

A Meditation on the Incarnation of the Word: Perspectives from the Gospel of Thomas in an East-West Synthesis

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Abstract

This article explores the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas and the concept of the Word both in the Christian tradition and in Eastern sources. The springboard into this meditation is the influential opening of John's Gospel, which identifies Jesus with the Christ and as such, with the Logos or Word. Through this identification with the Word as the creative agency of the Divine, understood archetypally as the Goddess or the feminine aspect of the Godhead, Christ as incarnated through Jesus is seen to bridge the masculine and feminine aspects of God. The Gospel of Thomas is then examined and seen to provide a different perspective on Jesus and his relationship to the Word. If John's gospel focuses on the exclusivity of Jesus as the sole incarnation¹ of the Word through history, Thomas speaks of the potential exclusivity of us all as fragments of the divine essence, a view closer to the esoteric understanding. The message of Jesus in Thomas is as fresh, as radical and as relevant as it ever was. It is a message common to Eastern and Western Wisdom teachings and constitutes another example of how Wisdom may manifest in a myriad different guises in the overlapping traditions of West and East, and yet remain One. The poems are intended to add a meditative dimension to the ideas being explored.

Introduction: The Word

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)²

Thus begins the Gospel of John, which contains some of the most resonant and powerful words ever written on the essence of the creative power of the Divine. Proclaimed in

the small hours of Easter Sunday at the most important service of the Russian Orthodox Church, and at Christmas by most Western Christian denominations, these words carry within them both mystery and certainty, a certainty which culminates each year in the promise of the Resurrection and the mastering of the darkness by the light.

Embedded in the ancient Orthodox liturgical rite, these words and the rite itself, open the door onto a deeper esoteric layer of Christianity, despite the exoteric focus of the Church as an institution. Ironically, and despite John's avowed purpose to proclaim the exclusive nature of Jesus as Christ and only Son of God, his words cannot fail to provide such an opening, raising as they do the question of the identity of the Word and the meaning of Its Incarnation in human form.

For John the Evangelist, Christ is unambiguously the Word or Logos, and as such, embodies the creative agency of God:

He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:2-3)

About the Author

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Furthermore, Jesus is equated by John with Christ and hence with the Word:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ... Full of grace and truth ... For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. (John 1:14-17, 18)

In the next verse, John has John the Baptist declare Jesus the only-begotten Son of God, a position reinforced throughout the entire narrative of John 1. John's point is that because Jesus the Christ as the Incarnation of the Word joins within himself both human and divine, he and he alone is able to close the cycle of Creation and Fall. This belief forms the bedrock of Christian theology in which Jesus acts as Redeemer and Savior.

Yet, Jesus himself speaks differently. At the end of John 1 when Jesus finally speaks he refers to himself as the Son of Man (another possible translation being the "child of humanity"). This is actually his favored way of speaking of himself throughout the synoptic gospels also, to which the Gospel of Thomas adds another term, the "Single One," an important concept which will be gone into later in the course of this paper. When questioned about his true identity (for example in Thomas 13) Jesus' response is both more nuanced and more far-reaching than sits comfortably in any dogmatic religious framework. Thus, for the purposes of this discussion, we will set aside Christological considerations and the well debated question whether Jesus, the Son of Man, was in equal measure human and divine, the two natures coexisting in his and only his person in a hypostatic union. The other side of this debate is represented by those who saw Jesus as only divine, or only human, but overshadowed by the divine Master being, the Christ, during the years of his ministry. These questions have been extensively debated from the inception of Christianity as a religion and hammered out at Church councils until the final defeat of the Aryan heresy at the Council of Nicea, which affirmed the doctrine of the hypostatic union as a core tenet of the faith. The powerful Gospel of John could be said to have played a key role in these later theologi-

cal concepts and in this formulation of the hypostasis, as did the conflation of the story of Jesus with that of other divine redeemers and avatars.

I do not presume to venture into this debate now, but I do venture to suggest that perhaps it has little to do with what Jesus himself taught and how he saw both himself and the rest of us. What we will see from the Gospel of Thomas is that if the human and divine natures come together in Jesus, they do so potentially in all of us, created as we are in God's image. Indeed, that was the kernel of Jesus' teaching. He can be seen as the example or the prototype of one who has realized this and who can thus help and guide others towards the same state. The Kingdom is here and now; God is present in our own flawed world, Jesus proclaims again and again. Could we but make the return to our true "Single" state we could return to this Kingdom as sons and daughters of God. The sayings from the Gospel of Thomas claim to offer a roadmap for this return.

At the heart of the return to the pre-Fall state and the seeing of the Kingdom here and now lies, I believe, the mystery of the Word Who is God, just what "It" represents and why "It" has such redemptive powers. This question remains regardless of whether one accepts Jesus as Christ and the Incarnation of the Word, or whether one sees him as a clear and pure vessel for the agency of the Word.

There are two sources which may serve to deepen our understanding both of God as the Word and of the role and teaching of Jesus.

The first of these is the Gospel of Thomas, which is essentially a collection of sayings or logia (from the Greek logia pl., logion sing. – sayings or saying) attributed to Yeshua or, in English, Jesus. Long lost to us, it is rapidly becoming established as a seminal Christian text since its rediscovery as part of the Nag Hammadi Library in 1945. These logia present Jesus' teaching with what reads as a minimum of filtration, or indeed, interpretation.

But there is another tradition which speaks of the creative agency of the Divine as the Word that can help deepen our understanding both of

Jesus' appreciation of the Kingdom as being present here and now, and the role of Christ as the Incarnation of the Word in Christian doctrine. This other tradition also helps us clarify Jesus' awareness of the Kingdom as being in this world. It is to this other tradition founded upon the Indian Vedas that we shall turn next. Given the persistent belief that Thomas himself preached and was martyred in India, this link is perhaps not as far-fetched as it might at first appear.

Vac: Vedic Goddess of the Spoken Word

Prajapatir vai idam asit:

In the beginning was Brahman

Tasya vag dvitiya asit;

With whom was Vac or the Word

Vag vai paramam Brahma.

And the Word is the Supreme Brahman.³

So reads the *Krishna Yajur-Veda, Kathaka Brahmana*, XII:5. All of creation issues forth from Vac, the Word, Who is Brahman. Vac is second in this text because she is within Brahman as potential, just as the Son, the Word is the second member of the Christian Trinity existing in relation to the Father or Source. The resonances between this concept of Vac and the opening of the Gospel of John are too great to be ignored. It is a correspondence which at the very least furnishes another proof of the deep structural and archetypal reality underlying the universe. The central understanding is clear in both accounts, Western and Eastern: as the Word is one with God, Vac and Brahman are One. The Brahman itself, the Unspeakable, goes forth as Vac, the Word, and becomes Speakable.

In the Indian conception, if Brahman (also called Parashiva) is the immoveable, changeless Absolute, the Ultimate beyond all categories, without name or form, Vac—or the Supreme Shakti—is the Dynamic Brahman⁴ who moves and flows, instigating vibration which manifests in names and forms thus creating the universe. The sound of this first vibration, the primordial sound of the origin that gave rise to all matter, was said by the Indian sages to be

the Sanskrit *Om*.⁵ In his synchronization of Christianity and Hinduism, Fr. Bede Griffiths placed the word Om at the centre of a Cross in a circle sitting on a lotus as a symbol for Christ the Word from whom creation comes, emphasizing the identity of the Eastern concept of the Word with Christ.

This ancient idea that matter originates in vibration or the utterance of the Divine Word is being upheld by some of the latest scientific research into the composition and origins of matter. For instance, a number of string theorists claim that the entire physical universe can be reduced to a vibration in space. In essence, according to this theory, every particle (whether electron or quark or even something still undiscovered) is a tiny filament of vibrating energy called a string. Vibration and consciousness are inseparably one, as the *Yoga-Vasishtha* V:78 says.

