

The Way of Salvation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth

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Summary

The *Gospel of Truth* is an early work of Christian mysticism that presents a path of salvation that differs markedly from that of modern mainstream Christianity. The purpose of this article is to explain that mystical path. The *Gospel of Truth* is sometimes puzzling to read, because we have only translations of an ancient translation, and because the original composition was written in a symbolic and veiled manner. This article will elucidate the puzzling passages by relating them to contemporary spiritual teachings.

Background

Coptic, or Coptic Egyptian, is nearly extinct, but once flourished as a literary language. Two Coptic versions of the *Gospel of Truth* were discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt as part of an extensive collection of ancient Gnostic texts. One Coptic version is largely intact but the other is in fragments. Thought to be originally written in Greek, this Gospel is presently available only in these two Coptic versions, and in various translations derived from these Coptic versions.

Neither of the surviving Coptic versions includes an explicit title. The title “Gospel of Truth” was given to the composition, because these words appear at the beginning of its first sentence:

The gospel of truth is joy to those who have received from the Father of truth the gift of knowing him by the power of the Logos, who has come from the pleroma and who is in the thought and the mind of the Father; he it is who is called “the Saviour,” since that is the name of the work which he must do for

the redemption of those who have not known the Father. (Grant 16:31-17:1)¹

As indicated by this first sentence, the *Gospel of Truth* is concerned with salvation or redemption. Here, “Father” is the name used for God. “Logos” is the Greek word that is often translated as “Word,” such as in the first verse of the *Gospel of John*: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”² “Pleroma” is the Greek word that literally means “fullness” and refers to the spiritual realm. This first sentence indicates that human beings do not achieve salvation alone and unaided; instead, we can receive help from the Logos, who has come forth from the pleroma and is called “the Savior.” Thus, the Logos is the mediating principle between the Father and human beings, and its nature and function are described throughout the rest of the *Gospel of Truth*.

The *Gospel of Truth* is anonymous, but it is sometimes attributed to Valentinus, who was an influential Gnostic Christian teacher during the second century C.E. Bentley Layton, a professor of religious studies, considers such an attribution to be plausible for the following reasons: 1) the *Gospel of Truth* has a stylistic resemblance to known fragments of Valentinus’ writings; 2) the reputed eloquence of Valentinus makes him a good candidate to have composed such an eloquent gospel; and 3) the *Gospel of Truth* lacks certain themes and

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features found in more complex Valentinian systems of thought, which suggests an early date of composition.³

Irenaeus of Lyons, in his work commonly called *Against Heresies*, referred to a composition titled the “Gospel of Truth” that was written by followers of Valentinus: “But the followers of Valentinus, putting away all fear, bring forward their own compositions and boast that they have more Gospels than really exist. Indeed their audacity has gone so far that they entitle their recent composition the *Gospel of Truth*, though it agrees in nothing with the Gospels of the apostles, and so no Gospel of theirs is free from blasphemy.”⁴

If the *Gospel of Truth* found at Nag Hammadi is the same work mentioned by Irenaeus, then it probably would have been composed before 180 C.E., because that is when Irenaeus’ work is usually dated. If the *Gospel of Truth* was written by Valentinus, then it probably would have been composed prior to 160 C.E., because that is often said to be the year in which he died.

Methodology

To understand some of the symbols used in the *Gospel of Truth*, we will consider related verses from the Bible. The *Gospel of Truth* does not make any direct citation of biblical text, but it includes numerous allusions to both Old and New Testament verses, sometimes combining those allusions. Even though the New Testament canon had not been identified at the time the *Gospel of Truth* was composed, this Gospel alludes to verses in *Matthew*, *Luke*, *John*, *Romans*, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, *Hebrews*, *1 John*, and *Revelation*.⁵

We will show that the key ideas in the *Gospel of Truth* are similar to those found in several contemporary spiritual teachings: the writings of Alice A. Bailey, who was a theosophist; the writings of Joel S. Goldsmith, who was a Christian mystic; and *A Course in Miracles (ACIM)*, which is a system of Christian mysticism. This demonstration will serve to clarify the *Gospel of Truth*, since a passage originally composed in modern English ought to be eas-

ier to understand than a translation of an ancient translation that is missing some words.

Nature of Error

The purpose of this article is to explain the way of salvation that is described in the *Gospel of Truth*. Before the Gospel sets forth that way, however, it describes the condition from which we need to be saved:

Ignorance of the father caused agitation and fear. And the agitation grew dense like fog, so that no one could see. Thus error found strength and labored at her matter in emptiness. Without having learned to know the truth, she took up residence in a modeled form, preparing by means of the power, in beauty, a substitute for truth. (Layton 17:10-20)

Here, we are told that ignorance of the Father leads to error, and that error did not know the truth and prepared a substitute for truth. This notion of error plays a central role in the *Gospel of Truth*, but to what does it refer? Harold W. Attridge, a historian of religion, acknowledges the “difficulty in assessing the provenance and affiliation of Error.”⁶ Some scholars have suggested that this “error” corresponds to the mythical figures of Sophia,⁷ Demiurge,⁸ or Isis.⁹ We, however, make another suggestion here.

