

Doubting Thomas: Is the Gospel of Thomas an Authentic Witness to Jesus?

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Abstract

The following piece is an edited transcript of a debate given at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in March of 2009. Dr. R. Philip Roberts, President of Midwestern Seminary, moderated the debate and has provided an introduction. The debate centers on the relationship of the Gospel of Thomas to the synoptic Gospels. The debate concludes with a few questions from the audience.

Introduction

The contents of the following debate—"Doubting Thomas: Is the Gospel of Thomas an Authentic Witness to Jesus?" deals with an important and controversial subject in the arena of New Testament scholarship. Opinions on the historic connection of the "Gospel" are varied and basically split the divide between evangelical and other confessional elements of the conservative spectrum and the liberal/skeptical element of scholarship. Notably the major issue of contention revolves fundamentally around the question of whether or not The Gospel of Thomas is a reliable testimony of the person of Jesus Christ.

In a fascinating twist of logic and argumentation the more liberal side of scholarship often vigorously argues for Thomas' reliability versus conservative elements which generally argue against, the non-biblical material of the witness of the so-called Gospel. Notably, these lines of difference are exactly opposite or reversed from discussions of the four canonical Gospels. In that case, conservative scholars often argue vigorously for the four Gospels' reliability as a witness to Jesus (see, for example, Richard Bauckham's *Eyewitnesses to Jesus*) while more skeptical scholars question the four Gospels' historicity. The Jesus

Seminar, for instance, made the determination that only 18 percent of the words of Jesus recorded in the canonical Gospels actually are attributable to Him. In relation to the Gospel of Thomas, however, this same Jesus Seminar published a copy of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John together with a copy of the Gospel of Thomas entitled *The Five Gospels*. Conservative New Testament scholarship finds this development amusing. The battle lines about the authentic witness of Thomas are clearly drawn.

The Gospel of Thomas was discovered in Egypt in 1945-46 as part of the Nag Hammadi finds. These discoveries were an uncovering of various proto-gnostic or gnostic texts, the Gospel of Thomas being the most discussed and circulated because of its claim to be a gospel (*kata euangelion* –as prefaced in the document). Comprised of 144 sayings attributed to Jesus and written in Coptic, Thomas has received much attention.

The argumentation for, or against, Thomas' authenticity hovers around several important issues. First is the content of the Gospel itself. Thomas contains numerous texts, which appear to have biblical or nearly biblical roots. Among them are verse 9 on the sower; verse 20 comparing the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed; verse 26 on the twig in our brother's eye and the beam in our eye; verse 44 on the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and so on. It is obvious that there is a remnant of biblical content in Thomas. In this sense, for people committed to biblical authority, Thomas has authentic elements.

The issue arises, however, with other texts which are clearly non-biblical, probably reflecting a gnostic or proto-gnostic influence such as the very closing of the "Gospel" itself- verse 114:

"Simon Peter said to them, 'Mary should leave us because women do not deserve life.' Jesus said, 'Look, in order to make her male, I myself will guide her, so that she too may become a living spirit-male, resembling you. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

Secondly, the theology of Thomas does reflect gnostic elements as in the above quote. Such elements seem contradictory to the Jesus of the canonical gospels, at least for more conservative scholars; and introduce elements of a value system inconsistent with those seen in the Jesus of the four gospels.

Thirdly, the dating of Thomas is widely viewed as mid-second century, dated by most scholars from around A.D. 150-175. This chronology would put it well beyond the age of the apostles and the more traditional dating of the canonical gospels. We possess only fragmentary

portions of these earlier Greek texts: a few introductory lines of the text and a paragraph or two of sayings. The very fragmentary Greek document parallels a later Coptic document (A.D. 300).

Despite the above facts, for some scholars the debate continues: “Is the Gospel of Thomas an Authentic Witness to Jesus?” So before you lays the interchange between Patterson and Evans, the content of their discussion at Midwestern Baptist Seminary’s chapel in March of 2009.

ROBERTS – First of all, let me introduce to you Dr. Stephen J. Patterson. Dr. Patterson is professor of New Testament at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He has taught there since 1988. Dr. Patterson grew up as the son of a pastor in rural South Dakota. He received a B.A. from Yankton College; holds graduate degrees from Harvard University and the Claremont Graduate School where he received a Ph.D. in New Testament in 1988.

Dr. Patterson specializes in the study of historical Jesus, Christian origins, and the Gospel of Thomas. He has authored and co-authored several books, most recently *Beyond the Passion: Rethinking the Death and Life of Jesus*. He has also authored numerous essays and reviews. Dr. Patterson is the chair of the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins. He and his wife Debra have two children.

Sharing in the dialogue is Dr. Craig Evans. Dr. Evans is certainly not a stranger to Midwestern Seminary. He’s been guest professor and seminar director here on several occasions including two years ago when we had him for our Dead Sea Scrolls workshops.

Dr. Evans is Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada. He earned a B.A. in History and Philosophy from Claremont McKenna College, a M.Div. from Western Baptist Seminary, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from Claremont Graduate University, the same place where Dr. Patterson studied. Dr. Evans taught at Trinity Western for twenty-one years where he directed the graduate program in Biblical Studies and founded the Dead Sea Scrolls Institute. He joined the Acadia faculty in 2002.

Author and editor of more than fifty books including his latest *Jesus, The Final Days: What Really Happened* and hundreds of articles and reviews. Dr. Evans has appeared in several History Channel and BBC documentaries and is a regular guest on Dateline NBC. He and his wife Virginia have two daughters and one grandchild.

Our dialogue will begin with Dr. Patterson, and he will discuss his perspective on the Gospel of Thomas. I would ask you, Dr. Patterson, just provide maybe a few moments of historical insight into the Gospel

of Thomas. Then, after Dr. Patterson speaks, we will have Dr. Evans come and he'll also respond in an equal amount of time. After they're finished, Dr. Patterson will have a chance to respond, Dr. Evans will do the same, and then we will have a time for open question and answer. So please express your appreciation as we welcome Dr. Patterson to the podium.

PATTERSON – Good evening, everyone. Thank you all for coming out this evening for this program, which I hope will prove to be as interesting to all of you as it is to us. Let me say, that the discussion tonight is structured as a kind of debate, and I suppose it will be. But you should also know that we've been looking at this gospel for a relatively short period of time now. A lot of issues about it are not yet settled, so part of what we're doing is debating, but part of what we are doing is trying to come to some clarity about how we should understand this gospel and its role in Christian beginnings. I understand that some of you may not be familiar with this gospel, the Gospel of Thomas, and so before I offer the prepared remarks that I have, let me just introduce you briefly to the gospel.

"These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote them down. And he said, 'Whoever finds the explanation or interpretation of these words will not taste death.' Jesus said, 'Let him who seeks not, cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds he will be troubled. And when he has been troubled, he will marvel and he will reign over the universe.' Jesus said, "If those who lead you say to you, 'See the kingdom is in heaven' then the birds of the heaven will precede you. If they say to you, 'it is in the sea', then the fish of the sea will precede you. But the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves then you will be known and you will know that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty and you are the poverty.'

Those are the first three sayings of the Gospel of Thomas. It was discovered in 1945 rather by chance in Upper Egypt along the Nile by a farmer looking for fertilizer. It was found as part of a larger collection called the Nag Hammadi Library, 13 codices that were stuffed into a jar and reemerged that day after many centuries of being buried in the sand. Among the codices found that day was Codex II, following the conventional numeration subsequently imposed, in which was found this text, the Gospel of Thomas. Scholars had known about the Gospel of Thomas for many years because of references to it in church fathers and the like, but it was thought to have been lost centuries before. So it was quite a surprise when in working through these new codices, Gilles

Quispe first noticed this title, *The Gospel According to Thomas*. And so the Gospel of Thomas was back.