Therefore, in superstring theory the basic constituent of matter is actually a vibrating string, as particles themselves are understood to be different oscillation patterns of tiny one-dimensional strings rather than point like objects.⁶ Every vibration furthermore will have a frequency, and our senses can pick up these frequencies, for instance, as sound waves, or in the form of electromagnetic radiation to be processed by our brains via our eyes. As the prominent neurosurgeon Dr Eben Alexander writes, “the current neuroscientific model of brain function relies on information processing as being wholly the result of vibration... Neuroscience would say everything you have ever experienced is nothing more than those electrochemical vibrations in the brain—a model of reality, not reality itself.”⁷ In fact, in a manner of speaking, quantum science seems well on the way to proving that physicality as such does not exist, and that information and consciousness are at the basis of all that is. It is logical to speculate that thought itself is therefore a vibration and a subtle form of information, which impacts on the rest of matter, both subtle and gross. The position arrived at is not as different from the Indian concept of *Maya* or the Eastern understanding of the world as a vibration of consciousness.

The Bible parallels the ancient Vedic understanding of vibration or sound creating the worlds in its assertion that it is the Word, the spoken utterance, which is responsible for creation: God *says* let there be light, and there is light. Similarly, the Spirit of God *moves* (the prime originating movement or vibration) upon the waters, and God *speaks* the Divine Word (Vac) of Creation. Vac derives from the Sanskrit “*vach*” meaning “to speak,” and, as utterance, is the mother of all sounds and of speech, besides being the Mother of the Vedas and of all the worlds. To emphasize her identity with Brahman, the Word as God, Vac herself is “the unborn” (*Shatapatha-Brahmana* VII 5-2:21), “the One” *ekam*, “the One Real” *ekam sat*, who extends as far as Brahman extends (*Rig Veda* 10.114-8), and who is seen as the Absolute Reality and Truth itself, the supreme power underlying creation. As the absolute force in the universe, she both possesses and embodies the creative power without which nothing can come into being, or, to paraphrase John, without which “nothing was made that has been made.” As the creative power that informs, manifests and exceeds the cosmos, it is not difficult to see Vac in a later guise as the Shakti, the Supreme Energy, forever one with the pure Consciousness of Shiva; nor, in a different time and place, as the Logos of John, the Word who is God. While remaining transcendent as the Supreme Shakti who is the Brahman (just as the Word is God), not only does the Goddess engender creation, she lives in it, incarnating in all names and forms as the immanent Godhead who can be found in the world. When Jesus speaks in Thomas and the other gospels of the Kingdom that is present in this world, he is developing this theme of the immanence and eternal all-presence of the Divine here and now.

Vac later became conflated in Hindu thought with the goddess of flow, music and speech—Saraswati as the Great Shakti, whose name means “the flowing one,” from *saras* meaning “flow” or “motion.” Saraswati is an independent goddess, but when she is paired with anyone it is usually with Brahma, the creator god of the Hindu trinity, thereby emphasizing her role in Creation. (Vishnu is the preserver in

this philosophy, while Shiva is the destroyer.) Saraswati is also the goddess of Wisdom and learning, and in the hymn of the *Rig Veda* 10.125, Vac, her precursor, speaks of herself in terms strongly evocative of Wisdom in Proverbs—knowledge of Her is the highest knowledge available to Man and Vac makes the true knower of Wisdom powerful and blessed beyond all.⁸ In a further parallel between the two traditions Wisdom conceals herself in the created world, just as the Shakti is veiled by Maya, and “the world knows her not,” neither recognizing nor honouring her, just as the world does not recognize the Word or Logos although the world was made by him, as John 1:10 states:

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

There are of course more direct Western influences on John's Logos, such as Philo of Alexandria (1st century BC-AD), for whom the Logos creates the ideas that mould matter, and who was himself influenced by Plato; and Heraclitus of Ephesus (6th century BC), who saw the Logos as the principle underlying and governing the universe. These influences have been extensively researched, therefore, an in-depth investigation will not be offered here. Nevertheless, Heraclitus and Philo most probably formed the immediate springboard for John's inspired meditation and a brief summary of their principal thoughts is needed in this context. In fact, Heraclitus was acknowledged by St Justin as the first to recognize the Logos, and thus as a Christian before the fact. For Heraclitus the Logos is akin to the mind of God, being the rational structure, universal law or truth which controls and orders the universe. It is also that which links all things; hence all things are unified in it. Human beings are able to link to the Logos or divine law by virtue of the matching logos which is inside every human soul as fire. Similarly, in the Indian tradition, every human being is one with the Brahman through his or her Atman, the indwelling core of divine consciousness in each soul. Ultimately, for Heraclitus, we can understand the order of the world through the Logos, because we contain the logos within us. Thus, the Logos speaks to all, and its wisdom is one. How-

ever, most people do not recognize this, and therefore fail to see the underlying order of the world. The primary element for Heraclitus was the ever-living Fire and in it he also saw the unification of opposites as well as the intelligence that holds everything together. As such, the Logos can be said to manifest through Fire.⁹ These themes, such as the primacy of Fire (both as the Kingdom and as Jesus himself), the unity or transcendence of opposites, and the blindness of most people to what is inside them and links them to all of creation, will all be seen to be prominent in the Gospel of Thomas.

Philo saw the Logos as the domain of ideas and also as the eldest son or first born of God, responsible for creation. For him too, the Logos was a link, linking principle or bond, holding everything together in a manner not dissimilar to Heraclitus, though for Philo, this additionally makes the Logos a mediator or connecting point between God and man, as humans are children of the Logos.¹⁰ Given the transcendence of Philo's God (anthropomorphizing God was an abomination for this Hellenised Jew), the Logos becomes necessary as an intermediary being to make God known to man through this function of mediation or intercession. Initially, Philo identified Wisdom or Sophia and the Logos as different principles, with the Logos secondary to and proceeding from Sophia. Sophia comes into being at the beginning and then Yahweh creates the "Son," and thus the universe, together with her. Accordingly, she is the Mother of the Logos, while Yahweh is the Father. The Son is then seen as being in the Image of both the Mother and the Father. In Thomas, Jesus introduces this idea of the Mother of Creation,

Who is Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas? And how does he see himself? A recurrent theme in the Gospel of Thomas is that of the "Single One." As the "child of humanity" (or Son of Man) as Jesus repeatedly calls himself, he is "Single" and calls on his followers to become the same, "single ones" such as he, if they are to enter the Kingdom. The Single One is one who has transcended and united within him or herself male and female, outer and inner, above and below....

speaking of her as the Mother who gives life (Thomas 101), making Thomas overall concur more closely with this, Philo's earlier position. Later, Philo confused Sophia and the Logos, seeing them as almost, though not quite, identical, and this in turn influenced the writings of the Church Fathers, some of whom saw Sophia as the Logos, and thus Christ as Sophia, with others conflating her with the Holy Spirit.¹¹ In fact, Sophia's standing in Christian theology has always been somewhat nebulous—is she or is she not part of the Trinity through identification either with the Son or the Holy Spirit? Or is she outside that structure entirely, occupying a position akin to God the Mother who is excluded from the traditional male-oriented Trinity, but who sometimes enters through the back door as a Wisdom figure? Philo left the door

open to both interpretations through his own shifting views. What remains clear is that Philo's shifting ideas played a big part in the development of Christology, enabling the identification of Christ, as the Word or Logos, with the feminine principle of Wisdom or Sophia.

John's Logos is most likely derived from these sources. Yet when we consider his depiction of the Logos as incarnated in Jesus, what we see is far closer to the feminine aspect of the Godhead who goes forth, both creating the world and incarnating in it, than it is to the active rational principle of the cosmos of the Greek philosophers, or to Philo's Logos who both is and is not personified.

Vac, Saraswati, God the Word, the Shakti, and their association with Wisdom: these are all threads which draw together, witnessing how people throughout history have attempted to give form and expression to an underlying re-

ality which they sensed. And there is a way in which all of these threads can be seen as coming together in the figure of Jesus. We touch here on the core of the great mystery in which the Christ, through his identification with the Logos or Word, becomes the masculine incarnation of the dynamic creative power of the Absolute which is traditionally seen as feminine, and is thus truly the image of both the Father and the Mother. And Jesus, as the transparent carrier of this Christ energy, becomes imbued with this very same Image, this same melding of archetypal feminine and masculine into one integrated inseparable Whole.¹² In Thomas this is the very same image he calls us likewise to enter into. Jesus' own name in Thomas for this state has best been translated as the "Single One."