Let us consider the next passage:

This, then, was not a humiliation for him, that illimitable, inconceivable one. For they were as nothing, this terror and this forgetfulness and this figure of falsehood, whereas this established truth is unchanging, unperurbed and completely beautiful. For this reason, do not take error too seriously. Thus, since it had no root, it was in a fog as regards the Father, engaged in preparing works and forgetfulnesses and fears in order, by these means, to beguile those of the middle and to make them captive. (Grant 17:21-36)

Here, we are told that error is a figure of falsehood, a nothing, and lacking a root, but having the ability to beguile and capture human beings. Later, the text refers to error by using both the terms “illusion” and “devil”:

Since there had been terror and confusion and uncertainty and doubt and division, there were many illusions among them. . . Do not be a place for the devil, for you have already destroyed him. (Meyer 29:2-6; 33:19-21)¹⁰

In the Bible, the term “devil” sometimes refers to a tempter—not a power or person, but an impersonal source of evil offering temptation. For example, *Luke* 4:13 states, “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.” From this point of view, sin does not originate in us; instead, an external tempter—the devil—has tempted us into sin. In and of itself, the devil has no power over us; it only appears to have power if we succumb to its temptation.

In summary, the *Gospel of Truth* characterizes error in the following ways: product of ignorance, fashioner of truth’s substitute, figure of falsehood, nothingness, lacking a root, beguiler and captor of human beings, illusion, and devil. The following definition, which we will use in this article, is consistent with all of these characterizations: “error” is the devil in the sense of consisting of illusions, or false beliefs, that are part of our environment and can beguile human beings, but do not originate from any particular person.

Several contemporary writers employ the same notion of error in their books. For example, Goldsmith states: “It is not your patient who is responsible for his ills, nor is it anybody else. It is not your patient who is responsible for his nature or his character—or lack of it. It is only his ignorance of how to separate himself from these impersonal or devilish influences which come to him as temptations or suggestions but which, in and of themselves, are nothing until he accepts or believes them.”¹¹ Here, Goldsmith agrees with several characterizations used for error in the *Gospel of Truth*: product of ignorance, nothingness, beguiler and captor of human beings, illusion, and devil.

Bailey says, “The world is full of illusions, many of them veiled under the form of idealisms.”¹² Many political, economic, religious, and social ideals exist in the world around us. If we accept an ideal and pursue it in a fanati-

cal way, trying to impose it on someone else, then that ideal has become an error for us. Thus, we may say that any ideal with fanatical adherents is an instance of error, illusion, or the devil.

Book of the Living

The Greek word “gnosis” can have the same meaning as the English phrase “knowledge of the Father.” Andrew Robison, a theologian, explains: “Broadly speaking, this gnosis is an understanding of the totality of existence and one’s self in the context of this totality.”¹³ In a passage quoted in the last section, we are told that ignorance of the Father leads to error. Because the opposite of ignorance is knowledge, knowledge of the Father, or gnosis, brings about our salvation, which is freedom from error.

A book is a symbol for knowledge. To represent the knowledge necessary for our salvation, the *Gospel of Truth* uses the symbol of the “Book of the Living,” which alludes to the “book of life” in *Revelation* 13:8.¹⁴ The first passage that mentions this book is:

In their hearts the living book of the living was revealed, the book that was written in the father’s thought and mind and was, since the foundation of all, in his incomprehensible nature. (Meyer 19:34-20:3)

The Apostle Paul spoke of the “power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (*Romans* 16:25). Kendrick Grobel, a professor of biblical theology, interprets the book mentioned by the *Gospel of Truth* as being that ancient mystery: “The ‘Book’ of which it often speaks is this preliterary gospel of Paul which is pre-existent not merely to Christ’s advent but to the universe itself insofar as the author identifies it with the Living Book of the Living.”¹⁵

Because the Book of the Living “was written in the father’s thought and mind,” we consider this book to be what *Isaiah* 55:9 calls the “thoughts” of God and what theosophical writers call the “plane of divine ideas.” The “book

of life” in *Revelation* 13:8 can also be interpreted as the plane of divine ideas.¹⁶

According to another passage, the Father reveals the Book of the Living as knowledge:

