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MARVIN W. MEYER

MAKING MARY MALE: THE CATEGORIES
'MALE' AND 'FEMALE' IN THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS*

The Coptic *Gospel of Thomas* is one of the most spectacular of the fifty-two tractates filling the thirteen codices of the Nag Hammadi library. Discovered in December 1945 by several Egyptian *fellahin*, the Nag Hammadi tractates were subjected to a variety of political and scholarly ploys, and were not made available in their entirety until the very end of 1977, when the last of the volumes of manuscript pages in the *Facsimile Edition* and the one-volume edition of *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* finally appeared.¹ One of the very first of the documents to be published was the *Gospel of Thomas*, and its appearance has already stimulated the production of numerous articles and monographs by the scholars who have recognized its significance for our knowledge of Christian origins and early church history. Since the time of its initial publication scholars have suggested a variety of interpretations of the *Gospel*, and to date no consensus has been reached. Yet, in my estimation, a reasonably strong case can be made that the *Gospel of Thomas*, in its present form, belongs at least on the periphery of Christian Gnosticism, and to that extent the Coptic text may be termed a gnosticizing gospel.²

One of the distinctive features of the *Gospel of Thomas* is its use of sexual imagery and the categories 'male' and 'female'. Before turning to a discussion of such themes as these, we first should observe that they find their place within the generally ascetic, world-renouncing message of the *Gospel of Thomas*.³ According to this tractate, spiritual persons come from the light, go to the light, and belong to the light of God; they can hardly identify with the darkness of this present world. *Logion 29* maintains that the world of flesh is a world of poverty; Jesus states, 'I am amazed, though, at how such great wealth' - the human spirit - 'has settled into such poverty'. A later *logion* (56) puts it even more graphically: 'Jesus said, "Whoever has come to know the world has discovered a carcass, and whoever has discovered a carcass is worth more than the world"' - that is to say, the one who seeks after the world finds it to be mortal, full of decay and death; but this discovery, troubling as it is, leads to the realization that the spiritual person is superior to this world of death. The insightful person, then, should renounce the world and the values of the world. Saying 110 has Jesus say, 'Let one who finds the world, and becomes wealthy, renounce the world'; in the next *logion* the justification

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is given: 'Whoever finds self is worth more than the world.' Traditional Jewish and Jewish Christian formulations can be used and transcended in the *Gospel of Thomas* (*logion* 27) as the ascetic message is delivered with power: Jesus claims, 'If you do not fast *from the world*, you will not find the kingdom. If you do not keep the Sabbath *a Sabbath*, you will not see the Father' (emphases mine). These lines, with their parallel structures, proclaim fasting and Sabbath-observance, but on a more comprehensive level, far beyond the limits of Torah-piety: the true fast is abstinence from the world, the true Sabbath is rest from the cosmos.⁴

On the other hand, those who choose to ignore the true fast and the true Sabbath, and show loyalty to the values of the world, are roundly condemned in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Your finely dressed kings and great men, Jesus warns, will not find truth, and your tradesmen and merchants will not enter the kingdom (cp. *logia* 64 and 78). For the true kingship is spiritual, and the true kingdom is of the Father. As *logion* 81 states, 'Let one who is wealthy reign, and let one who has power renounce it.' Thus are spiritual wealth and kingship embraced, and worldly power renounced.

It is within such a context that several statements are made concerning sexuality and sexual values. In this study we shall isolate and discuss five themes having to do with sexual imagery in the *Gospel of Thomas*.

First of all, the *Gospel of Thomas* emphasizes the central place of the family, but the family properly understood. As in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 10. 34-36 = Luke 12. 49-53), so also in the *Gospel of Thomas* (*logion* 16) Jesus claims to throw division upon family life: 'For five people will be in a house: it will be three against two, and two against three, father against son, and son against father, and they will stand alone.' While the first part of this saying parallels the NT gospels to a considerable extent - although, unlike the NT versions, no mothers and daughters are mentioned in the enumeration of the dissenting parties in the *Gospel of Thomas* - the conclusion illustrates more of a gnosticizing, ascetic tendency. The reference in the present *logion* to the family members *standing* may very well reflect the tradition of the divine or liberated person as one who is standing, a tradition to be noted with clarity in such Gnostic systems as that of the first-century C.E. teacher Simon Magus.⁵ The Coptic word translated 'alone' in the translation given above is *monachos*, a Greek loan word which functions as a *terminus technicus* with definite ascetic overtones. The implication is that the *monachos* is a lonely or solitary one who is not one of the masses, but rather is free from distracting social and sexual ties. Hence it is appropriate that later this Greek term can be used to designate *monks* per se.

If the previous saying, like several others in the *Gospel of Thomas* (cp.

55, 79, 99), recommends the rejection of the physical family for the sake of higher values, two additional *logia* near the end of the collection speak even more clearly about the nature of the family. *Logion* 105 is brief but enigmatic: 'Jesus said, "Whoever recognizes father and mother will be called the child of a whore."' It might be suggested that this saying means to refer, albeit in an oblique fashion, to polemical statements about the birth of Jesus. According to certain Jewish traditions surrounding Yeshu ben Pantera, Jesus was born of fornication as the son of the whore Mary and a Roman soldier named Panther.⁶ A more convincing interpretation of this *logion*, in my judgment, takes a different approach. According to this alternate understanding, the saying intends to urge the reader to resist the temptation to identify with one's earthly family. Indeed, the saying points out, the person who values physical familial ties, who acknowledges the role of physical parents, knowingly succumbs to the lure of the lower values and unseemly sexuality of this world.

