

What Is the Gospel of Thomas?

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Please note: *This document discusses the Gospel of Thomas as it was discovered within the Nag Hammadi library. It does not address the Infancy Gospel of Thomas nor the Acts of Thomas, which are unrelated documents.*

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The Gospel of Thomas: Is It an Authentic Account of Jesus' Life?

By Edgar Foster

This first essay is too brief to decisively or comprehensively answer the question raised in the title of this essay. Therefore, a few basic facts about the Gospel of Thomas (GThom) will be provided before exploring its features and how it compares with the canonical Gospels.

The Gospel of Thomas appears to have been originally written in Greek, but it survived in Coptic. It purportedly contains “secret words” spoken by Jesus to his disciple Thomas (Roukema 140). Some have dated it to 50–70 CE (Roukema 142). Certain scholars have regarded the Gospel of Thomas as the most significant text contained in the Nag Hammadi Library because of the important role it plays in New Testament (NT) studies (Helmbold 55). On the other hand, some writers have called it “a fifth gospel,” though Helmbold thinks that phrase is “misleading” (ibid.). In any event, while the number of logia (“sayings”) in GThom varies based on scholar boundary preference, it seems safe to say that there are at least 114 logia that comprise this ancient document (Roukema 140).

Because the Gospel of Thomas contains numerous logia, narrative is conspicuously absent from the work. Moreover, it seems that GThom at times follows the order of synoptic sayings, but now and again “perversely” inverts the order in the synoptics (Helmbold 57). Additionally, the “Passion Week of Christ’s Life,” which the canonical Gospels emphasize, is “entirely omitted in the Gospel of Thomas” (ibid.). The stress in GThom does not appear to be on biography; the document is concerned with sapiential logia attributed to Jesus. Other aporetic omissions in the GThom include a lack of emphasis on Jesus’ role as redeemer and revealer of God the Father (ibid.).¹ The synoptic Gospels, however, point to Jesus as the one who preeminently reveals the Father.

Finally, the Gospel of Thomas can be categorized in five ways: (1) Parables, of which there may be 24 contained in the Gospel; (2) Beatitudes. For example, see Logion 54, 68, 69a–b; (3) Woes. Compare Logion 102, 112; (4) Programmatic Sayings that tell us about the purpose of Jesus’ ministry. Consider Logion 1, 10; (5) Dialogue, Logion 6, 21, 114.

Are there specific examples of sayings in the Gospel of Thomas that either correlate with or do not harmonize with Jesus’ words in the canonical Scriptures?

The Gospel of Thomas seems to resemble Matthew’s Gospel in some ways. GThom apparently reproduces every Matthean parable of the kingdom (Mt 13), but interprets each illustration or parable differently (Frend 145).

The way to enter God’s kingdom (according to GThom) is through asceticism and theoretical contemplation (ibid. 146). What Frend calls “severe encratism” or asceticism

¹ Compare Mt 11:27; 20:28; Jn 1:18.

manifestly characterizes GThom (ibid. 146). Regardless of its origin, such encratism is reminiscent of Qumran. It evidently did not originate with the Jesus portrayed in John or the synoptic Gospels because the canonical Gospels indicate that Christ drank wine and enjoyed wedding celebrations as well as fine meals.²

In conclusion, we would like to quote some logia from GThom that illustrate the differences between the so-called fifth gospel and the canonical accounts of Jesus' life:

Logion 8: And he said, "The person is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish. Anyone here with two good ears had better listen!" Compare Mt 13:47–50.

Logion 9: Jesus said, "Look, the sower went out, took a handful (of seeds), and scattered (them). Some fell on the road, and the birds came and gathered them. Others fell on rock, and they didn't take root in the soil and didn't produce heads of grain. Others fell on thorns, and they choked the seeds and worms ate them. And others fell on good soil, and it produced a good crop: it yielded sixty per measure and one hundred twenty per measure." (Compare Mt 13:18–23.)

Logion 12: The disciples said to Jesus, "We know that you are going to leave us. Who will be our leader?" Jesus said to them, "No matter where you are you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being." (Compare Mt 23:10–12.)

Logion 13: Jesus said, "I am not your teacher. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended." And he took him, and withdrew, and spoke three sayings to him. When Thomas came back to his friends they asked him, "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas said to them, "If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you." (Compare Jn 13:13, 14; 14:26, 27; & contrast Mt 23:6, 7).

GThom implies that the disciples of Christ existed in heaven before coming to earth (Roukema 141). "Secret knowledge" is also emphasized in GThom (Ibid).

² See Mt 11:16–19; Jn 2:1–11.

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Significance or Non-significance of Apocryphal Writings such as the Gospel of Thomas

By Joe Schaffer

Previous to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library in the mid-twentieth century, there were a few known copies of the Gospel of Thomas (GThom) in Greek that were bedeviled by lacunae. Following the Nag Hammadi discovery, a complete Coptic form of the Gospel of Thomas was discovered. This sage-like non-Gospel is a series of “secret sayings”³ of a pseudo-Jesus to his disciples. There are some direct discrepancies between such writings and canonic scripture. For example, the Kingdom of God that is presented in GThom differs greatly from the Kingdom of God that is presented in canonic scripture.

Note this excerpt from Elaine Pagels work entitled, “The Origin of Satan”:

According to Mark, the world is about to undergo cataclysmic transformation: Jesus predicts strife, war, conflict, and suffering, followed by a world-shattering event, the coming of the Kingdom of God (3:1–37).

But in the *Gospel of Thomas* the “kingdom of God” is not an event expected to happen in history, nor is it a “place.” The author of Thomas seems to ridicule such views: Jesus said, “If those who lead you say to you, ‘Lord, 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.” (NHC II.32.19–24)⁴

Then on the next page she also states:

According to the *Gospel of Thomas*, then, the kingdom of God symbolizes a state of transformed consciousness. One enters that kingdom when one attains self-knowledge.

Her view is not isolated, as noted in the book, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, by Grant and Freedman:

The kingdom is not in heaven (i.e., in the sky), nor is it in the sea. It has no specific location. . . . According to Saying 111, the kingdom “is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.” It should be noted that Thomas does not speak of “the kingdom of God.” Indeed, “God” is only mentioned in Saying 97, where he is evidently subordinated to Jesus.”⁵

³ Gospel of Thomas Prologue.

⁴ P. 70, Random House, 1995.

⁵ P. 121, Barnes & Noble, 1993.

Another source, *The Gnostic Gospel of Saint Thomas*, by Tau Malachi, interprets this GThom passage with: “In transforming yourself, you transform the world in which you exist. Do you want to change the world? You are the world, and the world is you. If you want to change the world, make a change in your own consciousness.”⁶

This secretly gained knowledge is the basis of most forms of Gnosticism, no matter its form, whether Kabbalism, Zoroastrianism, or Christian syncretism.

As a guide for faith, it is difficult to extract useful clarity from apocryphal writings such as GThom, which appear to be fairly benign sayings, albeit at odds with canonical Scripture, and fosters statements similar to Kabbalists, Manichaen evangelizers, and magic-practicing Coptic “Christians.” The intellectual promises held out by Gnostic methods are fallacious, impractical, and devoid of spiritual calories (not life-improving but merely existing to titillate the sense of having filled one’s spiritual need). As the apostle Paul pointed out under inspiration, we must bring “every thought into captivity to make it subject to Christ.”⁷ But we cannot do this by relying on internal knowledge. It can only be accomplished by the strength of God and his assigned King, Jesus Christ,⁸ and the daily intake of healthy guidance found only in his Word.⁹

Gnostic concepts, despite their unthreatening appearance, if followed to their logical conclusion can be morally and spiritually dangerous. Not only would rendering the Kingdom of God into a mere internalization preclude that Kingdom from being a real government, it would also by default conclude that religion itself would be without structure, without organization, and devoid of boundaries.¹⁰

As a modern-day example, many of the high-ranking leaders of the Nazi regime held neo-Gnostic, even Satanic, ideals. They were also influenced by secret orders and by a man named Aleister Crowley, a writer of many Gnostic and magical books. He is credited with reintroducing the Gnostic Mass, which (if performed “successfully”) involves partial nudity, fornication, and the drinking of semen and menstrual blood.¹¹

The Nag Hammadi library cannot be credited with influencing the Nazi party, because the library was discovered in 1945, and only began to gain scholarly attention a few years

⁶ P. 9, Llewellyn Publications, 2004.

⁷ 2 Corinthians 10:5.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 12:10.

⁹ John 17:17; Ephesians 1:13.

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 3:5, note also 1Corinthians 4:7.