For he revealed it as a knowledge with which all its emanations agree, namely, the knowledge of the living book which he revealed to the Aeons at last as his letters, displaying to them that these are not merely vowels nor consonants, so that one may read them and think of something void of meaning; on the contrary, they are letters which convey the truth. They are pronounced only

when they are known. Each letter is a perfect truth like a perfect book, for they are letters written by the hand of the unity, since the Father wrote them for the Aeons, so that they by means of his letters might come to know the Father.
(Grant 22:35-23:18)

Aeon is the Greek word that often means age or lifetime. Various Gnostic myths use the term “Aeons” to designate the mythical inhabitants of the pleroma, and so some scholars assume that this term has a similar meaning in the *Gospel of Truth*.¹⁷ Throughout the Gospel, however, statements made concerning Aeons are true for human beings. For example, in the above passage, Aeons are said to be ignorant of the Father but can learn about him. Moreover, *Colossians* 1:26 uses Aeons to denote the men and women who live in the various ages, or periods, of the world. Consequently, some scholars believe that the term “Aeons,” in the Gospel, refers both to the inhabitants of the pleroma and to human beings.¹⁸ For simplicity, our suggestion is to take Aeons as denoting only human beings, rather than as referring to some other kind of entity.

In the above passage, we take each letter as representing a single divine idea, because “each letter is a perfect truth.” Knowing these divine ideas is a key step in the way of salvation, because these letters were written “so that they by means of his letters might come to know the Father.” Thus, these divine ideas convey knowledge of the Father, or gnosis.

The metaphor of these letters suggests that these divine ideas are received and grasped progressively and serially. Examples of these divine ideas might include the following realizations listed by Bailey: “Through the intuition, progressive understanding of the ways of God in the world and on behalf of humanity are revealed; through the intuition, the transcendence and the immanence of God is sequentially grasped and man can enter into that pure knowledge, that inspired reason, which will enable him to comprehend not only the processes of nature in its fivefold divine expression but also the underlying causes of these processes.”¹⁹

The *Gospel of Truth* also states:

This is the perfection in the thought of the Father and these are the

words of his reflection. Each one of his words is the work of his will alone, in the revelation of his Logos. Since they were in the depth of his mind, the Logos, who was the first to come forth, caused them to appear, along with an intellect which speaks the unique word by means of a silent grace.
(Grant 36:39-37:12)

This passage indicates that the Logos can transmit the thoughts of God to the intellect, or human mind, by means of a silent grace. In Bailey’s metaphysical system, the notion of the “soul” plays the same role as the Logos. Bailey agrees with the foregoing passage by writ-

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ing, “the soul is consciously aware . . . of the thoughts of God” and it is “possible for the soul to act as the intermediary between the plane of divine ideas and the mental plane.”²⁰

Receptive Meditation

How can we learn these divine ideas? The *Gospel of Truth* answers this question in two passages:

But those who are to be taught, the living who are inscribed in the book of the living, learn for themselves, receiving instructions from the Father, turning to him again. (Grant 21:3-8)

This is the word of the gospel about the discovery of fullness, for those who await salvation coming from above. Their hope, for which they are waiting, is in waiting, and this is their image, the light in which there is no shadow. (Meyer 34:36-35:6)

In the first passage, we are encouraged to turn inwardly to the Father and receive his instructions. In the second passage, we are encouraged to wait for the “salvation coming from above,” which is also called “the light in which there is no shadow.” Let us combine both answers: we need to turn inwardly to the Father, be receptive toward his instructions, and wait patiently for them. Such turning, receptivity, and waiting characterize the practice of what has been called “receptive meditation.”

In the Old Testament, *1 Samuel* 3:9 describes the attitude of receptive meditation: “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth.” Bailey describes it as follows: “Definitely and with full concentrated interest and attention—you orient yourself to the soul; you stand consciously ready for impression. What that impression will convey, what thought will come to you or what call to service will sound forth, you know not. Your attitude is one of a radiant, silent, poised expectancy. . . Note (if it comes) the emergence of some clear thought, the clarification of some bewilderment, the expansion of some mental perception into an intuition.”²¹

During receptive meditation, we listen for the voice of the Father. The *Gospel of Truth*, in the next passage, indicates that this voice is actually the Holy Spirit:

For, as for everyone who loves the truth—because the truth is the mouth of the Father; his tongue is the Holy Spirit—he who is joined to the truth is joined to the Father’s mouth by his tongue, whenever he is to receive the Holy Spirit, since this is the manifestation of the Father, and his revelation to his aeons. (Attridge 26:33-27:7)²²

ACIM agrees with this passage by saying that “the Holy Spirit is the Communication Link between God the Father and His separated Sons.”²³ Although mainstream Christianity considers the Holy Spirit to be different from the Logos, the *Gospel of Truth* uses these terms as synonyms, as shown by earlier quotations that refer to each as a revelation and as the factor that causes the words of God to appear.²⁴