An additional *logion* or two can provide clarification of the position of the *Gospel of Thomas* on the family. If a saying such as number 99 can hint, like the NT (cp. Mark 3. 32-35 = Matthew 12. 47-50 = Luke 8. 20-21), at the existence of a spiritual family by having Jesus assert, 'Those here who do the will of my Father are my brothers and my mother', then saying 101 makes the character of the family even clearer. Although the papyrus of this section is damaged, the present saying may be partially restored as follows: Jesus states, 'Whoever does not hate father and mother as I do cannot be my disciple, and whoever does not love father and mother as I do cannot be my disciple. For my mother [. . .], but my true mother gave me life.'⁷ The conundrum of the first two statements is resolved by the third, which posits the existence of two mothers, of two orders of family. The physical family is established through sexual ties, and is involved in the dark uncertainties and false dealings characteristic of this world, and hence is to be hated and repudiated. But the true family, the spiritual family, is to be maintained in love, for it mediates life. Here the *Gospel of Thomas* has Jesus speak of his 'true mother', presumably his spiritual mother. Such a statement is reminiscent of other references to the spiritual mother of Jesus in Gnostic documents and other ancient literature. In the Jewish-Christian *Gospel of the Hebrews*, for example, Jesus describes his relationship to his Mother the Holy Spirit (fragment 3); likewise, the *Apocryphon of James* from Nag Hammadi recommends that one become like 'the child of the holy Spirit' (I 6, 20-21); and the *Gospel of Philip* polemicizes against the doctrine of Mary the mother of Jesus conceiving by the Holy Spirit (cp. Matthew 1. 18 ff.) by raising the rhetorical question, 'When did a woman ever conceive by a woman?' (II 55, 25-26). These references all contribute to the familiar position of the Spirit as female, especially in Semitic contexts, and the trinity as a heavenly nuclear

family, not unlike classical Egyptian divine families or triads (e.g., father Osiris, mother Isis, son Horus; or father Amun, mother Mut, son Khons).⁸

In this regard it is helpful to add a note concerning Gnostic christology. Numerous Christian Gnostics wished to pay particular homage to the divine nature of Christ, and to derive the whole being of Christ from the Pleroma of God, so that they easily could move in the direction of docetism. It can be said by such Gnostic believers that when Jesus walked on the sand he left no footprints, and that when the crucifixion took place the true Christ, the spiritual being, stood apart laughing at the ignorant powers of the world who mistakenly thought they were executing him.⁹ Obviously this sort of christological perspective could have implications for Gnostic evaluations of the family of Jesus, and such is in fact the case. Sometimes the Gnostic sources de-emphasize or even depreciate the human parentage of Jesus, so that greater value is placed upon his divine parentage. To cite an example of such a tendency: the Gnostics mentioned by Irenaeus and Epiphanius describe the heavenly Christ passing through mother Mary as water passes through a pipe.¹⁰ It is this sort of depreciation of Jesus' human parentage and exaltation of his divine family that seems to be observed in the *Gospel of Thomas*.

The second theme to be isolated in the *Gospel of Thomas* is that of the wedding chamber. This motif occurs explicitly only twice in the *Gospel*, in *logia* 75 and 104, and only the former occurrence is really significant for our purposes. According to that saying Jesus speaks as follows: 'Many are standing by the door, but those who are alone (*monachos*) will enter the wedding chamber'. This concept of believers entering the wedding chamber is a familiar concept in Gnostic texts.¹¹ To be sure, the wedding chamber and the sacred marriage figure prominently in a wide variety of religious traditions, from early antiquity and on. Mention may be made of ruler and fertility cults in the ancient Near East, Greek and Hellenistic mystery religions, and also certain Jewish and Christian texts; in each of these settings the concept of the sacred marriage comes to expression in one way or another. But in Gnostic sources the image of the wedding chamber is especially prominent as a way of depicting the primal unity and heavenly wholeness that is possible when the soul is conjoined with its divine mate, its *alter ego*. As this salvific marriage is described in the *(Exegesis on the Soul)*, it is perfectly and permanently fulfilling and satisfying. The soul, described in the usual fashion as a woman, is joined to her heavenly bridegroom, her brother, and '[once] they unite [with one another] they become a single life' (II 132, 34-35), thus re-establishing the primordial oneness which existed before the fall of the soul from God, and repairing the torn and broken character of human existence.

This imagery did not go unnoticed by the opponents of the Christian Gnostics, the heresiologists. They were quick to snatch up the vivid descriptions

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and nasty rumours, and circulated the libel that some of the Gnostics were wild libertines, freely practising all sorts of shameful and forbidden things, secretly seducing women, and fleshing out the mystery of the syzygy and the wedding chamber in a most corporeal fashion.¹²

That some of the Gnostics may have been libertines remains a real possibility, but the evidence of the texts from the Nag Hammadi library indicates that many Gnostics had a very different understanding of the mystery of the wedding chamber from that attributed to them by the heresiologists. Both the *Exegesis on the Soul* and the *Gospel of Philip* are emphatic in declaring that the true wedding chamber is to be distinguished from fleshly marriage and sexual intercourse. In the *Gospel of Philip* the wedding chamber functions, alongside baptism, chrism, eucharist, and redemption, as one of the mysteries or sacraments. It is in the wedding chamber that the restoration of the original integrated existence is achieved. The *Gospel of Philip* proclaims that 'Christ came to repair the separation which was from the beginning and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the separation and unite them' (II 70, 13-17). The wedding chamber, the tractate continues, is for the sake of 'undefiled marriage', and undefiled marriage is by no means to be equated with 'the marriage of defilement' (II 82, 2 ff.). In the words of this *Gospel*, the undefiled marriage 'is not fleshly but pure. It belongs not to desire but to the will. It belongs not to the darkness or the night but to the day and the light' (II 82, 6-10). So pure, so spiritual is the wedding chamber that it can even be compared to 'the holy of holies' (cp. II 69, 24-25).

To conclude, then, on the wedding chamber: a similar conception of the pure, asexual wedding chamber seems operative in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Such is intimated in *logion* 75 by the linking of the terms *monachos* and 'wedding chamber': it is precisely the solitary ones, with their association with purity and chastity, who are worthy of the sacred marriage.

