore, will be embedded within interactions, and those interactions influence horizon. Thus, horizon is the framework which holds the fluidity of all experiences in union. For example, when one looks at a painting, there is more to understand – more meaning to be found - than just the image that is coloured to a canvas. The painter has a horizon and influences the painting by past and present experiences and the way it understands its world. The painting itself has a horizon; the kind of paint, the type of canvas, the way the paint holds to the canvas, when the painting was painted, where the painting is stored and may have been stored. Is the painting on the roof of a chapel? Was it commissioned? Is the image telling one kind of story and the location on the ceiling telling another? Finally, there is also a horizon of the person who gazes at the painting. Consideration of this horizon will focus the lens of interpretation and meaning coming from the painting. The art of interpretation, then, is a fusion of horizons. And it is the differences in horizon that lends different people to interpret the same event differently based on influences or knowledge held within horizon. Therefore, it is important to analyse horizons. The art of interpretation also holds a sense of inherent transparency. But that transparency is inherent to those engaged in an interaction that are shaped by similar contextual social and political systems. In other words, they understand knowledge the same way. To fuse horizons, knowledge must be transparent across horizons. For this project, the challenge is the transparency, for I am going to fuse horizons, which in the simplest of terms, span approximately 2000 years and the meanings of knowledge has changed.

The purpose of this project is to understand by analysis of horizons around *The Gospel of Thomas* as an art of interpretation - as a way to create new meaning. The horizons that I will look at, as defined by Gadamer: are the context of the community in which it was read for meaning; the context and history of the text itself and what we know

about it so far; and the context into which I will read – the community in which I, as reader, will discern meaning.

To get an understanding for the problem of knowledge, I will look to Marcus Borg, David Jasper and Northrop Frye. For an exploration of Gadamer's horizon I will look to Jean Grodin, Kieran Bonner, Kurt Mueller-Vollmer and Joel Weinsheimer. To understand the nature of Gadamer's concept of horizon, I will look to Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, and Weinsheimer's work on *Truth and Method*.

Chapter Two – Horizon: the Back of the Text

Common scholarly thought is that *Thomas* is a collection of sayings⁴ gathered over a long period. Further, common thought holds that there were many versions of *Thomas*, and the one and only complete copy of the text, found at Nag Hammadi in 1945, is a very late version of the text. This text is assumed to be highly edited and copied.

The context of the text is a challenge. Typically, to analyse a horizon, one needs to consider why the sayings were collected and written, and how the social and political environment was organized that lead to the text being produced. Further, that the text was produced by someone, one should consider the author of the text and how that person engaged with the social and political environment in which he was writing. What in the authors context inspired them to collect and write down these sayings. But research tells us that the author of *Thomas* is unknown. So, an analysis of the horizon of the author is virtually impossible. Therefore, to get a sense of a horizon, I will explore the context in which *Thomas* circulated. If *Thomas* is being read in these communities, it

⁴ See April D. DeConick. "The Gospel of Thomas." *The Expository Times*. 118 (2007)., Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism" Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)., Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities - The Battles for Scripture and the Faith We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

reasons that the sayings resonated with the members. The saying offered some meaning to those who read them. Research tells us that *Thomas* was circulated within the Christian communities in the city of Rome between the years 100 and 150 CE⁵ therefore, that will be the period I will analyse.

Further, it is important to my discussion to focus on one of the spiritual practices that was vibrant within the horizon, namely the attainment of gnosis. For the Christian gnostic community⁶, gnosis is the spiritual and physical freedom that can be obtained by learning to know oneself. "To know oneself, at the deepest level, is simultaneously to know God; this is the secret of gnosis."⁷ And it is gnosis that liberates.

This Chapter then, which I will call 'The Back of the Text', will offer an analysis of a horizon by answering the following questions: What were the social conditions of the period? And what were the social factors that inspired the sayings to be collected.

Chapter Three – The Text

The second horizon to be discussed is the text itself. When I speak of the text, I am referring to the document - the collection of papyrus - on which *Thomas* was written. I will explore its history⁸ - what was known about the text before the Nag Hammadi discovery, what was discovered at Nag Hammadi, what kind of subsequent research has been done to date.

⁵ To get an understanding of the social and political structures of the period, I will look to Rodney Stark, Elaine Pagels, Nicola Denzey Lewis, and Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller to ascertain the conditions of Rome, and how those conditions contributed to the emergence of Christian practice within the community.

⁶ To understand how the Christian Gnostics responded we will look to David Brakke, Kurt Rudolph, Pagels, and Stark. And finally, we will utilize the works of Pagels, Bart Ehrman, Denzey Lewis, Einar Thomassen, and Birger Pearson to understand these two groups - the Marcionites and the Valentinians - and what made them distinct within the social structures and as a response to access of power and reaction to that struggle.

⁷ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. (New York: Random House, 1979). xix.

⁸ To get an understanding of the history of the text, I will look to Denzey Lewis, James Robinson, Marvin Meyer, Ehrman and Pagels to give us their unique perspective of the history of the text.

It cannot go without saying that the Nag Hammadi discovery has been the most significant event to impact *Thomas* research. Before the discovery, the text was relatively unknown with just a few papyri fragments found years earlier. Therefore, it is important to note two key factors to *Thomas* research: the discovery at Nag Hammadi does signify the beginning of *Thomas* research, and, to date, there has been only one complete text found of *The Gospel of Thomas*.

The adventures of Muhammad Ali in the caves at Jabal al-Tarif, and the subsequent discovery at Nag Hammadi have had its archaeological, political and historical significance are well documented. "It is an intriguing story, this chance discovery of a cache of ancient Christian documents in 1945, in a remote part of Upper Egypt, a story of serendipity, ineptitude, secrecy, ignorance, scholarly brilliance, murder and blood revenge".⁹ It was a modern day, real life, Indiana Jones adventure. But the adventure turns to mystery as it reaches back in time, for "we do not know exactly who wrote these books or why they came to be hidden under the cliffs of Jabal al-Tarif... It is probably significant that a Christian monastery, founded by the famous Christian monks Saint Pachomius in the fourth century is located just three miles away."¹⁰

According to Bart D. Ehrman, amongst the texts found in Nag Hammadi codices, *Thomas* is deemed one of the most significant, namely for its structure - that virtually each saying begins with 'Jesus says'. Ehrman also held that most of the texts found at Nag Hammadi have subsequently been identified by scholars as gnostic. "On those grounds, from the beginning, a majority of interpreters have understood *The Gospel of Thomas* itself as some kind of Gnostic Gospel". As I will discuss, there is a significant debate around identifying *Thomas* as a gnostic text, based on the structure and genre of

⁹ Ehrman. *Lost Scriptures*. 51.

¹⁰ Ehrman. *Lost Scriptures*. 54.

the text.¹¹ *Thomas* is a collection of 114 sayings, or 'logia'. Research speculates that it is significant that it is not written like the synoptic gospels - it does not contain any narratives or biography of Jesus nor any account of his miracles¹². I will ascertain the depth of the significance of the structure of the text and how it relates to other texts – namely the lost gospel Q and to a gnostic worldview. My discussion will explore the research into whether *Thomas* a gnostic gospel and how these academic classifications impact our study of the horizons of the text.

Chapter Four – Horizon: the Front of the Text

Chapter Four needs to look at a horizon of the reader – me - embedded in modern culture. But don't assume that means it is the clearest because it is not. Knowledge is so ingrained into my thinking and actions that I don't notice it most of the time. The purpose of this chapter then is to identify what makes up my horizon. In other words, what is the context from which I read. I will define a horizon of modern culture as set in Canada during the last part of the 20th Century and the first decade of the 21st Century (1960-2010)¹³, and place *Thomas* into this new context to explore how the text can be meaningful for me.

I will call this section 'The Front of the Text'. Like 'The Back of the Text', I need to understand the social and political contexts of my community, so I need to 'get outside of myself and walk a mile in my own shoes' to deduce what it is like to live in the world I am living. Structurally the contexts are wide yet growing increasingly homogeneous. I live in

¹¹ I will rely on the work of Robert Funk, Roy Hoover and the members of the Jesus seminar along with Meyers, Ehrman, Borg and the work of April DeConick for a discussion about how *Thomas* may be defined. I will also look to Michael Williams and Denzey Lewis for an understanding of the term 'Gnosticism'. Finally, I will look to Funk et. al. and Ehrman to discuss whether *Thomas* is a Gnostic Gospel.

¹² Leloup. *The Gospel of Thomas*. 1.

¹³ In looking at the modern structures of Canada we will look to the works of Patrick Watson, Benjamin Barber and Conrad Black. Richard Rohrbaugh, Charles Taylor and Arjun Appadurai give us the research for the social, political and economic structures of modern society.

a society which is defined by strict social and economic structures which influence and motivate social interaction and the process of building communities. That said, communities are reorganizing in a kind of social fluidity, based on individualism and technology, which are constantly challenging economic structures. With technology, knowledge is being re-evaluated against economic structures. In other words, technology has made information 'free'. This sense of freedom is in the process of reorganizing economic structures - the process of commodification. It also had implications for religion and spirituality or what Peter Berger called spiritual capital¹⁴. Technology is a new tool, open to everyone, to create community and spread knowledge. I believe it is a platform to challenge consumerism, materialism, and other political structures. I will argue that the increase in individualism is giving space for a new kind of knowledge to emerge - a kind of knowledge that Borg tells us is understood as a relationship with God. In other words, there is a sense in culture that our current structures are meaningless, and as individuals, we are looking for meaning - spiritual meaning for our lives. For our discussion around spiritual capital I will offer examples of commodified spiritual capital by way of imagined interpretations from Rufus Wainwright, James Redfield, and Dan Brown.

Chapter Five – A Fusion of Horizons

Finally, Chapter Five will be the grand celebration where a horizon of the ancient community¹⁵ meets a horizon of the current community over the text and fuse in a search for meaning. The text discovered at Nag Hammadi and the subsequent imagined interpretation within popular culture has reinvigorated our understanding of ancient

¹⁴ To get a sense of how the modern Christian community works within modern structures, I will look to Ehrman, Borg and Robert Wuthnow, as well as Peter Berger.

¹⁵ For my discussion around Valentinian cosmology I will look to Ehrman, Meyer and Denzey Lewis.

Christian thought. One can argue that these interpretations are reflective of a modern, post-industrialized, context. Fusing the horizons will lend a framework where the past and present can come together to offer new meanings from an ancient text.¹⁶

I have recently adopted a cocker spaniel named Teddy. He is four years old, and although he was physically cared for in his previous home, he was left alone. Now that he is with us, he engages mischievously. He likes to get into the garbage, or he likes to pull socks out of the laundry basket and devour the heels. When he settles down, or snuggles up, one can catch a glimpse of his kind spirit, the love he must give, and how he wants to establish a relationship with us (one where he isn't in trouble), in his new home, his new community. He just doesn't have the tools. He doesn't have the 'training' - the knowledge. This is what I am hoping the thesis process will do for me. Provide me with new tools, new knowledge - an understanding of a text held sacred by an ancient community which celebrated their relationship with God, for I too want to strengthen my relationship within the Christian community widened beyond the conventional path.

¹⁶ For the discussion on language I will look to Borg. For assistance on interpretation I will look to Lynn Bauman and Jean LeLoup. I will refer to the Thomas O. Lambdin translation of *Thomas* found in Ehrman's *Lost Scriptures*.

Chapter One - Method

The Problem of Knowledge

Marnie Hughes Warrington tells us that one definition of universal history is a comprehensive and unified account of the known world or universe, including myth and cosmologies.¹⁷ In other words, the knowledge of relationships, values, memories, ideas, and events that make up worldviews. With the invention of writing, a way to record knowledge made it available to everyone. Writing knowledge into texts was an indication that humans required a tool to process, store and share information. And as such, knowledge is found in written histories, literature, philosophies, sacred texts and laws.¹⁸

Faith is also a certain kind of knowledge because it is the human response to God. It is knowledge of God and is revealed, through relationship, by God¹⁹. In other words, the experience of revelation - such as purportedly experienced by Moses and Paul - is, according to Marcus Borg, also the basis of faith, as knowledge. Borg argues that for the ancient Judeo - Christian community, faith as knowledge, was understood as a relationship with God. In other words, what Moses and Paul experienced, and ultimately recorded as knowledge, was their encounter or sacred experience with the immanence and transcendence of God²⁰. For our purposes, it is important to highlight the revelatory relationship itself, because it is the relationship - the encounter and the transfer of knowledge through revelation - which is transformative.²¹

The practice of sacred encounters as a path to knowledge continued through the worldview of the middle ages. This could be categorized as the era of saints and mystics

¹⁷ David Christian, "The Return of Universal History," *History and Theory*. Vol. 49, No.4. (2010): 7.

¹⁸ Charles F. Mullett, "Ancient Historians and Enlightened Reviewers," *The Review of Politics* Vol.21, No.3. (1959): 550.

¹⁹ Marcus J. Borg, *The God We Never Knew. Beyond Dogmatic Religion To A More Authentic Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), 169.

²⁰ Borg, *The God We Never Knew*. 170.

²¹ Brad S. Gregory. *The Unintended Reformation. How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2012). 30-31.

- some of whom devoted their lives to experiencing the sacred. Some of the most passionate writings, poetry, and music came during this time as a result of experiences, contemplative practice, and the creation of space in which to commune with Christ. How fortunate we are that much of that sacred knowledge is available to us in text. Borg called these texts attempts to express, or know, the ineffable. The availability of these texts creates space for others to participate in a relationship with God through revelation. Therefore, from a pre-enlightenment perspective, to engage in the pursuit of knowledge was an intimate exercise in which one also engaged in relationship with texts - because the texts were a way in which those whom had experienced the sacred expressed such revelatory knowledge. Engaging with a text was a way to engage God's glory and seek transformation.²²

During the period known as the Enlightenment or the "Age of Reason"²³, the worldview changed. Knowledge was about creating a static "block" of information - creating a reality that was material.²⁴ These blocks were then shuffled, manipulated, and built upon one another to create more information. Blocks of knowledge became to be understood as a 'fact'. The reasoning process - creating and shuffling blocks of information - replaced sacred tradition and divine authority as the basis for knowledge.²⁵ God needed to be quantified and the problem of how one was able to determine 'facts' about God²⁶ created a spatial distance between subject and object.²⁷ In other words, "the wondrous [sacred tradition and divine authority] became the naturally impossible, and the impossible became the province of God ...The wondrous thus became a thing of the

²² Gregory. *The Unintended Reformation*. 30.

²³ Borg. *The God We Never Knew*. 20.

²⁴ Gregory. *The Unintended Reformation*.26.

²⁵ Borg. *The God We Never Knew*. 6.

²⁶ Gregory. *The Unintended Reformation*. 27.

²⁷ Lawrence Nolan, "Descartes' Ontological Argument", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/descartes-ontological>.

past; it was the way God had acted in ancient times. The activity of God was then, not now.”²⁸

My challenge, therefore, is how to engage with a text written within and from knowledge of God’s immanence and transcendence from a context in which knowledge is understood as verifiable facts. Northrop Frye speaks to one possible path. “Science begins with the world that we have to live in, accepting its data and trying to explain its laws. From there, it moves towards the imagination: it becomes a mental construct, a model of a possible way of interpreting experience.”²⁹ Therefore, our realities, what we know of the world - our worldview - is two-fold. It is the acceptance of the data created by science, but it is also the mental construction of the sum of our experiences. In other words, how we have interpreted the experiences in our lives and applied the meaning of those experiences back into our worldview creates knowledge. The process of reading or hearing an ancient text requires one to be aware of worldview. Further, as readers, we must also be aware that the fundamental understanding of the world in which the text was written was meaningful to the author. Therefore, the challenge presented to us as readers is how do we bridge the divide and reconcile these two worldviews? It is my purpose with this paper to attempt a bridging and will do so hermeneutically.

David Jasper defines hermeneutics as “a useful technical term to describe our understanding of the nature of texts and how we interpret and use them.”³⁰ In other words, a process or methodology of interpretation, which can aid in finding meaning or knowledge that is distant or situated in a different worldview. The basic principle of hermeneutics equates our fundamental understanding of the world as meaningful to us. “We [as readers] are enmeshed in our world and immediately experience our world as

²⁸ Borg. *The God We Never Knew*. 22.

²⁹ Northrop Frye. “The Motive for Metaphor.” In *The Norton Reader: An Anthology of Expository Prose*. Arthur M. Eastman, and Caesar R. Blake ed. (New York: Norton, 1992), 667.

³⁰ David Jasper. *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 1.

meaningful because our world - with its other people, its histories and cultures, and its events - precedes any attempt on our part to understand it or explain it."³¹ In other words, as hermeneutical readers, we are working within a spatial divide - the space between the worldviews of the reader and the author. To give the space a framework, I will attempt to bridge the divide of contextual complexities by utilizing Hans-Georg Gadamer's work on fusing horizons.

Hans -Georg Gadamer

Previously we discussed the importance of an analysis of the horizon of the author of a text. In that I am going to use as a framework Gadamer's notion of horizon, I think it is important too explore Gadamer's horizon.

Gadamer was born in Marburg, Germany on February 11th, 1900. His mother died when he was 4 years old. Gadamer was raised by his father, a professor of pharmaceutical studies at the University of Breslau.³² He was groomed to follow his father's footsteps and pursue a university career in the sciences; however, secretly, Gadamer was fascinated by poetry. Following his passion, he enrolled into the University of Breslau in April of 1919 to study German literature.³³ The common account of his German studies was an experience of frustration, apparently thinking his lessons were too focussed on issues of grammar and the formal structure of language and less of whether language was a means of understanding.³⁴ In the summer of 1922, Gadamer contracted polio and for many months was confined to bed gravely ill, isolated from his

³¹ Erika Gobel and Yin Yin. "Introduction to Hermeneutic Phenomenology: A research methodology best learned by doing it." *IIQM - The Qualitative Research Blog University of Alberta International Institute for Qualitative Methodology* (Oct 2014): 1.

³² Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. 5.

³³ Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. 4.

³⁴ Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. 5.

peers and community. Further, his health restricted military participation in World War I. The separation did afford him ample time to read and write.³⁵

The years leading up to World War II and before the publication of *Truth and Method* are some of the most significant in modern world history, especially for those living and working in Germany. Scholars are somewhat divided regarding Gadamer's response to the political activities; however, Jean Grondin held that Gadamer's life and work are "an example of the attempt to find a reasonable foothold within a context of dangerous, trying, dramatic and extreme socio-historical circumstances."³⁶

Germany was the focal point of divisive socio-political events of the 20th century. Gadamer has been characterized as one of the academics who cautiously and perhaps naïvely disregarded the arising dangerous political forces. Unlike some of his academic colleagues, he did not join the Nazi party nor participated militarily. By most accounts, he did not take the Nazi movement seriously.

After June 30th, 1934, it was too late. Hitler suppressed all forms of dissidence and did not leave any doubt about the criminal nature of his regime. Every intellectual who respected himself, and who was not suicidal, had to remain silent. This is what Gadamer did. With him, prying minds did not find direct criticism of National Socialism, but neither did he truly adopt a compromising position, which is to his credit.³⁷

Forced into a fearful silence, he concentrated on his teaching activities and enacting his "inner emigration"³⁸, manifest as intermittent publications which focused on Greek philosophy. In other words, he intellectually emigrated to ancient Greece - its thought, and its culture. According to Kurt Mueller-Vollmer "[Gadamer's] work in

³⁵ Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. 5.

³⁶ Kieran Bonner, "Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography" *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 43(2), (2006): 236

³⁷ Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. 10.

³⁸ Bonner, "Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography" 236.

hermeneutics grew out of his historical and philosophical studies [of ancient Greece] and his abiding interest in literature and poetry, both ancient and modern.”³⁹

Throughout his academic career, Gadamer was exposed to the authoritative and totalitarian rule of both Hitler and Stalin. These political ideologies would have significantly impacted the academic environment and the context in which Gadamer practiced⁴⁰. Therefore, it is important to consider that Gadamer’s horizon held a deep sense of isolation. During the ascendancy of the Nazi regime, he again suffered physical, political, and social isolation such as being physically limited in travel, socially limited by distrust and disillusionment in the political sphere. These factors hardly favour a stimulating environment for unique intellectual discourse. Therefore, one could argue that interaction and sharing within the community declined, limiting the creation of knowledge. I think it is important to note that *Truth and Method* is a work borne out of the influences of the context of his experiences. Further, we must also note that his experiences - of isolation, limitation, and fear - is part of Gadamer’s horizon.

In Heidelberg in 1953, the political structures in Western Europe were settling. Gadamer found his voice once again and established a philosophical review devoted to the discussions of philosophical articles. Participation by the community solidified Gadamer’s passion to defend and practice dialogical approaches. The community levied pressure on Gadamer to publish a defense of his philosophy, however he was adamant that part of his defence was not to create a system of thought in isolation, but to engage in continual dialogue, which is ultimately, he felt, how one uncovers the truth.⁴¹ Moreover, in his opinion, the practice of philosophical dialogue was the process in which to engage in hermeneutics. The practice of hermeneutics was always about interpretation and in

³⁹ Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutical Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*. (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1985), 256.

⁴⁰ Bonner, “*Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*”, 236.

⁴¹ Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. 12.

carrying on a dialogue with texts.⁴² “The philosophy which he proposed, and which above all, he practiced, was a hermeneutic of philosophy. To interpret, to understand, is not only a process which is practiced in the social sciences but implies yet more fundamentally the whole existence of a human being.”⁴³

Gadamer completed *Truth and Method* in 1960 when he was sixty years of age.⁴⁴ *Truth and Method* is widely regarded as his greatest work.

Mueller-Vollmer described it as an “extensive and profound analysis and critique of classical hermeneutic thought.”⁴⁵ Interestingly, popular in scholarly conversation was around the meaning of the title. Many scholars felt it should have been called *Truth or Method* as Gadamer had expressed he did not wish to create a methodology.⁴⁶ For example, Joel C. Weinsheimer commented that “the title should really be ‘Truth or Method’ [for]...truth and method remain in [an] unresolved tension, not [an] identical certainty.”⁴⁷ Grondin called the title “inspired - it was vague, evocative, mysterious, and striking.”⁴⁸ These qualities also invoke similar qualities of the socio-political context of Gadamer’s horizon - vague [non- dissonant], evocative [meaningful], mysterious [silent], ... and perhaps non committal, isolated, or fearful.

What is horizon?

Gadamer answered the question, ‘how is understanding possible?’ by saying “all understanding is hermeneutical. [Any] analysis of the nature of understanding is coincident with an analysis of universal hermeneutic.... [understood as] the basic being

⁴² Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. 12.

⁴³ Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. 12.

⁴⁴ Jean Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer* (Quebec: Acumen Publishing, 2003), 3.

⁴⁵ Mueller-Vollmer. *The Hermeneutical Reader*. 256.

⁴⁶ Mueller-Vollmer. *The Hermeneutical Reader*. 256.

⁴⁷ Joel C Weinsheimer. *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), xi.

⁴⁸ Grondin. *The Philosophy of Gadamer*. 13.

in motion ... which constitutes its finiteness and historicity and hence includes the whole of its experience of the world."⁴⁹ Therefore, to question a situation – whether it be a text, a painting, or another person – one needs to consider all knowledge of and for them – past and present - which Gadamer understood as the horizon of understanding.

We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of "*horizon*." The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point... [W]orking out of the hermeneutical situation means the achievement of the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition.⁵⁰

The concept of horizon was first brought forth as a philosophical concept by Husserl and was initially understood through the metaphor of landscape – the horizon being a distant point from the perspective of the individual who looked out.

[T]o employ an analogy with sight: along with the object of attention, the focus of the vision [what are we to be looking at], there is also a field of vision, a horizon. The object is included within a horizon that comprehends not only the focus of attention (or intention) but also what is not the focus, a periphery of what is not objectified but could nevertheless become an intentional object, inside a different horizon.⁵¹

Gadamer thought Husserl's metaphor, laid out above, broke down when one considered a horizon not as spatial, but as sequential and material. In other words, horizon does not represent an object for which one is seeking understanding – like how one views a sail boat from the shore - rather horizon encompasses all things that are in the present - in the 'right now' - that one can see, feel, touch, smell, etc. as well as memory or past experiences and knowledge of experiences.

⁴⁹ Susan J. Hekman. *Hermeneutics and the Sociology of Knowledge*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 94.

⁵⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 313.

⁵¹ Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. 157.

Every experience has implicit horizons of before and after, and finally merges with the continuum of the experiences present in the before and after to form the one flow of experience ... The flow of experience has the character of a universal 'horizon consciousness', out of which only particulars are truly given as experiences.⁵²

Further, Gadamer speaks against a static understanding of the concept. He says

[H]orizon is not a rigid frontier, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further. Thus, horizon intentionality, which constitutes the unity of the flow of experience, is paralleled by an equally comprehensive horizon intentionality on the objective side. For everything that is given as existent is given in terms of the world and hence brings the world horizon with it.⁵³

In other words, the reality of the social structures within which we live, interact, and experience represents horizon. It is the height, width, and breadth of the 360 degrees in which one stands, experiences, feels, and interacts with others in shared knowledge; as well as past experience from memory and expectations for future interaction, drawn from experience of knowledge. Essentially horizon is all the factors: social, political, economic, and the experiences from and with those factors that makes up one's worldview - or as Weinsheimer summarizes

horizon is another way of describing context. It includes everything of which one is not immediately aware and of which one must in fact remain unaware if there is to be a focus of attention; but one's horizon is also the context in terms of which the object of attention is understood. This horizon can be called life or world.⁵⁴

Whilst Gadamer formulated his work into *Truth and Method*, he was also thinking and writing from the point of personal horizon. Each individual has their own personal horizon which contains all their life's experiences, attitudes, emotional reactions and preconceived meanings. A reader of a text will also engage with a text from a point of

⁵² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 216.

⁵³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 217.

⁵⁴ Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. 157.

personal horizon. Gadamer holds that each horizon undergoes a negotiated engagement with the text.

In fact the horizon of the present is being continually formed in that we have continually to test all of our prejudices. An important part of this testing is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present than there are historical horizons. Understanding, rather, is always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves.⁵⁵

In other words, to ascertain an interpretation of a situation [in our case – the text] requires a fusion of all horizons. It is important to reiterate that horizon is fluid. As each horizon is the union of fluid experience, and each experience contributes to knowledge, any fusion of horizons will not be static.

Fusion, according to Gadamer, requires a conversation which involves a relationship around the agreement of the horizons of the reader and writer. “Since both conversation and understanding involve coming to an agreement, ... all understanding involves something like a common language, albeit a common language that is itself formed in the process of understanding itself.”⁵⁶ Therefore, to isolate fusion into understanding, the reader and the author must agree on the form of common language or common understanding of knowledge at the point of fusion.

Language

“Language is the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object takes place between two people.”⁵⁷ This means that language is the consensus between the author and the reader. The language used by the author

⁵⁵ Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutical Reader*. 37.

⁵⁶ “The Linguisticity of Understanding - Hans-Georg Gadamer” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. plato.stanford.edu./entries/gadamer/, accessed December 17, 2015.