¹¹ Aleister Crowley in his later years suffered from poor health, and kept a talisman he called Segelah “for finding a great treasure.” Segelah was smeared with dried semen and menstrual blood. In his book, *Secrets of the German Sex Magicians*, he describes the making of elixirs from such body fluids. Other practices included sadism and bestiality, including the beheading of a goat while it was sexually violating a ‘scarlet woman,’ a euphemism for a woman during a menstruation cycle. Many have attempted to discredit descriptions of similar practices by early Christian writers, such as described by Origin and Augustine, but modern depravities would indicate that at least some individuals would have been willing and would have been willing to stoop to such a low moral decay. Ancient papyri discoveries, such as “The Coptic Hoard of Spells from the University of Michigan,” support that the ancient condemnations were accurate.

after WW II. However, the Greek fragments P.Oxy. 654, 1, 655 of the Gospel of Thomas were already known. It would be dishonest to deny that the Nazi party attempted to fulfill their own practical attempt to “change the world.” Crowley was a British national, and partly due to this and other familial and political and economic connections to England, Hitler actually included the expected aid of Great Britain as part of his master plan to rule the world. Even twenty months after the war began, and Germany found itself as an enemy of Britain, Hitler’s Deputy Rudolf Hess was so strongly convinced that he could still develop a peace plan with England that he parachuted into Scotland, after which he was ‘captured.’ Hess failed to negotiate any peace, and then suffered a temporary emotional breakdown. As history now records, the Nazi attempt at changing the world toward their views also failed.¹²

This relatively recent political history strongly asserts that this GThom ideology of self-improvement by a “kingdom within” is a fallacy. Even at the individual level this philosophy fails. How many poor and under-classed citizens would prefer that this self-help ideology would be true? For if it were true, then in time everyone would be comfortable and well fed, and the United Nations’ efforts to eliminate poverty by 2015 would be unnecessary. Canonic Holy Scripture provides the best example of the failure of this “kingdom within” misconception. When Jesus cured people, it was not from within that they were cured, but the cures emanated through Jesus, the authorized future king of God’s Kingdom government.¹³ Self-awareness as salvation is tantamount to medical faith healing, which empirically fails.

It is important to realize that Aleister Crowley began the push for Gnosticism and sex magic¹⁴ in the early 1900’s. The Greek fragments of GThom were known, and the general concepts of Gnostic self-knowledge/healing/success had been carried down through the ages by the underground of society. Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim forces attempted to suppress the ideologies, but they persisted through time, such that in the Introduction on page IX of an early twentieth-century Masonite book entitled *Who Is The King Of Glory?* the claim is made that “Christianity was but a poor and crippled orphan, appearing—after the third century—without evidence of its true parentage and sadly belying in its outward form the semblance of its real ancestral lineage.”

What a contrast this manufactured projection of early Christianity is, as being confused and identity-seeking, when compared to scriptural passages, such as Acts 4:12 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 15:14, that strongly indicate a group of people who clearly knew

¹² Nazi justification for change was also based upon a Nietzsche-Keirkegaard philosophical blend, which was construed as support toward their ideals. It would seem that neither the Nazi party nor Crowley heeded Crowley’s own advice, “Unless you know what your true will is, you may be devoting the most laudable energies to destroying yourself.” (Commentary on Liber AL vel Legis 1.35) According to Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14, all men, whether a practicing Christian or not, should have the will to serve Jehovah; all else will indeed end in failure. See Psalm 127:1.

¹³ Luke 1:49; 5:17.

¹⁴ It would be pointless and immature to use the ‘k.’

their identity, their commission, and their hierarchical leadership structure that reached up to their High Priest in heaven.¹⁵

The manufactured view of history is as described in the publication *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, by Jeffrey Russell: “Scholastic influence upon witchcraft has been greatly exaggerated. The witch ideas were evolved in popular culture and only afterward were picked up by intellectuals. The idea that intellectuals are always ahead of popular culture is one of the more pervasive, and less persuasive, self-delusions of the intelligensia.”¹⁶ Yes, the old falsehoods are merely intellectualized back into popularity, while the driving forces are actually fascination with ancient mysticism.

It is unlikely a mistake to indicate a possible link to witchcraft with the popularity of writings such as GThom. Not only do many modern self-proclaimed Gnostics indulge in magic, so did some ancients. A Coptic “Christian” magic-spell fragment, Ianda 14, used a verbal montage of Matthew 6:9–13 and Psalm 91:13 to protect the wearer of an amulet from demons and diseases. Other similar spells and incantations were to protect these “magic-practicing Christians” from diseases, or to cast spells to make a woman pregnant, fall in love, have success in business ventures, and other of lifes events. Gthom was found in the same region as writings of Christian magic and Manichean Psalms in Coptic.

In the second century there began a syncretic and evangelistic faith known as Manichaeism that attempted to compete with Christianity. Many of the doctrines and songs from this Zoroastrian/Judean/Christian faith were translated into Coptic, Greek, and other other languages . Mani, the founder of the religion, had a student who went by the name of Thomas; one of his writings even being called the “Songs of Thomas.” There is no certainty, but it would not be a stretch to suggest a study to determine whether this Thomas was the writer of GThom. Many of his songs cite Jesus, one of which calls him the “cane of the kingdom,” “the gate of the land of light,” and says that “the mind becomes the perfect church.”¹⁷ An alternative possibility is that an early repository of Christian thought was corrupted by copyists over time until it suffered Gnostic-like accretions such as those discovered in the NHL.¹⁸

In short, outside of canonic Scripture, the authorities of the textual sources are most likely untraceable, circumstantial at best, and if accepted religiously could unwittingly lead to dangerous compromises of the pure understanding of truth.¹⁹ There is no end of the confusing morass of false ideas that attempt to crowd attention for feeding one’s faith. A person cannot refute the many varieties of false ideas on a 1:1 ratio, as the father of the false light²⁰ has generated as many falsehoods as can be imagined during his thousands of years in corruption. It is by focusing on clear and simple canonic truth that falsehoods can

¹⁵ Hebrews 3:1, note also Titus 3:10; 2Peter 2:1.

¹⁶ P. 142, Cornell University, 1972.

¹⁷ The Wanderer Song.

¹⁸ Biblical Archaeology Society, “Lost Christianities” Seminar, Sept. 9, 2005, Chicago, Ill., “The Road Not Taken: The Mystical Gospel of Thomas,” Professor April DeConick, Wesleyan University.

¹⁹ 1 John 3:3.

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:14.

be refuted, else we would be inundated by an avalanche of concepts and attempts at dissuading a person from clinging to the single truth, as determined by the one who made all truth.

The fundamental differences of doctrine between apocryphal writings such as GThom compared with Scripture canon dictates inferences for Gnostics, Christendom, and Jehovah's servants. Even singular subjects such as "the Kingdom of God" are diametrically opposed or alien between these groups.

Because there is no single authority for Gnostic doctrinal interpretation, the impact of this opposition of concepts and facts will have varying impact. Even the scope of what is "Gnosis" is difficult to define amidst the myriad claims and accusations of who is or what makes a Gnostic. However, given that canonic Scriptural definitions, the building blocks of holding to one particular and definable faith, are clearly exclusive toward syncretism, a Gnostic would of necessity find the Biblical scope of understanding objectionable.²¹ One simply cannot indulge in the division-causing secret knowledge of a "kingdom within" while at the same time be in humble submission to the interpretation of faith by a Kingdom Government in heaven with its earthly tentacles in a singularly structured religion.

For Christianity in general, there is some moral abhorrence to the Gnostic interpretations of apocryphal writings, but the opposition is largely based on the challenges to the authority of the particular church, as having an organized faith, and the right to determine what is Scripture. Because so many sects of Christianity do not adhere strictly to the Scriptures, the rejection of apocryphal writings such as found in the Nag Hammadi library will vary. Some groups permit tradition to rule over Holy Writ; others allow theories of science and philosophy to quash Scriptural doctrine. If Gnostic thought were to permeate, it would simply be just another sect, a variation of a kind.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not suffer from doubts of identity, thus they would have both the strongest rejection of any claims and interpretations of apocryphal writings such as are found within the NHL, but also the least reaction.²² Because it is their commission to teach Bible doctrine to others, the presentation of what the Scriptures state with accuracy will be useful for establishing a unity of understanding.²³ It is through the clear presentation of Bible truths that a firm refutation for apocryphal claims is supported. Such refutation does not require a direct challenge to apocrypha, but is a side effect of thorough study, just as farmer would come to know which pests produce the greatest risk for his crop, not by studying pests, but by studying his crop and tracing any damage back to the pest. In that, reactions to such Gnostic writings might range from mere acknowledgment that attempts to corrupt a Christians faith is nothing new, to complete ignorance that such unimportant ancient texts even exist.

²¹ 2 Corinthians 6:14.

²² John 10:5.

²³ Matthew 28:19, 20; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

A Brief Historical Context of the Nag Hammadi Contents

By Joe Schaffer

Professor Gilles Quispel, Historian of Religion at Utrecht, Netherlands, found the erroneously categorized Gospel by a pseudo-Thomas in the antiquities market. The Jung Foundation of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, which held this codex as part of its Gnostic text collection²⁴ for proto-depth psychology and psychological interpretation,²⁵ authorized the purchase. That the pseudo-Gospel itself lays claim to be logia from Jesus, and that it was the first book of the Nag Hammadi Library (NHL) to be publicly published as an alternative to historical Christian doctrine served to popularize this writing.