Application of Knowledge

Mysticism is defined as “any doctrine that asserts the possibility of obtaining knowledge of spiritual truths through intuition acquired by fixed meditation.”²⁵ The *Gospel of Truth* has a mystical orientation, as shown by the passage quoted earlier that says, “In their hearts the living book of the living was revealed.” We take this passage to mean that a divine idea from the Book of the Living is revealed during receptive meditation as intuitive understanding, because *Proverbs* 14:33 says, “Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding.” Grobel has a similar interpretation: “Unlike ordinary books, which can be vocalized without understanding, this ‘Book’ can be read at all only by understanding.”²⁶

What happens to error when we receive intuitive understanding of a divine idea? The *Gospel of Truth* gives this answer:

Error was agitated, and she did not know what to do. She was troubled, she lamented, she attacked herself, because she knew nothing. For knowledge, which leads to the destruction of error and all her expressions, approached. Error is empty; there is nothing within her. (Meyer 26:19-27)

ACIM gives a similar answer: “What can correct illusions but the truth? And what are errors but illusions that remain unrecognized for what

they are? Where truth has entered errors disappear. They merely vanish, leaving not a trace by which to be remembered. They are gone because, without belief, they have no life. And so they disappear to nothingness, returning whence they came.”²⁷

The *Gospel of Truth* makes a strange statement regarding the Book of the Living:

No one had been able to take up this book, since it was ordained that the one who would take it up would be slain. And nothing could appear among those who believed in salvation unless that book had come out. (Meyer 20:3-9)

What does it mean to say that whoever would take up this book would be slain? Two kinds of death can be found in the Bible. The loss of physical life is the first kind mentioned, namely, in *Genesis* 3:19. Paul, however, refers to the second kind of death when he says, “I die daily” (*1 Corinthians* 15:31). This second kind is the progressive elimination of selfishness, and it occurs on a daily basis until the process of self-purification has been completed. The “second death” in *Revelation* 2:11 can be interpreted as the second kind of death.²⁸

Assuming that the Gospel is referring to the second kind of death, it is making the following point. Receiving intuitive understanding of a divine idea will dispel the illusions that oppose this idea, but it may not eliminate our habitual thoughts, feelings, and behavior that are based on those illusions. Consequently, simply receiving understanding of a divine idea is not sufficient; we must also take up the Book of the Living in the sense of applying our new knowledge from that book, eliminating everything in our lower nature that is inconsistent with this knowledge.

The Gospel describes how people undergo such self-purification:

By means of knowledge they will purify themselves from multiplicity into unity, devouring matter within themselves like fire, darkness by light, death by life. (Meyer 25:12-19)

What might these symbols mean? *Ephesians* 4:25 speaks of the essential unity of human beings: “for we are members one of another.” So, in the above passage, “multiplicity” might refer to feelings that human beings are separated into multiple divisions. *Galatians* 5:24 states, “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” In the above passage, “devouring matter within themselves” might be equivalent to crucifying the flesh, in which case it would imply eliminating passions and lusts. *Proverbs* 28:13 states, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper,” and so “darkness” might denote repressions, which are covered sins. *1 John* 3:15 states, “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,” so “death” might refer to all forms of hatred, including resentment and anger.

In summary, these two quotations are interpreted as having essentially the same meaning: “it was ordained that the one who would take it [this book] up would be slain”; and “by means of knowledge they will purify themselves.” Accordingly, we need to take any new divine idea that we receive from the Book of the Living and use it to slay ourselves psychologically, so that we purify our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Bailey makes a similar point: “Through the disciple’s grasp and application of these divine ideas or seed thoughts, he becomes initiate,”²⁹ where the term “initiate” connotes spiritual attainment.

Role of Jesus

In the *Gospel of Truth*, the principal emanation of the Father is called both the “Word” and “Son.”³⁰ In mainstream Christianity, Jesus is considered to be identical with both the Word and Son. Attridge and MacRae, however, say that in the *Gospel of Truth* “the relationship between the Son and Jesus remains obscure” and “no explicit distinction is made between the two figures.”³¹

Let us clarify Jesus’ role in the *Gospel of Truth*. The first passage mentioning him is:

Through the hidden mystery Jesus the Christ enlightened those who were in darkness because of forgetfulness. He enlightened them

and showed the way, and that way is the truth he taught them. (Meyer 18:11-21)

Thus, Jesus enlightened his followers through his teachings.

The Gospel continues:

For this reason error was angry with him and persecuted him, but she was restrained by him and made powerless. He was nailed to a tree, and he became fruit of the knowledge of the father. This fruit of the tree, however, did not bring destruction when it was eaten, but rather it caused those who ate of it to come into being. (Meyer 18:21-29)

The tree in this passage is related to both the tree on which Jesus was crucified and the tree in *Genesis 2:17*. The knowledge that Jesus brings “causes those who ate of it to come into being,” suggesting that those who receive this knowledge are transformed into a new and higher state of existence.