It is, as you can see, an unusual gospel. It is not a narrative gospel like the gospels we have in the New Testament. It is simply a list, really, a collection of sayings of Jesus, most of them introduced by a simple formula: "Jesus said." Many of the sayings that are found in the gospel of Thomas are similar to or virtually the same as sayings we find in the canonical synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But there are many other sayings in the Gospel of Thomas as well, not found in the canonical gospels. So it's a mixture of familiar things and unfamiliar things. The theology of the Gospel of Thomas has been debated for many years. Some think it's an Gnostic gospel; I don't think it is. I think it's something like a Platonic gospel. It uses Platonism in the way that Hellenistic Jews often use Platonism to interpret their religious traditions. But one of the questions about the Gospel of Thomas, and I suppose the thing we'll be focusing on tonight, is the role that it has playing in the quest for the historical Jesus and our search to understand, better the origins of Christianity.

The question is usually posed something like this: The Gospel of Thomas, a new gospel, should we incorporate it into the discussion of Christian beginnings or not? On the one hand, one group of scholars says: yes, we should because it is a gospel that presents very familiar material to us but in a way that is fundamentally independent from the sources that we already have - the synoptic gospels. That is, it is an access point to the oral tradition, if you will, or to primitive Jesus traditions. We should study it, therefore, for what it can tell us about the development of the Jesus tradition through the first few Christian generations (this is my particular interest), and also what it might tell us even about the historical Jesus. On the other hand, there is a group of scholars that says: no, it is not an early gospel; it is, in fact, dependent upon the synoptic gospels for that material it shares in common with them. That is, whoever created the Gospel of Thomas did so by extracting materials from the synoptic gospels, the canonical gospels. And therefore, it's a relatively late and derivative form of early Christianity and should be understood as a kind of spin-off and perhaps a heretical branching off of the main trunk-line, if you will, of early Christianity. Among the things that Craig and I will be talking about tonight are the three topics that I was given for the evening: Is it early? Is it independent? And is it a valuable witness? And in what sense is it a valuable witness to the Jesus tradition? So, that's what we'll be talking about. With that, I'll turn now to my prepared remarks.

Perhaps we should begin with a basic description of what we have, that is the extant remains of the Gospel of Thomas, because this will

highlight several problems that have to be reckoned with when we're dealing with this unusual text. Thomas is a list, as I said a moment ago, it's not a narrative. It's a list for which we have four extant witnesses, but really only one complete version and that a Coptic translation I was reading from an English translation of the Coptic translation a moment ago, a Coptic translation of, presumably, a Greek original. There are Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas from the famous archaeological find at Oxyrhynchus, but these fragments are indeed very fragmentary and often must be constructed on the basis of the Coptic text. They give us meaningful textual witness to between ten and twenty sayings of the Gospel of Thomas, depending on what you count as meaningful. That is far less than 20% of the whole, maybe as little as 10 to 15% of the whole. So we do not have the text in its original language, and we are limited, for the most part, to just one exemplar of this ancient gospel. This exemplar, the Coptic text from which I was reading, can be dated to the mid-fourth century based on dateable material in the cartonnage of Nag Hammadi Codex II, where it was found.

What do we know about the Coptic text? Well, the presence of scores of Greek loan words and untranslated Greek grammatical or syntactical elements indicate that it derives from a Greek text of Thomas. It is, however, at least three times removed from that Greek *Vorlage*, if you will, by a process that included at minimum (and now you'll have to bear with me just a moment) a Subakhmimic phase, which is a dialect of Coptic, a mixed Subakhmimic and Sahidic phase, (another dialect of Coptic), and finally the copy that we have in our Nag Hammadi Codex II. This we know from analysis of the dialect of Thomas and the other tractates from Codex II where it was found. I'll spare you those details, but here's the larger point: we don't have anything like a critical edition of the Gospel of Thomas with which to work--nothing like a Nestle-Aland Greek text to work with. We have something more analogous to say a single Coptic manuscript of the Gospel of Matthew, which would be a manuscript in the Nestle-Aland world of textual criticism that you would scarcely even consult to reconstruct the text of Matthew. And yet, this is the text, this is all we have for most of what we know about the Gospel of Thomas.

The state of the manuscript evidence is important for every other aspect of the discussion. For example, how does one date a list? Lists are malleable, they are cumulative, they grow and shrink over time. Formal irregularities that manifest in our Gospel of Thomas are enough to show that its sayings come from a variety of provenances and probably from different time frames. Now, within the list there are sayings like Logion 54, for example, "Blessed are the poor for yours is the kingdom of heaven," that are as old as anything in the New Testament. But there are

also likely to be sayings that are quite late, added perhaps in the second century, the third century, or even as late as the fourth century. For example, consider Logion 7, which goes something like, “Blessed is the lion which the human will consume and the lion becomes human.” Where does that come from? What century? Probably not the first century and probably not Palestine or even Syria where we think the gospel is written. Maybe Egypt. Sorting all this out would be easier if we had several manuscripts of this gospel, as we do for Matthew and Mark or Luke or John, so that late editions or harmonizations and the like, could be culled out by collation. But we don’t, so we are left to guess and oftentimes to guess saying by saying. A similar problem arises with the question of Thomas’ relationship to the synoptic gospels with which it shares, as I said a moment ago, roughly half of its content. Did a scribe take material from the synoptic texts, and in this way create the Gospel of Thomas? Or, did its author draw these synoptic-paralleled sayings from the oral tradition independently of the canonical gospels? The best answer to this question is probably both. Our Coptic text of Thomas stands at the end of an extensive history of scribal transmission. In a handful of cases, one can find embedded in Thomas’ version of this or that saying an echo or phrase apparently borrowed from one or another of the synoptic gospels. Of course, in each case, one must decide whether this or that detail is evidence that is pertinent to the compositional question, that is, when Thomas was written, or a matter for textual criticism of the Gospel of Thomas, that is, talking about later editions and corruptions and the like. In a well known landmark study from the 1960s, Wolfgang Schrage demonstrated that the Coptic translator of this gospel occasionally consulted a Sahidic version of the gospels when reaching for the right word or phrase to render what he had before him. Schrage concluded, wrongly, that this phenomenon indicated that the Greek precursor of our Coptic Thomas was also dependent upon the Greek New Testament gospels. To the contrary, it showed that a Coptic scribe made use of a Coptic usually Sahidic New Testament when he was making his translation. Analysis of the dialect probably indicates why. Our present Coptic text represents, how shall I say, an attempt to render a kind of back-woodsy Subakhmimic text of Thomas into a more clean, ecclesiastically more acceptable Sahidic version. Somebody was trying to clean it up for public use, and in so doing that translator probably occasionally consulted a Sahidic version of Matthew, Mark, or Luke to help him get the right expression, or vocalization, or what have you. With episodes like this, in the transmission history of the document, one has to be cautious; you just have to be cautious when you’re dealing with this text. Once again, I can only stress, we don’t have anything like

an original Gospel of Thomas that we can use to compare with our Nestle version of canonical gospels.