The Single One

Jesus said to them,
"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,
so that the male will not be male, nor the
female be female ...
then you will enter the kingdom." (Thomas
22)¹³

Who is Jesus? Specifically, who is Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas? And how does he see himself? A recurrent theme in the Gospel of Thomas is that of the "Single One." As the "child of humanity" (or Son of Man) as Jesus repeatedly calls himself, he is "Single" and calls on his followers to become the same, "single ones" such as he, if they are to enter the Kingdom.¹⁴ The Single One is one who has transcended and united within him or herself male and female, outer and inner, above and below, as Thomas 22 so eloquently states. This theme of the Single One affirms both the concept of the Word as being in the Image of both Father and Mother and links Jesus to the perfection of Christ as the Word in his transcendence of dualities.

The Single One, according to Jesus, is able to discern the Kingdom in the midst of this world,

seeing past the illusion of separation to the universe permeated—as it is, for those who have eyes to see—by the Energy and Power of God. That One is a "living spirit," who, crucially, has gone beyond the dualities of male/female, transcendent/immanent, body/soul. And Jesus as such a "Single One" invites us to be whole in the way in which he is whole. This path to Wholeness can be construed as the path of complete individuation, the process whereby we become the undivided, awakened and fully human Anthropos. If you are whole or unified, as Jesus says in Thomas 61, you are filled with light. If you are divided and thus in thrall to duality, you are filled with darkness. After all, the real power of the devil, one of his essential tasks, is to divide and scatter. But the "Father" is whole and Single, with no divisions of male and female, upper and lower, outer and inner—and that too is Christ.

However, despite this explicit call in Thomas 22 to transcend the male/female duality, humans, being what they are, caught in the constructs of their time and culture, soon interpreted this state of Singleness to be "male," meaning beyond the works of the female, thus beyond birth and death, and beyond flesh and matter. This worldview clearly underpins Simon Peter's demand in Thomas 114 that Mary "should leave us, for females are not worthy of life." Jesus' response is that the crucial thing is to become a "living spirit" and that every female who makes herself male, as he himself will make Mary male, will enter the Kingdom. To cease being female means in this context to go from the perishable and mortal, subject to death, to the imperishable and immortal, to become the virgin spirit who is able to enter the bridal chamber and attain Oneness again.

"Becoming male" rapidly became a popular trope for the Church Fathers to resort to when they had to deal with women who clearly did not demonstrate the moral and physical inferiority considered to be endemic to the female sex. Thus women who exhibited sanctity, virtue and incredible fortitude and moral perfection were granted the accolade of "becoming male," the male being the model of perfection, or *vir perfectus*.¹⁵

The background to this worldview (and to Thomas 114) was the dualistic philosophy of Aristotle, one of the fundamental building blocks of the ancient Mediterranean world, whether Judaic, Roman or Greek. Amongst a comprehensive list of value-ridden dual oppositions, it pitted male against female, mind against body, human, specifically human reason or logos, against animal, with the second member of each pair firmly embedded in an inferior position. Women, by their very nature, were regarded by Aristotle to be part of the animal kingdom and therefore devoid of human reason which was the province of the man.¹⁶ And since the Divine was considered to be the source of reason, the male was in a privileged relationship to it and superior through his very nature to the woman.

This philosophical premise, based on Aristotle's faulty biological premise that females are "cold" and do not participate actively in generation, continued to be influential in Western thought, for instance, in the scholastic speculations of Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), who argued that the female soul was inferior to the male soul, a position derived directly from the Aristotelian view that woman did not have a rational soul and was both rationally and physically inferior to man. Aristotle was one of the principal influences on the thought of Thomas Aquinas who substantiates many of his arguments by reference to the Greek as "his" philosopher. In fact, Aristotle was being rediscovered and translated into Latin in Western Europe in the course of the twelfth century, a rediscovery which was to have a tremendous impact on subsequent European thought. Albertus Magnus (1193-1280), the master of Thomas Aquinas, was also heavily influenced by Aristotle and forcefully reiterated his definition of woman as inferior and a misbegotten man.¹⁷ While Aquinas does assign the rational soul to both men and women, and while he does not concur with Aristotle's definition of a woman as a deformed or defective male (as she literally is for Aristotle), he does see women as generated accidentally due to interference with the natural process to produce males, and therefore, inferior as a sex. For Aquinas women's bodies are inferior, and the perfec-

tions and imperfections of their bodies are seen by him to affect people's souls. Hence Aquinas concludes that men's souls are generally superior to those of women because men's bodies are stronger and more perfect than those of women.¹⁸ But there are exceptions of course, as is implied in Thomas 114. Grace can overcome inferiority and at least for Aquinas women might be less human than men, but they are still of the same nature, not animal as for Aristotle.

This whole Hellenistic philosophical perspective is clearly articulated in Peter's objection to Mary Magdalene and his assertion that women are not worthy of Life in Thomas 114. But equally clear is the way in which Jesus and the whole Gospel of Thomas with its vision of the Single One subvert this dualistic view, calling explicitly for the integration of female and male in the perfected human being restored to wholeness, or Anthropos. In fact, the discrepancy and direct contradiction are so marked, that many scholars, including Stevan Davies, have made a strong case for viewing logion 114 as a later addition to Thomas, stemming from a time when the movement to exclude women from the inner circles of the church and from positions of authority was gathering increasing momentum. For some of the Early Church Fathers themselves after all, including Augustine, Diodorus and John Chrysostom, woman was not made in the Image of God, or only grudgingly so, despite the clear position of Gen 1:26-27. The sublime logion 113, however, makes an inspired and logical ending to the collection of sayings, calling out to us yet again to see what is there:

The disciples asked him: "When will the kingdom come?" Yeshua answered: It will not come by watching for it. No one will be saying, Look, here it is! Or, Look, there it is! The Kingdom of the Father is spread out over the whole earth, and people do not see it. (Thomas 113)¹⁹

There is also a nice symmetry and mirroring effect here with logion 3 at the beginning which affirms:

Jesus said: If your leaders say to you, "Look! The Kingdom is in the sky!" then

the birds will be there before you are. If they say that the Kingdom is in the sea, then the fish will be there before you are. Rather, the Kingdom is within you and it is outside of you. (Thomas 3)

By contrast, logion 114 reads as if it were tacked on to the end.

The Kingdom of the Father and a Return to pre-Fall Consciousness

Blessed are the single ones and the chosen ones, for you will find the Kingdom. Because you emerged from it you will return to it. (Thomas 49)

The Gospel of Thomas opens with the bold assertion that the one who understands the hidden sayings of Jesus will not taste death (Thomas 1), because that one will be beyond both birth and death and the world in which birth and death occur. That one will inhabit the Kingdom of the Father.

What underlies these two worlds which appear superimposed on each other—one subject to birth and death, the other a perfect Creation? In Biblical terms, the world of birth and death is the world of the Fall. In some dualistic or Manichaean Gnostic literature, it is called the world of the female as these Gnostics took their cue both from the story of Eve’s seduction by the serpent and the prevailing Graeco-Judaic philosophy. This in turn echoes a prominent strand in Hindu and Buddhist thought which views the world as Maya or an illusion to be seen through and transcended. Maya is literally that which issues forth or arises (“ya”) from the source or cause, “Ma,” the universal mother, and is thus usually perceived as fe-male. (Maya is usually understood as an illusion in the sense of the world not being what it appears to be, rather than in the sense of not existing.) In Thomas too there is a call to transcend this world of birth and death. Those “not born from a woman,” Thomas 15 states, belong to the Kingdom. Likewise, restating the same idea, those who pre-exist the fallen world are blessed (Thomas 19 – “Blessed is one who existed before coming

into being”), because they are the Anthropos, the original human who has not fallen away from being whole and Single and succumbed to dualism.

As for the world of the Kingdom inhabited by the Anthropos, the human being created in God’s image, it seems to stem directly from the first creation story of Genesis. All too frequently passed over in discussions of the Creation and Fall is the fact that Genesis contains two creation stories. The opening one takes place during the first seven days of Creation, beginning with the uncreated light and ending with the seventh day on which God proclaims His creation to be good and rests. Man too is part of this first creation, appearing on the sixth day:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... (Gen 1:26)

And so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them. (Gen 1:27)

Because this original human being is made in the image and likeness of God, he/she partakes of both the human and the divine—and, importantly, predates Adam and the Fall. This Anthropos or Single One, the “child of humanity” or “Son of Man,” is also within us (Mary 8),²⁰ similar to the Atman or the matching logos of Heraclitus found inside every soul. This is our hidden treasure, linking us to the first Creation which is the Kingdom of the Father.