Another passage about Jesus states:

Jesus became a guide, a person of rest who was busy in places of instruction. He came forward and spoke the word as a teacher. Those wise in their own eyes came to test him, but he refuted them, for they were foolish, and they hated him because they were not really wise. After them came the little children, who have knowledge of the father. When they gained strength and learned about the expressions of the father, they knew, they were known, they were glorified, they gave glory. (Meyer 19:21-34)

This passage is related to *Luke 18:16-17*, which also mentions “little children.” Here, we are told to become as little children in the sense of being humble, if we wish to be saved.

The *Gospel of Truth* describes Jesus’ speech:

But the materialists were alien and did not behold his likeness nor recognize him, although he came forth incarnate in form. Nothing obstructs his course—for imperishability is indomitable. Moreover he proclaimed beforehand that which was new, expressing what is in the heart of the Father and bringing forth the flawless Logos. (Brown 31:1-12)³²

The foregoing translation characterizes Jesus’

speech as “bringing forth the flawless Logos.” Other translations render this phrase as: “he had produced the Word that has no defect”,³³ and “he had brought forth the flawless Word.”³⁴ By saying that Jesus brought forth, or produced, the Logos, this passage seems to be making a distinction between Jesus and the Logos.

Other works in the Valentinian Christian tradition explicitly make this distinction, stating that the human Jesus was redeemed by being joined with the Logos at his bap-

tism. For example, Theodotus, one of Valentinus’ second-century followers, speaks of “the Name which descended upon Jesus in the dove and redeemed him” (*Excerpts of Theodotus 22*).³⁵ Here, the “Name” is a reference to the Logos, as discussed later in this article; and the “dove” relates to Jesus’ baptism, as shown by *Matthew 3:16*.

The *Gospel of Truth* provides more information about Jesus’ role:

When he entered the empty ways of fear, he passed by those stripped by forgetfulness. For he encompasses knowledge and perfec-

The *Gospel of Truth* describes three stages on the way of salvation: first, the stage of receiving divine ideas from the Logos and then applying them to purify our lower nature; second, the stage of acting as if the Logos were in charge of our lives, even though many illusions still remain in us; and third, the stage of rest, in which our lower nature is restful because our illusions are largely absent, permitting the Logos to act through us.

tion, and he proclaims what is in the heart.
(Meyer 20:34-39)

Thus, we have two teachers: the inner teacher who speaks in our hearts, sometimes called the Logos, Word, Son, or Holy Spirit, which the Gospel uses as synonyms; and the outer teacher, Jesus, who brought forth the Logos and thereby outwardly proclaimed what we are receiving in our hearts.

In particular, Jesus outwardly disclosed the content of the Book of the Living:

Jesus appeared, put on that book, was nailed to a tree, and published the father's edict on the cross. Oh, what a great teaching! He humbled himself even unto death, though clothed in eternal life. He stripped off the perishable rags and clothed himself in incorruptibility, which no one can take from him.
(Meyer 20:23-34)

In conclusion, as presented in the *Gospel of Truth*, Jesus brought forth the Logos into the external world, and his life and death serve to corroborate outwardly the teachings that we receive from the Logos within our hearts.

As-If Behavior

Let us summarize the meaning of the Book of the Living. This book symbolizes the knowledge of the Father, or gnosis, that we must learn to be saved. Each letter in this book symbolizes a divine idea. Reading a letter symbolizes receiving intuitive understanding of the corresponding divine idea. Because the letters are read sequentially, this book defines a journey of discovery that begins with the reading of the first letter and ends with the reading of the final letter. As described by *ACIM*, "The journey to God is merely the re-awakening of the knowledge of where you are always, and what you are forever. It is a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed."³⁶

For those aspirants who have made some progress on this journey, the later part of the *Gospel of Truth* provides more advanced instruction, starting with this admonition:

Speak from (the perspective of) the superior day, in which there is no night; and from the star that does not set, since it is perfect.

Speak, therefore, from the heart, for it is you who are the day that is perfect, and it is within you that there dwells the star that does not set. Speak of the truth with those who seek it, and of acquaintance with those who have sinned in the midst of their error. Make steady the feet of those who have stumbled, and stretch out your hands to those who are sick. Feed those who are hungry, and unto those who are weary give repose; and awaken those who wish to arise, and get up from your sleep. For it is you who are unsheathed intelligence. If strengthening is thus, it is truly strong.
(Layton 32:26-33:11)

Here, "the star that does not set" refers to the Logos, which is said to be within us. Because we are told to speak from the perspective of "the star that does not set," we are encouraged to speak as though the Logos were illuminating our thoughts and words.