The original textual sources of the Nag Hammadi (Naj' Hammádi) Library were separately conceived writings from various sources and languages; it is a collection of translations of other texts into a near Sub-Akhmimic form of Coptic with the contents ranging from religious sageness to philosophies. It appears to be a planned, albeit rushed, compilation, and what contents remain were part of three separately bound codices. What influenced the collection of this library cannot be determined with any absolute certainty because the scribe is not identified and any witnesses have been long dead. The environment of the time period can be described, which could provide a basis for understanding what Jinn documents were unburied and released from the stone jar in the Egyptian desert in 1945 by a man named Muhammad 'Alí al-Sammán,²⁷ who with his crew were searching for sabahk, a soil useful for fertilizer.²⁸

The codices were written in a Sub-Akhmimic, which was a local dialect of short usage, and appear to have been written before or soon after the end of the third century²⁹ based upon this form of Coptic.³⁰ The handwriting seems to indicate that there were at least three separate scribes who wrote parts of the library.³¹ Outside of the Nag Hammadi text, Sub-Akhmimic exists in a manuscript of the Gospel of John (John 2:12–20:20; symbol ac2 or ach2), in translated letters from Mani (founder of Manicheaism in Persia³²), and letters written between family members consisting of a father, wife, and two sons, which offered Manichaean exhortations of faith.³³

²⁴ *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2002.05.01, by Dermot Moran, University College Dublin.

²⁵ *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1990, "Gnosticism and the Gnostic Jesus," Part I.

²⁷ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/pagels.html>. [Accessed Nov. 26, 2003.]

²⁸ <http://www.Gnosis.org/naghamm/nhlintero.html>, "Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library." [Accessed Nov. 26, 2003.]

²⁹ *International Association For Coptic Studies*, Newsletter Bulletin D'Information Nr. 32, November 1993.

³⁰ "Coptic language," *Encyclopædia Britannica* from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=26637>. [Accessed May 18, 2003.]

³¹ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/gthomas/message/4265>. [Accessed Nov. 5, 2003.]

³² Paper by Paul Chandler Dilly, "Of Letters by Mani and Paraphrases by Shem", 2002.

³³ *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2002.05.01, by Dermot Moran, University College Dublin.

The earliest known evidence of the codex as a compilation method is described in a work published between 86 and 89 C.E.³⁴ Codices of the second century are described by one source as: “words of ‘sheets’ to indicate each turn around the axis (folio).”³⁵ It was not until later in history that codex pages were bound more tightly at one end and covered with vellum or parchment. Use of the codex gained popularity among early Christians but expanded most swiftly during the fourth century.³⁶ Hence the style of the NHL codex would place it sometime in the late third or early fourth century for its earliest possible dating.

In the first century, a man named Simon Magus is described as being called someone “who is Great.”³⁷ When the Christian use of the Scriptures was publicly demonstrated as more powerful than his magic, Simon Magus did not demonstrate a hatred for things condemned by Jehovah.³⁸ According to historical consensus, this allowed for his eventual apostasy from what he had been taught by Philip and the apostle Peter.³⁹ The teachings that stemmed from this, which smacked of Cabalistic numerology and Greek Gnostic Demiurges, were synchronized with immature Christian thought.⁴⁰ He presented Jehovah as an errant Demiurge who was “unaware of the true godly power above him,”⁴¹ and he desired to hold “apostolic” influence over the Christian flock⁴² in his vengeful attempt to destroy Christian truths.⁴³ Similar teachings had an influence on Valentinus⁴⁴ and other early so-called Christians who heavily promoted teachings vaguely similar to those of Simon Magus. This set the standard as to future priori teachings, which would promote privileged “Gnosis”⁴⁵ over the more clear, available, and humble canonical presentation of “Gnosis.” Valentinus, who taught at the Didaskalia in Alexandria until he left for Rome in 140 C.E.,⁴⁶ was ‘skilled at presenting errant and blasphemous teachings while hiding its “naked deformity”⁴⁷ from those who would receive his teachings.’ These doctrines held

³⁴ fr.encyclopedia.yahoo.com/articles/ni/ni_551_po.html. [Accessed Nov. 5, 2003.]

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 354, subject “Books”, section “Codex”, box on bottom of second column.

³⁷ Acts 8:9, 10.

³⁸ Acts 8:21–24. It is significant in verse 24 that Simon Magus did not repent, but merely requested supplication that the prophetic statements not be fulfilled, and that there is no evidence that the disciples lent support to his request.

³⁹ Arnobius, *Disputationum Adversus Gentes*, Book II, Chapter 12 {14–16}; Iranaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book II, Preface.

⁴⁰ *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1990 issue, “Gnosticism and the Gnostic Jesus,” Part I; 2 Peter 3:16.

⁴¹ Iranaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book II, Chapter IX, “There is But One Creator of The World.”

⁴² *A Global History of Christians*, Spikard/Cragg, p. 62, “Christian Intellectuals.”

⁴³ Tertullian, chapter XXXIV, “These Vagaries Stimulated Some Profane Corruptions of Christianity.”

⁴⁴ *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1990, “Gnosticism and the Gnostic Jesus,” Part I.

⁴⁵ Valentinus’ disciples taught that only they had a knowledge that would spring up within themselves as a result of having a “germ of superior excellence.” *The Stromata*, Book II, Chapter III.

⁴⁶ Edwin M. Yamauchi, “The Gnostics” in *A History of Christianity*, Lion Publishing 1977, p. 100, “Gnostic Leaders.”

⁴⁷ Iranaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book I, Preface.

that Monogenes (a.k.a. the “ineffable” pseudo-Jehovah) made the Logos⁴⁸ and Zoe, the progenerative mate (wife, or female half) of the Logos.⁴⁹ Several Valentinian writings were among those physically bound within the NHL.⁵⁰

Later, in 272 C.E., followers of Mani, a Zoroastrian syncretic sect, were scattered due to persecution in Persia. As these traveled, they argued against the “Old Testament” as being delivered from an evil demiurgic god in favor of the Christian “New Testament,” along with the Psalms of Mani. They claimed to offer a better, more loving, less angry God.⁵¹ Some followers in Egypt became prolific translators of the Manichaean doctrine in order to aid their proselytizing activities. Because the canon of the Christian Greek Scriptures had been well established by 200 C.E., Mani’s Paraclete could only attempt to augment the Scriptures with “new knowledge,” similar to the metaphysical visitor with a man named Muhammed ibn Abdullah in Arabia some four centuries later. Manicheism flourished in the Fayyum district of Egypt, complete with monasteries.

Around 305 C.E., the illiterate “Anthony of the Desert” was supposedly establishing the first orthodox “Christian” monastery in Egypt. In reviewing his life, however, this claim is most likely anachronistic, because he was more desirous of hermitage; his associates simply sought him out when he would hide in the desert.⁵² In 325 C.E., Pachomius and his sister were Christian converts who had established the first monastic and nunnery orders known to Christendom, in the upper Thebais region. These two are the original successful promoters of “Christian” monasticism, which was patterned strikingly similar to the Manichaean style. The ascetic lifestyle in these “Christianized” monasteries, which often included vows of silence, would have required little effort to hide one’s personal beliefs that were influenced by external sources, such as reading material.⁵³

During the mid-fourth century, rivalry between orthodox Christianity and Manichaeism grew so that by the end of the fourth century, adherents of Manicheism had lost all human rights in the now “Christianized” Roman Empire. Manichaean proselytization writings were purportedly offered to enlighten any and all with whom roving paired and celibate Manichaean Abbas came into contact. In effect however, such

⁴⁸ Valentinus taught the spirit part of Christ as a separate entity from the man Jesus

⁴⁹ Iranaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book I, Chapter I, “Absurd Ideas of the Disciples of Valentinus.”

⁵⁰ Edwin M. Yamauchi, “The Gnostics” in *A History of Christianity*, section on “New Evidence about the Gnostics”, Lion Publishing 1977, p. 97.

⁵¹ *The Watchtower*, Sept. 1, 1954, p. 529, par. 5. “Recognizing the Theocratic Organization for Life.”

⁵² W. Ward Gasque, “The Challenge to Faith” in *A History of Christianity*, section on “The North African Christians”, Lion Publishing 1977, p. 95.

⁵³ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, translated by Benedicta Ward, SLG, Cisterian Publications Inc. Revised Edition, 1984, p. XXV of the Forward, “The Place of Asceticism”; compare with Proverbs 18:1 and 1 Corinthians 15:33.

teachings became both a competitive effort with Christianity, and also as means of memetic infiltration into the Christian ranks.⁵⁴

It is possible, though highly unlikely, that Simon Magus himself, or one of his disciples, wrote the Gospel of Thomas (assuming that GThom was originally written in its discovered Greek form). However, being contemporary with the apostles would not be a prescription for acceptance as canonical Scripture.⁵⁵ If that were so, then Jesus would have had no reason to refute errant teachings of his day.⁵⁶ Christians are offered, among others examination methods, two simple tests for measuring the value of proposed influences on doctrine:

1. Testing the fruitage, or results, against godly standards.⁵⁷
2. Verifying against recorded sanctified history and standards.⁵⁸

Simon Magus claimed God-like sacred and mystic power.⁵⁹ Valentinus received his secret insights from a guardian angel,⁶⁰ and he taught marriage as a defilement.⁶¹ Mani gained privileged insight from a divine twin,⁶² and taught that procreation entrapped divine beings in the physical world.⁶³ These elitist teachings “all draw water from the same well” and “share an emphasis on esoteric teaching, the hidden divinity of humanity, and contact with nonmaterial higher beings called Masters or Adepts.”⁶⁴ They provide no measurable basis to their claims, and instead conflict with canonical Scripture, as compared with the cautions that follow.⁶⁵

On the subject of apparent divine interjection:

Galatians 1:8: “Even if we or an angel out of heaven were to declare to you as good news something beyond what we declared to you as good news, let him be accursed.”

On the subject of marriage:

⁵⁴ *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, by Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, pp. 20–23, section on “Ethics.” It should also be noted that monasteries in Phbow and Tabennessi would have had ready access to the site where the NHL had been buried.