A third sexual motif in the *Gospel of Thomas* concerns children and their attributes.¹³ The *Gospel of Thomas* and Gnostic sources are not unique in their emphasis upon children. Throughout antiquity, in Hellenistic, Jewish, and Christian sources, children are commonly alluded to as representative of innocence, sinlessness, and sexual naïveté and purity. The Gnostic sources, too, wish to provide such a positive evaluation of children, and thus can describe Gnostic believers and even Gnostic saviours as children. In the *Gospel of Thomas* it is claimed, in general, that babies at the breast resemble those who will enter the kingdom (*logion* 22), and that those who become children will know the kingdom and will be great (*logion* 46). Furthermore, in *logion* 4, a saying about reversals of fortune and value, it is observed that a young child only seven days old is the one who will communicate life to an old man. The specific reference to the one-week-old baby seems intended to highlight the unspoiled, unworldly

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character of the child; he has not yet been circumcised!¹⁴ *Logion* 21 likens the followers of Jesus to children living in an alien field, the world of flesh and corporeality. Jesus says, 'When the owners of the field come' - i.e. the harsh rulers of this world - 'they will say, "Give our field back to us." The children will take off their clothes in the presence of the owners, and thus give the field back and return it to them.' Here the removal of one's clothing seems to be linked, in a symbolic way, to the release of one's claim upon a piece of property. Thus the true children of the light are to let go of this world, take off the bodies that are clothing them, and be liberated from mortal existence to immortal life. The reference to stripping recalls the shameless and innocent nakedness of children in general, to say nothing of the 'naked but not ashamed' first parents in Eden (Genesis 2. 25); but this stripping motif refers even more easily to the ancient concept of naked souls wearing clothing put on in incarnation and taken off in ecstasy or death. *Logion* 37 communicates similar ideas with several of the same images: salvation will take place, Jesus declares, 'when you strip and are not embarrassed, and you take your clothes and throw them down under your feet like little children and trample them' - that is to say, when you, as children, or newly initiated believers, show utter disdain for your sinful, worldly garments.

The fourth theme to be isolated is that of wholeness, specifically as described in *logion* 22. Throughout the *Gospel of Thomas* one of the most terse and significant terms to be used is the Coptic phrase *oua ouōt*, a phrase which is translated in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* as 'one and the same'. *oua ouōt* seeks to be an intensive form of the number one, so that I prefer 'single one' as the most pleasing rendition of the phrase in English. In any case, *oua ouōt* functions importantly to designate the wholeness, beyond the division and fragmentation of human existence, which the Gnostics judged characteristic of salvation.

This concept of wholeness comes to a focus in *logion* 22. This saying indicates that nothing less than a totally new being is required if one is to enter the kingdom: what is needed is unification, integration, assimilation, transformation, *oua ouōt*. The *Gospel of Thomas* puts it as follows: 'Jesus said to them (i.e. his disciples), "When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one (*oua ouōt*), so that the male will not be male and the female will not be female, when you make eyes replacing an eye, a hand replacing a hand, a foot replacing a foot, and an image replacing an image, then you will enter the kingdom.'" - Celestial EXALTATION

This saying might provoke us to provide parallels, which are many and varied; or survey interpretations, which are equally numerous and diverse; or discuss Jung and the *coincidentia oppositorum*. These things

will not be attempted here.¹⁵ For the purposes of this study the statements about 'male' and 'female' in the saying are of most interest. At first glance we might conclude, as many commentators have concluded, that *logion* 22 advocates androgyny, the restitution of the original unified sexual condition. Such a conclusion would certainly be in full harmony with much of what is characteristic of late antiquity in general and the Nag Hammadi tractates in particular. Not only do these tractates describe countless gods, demigods, aeons, powers, and human souls as androgynous, 'according to the immortal pattern' (II 102, 3), as the tract *On the Origin of the World* states. Tractates like the *Gospel of Philip* also suggest that salvation entails the restoration of original androgynous unity: 'When Eve was still in Adam death did not exist. When she was separated from him, death came into being. If he again becomes complete and attains his former self, death will be no more' (II 68, 22-26). Hence, as we have seen, the place of the wedding chamber.

Also restored is the presence of FATHER

Yet a careful reading of the text of the *Gospel of Thomas* prompts us to take a slightly different approach with regard to *logion* 22. To be sure, male and female are to become *oua ouōt*; but the saying goes on to specify that this transformation is to take place by means of the mutual elimination of sexual characteristics rather than the hermaphroditic manifestation of complete sexual features. In the carefully chosen words of the *Gospel*, 'the male will not be male and the female will not be female'. This sort of transformation is similar to that mentioned by Paul in Galatians 3. 27-28, where he transmits a baptismal formula pronounced over an initiate to show that the initiatory sacrament effects a oneness which overcomes the social, ethnic, and sexual categories of human existence: 'for all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, οὐκ ἐνὶ ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ; for you all are one in Christ Jesus.'¹⁶ Even closer to the approach of the *Gospel of Thomas* is the Hellenistic Jewish thinker (Philo of Alexandria) whose writings in general resemble features of the *Gospel of Thomas* to a remarkable extent.¹⁷ In terms of the present issue Philo insists that God, the Logos, the heavenly Human, and the rational soul are not associated with the sphere of male and female; rather, the male-female polarity is a feature of the lower, mortal, created world. Furthermore, this contrast also reflects the cosmic difference between 'oneness' and 'twoness'. Clearly Philo values 'oneness' over 'twoness'; not only is God an unmixed oneness, but the Human stamped with God's image is also an asexual unity. In his tract *De Opificio Mundi* Philo observes that, with regard to the heavenly Human, 'the one that was after the (Divine) image was an idea or type or seal, an object of thought (*νοητός*), incorporeal, neither male nor female by nature incorruptible' (134). Similarly, for a world lost in duality, salvation entails the movement from multiplicity to asexual unity once again.

duality

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To return to the *Gospel of Thomas*: like Philo, the *Gospel of Thomas* logion 22 also proclaims a salvific oneness and unity. Furthermore, in both sources the character of this unified state is not seen as androgynous, or supersexual, but instead as asexual.

