

This **ancient manuscript** (date uncertain--second or third century? ca. 350 AD for the manuscript?) contains 113 or 114 verses. It is one of 50 texts found at Nag Hammadi in 1945. You can read the entire text online. It is *NOT* a GOSPEL at all, in the sense of telling the story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and commissioning of the apostles to preach to all the world. Of itself, it says it is "the **secret sayings** that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas recorded" (*Prologue*). The phrase "**secret sayings**" makes the collection suspect. The four **canonical gospels** (Mt, Mk, Lk, Jn) emphasize that Jesus made Himself and his teaching known to the whole group of disciples, and among them the special group of twelve apostles. By definition, "secret sayings" revealed to one apostle *cannot* be tested against the **public revelation made to the whole group**. The interest in *secret revelations* is typical of the **gnostics** of the second century who claimed to have **knowledge** not revealed to other people (*gnosis = a Greek word for knowledge; gnostic = "knower"*). As with Scientology, the secrets would only be revealed to those who joined the gnostic sect and participated in its initiation rites.

I do not believe everything I read. *Neither did the fathers of the Church.* Just because someone wrote down the words, "These are the secrets Jesus told me," it does not prove that they knew Jesus or that Jesus commissioned them to represent Him to the world. The **book of Revelation** begins with a similar claim to mystical revelation. After much debate, that book was finally incorporated in the **canon** (*list of inspired writings*) used by the whole Church in the **fourth century**, but it was an uphill struggle. Thomas had no **apostolic Christian communities** backing it as a candidate for the NT--that is, no community founded by one of the twelve apostles.

In Thomas, Jesus is **completely stripped of His Jewish identity**. Nothing at all remains of His teaching about Moses, the Prophets, the selection of twelve apostles (representing the twelve tribes of Israel) and the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation in a **New Covenant**. There is nothing about His purpose in becoming human and suffering rejection and death for the sake of His People; no exorcisms, no forgiveness of sins, no baptism, no eucharist. Salvation is reduced to knowing secrets (**gnosis, knowledge**): "Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death" (1). *This reduction of the portrait of Jesus to a mere sketch as a Teacher of Wisdom is undoubtedly what makes this "gospel" so popular today. Modern gnostics like the idea of saving themselves by discovering their own interior godliness and resent the idea that Jesus is Savior and Lord.*

There is no doubt that the collection **preserves (and modifies) some authentic sayings of Jesus**. This is typical of all anti-Christians: "**Many will come saying 'I am He'"** (Mt 24:24). Jim Jones of Jonestown, David Koresh (born Vernon Wayne Howell) of the Branch Davidians, and Do (Marshall Herff Applewhite), the leader of the Heaven's Gate cult, also quoted Jesus extensively and claimed to have a **special revelation** (*gnosis*) of God's plan of salvation. In principle, there is no reason to think that Thomas does not contain a saying not recorded elsewhere. In one to three years of journeying with His disciples, Jesus had to have said many more things than our gospels contain. The whole gospel of Mark can be recited in about 90 minutes! The gospel of John says explicitly that **Jesus said and did much more than the gospel records** (Jn 20:30-31, 21:25).

In the **canonical gospels** (Mt, Mk, Lk, Jn), Jesus clearly teaches that "**The Kingdom of Heaven is within you**" (Lk 17:21--synoptic tradition) and that "God is spirit, and those who worship Him will worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). **This is NOT a contradiction of the doctrine of the Body of Christ; it is the foundation of community.** Modernists who think in terms of isolated individuals get all excited about the **omnipresence of God** in Thomas and portray it as if this classical Jewish-Christian-Muslim doctrine would annihilate the **tradition of community worship**: 'Split the wood; I am there. Lift a stone; you will find me there' (77). It is *because* God is all-present and dwells within the hearts of His People that the community can "worship in spirit and in truth." There is a world of difference between the isolated believer and the Body of Christ: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst" (Mt 18:20). We should **find God in all things** (St. Ignatius Loyola) *and also* build up the Body of Christ.

Thomas contains classical **gnostic hatred of the body**. Like Plato, who said "**Soma sema**" (the *body* is a *prison*), the gnostics tended to believe that **spirit was good and matter was evil**: "How miserable is the body that depends on a body, and how miserable is the soul that depends on these two" (87); "Damn the flesh that depends on the soul. Damn the soul that depends on the flesh" (112); "Simon Peter said to them, 'Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life.' Jesus said, 'Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. **For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven**" (114). Despite some lamentable sayings of the Fathers of the Church which resemble this denigration of femininity, the Church has always taught that God created **BOTH** male and female "in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:27); *both* male and female are "good, very good" (Gen 1:31).

The translators on the web site above say that this last verse (114) is **not part of the original collection**. They do not explain how they know that this verse alone is not original but all of the other 113 are. The Nag Hammadi codex, found in Egypt in 1945, contains all 114 sayings. No other complete manuscript exists. This manuscript is written in Coptic, an Egyptian dialect that used the Greek alphabet. Jesus and the real apostle Thomas spoke Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek, not Egyptian. **That our translators judge that the collection has been corrupted in transmission is a strong warning against mindlessly taking everything else in the collection at face value or placing it on par with the canonical gospels.** "*Ancient: does NOT mean "authentic."*"

If you read the whole of Thomas, you will see that there are **good reasons why the Church never embraced it** or made it part of the **canon** ("*official list*") of the New Testament. We needn't assume corruption, greed, or self-interest. People who knew and loved the Christian tradition could see at a glance that this was not a book worth copying and keeping alive. **That's why it died out.** It was a *local* manuscript that sold poorly and ceased to be upheld or venerated by a *local* community.