⁵⁵ 1 John 4:1.

⁵⁶ Matthew 3:7.

⁵⁷ Deuteronomy 18:21, 22; Matthew 7:20.

⁵⁸ Nehemiah 8:14; Acts 17:11.

⁵⁹ “The Refutation of All Heresies,” by Hyppolytus of Rome, Book VI, chapter II, “Simon Magus.”

⁶⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*.

⁶¹ Gospel of Peter, on the “mystery of marriage.”

⁶² Gillian Clark, *Confessions*, Cambridge Latin Edition, Introduction to Books I–IV; also the quotation of the Kephalaia in *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, pp. 2–3, “Mani and Manichaeism.”

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1990, “Gnosticism and the Gnostic Jesus”, Part I.

⁶⁵ All cited scriptures are from the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* unless otherwise noted.

First Timothy 4:1, 3: “In later periods of time some will fall away from the faith . . . forbidding to marry.”

On the subject of procreation:

Psalm 127:3: “Sons are an inheritance from Jehovah; the fruitage of the belly is a reward.” (See also Proverbs 13:22a.)

A dishonest doctrine that promotes the seeking of salvation within oneself, no matter how appealing, provides an elation that lifts a person beyond wholesome self-esteem, and cannot lead to a healthy outcome. The promotion of narcissism and false expectations of entitlement can not only end painfully, but it is also a meme that runs counter to the well-being of both the group and the individual.

In 367 C.E., Athanasius released a doctrine now known as “The Canon of Athanasius,” which was distributed and read at every Christian congregation of the region. It was original, not in the listing of canonic Scripture, for by this time the canon had been established for several hundred years. This publication was the first to list with legal and sanctionable⁶⁶ authority which publications were accepted as canon, and which were to be left out. Any not discussed would have been either little known or considered as fringe, unimportant, or as unrelated writings. The Trinitarian-believing city overseer of Alexandria exercised this edict in a manner that, if not considered excessive, was at least overtly firm. This edict was a direct response to the overwhelming quantity and quality of pseudo-gospels and writings. Writings such as those found in the Nag Hammadi library are viewed by some scholars as the ancient equivalent of “dime store novels” of religious writings.⁶⁷ Others would view them as religious pornography.⁶⁸ It would most likely have been during such an adverse time that the three codices would have been buried.⁶⁹ This edict was appropriate in that most of the writings that were delisted by Athanasius promoted ideology over canonical accuracy.⁷⁰ It is ironic, however, that the condemning edict had been composed by a person who was himself already practicing a form of religious syncretism.

⁶⁶ The skeleton that was found with the NHL scrolls may lend credence that such sanctions were carried out. Unfortunately these remains were not collected and are now lost. Alternatively, the Coptic writings on the cave walls and the carved entrance in which the scrolls and remains were found may be indicative of a respected ceremonial burial.

⁶⁷ Dr. Marvin Meyer, author of *The Gnostic Bible*, as quoted in the documentary “Banned From The Bible,” ©2003 Filmrods, Inc. for The History Channel.

⁶⁸ 2 Corinthians 11:2–4.

⁶⁹ Ibid. “It is very likely that some of the monks near Nag Hammadi heard the pious, and powerful, and authoritative words of Bishop Athanasius. And they heard him say that there were some books they should not read. And they went to their library, and felt they had to dispose of these books. But they loved these books. They couldn’t throw them in the Nile, they couldn’t burn them, and so they stuffed them in to a big jar, put a top on the jar, and buried the jar.”

⁷⁰ Ibid. The quotation, however, is from V. Rev Fr. Bakra: “I don’t think people were looking for necessarily historical accuracy.”

How Do the Teachings in the Gospel of Thomas Correlate with Bible Canon?

By Joe Schaffer

Other sections of this paper have briefly discussed the failure of the Gospel of Thomas to align with Bible canon. It would seem appropriate to provide some examples as to how disparate the teachings of the Gospel of Thomas are. It is hoped that future publications will expand this effort for the Nag Hammadi writings.

In this section, the attempt will be made to provide a method of analysis that will reduce subjective interpretation when determining and comparing doctrine.

This can best be explained by example, and by stepping through the process.

Many forms of religion and philosophy make use of the illustrative view that life is a journey, a path toward some form of goal or end. A physical path of this sort entails following explicit directions to a desired destination. The examples that follow will make use of this comparison.

If we find that Guide A promises good results, but so do Guides B and C, then does it really matter which directions are followed, because, after all, there are many possible paths to follow in order to arrive at the same location? We will soon see that reliable information is necessary, not merely the existence of numerous potential paths. In this instance, a map is provided so that the reader may follow along from an understanding that would be similar to the insight of a higher intelligence, or a god. We will be able to see the progress of three different individuals following three separate paths, and determine their outcome.

For simplicity of following their path during this mental exercise, the devotees must reach an intersection before checking instructions for the next direction. We will assume they follow through faithfully and do not assume their own path, else we would have to add a fourth, fifth, and possibly sixth or more sets of Guides to follow, undermining our attempt at comprehending the results with simplicity.

A map is a two-dimensional reference to a three-dimensional domain. In the case of those seeking divine guidance in life, we are in a three-dimensional domain seeking direction in a fourth dimension. Hence our lack of a map in that realm, and the reason humans need to follow divine directions. (Ephesians 3:18) Thus, imagine the faithful adherents we are watching do not have access to our map on page 19.

We are given instructions from the Guides as follows:

A	B	C
North	North	North
Straight	Right	Left
Right	Straight	Left
Left	Straight	Left
Right	Straight	Left
Right	Left	Right
Left	Straight	Left
Right	Straight	Left
Right	Straight	Left
Right	Straight	Left

Subjectivity is reduced; well-defined coordinates can be translated into numeric values:

	A	B	C
Start Direction North= 1; East= 0; West= -1	1	1	1
1st intersection Right= 1; Straight= 0; Left= -1	0	1	-1
2nd intersection Straight= 1; Right= 0; Left= -1	0	1	-1
3rd intersection Straight= 1; Right= 0; Left= -1	-1	1	1
4th intersection Straight= 1; Right= 0; Left= -1	0	1	-1
5th intersection Left= 1; Straight= 0; Right= -1	-1	1	1
6th intersection Straight= 1; Right= 0; Left= -1	-1	1	-1
7th intersection Straight= 1; Right= 0; Left= -1	0	1	-1
8th intersection Straight= 1; Right= 0; Left= -1	0	1	-1
9th intersection Straight= 1; Right= 0; Left= -1	-1	1	-1

Values at each intersection will be normalized to a single Guide so as to reduce chart clutter. In this case, B is the reference standard. Which one is chosen as the standard is immaterial to the results other than formatting.

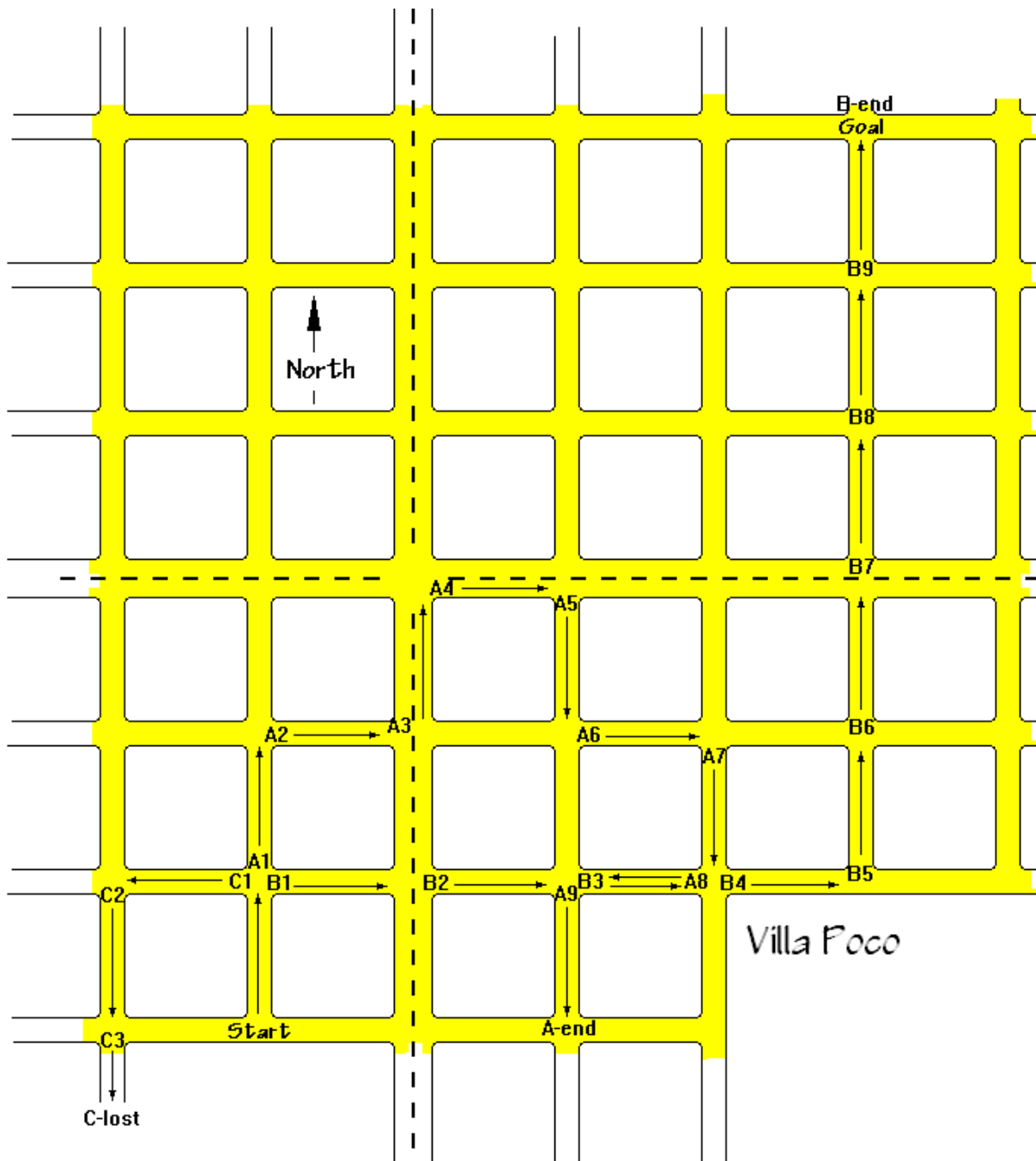
Given this information, we will plot using a chart on the page following the map (of which our mortal travelers through this representative life do not have access).