The next passage in the Gospel tells us to refrain from giving our attention to those things that we have cast away:

Do not focus your attention upon other things—that is, what you have cast away from yourselves. Do not return to eat what you have vomited. Do not be moth-eaten, do not be worm-eaten, for you have already gotten rid of that. Do not be a place for the devil, for you have already destroyed him. Do not strengthen what stands in your way, what is collapsing, to support it. (Meyer 33:12-23)

In other words, if we do give our attention to the impurities that we have discarded, we are actually strengthening them and bringing them back into our lives.

The foregoing instruction assumes that we have reached an intermediate stage on our journey: we have discovered that we can be illumined by the Logos through receptive meditation, but still are attracted to habitual thoughts and feelings based on illusions, even to thoughts and feelings that we have already cast away from ourselves. According to the principle "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (*Proverbs 23:7*), we can become illumined by regarding ourselves as illumined and acting

as though we were illumined. The foregoing instruction encourages us to proceed in that way.

Bailey calls the resulting activity the “as-if type of behavior” in the following passage, where she uses “soul” as a synonym for the Logos:

There comes a time in the disciple’s life when he must assume that he knows; he must take the position that he comprehends, and must proceed to act upon the comprehended knowledge. . . Govern yourself always “as if” your divine comprehension was perfected and the result in your daily life will be “as if” all concealed glammers and all hiding deceptive veils were non-existent. . . The as if-type of behaviour (for the disciple) brings in a still higher factor than that of thought; it involves the constant attempt to live as if the soul (not the mind but through the mind) is in constant control and the dominating aspect of expression.³⁷

The Father’s Name

Near its end, the *Gospel of Truth* includes an extensive discussion on the Father’s name, beginning with the following passage:

The name of the father is the son. In the beginning he gave a name to the one who came from him, while he remained the same, and he conceived him as a son. He gave him his name, which belonged to him. (Meyer 38:7-12)

In two verses of the New Testament (*John* 17:12 and *Philippians* 2:9), Jesus is said to have received the divine name. Thus, the notion that the Son possesses the divine name is part of mainstream Christianity. A distinctive feature in the *Gospel of Truth* is that the Son is said to be identical with the divine name, not just a possessor of it.

Einar Thomassen, a professor of the history of religions, acknowledges that the Valentinian notion of the divine name is a “puzzling theme.”³⁸ Consequently, there have been a number of studies on this theme, some of which have examined the historical derivation of the divine name from Jewish theology, other studies have used later works in the Valentinian

tradition to clarify how the divine name is used in earlier works, and still others have drawn on semiotic theory, which considers the process by which meaning arises in human communication. Next, we present our own approach.

John L. McKenzie, a biblical scholar, says, “It is a widespread cultural phenomenon that the name is considered to be more than an artificial tag which distinguishes one person from another . . . but it is thought to tell something of the kind of person he is.”³⁹ The Bible often uses a personal name as an indication of the bearer’s nature. For example, *1 Samuel* 25:25 states: “for as his name is, so is he.” A change in the personal name often indicates a change in the person, such as the change from Abram to Abraham (*Genesis* 17:5). In *Revelation*, “name” can be consistently interpreted as “nature.”⁴⁰ Similarly, our approach here is consistently to interpret “name” as “nature.”

The *Gospel of Truth* speaks of the “heart of the Father” at one point, and the “hot pleroma of love” at another point (Grant 31:11, 34:30-31). As given earlier, the first sentence in the *Gospel* states that the Logos “has come from the pleroma,” and so we may say that the Logos has come from love. Because *1 John* 4:8 states that “God is love,” we may say that the nature, or “name,” of the Father is love. In addition, Bailey says, “The Word is issuing from the heart of God, emerging from a central point of love. That Word is love itself.”⁴¹ If Bailey is correct, then we may say that the Logos, or Word, is the “name of the Father,” because the Logos is “love itself.”

Here is another passage concerned with the Father’s name:

When it was pleasing to the father that his son should be his pronounced name, and when he who came from the depth disclosed this name, he divulged what was hidden, for he knew that the father is free of evil. That is why the father brought him forth, so that he might speak about the place from which he had come and his place of rest, and that he might glorify the fullness, the majesty of his name, and the father’s sweetness. (Meyer 40:23-41:3)

The above passage states that the Son came “from the depth” and “divulged what was hidden.” Accordingly, the Father operates from a hidden, deep realm, and so his nature cannot be directly sensed or appreciated by human beings. But the Father’s Son, which is the Logos or Word, has come into our world, and so the nature of the Logos can be directly sensed and appreciated by human beings. Because “his son should be his pronounced name,” the Logos is actually the expression, or manifestation, of the Father’s nature within our world.