So what can one reasonably say or what might one reasonably say about the relative independence of the Gospel of Thomas and its traditions? Now, again understand that this is a big question in Thomas studies. If the text is independent, then it gives us another point of access to the oral traditions about Jesus, and something we can use then to study both the history of the Jesus tradition and perhaps even Jesus himself. So what can we say? Numbers might be helpful. There are roughly 95 parallels between the Gospel of Thomas and our canonical synoptic gospels, give or take a few depending on how you count. Among them, there are by my count, seven instances where one might detect influence from the synoptic gospels in the text of Thomas, and four instances where the order in Thomas seems to have been influenced by the synoptic text. The British scholar Christopher Tuckett would add another five instances, some of them from the Oxyrhynchus fragments, which, for the sake of argument, I will simply stipulate tonight. So that is, out of 95 parallels there are possibly sixteen instances of cross influence from the synoptic tradition, usually in the form of a single word or phrase and sometimes just the order. Put otherwise, out of 95 Thomas synoptic parallels 79 betray no sign of synoptic influence whatsoever. Now my assessment of this evidence is as follows: if Thomas were the product of systematic excerpting from the synoptic text, the incidence of cross influence would be much greater. The relative small number is better explained, I think, by incidental cross influence, some at the point of Coptic translation, but others later or earlier perhaps even at the point of composition say through secondary orality as the Finnish scholar Risto Uro has lately argued. The Thomas folk were not isolated from others devoted to the Jesus tradition, and the text of Thomas was not transmitted in a vacuum. There is no true independence among early Christian texts. But there is in the case of Thomas evidence for what I would call *autonomy*. That is, the Gospel of Thomas represents an autonomous interpretation of the Jesus tradition that is not dependent upon the canonical text. It apparently drew from other oral and written sources.

Now as to date, and I want to underscore this next statement: there is no reliable way to date the Gospel of Thomas. There's no reliable way to date this gospel. The problem lies in the nature of the genre, the list. Lists are not like narratives; the parts are not woven intricately into a narrative whole. Lists hold discrete items. Over the course of time, items may be added or sloughed off as no longer relevant. The consequence of this is that one might reasonably propose a time frame for individual sayings, but this would not necessarily indicate a date for the whole list or

collection. An ancient saying like Thomas 54, "Blessed are the poor" does not indicate that the collection dates from the time of Jesus himself. But neither does Logion 7, "Blessed is the lion" indicate that Thomas is a second or third century Egyptian text, allowing Howard Jackson's analysis of that odd saying. So, is there anything that we can say about the date? Perhaps, but it will of necessity be on the nature of educated speculation. And so, I speculate. My view is that the relative lack of influence from the synoptic text and the relative simplicity of many of its forms suggest that a core of this list probably existed very early on. And when I say "simplicity of the forms", I mean that many times in the Gospel of Thomas you have a saying that has a synoptic parallel or canonical parallel and the Thomas form will appear to be simpler. For example, where a parable is allegorized in the canonical tradition, in Thomas it's simply presented as a kind of simple story. So in form-critical terms, many of these sayings are very, very simple in form and simpler than their synoptic counterparts. This indicates to me that some core of this list probably existed very early on. Logion 12 embeds in the collection a reference to the authority of James the brother of Jesus, one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church. This is perhaps evidence that some early form of the collection was associated with James' authority, and thus perhaps was used by Judean followers of Jesus. However, I can see no reliable way of identifying the precise parameters of that early collection. I think it is very likely that there was an early version of this collection that circulated under the authority of James. But there is no way to identify what sayings in the collection actually belong to that early, early list. There just are not markers in the text to help us make those kinds of identifications. The incipit, or the first line of the Gospel of Thomas which I read to you a moment ago, identifies the collection with Judas Thomas, an association perhaps seen again in Logion 13, which champions the authority of a certain Thomas. The strong association of this figure, Judas Thomas, with Edessene Christianity suggests that a version of the collection existed then later in eastern Syria. Edessa was a town, a little caravan town east of the Euphrates river, the first stop on the caravan routes going east out of Antioch; after you cross the Euphrates river, you come to Edessa. It was the center of an early form of Christianity that is unusual in many respects, and the Gospel of Thomas appears to be one of the earliest texts we have from that area of Christian influence. This squares well with the Platonizing tendency of many sayings in the collection, a theological trait that is shared with other Edessene Christians, some of whom you know - Tatian, for example, the author of the Diatessaron; Bardaisan, a more obscure figure; and the Acts of Thomas and the Book of Thomas, also texts that come from this same Syrian provenance. But if it was used in

Edessa, when? It is tempting to think that the authority of James in saying 12 was of necessity augmented with that of Thomas in saying 13. That's a very interesting thing in the Gospel of Thomas, you have in saying 12, authority being given to James the brother of Jesus and then right after it in saying 13, authority is given to Thomas. It may be that this shift in authority, if you will, was necessitated when James was martyred in 64 CE and the group would have then perhaps fled east with other refugees at the outbreak of the Jewish revolt. That's simply a guess, but I think it's a reasonable guess. A reflection on the results of the Jewish revolt can perhaps be seen in Thomas' adaptation of an early beatitude of Jesus that goes like this, "Blessed are you whenever they hate and persecute you." You will recognize that from the Sermon on the Mount. But then the Thomas version continues, "But no place will be found there where they have persecuted you," which may perhaps refer to the destruction of Jerusalem or the desecration of the temple at the end of the Jewish revolt. Thus, a reasonable guess might be that the collection received considerable expansion and editing in the decades following the Jewish revolt or perhaps in the early second century. But we should also imagine that this collection circulated in eastern Syria, and as it circulated here, sayings would have been added or sloughed off, or others modified through the years. Thomas 52 might be a good illustration. Here it is possible perhaps to hear something of Marcion's teacher, Cerdo, who associated the prophets of the Hebrew Bible with the platonic creator God, the Demiurge, but not the true living God. That saying goes as follows: "24 prophets spoke in Israel and they all spoke through you. And Jesus replies, "You have only spoken of the dead and not of the living one in your presence." The remnants of this eastern Syrian period may also be seen in several Aramaisms or Syriacisms still to be detected in the texts, details first noticed long ago by Gilles Quispel. The bilingual nature of early Syriac Christianity and Edessa in general (that is, both Greek and Syriac were spoken there and virtually all of our texts from Syriac Christianity exist in both Greek and Syriac forms) explains these odd details, but it also makes it difficult to settle the issue of the original language of the Gospel of Thomas. We don't know if this gospel was composed originally in Greek or in Syriac.

The final phase that we know about was in Egypt. Exactly when the gospel was brought to Egypt is impossible to know. Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1, one of the Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas, gives us only a terminus anti quem (that is, a latest possible date) at the beginning of the third century. What changes were wrought as it began to circulate in Egypt sometime in the second century can only be guessed at.

If my remarks on these issues sound at all reasonable, then what is there to be found in Thomas that might be of interest to the student of Christian origins? There is, of course, the use of Thomas in the quest of the historical Jesus, where the independence and relative early date for Thomas are very very important issues, especially in the wake of John Dominic Crossan's work, whose method relies heavily on date and independent attestation. And before proceeding, let me say that I am highly sympathetic to Crossan's work and his use of Thomas in traditional historical analysis, even though his confidence in an early date for the later phase of Thomas is, I think, too strong. Again, it bears repeating that it is impossible to date the Gospel of Thomas with any degree of confidence early, late, or otherwise; it just isn't possible.