It will be observed that Guide C misleads the faithful adherent completely. If the adherent had come to realize that something was amiss as he was leaving the city limits, he would still have the difficult task of discovering a new, more trustworthy Guide.

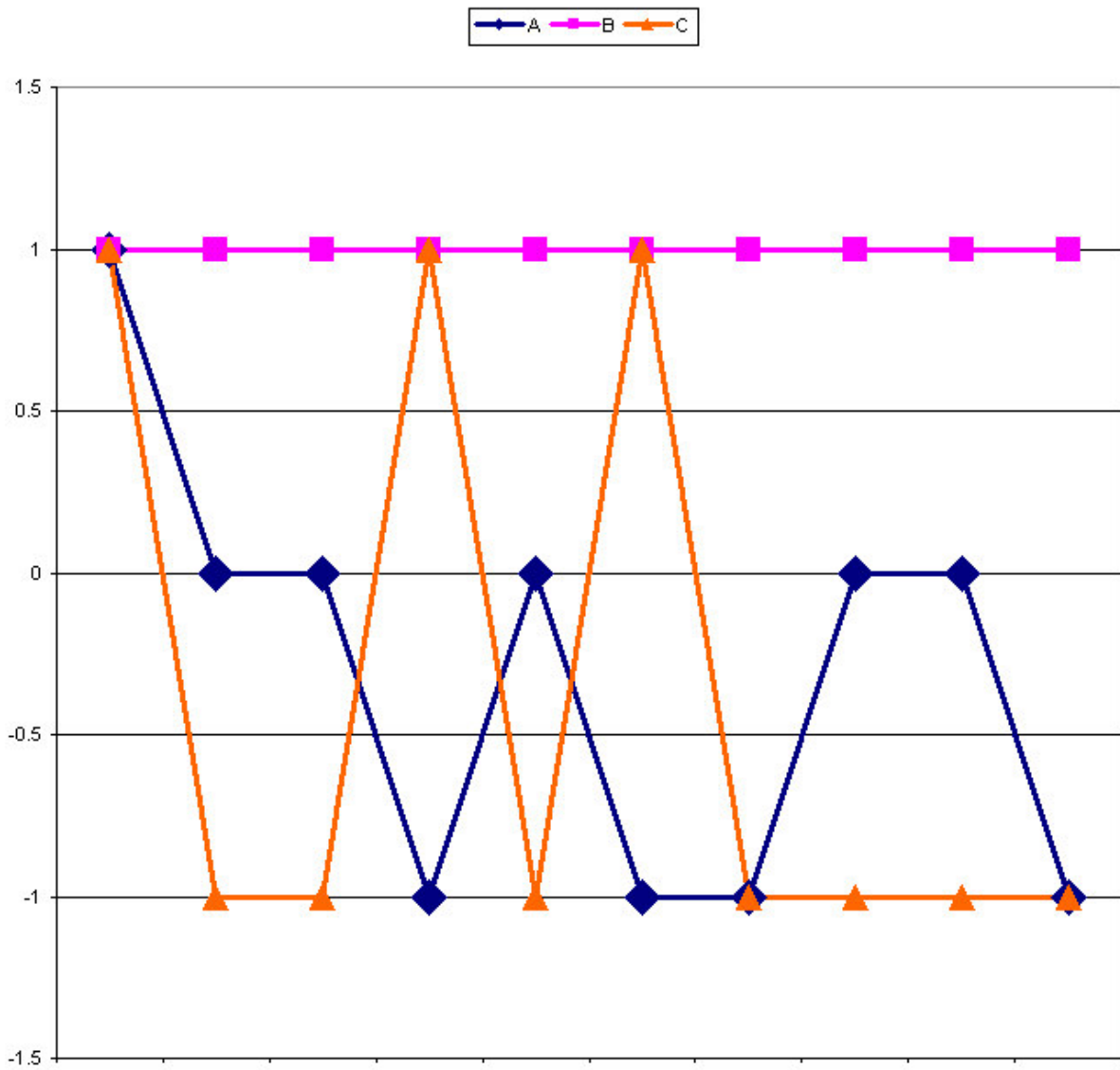
Guide A kept the follower within the city limits, which would make early failure detection more difficult. However despite the promised results, this Guide also ultimately failed.

Guide B was the one with the correct instructions. Hence, not all guides lead to the same path, even though a number of possible paths within certain constraints could have resulted in destination success.

On the next page, the map displays the paths of all three, and the chart on the following page displays the numerically assigned equivalent paths for a given step. Both show similarly that the three paths failed to correlate to a common end.



Correlation chart of Guide A vs. Guide B vs. Guide C



Start	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
Direction	Intersect	Intersect	Intersect	Intersect	Intersect	Intersect	Intersect	Intersect	Intersect
North=1	Right=1	Straight=	Straight=1	Straight=1	Left=1	Straight=1	Straight=1	Straight=1	Straight=1
East=0	Straight=0	1	Right=0	Right=0	Straight=0	Right=0	Right=0	Right=0	Right=0
West=-1	Left=-1	Right=0	Left=-1	Lef -1	Right=-1	Left=-1	Left=-1	Left=-1	Left=-1
		Left=-1							

In order to use this method for doctrinal comparison, we must first determine specific subjects that are important for consideration. Whether or not Jesus had long hair is immaterial, but whether God is doctrinally real, maybe real, or defined as mere symbolism would be important material for consideration. Inclusion of correlations to an expected opposite extreme or third concept can be included as a contrasting boundary, such as the belief of Magic-practicing Coptic Christians.

Hence, on the question of God being real, a value assignment of 1 could be assigned if the doctrine held God as real, 0 if neutral, and -1 if symbolic (or not real).

So, scanning the material sources we would arrive at:

1	God is Real = 1	God is Neutral = 0	God is Symbolic = -1
	GGThom: 1		
	Bible: 1		
	Magic: 1		

At this point, it would appear that all three sources agree that God is real. We have correlation. But what about the qualities of God? Let us continue:

2	God has a name: Yes = 1; No = 0; Shared Names = -1
	GThom: 0
	Bible: 1
	Magic: -1

Now we see that all three sources fail to correlate. Given more information it can be determined if any trend is indicated.

3	God is Almighty: Yes = 1; Neutral = 0; Lesser Being = -1
	GThom: 0
	Bible: 1
	Magic: -1

4	God should be worshipped: Yes = 1; Neutral = 0; Controlled = -1
	GThom: 1
	Bible: 1
	Magic: -1

5 God life-giver: Yes, and alone = 1; Yes, but shared = 0; Another source = -1

GThom: -1
Bible: 1
Magic: 0

6 God best source of instruction:
Yes, and alone = 1; Yes, but shared = 0; Another source = -1

GThom: 1
Bible: 1
Magic: -1

7 God loves: Yes = 1; No = 0; Shared = -1

GThom: 1
Bible: 1
Magic: -1

8 God has mercy: Yes = 1; No = 0; Shared = -1

GThom: -1
Bible: 1
Magic: -1

9 God has the highest power: Yes = 1; No = 0; Shared = -1

GThom: 0
Bible: 1
Magic: 1

10 God exercises justice: Yes = 1; No = 0; Shared = -1

GThom: -1
Bible: 1
Magic: -1

With the graphical presentation of the results on the following page, it becomes clear that on the subject of God, the GThom correlates neither with Bible canon, nor completely with Coptic Magic, but tends to follow in its own path. This is what makes it dangerous, because one can be diverted toward a path that appears valid, but leads ultimately to failure.

Then lastly we can look at a near-random scan of other subjects on another chart.