(←) This statement is false to justify & help his (C. Arnois). Reluctant to believe. Xto protest out

If we may assess the evidence of the first four themes related to sexual imagery in the *Gospel of Thomas*, we conclude that they are unanimous in recommending asexuality. Whether through the adoption of appropriate motifs such as the nature of children and the essence of unification, or the adaptation of ideas like the family and the wedding chamber, the *Gospel of Thomas* announces that the properly spiritual person is one who transcends sexuality and renounces the enslaving life and divisive categories of sexuality, as a part of his or her renunciation of this world of darkness and acceptance of the world of freedom and light.

Follow my is his coast To receive modern Xto doctrine

If this assessment is correct, then the fifth and final theme to be discussed presents us with an initial jolt: the concluding *logion* in the *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 114, states that if Mary is to realize salvation, she must become male. Indeed, one German commentator, Johannes Leipoldt, sadly concludes, 'es ist bedauerlich, dass das Buch mit einem Missklang endet'.¹⁸ Although the *Gospel* elsewhere advocates a life exalted above the disjointed life of maleness over against femaleness, here the final saying appears to fall back into a crass chauvinism: 'Simon Peter said to them, (i.e. the other disciples), "Let Mary leave us, because women are not worthy of life." Jesus said, "Behold, I myself shall guide her so as to make her male, that she too may become a living spirit like you men. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."

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The German commentator just mentioned is representative of many modern readers, for whom the conclusion of the *Gospel of Thomas* is a considerable embarrassment. Many might wish that the final *logion* of the text could be removed from a document which otherwise is so consistent in its liberating message. Indeed, from a critical point of view, we could feel a certain amount of justification were we to judge saying 114 to be an alien intrusion into the *Gospel*. After all, the *Gospel of Thomas* is a collection of sayings, and the addition of a new saying appended to the end of the collection would be a simple matter for a scribe copying out a new edition of the text. Furthermore, we know from the Oxyrhynchus papyri that there were in fact different versions or editions of the *Gospel of Thomas*, so that the suggestion that *logion* 114 might represent a later addition is not impossible. Finally, current scholarly opinion proposes some sort of a link between the Nag Hammadi library and Christian monks in the area, particularly the Pachomian brothers living at Pabau (modern Faw Qibli) - and monks might be especially tempted to add a saying like *logion* 114.¹⁹

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On the basis of the evidence, however, I judge that it is unnecessary to hear a dissonant chord reverberating from the last saying of the *Gospel of Thomas*. Hence, in the following pages I shall suggest the conclusion that the message of *logion* 114 may be seen as harmonious with the rest of the *Gospel*.

If saying 114 in general makes modern readers feel uneasy, Peter in particular emerges as especially hostile toward Mary. While Jesus insists that Mary can be saved, Peter doubts even that! Peter's place in Gnostic literature is prominent, which comes as no surprise, considering the universal testimony in early Christian literature that Peter is not only an apostle but often the first of the apostles. Hence Gnostic literature, too, has to come to terms with Peter. Sometimes, as in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, Peter is made to function as an enlightened Gnostic teacher. Adopted as a forthright guarantor of the Gnostic Christian cause, Peter in such Gnostic texts transcends the authority of the Great Church and the claims of the Great Church concerning him. At other times, as in the *Gospel of Thomas*, Peter is presented as an ignorant sexist, and may be portrayed in such a way as to reflect contemporary sexist attitudes in the Hellenistic environment and the Great Church, as perceived by the Gnostics. Thus also in the *Gospel of Mary* Peter is pictured as hot-tempered, 'contending against the woman (Mary) like the adversaries', even though, as Levi states, 'the Savior made her worthy' and 'loved her more than us' (BG 18, 9-15). Similarly in *Pistis Sophia* Peter rails against Mary and the verbosity of her speeches; Mary in turn responds, 'I am afraid of Peter, for he threatens me and hates our sex (*genos*)' (72).²⁰ *Gospel of Phil.* p

In the *Gospel of Thomas*, too, it is Mary against whom Peter speaks. A definite identification of this Mary is impossible. The possibilities include (in descending order of likelihood) Mary Magdalene, certainly the best single choice, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Salome, or some other Mary.²¹ Perhaps the safest conclusion is that a 'universal Mary' is in mind, and that specific historical Marys are no longer clearly distinguished, just as other historical personages may be blended into a 'universal James' or a 'universal Philip' in later Christian literature. On the other hand, Mary Magdalene does play a leading and specific role in such Gnostic documents as the *Gospel of Philip*, where Mary Magdalene assumes the part of the true Gnostic, and she and Jesus are described as having an intimate relationship with each other. In this *Gospel* it is said that Jesus loved Mary most of all the disciples and '[used to] kiss her [often] on her [mouth]' (II 63, 35-36). In the *Dialogue of the Savior*, too, a certain Mary - probably Magdalene - is addressed as 'sister', is acclaimed as 'a woman who knew all' (III 139, 12-13), and is taken in rapture with Judas and Matthew to the boundary of heaven and earth.