But this is not the only issue upon which the Gospel of Thomas might shed new light. I've become intrigued lately with the way in which Thomas fits into the picture of early Christianity in eastern Syria. All of the distinctive features of this text turn out to be common among early Christians in that part of the world. They are, for the most part, Jewish Christians, hardly distinguishable from their Jewish neighbors. They show little interest in Jesus' suffering and death, his resurrection, or any of the themes traditionally associated with martyrdom in general. Instead, they are drawn to Platonism as a way of interpreting the Jesus tradition. They engage in a measured asceticism and cultivate a certain aloofness over against the world. In many ways, they are Hellenistic Jews who are drawn to the Jesus tradition for its potential in cultivating a certain kind of wisdom theology. Thomas fits theologically very well in Edessa. The implications of this may be obvious but they are seldom stated. Consider: in the past many have inquired about why the Gospel of Thomas shows so little interest in Jesus' death and resurrection. One answer lay ready to hand in Thomas itself, salvation is not to be found in Jesus' atoning death in this gospel, but as you have just heard, in the interpretation of his words. This seems clear enough. But none of our early sources for Christianity east of the Euphrates River show much interest in the themes of suffering and martyrdom so prevalent in the west. Instead they are drawn to Plato. Why? Part of the answer is to be found, perhaps, in political geography. Until the early third century, the Euphrates marked the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. Trajan tried briefly to annex large parts of this territory, but he could not hold it, and the much wiser and experienced Hadrian, his successor (he was governor in Syria before he became Caesar so he knew this area very well) did not try to hold this territory and let it go. So until Caracalla finally succeeded in making it a Roman colony in 214, Edessa and the other cities that lay along the ancient trade routes east were independent city states. Consequently, the life that met early Christians there was much different

from the life of those who lived further west in Imperial lands. While Ignatius was living the life of a dissident and preparing for martyrdom with Jesus as his model, just a few hundred kilometers east Thomas Christians were living peacefully, more or less, among their fellow Jews in a multi-cultural city. A generation later we might place in similar contrast, Tatian of Edessa and his teacher Justin Martyr. Could this be the reason for their theological differences? In the west, under Roman rule, Jesus' followers could expect to be punished as dissidents, perhaps even killed. So, martyrdom and the story of Jesus' martyrdom as told in the canonical gospels became very relevant to them. They favored this interpretation of Jesus because it helped them interpret their lives and those of their martyred heroes. In the east, however, this was not the case. Stories of Jesus' martyrdom held little interest for Edessene Christians because they were in no danger of martyrdom themselves. While Ignatius was preparing for death, the Thomas Christians were preparing for life, life in a caravan town. How might one live wisely among all the hustle and flow of that commercial crossroads, where the delights of east and west met and mingled? For these Jesus followers, the key to life lay in Jesus' wise words. Their focus became the counter-cultural wisdom of Jesus, not his death on the cross.

Of what significance is all of this? For me, it raises interesting questions. Christianity as we know it in the west was born and grew up in the crucible of the Roman Empire. Did the dissident status of Christians in the empire affect the form their new religion took? They focused on Jesus' death. Was this simply the nature of Christianity or did their own concerns about martyrdom lead them to search for meaning in this aspect of Jesus' life and fate? Thomas and the course of Edessene Christianity shows that the potential to find meaning in the Jesus tradition was not exhausted by the focus on his death. When the issue was not death, but life, the Jesus tradition also provided resources - the wise, though counter-cultural sayings of Jesus. Like other Jews living in the Diaspora, the Thomas Christians found concurrence between their sage and the great sages of old, especially Plato. As such, Thomas probably represents one of the earliest chapters in Christianity's long affair with Platonism and anticipates what Clement, Origen, and ultimately Augustine would make a permanent part of Christian theology. It is striking that among our four gospels, not a single one presupposes what most Christian believers take for granted today - the existence of the human soul. Thomas, that odd, non-canonical outsider to the family of early Christian gospels, does. This should give us pause. Thomas might after all play a crucial role in an important chapter in the history of Christian theology. Thank you.

EVANS – I want to begin by thanking Professor Patterson for the clarity of his presentation. It was very clear and, I think, very accessible. I also want to begin by saying that, though I didn't have a calculator and I didn't add it up, I probably agreed with most of his points. I certainly agreed with what was said about Syria. And so we have common ground; Professor Patterson's openness to the possibility that the original Thomas was composed in Syriac, which actually was the first language of Syria at that time, with Greek as the second language. There are many things to be said; and I'm delighted that he was willing to be here so that we can air the issues surrounding Thomas. The other thing that needs to be said too—I think it was implied a few times in Professor Patterson's remarks that it is the nature of the work that we do, that there are always gaps in our knowledge. So invariably we find it necessary to speculate. I agree, we must speculate. That is the nature of this kind of work and you will hear me use similar words. So do not think that is a weakness or that something is being swept under the rug. It is just the way it is; there are gaps in our knowledge. I will also say that everything you have heard, including those important concluding remarks, that is, the last page or two of his comments, theoretically are possible, and so could be right. If so, this means that Thomas then becomes an important fifth gospel, another access to some of Jesus' thinking, his ethics, his worldview, data perhaps not clearly present in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, or perhaps not there at all. But I do have some reservations and I want to go over these. Here I shall review the slides on the screen quickly, which summarize theories of antiquity, and I don't need to repeat anything that Professor Patterson said. There are different theories and one of the most radical—at least as I understand it—has been offered by April DeConick, who thinks she has identified four stages in the development of the Gospel of Thomas. The first stage is very early. You will notice in your handout as well as up on the screen it is dated to the 30s and 40s, or 30 to 50. That is very early. DeConick thinks that is when a "kernel gospel" took shape. Of course it just continues to snowball and develop. Professor Patterson mentioned a couple of times that Thomas is a "list." You can subtract sayings from it, you can add sayings to it, and so there is an evolution over the course of time. Elaine Pagels has an interesting take on the history of Thomas. She dates Thomas a bit later; she has Thomas no earlier than the 90s, basically a contemporary of the Gospel of John. She hypothesizes a relationship between John and Thomas, a competitive relationship.

I have doubts about the great age of Thomas, although I do second the comments that Professor Patterson made about how it is hard to determine the date of a document that is in essence a list. This is because there can be sayings that are very old, there can be sayings that are not

very old. He has given some good examples of that. It is something I face in the nature of my own work. I often look at Targumic literature, which is the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible. With the exception of the Targum fragments found at Qumran, among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Targumic literature is post-New Testament and always presents a chronological challenge. This is true with early rabbinic literature, including the Mishnah, and other literature. How can we derive anything from literature that dates to the third, fourth, fifth centuries, and later that might have relevance for a pre-70s setting in the life of Jesus? That is a challenge. And yet, I believe there are some sayings here and there in this later literature, whose antiquity is sometimes supported from scrolls and other writings that we know predated Jesus, that are early. So in theory, again, I agree with that point that was made. I'm not going to argue this slide at length. Professor Patterson would certainly acknowledge that.

At this point I will present what I think is compelling evidence that Thomas was produced in Syria in the second half of the second century and probably not before the year 180.

The name Judas Thomas unmistakably points to the Syrian context where other writings of the second century in Syria were composed and where the famous doubting disciple is called Judas Thomas. I want you to see (as noted in the slide) there are other texts where he is identified that way, including the Syriac Gospel of John (but not the Greek Gospel of John).