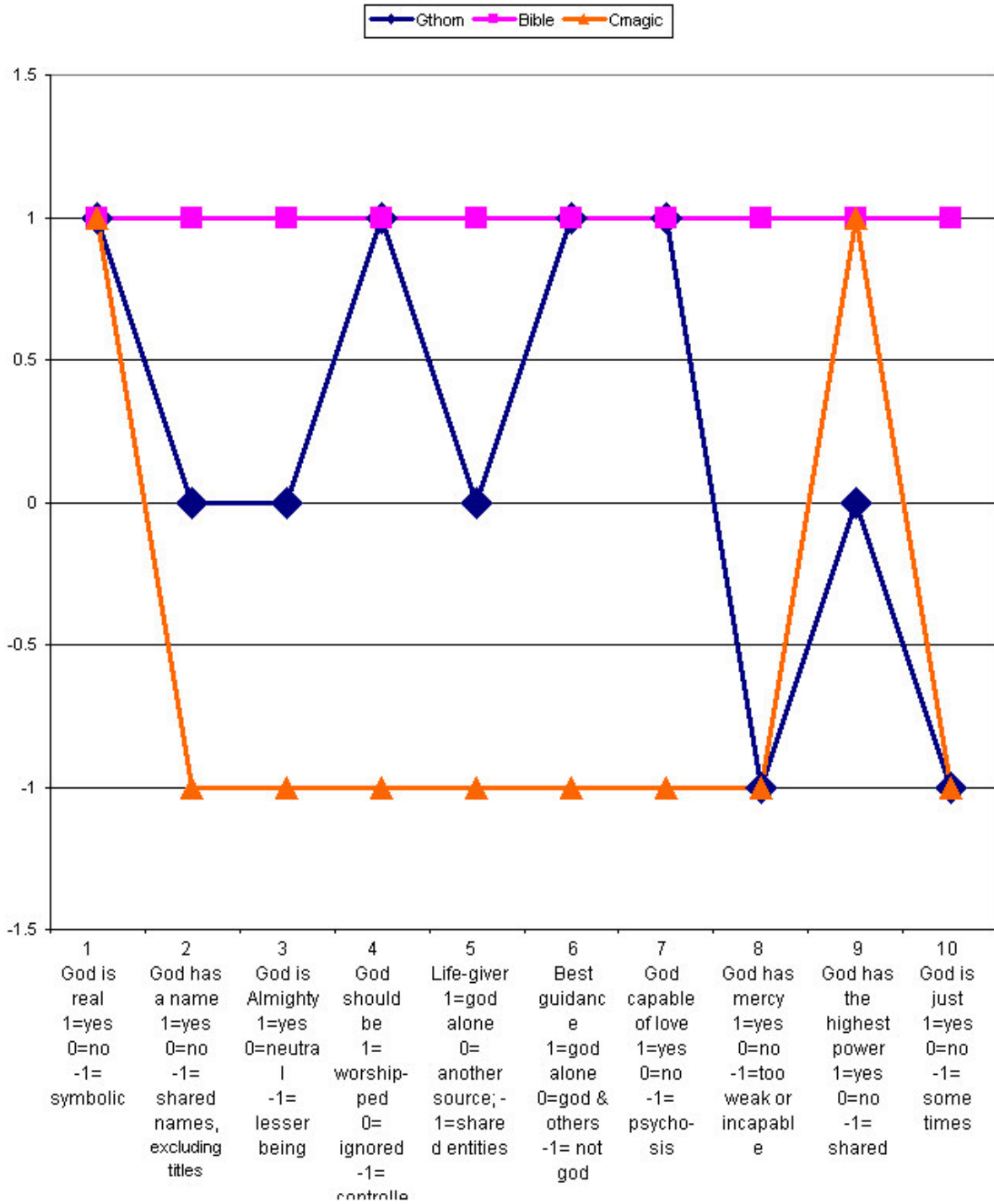
One would have to conclude that there is little correlation between Bible canon and the Gospel of Thomas. It would also appear to reside doctrinally somewhere apart from Coptic Christian Magic. Many of the writings bear similar visual patterns to Coptic Christian Magic, such as regular looping of graphic lines. Also, magic writings were bound in the NHL.



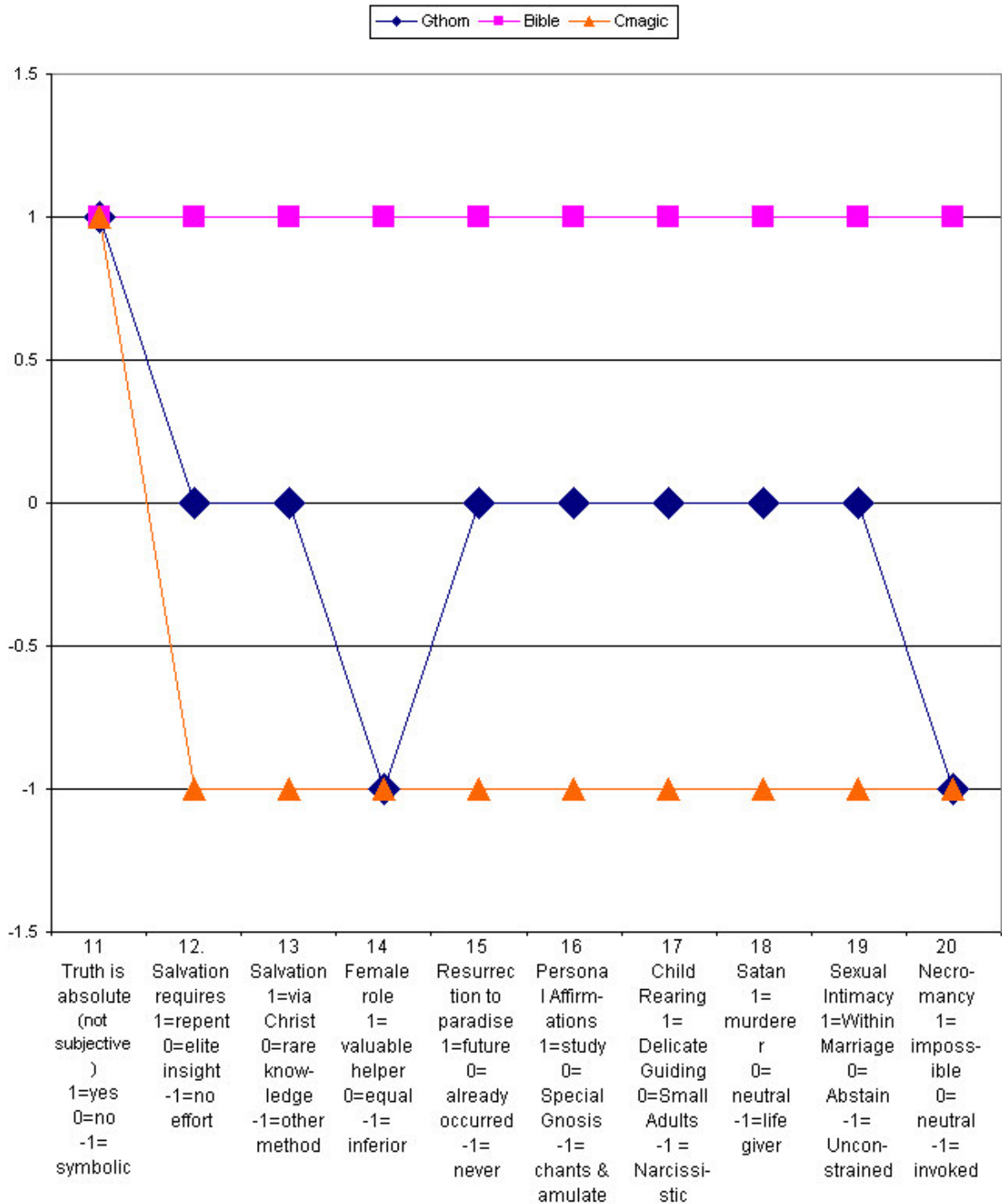
Above: graphic design from Gospel of Thomas, NHL.

Left: graphic design from Coptic Magic Text 4959. Coptic Museum, Cairo, Egypt.

Correlation chart of Gospel of Thomas vs. Bible Canon vs. Coptic Magic



Correlation chart of Gospel of Thomas vs. Bible Canon vs. Coptic Magic



- Notes 1: GThom 100 (implied); Psalm 90:2; Cambridge U. Library T.S. 12,207.
- Notes 2: GThom no source; Psalm 83:18; Michigan 4932f, London Oriental Manuscripts 6796; Egyptian Museum 67188.
- Notes 3: GThom no source; Ezekiel 10:5; Michigan 593, London Oriental Manuscripts 6796.
- Notes 4: GThom 15; John 4:23; London Hay 10391, London Oriental Manuscripts 6796, Coptic Museum 4960.
- Notes 5: GThom no source; Psalm 36:9; Anastasi No. 9 pg. 5 recto.
- Notes 6: GThom 101; Isaiah 48:17; Yale 1791 (first text), Moen 3.
- Notes 7: GThom 107; 1 John 4:8; Louvre E.14.250, Egyptian Museum 49547.
- Notes 8: GThom 107; Psalm 86:15; Oxford Bodleian Coptic Manuscript C. (P) 4, Louvre E.14.250.
- Notes 9: GThom 85; Isaiah 40:26; Oxford Bodleian Coptic Manuscript C. (P) 4.
- Notes 10: GThom 61; Isaiah 33:22; Anastasi No. 9 pg. 1 verso & pg. 2 recto.
- Notes 11: GThom 6; Ephesians 4:4–6; Nag Hammadi Codex VIII, Zoistranos 6.
- Notes 12: GThom 70; Acts 3:19–21; Nag Hammadi Codex VII, The First Stele of Seth, p. 120 line 30–p. 121 line 8.
- Notes 13: GThom 18; Acts 4:9–12; Cairo, Egypt Museum 10263. Note: While this papyrus does acknowledge a sacrificed Christ as breaking down the barrier to recovery, it supports a reliance on cosmic powers to bring about such recovery.
- Notes 14: GThom 114; *ay'zer*, Genesis 2:18 and Psalm 124:8; Nag Hammadi Codex VII, The Second Treatise of the Great Seth, “Do not become female, lest you give birth to evil.”
- Notes 15: GThom 51; Job 14:10–15; Nag Hammadi Codex VIII, Zoistranos 130.
- Notes 16: GThom 113; Joshua 1:8; 1 Timothy 4:15; Michigan 136, p. 8.
- Notes 17: GThom 4, 21, 37; Genesis 33:13; Matthew 23:37; London Oriental Manuscript 6172.
- Notes 18: GThom no source; John 8:44; Berlin 8503.
- Notes 19: GThom 15, 79, 114; Proverbs 5:20; Hebrews 13:4; Heidelberg Kopt. 518.
- Notes 20: GThom 11; Ecclesiastes 9:5–6; Louvre E.14.250.