Know yourself, Jesus calls us as did the oracle at Delphi, know the face you had before we all had faces, know yourself as the Single One, and nothing will be hidden from you, precisely because the Anthropos, the original human, is created in the image of God and partakes of the divine.²¹

Jesus said: One who knows everything else but who does not know himself knows nothing. (Thomas 67)

Self-knowledge returns to us the original state of Singleness and the virtually unlimited powers of the original human being through the resolution of dualism. Jesus implies as much when he tells us in Thomas 106 that you be-

come fully human when you make the two into one, or in Thomas 48 when he says that if two can make peace or come into harmony within one house they will be able to perform miracles, “move mountains.” They have returned to the state of being Single, the state of the original human being created in the Image of God, and as such, nothing is beyond them. Self-knowledge remains the portal of entrance to this state, as Thomas 3 asserts:

When you understand yourselves you will be understood. And you will realize that you are Sons of the living Father. If you do not know yourselves, then you exist in poverty and you are that poverty. (Thomas 3)

Babies and little children are free to enter the Kingdom, as Jesus repeatedly says, because they are still “Single,” not ruled by any dualist ideas or the separation and divisions these imply (outer versus inner, upper versus lower, male versus female). And when Jesus speaks of infants and babes, particularly those who are seven days old, as being preternaturally wise and perfect (“The old man will not hesitate to ask a seven-day-old baby about the place of life and he will live” Thomas 4, “These infants taking milk are like those who enter the Kingdom” Thomas 22), the reference is most likely to the first seven days of Creation before the Fall. These infants would therefore be both young and ancient beyond measure.²² To become like them is therefore to become Single and whole, outside and beyond any dualities. Besides, as Jean-Yves Leloup points out, the Jewish rite of circumcision takes place on the eighth day, so a seven day old child is not officially discriminated by membership of a gender, nation or religion.²³

The mystery of Christ incarnated, both fully human and fully divine, shows us glimpses of the face these infants share, the face we had when we were a part of the original light of the first Creation. Thomas 15 speaks of this face before the face—not born of woman and not a child of the Fall but of the Source itself, and by implication, fully sharing in the attributes of the Father: “When you see someone not born from a woman, prostrate yourselves and worship him; he is your Father.” Gnosis in Thomas

(and in the Gospels of Philip and Mary) means a return to that being in the light when we could both know and be fully known, see and be fully seen, and thus inhabit the Kingdom.

To reiterate, this Kingdom of the Father can be equated with the first seven days of Creation which culminated in the creation of Man, male and female, in God’s image. And this Kingdom has not disappeared from the face of the earth, as Jesus says again and again; it has simply become difficult to see. It permeates this fallen world, even if its presence is invisible to most. They are the ones who have eyes but do not see. As an interesting aside, in *The Ringing Cedars Series* by Vladimir Megré, the word *chelovek* or “man” in Russian is given a capital M to reflect its gender-neutral status, its associations with the divine and the manifest eternal Mind. Thus, Man’s potential, in Megré’s fascinating work, and the paradise on earth which we can choose to inhabit once more, read like a contemporary version of these same ideas.²⁴ Anastasia, a mystical figure in the series who reveals her philosophy about Man’s relationship to Nature, the Universe and God, attempts to provide a roadmap for a return to the Kingdom which is even now spread out upon the earth could we but see it, while her vision of the high destiny of Man derives from the same blueprint as the Anthropos or Jesus’ Single One. Significantly her name, Anastasia, means “resurrection.”

The realization which the Gospel of Thomas and Anastasia and other teachers and mystics lead us toward, is that to live in the Kingdom of God is essentially to be alive to the perception of the Word (Vac or Shakti) throughout creation—or see what is truly before us with the eyes of the pre-Fall state or the child.²⁵ In Thomas 113 Jesus speaks of the Kingdom as not being here or there, not having any time or space coordinates, for it permeates all of existence as the Word that is there in the very cracks of matter. So there can be and is no simple condemnation of the fallen world in Thomas, nor of matter, or of the body, because the Kingdom is also to be found there, even though its presence is invisible to most, concealed as it is within the world sidewise. But to see clearly and to be in the Kingdom is to re-

turn to the original Oneness of the Single One—the two becoming one which they ever were and ever are, opposites uniting, and the two polarities of masculine and feminine reintegrating into Wholeness—the Shakti melding with Shiva, the Shekhinah reunited with Yahweh²⁶—the Word inseparable from God because the Word is God.

Sidewise

The dispersal of Tiamat
The sacrifice of Sati
The fall of Sophia
Sidewise
Between the cracks
Turned sidewise
Inside the light
She is concealed
Within the world She has created

Who now will churn the ocean?
Who now will call her forth
To come together with the One She loves?

(Irina Kuzminsky)

The belief is that when the exiled Shekhinah is reunited with Yahweh heaven on earth will be reinstated. Esoterically this can be seen as the enactment of the Sacred Marriage which restores balance, harmony and peace to the earth—the return of the Kingdom.

The Spirit of Wisdom

Jesus said: He who drinks from my mouth will become like I am, and I will become he. And the hidden things will be revealed to him. (Thomas 108)

In a broader sense, the Gospel of Thomas is about Jesus' words as Wisdom teachings, or Jesus as "Word" in a literal sense. His story and his personality (in contrast to personhood) are ultimately not relevant here to his central message. But the words he speaks can both guide and awaken us, and show us how to return to the Kingdom of God which is our inheritance. These ideas are similar to passages from the synoptic gospels wherein Jesus takes on the attributes of Wisdom in sayings such as Thomas 28, 108, 90, 92, 93, and 94, are similar to passages from the synoptic gospels wherein Jesus takes on the attributes of Wisdom. In

fact, Jesus' relation to Wisdom in Thomas echoes some of the ambiguity of Philo's confusion of the Logos and Sophia, as Jesus appears to be both the son of Wisdom (she is the true mother who gives life) and, as her image, is imbued with her attributes and able to speak as her.

Thus in Thomas 108 Jesus says that whosoever drinks from his mouth, drinks his wisdom, his words, and so becomes, like him, a child of the Living One, the Father. This logion makes deeper sense of what are, for some, troubling words in the Gospel of Philip regarding Mary Magdalene (and for others quite the opposite): that the Savior loved her more than the others and that he kissed her often on the mouth.

The companion of the Son is Miriam of Magdala.

The teacher loved her more than all the disciples;
he often kissed her on the mouth. (Philip 55)²⁷

Elsewhere Philip clarifies:

The realized human is fertilized by a kiss,
and is born through a kiss. (Philip 31)

What is clear for those who have eyes to see is that these passages refer to a sacred kiss or the sacred embrace of Jesus and Mary:²⁸ Jesus kisses Mary Magdalene on the mouth so that she may drink his Wisdom, his Word, and become like him the spirit of wisdom, a "living spirit" who will be instructed by Wisdom herself to see and know. Sharing the same breath and spirit with Jesus through the kiss, Mary Magdalene becomes, accordingly, "the woman who knew the All," as the *Dialogue of the Saviour* testifies: "This word she spoke as a woman who knew the All."²⁹

Seeing

People cannot see anything that really is without becoming like it. (Philip 44)

Jesus said: Recognize what is right in front of you, and that which is hidden from you will be revealed to you. (Thomas 5)

Harold Bloom writes, "Seeing what is before you is the whole art of vision for

Thomas's Jesus."³⁰ "Seeing what is" is the crux of the teaching—see what is in front of you and you will know everything, Jesus says, and he seeks to awaken that seeing through violent paradox, through parable, through Zen like koans that silence the mind with their convolutions of thought. Jesus seeks to shock, to awaken, to provoke, for that is the way in which the mind can be silenced, and the veils of ignorance or Maya rent through to allow a glimpse of Wisdom with her direct knowing and direct vision. Thus, in Thomas 2 and 3, we hear that to find the sought kingdom is deeply disquieting, not at all what you might expect, while Thomas 56 affirms that the world and worldliness are a carcass, dead and illusory—and yet it is this same world in which the Kingdom is found. The Fall makes the first Creation difficult to see, the Gospel of Thomas tells us, but it is still there. In the Tantric tradition too, Samsara is also Nirvana, as the world is also the Kingdom, though to truly see this we must undergo the fire of egoic annihilation. In acknowledgement of this, the Gospel of Thomas continually speaks of the "elect," with many called but few chosen, because all too few are willing to walk the path of self-realization or follow Jesus into the Fire.