⁵⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 346.

comes directly from their horizon and is what the reader will use to ascertain meaning from the text. One of the challenges for my project is using the various translations and publications of *Thomas*. The first English translation was done within the last 70 years. As a reader, this lends a certain convenience, as it may reflect contextual understanding for me. The translation may or may not reflect what the author meant. Therefore, it is important to note that translations may affect language and thus consensus. Translations may highlight limitation in language and not fully ascertain nuanced meanings associated with the horizon from which it was written. Conversely, it may feature nuanced meanings based on the horizon of the modern translator. As Gadamer told us, understanding comes from a fusion of the horizons – as an interpretation of text.⁵⁸ That said, the notion of translation as Gadamer understood it, is a kind of negotiation. Translation shows that

language as the medium of understanding must be consciously created by an explicit mediation... Having to rely on translation is tantamount to two people giving up their independent authority. Where a translation is necessary, that gap between the spirit of the original words and that of their reproduction must be accepted. It is a gap that can never be completely closed. But in these cases understanding does not really take place between the partners of the conversation but between the interpreters, who are able to have a real encounter in a common world of understanding.⁵⁹

I think it is in the 'gap' where meaning comes alive. When one considers the gap as Gadamer held, as the space between the spirit or meaning of the original words and the spirit of the reproduction or translation, one can mediate common ground. In other words, the 'gap' is the space of fusion - to create meaning and understanding. The act of mediation is the manifestation of transformation - both from a sense of learning something new, as well as from a spiritual sense - of opening a 'gap' in one's self to allow the horizon of another to enter - a fusion.

⁵⁸ Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 218.

⁵⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 346. It is to be noted that the text of *Truth and Method* from which I have been working is a English translation from German.

Northrop Frye said that language, at its most practical - as a native tongue - gives understanding of 'things' - both inherent and acquired and allows for one to participate or interact with others in society.⁶⁰ In other words, understanding allows one to interact using language created by mediation. Frye also holds that understanding of that language requires something deeper. "After you've looked up all the hard words and the classical allusions and learned what words like imagery and diction are supposed to mean, what you use in understanding it, ...is your imagination."⁶¹ In other words, it is imagination which allows one to negotiate the 'gap' and garner a sense of another horizon.

As mentioned earlier, *Thomas* is an ancient text. To negotiate its language, I have the benefit of recent English translations. That said, I think it is important to note that the text with which I will be working is not the original. The only known complete text of *Thomas* found at Nag Hammadi, was written in Coptic⁶². Scholars have discovered, after the Coptic version surfaced, that there are three other fragments written in koine Greek, found earlier in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. These fragments have come to be known as: P. Oxy 1, which is a fragment of T26 through T33; P. Oxy 654, a fragment of the beginning of the text through to T7, and T24 through T36; and P. Oxy 655, which is a fragment of T36 through 39.⁶³

A complete text in koine Greek has not been found; therefore, caution in working with the Coptic text resides in the acknowledgment that this version is a translated copy and therefore may hold a hidden mediation of meaning. Textual criticism tells us that typically copies hold both intentional and accidental changes or mistakes. These

⁶⁰ Frye, "The Motive for Metaphor", 664.

⁶¹ Frye, "The Motive for Metaphor", 664.

⁶² Coptic - an Egyptian language written in a modified Greek script. See Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 2.

⁶³ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities - The Battles for Scripture and the Faith We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 53.

mistakes can therefore intentionally or unintentionally change the meaning of the text.⁶⁴ Further, the process of textual translation may infuse a sense of interpretation. In other words, there is a possibility that during the translation from koine Greek to Coptic, a copyist may have intentionally or unintentionally changed the meanings of some of the logion. Further, a translation from Coptic to English, may also have acquired changes. With all that said, scholarly analysis of *Thomas* is done using the only complete version available - the Coptic version.

The scope of this project is to fuse horizons. As a first step, I must recognize that *Thomas* was written with an understanding of knowledge garnered from the experiences and socio-political events of another horizon. By exploring these events, our aim is to sense the horizon in which the text was read and sense how knowledge was understood by the community for which it was written. With all of this in mind, lets begin our inquiry into The Back of the Text and look at the context of Rome.

⁶⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament - a Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 26-27.

Chapter Two - The Back of the Text

Gnostic Christian Communities in Rome from 100 to 150 CE

Dr. Abdul-Masih said that the degree to which a community has access to power directly correlates with its continued existence. Those who struggle within or against social, political and economic power structures risk diminishing their chances of survival.⁶⁵ It is from within and against those social, political and economic power structures of ancient Roman society that members of the Christian Gnostic community experienced faith, participated within community, and struggled against societal structures. The culmination of these experiences led the community to respond to the struggle against the social condition and through faith in salvation, seek insight, knowledge or gnosis.

The purpose of this chapter is to get a sense of the horizon of the Christian Gnostic community practicing in Rome in the first 50 years of the second century. We will look at how their community was defined and why the community struggled against wider society. We will also look at how the community accessed social and political power within the wider society.

Therefore, to analyse a horizon of the Christian Gnostic community,⁶⁶ it is important to discuss early Christianity and the range of relations it had with the Roman

⁶⁵ Dr. Magi Abdul-Masih is my thesis supervisor and mentor. I was fortunate to have many discussions with her which has informed my own thinking. This particular idea was discussed, July 7, 2016.

⁶⁶ It is important to note that "gnostic" or "gnosticism" is now being understood by scholars as a recent academic term. There probably wasn't a Christian 'gnostic' community. That said, most of the academic research utilizes these terms, therefore I will also do the same and will use Kurt Rudolph's terminology - the community of Christian Gnostics. Rudolph's identification is significant because it is based on research pre-Nag Hammadi. Academically, many of these groups were lumped together as gnostic. The landscape of the ancient Christian community may have been characterized by a multitude of smaller Christian groups all influenced by each other and the wider social environment. Further, scholarly usage of the term 'gnosticism' has seemingly not been constant, which has caused both confusion in meaning and interpretation. Many scholars continue to use the term and where referenced in this discussion is from that research.

Empire. In other words, how were the actions and worldview of the Christian community controlled within the context of the Imperial structure and culture.

Shirley Jackson Case, a Canadian historian of early Christianity and church history, said that to understand the rise of Christianity in Roman society, one must note that “each phase of [Christianity] arose in answer to some demand of the time”. In other words, the meanings and traditions of the early Christians were created, in part, as a response to the needs of the community.⁶⁷ Therefore, I propose that to understand the position of Christian gnostic community in which *Thomas* circulated, it is necessary to look at the teaching and practice of other Christian communities, as a response to the social needs created within the Empire. We will work backwards, starting with how the Empire, as the proprietor of power, organized political and social structures which were the catalyst for the emergence of the various Christian communities.

This chapter will be structured into three sections beginning with a discussion of the social factors within the Empire that gave rise to certain Christian practices. The second section will look at, to which belief systems and practices the Christian Gnostics were responding. And the final section will look at two Christian communities - the Marcionites and Valentinians – and how the constructed practices with limited access to social powers.

Karen King positioned the term ‘gnosticism’ as an insufficient academic term to identify both the community and the ideas within the community. King holds that the terms ‘gnostic’ and ‘gnosticism’ were created, to some extent, by historians of religion, in the 18th century, as an academic tool which has contributed to the ambiguity of the terms. Further, that the term ‘gnosticism’ was created to create a barrier around what was being identified as Christianity or the proto-orthodox movement and as such was used to cover a whole set of different kinds of early Christian beliefs and movements that were basically regarded in the early church as heretical. Further, she argues that using the term gnosticism solidifies, as static, certain ideas that were fluid. The term, therefore, she argues, is seemingly disingenuous, as it does not reflect historically a community, nor does it reflect a tangible line of thought. See Miguel Conner, *Voices of Gnosticism* (Dublin: Bardic Press, 2011), 135-137, 158.

⁶⁷ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians - The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 3.

The Roman Empire

Social Hierarchy of the Roman Society

To ascertain a horizon for the ancient communities in which *Thomas* circulated, I need to explore the social structures which the ancient communities lived, interacted, and experienced. Christian gnostic communities living in Rome lived within the Empire. Social structures within the Empire was structured to maintain social order by a strict system of stratification. The people within each rank competitively engaged in a limited economic structure to generate wealth - a consideration of upward mobility.⁶⁸ In other words, people strove to manoeuvre themselves upward within the hierarchy from which they were born.⁶⁹

The Empire's hierarchy was structured around status and rank. Status was displayed in clothing, by the position of the seats which were occupied in public, the number of employees held, and the amount of money spent on slaves, housing, and banquets. Each status and rank held differences in significance. Status was reflected in how one portrayed values, whereas rank reflected how one behaved in respect to legal or traditional rules. There were variations of status within the same rank at all levels even among slaves. Further, the members of a rank were far from equal in terms of occupation and economic resources.⁷⁰

The privileged *honestiores* were the top three ranks representing the elite: the senatorial order - those who managed the administration of the senate for the Emperor; the equestrian order - a rank of diverse responsibilities, political administrative aspirations and some military responsibilities; and the aristocratic order which were

⁶⁸ Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy Society & Culture*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 123.

⁶⁹ Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism" Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 39.

⁷⁰ Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*. 199.

mainly political figures of the local or regional level.⁷¹ A less significant rank, but one which still held considerable influence, was the veteran order - a rank of retired soldiers who were rewarded for their role in preserving the social order.⁷² The *honestiores* represented a very small percentage of the population and controlled the largest percentage of resources, namely land.⁷³

The largest rank in terms of population were the *humiliores* - the masses of humble free people. These were the common folks - traders, merchants, builders, tradespeople and farmers. Some of the *humiliores* were free born and some were freed people. All were considered Roman citizens with the rights that citizenship offered. That said, *humiliores* had seemingly limited upward manoeuvrability in the social hierarchy and were often the group burdened with providing new wealth when it was required at the top. Slaves, were the bottom rank of society and were considered property, not people.⁷⁴

The desire for upward mobility within the social hierarchy was competitive because it was the members of the higher orders who benefitted from the legal established property rights, acquisition of wealth, citizenship and other legal privileges associated with each level of the social status.⁷⁵

Economically, the system of stratification maneuvered resources and wealth. The economic framework, as a structure, was underdeveloped and unequal.⁷⁶ The Imperial authority was organized around urban centres built by the wealth of agricultural

⁷¹ Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*. 112-113.

⁷² Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*. 110.

⁷³ Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*. 115.

⁷⁴ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 31.

⁷⁵ Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*. 111.

⁷⁶ Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*. 111.

surpluses from the countryside.⁷⁷ The continual upward flow of resources left many of the *humiliores* migrating into urban centres, fraught with poverty.⁷⁸

The political structure, represented by a system of government administered by the *honestiores*, was typically heralded as conservative and traditional. The aims of government were to maintain and enforce law and social order, and to move revenue up through the hierarchy to support the Imperial authority and infrastructure.

Administratively, the *honestiores* were internally focussed. Innovations into the wider society were limited. Much attention was seemingly given to controlling their officials - preserving the status and rank of the elite - and limiting the upward mobility of those below than administering to the needs of their people.⁷⁹ This is an important factor to which the Christian community responded.

The Imperial cult was known as the dominant state religion in which Emperors were considered 'the sons of the Gods' or the divinely sanctioned head of state. The Emperor held the top position in the hierarchy and was afforded special status including deification after death.⁸⁰ The nature of the Imperial cult was one in which worship was directed for the strength and success of the Empire and for the success and the supremacy of the Emperor. Worship never involved accepting belief systems. The Imperial cult did not utilize creeds devised to proclaim the true nature of the gods and their interaction with the world, nor did it utilize professions of faith during worship services. Further, there were no 'right' beliefs or 'false' beliefs. What mattered were the acts of worship, officially sanctioned by and for the Empire.⁸¹

In Rome, the Imperial cult was thriving. It was the Empire's most ceremonial center, with temples, shrines, priests, and sacrifice, all very publicly displayed. There

⁷⁷ Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*. 119.

⁷⁸ Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*. 197.

⁷⁹ Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*. 203.

⁸⁰ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*, 35.

⁸¹ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 92.

were religions of “all kinds - family religions, local religions, city religions, state religions... virtually everyone worshiped numerous gods in numerous ways.”⁸² The plurality of the religious landscape within the structures of the Empire bred respect and tolerance and reinforced the hierarchy. As part of the Imperial infrastructure, groups of priests were commissioned to serve the cult primarily by offering sacrifices at temples for the benefit of the Empire. That said, the Authority tolerated a polytheistic religious culture around the Imperial cult because other gods were seemingly related to the hierarchy. There were certain gods that were associated with certain social status⁸³ and other gods were associated with certain domestic environments. Homes held small shrines, and religious ceremonies were lead for an entire household by the father or mother. This may have been the original framework for the Christian ekklesia.

The Authority’s tolerance of religion was secondary to political concerns. The Authority was unwavering in repressing political threats. Keeping peace in society and keeping their rule unchallenged was paramount. All kinds of measures were in place, including around private gatherings to repress dissidents and political activism. Rodney Stark argues that the Authority responded to Christianity as a political movement rather than a religion. He claims that Christianity held all the characteristics of a social movement.

⁸² Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 91.

⁸³ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to “Gnosticism”*. 36.

The Christian Community in Rome

Early Christianity as Social Movement

In 1956, Anthony C. Wallace, wrote that “all religions arise in response to a crisis.”⁸⁴ Social movements are social protests to political structures that restrict access to various social goods and services.⁸⁵ In the Empire, these restrictions, and its structural social stratification represented a crisis.

To understand Christianity as a social movement we must look at “the physical and social structures of the urban environment.”⁸⁶ Rome was understood to be a transient city, one swelling with rural migrants. Many of these migrants, who may have immigrated from foreign lands, were typically excluded from established urban culture. They were regarded as unsophisticated, uneducated, and poor.⁸⁷ Therefore, migrants, as a group, were deemed to hold no civic value, as typically their means of wealth had been expropriated. Moreover, as a group, they could not access the higher ranks of the social hierarchy, nor could they afford access to the civic temples and shrines.

Christians had resided in Rome since before the middle of the first century and, like other migrants, were largely shunned. In fact, Christians were considered social dissidents because they were understood to be followers of a dangerous man accused of magic, who had been executed by the Imperial authority. Further, Christians were considered dissenters because of their perceived atheism - they did not worship the gods who protected the Roman state therefore seemingly denied the divine status of the

⁸⁴ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity, How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 78.

⁸⁵ Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, *Dictionary of Sociology*. (London: Penguin Books, 1984). 261.

⁸⁶ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*. 147. Stark looked at Antioch. Meeks looked at Corinth. I will rely on the research from Garnsey and Saller who are specific about Rome during our period. Both Stark and Meeks noted that the social conditions were considerably worse away from the seat of Authority - in the urban centres away from Rome.

⁸⁷ Garnsey and Saller. *The Roman Empire*. 119.

Emperor.⁸⁸ R. M. Grant tells us that by the year 200 CE approximately 1% of the population in the city of Rome identified as Christian.⁸⁹ These were warning signs for an authority fixated on suppressing political dissention. Under this kind of political threat, what could have been the appeal of the early Christian community?

To understand the attraction of the Christian community, “we must understand how the message of the New Testament and the social relations it sustained solved acute problems afflicting Greco Roman cities.”⁹⁰ Stark argues that the Empire was dissolving into social chaos and chronic urban misery. There were very high levels of social disorder stemming from fear and lack of integration of rural populations. Further, the cities were heavily polluted, fostering disease.⁹¹ The Authority did not provide social services. There were no hospitals, social welfare, or medical care.⁹² The sick were expected to pay cultic priests for advice on treatment and for access to temples and shrines.⁹³ But many of the sick were too poor to pay for treatment. Under these conditions, Christians had a platform in which to offer an alternative social structure - to provide access to solutions to hunger and sickness and to make life more tolerable. In other words, Christians responded to misery.

The early Christian community used its faith as a way to build new social structures. God was the divine authority, not the Emperor. Further, the belief system of monotheism - ‘One God’ - validated a system of governance by which the Church was ruled. Because God alone rules, God delegates Authority - spiritual authority which is administered through the community. For the Christian community, there cannot be two

⁸⁸ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. (New York: Random House, 1979), 76.

⁸⁹ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*. 9

⁹⁰ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*. 147.

⁹¹ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*. 149.

⁹² Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to “Gnosticism”*. 39.

⁹³ Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief. The Secret Gospels of Thomas*. (New York: Random House, 2003). 6.

rulers.⁹⁴ Therefore, community leaders could reorganize political power struggles into authoritative religious rhetoric. They could build a new political structure, a new social hierarchy, which formed an inseparable unity with religion throughout the community.⁹⁵ Replacing the Emperor and the elite ranks, the community created an alternative social hierarchy lead by God and giving accessibility to God. The significant difference in the political structure of the community was that upward mobility was spiritual not material. And spirituality - belief systems - were manifest as practice and ritual, thus creating new social norms. In other words, the actions of the community responded to the deficiencies within the social structures of the Empire thereby creating new Christian structures as an alternative authority.

Further, belief systems manifest a sense of liberation and social action. Christian mercy was a primary value. Christian love and charity must extend beyond one's immediate family, to all those in God's family and beyond.⁹⁶ The community offered a culture, stripped of ethnicity, and social rank - God was the authority. God required that you love your neighbour regardless of their race, ethnicity, language, education, and social position.⁹⁷ This kind of social interaction created a safe place for migrants and other displaced residents. Those in need could find immediate practical help almost anywhere within the community.⁹⁸ For the homeless and impoverished, the Christian community offered charity and hope. For new migrants who were alone, the Christian community offered a social group. For those suffering from violence, such as women and slaves, the Christian community offered social solidarity. For those who were suffering from sickness or disease, the Christian community offered care, nursing, and peace in

⁹⁴ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 36.

⁹⁵ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 46.

⁹⁶ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 212.

⁹⁷ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 118.

⁹⁸ Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 8.

the belief that Christ offered salvation. In other words, teachings put into practice transformed human experience to mitigate misery.⁹⁹

Persecution and Martyrdom

The social actions of the Christian community were difficult for the Imperial Authority. On one hand, the Christian community offered a social safety net for those in need, but for those not in need, Christian social action was perceived as undermining the power of the Authority and that was something that they would not tolerate.

Within the wider society, Christians were labeled not as a religion, but as a criminal organization. Christians followed a man whom the Authority had put to death for sedition - rebellion and incitement against the Roman authority and Jewish leadership. Tacitus, a Roman historian of the Imperial court thought of Christians 'with utter contempt'.¹⁰⁰ He also reported that the group was officially persecuted, namely for public disturbances and agitation.

The Roman authority leveled charges for disruption of the peace against members of the community over an outcry from Roman families. The conversion to Christianity was understood as a rejection of one's previous family unit. But to the Christian community, new Christians weren't seen as rejecting a previous family, but as joining a new family. Research shows that within the community, Christians referred to each other as sisters and brothers and more importantly, referred to God as Father. Christians were to follow the example of Jesus and organized themselves in such a way "that made exclusive demands on individual members."¹⁰¹ These demands included leaving behind former community associations, including their families. Scholars point to

⁹⁹ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 213.

¹⁰⁰ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 76.

¹⁰¹ Bart Ehrman, *After the New Testament. A Reader in Early Christianity 100-300 CE*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 495.

texts such as Luke and Matthew¹⁰² to indicate that Jesus seemingly does not place family as a priority, for it was understood that the world order was coming to an end. Family and social institutions were therefore not important, but the preparation for the future kingdom was important.¹⁰³

The story of Perpetua is one that scholars cite as the example of familial disruption and the subsequent persecution. Although the death of Perpetua happened outside of our period, it is an important historical illustration of how elements of Christianity were reinterpreted into perceived criminal behaviour. Perpetua and her slave Felicity are Christians and have been arrested for being Christians. Ehrman tells us that she has seemingly left behind her immediate family, including her son. This has upset her father and to bring about her release, asked her to renounce Christianity. Stark tells us that typically people will conform to societal norms when they believe they have more to lose by being identified as a deviant than what they may stand to gain from the deviant act.¹⁰⁴ One can only assume that Perpetua felt she had more to gain from persecution and death, than even her infant son could provide.

Ehrman tell us that the first part of her story in the text *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is said to be from a private journal left behind by Perpetua. An eyewitness account of her death is also included in the text.

Early Christians recognized, and sometimes even celebrated, the fact that adherence to the religion could disrupt family lives. For many of them, the Christian church was a new family that replaced their old biological family. Nowhere can the disruptive possibilities of Christianity be seen more clearly than in the gripping account ... of the trial and execution of a Roman matron named Perpetua and her female slave Felicity. Perpetua reports that she had an infant son whom she had given over to the care of her family. In one of the most powerful and pathetic scenes of the account, her father

¹⁰² See Luke 14:26, Matthew 10:34-37.

¹⁰³ Ehrman, *After the New Testament*. 294.

¹⁰⁴ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*. 17.

pleads with her to consider the pain she is causing her loved ones by her senseless determination to die a martyr's death:

*“And then my father came to me [in prison], worn out with anxiety. He came up to me, that he might cast me down [from the faith], saying ‘Have pity my daughter, on my gray hairs. Have pity on your father, if I am worthy to be called a father by you ... Have regard to your brothers, have regard to your mother and your aunt, have regard to your son, who will not be able to live after you. Lay aside your courage, and do not bring us to destruction; for none of us will speak in freedom if you should suffer anything’.... And I grieved over the grey hairs of my father and I comforted him saying ‘On that scaffold, whatever God wills that happen...’ And he departed for me in sorrow”.*¹⁰⁵

Many family members who were left angry and upset tried to secure assistance from the Emperor to recover their lost loved one. Further, familial upset gave rise to suspicion and distrust of the community within the wider society. They were seen as a closed community who were absorbing family members and participating in activities understood as atheism, cannibalism, and sexual deviance. Compounded with a refusal to participate in the practices of the Imperial cults, Christians were perceived as rejecting the authority of the Emperor. “This refusal was widely seen as treasonous. These were the gods [in the Imperial cult] who protected society, who brought peace and prosperity to the Empire through the agency of the Emperor, who was himself sometimes considered divine.”¹⁰⁶

As we discussed earlier, one of the purposes of the Roman Authority was to maintain and enforce law and social order. Coupled with the disruption in families, and the unwillingness to participate in the Imperial cults, the Christian community was seen as making a political statement rather than a religious one. In other words, Christians were deemed as rejecting societal order, which gave the Authority the case in which to

¹⁰⁵ Ehrman, *After the New Testament*. 496. The bottom portion of the quote is from her story in the text *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* and is said to be from a private journal left behind by Perpetua.

¹⁰⁶ Ehrman, *After the New Testament*. 497.

publicly and officially persecute the Christian community to maintain law and order.

Christians were marginalized and devalued as humans, persecuted and violently used as fodder for the entertainment purposes. An activity to both promote fear and reinforcing social order through the power of the Emperor.

So why would Christians, knowing that in declaring themselves and participating in the community would result in pain and denigration, not simply renounce Christianity to save their lives? Pagels tells us that for the community, responding to the threat of their own suffering and death came from an interpretation of Christ's suffering and death.¹⁰⁷ "Past events became matters of religious conviction only when they serve to interpret present experience."¹⁰⁸ Christians framed persecution as a way to experience or follow Christ.

Scholars agree that the Christian community framed persecution and death as martyrdom. Under pressure from the Imperial Authority who were to quell any social dissidents, Christians could engage with the wider society in two ways; one was to stay quiet and not identify as part of the community, in effect not identifying themselves as a social dissident and therefore remain safe from persecution. Or, to identify as Christian, in effect proclaiming oneself as a social dissident. That said, many within the community who publicly identified as Christian interpreted an action of speaking out as 'confessors' of unjust treatment. This was understood as a way to follow Jesus, for He was unjustly treated, persecuted and ultimately crucified. Jesus had not accommodated the Imperial Authority and therefore he accepted his death. This Christian path, being a martyr, was to follow Jesus to be 'Christ-like'. Therefore, one must endure, in the face of violence and death. Martyrdom was viewed positively as being 'Christ like'. Moreover, community leadership urged Christians to become 'confessors', to endure all the violence, to imitate

¹⁰⁷ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 75.

¹⁰⁸ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 82.

the passion of Jesus, and go willingly to their deaths. Christ died for their sins, so that his followers would not have to die for their sins. Anyone who did not embrace martyrdom in the face of persecution denied that Jesus death was sufficient for salvation.¹⁰⁹ In other words, to die a martyr was to endure through death towards God.¹¹⁰

Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, like so many other Christian leaders, suffered persecution and martyrdom.

Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in Syria, was arrested around 110 CE, evidently for Christian activities. Rather than being tried on the spot, he was sent to Rome under armed guard to face trial and execution. Along the way he was greeted by representatives of various local churches, to which he then wrote letter sending his greetings and warning against false teachers, church dissension, and especially lack of reverence for ruling Bishops. Seven of Ignatius letter survive. The letter to the Christians of Rome is the most distinctive of all. It was written to plead with them not to interfere with the proceedings against him. Ignatius wants to be thrown to the wild beasts and so become a martyr for Christ, a true Christian. He urges the Roman Christians to grant him his wish and allow him to imitate the passion of his Lord.¹¹¹

The narrative of Ignatius is interesting to note. Outwardly the Empire and the Christian community were opposed, but inwardly each side was arranging a system where both strengthen their position. As discussed, the Empire ruled through threat and intimidation. They must be seen as having full authority. Ignatius' death, then, was made into a public spectacle in Rome for the Emperors entertainment¹¹² and was used as a way in which the Authority quelled social dissention. To execute a Christian leader in Rome reinforced the Authorities power to maintain social law and order. The system also satisfied Ignatius. The Empire transported him, albeit under armed guard, from Antioch to Rome. Along the way, Ignatius was able to stop and visit with others within the Christian

¹⁰⁹ Ehrman, *After the New Testament*. 506.

¹¹⁰ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 82.

¹¹¹ Ehrman, *After the New Testament*. 31.

¹¹² Ignatius was presented to the Emperor in Rome in an arena and was "mangled and destroyed by the wild beasts". Ehrman, *After the New Testament*. 507.

community and give them letters they would circulate, many of which were written *en route*. The Empire didn't want to capture and slaughter all Christians as they needed the income which this population provided. They did however, want to continually send a message through the social system that overt Christian activities would not be tolerated.

On the journey, Ignatius wrote a letter to the Christian community in Rome. Ehrman noted that Ignatius called on the community not to interfere with his sentence. It is significant because the sentence and ultimate martyrdom is what Ignatius wants - to become 'Christ like' - "to imitate Christ's own Passion will he be able to 'get to God'."¹¹³ In other words, to be tried and executed like Christ was to be released through death to salvation. "Ignatius reality was a Kingdom that was not of this world, a Kingdom that he wanted to obtain with all his heart. The kingdoms of earth meant nothing to him and were clearly run by the forces of evil. One could escape bondage to these forces by letting them do their worst, by allowing them to kill the body to free the soul. He believed by escaping this world he could attain God."¹¹⁴ Thus, the public spectacle designed to reinforce authority was also a way to escape the suffering within the Empire and be released to the Kingdom of God.

The horizon of the larger society was couched in tensions between the Christian community and the Authority. I also want to analyse within the wider horizon how Christians organized the community within the city of Rome. As an illustration of the historical allocation, research tells us that in 100-150 CE there wasn't a church building, nor a fixed set of texts, or scripture, or formalized creeds¹¹⁵ nor a leadership structure.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ehrman, *After the New Testament*. 507.

¹¹⁴ Ehrman, *After the New Testament*. 507.

¹¹⁵ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 42.

¹¹⁶ "Christianity lacked in the second century: a pope". Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 42. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, "the earliest list of the popes, given by Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* II.31; cf. Eusebius, *Church History* V.6), Pius I was the ninth successor of St. Peter" and was "pope from about 140 to about 154""Pope Pius I." So, there must

That said, scholars tell us that it was Paul's letter to the Romans which advised internal alliance by addressing the relationships within the community in the context of "God's covenant with Israel."¹¹⁷ Brakke argued that Paul expressed the need for unity and peace. The community was to rise above its tensions to maintain fellowship and thus carry out the activities needed within the wider society. So, what was going on within the community to which Paul's letter offered advice and inspiration?