Here is a third passage regarding the Father’s name:

Who then can utter his name, the great name, except him alone to whom the name belongs, and the children of the name, on whom the father’s name rests, and who themselves rest on his name? (Meyer 38:25-32)

This passage indicates that it is possible for human beings to “utter his name,” which means that it is possible for us to express the divine nature within our own lives. But, for us to be “children of the name,” the Father’s name must rest on us, and we must rest on his name. In other words, we must be aware of the divine nature within us and we must rest on that nature.

Hebrews 4:11 also speaks of “rest” as a state of blessedness: “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.” Why is it difficult to enter into that rest? The *Gospel of Truth* indicates that our illusions make us restless:

Since there had been terror and confusion and uncertainty and doubt and division, there were many illusions among them. (Meyer 29:2-6)

Goldsmith considers every illusion to be an instance of the belief that external conditions—whether persons, places, or things—have the power of good or evil over us.⁴² If that is so, then every illusion would cause some sign of restlessness within us, perhaps feelings of terror, confusion, uncertainty, doubt, and division.

If we do observe some sign of restlessness within our mental, emotional, or physical bod-

ies, the *Gospel of Truth* tells us how to free ourselves from it: turn once again to the Father, receive another divine idea that dispels another illusion, and apply the new idea to purify our lower nature. Bailey describes the result: “one by one those bodies which veil the Self are brought to a point where they are simply transparencies, permitting the full shining forth of the divine nature.”⁴³

Salvation

According to the *Gospel of Truth*, ignorance of the Father leads to error, which in turn leads to envy and strife. In contrast, people who have been saved, or redeemed, have knowledge of the Father, are illumined by the Logos, and express the divine nature within their own lives. The final part of the Gospel describes human beings who have been saved:

They rest in one who rests, and they are not weary or confused about truth. They are truth. The father is in them and they are in the father, perfect, inseparable from him who is truly good. They lack nothing at all but are at rest, fresh in spirit. They will hearken to their root and be involved with concerns in which they may find their root and do no harm to their souls. (Meyer 42:21-37)

In other words, human beings who have been saved are those who are “at rest,” which means that they rest on the divine nature, thereby permitting that nature to act through them.

In earlier quotations, the *Gospel of Truth* describes Jesus as “a person of rest” and “bringing forth the flawless Logos.” When human beings become saved, they become like Jesus, because they are also at rest and allow the Logos to act through them. Thus, the way of salvation in the Gospel enables human beings to become like Jesus.

In the final paragraph of the Gospel, the anonymous author discloses that he himself has been saved:

Such is the place of the blessed, such is their place. As for the others, let them know, in their own places, that I should not say more, for I have been in the place of rest. There I shall dwell, to devote myself, constantly, to

the father of all and the true brothers and sisters, upon whom the father's love is lavished, and in whose midst nothing of him is lacking. (Meyer 42:37-43:8)

Because the author states "I have been in the place of rest," he is claiming to have written his composition based on his own experience.

Conclusions

The way of salvation found in the *Gospel of Truth* involves a radical reliance on the Logos, which is given a variety of names throughout the Gospel: Savior, Word, tongue of the Father, Holy Spirit, star that does not set, Son, and name of the Father. Although the Gospel acknowledges that we can be saved by a book, that book is the Book of the Living, which is written by the Father and communicated to us by the Logos.

The *Gospel of Truth* describes three stages on the way of salvation: first, the stage of receiving divine ideas from the Logos and then applying them to purify our lower nature; second, the stage of acting as if the Logos were in charge of our lives, even though many illusions still remain in us; and third, the stage of rest, in which our lower nature is restful because our illusions are largely absent, permitting the Logos to act through us.

Because contemporary scholarship has found the *Gospel of Truth* to be puzzling, the following points of clarification were made. Error, the condition from which we need to be saved, consists of illusions, or false beliefs, that are part of our environment and can beguile human beings, but do not originate from any particular person. Although the term "Aeons" is sometimes translated as "eternal realms," in the *Gospel of Truth* this term refers to human beings. Jesus brought forth the Logos into the external world, and so his life and death serve to corroborate outwardly the teachings that we receive from the Logos within our hearts. The name of the Father can be interpreted as the nature of the Father.

Several examples were presented to explicate the abstract notions found in the *Gospel of Truth*: any ideal with fanatical adherents is an instance of error, illusion, or the devil; a list of

divine ideas that might represent the letters in the Book of the Living; and the suggestion that divine love is equivalent to the "name of the Father." This article showed that the key ideas in the *Gospel of Truth* are similar to those found in several contemporary spiritual teachings. This demonstration helps to clarify the *Gospel of Truth*, and it also shows that, in at least philosophy and religion, "there is no new thing under the sun" (*Ecclesiastes* 1:9).

¹ This quotation is from R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), and it is also available from the Internet:

<http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/got.html>.