Seeing the world as the Kingdom, Jesus transcends both dualism and the world abhorrence which afflicts those who realize that the world is indeed veiled by illusion. Seeing for them becomes synonymous with rejection and even revulsion, but for Jesus, seeing through is precisely that—seeing through to the truth, to the reality of the Kingdom which is there in the midst of this very same world. "Split a piece of wood" or "lift up a stone," as Jesus says, "and I am there" (Thomas 77). Again, we return to the Word as God in the world; Vac, Shakti, or the Word as the creative principle of God through whom the world is made, waiting to be discovered and seen.

In Hindu thought, the multiple roles that Shakti encompasses hint at the mystery of God in the world and this mystery's final resolution. For Shakti can appear as the creative principle through which the world is made; the veil of illusion drawn across the world; the play or *lila* of the Divine; the energy of Wisdom which

informs the world and leads us toward the realization of truth; and the force which cuts through evil and destroys illusion in the guise of the demon-slaying goddesses Durga or Kali in order to bring liberation to both gods and humans. The definitive Tantric realization is to see the Ultimate Reality in the midst of the world, not just apart from it. Once one has come to see this all-presence—not only outside nor only inside but both—one comes to inhabit what Jesus terms the Kingdom of God.

The "True Mother of All"

For my mother made me to die,
but my true mother gave me Life. (Thomas 101)³¹

In Gnostic thought Sophia can play multiple roles, beginning with her identification with the Wisdom of God, conflated in some Eastern Orthodox thought with Christ as Wisdom and as Word. However, the name of Sophia can also denote the fallen energy who created the Demiurge, who in turn created the world of the Fall and of death. Therefore, in this guise, she is responsible for this fallen creation, a world in which she herself is enmeshed and awaiting liberation. Sophia is likewise the Divine Mother, the "true mother" who imparts breath or spirit to her creation and is concealed within it, yet reaching out to those who seek and have eyes to see, to lead them into Life. As such, she is that aspect of God responsible for Creation, usually, though not exclusively, seen as the Divine Feminine. She has been called Shakti, Vac, Sophia, Devi, to say nothing of Isis, who is also praised as the Divine Word bringing illumination, or Kwan Yin, the "Divine Voice" who, according to Helena Blavatsky, calls forth the Universe.³² Her names are many yet all point to the One Supreme Energy of the creative Word.

In this manner, the Western Sophianic tradition and Gnosticism contain an interesting correlation to the image of the two mothers of Iogion 101, one who gives death, the other who gives life, in the image of the two Sophias, one fallen, one God the Word. This thematic is present in texts such as the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, with its call by the "Lord" to "destroy the works of womanhood (or of the female)" and

the ensuing dialogue (see Dial. Sav. 144:12-23). The idea here, consistent within itself, is that if women cease to give birth there will be no more death, because “Whatever is born of woman dies” (Dial. Sav. 140)—hence Matthew’s interpretation of the call to obliterate the “works of womanhood” as an understanding that women should no longer give birth (Dial. Sav. 144). There are echoes of this position in the already discussed notorious Thomas 114 with Simon Peter’s call for Mary to leave because she is female. There Simon Peter not unnaturally confuses the “works of womanhood” (meaning the cycle of birth and death) with women themselves as human beings, something which is clearly not the case in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* where Mary is granted preeminent status among the disciples.

In a final twist of paradox regarding the two mothers, the true mother who gives life is often reviled by the world as the Whore. Thomas 105 reads, “One who knows father and mother will be called the son of a whore” and this is reminiscent of the Nag Hammadi text, *Thunder Perfect Mind*,³³ in which this true “mother of all,” the Divine Feminine, is both holy and scorned. She is hidden within Creation, hidden in plain sight as it were, but debased by the world She has created and which does not know Her.

I am the honoured one and the scorned one
I am She who engulfs and She who releases
I am the initiator of the breath
My eyelid closes and a cycle ends
And then begins when once again it opens
I dance through space
And weave strands strings and superstrings
of light
Which takes on shapes and patterns in my
weaving
Which I see and am seen through by My
eyes
I am pure Being and Non-Being
And Beyond
I am the death of all your hopes and their
rebirth
I am quite simply
What I AM
And you may name me Mother.

(From *Sophia Songs*, Irina Kuzminsky)

Yet, knowledge of Her, just like knowledge of Vac in the Rig Veda, remains the highest knowledge, and, when attained, brings us to the Tantric realization that Samsara is Nirvana: not immanence or transcendence, but both together. The Kingdom is here.

The Father’s kingdom is spread out upon the earth, And people do not see it. (Thomas 113)

It is interesting to speculate that Mary Magdalene’s later reputation as a prostitute or whore might have a deeper archetypal layer. Having become a child of the Light, a living spirit alongside Jesus, having drunk Wisdom from his lips, she enters the bridal chamber as a Single One to become one with the light in a Sacred Marriage. And her fate as “the woman who knew the All,” and who carries some of the archetype of the Divine Feminine, has also been to be debased and labelled a Whore. Thus, she shares in the paradox of the sacred debased by the fallen world, a world which is no longer in relation with or turned toward God.

Clothes and Maya

To know the grace of true communion with him,
One must be clothed in clear light. (Philip 106)

To attain true communion, or the Sacred Marriage with the Christ, and enter the bridal chamber, becoming one with the light, we must first shed our own garments, the illusions we cling to, and become ourselves clothed in light. This idea of shedding the garments of illusion, or Maya, in order to enter enlightenment and thus the Kingdom, constitutes a further parallel between the Eastern and Western traditions, and is clearly articulated in the Gospel of Thomas. In fact, clothing or being clothed in illusion is something the Gospel of Thomas takes quite literally. First and foremost, Jesus asserts that we human beings are greater than the garments we wear and the food we eat—we should not focus on these, for they shall be provided for us, as shall all outer contingencies of life, by a benevolent and con-

scious universe. (Thomas 36, Matthew 6:28-33, Luke 12:22-31). And if we put the quest for the Kingdom and for Wisdom above all else, we shall be choosing the one thing that is most important in life, the pearl of great price, as parable after parable makes clear. Hence Jesus' rebuke of Martha and endorsement of Mary who has chosen "the better part" in listening to the Word:

Mary has chosen the better part,
and it shall not be taken from her. (Luke 10:42)

But, in addition, and more importantly, clothes become synonymous in Thomas with our fallen mortal bodies themselves. Nakedness and removing clothes is symbolic of dissolving the illusion of separation from the light and returning to the world before the Fall and before the newly discovered shame of Adam and Eve—the time of the Beginning which is also the End.

His disciples asked him: When will you appear to us? When will we see you? Jesus replied: When you strip naked without shame and trample your clothing underfoot just as little children do, then you will look at the son of the living one without being afraid. (Thomas 37)

Therefore, when you are baptized into Christ, in the words of the Church, you put on Christ as a garment, removing your own now superfluous one. This garment is constituted of light, and what the Anthropos does in returning to the Father and claiming his birthright, is to put on this transfigured body of light, which is incorruptible and not subject to birth or death. This body has been called by many names—the "diamond body," the "resurrected body," the "light body," but essentially it is a body transfigured by a marriage of matter and spirit, which come together to create a new immortal substance. The Gospel of Philip says of this body:

The Teacher rose beyond death ...
His body was whole,
He had a body, but it was the true body;
ours is transient,
an image of our true body. (Philip 72)

However, people who have attained this realization are no longer "at home in the world" which clings to its illusory divisions and poverty of consciousness. They are no longer of it, and the world of the Fall neither "knows" them nor loves them: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world ... therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:19) So they take off what the world has attached to them, the clothes of the flesh, the covering of Maya, and are free to leave and reclaim their heritage and their freedom:

Mary asked Jesus: Who are your disciples like? He replied: They are like little children in a field that does not belong to them. When the field's owners come they will say: "Give our field back." They will strip naked in the owners' presence and give it back, returning their field to them. (Thomas 21)

Radical Freedom and Radical Responsibility

Anyone who doesn't hate his father and his mother as I do cannot be a disciple of mine. And anyone who doesn't love his father and mother as I do cannot be a disciple of mine. (Thomas 101)

The heritage and freedom that Jesus offers are what John terms "sonship," the gift to become "sons of God" who are "born of God" (John 1:12-13). As the Logos or Word, Jesus as perceived by John, is the Son forever turned towards the Father or Source. For Thomas, he is One through whose example we can resume our own "sonship," becoming children of God, our light turned towards and merging with the Light from which we came. As "sons," as the Gnostic gospels affirm, we become clothed in incorruptible bodies of light, and whether this is called the resurrected body or the diamond body is largely a matter of vocabulary and tradition. But this "sonship" is only achieved by following a path of radical freedom from all attachments.