Diversity within the Community

In 49 CE Emperor Claudius ordered all Jews and Christian Jews living in Rome to leave.¹¹⁸ In 54 CE Claudius reversed the edict. In the intervening five years, the community was made up of Christians who had immigrated from Greece.¹¹⁹ Upon returning to Rome, did those who were ejected feel welcome back into the community? Or did they create their own smaller groups? Immigrants naturally congregate with others from their place of origin, namely because of shared comfort and personal connections to traditions. If groups gathered together based on regionality, a practice based on regional homogeneity may have sparked tensions with other groups who differ in tradition and practice. David Brakke argues a correlation between immigration and social diversity within ekklesia congregations, namely in worship styles, personal affinities, or social and economic similarities.¹²⁰ These social factors may have raised tensions between what Brakke called a 'collection of movements.'¹²¹ There was also a strong

have been an internal understanding within the community of a leadership structure. Catholic Encyclopedia. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12126b.htm>, paragraph 1.

¹¹⁷ Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word. The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written*. (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 120.

¹¹⁸ Acts 18:2 tells of Paul meeting Aquila and his wife Priscilla. "because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome." (RSV).

¹¹⁹ Borg, *The Evolution of the Word*, 119-121.

¹²⁰ David Brakke, *The Gnostics. Myth, Ritual and Diversity in Early Christianity*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010) 90.

¹²¹ Brakke. *The Gnostics*. 93.

sense that the groups tried to adhere to Paul's letter. Brakke discusses how the community negotiated differences in practice between Jews and Gentiles especially regarding purity laws and boundaries¹²² - the adherence to Jewish law, eating habits, observance of sacred days and circumcision. Therefore, the Christian community, in our period, mediated diversity in practice whilst attempting to achieve Paul's vision to create one community united as the people of God in Christ Jesus.¹²³ What ultimately mattered was a relationship with God as revealed by Paul.¹²⁴

Christian Gnostic Community

Scholars agree that a discussion of the 'gnostic' community is difficult because the information is limited. What is known of the Christian Gnostics come from two broad sources - surviving texts, and the critiques of the community from the church fathers.¹²⁵ Kurt Rudolph upholds the first step to looking at Christian Gnostics is to appreciate that they considered themselves first and foremost as Christians.¹²⁶ As the Christian community struggled to mediate differences within the movements, their "ecclesiastical rivals" found difficulty in accepting 'gnostics' as Christians.¹²⁷ In other words, Christian Gnostics understood themselves as Christian, but were not accepted by other groups as Christian. Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon (b.130-d.202), wrote that Christian Gnostics "had thoroughly infiltrated" the Christian community by saying the prayers and participating in rituals but "inwardly they understood these things to have a deeper symbolic meaning that the proto-orthodox Christians rejected."¹²⁸ Bottom line, Christian Gnostics were an

¹²² See Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*. Chapter 3, 74-110.

¹²³ Galatians 3:28. RSV.

¹²⁴ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 92-93.

¹²⁵ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. ii.

¹²⁶ Kurt Rudolph. *The Nature & History of Gnosticism*. (New York: First Harper & Row, 1987.) 206.

¹²⁷ Rudolph. *The Nature & History of Gnosticism*. 206.

¹²⁸ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 207.

active group of people who considered themselves Christians concerned with the attainment of gnosis.

What is Gnosis?

The term 'gnosis' in Greek means 'knowledge' but not simply in terms of knowing things or knowing about things, gnosis is a special kind of insight into the nature of reality.¹²⁹ As the term is understood by the community, gnosis may be understood as 'insight' for it involves an intuitive process of knowing oneself. To know oneself is to know human nature and human destiny.¹³⁰ It is important to differentiate knowledge and gnosis. As discussed earlier, knowledge is our worldview from which we interact with the world. Gnosis is knowledge that we learn through an experience. Gnosis is the knowledge that is unknown or hidden, that we cannot see, but learn to understand its impact on our sphere of reality once we experience it. In other words, gnosis is knowledge that we obtain through interaction. As an example, a child is told in the winter months not to touch its tongue to the metal poles in the playground. Engaging in this activity will result in your tongue sticking and ripping the skin. Yet every winter children in playgrounds put their tongues on metal poles. So why do children feel the need to experience this activity? They are asking themselves questions such as 'what would happen if I touch my tongue to a frozen metal pole (because children have been given general explanations)?' 'Will *my* tongue freeze?' 'Is it instant?' 'My tongue is warm so how can it freeze so quickly?' It is a mystery therefore it must be experienced. I was in elementary school when I experienced touching my tongue on a metal pole in the winter. I have insight into this natural phenomenon of reality through experience. It was not a pleasant experience. I could describe it to you with words, that would represent the

¹²⁹ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 12.

¹³⁰ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, xix.

experience, but you, as the reader, would never fully have the knowledge - the gnosis - the mystery revealed - unless you experience it for yourself. Moreover, I also have knowledge of myself - I am one who doesn't adhere to the warnings of others due to a desire to 'see what happens', and that I am awakened to the reality of frozen metal poles.

Gnosis, the deeper mysterious understanding, will include "a specific knowledge of one's divine origins and that the path to salvation comes through self-knowledge."¹³¹ According to Christoph Marksches, specific self-knowledge, as opposed to perception, predominantly found in philosophical and religious construction stemmed from the Platonic definition of gnosis, "the real *being* of things is appropriated in knowledge."¹³² It did not signify 'knowing' in relation to an understanding through perception but knowledge in the primary sense as "only of the structures of all reality which underlie the world of appearances, structures which Plato called 'ideas'". To refer to the example above, the Platonic 'idea' or 'the real being of things' is *what happened* to me and my tongue when it touched the frozen metal pole. Moreover, such knowledge or ideas is a recollection or a restoration of an original view of an individual. The original idea, according to Plato, had been lost and is now remembered through the understanding of what is experienced. In other words, 'right' knowledge - the real being, the real reality - is remembered through 'right' action - experience of reality. In other words, the real being, the spiritual self or the knowable part of God experienced through me as a child, is remembered in *what happened* when my tongue touched the pole. The experience is therefore spiritual in nature. One could argue that all experiences are spiritual in nature, but one would only attain gnosis when one recognizes *what happened – or the material medium of the spiritual experience*.

¹³¹ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 283.

¹³² Christoph Marksches, *Die Gnosis* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2001; reprint, London: T&T Clark Ltd, 2003), 1.

For the community, recognizing and acknowledging individual or collective experiences can be understood as a form of reality or spiritual in nature, and is a way to attain and express gnosis - by recognizing and acting with and through self knowledge or the real being. All human beings have the capacity to see through the world as perceived by the senses - all human beings are spiritual. And as such, "those who penetrate to a deeper knowledge of structures of reality are as like God as it is possible for human beings to be."¹³³ In other words, God is unknowable. We can experience God (and ourselves), not as we experience each other, but through experience of reality – action.¹³⁴ Action such as touching your tongue to a metal pole in the winter; however, to penetrate to a deeper knowledge is to engage in action in which one can sustain, such as engaging in activities of loving kindness, regardless of whether the action is towards a partner, family member, community member, or stranger.

According to Birgen Pearson gnosis is the "very basis of salvation. One comes to gnosis by having it revealed ... and through that revelation is awakened from ignorance, from sleep, or from drunkenness, which are various metaphors that are used for the state of the human being before he or she received Gnosis."¹³⁵

Gnostics and Christian Gnostics

Brakke tells us that based on ancient texts, there seemingly was a group that called itself and were known as Gnostics. He also notes that "this group corresponds to those who modern historians have often called 'Sethians' or 'Sethian Gnostics'."¹³⁶ Brakke believes historians have placed emphasis on labelling Gnostics as a community when it should be allocated to a worldview or school of thought. That the groups

¹³³ Marksches. *Die Gnosis*. 1-2.

¹³⁴ Marksches. *Die Gnosis*. 3.

¹³⁵ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 74. The language of 'sleep' and 'drunkenness' is important for it is found in *Thomas*.

¹³⁶ Brakke. *The Gnostics*. 72.

themselves used the title 'gnostic school of thought' as "a self-promotional designation that identified it as that school of thought capable of supplying knowledge (gnosis)."¹³⁷ Further, the Gnostic designation for themselves as a community highlighted an ideal – that as a religious people, their community was based along a racial or ethnic lineage - 'the immovable race' [from] 'the seed of Seth'.¹³⁸ Finally, that historically this community who identified as being part of the lineage of Seth and therefore subscribing to the Gnostic school of thought or worldview pre-date the life of Jesus and the emergence of Christianity.

Pearson agrees somewhat with Brakke in that those within the early Christian community who subscribe to the ideas of the gnostic school of thought pre-date those who subscribe to the ideas of the Gnostics as a Christian heresy.¹³⁹ He tells us that "the original Gnostics were sectarian mystical Jews who divorced the rigid Jerusalem temple culture before the advent of Jesus Christ."¹⁴⁰ Pearson also tells us that the (Sethian) Gnostics originally laid the foundation of the gnostic myth which tells the story of the fall of Sophia and the creation of the demiurge - that has come to represent gnostic thought. So, from ancient texts, that were in circulation during our timeframe,¹⁴¹ we can imagine that in Rome during our period, there was a Christian gnostic community who subscribed to a pre-Christian school of thought around the value in obtaining gnosis.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Brakke. *The Gnostics*. 72.

¹³⁸ Brakke. *The Gnostics*. 72.

¹³⁹ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 71.

¹⁴⁰ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 69.

¹⁴¹ See Valentinian texts such as *The Gospel of Truth*, *The Gospel of Philip*, and *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, which were included in the Nag Hammadi library.

¹⁴² Rodney Stark's research into the wider Christian community was so compelling that I wanted to reference his research on the Christian Gnostic community. He steps into it from a familiar trajectory - with the assumption that the discovery of 'gnostic' texts indicates that there was a community responding to social conditions. Unlike the wider Christian communities, he declares that 'gnostic' texts are not a reflection of Christian Gnostics responding to social conditions. Contrarily, he says that the existence of 'gnostic' manuscripts simply reflects 'heretical movements' ergo not Christian. Further, he says that 'gnostic' texts "are works entirely without provenance or context. We don't know who wrote them, where or when. Nor is there the slightest

Karen King argues that as scholars we don't need to necessarily be stringent on our categorization of different worldviews, but rather, in reference to texts, look for the variety in ideas.

If we look through the Nag Hammadi texts, we do find a wide variety of worldviews, even if they are similar. But we also find that if we look at the New Testament, there's a lot of variety there. But I think to talk about the orthodox worldview, [and] the Gnostic worldview makes it very difficult for us to see the differences within or among the [early Christian] groups ... but also the similarities that you find between and among these groups.¹⁴³

In that all three scholars have written post Nag Hammadi discovery, I think that during the first half of the second century, we should be imagining Christianity as a plurality - i.e.: as Christianities¹⁴⁴. And that there were Christian groups who realized some of the tenets of the gnostic school. I think it can be argued that Irenaeus' work can be understood as a response to the plurality in the emerging community. But I also think it is important to remember, as we saw above, that the Christian communities responded to messages of hope, charity and healing. Ehrman summed this thought as well when he said "Christianities also involve the social groups that utilized these texts, groups of Christians who, like all groups of Christians at the time and in all places, understood

surviving hint that most of these strange works were associated with [the emerging Christian] social movement." Stark's argument strikes me as benign, because as discussed, the authors of these text, considered themselves Christians, certainly not a heretical movement. Further, Christian Gnostics practiced a way to encounter God - the attainment of gnosis and did so through the social activities of the Christian communities, as a response to the social conditions of the Empire. Important to note in Stark's commentary that he is looking at the Christian Gnostic community from a proto-orthodox interpretation - "Purely as a matter of faith, one is free to prefer Gnostic interpretations and to avow that they give us access to secret knowledge concerning a more authentic Christianity, ... but one is not free to claim that the early church fathers rejected these writings for nefarious reasons. The conflict between many of these manuscripts and the New Testament are so monumental that no thinking person could embrace both. Consider that some Gnostic 'scriptures' equate the Jewish God with Satan!" See Rodney Stark. *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2006) 187.

¹⁴³ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 160.

¹⁴⁴ As Thomas may be illustrating. See Logion 66.

themselves to be the fortunate heirs of the truth, handed down to them by their faithful predecessors, who received their understandings about God, Christ, the world, and our place in it from people who should know - ultimately from the apostles of Jesus, and through them from Jesus himself, the one sent by God."¹⁴⁵

Social Context of the Christian Gnostic Community

Rudolph holds that research into the social structures of the Christian gnostic community is scarce but notes that with the discourse from church fathers and the texts discovered in Nag Hammadi, a social structure can be reconstructed. He argues that the scarcity in research comes from two factors: the Christian gnostic community was closed, and that a political motivation within the wider Christian community most likely acted to erase this community from history.

As we discussed earlier, the early proto-orthodox leadership organized as a reflection of Apostolic Succession. The Christian gnostic community also seemingly organized themselves from a spiritual perspective. There was a hierarchical structure to the three kinds of human beings found in earth: the pneumatics or spiritual in nature, the psychics and sarkits or material in nature. Only the pneumatics have received gnosis. The human of psychic nature, or what is also referred to as 'other' (perhaps Orthodox) Christians, will attain a lesser form of salvation, for the psychics' honour and glorify the demiurge - the lesser god. Those of the material nature are the lowest humans and are unable to receive gnosis therefore doomed. Those of the spirit - the pneumatics - recognize their own nature as being elected by God. Those who know - obtain gnosis -

¹⁴⁵ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 91.

are called by spirit to seek the deep things of God because gnostic secrets are revealed through grace to those who seek them.¹⁴⁶

As a response to the wider Christian community, the Christian Gnostics seemed rigidly protective of their secrecy. The pursuit of gnosis was understood as an individual practice. As we discussed earlier, gnosis was the pursuit of knowledge through experience. For Christian Gnostics, attaining gnosis was a way to experience closeness to God.

Christian Gnostics were social groups participating within a wider Christian group. They may have had membership in an ekklesia or perhaps set up their own ekklesia as a place to worship. Christian Gnostics shared the scriptures of other Christian groups, practiced baptism and eucharist with other Christian groups, but seemingly believed that they had a deeper, more spiritual, secret understanding¹⁴⁷ all within a Christian context. "Christ was the divine being who brought this knowledge from on high. Those who received this knowledge were thereby given the means of salvation."¹⁴⁸ Therefore, there was a focus on an encounter and relationship with the risen Christ in the present than venerating Jesus past activities.¹⁴⁹ Of course, other Christian communities did not share this perspective. For example, Pagels tell us "the [proto-]orthodox relies solely on the public, esoteric teachings which Christ and the apostles offered to 'the many,' however, gnostic Christians claimed to offer, in addition, their *secret* teachings, known only to the few."¹⁵⁰ This secret knowledge as understood as an awakening - to uncover a mystery through an experience.

¹⁴⁶ Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul - Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). 160.

¹⁴⁷ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 126.

¹⁴⁸ Ehrman, *The New Testament*. 208.

¹⁴⁹ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 12.

¹⁵⁰ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 14.

As Christian Gnostics understood themselves as Christians, they also participated in social action through love or following scripture and ritual. 1 John 4:8, says “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.”¹⁵¹ One cannot know God if one doesn’t love, for God is love. God is unknowable but can be known by knowing love. God is the mystery and love is the experience in which the mystery is revealed. Social action - loving kindness to mitigate social misery - is the way to experience love and thereby know God. It is the experience of love that reveals the mystery - gnosis

Social action within the wider society may have been the premises of individual and collective experiences. The Imperial social conditions were by all accounts horrific. The way to salvation and escape from earthly horror, was to continually participate in attaining gnosis - experiencing love to encounter God.

Christian Gnostics were not very different from other Christian communities; however, other Christian groups within the wider society did not agree. Irenaeus spoke of the “inexperienced ones”, uneducated, simple folk who fell victim to the charms of the Christian gnostic missionaries.¹⁵² Interestingly, this does tell us that the Christian gnostic community had a large enough membership that the proto-orthodox leadership felt threatened. New members into the Christian gnostic community came from all levels of the social structure - higher and lower classes including slaves. There is also evidence that women were in leadership positions as teachers, healers, missionaries and prophetesses. Further, women participated in baptism and eucharist rituals.¹⁵³ Some of

¹⁵¹ “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.” RSV. Borg (*Evolution of the Word*. 405) speculates that this letter was written around the year 100 CE, therefore may have been circulating in the Christian communities during our timeframe.

¹⁵² Rudolph. *The Nature & History of Gnosticism*. 208.

¹⁵³ Rudolph. *The Nature & History of Gnosticism*. 211.

this is known from text such as *Ptolemy Letter to Flora* and some from church fathers' writings.

Further, there is a sense that the Christian Gnostics had a circle of elites, who were intellectuals, well versed in mythology and philosophy, who also may have engaged in activities to bring outside members into the community. From outside the community, the assumption was, to obtain gnosis required one to have a level of education, to teach the recruits on how to interpret experiences. Rudolph tells us that within the Christian gnostic community there was no central administration, no distinct church leadership, no formalized church, that each individual practice was aimed at achieving gnosis¹⁵⁴.

In Rome, because of the Christian communities' physical and political position, news and information travelled through the community on a regular basis, often by charismatic leaders. The Christians gnostic community was identified as having many charismatic leaders. Therefore, it is important to explore the horizons of such communities in our timeframe, and I will look at the Marcionites and the Valentinians. Why these two communities? Research tells us that both have identified in some way as a Christian Gnostic community. Rudolph tells us that research of the social structures of the Christian Gnostics is scarce, but we do have information of the influences within each community. I need to emphasize that both Marcionites and Valentinians would have considered themselves Christians first. It is how they interpreted being Christian that was important.

Marcionites

Scholars agree that most groups within the early Christian community claimed their worldview by tracing lineage back through the apostles to Jesus, which was Jewish.

¹⁵⁴ Rudolph. *The Nature & History of Gnosticism*. 212-213.

For this reason, apostolic authorship - especially the writings of Paul - assumed significant importance to the earliest Christian communities. Apostolic texts are important in and among themselves, however so are the social groups that produced, read, and cherished them. Marcionites were no different.¹⁵⁵

The biography of Marcion of Sinope is for the most part unsubstantiated, but scholars do know that he migrated to Rome around the year 140 CE. He was the son of a bishop in the Roman province of Pontus on the Black Sea coast and there is some suggestion that he left Pontus due to a disagreement with his father and the congregation. He was understood in Rome to be a scholar, teacher, and evangelist. Grant tells us that Tertullian's early letters¹⁵⁶ mentioned that Marcion was originally known as a Christian and was initially an active member of the Christian community in Rome including making a large contribution of funds to Christian leadership.¹⁵⁷ However, his activities, five years on, drew the ire of the community leadership to the point that a "formal hearing" with the presbyters was held to discuss his interpretation of scripture.¹⁵⁸

According to Adolf Von Harnack, Marcion's approach to Christianity was innovative. "The way in which he attempted to sever Christianity from the Old Testament was a bold stroke which demanded the sacrifice of the dearest possessions [traditions] of Christianity."¹⁵⁹ He was the first figure to clearly ask 'What is Christian?' and derives his activities around answering that question¹⁶⁰. Grant argued what led to Marcion to ask these questions resulted from the second Jewish revolt and massacre that ended in 135 CE. "Marcion took current events seriously; he tried to see their theological

¹⁵⁵ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 93.

¹⁵⁶ R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). 126.

¹⁵⁷ Paul Foster, "Marcion: His Life, Works, Beliefs, and Impact," *The Expository Times* 121(6) (2010).272.

¹⁵⁸ Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* I.27, told us that Marcion's interpretation of Luke 5:36 was a point of contention for Roman church leadership.

¹⁵⁹ Adolf Von Harnack, "Marcion." *History of Dogma*, paragraph 7.

¹⁶⁰ Von Harnack. "Marcion." *History of Dogma*. para 9.

significance.”¹⁶¹ It was Marcion’s view that because of these events, Christianity should be distinct. Theologically, Marcion felt to attach any Jewish perspective was not significant and should not be included in emerging Christian traditions. Further, in answering the question “what is Christian?” led to an alternative understanding of God - a strict belief in two Gods - the just, law bound God of the Jewish scripture and the merciful loving God that Jesus revealed. Grant tells us that an association with the gnostic teacher Cerdo had an important foundational influence on the Marcionite dualistic position. Cerdo, understood as a Syrian Christian gnostic whom Irenaeus called a heretic¹⁶², expressed these kinds of dualistic ideas based on conflicts within the Christian community. Cerdo believed tensions evolved from “two different forms of Jewish Christian theology: first a “synthetic, almost mystical kind of theology in which correlations among angels and names were very important”, and the other “a more rationalistic theology which tried to make distinctions between names.”¹⁶³ The names in question were the names of God. In the Old Testament, the name ‘Lord’ refers to actions as creator and judge while the name God was used in reference to goodness and mercy. The theology created by Cerdo and Marcion was based on transferring this distinction between the names from the Old Testament to the story of Jesus. “They could have said that the God of the Old Testament was Lord, while the Father of Jesus was God. But in transferring the distinction they also transformed it.”¹⁶⁴ Pagels said “Marcion was struck by what he saw as the contrast between the creator - God of the Old Testament, who demands justice and punishes every violation of this law, and the Father whom Jesus proclaims - the New Testament God of forgiveness and love. Why, he asked, would a God who is ‘almighty’ - all powerful - create a world that includes suffering, pain,

¹⁶¹ Grant. *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*. 122.

¹⁶² Rudolph. *The Nature & History of Gnosticism*. 314.

¹⁶³ Grant. *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*. 124.

¹⁶⁴ Grant. *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*. 125.

disease - even mosquitoes and scorpions? Marcion concluded that these must be two different Gods."¹⁶⁵

Marcion also "claimed the apostle Paul as his authority for his views."¹⁶⁶ Von Harnack tells us that Marcion reached his reverence for Paul as a response to the traditions of the Christian community. To Marcion, "it was the sum of all that the past had described as a revelation of God: only what Christ has given him was of real value to him."¹⁶⁷ In other words, Marcion equated real value, or authority, as coming through revelations told by Paul. Further, it was Paul who understood the "sense of community, firmly united by a fixed conviction, harmoniously organized, and spread over the whole world."¹⁶⁸

Marcion took it upon himself to declare that Paul's gospel was not the kind being circulated by the community, as those texts had been corrupted by copyists "who did not realize that Jesus had nothing to do with the Jewish God or the religion that he established."¹⁶⁹ From reading early texts, Marcion felt that the disciples misunderstood Jesus. These misunderstandings set down in text led Marcion to conclude that only Paul understood Jesus. That said, Marcion did express that he was pretty sure Paul's letters had also been altered. It was within the alterations - the text added by the Jewish community - that Marcion argued proved the 'authentic' gospel had been given to Paul by revelation. Therefore, in response, Marcion produced his own gospel. Grant argues that the motivation for Marcion's gospel was to prove that the inconsistencies within Christian tradition were due to alterations, and insertions of text by the Jewish community. Others suggest Marcion re-wrote the Gospel of Luke for his community¹⁷⁰ to

¹⁶⁵ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 28.

¹⁶⁶ Ehrman, *The New Testament*. 217.

¹⁶⁷ Von Harnack. "Marcion." *History of Dogma*. para 8.

¹⁶⁸ Von Harnack. "Marcion." *History of Dogma*. para 8.

¹⁶⁹ Ehrman, *The New Testament*. 217.

¹⁷⁰ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 49.

shed the alterations and bring back a gospel as closely to Paul's as one could. He also undertook an edit of Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon.¹⁷¹ In Marcion's view, all Jewish references were to be removed to allow the revelation of Jesus to shine through.

Marcion's gospel excluded passages that referred positively to scripture in the Old Testament and to the Lord - the Jewish God and his creation. Further, in contrast to Matthew 5:17¹⁷², Marcion's gospel proclaims that Jesus claims to have come, "not to fulfill the Law, but to abolish it". A complete text of Marcion's gospel has not survived however we know it existed for it has been quoted and criticized by Tertullian.¹⁷³

As we will see later, the idea of Paul's direct revelation was also important for the Valentinian community, but scholars differ on whether to identify Marcion and the Marcionite community as Christian Gnostics. Marcion's beliefs in the notion of two gods - dualism - can be understood as a gnostic tenet. Marcionites differed from other Christian Gnostics in that "unlike cosmological systems in some forms of gnostic thought that viewed the God of the Jewish scripture as a lower deity responsible for the creation of the material world, Marcion set up a more exclusive opposition between these two deities."¹⁷⁴ In other words, for Marcion, the Christian God was good, and the Jewish God was bad, which was different than being understood as demiurgical or subordinate.

Further, Von Harnack said that Marcion cannot be considered among Christian Gnostics because Marcion was interested in a soteriological understanding emphasis on faith, not gnosis. Von Harnack also argues that Marcion did not emphasize the mystery or secrecy typical of Christian gnostic communities. "He never made the distinction

¹⁷¹ Foster, "Marcion: His Life, Works, Beliefs, and Impact." 274.

¹⁷² "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them." RSV.

¹⁷³ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 49.

¹⁷⁴ Foster, "Marcion: His Life, Works, Beliefs, and Impact." 276.

between an esoteric and an exoteric form of religion. He rather clung to the publicity of the preaching and endeavored to reform Christendom."¹⁷⁵ Von Harnack also tells us the early emerging community attacked Marcion's system of thought as a form of gnostic heresy yet failed to learn from him, how to make Christianity into a philosophic system.¹⁷⁶ Further, I would argue that the effort exerted by community leadership in discrediting him also proved a missed opportunity. As we have discussed earlier, the community had succeeded in creating practice and social action to respond to social misery but had not formulated a system of universal beliefs in which to tie the community together especially against the injustices found with the wider society. As we will discuss later, Valentinians had begun to create belief systems stemming from the gnostic myths. Von Harnack said that ultimately Marcion had "formed no such [belief] system, but he has given a clearly outlined conception ... of Christianity as the religion which redeems the world."¹⁷⁷

Ultimately, Marcion was expelled from Rome. Ironically his actions motivated Christian community leadership to formulate standards for Christian theology which spoke to Marcion's notion that the community was without a unifying philosophy.¹⁷⁸

Marcion was influential to the emerging Christian community. Marcion's notion of dualism is highly reflective of the Sethian school of thought, therefore we know that these themes were available in the community during his time. Further, the notion of dualism also alerted the Christian community to develop traditions around unity which had the effect of strengthening social structures within the community. The horizon of the timeframe must include these influences.

Valentinus and the Valentinian community

¹⁷⁵ Von Harnack. "Marcion." *History of Dogma*. para 1.

¹⁷⁶ Von Harnack. "Marcion." *History of Dogma*. para 10.

¹⁷⁷ Von Harnack. "Marcion." *History of Dogma*. para 10.

¹⁷⁸ Marksches. *Die Gnosis*. 120-121.

When one reads about Christian Gnostics, one is often reading of the Valentinians. This community is important to our exploration of horizon for it is speculated that *Thomas* was read in this community. And as we will discuss in Chapter Three, the only complete copy of *Thomas* was found within the same codex as Valentinian writings.