There is an esoteric quality of Thomas, and that is consistent with or coherent with Syrian Christianity of the second century. Thomas' ascetic perspective, I think, reflects second century Syrian Christianity. I want to note these three successive Logia – 63, 64, and 65. The one that is labeled 65 is the parable of the vineyard tenants, which is found in Mark 12, Matthew 21, and Luke 20. There is a debate as to whose form of this parable is the earliest, the most original. I think most regard the parable as genuine and as reaching back to Jesus. Do we have the original form and the original setting in Mark? Or perhaps we should look at the form that is in Thomas. My own view is that Thomas gives us Luke's version, which has simplified Mark, primarily by omitting the allusions to Isaiah 5. Thomas presents the parable in this 63–65 cluster, which is reflective of ascetic or anti-commercial, anti-materialism, anti-wealth perspectives. Notice saying 63, "there was a rich man who had a lot of money. That night he died." Or saying 64, "buyers and merchants will not enter the places of my father." We see this also in saying 65, Thomas' version of the parable of the Vineyard, where a money lender, a *chrestes*—not a *chrestos*, a "good man," as misread by some at one time, but a "money lender," or a "money man"—owned a vineyard and leased it to some

farmers. In Thomas this parable is presented in a completely new perspective. I see here an editorial orientation in Thomas that reflects a new perspective that is consistent with what we know of second century Syrian Christianity. This includes renouncing the world, vegetarianism, as seen in statements such as “If you do not fast,” “Wretched is the body that depends on a body,” “Woe to the soul that depends on flesh,” and teaching regarding celibacy. All of this is consistent with second century Syriac Christianity.

For evidence of late second century vegetarianism, I refer to the already mentioned Tatian. He was a disciple of Justin Martyr for many years in Italy and then returned to his native land we think around 170 or 171 A.D. In short order, perhaps in a year maybe two years, he produced the *Diatessaron*, a blending, or harmony of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. That’s why it’s called a *Diatessaron*, “through four,” the story of Jesus combined and told in one continuous narrative. A few years later, not long before he died, Tatian also produced the work *Oratio* (“Oration”). We find these distinctive ideas (asceticism, vegetarianism, radical celibacy) in his work. Some of his views we know second-hand because other church fathers refer to him in passing. For example, Jerome says Tatian “condemns and rejects meat, which God has created for use” (*Adv. Jovin.* 1.3). Jerome describes Tatian as “the chief of the Encratites,” who “asserts that wine is not to be drunk” (*Comm. Amos*). Marriage also is condemned by Tatian, saying, for example, “He sows to the flesh who is joined to a woman” (*Comm. Gal.* on 6:8). Tatian, we are told by Irenaeus—and Irenaeus was writing not long after Tatian’s death, writing in the early 180s—“denounced marriage as defilement and fornication” (*Adv. Haer.* 1.28). With respect to asceticism, Tatian declares that “the rich lack many things, the poor man more easily obtains his purpose. Die to the world, repudiating the madness in it” (Tatian, *Oratio* 11).

Another thing that worries me about accepting the idea that a discrete portion of Thomas, however edited and pruned, can be dated to the first century, is Thomas knows more than one half of the New Testament writings. There is a work that tabulates these parallels (C. A. Evans, R. L. Webb, and R. A. Wiebe, *Nag Hammadi Texts and the Bible* [Brill, 1993] 88–144). I find it extraordinary that a work written at the end of the first century or beginning of the second century would know that many books. What other writing from the late first century (if that is when Thomas was actually written) knows that many books, books that would in time become part of the New Testament? Of course, nobody was talking about a New Testament as a canon in this period of time.

These are observations that give me pause. They lead me to conclude that Thomas is probably late, not early. When I was at Claremont in the

1970s I was part of the Nag Hammadi Seminar at Claremont. I studied Coptic, the language of the Nag Hammadi books, of which Thomas is one. Charles Carlston, a visiting professor from Andover Newton, James Butts, and I were the three Coptic students taught by Charlie Hedrick. I heard over and over again: "Thomas is a late first century gospel" and I accepted that. I saw no reason why not; everyone says that, so perhaps it is. In some of my earliest publications, I refer to Thomas that way without too much critical thought and simply assumed everybody knew that. In the passage of time, as I became more engaged in historical Jesus research, I became more and more troubled with Thomas. There are too many things about Thomas that strike me as late.

Here is an example. I compare Mark 4:22 with the parallel in Luke 8:17 and Thomas 5 (as preserved in P.Oxy. 655):

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Mark 4:22 | "for there is nothing hid, unless it be revealed" |
| Luke 8:17 | "for there is nothing hid that will not be revealed" |
| P.Oxy. 655 | "for there is nothing hid that will not be revealed" |

The form in Thomas agrees exactly with the smoother Greek of the form found in the Gospel of Luke. Almost all Gospel scholars agree that Luke has improved upon Mark's less polished form of Greek, that Luke's form is not the oldest form of the saying. The agreement between Thomas and Luke suggests that Thomas is acquainted with Luke, not an older, independent form of Jesus' teaching.

Now, of course, this observation is probably one of the examples that Professor Patterson referred to when he cited sixteen points where out of the 95 points of agreement or parallels between Thomas and the synoptic gospels, there is evidence of interference or direct linkage somehow with the synoptic form.

Another aspect of Thomas that I find troubling is its knowledge of Tatian's *Diatessaron*. Tatian had been in Italy under the tutelage of Justin Martyr. He returned to Syria, as best as we can reconstruct through our historical sources and the comments and references to him, around 171 or so. By 172 or 173 he has written the *Diatessaron*. The rub is that we find agreements between the *Diatessaron* and Thomas. This is what makes me think that the Gospel of Thomas that we have was produced after this period of time. Let me give a few examples. "I have not come to bring peace but a sword" Jesus says in Matthew 10:35. The Syriac *Recognitions* says "I have not come that I might cast peace *on the earth* but rather *war*" (2.26.6). And then we have in the Gospel of Thomas, "they do not know that it is dissention which I've come to cast *upon the earth*: fire, sword, and war." I put in italics the points of agreement. It strikes me that what we have in Thomas is a version of Matthew 10:35

refracted through Syriac ways of saying things. Look at the next example, and this one's an interesting one because John Dominic Crossan, whose name has been mentioned, uses this as his prime example for the independence of Thomas from the Synoptic Gospels. By the way, I'm actually going to agree with an important point that Professor Patterson made. I don't think the Gospel of Thomas is directly dependent on Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I think those who have argued for Thomas as being secondary and late are mistaken at that point. So that is a very important point that he has made. Matthew 5:3, the well known beatitude, reads "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Both parts of this beatitude are in the third person. Luke, however, gives it in the second person: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Of course in the Gospel of Thomas saying 54 we find "Blessed are the poor"—that is third person—"for yours is the kingdom of heaven"—that is second person. Crossan attaches great importance to this strange mixture. He can't imagine why anyone would mix second person and third person forms. Why would the author of this saying, if he has Matthew in front of him and he has Luke in front of him, pick a third person from one source and the second person from the other? That is a good way of putting it. I don't think that is what happened. I think someone has harmonized materials, and in harmonizing materials, blending together two, three, four gospels as Tatian did all four of them, one in effect creates new forms of sayings. The harmonizer sometimes has to compromise. What do I do? It is third person in Matthew 5, second person in Luke 6; "I'll take one from each," he decides. So we end up with this combination. And this is just what we see in Syriac tradition. In the Syriac version of Matthew 5:3 we read "Blessed are the poor in spirit [third person], for yours is the kingdom of heaven [second person]." This mixed Syriac form likely originated with Tatian, but we can't be certain, because this verse is not fully preserved in the *Diatessaron*. In any case, the mixed form in Thomas is no mystery and hardly provides support for the contention that Thomas contains a form of a saying that predates or is independent of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