It is in this context of radical freedom that we can best understand the structure of the Gospel of Thomas. Thomas is free from story, any

story or narrative of the life of Jesus, implying that, in this context, he too is free from parentage and descent from any but his “real parents.” The synoptic gospels do their best to provide genealogies and narrative but Jesus himself speaks differently. When told that his mother and his brothers are searching for him, he asks rhetorically—who are my mother, my brothers or my sisters? Those who hear the word of God and act upon it are my mother, my brother, my sister. These words from the synoptic gospels appear harsh (see Luke 8:20, Matthew 12:48, Mark 3:31-35), but the Gospel of Thomas contains words which are even harsher. In Thomas 101, Jesus says, in effect, my mother gave birth to me into death or falsehood,³⁴ but my true mother has given me life. This distinction between being “born of woman” and being born in the Image of God is a recurrent theme in Thomas. Both Thomas 55 and Thomas 101 have Jesus ordering his followers to hate their fathers and their mothers, which Thomas 101 then supplements by Jesus’ command to love “his father and mother as I do” in order to be his disciples, pointing again to the distinction between one’s “true” and one’s “false” parents. Jesus is calling for freedom from even the closest family ties which must be shed along with one’s garments, for in shedding its garments the ego (to use our language) must shed any attachments, any protective mechanisms and any history. Only when you can see yourself naked, as Thomas 37 says, and can face what you are in your heart without being ashamed will you be a “son,” the “child of the Living One,” returning to the state of Adam and Eve before the Fall and before they knew shame, and beyond that, to the first Creation.

But to be true children of the light with all the radical freedom that grants us also demands radical responsibility. Responsibility is inseparable from freedom. To attain freedom and rebirth into the Image of God one must pass through the fire, or we might say, endure an arduous process of self-knowledge and individuation. Only then will we be able to bring forth the light which is within us. And it is the light which comes from a person of light, as

Jesus states, which allows the Kingdom to become visible.

There is light within a man of light, and he lights up all of the world. If he is not alight there is darkness. (Thomas 24)

Light is within a person of light. But if the responsibility to shine that light inside you is not taken you are responsible for the darkness of the world. This statement from Thomas 24 is a more extreme version of the synoptic gospels’ injunction not to hide your light under a bushel. You cannot choose invisibility; you cannot choose to hide what you have been given, or not only will what you have been taken away from you—the implicit threat of the parable of the talents—but *you* will be the cause of the darkness in the world.

Yet, this is a path requiring wisdom and strength to survive in what is often a hostile world, hence the often repeated injunction to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves (see Thomas 39, 32). It is also a path that requires fortitude and commitment in the face of difficulty. The Gospel of Thomas, therefore, often reads like a document for the elect, a spiritual elite even. Jesus says:

... I will choose one of you out of a thousand and two of you out of ten thousand. They will stand up and they will be one alone. (Thomas 23)

There are many standing by the door, but only the single will enter the bridal suite. (Thomas 75)

“Many are called but few are chosen” is the message implicit in all of the gospels. But that is because, in the end, very few are willing to walk the path back to the Beginning with all the discipline, responsibility and hardships this entails, even though that is the only choice we have, as the Gospel of Thomas makes clear, if we are truly to be living and not dead, becoming once again children of the Living One.

Did I ask God
To throw me on the anvil
And hammer me repeatedly
Upon the block
And forge me

Thrusting me
Seven times seventy
Into the fire?

(Irina Kuzminsky)

Which God?

But who is this God who we are called to be born of and become “sons” of in the manner of Christ, this God whom Jesus names Father? The God who is one with the Word, or in a different terminology, the Brahman who is one with Vac, or Parashiva who is one with Parashakti? Here we sense that we are touching the root of the mystery which Jesus is pointing towards and which he embodies. That mystery which is so great and so disruptive that when Thomas (in Thomas 13), gives his reply to Jesus’ question of “who am I,” and clearly comes close to the truth, both his reply and Jesus’ subsequent revelation are too shocking and dangerous to disclose. There is a clue to the substance of this revelation in the fate of the Persian Sufi, mystic and poet, Al-Hallaj (858-922), who was martyred and killed for his proclamation *Ana al-haqq*—“I am the Truth, i.e. God!”³⁵

I saw my Lord with the eye of the heart.
I said:
Who art thou?
He answered:
Thou.

(Al-Hallaj)

From the Western tradition, the great mystic Meister Eckhart writes of the same truth:

“God’s being is my being and God’s primordial being is my primordial being. Wherever I am, there is God.” “The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.”³⁶

But which God is this? Scarcely the masculine deity pictured sitting on a cloud, or the tribal God of sacrifice and power who calls for his enemies to be exterminated. Even in the early years of Christianity, as the contemporary Orthodox theologian Jean-Yves Leloup points out, the great Christian theologians warned against anthropomorphizing words such as Father and Son.³⁷ God is Father, rather, as

Source and Ground, the great Unknown, the Unknowable Abyss intimated in the Book of Job. This God is both the Abyss and yet intimate enough for Jesus to call him Abba.

This God of Jesus is in some ways closest to the Shakta conception of Kali as primary Goddess and Ground of Being, so evocatively given voice to by the 18th century Bengali poet seer, Ramprasad.³⁸ In his songs to Kali, Ramprasad captures much of the paradox, the mystery, the fierceness and the gentleness of the Divine, along with its intimacy and sheer Unknowability in one. Beyond the ken of human beings, beyond speech and the knowable, Kali, to paraphrase John Woodroffe, is the “Void (Shunya) of all which we know,” and “at the same time the All (Purna) which is Light and Peace,”³⁹ encompassing, as does the God of Job, both destruction and grace.

In Tantric Shakta traditions Kali appears as the formless Consciousness and the Primal Shakti, the source of the original movement or vibration from which the world is manifested. To recover her blissful fullness is to go beyond the dualism of the created world—to the state where above is as below, the inner as the outer, and male and female are one, the Single One, as logion 22 so beautifully states.

Names of G-d

Some call You the Unknowable
Some speak of You as Dark
While others dance in drunkenness
Seek You in grapes, in pressing and in Wine
Still others sense your mysteries in the Way
Or speak of Wisdom and unfathomable Space
The One from Whom all Buddhas know their birth
While prophets speak of the supreme I AM
And mystics probe into Your darkness
But sweetest to my heart
Most piercing is Your Name of Kali
Your Naked IS-ness scarcely covered by this Name
– Thus do I simply call You
– Mother.

(Irina Kuzminsky)

In a further parallel, Kali is seen to bring purifying fire and destruction to the world, yet this Fire itself proves to be grace. Jesus in Thomas 10 speaks as this aspect of the Divine, the Unknowable or Black mystery of God that ignites the world and sets fire to it. "I have thrown fire on the world. Look! I watch it until it blazes." (Thomas 10)⁴⁰

In Thomas 16, as in the synoptic gospels, Jesus speaks of bringing not peace but a sword, and a heightened separation between people, between those who see and those who do not see. It is as though the teachings of Jesus crystallize human beings into the heart essence of what they are, and the choices they make—good or evil, knowledge or ignorance, light or darkness, seeing or blindness, fullness (*pleroma*) or emptiness (*kenoma*)—become that much more stark. The very presence of Jesus in the world as one who is so much of the light that he becomes the uncreated light (as aptly said by Harold Bloom)⁴¹ polarizes people into that choice. You cannot serve two masters, as Jesus says. You must, in the end, choose.

In the *Dialogue of the Saviour* Mary speaks of Jesus in terms similar to those in which he speaks of himself:

Mary said,
"Master, you are awesome and marvellous,
And like a devouring fire
to those who do not know you." (*Dialogue of the Saviour* 140-141)

And Thomas 82 implies not only that Jesus is Fire, but that the Kingdom itself is Fire, therefore fire is grace itself.