The community and its leader, Valentinus, were well documented by some of the early Church fathers, and some of the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi.¹⁷⁹ It is important to note that Valentinus and the Valentinian community identified themselves as Christians. Valentinians believed “there was no doubt that Jesus Christ was the way, the truth and the light.”¹⁸⁰

Valentinus was a “teacher... who taught in Rome and, because of his charismatic presence and rhetorical power, acquired a large following... Valentinian Christianity was seen as one of the main enemies by proto-orthodox authors like Irenaeus and Tertullian, but whether it was, as they claimed, an insidious attempt to pervert the truth is another matter. The few fragments that we have from the hand of Valentinus himself are both thoughtful and thought-provoking.”¹⁸¹ It had been speculated that in the late 130’s he was very nearly elected to be the bishop of Rome.¹⁸² “He lost out, so the story goes, to someone who had confessed his faith under fear of persecution [and by] supporting the heresiologists’.”¹⁸³ Einar Thomassen believes that this narrative may be overstated. “The idea that there was one bishop overseeing the whole of Christianity in Rome in the second century cannot be correct. We know from sources from that period that there

¹⁷⁹ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 210.

¹⁸⁰ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 104.

¹⁸¹ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 127.

¹⁸² Ehrman, *The New Testament*. 210.

¹⁸³ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to “Gnosticism”*. 63.

were several people who were called bishops, and they were just overseers of individual communities.”¹⁸⁴

It is unclear what ultimately happened to him. Rumours suggested he may have stayed in Rome. Others, like Epiphanius, claimed, he left Rome, was shipwrecked on Cyprus, and went mad. It would be important to understand his horizon to know whether he had been condemned or exiled as a heretic, and that, unfortunately, is unknown.¹⁸⁵

In terms of social context, the Valentinian community was at the height of its activity around the years 130 CE. Research shows that Valentinians organized around a Christianized version of the cosmology in the gnostic myth. “In their way of understanding people, Valentinians employed a three-fold division of humankind: they thought of themselves as uncommon Christians and spiritual people - ‘the spiritual’ or ‘the perfect’; they considered ordinary Christians psychical people - people with a soul; and unbelievers were judged to be material people or people of flesh.”¹⁸⁶ Further, “one of the hallmarks Valentinian Christianity is that it is very close to mainstream Christianity... many scholars of Valentinus imagine that he and his followers probably worshiped with other mainstream Christians, but then held additional private meetings in which the hidden or higher meanings of such things were discussed.”¹⁸⁷ That said, there are surviving fragments of text which speak to how the community focussed activities in living ‘the mystery’. An example of this is found in Valentinus’ work *The Gospel of Truth*. Ehrman called the text, “a moving expression of Gnostic joy in experiencing enlightenment... It is called a Gospel because it presents the ‘good news’ of God’s gracious revelation of saving knowledge, gnosis, which comes through Jesus Christ.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 105-106. Thomassen’s comments also speak directly to the research conundrum in Note 38.

¹⁸⁵ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to “Gnosticism”*. 63.

¹⁸⁶ Marvin Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 117.

¹⁸⁷ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to “Gnosticism”*. 66.

¹⁸⁸ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 45.

In other words, experiencing enlightenment or living the mystery was a primary activity for the Valentinian community.

How then did the worldview of the community, the activity of living the mystery, differ from other Christian communities in our period? Thomassen directs us to read texts like Ptolemy's *Letters to Flora*. He argues that the Valentinian community saw themselves as 'a middle way' in understanding God. Thomassen argues that it also saw itself as a community between Christian groups who were emerging from Old Testament traditions, and groups subscribing to gnostic belief systems, who were ardent in understanding God of the Old Testament as a lesser and evil entity.¹⁸⁹

The Letter to Flora is a lesson in Ptolemy's¹⁹⁰ views of the Old Testament texts, which he claimed were based on proper interpretations. "The proper interpretation of the Bible, Ptolemy avers, depends on understanding the nature of its divine inspiration. Those who maintain that it was authored by the Perfect God and Father err, because a perfect being could not inspire laws that are imperfect."¹⁹¹

Valentinians therefore focussed their understanding of God as inspiration, and experience. Thomassen said that "Valentinians had a more accommodating view of the cosmos, of the theology of the Old Testament where they lay claim that some of the prophets had an inkling of the gnostic saviour who was to come."¹⁹²

And of course, the Valentinian's revered the apostle Paul. It has been speculated that Valentinus may have been a student of Theudas, who was believed to be the disciple of the apostle Paul¹⁹³. Valentinian's looked to Paul for two reasons: Paul

¹⁸⁹ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 107.

¹⁹⁰ Ptolemy is "one of the most famous Christian Gnostics of the second century... a renowned teacher" and past student of Valentinus. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 201.

¹⁹¹ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 201.

¹⁹² Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 106.

¹⁹³ Ehrman, *The New Testament*. 210.

received a direct revelation from Jesus Christ, and Valentinus received Paul's teachings in direct succession.

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through revelation of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁴

Ehrman called Paul's letters occasional in nature. "Paul's letters are not essays written on set themes or systematic treatises that discuss important issues of theology. They are actual communications to particular individuals and communities."¹⁹⁵ They were written to address issues that had arisen in the Christian communities from his revelatory experience. Therefore, Paul's letters were directly relevant to the society in which the Valentinians inhabited.

Revelation, understood as mystical experience, was extremely important to the Valentinians. To attain gnosis, Valentinians needed to encounter the mystery of God. It was the belief that the revelation of Christ to Paul was a direct encounter with God. And that the messages Paul received during the encounter were helpful to others who want to encounter God. Paul had received deep knowledge of God through mystical revelation, and was teaching this knowledge to the Christian communities, therefore it was important for Valentinians to discern Paul's letters. One must read Paul.

Further, Valentinians also understood themselves to be in direct spiritual lineage to Paul, therefore they understood Paul's teaching to be for them. The succession was understood as coming via Theudas, who was believed to be a disciple of Paul. After his time with Paul, Theudas became a teacher and it is understood that Valentinus was one of his students.

¹⁹⁴ Galatians 1:11-12, RSV.

¹⁹⁵ Ehrman, *The New Testament*. 311.

There are two significant aspects of Paul's teaching that resonated with the community: namely, the logic of substitution and spiritual resurrection. The logic of substitution is a model of salvation by an exchange. "The saviour assumes or takes upon himself what he comes to save human beings from."¹⁹⁶ It was Valentinus' idea that Christ, a spiritual being, donned a material existence to overcome that existence by death (or nothing) so that humans could experience or assimilate into his spiritual existence. In modern Christian beliefs, we understand Christ as assuming original sin - Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience - so that we may experience his sinlessness. Valentinians did not equate Christ as assuming sin, but of flesh. They believed that Christ took flesh or a body, became human so that other humans could partake in his spirituality.¹⁹⁷ Thomassen tells us that this is the same idea in which we find in the letters of Paul, that Christ "swallows up death, makes it into nothing, and we become integrated into him."¹⁹⁸

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul speaks of spiritual resurrection¹⁹⁹, an idea heralded by the Valentinian community. Valentinians did not believe, nor did they believe that Paul believed, in the resurrection of the flesh. They believed that Christ did sow his material body and arose as spirit. It is also from the spiritual resurrection that the community begins its experience with Christ. Namely because it was after the spiritual resurrection, that Paul received his divine experience and was given secret wisdom. "Followers of Valentinus say that only their own gospels and revelations disclose those secret teachings. These writings tell countless stories about the risen Christ - the spiritual being

¹⁹⁶ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 112.

¹⁹⁷ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 112.

¹⁹⁸ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 112. Also see Einar Thomassen. *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the 'Valentinians'*. (Boston: Brill, 2006).169.

Thomassen is referencing

¹⁹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:44 "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body." RSV.

whom Jesus represented”²⁰⁰ and often begin with a narrative of the spiritual Christ appearing to his disciples.

Paul was also influential in another area of the Valentinian community, namely in its relationships with women. Pagels tells us that this was a point of difference which caused the Valentinians to experience tension within the wider Christian communities. The orthodox leadership position was that God is male and that there were no female apostles, therefore following the tradition of apostolic succession, male dominance over women was divinely ordained.²⁰¹ Further, orthodox leadership would have referred to the deutero Pauline letters of I and II Timothy, Colossians, and Ephesians in which Paul was reported to advise that women be subordinate to men.²⁰² Pagels argues that this notion came from the idea that Paul, once a Pharisee would have continued to uphold Jewish tradition in relation to women, which manifests itself as complete exclusion in religious, social and political matters outside of her family.²⁰³ Socially, these ideas highlighted the diversity which impacted daily life; social lives, family lives, and the activities of the Christian communities.

Paul also wrote that he endorsed the work of women “in Christ” meaning that all Christians were equal unto the one spiritual community. According to Meeks, “at Christian initiation, the person presiding ritually announced that ‘in Christ ... there was neither male nor female.’²⁰⁴ This was an important idea to the Valentinian community because women represented one half of the dyad - or God.

Valentinus explained God as a dyad - a divine presence both male and female. The male / father - is unknown and unknowable. The female / mother - is silence and

²⁰⁰ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 15.

²⁰¹ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 48.

²⁰² Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 65.

²⁰³ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 63.

²⁰⁴ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 61.

grace.²⁰⁵ Valentinians understood silence and grace as a vehicle to divine mystical experience. How the unknown (perhaps represented as male) becomes known is through the female / mother, as she gives him birth, in silence and grace. She encapsulates the unknown in her silence. She also encapsulates humans in her silence. Within that womb of silence and grace, the unknown becomes known to us - as we are all together and that togetherness is the mystical experience that occurs within the womb. Therefore, to know God, is to experience the unknown within silence and grace.

This relationship or dyad was also reflected in the social structures of the Valentinian community. Women participated in the community by offering their resources and labour. They were included as equal and were encouraged to teach and prophesy and were honoured as healers. These roles gave them visibility within the community which ultimately manifested into a kind of social and political power.²⁰⁶

Within the wider communities, there was also the question of the nature of sex and the value of sexuality when it came to the role of women. The orthodox leadership valued modesty for women and held onto the Jewish notion that women were to be excluded from religious (and arguably all public) life. Pagels tell us that the orthodox perspective was that Jesus had violated Jewish tradition by openly speaking with women, as He did with the Samaritan women at the well²⁰⁷ and when He visited women as companions such as Mary and Martha.²⁰⁸ Regarding the value of sexuality, the orthodox position was to equate sex and the sexuality directly with women. They also valued sexuality as 'bad' and therefore, women were for procreation purposes.

Gnostic Christian communities also equated sex and sexuality with women; however, unlike the orthodox position, the Valentinian community felt sexuality was to be

²⁰⁵ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 49.

²⁰⁶ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 60.

²⁰⁷ See John 4. RSV.

²⁰⁸ See Luke 10:38-42. RSV.

celebrated as a life force. Marcus, a student of Valentinus, and a prominent community leader after our period, was said to have symbolized part of the eucharist to female sexuality - namely, the wine as her blood - as grace, and the chalice as her womb.²⁰⁹ Followers of Valentinian teachings were said to have prayed to the divine mother for protection, mystical silence, and for grace through the womb - through birth and baptism as the gift of life.

Therefore, Valentinians were active members of the wider Christian community who engaged in a response to the wider misery in society, as well as to engage the mystery and encounter God. Valentinus wrote in *The Gospel of Truth* that “through this, the gospel of the one who is searched for, which [was] revealed to those who are perfect through the mercies of the Father; the hidden mystery, Jesus, the Christ, enlightened those who were in darkness through oblivion. He enlightened them; he showed (them) a way; and the way is the truth which he taught them.”²¹⁰ For the community, the way is the truth, to encounter God, which Paul taught them through revelation from Christ. The way is to love, to bring forth light from the dark to encounter God. The way is to experience truth and love, as mystical revelation - as gnosis - to encounter God. And Valentinians experienced love through their Christian social action, as a way to experience the mystery.

As discussed, *Thomas* is well regarded as being circulated within this community. Can we conclude that this community used *Thomas* as a tool to engage the mystery? We will probably never know but we do know that the Valentinian community would have played a part in shaping the horizon of our timeframe.

²⁰⁹ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 50.

²¹⁰ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 46.

Chapter Three - The Text

The Gospel of Thomas

One of the characteristics of a horizon of the 'Back of the Text' is that the Christian Gnostic communities sought gnosis through engaged sustainable action. Texts were used as a tool to inspire and motivate action. And *Thomas* was one of the texts circulating through the Christian gnostic community. Therefore, to fuse a horizon of the Back of the Text, I will endeavour to analyse a horizon of the text itself by looking at its history and the research into the only complete copy of the text discovered to date.

The History of the Text

Up until very recently, the history of *The Gospel of Thomas* text was relatively unknown; however, it was known that the document did exist and circulate within the early Christian communities. There are surviving works by members of these early communities who reviewed, criticized and disparaged the text as heretical. The first to make direct reference was Hippolytus in his work *Refutation of All Heresies*.

And concerning this (nature) they hand down an explicit passage, occurring in the Gospel inscribed according to Thomas, expressing themselves thus: He who seeks me, will find me in children from seven years old; for their concealed, I shall in the fourteenth aeon be a manifest (5.7.20).²¹¹

One may note that Hippolytus seemingly quotes from T4²¹².

Jesus said, "The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a small child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live. For many who are first will become last, and they will become one and the same."²¹³

²¹¹ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 101.

²¹² Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 100.

²¹³ Translation by Thomas O. Lambdin.

James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English. The Definitive Translation Of The Gnostic Scriptures Complete In One Volume*. 3rd ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2000), 126.

Cecil of Jerusalem and Origen of Alexandria, also referred to the text. It has been intimated that Origen included *Thomas* on the list of heresies that was used for the creation of the proclamation known as the Festal Letter issued by Bishop Athanasius in 367 CE.²¹⁴

Fragment Discoveries

As discussed in Chapter One, there is evidence of the existence of the text in the early community because of the discovery of three papyri fragments. These fragments were discovered in 1897 in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt by archeologists Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt.²¹⁵ *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1* (P. Oxy 1) is the first of these Greek papyri containing T26 through T30, T77, T31 through T33 (in that order), and is now preserved at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654* (P. Oxy 654), is a fragment of the beginning of the text, T1 through toT7, and T24 through to T36 and is now preserved at the British library. It has been noted with interest that this logion looks to have been written on the back of another, perhaps discarded, document. *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 655* (P. Oxy 655), which is a fragment of T36 through T40 is now preserved at the Houghton Library at Harvard University.²¹⁶

Nag Hammadi Discovery

In 1945, a complete copy of *The Gospel of Thomas* was found. This is the only known complete copy of the text. Therefore, this has influence within a horizon, as it is the only source in which to utilize reconstruction. Further it is the text in which we are using for our discussion, therefore it is a horizon we must construct. *Thomas* found at

²¹⁴ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 283.

²¹⁵ Meyer. *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 21.

²¹⁶ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 53., Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 101., and Koester in Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 124.

Nag Hammadi is unique – for it offers the perspective of both the ancient and modern context - it has experienced both. As Gadamer told us in Chapter One, horizon is fluid. This text had been buried for approximately 1650 years. Its horizon, in terms of influence and growth, became static. So much so that its name was lost for a period time. Nag Hammadi reignited experience of the text - for the discoverers, scholars and the modern seeker, who have been inspired by the text. Nag Hammadi then is important to a horizon because it may give us a sense of its experience pre-burial and most certainly its experience post discovery.

The text discovered at Nag Hammadi is written in Coptic²¹⁷ and was housed in a jar buried inside a cave outside Jabal al Tarif, Egypt. The story of the discovery is as dramatic as it is historically significant.

In December 1945, an Arab peasant made an astonishing archaeological discovery in Upper Egypt. Rumours obscured the circumstances of this find - perhaps because the discovery was accidental, and its sale on the black market illegal. For years even the identity of the discoverer remained unknown. One rumour held that he was a blood avenger; another, that he had made the find near the town of Naj Hammadi at the Jabal al Tarif, a mountain honeycombed with more than 150 caves... Thirty years later the discoverer himself, Muhammad Ali al-Samman, told what happened. Shortly before he and his brother avenged their father's murder in a blood feud, they had saddled their camels and gone out to the Jabal to dig for *sabakh*, a soft soil they used to fertilize their crops. Digging around a massive boulder, they hit a red earthenware jar, almost a meter high. Muhammad Ali hesitated to break the jar, considering that a *jinn*, or spirit, might live inside. But realizing that it might also contain gold, he raised his mattock, smash the jar and discovered thirteen papyrus books, bound in leather.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Coptic was the language of the Christian monastic culture that flourished in 4th Century Egypt. See Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 2.

²¹⁸ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, xiii.

There are fifty-two texts included within the leather binding²¹⁹ of the twelve books - or codices; the thirteenth is made up of eight loose papyri leaves. Due to duplication of texts found within the codices, there are forty-five separate texts²²⁰ in what is now known as the Nag Hammadi library.

The story goes that Muhammad Ali retrieved the codices²²¹ from the cave and took them to his home settlement. Due to unpleasant circumstances in Ali's life, a local priest took possession of the codices for safekeeping; however, the brother-in-law of the priest, a local history teacher, had suspected the significance of the codices. In 1946, after spreading the tale of the discovery, he was invited to sell one book to the Coptic Museum, which is understood to be Codex III.²²² The narrative of the history of the codices fragment at this point as the codices separate from a complete collection into a series of loose texts which travel around the world.

A French scholar of antiquity visiting the Coptic museum in Cairo, Jean Doresse, managed an initial publication of Codex III in 1948. This was seemingly the first the world was allowed a glimpse of the texts. As a matter of fact, the publication created such excitement that in 1952, the Department of Antiquities of the Egyptian government expropriated the other ten and a half codices to house them in the Coptic Museum in Cairo to ensure possession of the other books as cultural artifacts.²²³

In 1949 it was discovered, that most of Codex I had been exported (or as some suggest, smuggled) from Egypt by Belgian antiquities dealer Albert Eid who

²¹⁹ The leather-bound books were manufactured in the second half of the fourth century. The spines of the leather bindings were strengthened by scrap paper and receipts that are dated 341 CE, 346 CE and 348 CE therefore the books must have been manufactured sometime after 348 CE. See Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 53-54.

²²⁰ Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ix

²²¹ Muhammad Ali admitted to James Robinson that initially he discarded the books and loose papyrus leaves on a straw pile next to the cooking ovens. His mother used some of the leaves as kindling for her cooking fires. Also see Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, xiv

²²² Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 24.

²²³ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 53, and Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 24.

unsuccessfully tried to sell the Codex on the American market.²²⁴ Gilles Quispel, Professor of History of Religion at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, caught wind of these ancient texts that were being circulated for sale. In 1951, Quispel connected with the Jung Foundation in Zurich to initiate a purchase. The sale was complete, and the Codex was housed by the Jung Foundation in Switzerland. The Foundation ultimately published the Codex and was returned “bit by bit”²²⁵ to the Coptic museum after publication.

During this timeframe, frustration in the scholarly community was building around the lack of access to the texts as publication was slow and somewhat piecemeal. Further, many of the texts housed in the museum had yet to be viewed by anyone in the scholarly community. Therefore, no one really knew which text were discovered, how many texts were discovered or the depth of the significance of the discovery. In 1960, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) planned with the Minister of Culture and National Guidance of Egypt, “to publish a complete edition through an international committee jointly chosen by Egypt and UNESCO. But when it was discovered that many of the texts had already been assigned for publication, the UNESCO plan was limited to a facsimile edition or as some has called it a complete edition of photographs of the texts.”²²⁶ The first publication of *The Gospel of Thomas* was made from the facsimile edition in 1959, ten years after the museum had taken possession of the text.²²⁷

²²⁴ Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 24.

²²⁵ Codex I or the Jung Codex, includes five texts - The Prayer of the Apostle Paul, The Apocryphon of James, The Gospel of Truth, The Treatise on the Resurrection, The Tripartite Tractate. See Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, xiv. The final ‘Bit’ wasn’t returned until 1975. See Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 24.

²²⁶ Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 25.

²²⁷ Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 25.

In 1955, after Quispel had assisted in beginning the publication of the Codex I, or what is now known as the Jung Codex, he went to the Coptic Museum in Cairo to view the remaining texts. It is commonly known that it was Quispel who realized that one of the texts was in fact *The Gospel of Thomas*.

Arriving in Cairo, he went at once to the Coptic Museum, borrowed photographs of some of the texts, and hurried back to his hotel to decipher them. Tracing out the first line, Quispel was startled, then incredulous, to read: "These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and which the twin, Judas Thomas, wrote down." Quispel knew that his colleague H.-C. Puech, using notes from another French scholar, Jean Doresse, had identified the opening lines with the fragments of a Greek *Gospel of Thomas* discovered in the 1890's.²²⁸

Once scholars could have unfettered access to the text, *The Gospel of Thomas* quickly became one of the more interesting texts in the collection. In fact, "among the books of the Nag Hammadi library, none has provoked such intellectual fervor and excitement as *The Gospel of Thomas*, the single most important non-canonical book yet to be uncovered."²²⁹ So why is it so important? Mainly because it holds a distinct paradox - it is called a gospel, yet does not look like, sound like, or feel like the other gospels with which we are familiar.

The Gospel of Thomas Research

There are three areas in which *Thomas* research thrives: identifying the genre of the text, how the text relates to the lost document Q - the hypothetical document which many New Testament scholars believed was used by Matthew and Luke, and can the text be defined as a 'Gnostic Gospel'. The modern voices continue to discuss these questions and it is important to highlight the conversations around each of these questions to date.

²²⁸ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, xv.

²²⁹ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 51.

What kind of text is *The Gospel of Thomas*?

The Coptic version is a complete text - it has a beginning, middle, and end, and has all 114 sayings, or logia. Commonly *Thomas* is identified as a 'sayings gospel', or a 'wisdom collection' or as Meyers calls it 'a gospel of wisdom'.²³⁰ In terms of genre, *Thomas* is less like the New Testament Gospels and more like the Book of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Bible. "It is a collection of sayings that are meant to bring wisdom to the one who understands it."²³¹ Some within the academic community question why *Thomas* holds the title of gospel for as Ehrman notes, *Thomas* contains "no stories about Jesus here: no birth, no baptism, no miracles, no travels, no trials, no death, no resurrection, no narrative of any kind. Most of the sayings are simply introduced by the words, 'Jesus said...'"²³²

Most scholars argue that to fully understand a text, one must place it historically within a context – a horizon. In other words, one would like to know the date in which it was created. Grenfell and Hunt, estimated that P. Oxy 1, P. Oxy 654 and P. Oxy 655 were composed around 140 CE; however, after further consideration of the papyri, those dates have been revised to reflect an earlier period.²³³ This is significant because the revision may speak to a date of composition that may coincide with the creation of any of the New Testament Gospels. Stevan Davies argues that the earlier composition date of *Thomas* may also indicate that it was a companion to the other Gospels. Ehrman suggest that *Thomas* was composed after the canonical gospels, and Pagels suggests that the Gospel of John, which is widely accepted as being dated around 90 CE²³⁴, was written as a response to *Thomas*²³⁵ thereby putting the creation of *Thomas* prior to 90 CE.

²³⁰ Meyers, *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 61.

²³¹ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 218.

²³² Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 55.

²³³ Meyers, *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 64.

²³⁴ Borg, *Evolution of the Word*, 31-32.

²³⁵ See Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 31-73.

Nicola Denzey Lewis held that *Thomas* is unique from other Christian writings and argues for a composition date of mid second century. That said, she argues that in terms of understanding the genre of the text, one must consider that the collection of logia in *Thomas* were not all written at once. She agrees that *Thomas* is a 'sayings' collection, but that the sayings had been created or grew over time. April DeConick concurred, describing *Thomas* as a kind of 'living' document that grew and changed as the context of the community changed. She argues that *Thomas* is a product of an earlier oral culture in which wisdom was taught by retelling memories or sayings. *Thomas*, as a text, has a "long history of transmission."²³⁶ At one time, the text may have been nothing more than a simple written note or list of some of Jesus' sayings.²³⁷ "So, *The Gospel of Thomas* is a 'rolling book' containing memories of the words of Jesus over the entire life of the community until such a time when the book began to be considered 'sacred' and preserved by copyists, instead of orators who had enjoyed more flexibility with the text."²³⁸

Thomas was created - the oral traditions were written down - as a response to the experiences and needs of the community. In other words, the text was created (perhaps repeatedly) as a tool for making sense of the communities' changing social circumstances.²³⁹ And, if this is the case, then the sayings of *Thomas* may represent different moments of a developing tradition, both the text itself and the community.

An aggregate text like this likely would have been the result of its recitation and explication during community gatherings where the written sayings of Jesus were orally re-performed probably in homilies.... [further] we can imagine that the developing traditions were re-scribed at crucial moments in the history of the community, when members fear the loss of

²³⁶ April D. DeConick. "The Gospel of Thomas." *The Expository Times*. 118 (2007). 476.

²³⁷ DeConick. "The Gospel of Thomas". 476.

²³⁸ DeConick. "The Gospel of Thomas". 476.

²³⁹ DeConick. "The Gospel of Thomas." 474.

their traditions or when pressure within the group demanded significant reinterpretation.²⁴⁰

Wisdom sayings, therefore, are brought forth and reinterpreted by the present experiences within a community. As there is not a definitive date that *Thomas* was composed and as there is only one known complete copy, one can only speculate on the rate of fluidity or changes to the text. That said, reading the sayings in light of any social context further extends the fluidity of meaning, if not fluidity of content. The Coptic text found at Nag Hammadi may be a 'later' version but we can ascribe meaning to the sayings for any social context. For example, Pagels argument that *The Gospel of John* was composed as a response to *Thomas*²⁴¹ is compelling if one imagines a community gathering in which a faction or group finds itself wanting to express a more orthodox worldview within the emerging community.

Is *The Gospel of Thomas* related to the Lost Gospel Q?

Much of the research into the Lost Gospel Q is reminiscent of the research into *Thomas*. Both are deemed sayings collections, and both are understood as part of a developing tradition within the early Christian communities. There is one significant difference between the Lost Gospel Q and *Thomas*. A complete copy of *Thomas* has been uncovered and is entangled in academic scrutiny. A complete copy of Q has never been identified therefore most within the academic community understand Q as a hypothetical. In other words, the existence of Q is possible to deny, and many do deny that Q exists. The Q theory was created in the 1830's as a solution to source questions in the textual study of the synoptic gospels.

Probing into the synoptic Gospels, historians began discovering unusual patterns in the texts. It seemed that the

²⁴⁰ DeConick. "The Gospel of Thomas". 476.

²⁴¹ See Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 34-41.

authors of Matthew and Luke had copied heavily from the Book of Mark... Then in 1838, Christian Weisse, a lecturer in philosophy and theology at the University of Leipzig, unearthed proof that Matthew and Luke had drawn not only from the Book of Mark, but from a second source as well. Laying the books of Matthew and Luke side by side, Weisse realized that this unknown second source was filled with sayings of Jesus that did not appear in The Book of Mark. It soon became known as “Q,” drawing its name from the German word “Quelle” or “source”.²⁴²

When the Nag Hammadi library was discovered, the academic community initially speculated with great excitement that *Thomas* could be the lost Gospel Q. The argument is supported by the commonly held corresponding characteristics. First, like *Thomas*, Q may be a sayings gospel, and consists primarily of sayings attributed to Jesus. Further, it does not hold narratives such as the birth stories, and more importantly, no death and resurrection stories. This suggests that in early Christian communities the death and resurrection of Jesus was not a central message. Secondly, like *Thomas*, Q is understood as a wisdom gospel containing instructional sayings about how to live the teachings of Jesus, and as such avoid criticisms and practices that would result in judgement by God. Third, like *Thomas*, Q is understood to hold sayings about Jesus himself and his relationship to God.²⁴³

There are some important distinctions between *Thomas* and Q. First, *Thomas* as a saying gospel begins each saying with “Jesus said” indicating that these are the words of the ‘Living Jesus’ - an understanding or perhaps the language with which Jesus referenced himself.²⁴⁴ In contrast, Q sayings have been understood as being assigned to him. Secondly, within the academic community, *Thomas* is understood as a sayings gospel; however, there is a cluster of scholars who argue against Q being entirely a

²⁴² Marcus Borg. *The Lost Gospel Q. The Original Sayings of Jesus*. (Berkeley, CA.: Ulysses Press, 1996). 26.