When is Thomas explicitly mentioned? Thomas is referred to by Hippolytus in his *Refutation of Heresies* that we think should be dated around 220 A.D. Origen about ten years later in his *Homilies on Luke* refers to the Gospel of Thomas. Thomas is not quoted by anyone in the first and second centuries. Contrast this observation, this non-usage, with the citations of, allusions to, and explicit discussion of the four New Testament gospels. Clement, writing at the end of 95, knows the Synoptic Gospel tradition. But I will focus mostly on Papias, who wrote around 110. Papias talks about the four gospels. He knows the Gospel of

Mark. For the sake of discussion let us say Mark was written in 70. I actually think it is earlier than that. In any case, Mark is written in 70, and John in about 90, and Matthew and Luke in between. So in this 20-year period of time, we have the four New Testament gospels. And within forty years of Mark, Papias is talking about Mark, or within 20 years of John, Papias is talking about John. Papias doesn't talk about Thomas. If Thomas was produced in the 70s, how is this omission to be explained? If we accept April DeConick's reconstruction, and assume a "kernel" of Thomas already as early as the 40s or 50s, how is this to be explained? Papias is very interested in Apostolic tradition. If there is a core of material that is supposed to represent Jesus' teaching, and it is treasured by a group that rallies around the name of either James or later Thomas, how is this omission to be explained? Now, it's possible Papias simply didn't know and it got by him maybe because of the eastern origin and circulation of Thomas. But I have to wonder, how does this continue? Ignatius, writing around 180 and very concerned with gospels and gospel-like writings, doesn't know of Thomas. Around 150 Justin Martyr harmonizes the three synoptics, not the "four" Synoptics. That is, he doesn't harmonize Thomas. The author of papyrus Egerton, which I date to the middle of the second century, is, I believe, a harmony. We have Synoptic and Johannine elements combined. I reject the theory that it's a mid-first century document that in its original form predates the New Testament gospels before their bifurcation into distinctive Johannine and Synoptic streams. So we have another second century harmony. Where's Thomas? Why hasn't Thomas material been incorporated into these gospel harmonies? We have Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John harmonized by Tatian, but not Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Thomas harmonized by Tatian. And this is what troubles me. I am especially troubled by Irenaeus who at length insists there are only four early, apostolic Gospels, and who mentions the other gospels produced by other groups, including the *Gospel of Judas*, much talked about in the public press three years ago. Yet Irenaeus doesn't know of Thomas. How does Thomas stay under the radar for 150 years, from 70, let us say, to 220? Is it possible? Sure, lots of things are possible. It is just hard to explain that.

Are there stages of Thomas? That's an interesting idea. Does the list expand, does the list contract? What do we actually have? It has already been mentioned that we have the three manuscripts from Oxyrhynchus. They are numbered the way they are just because of the luck of the find and the priorities of the British papyrologist who unearthed them in Egypt at an ancient site called Oxyrhynchus in a city dump, buried under dry sand, sometimes running 30 feet deep; thousands of papyri documents were recovered. So the very first one published in the series

in 1898, P. Oxy. 1 is a fragment, as it turns out, of a manuscript of the Gospel of Thomas. And then a couple of volumes later, documents numbers 654 and 655 are published, and we have two more fragments of Thomas—though the editors at that time did not know that it is Thomas. As Professor Patterson remarked, it wasn't really until the Nag Hammadi discovery shortly after World War II, when the thirteen leather-bound Coptic codices were discovered. Not all the contents of these codices, of course, are Gnostic. I agree with him, I don't think Thomas started out as a Gnostic writing, even though Thomas was found in what we call codex number two, as the second tractate. Then we realized that the three Greek fragments discovered earlier belonged to it.

Because of these four manuscript finds (three Greek mss. and one Coptic ms.) We actually can test this idea of lists growing and shrinking. So we have three Greek manuscripts dating the earliest, perhaps 210 or 220; the latest not much beyond 250 or 260; and we have a Coptic document that could be as early as 320, at least no later than 340. So we have about 100 years of manuscript history. What we find is that the manuscripts are essentially the same. Not identical; one saying is noticeably out of place, and some sayings are a little longer or a little shorter, but there is no cluster of new sayings that have been added or deleted. Now I realize with the Greek manuscripts we only have about 20 percent or so of the whole document. So perhaps in the 80 percent that we don't have maybe there was some evolutionary change. However, what we actually have provides no indication of a history of expansion and/or deletion. The evidence suggests a stable textual tradition. This is something that concerns me when we speak of various stages in the growth of the Gospel of Thomas and use this hypothesis as a major part of the justification for dating Thomas as early as the 70s. When dealing with evidence, even when we know it is incomplete, we must respect what we have. Speculating about hypothetical evidence, in order to justify a theory that otherwise lacks evidence, strikes me as special pleading and as very risky.

Some things need to be said about the question of the original language of Thomas. It was acknowledged that perhaps the original language was Syriac. I think that is a very good suggestion. Nicholas Perrin in his work, *Thomas and Tatian*, has put that to the test. Catchwords help us memorize strings or lists of sayings. We find catch words in the book of Proverbs, for example. Catchwords help us memorize strings of sayings. If you have the word "door," for example, "I am the door of the sheep fold," and then your next saying has the word "door" in it, that helps you. Simply saying the first saying helps you remember the next one that comes, and the next one that comes may have another word that links with the saying after it. These are called

catchwords. Catchwords don't disappear when you go from one language to another. "Door" would be the same in Greek, it would be the same in German, it would be the same in English. Some of these catch words - you can see them in English translation. However, some catch words work a little differently. Sound alike words, such as synonyms, homonyms are not always just a simple thing like "door." So when you move from the original language of a text to another language you start losing some of the catch words. It is interesting that when Perrin retroverts Coptic and Greek Thomas into Syriac—and Syriac remember is the first language of Syria and Edessa, the city that has been rightly mentioned and emphasized—there are just under 600 catchwords in Syriac, but in the Coptic about 250, in the Greek about 250. Many of the catchwords survived in the Greek and Coptic translations, but fewer than half. Perrin thinks that this is pretty good evidence that Syriac was the original language. The other thing too is that sometimes there are clumsy sayings in the Coptic; we think there's something wrong here, something lost in translation. Again this would point to translation. Often it is the Syriac that explains the clumsiness of the Coptic reading or clumsiness, awkwardness, or illogic in the Greek. The Syriac then explains this is where the translator went wrong. The other interesting thing is that the presence of so many catchwords argues against the idea of stages in the evolution of Thomas, because catchwords make the addition or deletion of chunks of material difficult not impossible, but it's like a chain; if you tear out the links, you have broken the chain. So the presence of catchwords suggests that Thomas was composed in Syriac, pretty much as we have found it, partially in Greek and fully in Coptic.

Let me illustrate the problem of ascertaining the original language of an ancient document by an appeal to an old Jewish work called the *Testament of Moses*, a writing that is included in the loose collection scholars call the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Many of these writings, which are important for understanding the first century, survive in translation and not in their original language. For example, we have the entire book of *Enoch* in Ethiopic. We have big chunks of it in Greek translation, but thanks to the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now have a good portion of *Enoch* in its original Aramaic. Of the *Testament of Moses* all we have is a Latin translation of a portion. We are confident that this Latin was based on a Greek text. What we are not sure about was whether there was a Hebrew or Aramaic original behind the Greek, which the Latin translated. You can see how complicated it is.