Whoever is near to me is near the fire.
Whoever is far from me is far from the Kingdom. (Thomas 82)

Can this not also be the fire of the burning bush which is bathed in the flames of the presence of God yet is not consumed by them? And, continuing on from this analogy, would it not be possible to relate the Fire of which Jesus speaks to the fire of the Kundalini Shakti as she rises to unite at the crown chakra with Shiva, bringing in her ascent the experience of light and enlightenment, which is none other than a revelation of the Kingdom? There are

many well-documented accounts of the experience of Kundalini as a burning sensation, as fire which burns away all our dross and all that is extraneous to our true essence until our body itself becomes the burning bush. The fundamental experiences of awakening to our true nature are surely common to all human beings, whatever images or words we may clothe such experiences in.

Be Passersby

Be passersby. (Thomas 42)

The children of the pre-existent light, the children of the Living One, are called to be passersby in this poverty-stricken world, which does not know them and which can no longer hold them. Jesus speaks of this mode of being in the synoptic gospels when teaching his followers how to live in a world which is foreign to them, saying, "But you are not of this world as I am not of this world." (John 15:10) To be a passerby is to be a wanderer, never quite at home, and not to allow the illusions of the world to adhere to you, walking in the gaps as it were, without attachment. Not surprisingly, there are echoes of the Hindu and Buddhist teachings here on non-attachment—not being drawn in by the good or the bad experiences of life, the pleasurable or the painful, criticism or praise, but to keep walking towards the goal of light, of enlightenment. Being passersby allows us to remain unattached to the temporal and to enter the radical freedom of being a child of the light. We are, after all, only custodians, not owners of anything here, and to be a passerby is to acknowledge that and live it in full consciousness, knowing that all will pass. The only constant in this world, as Thomas 63 proclaims, is change and the unknowable. There is nothing here that we can control, no security to be had in an illusory changing world. So a passerby ultimately lives by having trust in the universe. He or she finds their security in the Unknowable and the Unknown.

The Gospel of Thomas is above all a living Word transmitted by the Living Word, showing us how to regain the Kingdom, the paradisiacal world which Anastasia sees as returning once again to the earth. The transfiguration

that is asked of us to make this possible is an ability to stay burning in the divine light, the Fire, yet, like the burning bush, not be consumed by it. In Thomas 82 Jesus implicitly equated both himself and the Kingdom with Fire. This burning in divine light impels him to take action—to become the Light and to lead others to it. In the same way, this divine burning calls us to action. The Kingdom, Jesus shows us again and again, is in the doing and the being.

Fuel for the Fire

My Kali bid me set the world on fire
 This sacred passion was the path for me
 But did She think to tell me as I lit my pyre
 That I myself was fuel and must ignite like
 tinder and catch fire?
 For only burning embers set dry seasoned
 wood on fire
 And only that which has consumed itself in
 fire
 Has then the heat and light to set the world
 on fire.

(Irina Kuzminsky)

Jesus says of the Path: “When you give rise to that which is within you, what you have will save you.” But “If you do not give rise to it, what you do not have will destroy you.” (Thomas 70) This journey of self-knowledge, seeing and transformation is by no means easy. But is there really a choice? The living do not die, and the dead do not live, as Thomas 11 proclaims. And yet, though many are called so few are chosen. But it is we ourselves who do the choosing. We are the ones who may elect to follow this path and regain the Kingdom and our inheritance as children of the Living One.

Therefore, “Whoever finds the correct interpretation of these sayings will never die.” (Thomas 1)

Be passersby.

Be filled with light and resurrect in this life.⁴²

For the “child of humanity is within you” as Mary says. (Mary 8)

And shine your light lest we should all be plunged into the darkness.

Conclusion

“In the Beginning: the Word.”

The opening of John’s gospel began this meditation and it is fitting to return to it now.⁴³ Actually in the Greek from which the Church Slavonic translation of the Russian Orthodox Church is derived, the wording is subtly different.

En arche en o logos

In the Beginning was (is) the Word

Kai o logos en pros ton Theon

The Word (Logos) is toward God

Kai Theos en o logos.

And God is the Word.⁴⁴

From the above we can see that the Church Slavonic captures the directional quality of “pros” which implies movement toward. The Word is turned toward God. Hence at the heart of all existence and life, even of the existence of God, is relation. The Word is in the Beginning, and it is turned toward God. The feminine is traditionally linked most closely to love and relation, as well as to creation (through birth), and this is no less true of the Divine in its Feminine aspect. The goddesses who represent aspects of the Great Feminine or Supreme Shakti herself often either have love and yearning for union as their central motivation, or are in a state of total union or identification with the Source. Thus Vac is Brahman; Kali, in the Tantric understanding is the Universal Mother and the formless Consciousness at the Source of all; Parashakti is one with Parashiva, as the Word is one with God.

Any profound encounter with the Gospel of Thomas shows us a way to regain that relation to God. And what is the Kingdom other than the whole of Creation perpetually turned toward and existing in relationship with God.

The living Word of the Gospel of Thomas, as spoken by the Word made flesh and existing among us through the Incarnation of Christ, points us towards the very secret of life and of who we were made to be. That is the true treasure of the Gospel of Thomas. Yet, Thomas need not be seen as a replacement for other gospels, but rather, as complementary to them,

presenting us with additional perspectives on Jesus' teaching. Thomas demonstrates how all True revelations meet in their attempts to express the Inexpressible and show a path for attaining the realization they point towards. In this, the Gospel of Thomas is no different to other revelatory texts. Its particular merit is perhaps its universality. Jesus' message is presented here in the form of Wisdom sayings, a form which would be more familiar and accessible to those who come to the teachings from other traditions, including Eastern ones. The insights in Thomas open up vistas of correspondences with these other traditions and their understanding of the creative Word, self-realization, and the spiritual path. As a radical and yet universal message, the Gospel of Thomas speaks also to modern-day Western spiritual seekers who are no longer content with unquestioning acceptance of traditional theological teachings, but yearn for their own experience of God or the Divine. For women in particular, Thomas' transcendence of dualism and hierarchy discloses the way to reclaiming Jesus' truly radical and liberating message and serves as an invitation to see him embodying archetypal feminine and masculine attributes as Christ, the incarnation of the Word, as embodying both archetypal feminine and masculine attributes.

¹ Incarnation is used here both in its sense as the Incarnation of Christ, the Word, in Jesus, and also, more generally, as "assuming flesh" in the world of matter.

² Unless otherwise stated quotations from the New Testament are from the King James Bible.

³ Like many, my first introduction to this text was through Sir John Woodroffe (aka Arthur Avalon) in *The Garland of Letters* (Leeds, UK: Celephaïs Press, 2008), 4. Slightly varied translations are possible such as: "Prajapathi (who is Brahman) is truly abiding (or eternal); And Vac his companion is truly abiding (eternal); So Vac is the Supreme Brahman."

⁴ A term from Woodroffe in *The Garland of Letters*, p.10. "It is this rigid, unwasting, enduring Ether which is Vajra ... the static manifestation of the static Brahman, in which the Dynamic Brahman as Sarasvati flows or

moves. The former is Shunya, the void of space, in which all movement takes place."

⁵ Interestingly, and significantly, Dr. Eben Alexander M.D. came to the same experiential conclusion during his NDE, naming the Source at the heart of all as the Om vibration. See Eben Alexander, M.D., *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), and *The Map of Heaven* (Sydney: Macmillan, 2014).

⁶ For definitions of string theory, see Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos* (London: Penguin, 2004), 345; Heinrich Päs, *The Perfect Wave* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁷ Alexander, *The Map of Heaven*, 140-141.

⁸ For an excellent introduction to Vac (Vak), see John Woodroffe, *The Garland of Letters*. His seminal research on the ancient texts and the Tantric tradition in particular cannot be bypassed and remains the foundation for most other Western exploration of this rich and important spiritual and philosophical tradition. For Wisdom in Proverbs, for example, see Proverbs 4:6-7, 3:13-18.