According to the *Gospel of Thomas logion* 114 Mary will be saved when

to she becomes a male, a living spirit. Such a statement of sexual transfor-
of mation is by no means rare in the ancient world, but may be found, with
of at varying implications, in a number of sources. I cite a few examples of such
he statements by way of illustration. In his *Metamorphoses* books 9 and 12
in Ovid speaks of women being changed into men in answer to prayer; thus
ts do the gods answer prayer, and deliver women from painful and difficult
ic circumstances. In the *Timaeus* 90-91 Plato discusses similar matters in
ne connection with reincarnation, and considers the possibilities of wicked
ly men being punished with reincarnation as women (90E): in his hierarchy
of beings women are considered to be situated below men and just above
D, beasts (pity, then, the fate of wicked women!). In Egyptian mythology
er Isis can be said to make herself into a man (by being joined to Osiris?) by
and bearing Horus?), and women can likewise be transformed, joined at death -
an to the god Osiris. Within Christianity the Jewish Christians of the Pseudo-
at Clementines recommend that believers leave behind this inferior world,
s, this lustful body - all that can be characterized as female - and embrace
d the higher world, the world of eternal life and spirit - which can be character-
is ized as male. In this context we may also call to mind transvestite
e and other practices, whereby pious Christian women can be described
l, as rejecting femininity and sexuality by dressing like men or looking like
t, men: such is the case with the personified virtue Continnence daughter of
e Faith in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Thecla and Charitine in the apocryphal
r acts of the apostles, and so on. We may complete this quick survey by
recalling the evidence, even down to the medieval inquisition records, that
some Christians have suggested that women are changed into men in order
to enter paradise⁽²²⁾

Of special importance for our discussion of sexual transformation in the
Gospel of Thomas is Philo of Alexandria. Philo waxes perversely eloquent
in the choice of colourful and descriptive phrases he uses to deride the
imperfect status of femaleness. A partial list of such phrases includes the
following: 'weak, easily deceived, cause of sin, lifeless, diseased, enslaved,
unmanly, nerveless, mean, slavish, sluggish'.²³ As he explains in his *Quaes-
tionnes et Solutiones in Exodum*, where he seems to allude to the absence
of a penis on the female body, 'the male is more perfect than the female.
Wherefore it is said by the naturalists that the female is nothing else than
an imperfect male' (book 1, 7).²⁴ For Philo the masculine principle is
preferable to the feminine: after commenting on the feminine name and
the masculine nature of Wisdom, Philo continues by observing, in his tract
De Fuga et Inventione, 'As indeed all the virtues have women's titles, but
powers and activities of consummate men (*ἀνδρῶν τελειωτάτων*). For that
which comes after God, even though it may be the highest of all other
things, occupies a second place, and therefore was termed feminine to
express its contrast with the Maker of the universe, who is masculine, and

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1 Cor 11:7-12

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its affinity to everything else. For pre-eminence always pertains to the masculine, and the feminine always comes short of and is lesser than it' (51). Here Philo can symbolize as masculine what elsewhere, as we have seen, he describes as asexual. And here he establishes, in a fashion typical of several philosophical schools, a hierarchy of being, and claims that femaleness is on the side of passivity, corporeality, and *αἰσθησις*, while maleness is on the side of activity, incorporeality, and *νοῦς*. So progress, he concludes, 'is indeed nothing else than the giving up of the female gender (*γένος*) by changing into the male' (*Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum* book 1, 8). In my analysis Philo's brand of Hellenistic Judaism brings us very close to Gnosticism and especially the *Gospel of Thomas* in the use of terminology and theme.

Like Philo, and the *Gospel of Thomas*, other gnosticizing texts likewise can castigate femaleness and praise maleness, and recommend the transformation to maleness. In certain of these texts the female is portrayed like the fertility goddess, the earth Mother, characterized, according to the Gnostics, by passion, lust, and flesh. Indeed, like the fertility goddess, the female in Gnostic interpretation can represent the human cycle of life, from birth to death. With regard to one typical manifestation of fertility piety, namely the piety expressed in the Eleusinian mysteries, the Christian heresiologist Hippolytus, in his discussion of the Naassene Gnostics (*Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 5.7.34), tells us that one of the most sacred of the utterances of the initiates is *ὄε κὺε*. This utterance is composed of two imperatives, one apparently directed to the sky Father and the other to the earth Mother. The situation evoked by these commands entails a cosmic act of intercourse between heaven and earth, with the semen of the Sky entering the womb of the Earth, thus producing a state of fertility and life in the world. To be sure, the Eleusinian mysteries, centering as they do on the careers of the two grain-goddesses of the earth, Demeter and Kore (or Persephone), admit that decrease and death are also part of the rhythm of the life-cycle in the cosmos. Yet the mysteries celebrate the triumph of life over death, both in the realm of crops and in the life of humans, who may also transcend death through their initiation experiences²⁵.

With a radicalization of these sorts of concerns, the Gnostics have overturned the values of such fertility piety, and emphatically have shown the cycle of life to be a cycle of death. The focus is upon the earth, the arena of sexuality, procreation, and death, according to the Gnostics. In the words of the tractate *On the Origin of the World*, 'the first sensual pleasure sprouted upon the earth. The woman followed the earth, and marriage followed the woman, and reproduction followed marriage, and death followed reproduction' (II 109,21-25).²⁶ The source of all the vicissitudes of life and death, the female as depicted by the Gnostics shows all the ambiguities and possibilities of the fertility goddess: she can be mother, lover,

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revealer, bestower of life and bringer of death. As Mother Sophia, she can fall from grace in the divine realm, and through her blunder this world of passion and darkness comes into being, in a manner reminiscent of the fall of Eve as recounted in the Hebrew Bible. Yet even in her product, her 'abortion of darkness' (*Apocryphon of John* BG 46, 10-11), there is a spark of light and life, for she is, after all, the divine Mother. Hence, while the heavenly light is dimmed (the Gnostics refer to this as the 'deficiency', in contrast to the fullness) on account of 'the disobedience and the foolishness of the Mother' (*Letter of Peter to Philip* VIII 135, 11-12), the light may be restored and the Mother may be transformed, as the whole cosmic order is returned to heavenly bliss once again.