We have another important example of this problem in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. Comparing the Greek translation with the original Hebrew and Aramaic text has given scholars a lot of practice in this field of study. We often can tell when a Greek or

Latin text is in reality a translation of a Hebrew or Aramaic text. This expertise comes into play when we consider the Gospel of Thomas. The suggestion that Thomas was written in Syriac, the native tongue of Syria, is not wild speculation. And if in Syriac it presents us with just under 600 catchwords, as opposed to some 250 for Coptic and for Greek, then it encourages us to see Thomas as a Syriac production. If so, this helps explain its connection to Tatian's *Diatessaron*, which was very likely originally composed in Syriac as well.

In response to what Professor Patterson said a few minutes ago: No, I do not think the Gospel of Thomas is directly dependent upon Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I think it is dependent upon Tatian's *Diatessaron* and other Syriac traditions, which helps us understand why there are so many distinctive readings in Thomas, helps explain the other 79 points of contact between Thomas and Matthew, Mark, and Luke and why several of them are different. Many of those 79 parallels that contain differences agree with Tatian and other Syriac traditions, which we date in most cases with confidence to the second half of the second century in Syria. So what I'm finding is there is not a lot of room left for a Thomas that exists in the first century, a Thomas that somehow stayed under the radar with no explicit comment until the third century.

But here is another point that I don't see very often in the discussion. I call it Thomas and the lack of verisimilitude. Do we really have pre-70 Palestine reflected in Thomas? Now I realize it is not a narrative gospel; it is a collection of sayings and so that fact will reduce the possibility and degree of verisimilitude. But if you look at the material that Matthew and Luke have in common, often called Q, Jesus' teaching, which almost entirely lacks narrative, we still find traces of verisimilitude to the way life really was, as we know from other historical sources, as we know from archaeology, the way life was in Palestine pre-70. It is not there in Thomas. Why? The Gospel of Thomas provides no help to archaeologists and historians of pre-70 Jewish Palestine. Jewish and Christian archaeologists and historians make extensive use of the four New Testament gospels and the book of Acts and sometimes Paul's letters. If Thomas is early, or at least some chunk of it is early, and accesses authentic Jesus tradition — where Jesus really lived, what he really talked about — why the absence of verisimilitude? Here is a quotation that appeared just last week in *Biblical Archaeology Review* by Ron Hendel, who is a professor of Hebrew Bible. He comments "Biblical archaeology involves the rigorous correlation of textual data from the Bible and material evidence from archaeology." He is right. Historians and archaeologists can find no correlation between Thomas and the material evidence of archaeology. I'm referring to pre-70 Palestine, not necessarily late second century Syria. Where is the correlation between

Thomas and the world of Jesus and his disciples? This is why I say Thomas lacks verisimilitude. The world of Thomas is not the world of Jesus and his followers. Should we prefer the distinctive forms of material in Thomas? And that's what we are really talking about; we are not talking about all the parallels where Thomas says essentially the same thing that we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We are talking about those instances where Thomas is distinctive with either a familiar saying given a new look or a completely unfamiliar saying. Should we prefer the distinctive forms of material in Thomas, forms that stand in tension with the four gospels themselves, which everyone agrees are first century and other writings known to have been produced in the first century, but do not stand in tension with distinctives that developed in Syria in the second century?

I conclude: (1) Both Greek and Coptic Thomas betray the presence of Matthean and especially Lukan content and editing. (2) Thomas knows more than one half of the New Testament. (3) Thomas reflects second century Syrian traditions and it may have been originally composed in Syriac with Greek and Coptic later translations. (4) Thomas is unknown until the beginning of the third century. (5) Thomas probably contains little or no early or authentic material beyond what is preserved in the New Testament gospels themselves. On what factual basis can one or should one argue for a first century date for Thomas? Allow me to appeal to Occam's Razor, but in its more original Missouri form: If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck. This is not to say that it is impossible or we should never think that there is any chance to find an authentic saying in Thomas, even if everything I have said is accepted. For me, Thomas is never pushed off the desk and never looked at. Of course not. So when I am talking about the historical Jesus and what Jesus most likely said, what he most likely meant, and what he did, and so on, Thomas is still born in mind. There is a chance, just as surely as the targum may preserve something that authentically reflects how a given passage was interpreted in the first century, just as surely as the Mishnah may retain an understanding of law that was applied and understood in Jesus' time, so may Thomas somehow, however in one way or another, retain a form of a saying that is closer to the way Jesus said it. Or a saying that did not survive in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, but Thomas preserved it. But on the whole, I find the evidence wanting that Thomas as a document in any form existed in the first century or existed in the first half of the second century. The evidence taken as a whole points to the second half of the second century. Or another way of putting it: which theory rests most comfortably with the evidence that we have. I think the theory that Thomas was probably written around 180 and then within 40 years or so is cited and discussed. Likewise, Mark

was written in 70 and within 40 years is cited and talked about. Thank you very much.

PATTERSON – Let's do some back and forth and clarify in the next few minutes and then as soon as possible we'll open up to questions from the audience. Again, let me complement Professor Evans on, as he has said of me, being a model of clarity; your arguments are very well stated, Craig.

I'm just going to look at the conclusions that you've ended with here, Craig. There's a lot of material here so I won't belabor it all. Both Greek and Coptic Thomas betray the presence of Matthean and especially Lukan redaction and special material. I don't dispute that at all. The question is, what do the numbers mean. My position has always been that there are instances where, I think, you can say that the synoptic texts have influenced Thomas, but when the numbers are small, what does it mean? And when we have just one exemplar of Thomas, which is relatively late, and when we know from analysis of the Coptic that the Coptic scribe was taking a look at the Coptic New Testament--this is what Schrage shows. There's going to be some influence. My position is that the influence is so small, or relatively small, that I can't really imagine those numbers if Thomas was actually taking things out of the New Testament as a compositional technique. The numbers I gave you, 16 instances in 95 tries was based on all synoptic parallels. But it's really interesting to run those numbers again just with parallels in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, because in those cases you can actually trace redaction very clearly from Mark to Luke, or from Mark to Matthew. How many parallels are there between Thomas and Mark, where Matthew and Luke also have a redacted version of Mark? Twenty-six. Now, of those parallels, how many times does Thomas reproduce clear redaction from Matthew or Luke, that is, their changes to a Markan passage? The answer is two - possibly three times if you take one of Chris Tuckett's instances. There are two or three times out of twenty-six tries where we can really control the evidence. We may simply disagree on this, but for me that just means that it probably was not a case of Thomas drawing on the New Testament at the basic compositional level. So, the numbers are kind of important, I think, and we should talk about that.

That Thomas knows more than half of the New Testament; I'm not convinced that Thomas knows any of the New Testament beyond those instances that I've just referred to. So I have to look at the essay. If it were clearly evident that Thomas knows half of the writings of the New Testament, then this debate would be over. I don't think any other author from the second century could be said to know that many of the New

Testament writings, if verbatim quotation or something very close to it is the standard of proof. So I would have to see those details, and form an opinion about each one of them, but I don't think that Thomas knows any of the writings of the New Testament.