⁹ See particularly Heraclitus, Fragments B1, B2, B12; B10 on all things issuing from the one; B30, B31 on the ever-living Fire; B12, B49a on change; B34 on hearing and not understanding; B41 on Wisdom as knowledge of the thought by which all things are steered through all things. A good online annotated source for the Fragments of Heraclitus with Greek text and English translations is: www.heraclitusfragments.com, a project maintained by Randy Hoyt. Most of the translations are from John Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* (London, 1920).

¹⁰ For Philo, see Philo, *The Works of Philo*. Trans. C. D. Younger, (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1993).

¹¹ For more on Philo and Sophia, see Thomas Schipflinger's excellent book, *Sophia-Maria. A Holistic Vision of Creation*. Trans. James Morgante (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1998).

¹² In a similar vein, Jean-Yves Leloup in *The Gospel of Thomas* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2005), 205, writes: "The Son is the Image and Likeness of both [celestial Father and Mother], incarnating the two in One."

¹³ There are several scholarly translations of the Gospel of Thomas available. Each contains an

- element of interpretation and reconstruction of the text but all are based on a solid study of the original. The ones I have particularly made use of are: Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Thomas* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2005); Marvin Meyer and Harold Bloom, *The Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Harper, 1992); Marvin Meyer (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (New York: HarperOne, 2007); Stevan Davies and Andrew Harvey (series ed.), *The Gospel of Thomas* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004). All translations used in the body of the text are from Stevan Davies' rendition of Thomas unless otherwise specified.
- ¹⁴ "Single" or "whole" are both possible translations of *monakhos*.
- ¹⁵ On "becoming male," the Early Church Fathers and the "woman problem," see Dr Marie-Henry Keane O.P., "Woman seen as a 'problem' and as 'solution' in the theological anthropology of the Early Fathers: Considering the Consequences," paper presented to the Catholic Theological Society of South Africa, Oct 1987, online at: www.catherinacollegelibrary.net/theology; Kari Vogt, "Becoming Male: One aspect of an Early Christian Anthropology," in "Women: Invisible in Church and Theology," Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, eds. *Concilium: Religion in the Eighties* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), 72-83. Reprinted in Janet Soskice and Diana Lipton, eds. *Feminism and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49-62.
- ¹⁶ See Aristotle, *The Generation of Animals*. Trans. A. L. Peck, (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1943), II.iii, 175, for his contention that woman is a deformed or defective male. Also, see his *Politics*, in which Aristotle contends that woman's lack of reasoning power puts her in the same category as children and the insane.
- ¹⁷ Albertus Magnus, "De Natura et Origine Animae," in *Opera Omnia*, Monasterium Westfalorum, 1955, vol. XII, *Quaestio 22*, p.135:53-4. Quoted by Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, London, 1993), 429, n.37.
- ¹⁸ For Thomas Aquinas see Kristin M. Popik, "The Philosophy of Woman of St. Thomas Aquinas" in *Faith and Reason* (Christendom College Press, Ft. Royal, VA, 1978), 16-56. To find articles online taken from her doctoral dissertation, see: www.catholicculture.org/culture/libraryview.cfm?recnum=2793. Popik is the first woman to receive a Ph. D from the University of St. Thomas (Angelicum) in Rome.
- ¹⁹ Translation from Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Thomas*.
- ²⁰ See Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (Rochester, VT.: Inner Traditions, 2002).
- ²¹ See also John 10:34 "Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?"
- ²² For this understanding I am indebted to Stevan Davies. See further, Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas*, p. 2.
- ²³ Leloup, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 71.
- ²⁴ Vladimir Megre, *The Ringing Cedars Series*. (Ringing Cedars Press, 2005).
- ²⁵ Hinting at a similar understanding, Amritanadamayi Ma, or Amma, the 'hugging Saint' from Kerala, has participants in her retreats wear bracelets one of which reads: "The childlike innocence deep within you is God."
- ²⁶ It is stated in the Zohar that the whole first five books of the Torah exist so that the Shekhinah can be reunited with Yahweh.
- ²⁷ All translations from the Gospel of Philip are taken from Jean-Yves, Leloup, *The Gospel of Philip* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2004).
- ²⁸ See for a further development of this thematic, Jean-Yves Leloup *The Sacred Embrace of Jesus and Mary* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2006).
- ²⁹ See *The Dialogue of the Saviour*, 139:13. This translation is from Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 26. Other translations have "everything" or "completely" instead of "the All." There is a good version of *The Dialogue of the Saviour* in Marvin Meyer, with Esther A. de Boer, *The Gospels of Mary. The Secret Tradition of Mary Magdalene the Companion of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004). Most scholars agree that the Mary in this Dialogue is Mary Magdalene, as her portrayal here is consistent with her appearances in other texts. However, for a different perspective which leaves open the possibility of the Mary here being Mary the Mother of Jesus, see Anna Cwikla, "Strategic Ambiguity and Convenient Assumptions: The Identities of Mary in the Dialogue of the Saviour" Oct 19, 2012. Uni-

versity of Alberta Religious Studies Graduate Seminar. Published online at: www.academia.edu/.

30 Harold Bloom, in Marvin Meyer and Harold Bloom, *The Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Harper, 1992), 126.

31 As translated and restored by Leloup, *The Gospel of Thomas*.

32 Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine, I* (Los Angeles: Theosophical University Press, 1888), 307. As cited by Celeste Jameson and John F. Nash in “Musical Harmony, Mathematics and Esotericism,” in *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Summer 2015, 64.

33 “For I am the first and the last.
I am the honoured one and the scorned one.
I am the whore and the holy one... [...] I am the one who is disgraced and the great one.”

For the full text of *Thunder Perfect Mind*, see *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition*. Ed. Marvin Meyer (New York: HarperOne, 2007). The text is structured as a series of polarities and in each case the speaker transcends dualism and encompasses both opposing poles of the polarity.

34 This is a difficult restoration. Logion 101 can be read “For my mother gave me falsehood...” or “For my mother, who has given birth to me, has destroyed me...” or “For my mother made me to die...” See Marvin Meyer, with Esther de Boer. *The Gospels of Mary. The Secret Tradition of Mary Magdalene, the Companion of Jesus* (New York: Harper-SanFrancisco, 2004), 34, 106, fn.99.

35 Al-Hallaj, Mansur. *The Tawasin* of Mansur Hallaj is available online at: www.HolyBooks.com, in a translation by Aisha Abd Ar-Rahman At-Tarjumana. The extract of the poem quoted is from the chapter “*The Ta-Sin of the Point*” 12.

36 *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, versions by Matthew Fox. (Rochester, Vermont: Bear & Company, 1983), 20-21.

37 Leloup, *The Sacred Embrace of Jesus and Mary*, 62.

38 Ramprasad Sen, mystic Bengali poet (1718-1775). For a beautiful collection of Ramprasad’s poems to Kali see Lex Hixon, *Mother of the Universe: Visions of the Goddess and Tantric Hymns of Enlightenment* (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 1994).

39 Woodroffe, *The Garland of Letters*, 223. The *Mahanirvana-Tantra* praising Kali attempts to give a flavour of the nature of the Absolute:
“Resuming after Dissolution Thine own nature dark and formless, Thou alone remainest as One, Ineffable, and Inconceivable. Though appearing in form Thou art yet formless; though Thyself without beginning, multiform by the Power of Maya, Thou art the beginning of all, Creatrix, Protectress and Destructress that Thou art.” IV. 34.

40 In a similar vein to Kali’s destruction of the demonic forces, Revelation 19:11-16 contains a vision of Jesus as the warrior armed with a sword wielding destruction: “From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations ... he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty ...”

41 Bloom, in Meyer and Bloom, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 127.

42 You must awaken while in this body, for everything exists in it: Resurrect in this life.” Philip 23 in Leloup, *The Gospel of Philip*.

43 Elaine Pagels in *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003), makes a good case for John’s gospel having been written as a direct response to and refutation of the Gospel of Thomas in an attempt to undermine it, presenting an alternate image of Jesus as uniquely divine, and belittling the figure of Thomas who keeps appearing as the doubting and questioning disciple who has to be “put in his place.” It is hard to refute her arguments, and yet in some ways John’s gospel transcends its writer’s intentions, opening the door to a more mystical and personal relationship with Jesus’ teachings.

44 Leloup, *The Sacred Embrace*, p. 61. For a beautifully nuanced, poetic and philosophically profound discussion of the Logos in John, see Leloup, Chapter 5, “*And the Word Was Made Flesh*,” in *The Sacred Embrace*.