²⁴³ Borg. *The Lost Gospel Q*. 16.

²⁴⁴ Funk et al. reference the language of ‘the living Jesus’ as Thomasean citing the opening prologue and T52 - “He said to them, ‘You have disregarded the living one who is in your presence...’ 503.

sayings gospel. In fact, these scholars, such as Ehrman, argue that Q does hold narratives. He argues that Q includes two narratives; the temptation of Jesus, and the healing of the centurion's son.²⁴⁵ Mark Goodacre argues that the first third of Q is actually a narrative which "corresponds to elements in Matthew's reworking of Mark"²⁴⁶ therefore having nothing to do with *Thomas*. Lastly, one of the major distinctions between *Thomas* and Q is the perspective in which the text reaches into the community. In other words, how the text was read and interpreted - what it meant for the community. To highlight the distinction, let's look at the following two verses - Q79 and T113. Although seemingly similar prose, the sayings are thematically different, which creates a different expectation within the community. Q79 reads

Jesus was asked, "when will the kingdom of God arrive?" He replied, "You won't be able to see the kingdom of God when it comes. People won't be able to say 'it's here' or 'it's over there.' The kingdom of God is among you."²⁴⁷

The Q verse offers a sense of hope for the community - that the Kingdom of God will one day benefit the community. It is this theme of hope which is important throughout Q. In opposition, *Thomas* seemingly denies the idea of the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

Thomas 113 reads

His disciples said to him, 'When will the Kingdom come?' <Jesus said,> 'It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying 'here it is' or 'there it is.' Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.'²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Ehrman. *The New Testament*. 223.

²⁴⁶ Mark Goodacre. "The Gospel of Thomas and Q" June 10, 2009. <http://www.ntweblog.blogspot.ca/2009/06/gospel-of-thomas-and-q>, paragraph 5. Goodacre references verse Q3.2 to verse Q7-18-35.

²⁴⁷ Borg. *The Lost Gospel* Q. 114.

²⁴⁸ Ehrman. *Lost Scriptures*. 28.

This verse suggests a theme of a present awareness for the community, not a kind of futuristic hope. It seemingly reads that the Kingdom is already here, one just needs to be aware and to seek it out.²⁴⁹

The distinctions have led to an uneasy scholarly consensus that *Thomas* and Q are not one and the same. Despite the distinctions, the similarities in the texts are important for two reasons: namely, it adds a sense of legitimacy to the Q hypothesis and, as Borg held, there are over one-third of the sayings in *Thomas* that are similar to verses in Q.²⁵⁰ This is important for supporting the claim of legitimacy of the Q hypothesis. In other words, having another source text in addition to Matthew and Luke supports the hypothesis of Q's existence. Further, another text holding similar verses emphasises the diversity within the early community. Many texts were circulating, all which may be addressing different points of view around the same social issues.

The similarities in the verses also lends a sense of legitimacy in dating *Thomas* around the year 70 CE. Scholars argue that there are more than 200 verses found in both Matthew and Luke but not in Mark. Therefore, these verses must have been sourced from Q.²⁵¹ Matthew is understood to be composed in approximately 80 CE and Luke approximately 100 CE.²⁵² Identifying Matthew as being the earliest text to use Q as a source, we can approximate Q as being written before 80 CE, which is within one decade of the suggested timeframe for *Thomas* (70 CE). The suggestion that these two texts were circulating within the Christian communities in and around the same period also, I believe, reinforce my position, that *Thomas* was a text in which early Christian communities utilized in practice to assist with their needs.

²⁴⁹ Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 223.

²⁵⁰ Borg. *The Lost Gospel Q*. 27

²⁵¹ Borg. *The Lost Gospel Q*. 14.

²⁵² Borg. *Evolution of the Word*. 32.

Finally, we must remember that the theme of *Thomas* is to uncover the meaning of the secret sayings. He tells us that up front, “These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke in which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down. And he said, ‘Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death’.”²⁵³ Therefore, the author of *Thomas* - who may be the disciple Thomas himself - knew and understood several the sayings of Jesus in a very particular way. Thomas or someone in his name, collected these sayings of Jesus and wrote them down as a kind of tool for the community to parlay the “beliefs rooted not in the death and resurrection of Jesus but in his secret message.”²⁵⁴

What is a Gnostic text?

One of the most interesting areas of discussion is around whether *Thomas* should be classified as a gnostic text. According to James Robinson, the publication of the Nag Hammadi library in English in 1978, “marks a new beginning in the study of Gnosticism”²⁵⁵ and *Thomas* was included in that library. In that *Thomas* was found among other texts that are considered gnostic texts is not enough to suggest that it is also a gnostic text.

What is a gnostic text? At this point, we need to refresh ourselves on what factors are considered for a text to be identified as gnostic. Davies defines the academic term ‘Gnosticism’ as a process of gnosis. For Davies, the process is one of discovery of the depth of the relationship between you and God. Gnosis is “discovering the way that God has turned into you [the embodiment of the divine spark], and then [you] realizing that if you can describe [the process of] how it is that God turned into you, you can reverse the

²⁵³ Ehrman. *Lost Scriptures*, 20.

²⁵⁴ Ehrman. *The New Testament*, 221-222.

²⁵⁵ Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 25.

process.... when you understand how the problem arose, of [how] the spirit [became] trapped in the human body in the world, then you can reverse the process."²⁵⁶ As discussed in Chapter Two, this belief was important for the Christian gnostic community. Therefore, it reasons that a text produced for a gnostic or Christian gnostic community would reflect a worldview that does not speculate how the world began but describes the process of how the divine world or the divine spark, is within each individual. Further, if a community, all of whom hold the divine spark, could uncover the process or attain gnosis, then the community could construct a reversal of that process and journey back into God. It is this focus on the process, Davies argues, why Gnostics and Christian Gnostics were heavily concerned with creation mythologies. If they could understand how creation happened, they maybe able to reverse the process²⁵⁷ and expedite back to God - or reach salvation.

Robert Funk, Roy Hoover and the scholars of the Jesus Seminar have argued that gnosticism must only be discussed in its mature form which, they speculate, was achieved in the 2nd Century. Accordingly, the fundamental gnostic worldview was the inherent belief that the world was evil. Akin to Davies, Funk et al. speculated the Gnostics, as an expression of tradition, fostered elaborate speculation about a variety of problems both within their community and in the wider community. Further, they were reticent to express their convictions about the evilness in the world through their own creation mythology.²⁵⁸ Both expressions were a practice to uncover the process or to achieve gnosis.

Denzey Lewis argues that as the Christian worldview grew out of Judaism, the Jewish scriptures held the authority. As the Christian community grew, it also diversified.

²⁵⁶ Conner, *Voices of Gnosticism*. 11.

²⁵⁷ Conner, *Voices of Gnosticism*. 11.

²⁵⁸ Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels. The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 500.

The diversity signalled a shift in attitude away from the sacredness of the Jewish scriptures²⁵⁹. Likewise, Davies notes that Gnostic texts typically reflect the creation story found in Genesis, however often looked up to and expressed

Moses as an interpreter of the story not its author. The funny thing is they're not looking at Genesis as the book of Moses, and therefore somehow Moses must be the infallible interpreter, but rather they accept the general pattern of the Genesis story and think that Moses misunderstood it. The story is right, but Moses' interpretation is wrong.²⁶⁰

In this context, one of the characteristics of a Gnostic texts is to create a purposeful worldview in which to right the 'wrongs' of Moses interpretation. These texts, therefore, are proclaiming an alternative view from the one in which Moses gave.²⁶¹

'Gnosticism' within the Nag Hammadi Library

The classification of the texts found in Nag Hammadi is hotly contested.²⁶² There is a school of scholars who view the term 'gnosticism' as too broad to be significantly useful. For this discussion, I want to look specifically at the work of Michael Williams and his classification of the text within the Nag Hammadi library.

Williams argues that the term 'gnosticism' as a typological construct for the library is a failure, namely because the academic community has been unable to achieve any kind of clarity or consensus in classification towards identifying a community from these 52 texts.²⁶³ "Gnosticism could not be defined usefully, because every single supposedly gnostic feature could either be present or absent from any single supposedly gnostic text."²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 10.

²⁶⁰ Conner, *Voices of Gnosticism*. 12.

²⁶¹ Conner, *Voices of Gnosticism*. 12.

²⁶² See Note 66.

²⁶³ Michael Allen Williams. *Rethinking "Gnosticism". An Argument For Dismantling a Dubious Category*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). 46.

²⁶⁴ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 18.

As we discussed above, Jean Doresse was the first scholar to have access to the Nag Hammadi library. According to Williams, it was Doresse who declared the library to be gnostic. As we know, Doresse only had initial access to Codex III and from the analysis of one codex, the entire library was defined and ultimately held an incongruent classification. Williams argues that the library was probably compiled from smaller sub collections and that the codices are actually a reflection of the context in which they were arranged.²⁶⁵ One must remember that what is commonly understood as the library, was formed when the codices were hidden all together in earthenware pots as a response to the changes to the social structure in the 4th century. There may be significance to how the codices were arranged within the leather bindings and within the pots, as well as significance to the notion that certain texts were packed away and packed together.

Speaking of the codices themselves, Williams believed that they were arranged with a “probable rationale”, namely a relationship to how they were read. “The codex of Nag Hammadi (not unlike the New Testament as a collection) illustrates the degree to which intertextual relationships reflect by codex production encourages hermeneutical perspectives.”²⁶⁶ In other words, the codices were constructed to reflect a certain meaning or message. And that the codex, as a tool, was created to communicate different meanings. Hence, the significance of the same text found in different codices, perhaps suggesting community concerns or preference.²⁶⁷ Moreover, the significance of the placement of a text within a codex was done by design. In other words, Williams argues that the placement of the texts are deliberate and meaningful. That the placement of the texts act as a conversation which reflects a possible history or a sacred collection to those who buried them.

²⁶⁵ Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*. 241.

²⁶⁶ Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*. 241.

²⁶⁷ Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*. 241.

We are interested in Codex II. It was constructed to hold the following treatises in this order: *Apocryphon of John*, *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Philip*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *On The Origins of the World*, *Exegesis of the Soul*, *The Book of Thomas the Contender*. Williams argues that Codex II follows a pattern of arrangement that may reflect “commonly attested patterns in the ordering of Christian scripture.”²⁶⁸ In other words, Codex II follows the same textual structural arrangement as the New Testament.

At the end of his research Williams solicited scholarly opinion to show the variance of opinion on the generic characteristics of each of the Nag Hammadi text. For *Thomas*, the opinions were equally divisive, with 50% of the scholarly opinion claiming that *Thomas* is not a Gnostic text but written from the perspective of the pre-Christian gnostic community, 25% claiming *Thomas* is a Gnostic text and 25% percent classifying it as Christian gnostic.²⁶⁹ William research concludes that the split in consensus in academia is still diverse.

Is *The Gospel of Thomas* a Gnostic Gospel?

Funk et al., argue, like DeConick and others, that *Thomas* should best be described as reflecting a ‘rolling corpus’ tradition and agree that many of the sayings are probably earlier versions of canonical saying or parables. They also note that *Thomas* specifically does not hold one significant gnostic theme - a narration about creation nor an evil creator god. That said, they do argue that within the ‘late’ Coptic version, there are reflections of a developing gnostic worldview. For example, in T28 Jesus “speaks as the Redeemer come from God. He reminds his followers of their forgetfulness and tells them they are in need of Enlightenment.”²⁷⁰ Further Funk et al. argue that in six separate

²⁶⁸ Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*. 145.

²⁶⁹ Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*. 47.

²⁷⁰ Funk, et.al., *The Five Gospels*. 501.

logia²⁷¹ Thomas speaks against existing in the world - a common gnostic theme. Further, as well as reminding people of their origin (T49) Jesus speaks to show them how to escape from the world (T50). Finally, the most important gnostic theme, in T38, Jesus speaks of his own return to the place from which he has come.²⁷²

As example, T27 and T14, may be reflective of Funk's argument. Both logia are seemingly speaking to a similar message, however on a deeper reading, one of the logia can be thought of as having gnostic tendencies whereas the other reflecting more orthodox traditions.

T27: <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."²⁷³

The 'world' in T27 may mean the world as described by Davies - the Divine world or the Divine spark within. Further, the world system in which we live, outside of the divine world within, is evil and potentially distracts us from the process of achieving gnosis. Therefore, one must fast from the world. One must take a break and get away from the evil forces which can leave us in a confused, catatonic state. One must fast to experience moments as sacred and commit to the process of receiving gnosis - the way to the 'kingdom'.²⁷⁴ William Stroker notes in his book *Extracanonial Saying of Jesus* that T27 does not have canonical parallels. Whereas T14 has parallels to canonical sayings in Luke, Mark and Matthew.²⁷⁵

T14: 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 spirit. 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

²⁷¹ T21, T27, T56, T80, T110, and T111. See Funk, et.al., *The Five Gospels*. 501

²⁷² Funk, et.al., *The Five Gospels*. 501.

²⁷³ Ehrman. *Lost Scriptures*. 22.

²⁷⁴ Joseph Lumpkin. *The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas. Wholeness Enlightenment and Individuation*. (Blountsville, Fifth Estate, 2012), 119.

²⁷⁵ Luke 10:8-9, Mark 7:15, Matthew 6:1-8, 15:11. RSV. See William D. Stroker. *Extracanonial Sayings Of Jesus*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).296-297.

among them. For what goes into your mouth will not defile you, but that which issues from your mouth - it is that which defile you".²⁷⁶

One interpretation of fasting and eating harkens to the conflict of the early community which struggled with the boundaries associated with Jewish purity traditions. Funk et al. notes that this logion "reflected the concern of the early Christian movement to define its social boundaries over against other Judean groups."²⁷⁷

Davies held that *Thomas* is not a Gnostic Gospel²⁷⁸ or a text specifically for the gnostic or Christian gnostic community. Williams agreed. Funk et al. thought that *Thomas* held gnostic themes. I think that the gnostic themes are more poignantly read into the text from a different horizon - perhaps the one of the reader. *Thomas* has been speculated to have been created too early for it to have been created by the Christian Gnostic communities. Funk et al. confirms this notion in that they speculate that the first edition of *Thomas* was created during the decade 50-60 CE.²⁷⁹

I think the Funk et al. research strengthens the argument for *Thomas* as a rolling corpus tradition. If we imagine a wider Christian community undergoing oppression within the social structure, then we can also imagine that logia captured in *Thomas* could have been continually developed as *meaningful*, for the purpose as a tool for practice within any or all the Christian communities. In other words, any Christian gnostic themes that may be read into *Thomas* may have come from that community in which an addition to the text serves a purpose within the wider social construct. In other words, sayings were incorporated into a 'living text' as a tool within the community for which it was used to meet the specific needs of the community.

²⁷⁶ Ehrman. *Lost Scriptures*. 21.

²⁷⁷ Funk, et.al., *The Five Gospels*. 481.

²⁷⁸ Conner, *Voices of Gnosticism*. 14-15.

²⁷⁹ Funk, et.al., *The Five Gospels*. 548.

I also agree with Funk et al. that Christian gnostic themes were at the height of their maturity during our timeframe. If not, then a stronger argument for *Thomas* being a static text needs to be developed. To date, only one copy of the complete text has been found and three fragments of an earlier version. That is not a lot of text to compare, nor will we, as an academic community, be confident of the history of the text.

We can however, combine all the research to get a sense of horizon of the text. It was an ancient document, read and treasured. This group felt it important to preserve *Thomas*, and others, in a codex bound in a specific way to reflect a relationship and reflect meaning. Therefore, we know that within the horizon of the text there is held an importance, both from the community who read it and from the scholarly community post discovery. For our purposes, establishing the title 'Gnostic Gospel' to the text is not helpful to my discussion. On the contrary, what we would like to image is how the text may have aided the Christian Gnostic community. And for the purposes of fusing the horizons, what did Jesus say in *Thomas* that is meaningful for all the communities.

Chapter Four - The Front of the Text

Modern Voices – My Horizon

To fuse a horizon of the text within a meaningful worldview for interpretation, it is essential to construct a horizon for The Front of the Text comparable to The Back. This chapter will be a construction of a horizon for the Front of the Text – a horizon of the reader - me - and the context from which I read. I will define the modern culture as set in Canada during the last part of the 20th Century and the first decade of the 21st Century (1960-2010). The horizon is mine therefore, the Canadian context plays a meaningful part to the horizon.

The global context has changed and significantly expanded since *Thomas* was purportedly written. New worlds of culture have emerged, new land masses inhabited, peoples conquered and their ways of life both tamed and exploited. Our global world is now connected and structured around digital technology which has offered a perceived benefit of structural openness by allowing the voices of all cultures and places to be linked together. Many things within social structures have stayed the same, such as the dominance of patriarchal hierarchical organization of society. Although it may be argued that these hierarchies have weakened in some cultures over time, there are still some lingering patriarchal footholds fostering continuation of the consequences of hierarchical structures in the political, economic and social realms. Further, the development and functions of digital technology within these structures has also accelerated a corresponding consequence that fosters a dominant homogeneity of such structures.

Canada

I am a citizen of Canada - a sovereign nation geographically vast in its landscape, rivalled globally only by the Soviet Union. Canada, with its wide spaces,

holds a sparse population - perhaps attributed to its climate. Patrick Watson and Benjamin Barber described Canada as

a peaceable, orderly democracy with a calm rather than fierce pride in its almost unmatched level of individual liberty and social justice... It is still struggling patiently with a large catalogue of mass society conflicts: French against English; east against west, and both against the industrial center; provincial governments against the national capital; Catholics against Protestants; sad and unresolved injustices against its native peoples - Indian, Inuit, and Metis; [and] a big pushy neighbour that encroaches on Canada's economic, territorial and cultural Independence.²⁸⁰

Canada is one of a select few nations that has not experienced internal struggles erupting into mass civil violence. "There have been fewer than 50 deaths in Canada from civil disturbances and three murders of prominent political figures."²⁸¹ Moreover, to date, Canada has not experienced a civil war. Canada has not been resistant to participating in global struggles including participation in recent conflicts in the Middle East.

The Dominion of Canada - as it was called at the time of Confederation in 1867 - was not born out of revolution, like our neighbours to the south. It was birthed through a series of negotiations between what was then the British North American colonies: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and the Province of Canada (Ontario and Quebec).²⁸²

My current context is Halifax, Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia is one of the smallest geographical provinces in Canada, second to Prince Edward Island. According to Statistics Canada, as at July 1, 2016 the population of the province was 949,500

²⁸⁰ Patrick Watson and Benjamin Barber. *The Struggle for Democracy*. (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd., 1988). 162.

²⁸¹ Conrad Black, "How the rise of Canada is in some ways greater than even America's." *The National Post*, 30 June 2017. The three referenced were: D'Arcy McGee, founding father of Confederation assassinated in 1868, George Brown, founding father of Confederation assassinated in 1880, and Pierre LaPorte, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Labour of the province of Quebec, assassinated in 1970.

²⁸² The Canadian Encyclopedia. "Confederation." <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/confederation/>. Accessed May 25, 2017.

people.²⁸³ Due to its brevity relative to the rest of the country, Nova Scotia plays an insignificant role in Canadian political and economic structures. Before Confederation, Nova Scotia held a higher structural position. It was a prosperous colony of approximately 350,000 young people, considered one of the larger territories entering the confederacy negotiations. As it does now, the population included people of British, Irish, Scottish, German, Mi'kmaq and Acadian descent. Today, the province also hosts a vibrant Middle Eastern (Lebanese) and African Canadian community. Before confederation, the largest urban centre was the city of Halifax,²⁸⁴ founded by Great Britain in 1749 under the now controversial Governor Edward Cornwallis.²⁸⁵

Canada grew from east to west as the Canadian National Railway grew to connect the country. Much of the land to the west of the province of Canada, was settled once European immigrants could access the region by the development of the railway. Most of those regions, politically organized as provinces, did not join Confederation until the early 1900's.²⁸⁶ Currently, within the federal dominion of Canada there are 10 provinces, each having its own provincial capital and under the democratically elected premier.²⁸⁷ Watson and Barber tell us that "each premier fiercely guards his provincial powers - authority over education, resources, interprovincial transportation, health and welfare, some aspects of trade and employment, the administration of law & order.... It is upon this chessboard of competing regional authorities that those who battle for the rights of the individual must fight against divisive forces that are sometimes almost

²⁸³ Statistics Canada. "Population by year, by province and territory". <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo02a-eng.htm>. Accessed May 25, 2017.

²⁸⁴ The Canadian Encyclopedia. "Nova Scotia." <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/nova-scotia/>. Accessed May 25, 2017.

²⁸⁵ The Canadian Encyclopedia. "Halifax." <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/halifax/>. Accessed May 25, 2017.

²⁸⁶ Manitoba joined in 1870, Saskatchewan joined in 1905, Alberta joined in 1905, and British Columbia joined in 1871.

²⁸⁷ Canada also has three territories: The Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. A Province receives its power from the Canadian Constitution whereas a Territory receives relegated powers from the Federal government. See Canadian Department of Justice.

tribal.”²⁸⁸

The Structure of Modern Society

According to Richard Rohrbaugh, modern Western societies, including Canada, are structured around an understanding of the self as an individual entity - who is a “bounded and unique center of consciousness”, a more or less unified, psychologically integrated and motivated entity.”²⁸⁹ In other words, as a nation - singular and contained. A self is also an individual person, who is singular and contained in their distinctive identity. In contrast, ancient societies view the self as a fundamental collective where individual “persons are so embedded in groups that the group and the individual are in large measure coextensive.”²⁹⁰ In other words, there isn't a psychological or social distinction between oneself and the community to which one belongs. Identity is directly tied to community.

Modern Western culture, on the other hand, stands opposite to the collectivity of ancient culture. The horizon of modern Western culture is structured to value the distinctiveness of the individual, manifest in the legitimization of the rights and freedoms of the individual. Therefore, I need to consider the affects of what is known as individualism on my horizon.

Individualism

What is the meaning of individualism? According to Abercrombie et al. individualism refers to a collection of thoughts, or developing traditions, which emphasize

²⁸⁸ Watson and Barber. *The Struggle for Democracy*. 163.

²⁸⁹ Richard L Rohrbaugh. “Ethnocentrism and Historical Questions about Jesus” in *The Social Settings of Jesus and the Gospels*. ed. Stegemann, Malina and Theissen (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2002) 28.

²⁹⁰ Rohrbaugh. “Ethnocentrism and Historical Questions about Jesus”. 28.

the importance of the individual in relation to all other structures.²⁹¹ Rohrbaugh tells us that individualistic culture shares certain characteristics - being formed and identified around personal experience, achievements, possessions, abilities, and personal preferences. Individuals place emphasis on their own actions within social structures as a personal choice. They are focussed on personal rights, satisfying their needs and exploiting their own abilities. In other words, individuals are completely motivated by their own needs, goals and aspirations. But most important is the emphasis on personal choice. An individual must be able to choose their own career, lifestyle, property, religion, and their own attitudes about values and social norms. It is from these choices that one measures their personal success - as defined by themselves.²⁹² Individualism is the antithesis to community.

Charles Taylor holds that modern culture is suffering a collective societal malaise, caused by the emphasis on individualism - on the importance of the individual vis-a-vis social structures and community. He believes that individualism is contributing to an environment in which people are experiencing a sense of loss in their lives, or a decline in their personal success - which is defined by themselves.²⁹³ Moreover, people are continually experiencing rapid change in culture and social structures, which attributes to a feeling of disconnection from a larger order or society. These people understand themselves to be primarily individuals with rights that reign superior to the larger order limiting their society to the actual space in which they live, shaped, and created by their own choices and needs.²⁹⁴ In other words, individuals do not make direct connections to

²⁹¹ Abercrombie et al. *The Dictionary of Sociology*. 121.

²⁹² Rohrbaugh. "Ethnocentrism and Historical Questions about Jesus". 29.

²⁹³ Charles Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. (Concord: House of Anansi Press Limited, 1991), 1.

²⁹⁴ Charles Taylor. The 1991 CBC Massey Lectures, "The Malaise of Modernity" CBC Radio. <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-1991-cbc-massey-lectures-the-malaise-of-modernity-1.2946849>. Accessed May 23, 2017. I would argue an example of this is the use of social media. Technology and social media has given the individual a platform to express their personal anger against large institutions - especially corporations - when an individual has felt their personal

community, large institutions, or societal structures, such as religion. These are now considered outside and increasingly out of reach.

Taylor argues that the modern era began in the seventeenth century,²⁹⁵ which correlates to the period in which the nature of knowledge began to change. As discussed, the nature of knowledge changed gradually from a relationship with the sacred and community to a manifestation of static blocks of information. Taylor also argues that the movement towards an emphasis on individualism has manifested gradually within culture to exhibit an emphasis on individuals as the masters of our own life paths. I would argue that the development of individualism can be revealed in the changes in social roles or social positions people occupy.

A social role is typically understood as the culturally expected behaviour of a person within the role rather than by the person's own individual characteristics.²⁹⁶ In terms of my horizon, I have experiences in making choices within social roles contrasted with the other women in my family. My grandmother, who was born in Canada in 1910 had significantly different social roles than I have. She was born to a homemaker and a carpenter in a rural environment. I was born of two parents who both worked outside the home in an urban environment. My grandmother experienced the suffragette movement - her own mother was not allowed to vote during a period of her life. She was culturally expected to marry and have children. She was also not expected to be educated, however, unlike her mother, she had access to education and did choose, differently, even from her sister, to attend university. She married in 1935 and led a life defined by the roles she was to play - as wife, mother, Minister's wife and community member. There was no cultural pressure for her to engage social roles as an individual or

rights have been somehow wronged - when they haven't received an expected level of service etc. The problem with this is one corporation cannot meet the needs of each individual expectations - this creates tension within society.

²⁹⁵ Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. 3.

²⁹⁶ Abercrombie et al, *Dictionary of Sociology*, 209.

educated woman.²⁹⁷ For me, after 60 years of steady cultural change, I have not experienced the same expectation to marry or have children, albeit it is still a cultural norm. I have access to education and there is a cultural sense of expectation for me to pursue a life path [career] based on education. I am to interact with society as an individual - not as a wife or mother. I have access to finance, property and the business environment and am free to financially support myself. I have owned my own home and participated in the business environment. I can construct social roles for myself within an individualistic context.

The change in social roles has been accelerated by the onset of the technological advances. Many of the tasks, roles, and responsibilities that were assigned to my grandmother are not assigned to me, because they either do not exist anymore, or there is a technological advancement that has eliminated the task - namely technological innovations in transportation and communication. In my horizon, my life choices are wider than my grandmothers because I have access to many different social arenas she did not; such as access to work outside the home, the pursuit of leisure activities, and the concept of personal time.