Grant, however, acknowledges that the actual translation was made by W. W. Isenberg. Standard enumeration of Nag Hammadi documents is based on entire codices, according to which the *Gospel of Truth* begins on page 16, line 31 of its codex. The identification, Grant 16:31-17:1, indicates that this quotation is from Grant's book and is the English translation of the Coptic text from page 16, line 31 to page 17, line 1.

² All biblical verses are taken from the King James Version.

³ B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), p. 251.

⁴ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, book 3, chapter 11, paragraph 9.

⁵ J. Williams, *Biblical Interpretation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth from Nag Hammadi* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), analyzes many biblical paraphrases in the Gospel of Truth.

⁶ H. W. Attridge, "The Gospel of Truth as an Exoteric Text," in C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (eds.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2005), pp. 239-255.

⁷ S. Petrement, *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), p. 379.

⁸ H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 190.

⁹ J. Helderman, "Isis as Plane in the Gospel of Truth?" in M. Kranse (ed.), *Gnosis and Gnosticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), pp. 26-46.

¹⁰ M. Meyer, *The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005).

- ¹¹ J. S. Goldsmith, *Realization of Oneness* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1967), p. 53.
- ¹² A. A. Bailey, *Glamour: A World Problem* (1950; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1973), p. 184.
- ¹³ A. C. Robison, "The *Evangelium Veritatis*: Its Doctrine, Character, and Origin," *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 43, 1963, pp. 234-243.
- ¹⁴ K. Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 59, says, "the author's name for the book is 'Book of the Living.'" The word "living," which sometimes appears before "book," is taken as an epithet rather than as part of the title.
- ¹⁵ Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth*, p. 20.
- ¹⁶ Z. F. Lansdowne, *The Revelation of St. John* (York Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2006), p. 112.
- ¹⁷ Meyer, *The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus*, pp. 95-112, replaces "Aeons" with "the eternal realms" throughout his translation of the Gospel of Truth.
- ¹⁸ Petrement, *A Separate God*, p. 381, states: "It seems to me that in the *Gospel of Truth* . . . the word 'aeon' is not yet always the technical word that it will generally be for the Valentinians. It still has something of its ordinary meaning: it can refer to the periods of the world, the 'ages,' the 'aeons,' that is, to men and women who live in these ages."
- ¹⁹ Bailey, *Glamour*, pp. 135-136.
- ²⁰ A. A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (1934; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 456-457.
- ²¹ A. A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II (1955; reprint. New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1972), p. 490.
- ²² H. W. Attridge and G. W. MacRae, "The Gospel of Truth," in J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), vol. I. Internet: <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gostruth.html>.
- ²³ *A Course in Miracles (ACIM)* (second edition; Glen Ellen, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1992), vol. I, p. 96.
- ²⁴ In the *Gospel of Truth*, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as a revelation (27:6) and the Father's tongue (26:35); the Logos is spoken of as a revelation (37:6) and the revealer of the Father's words (37:7).
- ²⁵ *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (second edition; New York: Collins World, 1976).
- ²⁶ Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth*, p. 85.
- ²⁷ *ACIM*, vol. II, p. 192.
- ²⁸ M. P. Hall, *The Apocalypse Attributed to St. John* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1981), p. 63; Lansdowne, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 19.
- ²⁹ Bailey, *Glamour*, p. 171.
- ³⁰ In the *Gospel of Truth*, the "Word" is described as coming from the thought and mind of the Father (16:35-36), revealing the Father's words (37:7), and supporting the totality (24:3); the "Son" is described as coming forth from the Father (38:8-9), revealing secret things (40:28), and glorifying the Father (41:1-3).
- ³¹ Attridge and MacRae, "The Gospel of Truth," in Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library*, vol. I, p. 74.
- ³² T. P. Brown, *Metagospels: Thomas and Philip and Valentine* (Athens: Ecumenical Coptic Project, 1992). Internet: <http://www.metalog.org/files/valent.html>.
- ³³ Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*.
- ³⁴ Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth*.
- ³⁵ R. P. Casey, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (London: Christophers, 1934), p. 59.
- ³⁶ *ACIM*, vol. I, p. 150.
- ³⁷ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, pp. 554-556.
- ³⁸ E. Thomassen, "Gnostic semiotics—the Valentinian notion of the Name," *Temenos*, vol. 29, 1993, pp. 141-156, cites many studies concerned with the divine name.
- ³⁹ J. L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (1965; reprint; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 603.
- ⁴⁰ *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation Based on a Study of Twenty-Four Psychic Discourses by Edgar Cayce* (1945; reprint; Virginia Beach, VA: A.R.E. Press, 1969), p. 141; Lansdowne, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 14.
- ⁴¹ A. A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I (1936; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), p. 65.
- ⁴² J. S. Goldsmith, *The Thunder of Silence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 56.
- ⁴³ A. A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (1960; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), p. 6.