Frequently Asked Questions

Because a growing number of people now quote GThom, shouldn't it be recognized as holy writ on a par with the Christian Bible, the Jewish Tanakh, the Muslim Quran, the Hindu Vedas, and such like?

Even if numerous scholars would come to value the GThom as equivalent with other holy writings, this would not be tantamount to interpretation that true Christians should recognize the GThom as a portion of the Word of God.

A person should reasonably hold their faith as something precious, to be modified only by the authority that established their standard of worship. For Christians, this would include testing the “inspired expression” with scriptures such as 1 John 2:22 (Jesus is the Christ), 1 John 4:2 (Jesus Christ had come in the flesh), 1 John 4:15 (Jesus Christ is the Son of God), and 2 John 1:9 (adheres to [traceable] teachings of Christ). If any teaching fails against these and other scriptural tests, then a Christian would not find a proposed doctrine or script acceptable, regardless of who or how many others may concede it. GThom does express that Jesus was on earth [that is, saying 99, which makes allusion to the event recorded in Matthew 12:46–50]. Yet GThom sayings 29, 87, 106, and 112 support a conflicting concept from established scripture of Jesus not having been the Christ in the flesh. As such, a popular position that would regard GThom as Holy Writ would be immaterial to whether or not it is truly the word of God. For example, millions of Muslims do not regard the Hindu Vedas as holy words, although millions in India read them. In contrast, how many proclaimed Christians in South America would be familiar with the Quran or Talmud?

The comments of John Dominic Crossan, author of *Excavating Jesus*, cautions us: “We have to remember that the books that we have outside of the New Testament are just random. They just happened to survive. There are probably dozens more, hundreds more that are gone forever.” (Quoted from the documentary “Banned from the Bible,” produced by Filmrods, Inc., ©2003, for the History Channel.)

Would it be wise to subject one's faith to the randomness of time and chance?

By what authority can the claim be made that the Gospel of Thomas (or any of the other Nag Hammadi Library books) is not authentic Scripture?

The more pertinent reality is not that any authority exists to exclude the NHL books from being counted as canonical, but rather that no authority exists which would compel a Christian to include them.

Attempts to count these books as Scripture are fabrications and constructs, whether modern or ancient. Even during the first few centuries of Christian history so many writings had been touted as inspired, and in turn rejected, at such a rate that Clement of Alexandria wrote about these as having ‘possessed more gospels than there really are.’ It

is possible, even likely, that GThom and some of the other NHL writings are relics of this intentionally corrosive activity.

Another more remote possibility is that these documents were actually intended for those who worshiped the elitist Gnosis, although it remains uncertain which Gnostic sect would have been the intended recipient, or even if the intended audience were all Gnostics in general. This latter view, if accepted, would add further emphasis for a Christian to consider these documents as baneful.

The Gospel of Thomas purports itself to be a list of approximately 114 sayings of Jesus (based on the more popular divisions by Layton and Blatz, or 118 by Doresse's count). Most of the other NHL books do not place themselves directly in this category, but the majority do attempt to explain ideas of a religious nature. The unknown writers could have easily compiled a complete collection of sageful sayings by filling in details based upon their own cultural and philosophical ideals without the benefit of inspiration by holy spirit. Other writers are known, as in Plato's Republic, one of the books found in the NHL, and it is by no means considered as authentic Scripture.

Outside of the codices contents, the overwhelming preponderance of doubt compels modern adherents of canonical Christian scripture to refute the GThom as equal to canon. There is no existing traceableness to an ancient Christian or Jewish authority.

Christian writers contemporary to the NHL writings were more likely aware of the lack of a trusted source, and by evidence of exclusion had refused acceptance of this into the holy canon, if any inclusion had ever been considered at all.

Luke was not a directly appointed apostle, yet he wrote a Gospel. Neither was Paul, yet he wrote many letters now considered Bible canon. Jesus never spoke to them directly during his ministry on earth. Yet both writers claimed to present knowledge of Christ directly or transcendentally. So why would GThom and other NHL books not be considered valid just because it is not traceable through the apostles?

When Luke's and Paul's writings were distributed among first-century Christians, most of the surviving apostles and their direct pupils could have taken the opportunity to raise objections. Later Luke and Paul's writings could not be ignored as they were included in Bible canon, and of the many recorded historical discussions of Bible canonicity, there is no evidence of apostolic denunciation of either writer. All the NHL publications would have been ignored on this basis as they had never been included in the Bible canon.

A mere claim does not validate the value of a document, just as anyone with delusion can claim they are "Napoleon, king of France." Validation of any document or claim, especially one that would be acclaimed as divinely inspired, could be supported only on the basis of well-founded evidence. While it is possibly true that neither Luke nor Paul actually heard Jesus speak while he was alive on the earth, the above reasoning that supports canonizing elements within the NHL is incomplete and misleading. Luke did not

claim to be writing from personal experience; he accurately reported that he compiled a report of interviews from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1, 2) and correlated the positive proofs (Acts 1:3). This would be similar to a well-researched modern-day investigative report.

Paul received a personal revelation while zealously persecuting Christians. It is not insignificant to note how this revelation was orchestrated by Christ, as recorded in Acts 9:3–6, in that the revelation consisted of a single question, applied directly to his cruelty, and could be answered only by Paul's thenceforth behavior. No mystical insight was employed; in fact, further scriptural instruction and insight was to be handed to him at a later time by a human disciple named Ananias. Paul's later inspired writings were not based upon any special mystical insight resulting from this incident. Instead, his skills, legal training, and personal studies of the Hebrew Scriptures were employed; in short, an intended composite of his training, understanding, and experience were to be his pool of authority.

The one event which some construe as having been a mystical event with the canonic Paul (2 Corinthians 12:2–4) he declared as:

- 1: He was unauthorized to report (2 Corinthians 12:4) and
- 2: It could lead to the improper exalting of a human (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Whatever potential 'secret knowledge,' if there were any revealed to Paul, was neither published nor expounded by him, and without sufficient evidence could not be declared as anything intellectually required, nor elitist, nor of more significance than private information passed between two friends, or a husband and wife.

A Christian must use extreme caution to avoid being misled into a position of 'not caring' what Jehovah declares as truth because of developing a strong position that "I am right," or even of giving in to confusing pseudo-logic. Luke and Paul did not display such a position; in fact they represented a position counter to this (Acts 28:30, 31).

Why shouldn't a person study the NHL contents? It can be enlightening.

There is no evidence that any of the NHL books were inspired by God.

Though the word choice in some of the books of the NHL is similar to canonical Scripture, the concepts of the messages are disparate from accepted canon, and are open to a wide array of interpretation. Note this excerpt from one of the NHL books:

Jesus said to them: When you make the two one, and when you make the inside as the outside, and the outside as the inside, and the upper as the lower, and when you make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male is not male and the female not female, and when you make eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, an image in

place of an image, then shall you enter [the kingdom].—Pseudo-Christ, Gospel of Thomas 22.

When comparing the cited GThom passage above (note also GThom 114) with Matthew 19:4, 5 and 1 Peter 3:7, it becomes clear that fundamental differences in realities are being presented. GThom 22 offers an overt unisex solution for ‘the two becoming one,’ whereas canonical Scripture merely indicates the factual basis for the separate roles, and the responsibilities each mate carries as a part of his or her unique design. Both roles in canonical Scripture are differentiated and not fused, with neither being denigrated.

The confusion presented by the doctrines embedded within the NHL—or “the freedom of uncertainty,” as some prefer thinking of it—is not enlightenment. No matter how delightful these doctrines may seem, they are a form of delusion by confusion, while falsely promising clarity.

The intended meanings of some NHL texts such as GThom 22 quoted above are sufficiently dubious that multiple and often conflicting interpretations are proffered. Some have related this text to the Buddhist denial of materialism; others propound that it demeans the role of women; in contradiction, others hold that it honors them. This passage has been used to justify sexually deviant rituals and practices, although others have interpreted it toward extreme asceticism and celibacy. And there are many other interpretations, which range from our existence being an illusion of the fractured cosmos to this being indicative that children are actually closer to salvation than adults.