That said, there are still prevalent tensions in society which maintain barriers and distrust in the social structures. There is still a patriarchal hierarchy in the Canadian context that can manifest as, among other things, sexual violence, poverty, gender and race discrimination, pay inequity, or restricted access to certain areas of the labour market. No matter which choices are made, patriarchy contributes to reinforce barriers within the modern horizon. To that end Taylor notes that complete freedom is unattainable despite all the individual options from which to choose. Society will always

²⁹⁷ Jody Wood, "What did she say?" (Final Research Paper GTRS 6130, Saint Mary's University, 2015).

hold a sense of incompleteness because some structures, like patriarchy, will always restrict freedom of personal choice.

Individualism fosters a sense of rights - that as single individuals, we have the right to participate and have access to structures, including those constructed by nation states. This right to access and participation is identified as freedom. In other words, being able to choose and participate in the successes of my own life path means I am free. The notion of freedom is so important to individualism that freedom is now, in many Western societies, protected by the legal system. In Canada, as a citizen, my rights and freedoms are protected under the Canadian Constitution and The Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Taylor tells us that a consequence of the individual emphasis on the right to access and *right to choose*, society no longer places emphasis on the actual options from which it chooses.²⁹⁸ If we choose and dislike the outcome, we merely choose again and so on. We are no longer bound by the social structures of community. For example, as an individual my horizon is shaped by my choices in life: my family structure, how I sustain myself financially, and my relationship with God. The engagement in choice manifests as tensions within the larger social structures, as each individual engages differently.²⁹⁹ Further, Taylor says that the freedom that comes from choice culminates into a “narrowing and flattening” of our lives, because as individuals, we are so focussed on ourselves and the process of making choices, that we miss the actual richness and depth of the options from which we are choosing. In other words, our choice - the things we have chosen - have lost meaning. The focus of our lives narrows to the space around ourselves and flattens to reflect our purpose *to maintain* the right to choose. Therefore, personal rights and freedoms, have reduced and compartmentalized society into small

²⁹⁸ Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. 3.

²⁹⁹ See note 16.

blocks from which we need to choose to manifest personal success within society. My sense of being an individual is so ingrained that at any time I can provide a list of identifying traits to explain my individuality - age, gender, race, status, etc. I could further compartmentalize these traits and give you my current hair colour (because I have the right to choose that colour), and my current dress size (because I also have the right to determine by own dietary plan). I have the freedom to form and give my opinion, no matter how intelligent or inane it may seem to you. I also have the freedom to defend my opinions, regardless of how different they are to your opinions. To that end, because I am focussed on my choices and the path that I am on, I build social boundaries around myself and suffer from seeing anything else or connect to anything larger than myself.

Commodification

A second factor leading to societal malaise is what Taylor calls Instrumental Reason. A process in which we apply economic value to all things.³⁰⁰ Following Taylor, I like to think of this application as a process of commodification.

The Canadian Securities Institute defines 'a commodity' as a *product* used for commerce that is traded. A commodity may also be an underlying asset, which means a commodity is tangible. One can pick it up and feel it - like a gold bar or a bushel of wheat. Typically, commodities are consumed, such as oil, livestock, lumber, and sugar.³⁰¹ Commodification is a process in which a 'thing', such as but not limited to, an underlying asset, is turned into a product and given economic value.³⁰² Arjun Appadurai argues that as part of the process of commodification, it is the economic exchange that creates the application of economic value. In other words, during the economic

³⁰⁰ Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. 5.

³⁰¹ Canadian Securities Course Vol I. (Canadian Securities Institute: Toronto, 2007). 10.9.

³⁰² An underlying asset could be Gold, and the product is gold bracelets or coins etc. An underlying asset could be Oil, and the product is gasoline or home heating fuel etc. The price of the underlying asset affects the price of the product. Both have inherent economic value.

transaction or exchange of things, the value is embedded and established into the thing that is going to be or has been exchanged.³⁰³ Further, the value that is created either through the identification of the thing being transactional or after being exchanged becomes part of the thing or product - the thing holds a value, worth, or price tag. This value can only be established when one person wants something that someone else has, because it is the want or desire that creates an economic exchange, or what we commonly refer to as a market. Therefore, the process of having things commodified happens when a thing is desired by another and is identified as being exchangeable and valuable - a product. Commodification, then, is the transformation of every thing into a product that can be subject to trade or exchange. For example, an individual is commodified when they sell their labour for wages. An individual is also commodified when they sell a kidney. Further, a thing is commodified continually, which affects the value structure of that thing. For example, different types of labour hold different value structures, which in turn commodifies the people who do different types of labour. Food is another highly commodified product. From inception (seed) to the plate, food can pass through at least four exchanges. Take for example, a strawberry, grown in Florida and arriving in Nova Scotia grocery stores. That strawberry would have potentially passed through 10 exchanges: seed supplier and farmer; farmer and worker; farmer and produce buyer; produce buyer and trucker / transport; transport and customs broker; truck driver and customs agent; trucker and food distributor; food distributor to grocery retailer; retailer to store; store and individual buyer (you). Each of these exchanges would have its own dynamic that defines the value of the strawberry.³⁰⁴ Moreover, we

³⁰³ Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspectives*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). 3.

³⁰⁴ This series of exchanges is commonly referred to as 'supply chain'. The number of exchanges may be a good reason to consider "buy local" initiatives as the number of exchanges are less. The higher number of exchanges, the higher the potential for impact on the value of other things - such as the environment. Is there an argument that backyard berries and vegetables are not

commodify time and space. We assign economic value on efficiency with higher efficiency using less time therefore holding higher value.³⁰⁵ If the transport trucker can drive his truck full of strawberries to the food distributor faster, he is rewarded - the value of his labour is increased. If the strawberry farmer can use soils or fertilizers to grow strawberries faster, bigger, and sweeter, then the strawberries are higher in value. Each time the strawberry is commodified, its value has the potential to change. The next time you are in the store and see strawberries know that although you are looking at a sweet and delicious berry, you are also looking at a symbol of commodification in our structures. As a culture, we have commodified all things into products to be exchanged.

Taylor argues that commodification is the consequence of societies no longer having a sacred structure. Modern social structures are showing the strain of being too flat and too narrow and are no longer grounded in any kind of social order - such as what was understood in the ancient culture as God's will or a certain kind of revelatory knowledge - relationship or connection. The value of certain knowledge of revelation is low because by its nature it is not transactional - it is based on a perceived commitment to something - living inside your connection, community or relationship. Taylor says that social structures once grounded in this certain kind of knowledge have now been broken down into blocks of static information with a perceived sense of value³⁰⁶ that is continually changing with each transaction. Appadurai agrees in the sense that value is subjective knowledge - it is a value judgement made upon an object through exchange³⁰⁷

commodified? I would argue that the ground - the patch of earth - 'in your backyard' has been commodified.

³⁰⁵ Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. 5.

³⁰⁶ Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. 5. One could argue that university tuition is an example of this. The University institution places a perceived value on the block of knowledge given per degree and per class. The value of a degree is assigned, in part, by the perception of the school - its reputation.

³⁰⁷ Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*. 3.

- or what the market decides.³⁰⁸ Therefore, things that are commodified have lost the kind of meaning provided by connection or community. The process of commodification further reinforces the loss of connection for transaction of things are between individuals. Each transaction is negotiated for value thus within each transaction there is an element of fear.

Fear

Fear is the consequence of too much freedom. In highly individualized societies where freedom and the right to choose are highly regarded, fear acts as an agent of containment.³⁰⁹ Thus, in highly individualized societies, social structures host battles between fear, freedom and self inherent protection. The struggle against each position grows expediential. For example, one can look at social tensions around the immunization of children. Parents demand that they have a choice in whether their children are immunized. This demand which is a recent phenomenon, came about due to freedoms within society – freedom to question everyone and everything – even the medical community. This freedom also allows for false and misleading information to spread.³¹⁰

William Grassie tells us that religion, as part of the social structure, provides four important resources: to provide explanations, to provide comfort, to provide social order,

³⁰⁸ For a fascinating example of this, read any media commentary about the movement of the stock market. Note the language ‘the market’ as depicted as something singular, individual, separate and autonomous, even though it is the physical place in which exchanges take place - i.e. the trading floor of the Toronto Stock Exchange. ‘The market’ is not an individual entity but is made up of a pool of individual analysts who buy, sell or influence individual stocks based on individual predictions of outside events, which collectively make up market indices.

³⁰⁹ June Callwood. *Emotions. What they are and how they affect us.* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1987). 97.

³¹⁰ See Genna Buck and Jonathon Galehouse. *The Real Vaccine Scandal.* MacLean’s Magazine. February 11, 2015.

and to provide illusions.³¹¹ These resources, as instilled by religion, address one common need – to address fear. In ancient communities, religion offered certain knowledge to explain things that were unknown and thus things of which to be afraid - such as natural phenomenon – weather events, the movement of the sun, moon and stars, the existence of disease, and dreams. Religion was tasked with explaining why some people were more successful or in higher positions of power than others. Religion also provided knowledge as comfort for those struggling with external terror, evil, death and social injustice. This kind of certain knowledge is the basis for the function of religion – to meet the needs of the whole society by providing a moral code of behaviour and social roles - which brought individuals together into community. Appadurai noted that commodification of things is couched in motivation or need, and it is the need which ultimately “encode things with significance.”³¹² Therefore it can be argued that the process of commodification has replaced religion in meeting social needs. So how does an individual in the modern context satisfy a need for spiritual engagement?

In Chapter Two, I established that *Thomas* was a tool used in spiritual practice as a way to engage in action or an encounter with God. Spiritual practice was a way to meet the social needs of the community. In the modern society, the social needs of the ancient world have seemingly been addressed by our nation states. Therefore, can an ancient text still offer a way to foster engagement in action? The individualistic culture promotes a compartmentalization of social lives, a disconnection from larger social structures, and quantifying a low value on revelatory knowledge. Consequently, it stands to reason that alienation and suffering on an individual level must be as prevalent in modern society as the ancient one. Except, within the ancient society, the suffering was external or communal, the needs were within the social structures. In a modern society, the suffering

³¹¹ William Grassie. *The New Sciences of Religion. Exploring Spirituality from the Outside In and Bottom Up.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). 75.

³¹² Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things.* 6.

is seemingly hidden, and the identification of social needs are confused and dismissed by the transactional nature of things – including spiritual practice. Therefore, one could argue that the need for spiritual practice as engagement on an individual level must also be high and so the need for tools – such as *Thomas*. So how can spiritual engagement be cultivated in an individualistic society when such society places a low value on the social structures that may be providing engagement? I think this question is important in the exploration towards fusion of horizons, so I will look at the modern Christian community to see how it is cultivating a response for spiritual engagement.

Contemporary Christian Community

Christian Community in an Individualistic Society

Commodification and fear may motivate individuals to seek spiritual engagement within the Christian tradition but outside of the social structures. Taylor notes that a consequence of individualism is the deadening of our sense of timing to respond to anything outside of our own selves.³¹³ Modern social structures are slow to respond to needs within our society. In other words, because of weak communities, we don't as a society appreciate the necessity of what goes on around us - especially in terms of social injustices - unless and until it directly affects us. We rely on the governments of our nation states to address the social needs of society – such as health care, immigration, gender equality, and social injustice. Moreover, as individuals focus on ourselves, we do not serve to strengthen groups or build community intent on addressing social needs. So, unlike the Christian communities in Rome who responded to the miseries of that society, outside of the ancient social structures, Christian communities today are seemingly adrift to respond to social needs; however, that doesn't negate the struggle. It just highlights the characteristics of individualism which affect Christian communities in

³¹³ Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. 5.

building sustainable communities. Robert Wuthnow tells us that the need to create cohesion is great. The Christian community struggle to define themselves, opting to compartmentalize and identify as Church denominations rather than as part of a wider Christian community. Further, he argues, it is the tensions between different denominations that are hindering the efforts of community building.³¹⁴ Ironically, the argument used to build and sustain a Church denomination is found in individualism - each denomination heralds and protects its own worldview of divinely inspired traditions and social practice. Each denomination wants to be separate and distinct - as an individual group within the larger Christian community. One could argue that this notion of distinctness is reminiscent of the ancient communities - such as the way the Christian Gnostic community and other orthodox communities may have created a sense of separateness from each other. As discussed, the Christian Gnostics always identified as being Christians first. Wuthnow notes that as denominations struggle to attract parishioners, they are somewhat forced to take a more casual attitude towards their distinctiveness.

[P]astors seldom refer in sermons to any distinctives of their tradition. Tolerance is the watchword. Cooperation has come to replace even ecumenism because the latter implies more awareness of formal traditions than we seem to feel in our growth.³¹⁵

In 2017, in an effort to attract younger parishioners, the Church of England changed its canon law to allow clergy to conduct services without their robes. Clergy within the Anglican tradition in the United Kingdom say that traditional dress for the priest - the surplices and albs - put off younger people from attending and set the priests apart from the congregation.³¹⁶ In other words, denominations are narrowing traditions and

³¹⁴ Robert Wuthnow. *Christianity in the 21st Century. Reflections on the Challenges Ahead.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). 24.

³¹⁵ Wuthnow. *Christianity in the 21st Century.* 25-26.

³¹⁶ Harriet Sherwood, *The Guardian*, July 10, 2017.

practices.³¹⁷ That said, one could argue that the narrowing of traditions is an attempt to reach out in response to social needs. Changing dress for the clergy and loosening more formal traditions are a way to build a community from the bottom up. I think that the changes in traditions are partly a response to an organization that is suffering the effects of societal disconnection. Wuthrow agrees and said,

The vital tension between community and individualism within the churches, as in the broader society, will not be decided from on high by church leaders or from below by the blind forces of societal change. It will be determined *where it is experienced most acutely* - in the individual life experiences of the average churchgoer. If people want to have community and be individualists as well, they will have to be creative in reconciling the two.³¹⁸

In other words, the speed in which individuals make choices creates barriers for a bottom up approach to take root. Further, current traditions cannot seem to inspire individuals who are accustomed to the process of choosing and the gratification that choices may bring. Hence as individuals switch from denomination to denomination looking for community, they are also seemingly motivated by a search for personal meaning that they are not finding within the traditional institutions.

The Commodification of Spiritual Capital

Christian denominations struggle with building community because individuals are seemingly unable to connect to traditions and practices. Peter Berger and Gordon Redding tell us that one of the ways of assessing a connection to social structure is to assess the level of trust the individual has in those structures. When spiritual capital – the set of resources that religion provides,³¹⁹ like the resources laid out by Grassie above

³¹⁷ Wuthnow. *Christianity in the 21st Century*. 26.

³¹⁸ Wuthnow. *Christianity in the 21st Century*. 40. Emphasis added.

³¹⁹ Peter L. Berger, and Gordon Redding, eds. *The Hidden Form of Capital. Spiritual Influences in Societal Progress*. (London: Anthem Press, 2010). 2.

- is available in high quality to meet the needs of the individual, the individual places a high level of trust in how the structure works.³²⁰ The characteristics of individualism supersedes spiritual capital. In other words, individuals place trust in their own actions and choices over those within a structure. This lack of trust is quantified by low attendance rates in church or the engagement in Christian traditions; yet, the need for engagement is seemingly present. Social research tells us that although attendance is low, some individuals are not leaving the tradition altogether, instead participate in denomination switching as a way to pursue spiritual capital.³²¹ That said, there is a population of individuals who have left completely – some due to mistrust, hurt and traumatized in the tradition itself because of social and criminal violations.³²²

The level of trust in spiritual capital plays a role in the process of community building. Wuthnow tells us that the process of traditional community building has been weakened by the commodification of spiritual capital. In other words, the set of resources that religion provides has undergone a series of transactions to create choice and a different kind of value for individuals in

smaller, more intimate [groups], but also more transient groups. Singles group this year, young marrieds next year, maybe choir at some other time, maybe the peace concerns fellowship after that. You become involved with like-minded people, develop some of the rituals and local symbolism that is always been part of the congregation, and perhaps find support and religious nurturance... Increasingly, people start house churches that have no official denominational connection, seek spiritual direction at centers operated separately from local churches, and pray the Lord's Prayer at twelve step groups to their 'higher power'.³²³

³²⁰ Berger and Redding. *The Hidden Form of Capital*. 4.

³²¹ See Bibby, Reginald. W., "Continuing the Conversation on Canada: Changing Patterns of Religious Service Attendance". *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 50, (2011): 831–837.

³²² See for example "A timeline of residential school and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-timeline-of-residential-schools-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-1.724434>.

³²³Wuthnow. *Christianity in the 21st Century*. 30.

Further, culture seems to be looking for ways to increase trust in spiritual capital by connecting across traditions which is increasingly manifest through commodification. There are yoga classes and Ayurveda methods being taught in church basements, meditation and prayer groups on the beach, and of course a multitude of lessons for spiritual seekers, found in book stores, online and in film. For example, Oprah Winfrey produces a television series called *Super Soul Sundays*, where individuals can learn and participate in all kinds of traditions.³²⁴ Winfrey, who is a highly trusted and popular personality, has created an exchange in which spiritual and religious principles are organized and commodified into one-hour segments for individual consumption as well as creating a marketplace for the books and products of the guests. I would argue that Winfrey's television series is an example of culture seeking spiritual capital.³²⁵ Further, the program offers a reorganization of community and a way to connect by building trust. Instead of individuals gathering in a building, we are gathering around our televisions or tablets and online forums to discuss the principles. Instead of priest and ministers, we are seeking spiritual meaning from others outside of the tradition. I think that evidence of a low connection to social structures like religion correlates directly with a higher level of need for spiritual engagement. I also think one can argue that the plethora of commodified products offered as spiritual capital equates to a high level of need in spiritual engagement. As Appadurai told us earlier, commodifying is inherent of need. That said, the effect of commodified products offered as spiritual capital is increasing the erosion of traditional practices of religions but may be increasing the level of trust and connection with larger social systems.

³²⁴ See <http://www.oprah.com/app/super-soul-sunday.html>

³²⁵ Hume & McPhillips call this a movement against secularization and "a re-enchantment of self, community and culture". See Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips, eds. *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate. 2006.

Spiritual Capital in Popular Culture

In this section I will explore whether there is a need for spiritual capital in the lives of individuals and how it affects my horizon for the purpose of fusion. In terms of spiritual engagement my horizon is littered with spiritual capital, both in the traditional sense, through interaction with a Christian denomination and contact with commodified products. Thus, I think it is important to look at three examples of commodified spiritual capital that I had engaged before I found *Thomas* and embarked on this project, therefore have affected my horizon.

That said, it is also important to note that a need is present in the one who put forth their efforts to create. Artists don't create works of art that they do not have a longing to express, nor do they create just for money. If economic benefit was the only motivation, these artworks wouldn't be examples of commodified spiritual capital. One doesn't typically exert the efforts to create and produce anything – whether a text, film, novel or thesis - without first recognizing that something needs to be expressed. Typically, a creative project starts with an idea. And a writer – whether it be a novelist or screenplay writer - wants to tell the reader a story about that idea because the idea is of interest to them. No one writes a story about an idea that doesn't incite sizzling curiosity. Such a story would be buried unfinished in the back of a drawer due to lack of interest. Pierre Burton held that “the idea itself is only a start [of a creative project]; it is what a writer does with the idea that makes the difference.”³²⁶ In other words, how one expresses the idea through language or film is important but also how one expresses and interprets the idea via an experience.³²⁷ From the perspective of my horizon, framing my work on this project as an example of commodification – to achieve the degree – I negate the purpose or the path which led me to explore this topic. I also

³²⁶ Pierre Burton. *The Joy of Writing. A guide for writers, disguises as a literary memoir...* (Canada: Random House, 2003). 173.

³²⁷ Burton. *The Joy of Writing*. 171-175.

respect that I have a need – to search for a relationship with God. That said, Ehrman, wrote in *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code* that

movies are one of the chief ways people come to think about the past... Although I am a historian by profession, even my own views of the past are affected by the films I see and the books I read. How much more must this be true for people who do other things with their lives, who only occasionally come in contact with events from the ancient world, usually not through the work of historians, or scholars of antiquity, but through films and books.³²⁸

In other words, commodified spiritual capital has an affect on our worldview and therefore are important for the purpose of fusion.

Stigmata - (Directed by Rufus Wainwright)

First, we must recognize that the film is an example of commodified spiritual capital. The film is the outcome of a process in which a thing - the narrative - is given economic value. The value is twofold: this film is a product that was a creative expression of art and entertainment and it is to be consumed by the public for sales revenue. The film grossed MGM Studios \$50 million dollars over a one-year period and is still in circulation in secondary markets.³²⁹ With that said, I can now discuss how the film is an example of a creative idea about a desire for spiritual engagement.

The content of the film *Stigmata* is considered one of best popular interpretations of *The Gospel of Thomas*. The theme of *Stigmata* is mystery couched in conflict. The plot is a race against time for a group to translate and understand the meaning of an ancient text. The Catholic Church is represented by smug deacons who are cast as the antagonist and Father Kiernan, the intellectual Vatican scientist, who is cast as the

³²⁸ Bart D. Ehrman. *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code. A Historian Reveals What We Really Know About Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Constantine*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 187-188.

³²⁹ "Stigmata," IMDb, <http://www.imdb.com>.

protagonist. The messenger, Frankie Paige, a young female, who is living a life unrelated to the efforts by others around the text, becomes embroiled in a personal and physical transformation, in the form of a stigmata. The message for the audience is - if you engage with a religious text, as an individual outside of the church, you too may encounter transformation. As the character Brother Delmonico said, 'everyone had a different experience of Jesus so they all wrote different stories... all the gospels, they are interpretations, memories, dreams, reflections.'³³⁰ Engaging with other interpretations will inspire meanings for ourselves.

The story unfolds first with a group of excommunicated priests lead by Father Alameida - who are working secretly together to identify and translate an ancient scroll. Father Alameida, who is working in Brazil, dies and his rosary is stolen from his body and sold. Frankie Paige, receives the rosary as a gift, and starts to experience stigmata - the physical manifestation of Jesus crucifixion on the body. During one of the stigmatic episodes she reveals ancient text to Father Kiernan by writing in ancient Aramaic on the walls of her apartment. As the film proceeds we discover that the ancient text is the same text in which the group is secretly translating, called the 'Jesus Gospel' and is based on *Thomas*.

Denzey Lewis tells us that despite the film being fiction, *Thomas* is cited "more or less accurately, and [the film] presents an authentic struggle in ancient Christianity recast as a modern dilemma."³³¹ The lines in the film, a combination of T3a and T77b are most poignantly spoken once it is understood that the stigmatic episodes are occurring as revelation of the text. Leading up to Frankie's transformation and the climax of the plot, Marion Petrocelli, the last member of the group of ex-communicated priests tries to explain the significance of the text to Father Kiernan

³³⁰ *Stigmata*, film, directed by Rufus Wainwright (New York: MGM, 1999).

³³¹ Denzey Lewis. *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*. 116.

The true Church of Jesus Christ is so much more than a building made of wood and stone.
I love Jesus. I don't need an institution between him and me.
You see ... (he points up to the crucifix)
Just God.
No priests.
No churches.
The first word in Jesus gospels are ... *The kingdom of God is inside you.* (he points directly to Father Kiernan's heart) *and all around you. Not in buildings of wood and stone. Split a piece of wood and I am there. Lay the stone and you will find me.*³³²

At the end of the film, Father Kiernan returns to Brazil to find the original scroll, risking his status with the Church. He finds it in the floorboards and experiences his own encounter with God revealed as "These are the hidden sayings that the living Jesus spoke. Whoever discovers the meanings of these sayings will not taste death."³³³ This is a combination of the first line and T1 of *Thomas*.

The postscript of the film claimed

In 1945, a scroll was discovered in Nag Hammadi, which is described as "the secret sayings of the Living Jesus". This scroll, the Gospel of St. Thomas, has been claimed by Scholars around the world to be the closest record we have of the words of the historical Jesus. The Vatican refuses to recognize this Gospel and has described it as heresy.³³⁴

We know that *Thomas* found at Nag Hammadi was not a scroll but a text on papyri located within a codex. In reference to the statement that 'scholars claim that *Thomas* is the closest record we have to the historical Jesus', I discussed in Chapter Three, that scholars have varying opinions on the text, its publication timeframe, and its relationship to the historical Jesus. Funk et. al. called *Thomas* "a significant new independent source of data for the study of the historical Jesus"³³⁵ and Robinson, one of the first significant researchers in the Nag Hammadi discovery said, "many of the sayings like the oldest

³³² *Stigmata*, dir. Rufus Wainwright

³³³ *Stigmata*, dir. Rufus Wainwright

³³⁴ *Stigmata*, dir. Rufus Wainwright

³³⁵ Funk et.al. *The Five Gospels. What Did Jesus Really Say?* 15.

sayings in the canonical gospels were certainly first circulated in Aramaic, the language of Jesus³³⁶ but neither scholar directly referred to *Thomas* as the closest record of sayings said by Jesus. So, one must be careful around claims made in popular culture, keeping top of mind that these interpretations are typically based in fiction.

As spiritual capital, the film offered an illusion - a message of inspiration. If, as a seeker, the story of both Frankie and Father Kiernan's transformation has created inspiration, one may look further into *Thomas* for more. An antidote to malaise is mystery - something unforeseen, something to be discovered. Something which offers hope for a transformation from the discomfort we are in.

The Celestine Prophecy by James Redfield

The Celestine Prophecy is also an example of spiritual capital commodified. It is a book written by James Redfield and published in 1993. The first printing of the book sold over 250,000 copies. The book is still in print today now available with companion publications and guidebooks.

The storyline is also about a mysterious ancient text. Davies noted that *The Celestine Prophecy* was an allusion to *Thomas* and an "enormously popular book, centered on a newly discovered collection of Aramaic sayings found in the Mayan ruins deep in the jungle of Peru."³³⁷ The idea of secrets and the mysterious is not new. It is an element of spiritual capital. Davies mused that

the idea of secret knowledge was appealing then [in ancient communities] as it was now. But I don't think it [spiritual capital] was really so secret, I think that they [the ancient communities] publicize their beliefs.... I don't think they really had secret information. Religions love to claim secrets.... books in your local bookstore now, half of them have secrets and mysteries in the title, just as a lot of the Gnostic stuff had

³³⁶ Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 125

³³⁷ Stevan Davies. *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*. 2nd ed. (Oregon House, CA: Bardic Press, 2005), i.

secrets and mysteries in the title. Even in the canonical gospels Jesus talking about mysteries of the kingdom of God.³³⁸

The book is a fictional story about a group of people who are coming together into a community in Peru around a newly discovered sacred text called 'the Manuscript'. The community is mostly made up of Catholic clergy, scientists and 'restless individuals'. The Manuscript, has been divided into 9 separate texts and each give a specific insight. These insights are to be read and embodied into a process. Tensions arise within the community as the militaristic government of Peru that fear that the texts will undermine its authority, actively works to suppress the Manuscript.

The story is written on two levels. The first level is the tale of the unnamed protagonist who partakes in an adventure to join the Manuscript community and seeks the spiritual insights offered by the text. The second level is to provide the reader spiritual resources for inspiration, insight or experience. Redfield told Katie Struckle of *Writer's Digest* in March 2008, that although he considered the book to be a novel, his intention was to write a parable, a story meant to illustrate a point or teach a lesson. "A parable has a structure much different than a novel. A parable is to entertain, but also to pull together insights and to not only tell a story, but to tell a story that elevates one's awareness at the same time."³³⁹ In other words, one could argue that Redfield recognized that there was a lesson to be taught, for seekers of spiritual engagement. And that to teach a lesson to others, he must have had an experience with the material as a way to provide value.