The fallen Mother, and indeed all who participate in the 'deficiency', may be transformed: this is the message of hope in many Gnostic documents. But such a transformation frequently is depicted as overcoming all that is associated with the female in this world. According to the *Tripartite Tractate* from Nag Hammadi, when deprived of the male the female is weak (I 78, 8-13). In the *First Apocalypse of James* James apparently can call women 'powerless vessels' (V 38, 21-22); in this case, however, these 'powerless vessels' too have been transformed, and made potent. The female in this world, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* insists, gives birth to mortality and death: in this text Christ is made to say, 'The one who is from the truth does not die; the one who is from the woman dies' (III 140, 12-14). At times two cosmic realms may even be distinguished, as in the *Testimony of Truth*, where it seems that the male is put on the side of the day, the light, and the incorruptible, but the female is relegated to the night, the darkness, and the corruptible (IX 40, 23-29).

With such an image of the role of the female in this world, it is no wonder that some ascetic Gnostic texts are clear in their denunciation of and opposition to the deeds of femaleness. If the *Book of Thomas the Contender* pronounces a woe upon those 'who love intimacy with womankind and polluted intercourse with it' (II 144, 9-10), the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is even more explicit in citing the command, 'Destroy the works of femaleness' (III 144, 19-20).²⁷ Furthermore, the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* warns the reader against becoming female, 'lest you give birth to evil and its brothers: jealousy and division, anger and wrath, fear and a divided heart, and empty, non-existent desire' (VII 65, 24-30). Finally, a similar warning is issued by the Nag Hammadi text *Silvanus*, which counsels the readers against separating from the life of the *νοῦς*, since then 'you have cut off the male and turned yourself to the female alone', and have thus become *ψυχικός*, only a person of *ψυχή* (VII 93, 11-13).

Since for Gnostics femaleness can encompass passion, earthliness, and mortality, it is reasonable to see how they can propose that all humans

are involved in femaleness. Such universal participation in femaleness is made even more obvious by virtue of Hellenistic theory on the soul. As has already been mentioned in passing, *ψυχή*, the feminine term for 'soul', is presented throughout the Greek-speaking world as a female, and the subsequent myths of the soul show the career of the female *ψυχή* of all human beings. The Nag Hammadi library, too, includes a gnosticizing document recounting the myth of the soul. Entitled *Exegesis on the Soul*, this tractate gives a dramatic account of the fall, prostitution, and eventual salvation of the soul: she – indeed, every Gnostic – finally is saved and transformed by being reunited with her heavenly brother in the spiritual wedding chamber.

If such is femaleness, Gnostic texts are also clear in their praise of maleness. Often the male is portrayed, like the familiar sky Father, as linked to that which is divine and heavenly; and maleness increasingly is removed from that which is sensual and mundane. Numerous divine beings – even female beings! – can be described with honorific epithets suggesting the supremacy of the category 'male': the male virgin, the thrice-male child, the great male Barbelo, the thrice-male Father, and so on. Sometimes tractates become so enamoured of these honorific epithets and symbolic attributions that they stumble over their syntax, as in the *Three Steles of Seth*, which refers to 'the malenesses that really are to become male three times' (VII 120, 17-19). Furthermore, as in Philo, Gnostic texts specify that the *νοῦς*, the mind and the link with the divine, is male. The tractate *Silvanus*, just quoted to illustrate a similar point, asserts that 'reason and mind are male names' (VII 102, 15-16), and the *Testimony of Truth* commends the insight of the one who 'is a disciple of the mind which is male' (IX 44, 2-3). Thus, in contrast to femaleness, the male in Gnostic sources represents that which is on the side of mind, heavenliness, and perfection.

Several Gnostic texts besides the *Gospel of Thomas* allude to the possibility that the female can be transformed, and depict this as the transformation of the female into the male. For our purposes four citations should suffice.²⁸ First of all, the fragmentary teachings of the Valentinian teacher Theodotus, preserved in Clement of Alexandria's *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, state that the followers of Theodotus designate the male as angels, and the female as 'themselves, the superior seed' (21.1). The excerpt goes on to describe how the female, that is to say, the Valentinian Gnostics themselves, must become male and unite with the angels in order that she – or they – may enter into the fullness of the divine. 'Therefore', the fragment summarizes in a parallel fashion, 'it is said that the woman is changed into a man and the church here below into angels' (21.3). A later excerpt of Theodotus amplifies upon this idea, and indicates that when a female seed (i.e. the spark of light here below) becomes male it is liberated, for no longer is it weak and subjected to the cosmic (powers)' (79). In a

word, it has become heavenly. Secondly, the Naassenes as described by Hippolytus confess that only pure, transformed, spiritual people can approach 'the gate of heaven', 'the house of God'. Combining several of the sorts of motifs we have noted throughout this study, the Naassenes assert that 'when people come there they must lay down their clothing and all become bridegrooms, being rendered wholly male through the virgin spirit' (*Refutatio* 5.8.44). Thirdly, the Nag Hammadi tractate which goes by the title *First Apocalypse of James* uses poetic parallelism to connect the female with perishability and the male with imperishability: 'The perishable has [gone up] to the imperishable, and the female element has attained to this male element' (V 41, 15-18). And lastly, another Nag Hammadi tractate, *Zostrianos*, concludes with a dynamic sermon preached to awaken 'an erring multitude' (VIII 130, 14), and part of the sermon is delivered as follows: 'Flee from the madness and the bondage of femaleness, and choose for yourselves the salvation of maleness' (VIII 131, 5-8). Here again, as in the previous passages, the female is linked to the enslavement of earthly existence, and maleness promises true freedom.