By not having an authoritative standard for measuring the mystical understanding, a person or a group is left with their own limited autonomy to weigh out both the passage and the proposed interpretation. Such a method can be formidable and most certainly runs counter to the methods supported within canonical Scripture, for humans are not the reference center for interpreting Scripture. (2Peter 1:16-21)

A pseudo-analytic path often ends in some form of aberrant deformity of faith (2 Peter 1:20). This is due to the tendency of imperfect men to seek self-interests, to perceive a reflection of their goals, arriving at conclusions irrelevant to the actual content (selective perception). This will remain a large risk factor until the corruption that encompasses our imperfect nature is dealt with (Jeremiah 17:9). If this error becomes evident by the many fragmented and scattered religious groups that claim to follow the clear and solid message of canonical Scripture, then even more so would the practice of an autonomous method toward faith lead to an even wider variety of conflicting doctrines and practices, and more especially if it were to be based upon vague mystical messages.

By example, note the traditional behavioral roles of a parent with their child. Unclear instructions of pedestrian safety and caution during busy traffic might lend a child toward risks and uncertainties that could compromise the child’s health or life. A loving and sound parent would deliver the clear instruction: “Do not play in the busy road because an automobile can hurt or kill you.” The need to avoid the risk of any vague references would be clear to a parent, because confusion would have a higher certainty of risk and failure. The same is true of those who would be children of protective instructions from God,

wherein the enlightenment of GThom is often vague, indistinct, philosophical, and unlike the clear message and specificity of the Hebrew/Greek canonic Scriptures.

Just as different computers run different operating systems, doesn't God allow for diversity within his unity? And is not the fact that there are a wide variety of *denominations* of the Christian faith who adhere to the same basic fundamentals of the faith evidence that God allows for this kind of variance?

It is well known that computers can also be commandeered, damaged, and caused to malfunction with malevolently designed program codes, popularly called a virus or worm.

If humans are to be compared to a computer, then survival is not an optimal life, whereas enjoying life and having a purpose would be. False teachings can carry dangerous memes, bringing spiritual disorientation and loss as to purposeful direction. This would leave a person exposed to victimization, much as a pedophile attempts to confuse the standards of a child in order to prey upon them for selfish pursuits and in blatant disregard to any inflicted damage toward the innocent victim. Although it is true that a specific hardware design that culminates as a functional computer may be able to run a variety of high-level machine codes, also known as operating systems, in each case a specific understanding of the limits and abilities of the hardware is required. A successful operation of a particular code does not imply a high degree of optimization for the hardware itself.

During software design phases of even benign or useful complex codes (and what useful code isn't somewhat complex?), in order to assure optimized performance there is often an assigned program manager who will oversee the code structure and decide what contents are best for the design goals. Failure to adhere to the goals would produce an unintended and predictably undesired outcome.

Just as in programming, math, or science, there is not just excitement, but also safety in discovering a new universal and repeatable truth. Emotional preferences have no bearing on factual discovery, but factual discovery can have a bearing on the emotions. This would lead to the conclusion that not all doctrine that purports to be Christian can be accurate to its claim. In fact, there would be room for only one compiled doctrine set that could fill the unique religious equivalent of the 'sum of all proofs,' or more accurately from a human perspective, "a high degree of certainty of evidence and probability."

In any endeavor by humans toward understanding truth, the discovery and awareness would always be limited to the extent of human cognizance; but human limitations have no bearing on what facts exist outside our realm of understanding. (1 Timothy 2:7; also note that although some hold that proof can never be 100 percent, note the degree of certainty presented in scriptures such as Matthew 8:26, 27.) To discover enlightenment that has valuable significance, a thorough search in canonical Scripture would show that it offers an appealing knowledge that can only be discovered and appreciated by living forever (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The NHL writings offer only more vague directions to seek spiritual fulfillment, with a perceived but unguaranteed promise of discovery. The NHL writings are a result of philosophy, which by their basis renders them as mere theories. Intellectual theories they may be, but nonetheless by their very nature binds them as antithetic to the realities and facts expressed in canonic Scripture.

Abraham was not promised an understanding of the possible nature of mankind's future, but a flesh and blood offspring to be generated through, and only through, his wife Sarah, which was to produce the physical results of a nation of people. In a single word: Fact. The Israelites were not given a neutered promise, but a location within a physical domain with measurable borders. Again: Fact. Christians are not being offered a dubious gift, but one that results from a purchase made from blood that carries a value higher than twenty billion, or more, sinful human lives, and will result in the potential to live forever. Fact.

Any teaching that is contrary to these, or that does not hold to these facts would be either a lie, or in the most benevolent view, a theory. Any alternate theory produced after the discovery of fact is usually considered to be alternative to the facts, or a lie. Theories may be infinite in possibilities, but they are always incomplete, or something less than whole, until proven true (or false) by fact. An unproven theory is a fraction of some value less than truth. Just as any fractional value is lesser than a whole, so is the NHL, or any other theory/philosophy/mystery writing as pseudo-Bible Scripture.

Theory, no matter how delightfully construed, argumentatively convincing, or even usefully workable, always carries the risk of being a lie, whether unaware or not, and can lead to further error. Discovery of fact replaces the theory, removes the risk of unknown error. Fact is always truth, and theory must always yield to fact. Jehovah's inspired word is the one and only truth to date, as indicated by innumerable proofs. (For more information see chapter 2 of the book entitled *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.)

Aren't the NHL writings valuable for at least revealing the historical Jesus, which was an understanding lost by the meddling of dogmatic, stagnant, and isolationist institutions claiming to be Christian?

The NHL writings offer a variety of views of Jesus that are quite in contrast to the historically understood Jesus, and even to the canonic presentation of Jesus.

Some of the NHL contents indicate that Jesus was sexually involved with Mary Magdalene, and that there existed a son (or daughter according to some versions) of the Son of man. This NHL view is clearly not upheld nor indicated in canonical Scripture. For instance, alleged insight from the Gospel of Philip has prompted a number of discussions, both historical and modern, that bring into question the claim of Jesus being without sin, and smear Mary Magdalene's reputation of post-discipleship chastity.

A conspiracy theory has even been passed down through the ages, the whole of which offers suspicion of a secret 'holy grail,' as a euphemism for a genetic lineage from Jesus

who 'may secretly control governments and economies,' or who by some accounts will reveal himself at the end times and somehow save the world. This latter view would appear to render the Christians' with a hope in the heavenly Kingdom as illegitimate and empty. (Deuteronomy 21:16; Romans 11:24; Hebrews 12:28)

So the choice facing a person is whether they believe that canonical Scripture and the historical connections toward legitimacy are the true source for faith and doctrine, or whether the unlinked, unknown, and unfamiliar NHL writings are somehow superior. But one contemplating this should take note: the NHL writings are not Jehovah's story, nor is the pseudo-Jesus presented in these writings in alignment with Jesus' canonical character.

The only revelation about Jesus found in the NHL is what was in the imaginations of some long-ago, unknown philosophers. If a person wants to improve his understanding of Jesus, the best sources to date are still Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Just as those in modern times who support conspiracy theories are considered as fringe societies, many of the same type of theories abounded in the days of canonical compilation. A 1,500-year-old conspiracy theory is still a theory, just as a 1,500-year-old lie is still a lie. Time does not increase the value of fringe documents any more than it converts a lie to truth.

It is important to keep in mind that some of the most popular documents of the first half-millennium of Christianity were not included in the Bible canon, such as the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, and many others. It is evidence that God's holy spirit was involved in establishing a timeless Christian canon, and not current popular choice.

Doesn't GThom give strong evidence that Jesus had learned to be a sage in India?

Although the NHL writings do seem to correlate well with sageful philosophies of India, both ancient and modern, there is no valid basis outside of the allegorical and modern claim that would connect any of the NHL writings to Jesus of Nazareth.

Because there is no evidence of who the original writers of such documents as GThom and the Gospel of Philip were, the most likely India-sage tie might be through Pantaenus, a Stoic philosopher who claimed to have become a Christian while on a Stoic missionary tour in India. The methods employed by instructors of the Didaskalia he founded in Alexandria (downriver from where the NHL was discovered) at the end of the second century gives evidence of his leanings toward Greek philosophical/Christian syncretism. NHL writings such as GThom and the Gospel of Philip would have found a comfortable home and resonance among some instructors or students within the Alexandrian school.

Other writings such as those found in the Codex Nazaraeus would also support the assertion of such pseudo-Jesus sagery as not being from a Jewish or Christian source, because the Natzoraia are attributed to having written polytheistic books such as the Book of Adam. (It would be as much a mistake to equate the Natzoraia with the sect mentioned

in Acts 14:5 as it would be to associate their Nusairi descendants, in residence below the mountain of Jebel el Ansariye in Syria, with Christians.)

Attributing sagery resulting from travel to locations outside of Israel to pseudo-Jesus occurs only in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Some writings would have Jesus accomplishing travels after escaping or having faked his death on the torture stake, which is presented in the Apocalypse of Peter. The non-docetic Quran teaches that Jesus did not die on the torture stake (“The Women”: 157; see also the Quran translation with commentaries, 1995, by Maulana Muhammed Ali, commentary #424 pg. 142, “Jesus traveled in the East after his unfortunate experience at the hands of the Syrian Jews, and preached to the lost ten tribes of Israel.”)

Such conflicting details compete with and detract from the lesson taught by the authentic Jesus, who is Christ. He said, “I have not spoken out of my own impulse, but the Father himself who sent me has given me a commandment as to what to tell and what to speak.” (John 12:49, *NW*)