Further, *The Celestine Prophecy* is reflective of a text like *Thomas* for it can give us an interpretation of what it was like for an ancient community to navigate their worldview around the political structures and consequences of the occupation of the

³³⁸ Conner. *Voices of Gnosticism*. 11.

³³⁹ Katie Struckle. "The Celestine Prophecy." *Writer's Digest*, 11 March 2008. Paragraph 10.

Roman Empire - the structure which ultimately held power in society. In terms of spiritual capital, the book offers the resources of nine spiritual principles as well as a modern representation of a political power oppressing an alternative worldview and how a community of seekers can attempt to organize whilst navigating political suppression or just plain malaise.

The Celestine Prophecy is also a story of transformation - it is a narrative and a process - a process in which a reader can acknowledge and apply the insights as practical tenets into daily life. According to Struckle, what Redfield hears from individual readers is that the book explores situations that are commonplace. Further that readers have expressed that the book has provided clarity for their own spiritual experiences. "Maybe I did capture the pulse of what people were really interested in, in terms of expanding their own spirituality & their own spiritual experience."³⁴⁰

The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown

The discussion about the commodification of spiritual capital cannot be complete without a look at probably the most controversial example, Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*.³⁴¹ But before I delve too deep into the discussion, I want to acknowledge the controversy around the novel. At latest estimates, Brown has exceeded 80 million copies sold worldwide.³⁴² Brown has fictionalized and inspired modern society's imagination with themes from ancient texts.³⁴³ He has created a narrative around the historical figures of Jesus and Mary Magdalene in a way which modern western society has not previously thought. He has identified a need in modern culture around the need for love

³⁴⁰ Struckle. *Writer's Digest*, Paragraph 19.

³⁴¹ The novel has also been adapted to film in 2006 starring Tom Hanks as Langdon, but for this discussion, all mentions are referencing the novel.

³⁴² Reuters News Agency, "Dan Brown's novel breaks one-day sales records". Sep 16, 2009. Paragraph 9. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-books-danbrown-idUSTRE58E5Q720090917>.

³⁴³ Meyer notes that the themes are found in *The Gospel of Mary* and *The Gospel of Philip*. Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 8-9.

and the nature of relationships and piqued the curiosity of millions of people. As my brother, who gave me a copy of the book at Christmas in 2004, said “this will make you wonder.”³⁴⁴

By all accounts, including mine, the novel can be described as a fast-paced and entertaining mystery about the main protagonist, Robert Langdon, a symbology professor from Harvard University and the deuterogamist, Sophie Neveu, a cryptologist with the French Judicial Police. The story is set in many intriguing locals including the lower levels of the Louvre Museum in Paris, luxurious private banking rooms in Zurich, Switzerland, and Leigh Teabing own cluttered salon at Chateau Villette in France. There are also many shadowy figures, such as the antagonists Silas the monk, who lurk in and out of the storyline offering tension and suspense to the plot of the story. *The Da Vinci Code* touches on many historical figures and moments over history. That said, my purpose isn't to debate the ‘factuality’ of the historical content of the book, for I concede, *The Da Vinci Code* is a fictional novel which gives an interpretation of some of the Gospels - namely *Philip*, *Mary* and *Thomas* - discovered at Nag Hammadi.

Again, I take the position that *The Da Vinci Code* is a fictional novel, written by a fiction writer, regardless of his claims the research in his book is accurate.³⁴⁵ I believe the fact statement was part of the fictional process to create a veil around the plot. And it worked. The explosion of reaction to the novel is immense. Why? Because “the secret lies in the novel's potent convergence of elements that entertain, enlighten, and empower the reader. A succession of seemingly complicated codes, pregnant symbols, and clues promises to lead to a hidden ‘truth’.”³⁴⁶ Criticism comes from all arenas: historians, theologians, literary critics, and book review clubs. And it has spun an

³⁴⁴ See Note 33.

³⁴⁵ See Fact Page in Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, (New York: Random House, 2003). 2.

³⁴⁶ Amy Bernstein. “Decoding the Da Vinci Phenomenon” *Secrets of the Code*. Dan Bernstein ed. (New York: Client Distribution Inc. 2004) 7.

avalanche of further works, from religion scholars and historians to learned amateurs who have all come under the spell of Brown's novel and are interested in finding out more about the historical Jesus and the texts that were so recently discovered. And it is for that reason - the impact on our social culture - is why *The Da Vinci Code* is an example of the commodification of spiritual capital.

Dr. Mark Stibbe, New Testament theologian mused on a St. Paul's theology centre's podcast that *The Da Vinci Code* was one of the best evangelistic opportunities that churches have had in a decade because, in his opinion, people who don't typically attend church services will be reading the novel³⁴⁷ and be intrigued.

Ehrman notes where the academic and theological world may have fallen short, Brown has succeeded. "[The book] has gotten people interested in a range of historical questions about early Christianity."³⁴⁸ It is the sense of 'wonder' that is the response to a spiritual need in culture - as the volume of the publication reflects. As individuals put down the book, or come out of movie houses, they are thinking and feeling about Brown's interpretation. They are connecting to the need in themselves for meaning and asking themselves if this interpretation can offer spiritual fulfillment. And those who perhaps answer, "It Can", make individual choices to go to school, read scholars, go to church or develop individual spiritual paths. And it is that wonder in which communities are born, under the guise of a common thought or intrigue. Stibbes is right, the interpretations offered by popular culture open doors for building communities that the religious institutions themselves seemingly struggle to do.

³⁴⁷ Tomlin, Graham and Mike Lloyd. "The Da Vinci Code". *GodPod*. (St. Paul's Theological Centre, October 4, 2007). <https://sptc.htb.org/taxonomy/term/377>.

³⁴⁸ Ehrman. *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*.188.

But we must not lose the notion that Brown's novel as well as other modern interpretations³⁴⁹ are commodified spiritual capital. These products offer individual choices, outside of the resources offered by religious institutions, to explore spiritual engagement to those who are seeking. In other words, Brown's book has seemingly tapped into a need with the modern individualized society for spiritual experience.

As Taylor tells us, the malaise in society is a result of disconnect from sacred structures and a lack of trust in the resources offered by religions. As a result of individual suffering, communities are being reimaged around commodified spiritual capital – products that are created to meet the need for spiritual engagement. And these communities are being created through technology. Spiritual engagement is being addressed, continually, by trusted television personalities, novelists, filmmakers, bloggers, and social activists who have developed a communication style which reaches the largest audience. I think one could argue that gospel writers were doing the same thing, creating a communication 'product' to tell the "good news". Further, I think that *Thomas* is one of the 'products' of the timeless tradition of communication and may have been a kind of commodified spiritual capital for its time. For my horizon, *Thomas* is commodified spiritual capital. Many versions of the text and subsequent analysis are freely available to those who seek.

³⁴⁹ Ehrman speaks about other examples such as Martin Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ* which also explores, in parts, the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus and Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*. See Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*. 185-187.

Chapter Five - A Fusion of Horizons

Finding Meaning

In this final chapter, I will take the analysis from each horizon and attempt a fusion. Marcus Borg said, “the Christian life is about entering into a relationship with that to which the Christian tradition points, ... and a Christian is one who lives out his or her relationship to God within the framework of the Christian tradition.”³⁵⁰ The purpose of this project is to utilize Gadamer’s fusion of horizons as a framework to build a relationship within the Christian tradition.

We have discussed that the modern context is shaped by individualism, where individuals shape their lives around choices to achieve personal success. This process has eroded established social structures, including religion. We discussed that individuals felt a low sense of trust in religion as a structure which seemingly manifests in two ways: the changes in attendance rates in traditional churches and the rise of commodified spiritual capital. We looked at examples of popular commodified spiritual capital.

We speculated that *Thomas* is also an example of commodified spiritual capital in modern context. It could be argued that *Thomas* has been through a significant number of exchanges since it was first shared as oral histories within a community. Now the text is available as a product without the social boundaries of a specific community. I found *Thomas* in a mass publication in a book store. One could argue that the process of commodification diminishes the sacredness of the text, which could suggest the venerability of the text is found in its physical form, not in the meaning for the individual who finds inspiration within the pages. Therefore, just as it was in the ancient community,

³⁵⁰ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time. The Historical Jesus & The Heart of Contemporary Faith*. (New York: HarperOne, 1994) 17.

Thomas is still a tool to be read to meet spiritual engagement. Meyer describes *Thomas* as a gospel of wisdom. “Hearers and readers are encouraged to encounter the sayings, interact with them, and discover for themselves their interpretation and meaning.”³⁵¹ Meyers offers his advice to individuals within the modern context. Meyer is saying, as individuals we have access to *Thomas*, the product, and because of that access we can choose to encounter the sayings and choose to interact with the saying – the wisdom transcends horizons. We, as individuals, can do what the ancient communities have done - look to *Thomas* as a way to find meaning in our lives.

I have discussed that *Thomas* may have been a version of commodified spiritual capital for the ancient communities in which it circulated. *Thomas* was utilized in the 4th Century, it has been speculated, by Christian monks in the Saint Pachomius monastery who ultimately hid it. They considered the text important enough to make a copy, bind and hide, with other texts. Denzey Lewis claims that the Nag Hammadi discovery tells us a lot about what was silently lost in early Christianity, namely the history of the diversity within early Christian communities, once orthodoxy became the dominant form of Christianity.³⁵² That said, we now have a sense of the diversity within the horizon of Rome in the first century. We know these communities utilized texts, traditions, and faith for building a relationship with God. And through that relationship, communities engaged spiritually to mitigate social suffering. We also know that texts like Paul’s letters helped build community in a context which was organized by the oppressive hierarchy of the Roman Empire. The Christian Gnostic community may have read *Thomas* as a path to gnosis as a personal internal process within a communally structured community. This pursuit was made clear within their worldview thus, I will explore the worldview or cosmology of the community which may, at the point of fusion, offer the modern horizon

³⁵¹ Meyer, *The Gospels of Mary*. 23-2.

³⁵² Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism*. 26.

a fresh and unique perspective. One that doesn't object to individual pursuits but celebrates it. For example, Denzey Lewis, noted that the film *Stigmata* was a modern representation of how ancient communities sought God. I believe that seeking God is the actual point in which our horizons fuse. In our modern context the language around 'God' has been compartmentalized in terms of meaning. It is tied to religious traditions therefore modern spiritual engagement is attempting to reimagine its path. Fusing horizons is also an attempt in seeking a path and entering into a relationship with what I will call More – spiritual engagement that transcends religious traditions. Therefore, part of this discussion will lean on how language helps to promote clarity.

For Valentinian Christians the pursuit of gnosis was a distinct practice of the community based on the cosmology taught by Valentinus. *Thomas* was an important text to this community. To read *Thomas*, in our modern horizon, I need to explore how the Valentinian cosmology - or his teaching about creation - assisted in the process.

The Valentinian Cosmology

There are seemingly two main sources for the Valentinian cosmology - Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* and *The Secret Book of John*.³⁵³ Meyer felt that Irenaeus, when critiquing the cosmology, had adapted or reinterpreted some of the cosmic principles found in the Sethian gnostic school of thought, as Valentinian cosmology. Valentinus developed his own kind of system, which echoed Sethian cosmology, but held firm with distinct Christian features. Ehrman tells us that *The Secret Book of John* is a narrative about a discussion between the post-resurrection Jesus and his disciple, John the son of Zebedee. "The book contains one of the clearest expositions of the Gnostic myth of creation and redemption, an exposition designed, ultimately, to explain the existence of

³⁵³ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 121. Also referred to as *The Apocryphon of John*

evil in the world and the path of escape for those who recognize their plight.”³⁵⁴ The Valentinian cosmology is as follows:

The origin of the world is Unknown. The first separate emanation from Unknown was Silence. Valentinus explained the divine origin or God as a dyad – a divine presence both male and female. The male or father – is unknown and unknowable. The female or mother – is Silence³⁵⁵. Silence is the vehicle in which Unknown becomes known through further emanations. In other words, Unknown - represented as male - becomes known through Silence - represented by female. Silence gives birth in the form of further emanations, that which can be known. Emanations from Unknown are divine – as Unknown is divine.³⁵⁶ As Unknown and Silence bond, as a pair, emanations grew in numbers and filled the Pleroma. In the Valentinian cosmology, emanations of Unknown were also called aeons. The description of each aeon is different depending on which version of the cosmology one reads, but for our purposes, it is important to note that all aeons became part of a bonded pair creating a whole³⁵⁷ and thereby creating further aeons. It is also important to note that the Pleroma was structured downward from Unknown.

For our purposes, the important part of the cosmological myth is what is known as “the fall” for it created the material world. One aeon – Wisdom – also known by her Greek name Sophia³⁵⁸ - instead of bonding with her pair, replicated herself - creating an aeon alone. Her actions facilitated a break in the Pleroma, and a failure within the cosmos. Sophia was banished from the Pleroma for causing a break with profound

³⁵⁴ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 297.

³⁵⁵ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 49.

³⁵⁶ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 123

³⁵⁷ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism*. 65.

³⁵⁸ According to *The Secret Book of John*, Sophia is also known as the wisdom of insight. Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 95

implications for divine and human life.³⁵⁹ Sophia's fall facilitated the creation of the material world.³⁶⁰

Sophia, realizing she has denigrated the system, sends the Demiurge - her replication - down into a lower sphere where he cannot be seen or see the Pleroma. Being unaccompanied, alone, and ignorant of his history, Demiurge, harnessing the divine power received from his mother and creates the material world, declaring himself the only God.³⁶¹ In his new material world, Demiurge creates Adam (as told in Genesis 1-3). Adam is brought into existence without the spirit of the divine. In response, Unknown intervenes and circumvents Demiurge by breathing Life into Adam - and subsequently imparting a divine spirit into all humans. The breath of the Unknown makes humans spiritually alive. Further, Unknown imparts Thought to humans - to teach them the way of their divine nature - the way in which they descended into the material world. And, most importantly, the way in which we humans can re-ascend - come back to Unknown.³⁶² The creation myth, therefore, tells us that the material world was not the idea or creation of Unknown, but as a result of Sophia replicating herself and creating the fall into the lower realms. Further, as a result of the actions of Unknown, humans hold divine breath or spirit within us. It is that spirit and thought, inherited through their lineage to Adam that the Christian Gnostics pursue - for it stimulates the internal longing or yearning to re-ascend back to the divine realm. The spirit needs to be liberated, it needs to re-ascend, in order to return to its real home.³⁶³

According to Meyer, Valentinians use the above cosmology as a framework for their Christianized worldview. They discuss in one version of the myth in which two other

³⁵⁹ Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 83

³⁶⁰ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 123.

³⁶¹ Isaiah 45:5 "I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God". RSV. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 123. His is also the god that Marcion equated with the Old Testament and felt compelled to eradicate.

³⁶² Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 124.

³⁶³ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 124.

aeons - Christ and the Holy Spirit - try to assist Sophia by slicing off Desire, which is the cause of the break. Desire is cast from the Pleroma. By removing Desire, Christ is able to restore unity within the Pleroma. In another version of the myth, Jesus the Saviour - who is different from Christ - descends into the material world and is presented as the fruit of the fullness, or as thought becoming flesh³⁶⁴ in which to aid Sophia and the world.

Finally, the myth found in *The Secret Book of John*, is a dialogue between Jesus the Saviour and John, son of Zebedee. John receives a revelation of the sacred.

Straightaway, [while I was contemplating these things,] behold, the [heavens opened and] the whole creation [which is] below heaven shone, and [the world] was shaken. [I was afraid, and behold I] saw in the light [a youth who stood] by me. While I looked [at him he became] like an old man. And he [changed his] likeness (again) becoming like a servant. There was [not a plurality] before me, but there was a [likeness] with multiple forms in the light, and the [likenesses] appeared through each other, and the likeness] had three forms.³⁶⁵

Denzey Lewis tells us that these three forms - understood as Father, Mother and Son, were symbolic of the transcendent nature of Jesus the Saviour - one emanation that is also a family of three³⁶⁶. The familial themes were also important to Irenaeus, who some scholars think, misinterpreted the transcendent nature of Jesus, for he commented that the Valentinian community characterized Jesus Christ as the son of Sophia.³⁶⁷

Pagels tells us that the cosmology described in *The Secret Book of John* reveals that humans have an innate connection to the Unknown, but that connection is hidden, because the divine nature of our inheritance is hidden.³⁶⁸ In other words, each of us have inherited the divine breath - which by virtue of its nature aches to connect with the Unknown. It is the hiddenness of our divine reality that spurs longing within us - seeks

³⁶⁴ Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 126.

³⁶⁵ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 298.

³⁶⁶ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism*. 154.

³⁶⁷ Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 127.

³⁶⁸ Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 102

connection. Further, we know we desire a connection because we experience a longing or yearning for connection. Yet, the nature of divine reality is hidden, therefore we don't have the tools to make such a connection. We don't know for what we are to seek.

Most scholars agree that there are multiple Valentinian texts describing the cosmology. Depending on which version of the myth with which one is engaged, the names of the emanations are different. For example, we have used the term Unknown for the first emanation, however it is also known as the One³⁶⁹, or the Great Invisible Spirit. Further, this first emanation is also known by a series of adjectives: eternal, unlimited, unsearchable, immeasurable, invisible, ineffable, or the divine.³⁷⁰ Denzey Lewis tells us that adjectives are a way to deal with the limitations of language and thought.³⁷¹ A tool in which to express something absolute, something beyond our immediate power to comprehend. And this leads us to a discussion around language.

The Language of Metaphor

This chapter of the project - uncovering new meaning - is the most challenging for two reasons: it requires a critical analysis to be written in a language I don't know, and with knowledge I don't have and cannot obtain through a library search.

It is important that I emphasize and bring forth again, that this whole project began as a response to something missing in my life. That said, this project has also alerted me that moving forward gets difficult, namely because of the glaring light it has shone on my underdeveloped perspective. It is, in fact, not only unfamiliar, but wholly immature. Especially in terms of how to write - the language in which to write. I have, in the past, been somewhat successful in writing short story fiction, and am therefore somewhat fluent with the use of simile and metaphor, but in an arena in which I can

³⁶⁹ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. 122.

³⁷⁰ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism*. 154

³⁷¹ See Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism*. 154.

envision the narrative. In this case, the vision is hazy - hidden. Therefore, I will rely on Borg. He writes that Christian knowledge and the language in which it is written is to be understood beyond a literal reading.³⁷² In other words, from a perspective that is actively engaged in metaphor and symbolism outside of our literal modern understanding. Borg acknowledges that our modern world has developed in such a way that language is now understood literally and factually with little room for active interpretation. Borg tells us that ancient communities did not understand language like this. He said

language, especially religious language, often has a more-than-literal, more-than-factual, more-than-historical meaning. This is its metaphorical meaning. Metaphor is about 'the surplus of meaning' that language can carry. Metaphorical meaning is not inferior to the literal-factual meaning - it is not less than, but *more than*³⁷³.

Therefore, with this in mind, I offer the following modern fusion of language.

Feed the Birds

I have family that reside in London, England. Part of the process of anticipating a trip to London to visit with my family, is also to anticipate which parts of the city I shall visit. Typically, I have sought such valuable advice from a reliable source - Walt Disney. The journey to seek advice follows a usual path. The flight is overnight; therefore, the travel day commences with a series of tasks in order to leave. One must secure the house, pack clothes, and gather the assortment of needed things. Then the day offers a period of time before commencement to the airport. This is the time for inspiration - from Mary Poppins, the Banks children, and of course, Bert, the chimney sweep. I love the film - the animated scenery, the bright colours of the characters, and, of course, the music. I have taken the inspiration literally and visited actual locations of the film, namely Hyde Park, and St. Paul's Cathedral. I realized through this project, that I have

³⁷² See Borg, *Speaking Christian*. 21 - 33.

³⁷³ Borg, *Speaking Christian*. 29. Emphasis added.

visited St. Paul's every time, proclaiming it my favourite place to be. I also realize that upon each visit, I wander a little bit deeper inside the building. Once I took the tour of the building. The last time I attended an evensong service. Borg has an exercise in his book *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* in which he challenges the reader to acknowledge personal images of Jesus as a way to seek "a relationship with God that involves us in a journey of transformation."³⁷⁴ In other words, where in our lives have we sought out Jesus, and what modern image of him - as teacher, or divine saviour - have we attached to our journey. So, I mined my own experiences and dug up the realization that there was a connection to those Cathedral visits. But it wasn't about the building, it was a connection to the scene in the film.

The scene begins with Mary Poppins, in the nursery with the Banks children. Mary has delighted her charges with an announcement that they are to accompany their father on a visit to his place of employment - the Bank. They jubilantly chatter about their proposed outing whilst Mary shows the children a snow globe. The little boy, while getting himself into bed, exclaims 'the Cathedral'. Mary quietly tells the children that while on their journey, to keep in mind that "sometimes a little thing can be quite important."³⁷⁵ Then she sings....

Early each day to the steps of St. Paul's
The little old bird woman comes
In her own special way to the people she calls
Come buy my bags full of crumbs

Come feed the little birds, show them you care
And you'll be glad if you do
Their young ones are hungry
Their nests are so bare
All it takes is a tuppence from you

Feed the birds, tuppence a bag,
Tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bag

³⁷⁴ Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. 3.

³⁷⁵ *Mary Poppins*, VHS, directed by Robert Stevenson (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1964).

'Feed the birds', that's what she cries
While overhead, her birds fill the skies

All around the Cathedral the Saints and Apostles
Look down as she sells her wares
Although you can't see it, you know they are smiling
Each time someone shows that he cares

Though her words are simple and few
Listen, listen she's calling to you
Feed the birds, tuppence a bag
Tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bag.³⁷⁶

While Mary sings, the scene of the film shifts to an old woman sitting on the steps of St. Paul's surrounded by baskets of bundled bread crumbs. She calls to the people in the street, while the flock of birds, flutter and fuss around her.³⁷⁷ The literal factual reading, which has come to represent the modern horizon, could surmise that the bird lady has found herself a niche market. If one has literally been to the steps of St. Paul's, one is aware that the birds that congregate are pigeons, often regarded in the modern context as a less than desirable member of the avian family. Further, if feeding the birds (pigeons) were important, the bird lady would just spread the crumbs around herself. In the commodification process, she has turned the crumbs into a product to be sold. She has created a need, where, it could be argued, there isn't one, as birds are quite capable of feeding themselves. One could contend the need she has created is experiential - to feed the birds, one must pay for the crumbs to engage in the experience of feeding the birds - commodification. Finally, her venture is a risky one, for there is no guarantee that others will identify with the need to feed the birds, nor is there a guarantee that once these bags are purchased, that they will be distributed to feeding the birds. But perhaps that isn't an important part of the process because by selling the crumbs, she has identified a way to enrich herself in her pursuit of a successful existence. She has

³⁷⁶ Richard M. Sherman, Robert B Sherman, Walt Disney Music Company, Songwriters. "Feed the Birds." *Mary Poppins*. Walt Disney Productions. 1964.

³⁷⁷ The scene is found here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMggqNKTrfE>

created a market in which she can supply the goods to meet the demands of the birds and as consumers - the ones who purchase the crumbs- are engaging in the process of exchange. But as the character Mary Poppins tells us in the film, sometimes it is a little thing which can be quite important.

In this case, the little thing is the metaphor. As Borg said, a word used as metaphor offers a surplus of meaning - meaning that is *more than* the literal meaning. It is the metaphoric surplus of meaning which gives a voice and connection to an indescribable, yearning part in us which is seeking meaning - sacred meaning - to the More than the literal can provide. It is the More which we are looking for. If we read the parts of this narrative as metaphor, we can reach a much different reading. For example, I like to think of the bird lady as metaphor for More - call it Spirit of Jesus. More is calling out to seekers - the people on the street - to feed the birds - show them you care. The birds are also metaphor for each one of us - with our empty nest - empty hearts, and hungry tummies - hungry spirits. The More is calling to us to buy its crumbs and feed the birds within us. And to feed the birds around us as well, other individuals who suffer hunger, homelessness, poverty or other forms of social injustice. The More is calling out to us to feed the birds as a way to build community.

We can also read the bird lady as metaphor for each one of us. I am the bird lady, I am sitting on the steps and I am calling out for More. Calling out - yearning for an experience of feeding that which is missing. The birds may be metaphor for that which is missing - More - that which needs to be fed. 'Feed the birds' we call - feed what is missing in ourselves and perhaps in each other. These are the simple things, to give a little of ourselves to others, that is quite important.

Further, I think it is important to note the experience of engaging with the scene - to have watched the film. The song is sung as a lullaby to the children, but there is also a haunting quality which is to engage our attention. I think it is important to note the

longing, the haunting tone which I now believe is to evoke a sense of sadness for the bird lady, but also as a way to stimulate an experience within ourselves. The longing evokes our awareness of the need for More.

I completed Borg's challenge prior to writing this section and dug out an old VHS of Mary Poppins. Now writing here, I note that I am writing about the experience from memory of watching the scene that day with the fresh eyes of realization. On this day I could have watched the scene again to have in the forefront of my mind - the literalist version of the film. But it is not the literalist version I want. It is the memory of the experience – knowledge - that I want to convey. Just like scholars have argued ancient communities did through the exchange of oral histories, the narrative is not a factual description of the events as they took place, but how the event was experienced. My meaningful experience with the film has settled within me now and it is the memory of the experience which has added to my understanding of metaphor.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that each time I have visited St. Paul's, regardless of my intended purpose, I climbed the stairs and did a quick scan of the crowd gathered on the steps. In my mind's eye, I wanted to 'see' the bird lady among the crowd. I wanted to 'hear' her voice. I know that she is literally not there - she doesn't exist - she is a character written by P.L. Travers as part of the Mary Poppins series.³⁷⁸ Yet I now recognize that I was drawn to the Cathedral to look for her – for what she represents - More. Like the examples given in Chapter Four, Walt Disney Productions has responded to my need for More. I acknowledge that the title for this chapter is Finding Meaning and I have found meaning in the application of metaphor, that one needs to hear, what others are calling to us, and that typically within that calling regardless of the package in which it came - there maybe More.

³⁷⁸ In contrast, during a visit to Hyde Park, I didn't consider looking for a chalk painting into which to jump. Nor have undertaken to find Cherry Tree Lane.

Up to this point, I have used the word More to identify the indescribable yearning that seekers look for. But as we are moving on to a reading of an ancient text, we look to the metaphors, many of which harken back to the Valentinian cosmology. The discussion about the Valentinian cosmology is important because *Thomas* holds metaphorical language that is akin to the various cosmology myths. Specifically, metaphors such that emphasise on the breath of God or divine breath. Further, ancient text tended to express metaphor in more physical or natural terms. For example, when we are thirsty, we seek water and when we are hungry we seek food. The language of the Valentinian cosmology and *Thomas* both hold metaphors about food and drink – specifically being drunk and thirsty in relation to seeking God. For my analysis hunger, thirst, and drunkenness can be metaphor for seeking More. It is these types of metaphors I will use to explain my readings going forward.

Fusion of Horizons

Meyers said that *Thomas* is a conversation³⁷⁹ in which a reader may interact with the sayings in a creative way to find an interpretation and to seek More.³⁸⁰ Bauman also suggests that a reader is best to engage *Thomas* as a dialogue. That we engage by asking questions, offering personal narratives and listening to the 'Living Jesus' through his sayings.³⁸¹ Most importantly, engaging with *Thomas* is about challenging my own worldview. It is to help me get past my individual collection of achievements. At this point I shall offer three logion which spoke to me. They are Logion 2, 3 and 5. I have chosen these three for, as we will discuss, they seemingly are the advice for a seeker at the beginning.