In the wake of the preceding discussion, *Gospel of Thomas logion* 114 can be understood as quite compatible with the perspective of the rest of the *Gospel*. Although the categories 'male' and 'female' have a different symbolic value in the final *logion* from the rest of the tractate, these categories as employed in the *Gospel of Thomas* reflect the varieties of contemporary Hellenistic and Gnostic usage. Indeed, they can do no other; and it is precisely here, on the symbolic values of 'male' and 'female', where more critical research is needed. Yet the message intended by saying 114 is appropriate within a world-renouncing, liberating document like the *Gospel of Thomas*. What is true for Mary as a woman is equally true for all those who participate in femaleness. Sensuality and sexuality are overcome, the dying cosmos of the mother goddess is transcended, and she - and all human beings - who are physical and earthly can be transformed to the spiritual and heavenly.

NOTES

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[1] Photographic reproductions of the Nag Hammadi texts may be found in *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972-84), English translations in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden: E. J. Brill; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977; slightly revised paperback edition, 1981). Most of the translations of Nag Hammadi texts used in this article are based on the latter volume, though at times I have modified the translation in consultation with

the Coptic text. The translations of the sayings from the *Gospel of Thomas* are my own (*The Sea Teachings of Jesus* [New York: Random House, 1984]). The references to Nag Hammadi texts (except the *Gospel of Thomas*, where sayings numbers are employed) include codex numerals, a page and line numbers; the abbreviation BG refers to the Berlin Gnostic Codex 8502, which is similar to the Nag Hammadi texts and is published along with them.

- [2] On the interpretation of the *Gospel of Thomas* cp. the entries listed in David M. Scholer, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1948-1969* (Nag Hammadi Studies 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), updated annually in the autumn issue of *Novum Testamentum*. For a fine article reviewing the various approaches see Gilles Quispel, 'The *Gospel of Thomas* Revisited', *Colloque internationale sur les Textes de Nag Hammadi*, ed. B. Barc (Quebec: L'Université Laval, 1981), 218-66. A brief, balanced discussion has also appeared in John Dominic Crossan, *Four Other Gospels* (Minneapolis: Winston [Seabury], 1985) 23-37.
- [3] Cp. the excellent study by Ernst Haenchen, 'Die Anthropologie des Thomas-Evangeliums', *Neues Testament und christliche Existenz: Festschrift für Herbert Braun*, ed. H. D. Betz and L. Schottroff (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1973), 207-27.
- [4] On Jewish Christianity, Gnosticism, and the *Gospel of Thomas*, cp. Alexander Böhlig, 'Der jüdische und judenchristliche Hintergrund in gnostischen Texten von Nag Hammadi', *Le Origini dello gnosticismo*, ed. U. Bianchi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967) 109-40; Henri-Charles Puech, 'The *Gospel of Thomas*', *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), vol. 1, 278-307; Gilles Quispel, 'Gnosticism and the New Testament', *Vigiliae Christianae* 19 (1965) 65-85; R. McL. Wilson, 'Jewish Christianity and Gnosticism', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 60 (1972) 261-72.
- [5] See Werner Foerster, *Gnosis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), vol. 1, 27-32.
- [6] Discussion and references may be found in Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Macmillan, 1925) 17-54.
- [7] On the restoration see *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, ed. B. Layton (Nag Hammadi Studies; Leiden: E. J. Brill, forthcoming); *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 129; *The Secret Teachings of Jesus*, 107 ('For my mother [brought me forth] ?').
- [8] Further discussion in Elaine H. Pagels, 'What Became of God the Mother? Conflicting Images of God in Early Christianity', *Signs* 2 (1976) 293-303; *idem*, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979) 48-69.
- [9] Note, for example, *Acts of John* 93; *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* VII 55.9-56.19; Coptic *Apocalypse of Peter* VII 81.3-24; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.24.4.
- [10] *Adversus Haereses* 1.7.2; *Panarion* 31.7.4; see the brief discussion, with additional bibliography, in my monograph *The Letter of Peter to Philip* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981) 154-7, 186-7.
- [11] Cp. Robert M. Grant, 'The Mystery of Marriage in the *Gospel of Philip*', *Vigiliae Christianae* 15 (1961) 129-40.
- [12] The question of whether or not a flagrantly libertine Gnosticism existed in the ancient world remains controversial. For two approaches cp. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963) 270-81, and Frederik Wisse, 'Die Sextus-Sprüche und das Problem der gnostischen Ethik', *Zum Hellenismus in den Schriften von Nag Hammadi*, ed. A. Böhlig and F. Wisse (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975) 55-86.
- [13] On the place of children in the *Gospel of Thomas*, and antiquity in general, see Jonathan Z. Smith, 'The Garments of Shame', *History of Religions* 5 (1966) 217-38; Bertil Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel According to Thomas* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) 217-29.
- [14] A Jewish boy was usually circumcised on the eighth day; cp. Genesis 17. 12, Philippians 3. 5.
- [15] Note may be taken, however, of several items relevant for *logion* 22: 2 *Clement* 12; *Clement of Alexandria*, *Stromateis* 3. 13 §92; Marie Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite* (London: Studio Books, 1961); Mircea Eliade, *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965); A. F. J. Klijn, 'The "Single one" in the *Gospel of Thomas*', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962) 271-8; especially Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity', *History of Religions* 13 (1974) 165-208.
- [16] Note that Paul's style involves 'neither . . . nor' constructions except for the description of 'male and female', which may hark back to Genesis 1. 27 and the distinguishing of the two sexes. See the discussion in Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 195-200.