³⁷⁹ Meyer, *The Gospels of Mary*. 23.

³⁸⁰ Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*. 66.

³⁸¹ Lynn Bauman, *The Gospel of Thomas. Wisdom of the Twin*. 2nd ed. (Ashland Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2002), 2.

Logion 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.'³⁸²

Logion 2 is a good starting point. Why? Because upon initial reading, the logion is giving us five steps - like any good modern self-help book - into how to start the search. It answers the question - Where do I begin to search for More? From the perspective of a literal read - the steps are there but the content is seemingly opaque. On a deeper reading, this is not the case.

As said, *Thomas* is a conversation. The conversation in Logion 2 starts by advising on the question of How? How does one look for More? But I think it is important to start with a different question - Why? Why am I embarking to seek for More? There may be a few answers. Am I seeking More because it is an interesting puzzle that needs to be worked out? Perhaps initially but that answer assumes that the reading is literal. In other words, one can gain factual knowledge from the logion. And if so, I suspect one wouldn't go much further in their exploration of *Thomas* for the literal reading is seemingly quite disheartening. For it says that those who want to seek should do so until he finds what he is looking for - to find the answers to the puzzle - the answers that they think they have found will upset, shock and astonish. Modern culture cultivates enough fear to generate a steady flow of shock and astonishment. Therefore, *Thomas* advice - to literally seek upset - is not attractive. If I want to be upset, shocked and astonished, I can just watch television news. Further, I strain to ask myself the question again because I have a family, a home, all the 'things' that constitute a successful individualistic lifestyle. In the pursuit of success, I have done the work to make money, to achieve certain level

³⁸² Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 20.

of comfort, and I have traveled and exposed myself to other cultures. Why am I looking for More? Because the day I found *Thomas* I was not building business relationships, or fostering personal ones, I was lurking alone between tall wooden shelves in a dark, dusty bookstore. I was looking for the bird lady. I was looking for More. Therefore, the answer the question of Why? is to acknowledge that there is something missing.

Acknowledgement is the first step to tackling any situation, bring the situation out of the darkness into the light. This phrase is typically understood in the modern context for those who are longing to create change in their lives. In the individualistic culture where choice is abundant, one must acknowledge that previous choices have not led to success. For example, to escape a financial quagmire, one must be acknowledging how one reached the state of distress. An alcoholic must acknowledge that the effects of alcohol causes personal adversity. Acknowledgement is bringing the hidden into the light. Further, it is also to recognize that the thirst for More has not been met from places of comfort. In other words, individualized success also hasn't satiated longing. So where is the need for More expressed? In metaphor.

With the limits imposed by language, metaphor surpasses the literal. For example, I experience hunger and thirst when I need food and water. When I am hungry I crave, desire, long for, yearn for - all the synonyms satiating hunger - is the language that represents more than the literal.

Therefore, to answer the question Why? I need to acknowledge I am thirsty for More. And that thirst is metaphor for the missing. Bauman tells us that to acknowledge is the foundation to recognizing our thirst³⁸³ and like those visits to St. Paul's, acknowledging is what I was doing while I looked through the crowds on the stairs. Leloup tells us that to acknowledge is already to have found. We have glimpsed meaning - we have found the beginning of the path, we have found the stairs to St. Paul's. We

³⁸³ Bauman, *The Gospel of Thomas*. 7.

have a sense in which direction we can find water. "In a sense, to seek is already to find. Otherwise, how could we ever have the idea to search, how could we be propelled by this desire, unless it were for something that we somehow already know?"³⁸⁴ I know I am missing More. Therefore, I have sought and found. I have sought acknowledgement and found the path. I am seeking metaphoric meaning and have found trouble.

But it is also metaphor that causes trouble. Which leads us to question Why? Why does finding meaning cause trouble? Because the knowledge of the new meaning is the breakdown of our literal worldview. Therefore, trouble is a metaphor. For example, as discussed, the literal understanding of trouble is seemingly greater in our modern context - and this is known because of how trouble is manifest and commodified. There is a lot of information and analysis to be consumed in pop culture on how to address trouble. There is also a lot of money to be made. But to be troubled is to undertake a metaphoric analysis of thirst. To engage trouble as a metaphor is to engage the bird lady in whatever form she emerges. That within trouble, one can glimpse More. More tells us there is no such thing as coincidence. We will become troubled, uncomfortable, perhaps embarrassed, as we embark on the purposeful destruction of our worldview. It is tough to change. It is the hardest process for any person or culture especially in an individualistic society where to compromise or to change means that there is a 'thing' that has to be given up or lost. Further, trouble is ignited when we realize that our worldview, our individualistic path, has failed to lead us to a place of fulfilment. That the collection of achievements that we hold up as evidence of a life of success, is not a satisfactory sum total.

Being astonished is double sided metaphor. On the one hand, one has not found the success one seeks and faces conflict in being pushed beyond the comfort zone of

³⁸⁴ Leloup. *The Gospel of Thomas*. 64.

our worldview.³⁸⁵ We are uncomfortable consciously challenging of our current worldview. Why? To challenge and change is also to mourn, but, on the other hand, it is also to receive and accept the new. To see the light and step into it. An abundance of light is breathtaking - think of fireworks, or the beauty created by a single candle in the dimness. We are awed by the energy, simplicity, and allurements that light provides within the dark. It is within that wonder to receive that Jesus said will give energy and passion to move forward. It is to finally glimpse at More.

When Jesus said, you will rule over all, it is not the literal meaning of rule such as having dominance or total control over all things, it is metaphoric of understanding More. To gain self knowledge. And this knowledge is experiential. One does not have an experience, one lives an experience. This is the moment of transformation. I believe that is why people love stories - because stories are the way in which we discern our experiences that cannot be reduced to a commodity. A story can only grow and be tailored to a context. It can only reign.³⁸⁶

Thus, Jesus tells us to begin a search for More is a process of first acknowledging our horizon. And what is missing. From there I can critique, suffer, mourn and awaken to a sense of More. I can recreate the narratives that have been taken for granted as reality. I can reshape how to experience life and how it is lived.³⁸⁷

Logion 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

³⁸⁵ Ron Miller, *The Gospel of Thomas. A Guidebook for Spiritual Practice*. (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2004), 3.

³⁸⁶ Some scholars have translated 'rule' as 'reign'. See Bauman and Leloup.

³⁸⁷ Borg. *The God We Never Knew*. 20.

sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty.³⁸⁸

Logion 3 is Jesus' wisdom in answering our questions. In our individualistic culture, we rely on the array of choices to offer us what we are looking for. But in this logion, Jesus is saying that thirst cannot be fulfilled within or by the social structures. He is directing us to ask ourselves the question Who Am I?³⁸⁹

In ancient Christian communities, the Kingdom of God was the alternative to the social and political structures of the Roman Empire. It was the alternative to the Kingdom of Herod or Caesar.³⁹⁰ *Thomas* did not use the Kingdom of God in literal terms, rather, the Kingdom is metaphor the place in which one explores the question Who I am?³⁹¹ If the Kingdom of God is inside you and outside of you, then what in you represents the Kingdom. In other words, to what have I given personal power that may have affected or direct my horizon or worldview? Is it past experiences, memories or fears? Is it my environment? or is it my ideas and successes borne from an individualistic culture?³⁹² The Kingdom is the thirst which has motivated me to search for More. And it encompasses my horizon.

Jesus then asks us to know ourselves. To answer the question, Who Am I? When you know yourself, you will become known. If you know yourself, then you know yourself the way the Unknown knows you. Modern culture is a forward-facing culture in which one looks outward for opportunities to fulfill the goals of self-defined success. From birth, we have been completely dependent on our mothers for our survival. We have been socialized to be dependent on the outside world and are committed to

³⁸⁸ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 20.

³⁸⁹ Bauman, *The Gospel of Thomas*.9.

³⁹⁰ Borg. *The God We Never Knew*. 100.

³⁹¹ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. 128.

³⁹² Leloup. *The Gospel of Thomas*. 67.

outward activity. We participated in the activity of making choices and trying to achieve a level of self-defined success. We choose programs at school, we choose certain schools, we choose certain life paths, religious traditions and employment through which to satisfy the life goals that we identified for ourselves. These choices have become polarized by either a sense of reward or punishment. We either attain great heights of success which may be manifest as comfort, cash, acclamation or humility, or we deem ourselves a failure and offer to punish ourselves. Our lives are filled with self-determined action. But Jesus tells us that the gifts to meet the thirst for More are not outward facing, but internal. We cannot 'get' them from external structures.

Jesus said that one thirsts for More inside and outside of ourselves. So, the question becomes where do we look first? Do we look first to the outside because we have been conditioned to interact externally? Or do we look first at the inside? I don't think it is a matter of picking a starting point because looking is fluid - like an upward spiral. As we said, we are conditioned to first rely on the external world when we are born, we rely on our mothers to meet our immediate needs. But through that interaction with our mothers we are gaining knowledge of ourselves. As I grow and interact with the world I gain self-knowledge and I am more aware of Who I am by external definitions. So, the starting point then is What is self-knowledge? Is it Learning? I know I can read, I can write, I can drive a car. I know how to react emotionally. I can grieve, I can be sad. I can express desire. Therefore, can I say that my self-knowledge is external? I have knowledge of me by me. I can say I know myself externally. But do I know myself internally? Jesus said, when you come to know yourselves, then you will become known. By whom? The Unknown. Like the Valentinian cosmology, the Unknown becomes known when an emanation is created. The Unknown shared a part of self, known as Me, and I thirst to know what that is to be known. Therefore, there is no beginning. One can only thirst to know internal self-knowledge. Internal self-knowledge

is experiential. I have lived an experience of love with my family, animals, and myself. I have lived all kinds of experiences, which contribute to my internal self-knowledge. Like an upward spiral, internal self-knowledge manifest externally, as does external self-knowledge manifest internally. Past experiences, the environments which I live, choices, ideas and passions all are knowledge which has interlaced the spiral. There is no beginning in terms of where self-knowledge starts and there is no end.

Jesus said, "but if you will not know yourselves you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty."³⁹³ Again, we need to extent our reading to recognize that poverty is not the literal poverty - the state of being financially poor - but a metaphorical poverty as in insufficiency of experiential self-knowledge. It is the internal self-knowledge that is the gifts which lift us from poverty. So, Who Am I? I am poverty without self-knowledge. Without knowing who I am, not to be known is to be without - to be poverty. And self-knowledge is experiential. Further, as discussed, we do not 'have' experience, we live them. Experiences are not collections of 'things' to have - for to have makes you poor. Richness comes from living.

What shapes of our self-knowledge? It is typically interactions with others - the external. And we shape our self-knowledge from our understanding of those interactions. We allow others to define us as - I am thoughtful, I am kind, I am selfish. Further, it is the expectation of this self-knowledge that further dictates our experiences. I think my husband is kind therefore I expect experiences of kindness with him. I allow - expect - the actions of others to shape my experiences. I am allowing others to shape my self-knowledge. I think Jesus is saying that those expectations of others limit me - makes me poor, whereas if I do not expect anything from anyone else - I am limitless.

Who I am is a mixture of both external and internal experiences. It is the invisible within the visible - like the spaces between each letter on this page. Further, to be

³⁹³ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 20.

known is to interact with others without expectation - to love another as ourselves, as if they were within us, without reducing that other to ourselves or ourselves to others.³⁹⁴ I will never completely know Who I am, but for now growing self-knowledge - living each experience - brings me closer to being a child of the living father. And knowing who I am is More, for it is known.

Logion 5

Jesus said, 'Recognize what is in your sight, and that which is hidden from you will become plain to you. For there is nothing hidden which will not become manifest.'³⁹⁵

We are still engaged in conversation. Logion 5 is seemingly an extension of the dialogue around Who I am. Jesus has asked to discern experiential self-knowledge for those are the gifts of the Unknown. The discernment is to encompass one's entire horizon - that which is seen and unseen. In other words, to discern is to see - to open our eyes and see what we are looking at right now, right in front of us. That More is not a puzzle that needs to be worked out but is that which is right in our immediate horizon, not somewhere else. More is here, where I Am. Modern culture has been taught to look literally. We see and therefore interact with everything as a separate entity from us. A tree is over there, and it is different - and perhaps inferior - to us. We haven't been taught to look, as much as we have been taught to covet and dominate. Further the way one sees is entrenched - in habits, saturated in memory, and assumptions about what one thinks is going on around them. Modern culture sees with distorted eyes. Jesus is asking that we change the way we see. We need to be troubled with what we see. That our surroundings, our horizon, is not a landscape from which we collect and manipulate, as we have done in support of our self-defined collection of accomplishments, rather our

³⁹⁴ Leloup, *The Gospel of Thomas*. 69.

³⁹⁵ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 20.

surrounding 'Are'. In other words, a tree is a tree. We have commodified trees into firewood, housing materials, and chopsticks, among other things. We have separated ourselves through a culture of individualism which demands separation, competition and domination. Modern culture has taught that everything that we are not, are 'others' that we are separate and compete with or dominate. Jesus is asking us to change the way we see, and in the process, we will also see ourselves - not as separate. For the separateness keeps all other things hidden. Jesus says, if you "recognize what is in your sight, that which is hidden from you will become plain".³⁹⁶ Individualized culture cannot see the plainness of a single tree - we cannot see its plain beauty, nor its natural functionality - that plainness is hidden from us. We cannot see that a tree, on its own, is a bearer of fruit, a provider of shade, or that its leaves, in autumn, act as winter shelter for other smaller creatures. The commodification of trees has hidden all of these other things about trees. If we recognize these things, they are no longer hidden. In other words, once we include our surroundings into our lives, they become plain and that plainness is metaphor for richness. If we continue to separate them, they remain hidden.

That speaks to our inner word as well. How do we see ourselves? We can look at our bodies, but do we really see them? Do we see the wonder that our hands can achieve? That our feet are able to carry us around all kinds of terrain? Many years ago, I did an expedition in Ujong Kulon National Park on Java, Indonesia. The expedition included two days of beach trekking. I noticed that our Indonesian guides all walked the beach and most of the forest floor on bare feet. I and my trek mates had obtained "modern" footwear for the journey. When I asked the question why they walked barefoot, it was explained that they believed the earth would naturally support them. By placing your foot on the sand invites the earth to rise and surround your foot with support. At that moment, your feet and the earth connect. The sand, from the perspective of looking

³⁹⁶ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 20.

down at it, seems separate, but connected though our feet. I look off my boots after that and suffered significantly less blisters.

If our feet connect with the earth, then it reasons that our head or our face should connect higher up. John O'Donohue wrote that in fact the head is the pinnacle of the body and the face is the mirror of the mind. One's face reflects all that the mind has understood of its surroundings and self-knowledge³⁹⁷ - its past experiences as well as its future hopes. In other words, the face reveals who you are and how life has interacted with you. Therefore, the face is the place where the hidden can manifest, for it is the face which reveals to yourself and others one's inner self knowledge. So how does the face become known? I think the metaphor of the mirror is important here for it is symbolic of transformation. A mirror is literally the tool in which we can look at our own face, but it is also metaphoric for the hidden to manifest. One can look into the mirror and see what our minds have understood about ourselves.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Valentinians followed Paul very closely believing they received revelation through Paul, as Paul has received from Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 13:12 Paul wrote "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood."³⁹⁸ This seems to speak to how the known becomes known by the Unknown. And that process is through the metaphor of the mirror. That our face, which makes plain self-knowledge, sees and thereby gets to know himself - finds answers to the question Who Am I? Further, the self-knowledge gained through finding answers to Who Am I? transforms our self-knowledge. We are also seeing what is hidden - the known is becoming known by the Unknown. Through the mirror, we are seeing our 'twin'.

³⁹⁷ John O'Donohue. *Anam Cara. A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. (New York: HarperCollins.1997). 40.

³⁹⁸ RSV.

Thomas opens with “these are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down.”³⁹⁹ As discussed, scholars are undecided as to whether the *Thomas* whose name the Gospel was written is associated with the disciple Thomas mentioned in the New Testament. But, regardless of if they are associated, we do know that ‘Didymus’ and ‘Thomas’ both mean ‘twin’. ‘Didymus’ means twin in Greek, and ‘Thomas’ means twin in Aramaic and Syriac. Scholars are also undecided if this reference to twin is literal or metaphoric. In other words, did Jesus of Nazareth have a literal twin brother named Thomas or Judas? It is unknown. If we follow the metaphor interpretation, one of the pieces of advice this gospel gives is to search out the mystery of Jesus’ twin.⁴⁰⁰

As discussed in Chapter Three, the complete version of *Thomas* wasn’t a first edition text, but rather a later version of a rolling, changing, collection of sayings. Therefore, I think that the text was *Thomas* purposefully and metaphorically. And I think the first subtle confirmation of that is Logion 5.

Denzey Lewis also tells us that there is evidence of this in another logion.⁴⁰¹ In Logion 13, Jesus asks Thomas, Simon Peter and Matthew to compare him to someone or something else. Jesus is unsatisfied with their answers but takes Thomas aside and tells him something. Peter and Matthew asked Thomas, “What did Jesus say to you?” Thomas said to them, ‘If I tell you one of the things which he told me, you will pick up stones and throw them at me; a fire will come out of those stones and burn you up.’⁴⁰² Thomas is telling Peter and Matthew that Jesus told him something so significant about himself that if Thomas were to repeat it - Peter and Matthew would have to stone him to death! According to Denzey Lewis, the only crime that would require such a punishment

³⁹⁹ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 20.

⁴⁰⁰ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism*. 104.

⁴⁰¹ See Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism*. 113.

⁴⁰² Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 21.

in the ancient communities, was blasphemy.⁴⁰³ Thus, can we then read that Jesus is divine and that Thomas was now being told as much? Seemingly one can surmise that Jesus told Thomas - I am divine, you are Thomas - Twin, therefore you are also divine.

There is a sense of doubleness in the opening statement in that there are two names meaning twin - Didymus and Thomas. Denzey Lewis also noted a sense of doubleness with the metaphor of twin. In other words, the double names seemingly suggest that Thomas is a twin twice - once the twin of Jesus but also the twin of someone else. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part..." Now as I look into the mirror, I see myself but I also something else – a part of myself which I know through my past experiences. In other words, when I first look into the mirror I see on my face the experiences and the knowledge of those experiences. It is in seeing my face in the mirror that I will also see the reflection of myself - my twin - and I shall understand my divine being. I will also be seen, for the image - the face of my twin - will be looking back at me. I am the known, becoming known, by the Unknown.

Thus, the metaphor of the upward moving spiral is at work. Jesus is asking us to look at our surroundings - the external - to see that which is hidden. He is asking us to shift our vision on the outside. He is also asking us to look into the mirror and see our faces and what we have lived as self-knowledge, our inner world - the internal. He is asking us to seek our twin - the manifestation of More - our own divinity.⁴⁰⁴

The fusion of horizons has manifest as a conversation. It is a conversation about finding meaning. Meaning mingling between and around the horizons: of the ancient Christian community, the *Thomas* text, and the modern individualized culture. Therefore, meaning is manifest in engagement with a thirst for More. With a sense that there is

⁴⁰³ Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism*. 115.

⁴⁰⁴ April DeConick. *Seek to See Him*. 168.

More that cannot be collected from culture or worldview. I thirst for More. So, I engage in a conversation with the sayings in *Thomas*. The first thing the text asks is Who Am I? Not in terms of my horizon or my collection of achievements, rather to acknowledge that I am thirsty. To acknowledge is to find. To find is to recognize that from where I am is no longer. That my perspective within my horizon is changing, mourning, growing and inspired. That my thirst is grave, yet satiable. That water is scarce, yet abundant. It all depends on where I look. In the right places - the hidden places that are before me. That I can be satisfied if I learn to know who I am. The journey is limitless as I acknowledge experiential knowledge. I am a storyteller, who will live each experience to know who I am. I am the twin - the one who looks into the mirror and sees my own face and the face of the one who looks back at me. I see the lines and light of my skin which shines with the experiences and the divine breath of the Unknown. I am to know More which is hidden in my understanding of my experiential knowledge revealed. The process of the hidden revealed is like an upward spiral - a cyclical dance between the internal and external - together in partnership and relationship with the twin. In other words, my face and the face that looks back at me are together in a fluid spiral, moving so quickly that it shines translucent. The spiral revolves so quickly between the inner and outer worlds that it disappears. Therefore, the metaphor that is the twin, is the representation of the fluidity and transparency of the inner and outer worlds. Of the Spiral moving so quickly that it melts into One - More.

Conclusion

Jesus said, "Now the sower went out, took a handful (of seeds), and scattered them. Some fell on the road; the birds came and gathered them up. Others fell on rock, did not take root in the soil, and did not produce ears. And others fell on thorns; they choked the seed(s) and worms ate them. And others fell on the good soil and it produced good fruit: it bore sixty per measure and a hundred and twenty per measure".⁴⁰⁵

To summarize, we have a sense of a horizon behind the text. We discussed the structures of ancient Roman society and how those structures shaped communities; social communities, political communities, and economic communities. The ancient Christian communities developed as a response to the consequences of inequality produced by the Empire's structural hierarchy and responded with social action. Further, ancient Christian texts – such as *The Gospel of Thomas* - were utilized within this horizon as a tool for spiritual practice.

We know from the text that an unknown author, probably exposed to an earlier oral tradition, ultimately found the sayings significantly meaningful to collect and record into *The Gospel of Thomas*. We know that only one complete copy of the text has been discovered, found as part of the Nag Hammadi library.

We also have a sense of a horizon of the front of the text. We discussed the structures of modern Canada and how those structures and global influences have shaped a culture of individualism and commodification of resources, the antithesis of community.

I started this paper with referencing logion 9 because it is my favourite. Now looking at it here, it is seemingly prophetic and a metaphor for the fusion of the horizons in this project. Initially, I read the logion as situational, as the seeds fell into different

⁴⁰⁵ *The Gospel of Thomas*. Logion 9. as found in Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. 21.

environments, different results were reached. I read it as a kind of choice. I read it as if I were observing a scene, separate from the action, and the prelude for an action or decision I needed to make. I need to pick an environment. In other words, where shall I be when the seeds are scattered, on the rocks, on the road or on good soil. I read it initially with my modern worldview firmly entrenched.

Reaching the end of this phase of the journey, I now recognize that the overall meaning of any spiritual journey is to live experiences both internal and external but also to live experiences and grow by resting deeper – resting within More. The process all starts in your head! The intellect, cognitive reasoning or watching observing is the head work, that we have all been rightfully trained to do. To observe, think analyse, and respond with seriousness. Once we grow past our head space and sink into the part of self, our heart spaces - More greets us with delight, like chocolates, snowflakes, or twinkling lights.

I now know that Logion 9 is not a series of choices – that my worldview as trained me to do – but a framework for a process. And in this case, the process of the spiritual journey that is to find More within *The Gospel of Thomas*.

The sower is More. Or it is 'Unknown' from the Valentinian cosmology. It is the beginning and the end with no starting point. Jesus said, the sower went out with a handful of seed. This is a beginning, in which one holds knowledge. As in the explorations of horizons, some of the seeds fell on the road – the roads in Rome, with its noise and poverty, dirt and despair. The birds came together and gathered up the seeds – like the birds at St. Paul's Cathedral – the birds in the form of Christians gathered up the seeds to use them as a way to administer to the social ills of the time. As we discussed, the degree to which a community has access to power directs their lived experiences. Therefore, the seeds represent social, political and economic power that were gathered by the Christian community as experienced faith. It was the seeds that

lent power to action and participation within the community to struggle against societal structures. But the seeds also represent something deeper, they represent the power of practice and tradition within the community – to seek faith in salvation, seek insight, knowledge or gnosis. The road represents the Back of the Text – the beginning of a journey – where it is acknowledged.

Jesus also said that the sower scattered seeds which fell on rocks and did not attach to the ground with roots and did not produce ears. These seeds did not produce ears of corn nor ears of those who can hear. The rocks represent the hard hearted – the horizon of The Text itself – the ongoing intellectual debates, arguments, and analysis which sets the text in a historical context. Ironically one could argue that hard heartedness is symptomatic of fear. In other words, the period to be troubled, for the concepts and beliefs scholars recognized are being questioned. But having a hardness to oneself on the outside also indicates that there is a softness inside. Like a good caramel chocolate, the softness inside represents an innocence and eagerness. It is to become astonished. As each new scholar offers an analysis, the opportunity for growth and wonder emerged. Imagine the wonder and excitement Gilles Quispel experienced in 1955, when he went to the Coptic Museum in Cairo and realized that one of the texts of Codex II was *The Gospel of Thomas*. It must have been breathtaking. Imagine the enthusiasm within the group known as the Jesus seminar when they thought they had found another source to explore the historical Jesus in *Thomas*. Imagine the thrill of trying to link Q with *Thomas*. The wonder of imagining that the theory of Q may be realized. Can we argue that these people did not produce ears of corn – I suggest yes, but they did produce something else, a place to walk. A section of the path for the journey to continue, for without these people and their hard work, one may not reach the good soil.

Jesus also said that the sower scattered seeds on thorns. These seeds were lost, for the thorns choked to their growth, and the worms ate them. The thorns represent The Front of the Text – those caught in the prickly path to individualized success. As we discussed, the modern context is shaped by the self as an individual, and that everything we do, or touch has been commodified into a product for sale. Including religion and the spiritual journey.

Within any garden, plants grow. The expertise of the garden lies with the knowledge of which plants to cultivate and which to weed out to create the desired garden. Modern individuals approach the world from a self-centre, surrounded by thoughts analysis, critiques, capital – all indicative of thorns which weed out the desired plants. The gardener – as an individual – still works his garden through experience. If he doesn't take heed of the knowledge by which the experiences offer – he will end up with thorns.

The worms represent the commodification process, the exchange that the worm makes within the soil to exist, eating seeds and other nutrients. The worms are reductionists, reducing the soil to the lowest common denominator in the garden - thorns – noise, aggression, and singleness – which chokes out all the other plants – other thoughts, ideas, voices.

That said, worms also till the soil, slithering through it not only devouring the good but the bad. Creating space for sunlight to reach. Adding its own kind of fertilizer. Jesus said that the sower scattered seeds on good soil and it produced good fruit. Sweet, supple, vitamin filled nourishment. The good soil, full of ideas and perspectives produced sweetness and items which sustain life. He also said that it bore fruit 60 per measure and 120 per measure. Each seed held a measure, just as each experience holds knowledge. There are not good seeds and great seeds, just as there is not good knowledge and great knowledge. All knowledge is experiential. Therefore, all seeds are

experiential – equal and good – regardless of the outcome. The good soil represents our fusion of the horizons – I have reached the place on the journey where I am past the rocks and the thorns and digging deep into the good soil. I am planting seeds and watching them bear fruit. I am taking the text and extracting the seeds for growth. I am taking the logion to heart – planting them deep within me and allowing the birth of all kinds of different kinds of fruit – all sweet, supple, equal, and good.

The sower isn't finished scattering seeds – he never is. But for me, I will plant my feet in the good soil and cultivate the ground – with thoughts, words and metaphors. I will continue to read *Thomas*. There are 114 sayings - this journey is vast and deep. And of course, I would be remiss not to mention that I started this project looking for a great love story between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. I have yet to find that particular story, but I did find a love story, a deep love that is not between two people, but about living.

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