- [17] Cp. A. F. J. Klijn, 'The "Single One" in the Gospel of Thomas', esp. pp. 276-8. Particularly helpful for the present discussion has been Richard A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970). Here the text consulted and translations employed (with occasional modification) for Philo are taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition.
- [18] *Das Evangelium nach Thomas* (Texte und Untersuchungen 101; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967) 77. recently, James LaGrand has echoed these sentiments by charging that *logion* 114 contains 'the most outrageous sayings in *Thomas* . . . Peter's request . . . seems cruel and misogynist, and Jesus' response seems to do nothing more than temper the inhumane spirit of the request with casuistry' ('How Was the Virgin Mary "Like a Man"?', *Novum Testamentum* 22 [1980] 106-7). Similarly, John Dominic Crossan finds 'ineffable chauvinism' in *logion* 114 (*Four Other Gospels*, 34).
- [19] Cf. Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983) 152-3. For a discussion on the possible Pachomian provenance of the Nag Hammadi library, see James M. Robinson, 'Introduction', *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*; Frederik Wisse, 'Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt', *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 431-40. On the Greek fragments cp. M. Marcovich, 'Textual Criticism on the Gospel of Thomas', *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1969) 53-74.
- [20] On Peter in Gnostic literature cp. Pheme Perkins, 'Peter in Gnostic Revelation', *Society of Biblical Literature: 1974 Seminar Papers*, ed. G. W. MacRae (Cambridge, MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974), vol. 2, 1-13; *idem*, *The Gnostic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1980), 113-56. For a Coptic text and English translation of the *Pistis Sophia*, see Carl Schmidt and Violet MacDermot, *Pistis Sophia* (Nag Hammadi Studies 9; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).
- [21] Cp. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), vol. 3, 288-93, for descriptions of the several women named Mary in the early Christian movement.
- [22] Cp. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9. 666 ff.; 12. 171 ff. (see also Plutarch, *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus* 75EF; Phlegon of Tralles, *Mirabilia* 6 [a young girl sprouts male genitals, καὶ ἡ κόρη ἀνὴρ ἐγένετο], etc.; M. Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite*, 33-43); Plato, *Timaeus* 42A-D; Hermann Kees, *Aegypten (Religionsgeschichtliches Lesebuch*, ed. A. Bertholet; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1928) 18, 30 (also K. H. Rengstorff, 'Urchristliches Kerygma und "gnostische" Interpretation in einigen Sprüchen des Thomasevangeliums', *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 569-72); Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 2.15, 3.27, 19.23, 20.2; *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 3.8.4; *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 40; *Acts of Philip* 44 (Delcourt, 84-102); H.-Ch. Puech, 'The Gospel of Thomas', 303 (references to medieval inquisition records; cp. F. P. Badham and F. C. Coneybeare, 'Fragments of an Ancient (? Egyptian) Gospel Used by the Cathars of Albi', *Hibbert Journal* 11 [1913] 805-18, along with Robert M. Grant and David N. Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960] 81-2, 197-8); also Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.12 §100; Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium* 8.7-8.
- [23] Compiled by Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Image of the Androgyne' 176, from Richard A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female*, 42.
- [24] Note may also be taken of the male devotees of the Great Mother Cybele and Attis. In moments of religious frenzy and ecstasy, such worshippers could achieve the ultimate identification with Attis through an act of self-castration. Thereafter such a man can be described by Augustine as *effeminatus* and *semivir*; in poem 63 of Catullus such an emasculated person is said to have become a woman! Cp. Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), esp. 181-2. On the Naassene Gnostics participating in these mysteries, but drawing spiritual or ethical conclusions, see Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 5.6.3-11.1, esp. 5.7.13-15 and 5.9.10-11.
- [25] On this utterance in the Eleusinian mysteries cp. also Proclus, *In Timaeum* 293C; C. Kerényi, *Eleusis* (New York: Schocken, 1977) 141-2. In general see Ugo Bianchi, *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 9-13, 724-7, 740-4. Here it may be recalled that while numerous religious traditions within the Indo-European sphere posit a Sky Father and an Earth Mother, other Mediterranean traditions can suggest a Sky Mother and an Earth Father; cp. Egypt, with Nut the heavenly Mother, her star-studded body arching over the earth and supported by the four pillars. i.e. her arms and legs, and Geb the earth Father, whose bodily undulations can represent the topographical features on the face of the earth.
- [26] This passage in the tract *On the Origin of the World* has been emended by Hans-Gebhard Bethge; see the resultant translation in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* 168. For a parallel to this passage cp. the *Authoritative Teaching* VI 23, 7-26.
- [27] The conclusion to the text *Dialogue of the Savior*, still fragmentary, has been improved

considerably through the identification of a fragment now at Yale University; cp. Stephen Emmel, 'A Fragment of Nag Hammadi Codex III in the Beinecke Library: Yale Inv. 1784', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 17 (1980) 53-60 (see the paperback edition of *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* 237-8.) On the particular statement in question cp. also Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 3.9 §63.

[28] The translations of Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus are taken from Werner Foerster, *Gnosis*, vol. 1. Additional references to the female becoming male may be found in the Valentinian Gnostic Heracleon's comments (fragment 5) on John 1. 23 (in W. Foerster, vol. 1, 163), and in the Nag Hammadi text *Marsanes* X 9, 1-3 (see Birger A. Pearson, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X* [Nag Hammadi Studies 15; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981], 274-5). Here I am concerned only with statements recommending sexual transformation, where the female is specifically said to become male (Coptic *hoout*). Mary's statement in the *Gospel of Mary* (BG 9, 18-20) that the saviour has 'made us into men' employs the more neutral *rōme*, and thus is a statement describing humanization (against Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 67; and Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue*, 134, 140-1); cp. also the *Gospel of Mary* 18, 16 (*rōme*) par. P. Ryl. 463 (*ἀνθρωπων*), Ignatius' *Romans* 6.2 (*ἀνθρώπος ἕσομαι*), and probably Ephesians 4. 13 (*εἰς ἀνδρα τέλειον*). Further, it should be noted that the possibility of the transformation as described in *logion* 114 may be paralleled by the suggestion of the transformation of the lion in the enigmatic saying 7 (this leonine *logion* is the subject of the Ph.D. dissertation of Howard M. Jackson, Claremont Graduate School, 1983). As there is hope for the woman, claims the *Gospel of Thomas*, so also is there hope for the lion!

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