Then there is the argument that Thomas reflects second century Syrian traditions – like the Diatessaron – that may have been originally composed in Syriac, with later Greek and Coptic translations. The problem with those arguments is they must always go from the Coptic back to an hypothetical Syriac original. Han Drivers and Gilles Quispel originally made some of these arguments, showing how an odd turn of phrase in Coptic could be explained if you could presuppose a Syriac original rather than a Greek original. The problem, of course, is that the Coptic we have is actually a translation of a Greek *Vorlage* and not a Syriac *Vorlage*. We are fairly certain of that. That doesn't mean that Thomas was composed in Greek. It could well have been composed in Syriac, but to get to our Coptic text, you have to go from the Syriac to the Greek and then through at least two iterations of the Coptic to get to the text we have today. A Subakhmimic version, a mixed Subakhmimic Sahidic version, and then what we have now. There are just too many steps in that process for me to put a whole lot of confidence in those arguments.

Thomas is unknown until the beginning of the third century: perhaps. But you may recall that Second Clement (12:1-2) quotes a piece from some gospel, and it's almost word for word out of the Gospel of Thomas, saying 22. Now, historically, students of that text have attributed it to the Gospel of the Egyptians because Jerome attributes that saying to the Gospel of the Egyptians, and so typically in our versions of the Apostolic Fathers there'll be a note: this comes from the Gospel of the Egyptians, but it could just as easily have come from the Gospel of Thomas, which would make it one of the earliest cited gospel texts. I won't mention also of course the saying that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 2:7, which could be a quotation of a version of Thomas 17—the provenance of this saying is much disputed. There may be at least some versions of Thomas sayings floating around early, and I think we should take that into consideration.

Finally, the business with Tatian. Nicholas Perrin argues this way -- Simon Gathercole argues in this way in his work on Thomas also--namely that Thomas shares certain ideas with Tatian (and Bardaisan, another important figure we need to bring into the conversation --and the Acts of Thomas, the Book of Thomas—all these works share certain theological concepts and predilections). I agree with that. The question is what do these common features mean? How do you explain those things historically? You could say that Tatian introduces asceticism to Syrian Christianity and therefore the asceticism of Thomas presupposes Tatian--

that's what Nick Perrin argues. But you could just as easily say Thomas represents asceticism, Tatian comes back to Syria from Rome, becomes an ascetic, and therefore Thomas is the source of Tatian's asceticism. I don't know a way to solve that problem, to tell you the truth. I do think that Thomas makes sense in a Syrian milieu. It has all those marks. One thing I will say though is that Thomas has a lot of Platonism in it. But when I compare Bardaisan or Tatian and their use of Plato, Thomas is relatively unsophisticated. Tatian in his Oration to the Greeks almost quotes from the *Timaeus*. It's very close--and Bardaisan does also. But in Thomas you don't have that kind of sophistication. It's something more like cocktail party Platonism; that is, I think the author knows as much about Plato as say I would know about Freud. I could throw around a few terms like *id* and *ego* and such, but there's no sophisticated knowledge there. Now, of course, does that necessarily mean that Thomas represents an early phase of the appropriation of Platonism, when it hasn't sunk in very well yet, or is he just an ignoramus? Could be either way, I don't know. But I do think that it could mean that Thomas represents a relatively early attempt to incorporate Platonism.

One last thing, where else do we find this cluster of ideas? They're all in Thomas: the idea of secret wisdom associated with words, logia, baptism as a kind of entry point to that secret wisdom, asceticism, an interest in androgyny, neither male nor female, an interest in Plato, an interest in realized eschatology. I would argue that all of those elements are also constitutive of the position of the opponents in 1 Corinthians often associated with Apollos or some such figure from Alexandria. Here also you find the idea that what is important is secret wisdom, that you get access to it through special baptism; that you should be an ascetic like Paul is an ascetic (chapter seven of the epistle), that you should try for something that's neither male nor female (referring of course to chapter 11 in the prayer and prophecy section of that chapter) and then realized eschatology in chapter 15. Even vegetarianism could be up for discussion in chapters 8-10 of 1 Corinthians. I think that what we're seeing in the Gospel of Thomas is not so late as it is hidden in early Christianity. It's hidden in the opponents of Paul in 1 Corinthians whose voice we don't hear, but I think that when we put the pieces together, it's pretty close to what we have in the Gospel of Thomas. Now that's not to say that they were reading the Gospel of Thomas or something like that; I don't suppose that's true. But I think this interpretation of the Jesus tradition - a kind of Hellenistic wisdom interpretation that draws heavily on Plato - it's possibly very very early, and probably is evidenced in 1 Corinthians itself. Just some things to think about, talk about back and forth. What do you think?

EVANS – Hang on to those last few words, especially the parallels that were suggested with respect to the Corinthian correspondence, 1 Corinthians particularly. I would probably take that same approach if we knew Thomas existed in the first century. Let us suppose Papias talked about Thomas. What is the backdrop to a first-century Thomas? Professor Patterson’s proposed Corinthian parallels could explain a lot. Maybe Thomas is wrestling with some of these issues, with which Paul wrestles in 1 Corinthians. That would be a very plausible approach—if we possessed less ambiguous evidence that suggested that a form of Thomas may well have circulated as early as the 70s. In my view, the problem is that there is significant evidence of the lateness of Thomas and no evidence of “early” forms of Thomas that could have been composed in the first century. Part of this evidence is seen in the large number of parallels between Thomas and about one half of the writings that in time became the New Testament. I again refer Professor Patterson and the audience to the already mentioned list of parallels that my colleagues Bob Webb, Rick Wiebe, and I compiled. In this work we went through the Nag Hammadi library looking for every possible parallel without any suggestion about which direction it goes, through the entire Nag Hammadi library and produced this fairly lengthy volume. We printed the text of Thomas and the biblical parallels side by side. These parallels suggest that half the books of the New Testament appear to be known to the author of Thomas. Now one could always reverse it and say: “No, all these other writings are echoing Thomasine traditions or they are all echoing some common tradition one way or the other.” But I do not find this suggestion plausible.

In the end I ask myself which theory — an early composition of Thomas, or a late composition of Thomas — rests the most comfortably with the evidence that we have and requires the least amount of speculation or special pleading. I have concluded that the theory that best fits the evidence sees Thomas produced in Syria in the late second century, a Thomas that knows of and is influenced by Tatian and his *Diatessaron* and ideas expressed in his *Oratio*.

The conclusion that Thomas is a late second century product accounts for *all of the evidence that we have*: Greek and Coptic manuscripts ranging in date from 220–340 that suggest a document with a stable textual history, a document probably originally composed in the Syriac language, as the great number of catchwords in that language indicate. The conclusion of a late Syriac Thomas coheres with the numerous parallels between Thomas and Syria traditions, some of which are distinctive to Syriac Christianity and its literature, as we see in the *Diatessaron*, the *Oratio*, the *Recognitions*, and other sources. Professor Patterson drew our attention to 2 *Clement* 12:2, which reads “When the

two shall be one, and the outside like the inside, and the male with the female, neither male nor female,” which closely parallels saying 22 in the Gospel of Thomas. He wonders if 2 *Clement* has quoted Thomas and, if so, is this evidence for an early date of Thomas? Scholars have suggested that 2 *Clement*, which is more of a sermon than a letter, could date as early as 100–120 or as late as 170. Helmut Koester thinks the work dates before the middle of the second century. Accordingly, if 2 *Clement* has quoted the Gospel of Thomas, this is then the earliest citation of the work and suggests that Thomas should not be dated later than the first half of the second century. However, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), writing shortly before 200, says the saying in question derives from the Gospel of the Egyptians (cf. *Stromata* 3.13.92), a work scholars think was composed sometime in 120–140. I think we should accept Clement’s testimony, given that he lived in Alexandria, Egypt, the region that also produced the Gospel of the Egyptians. If he says the saying comes from this work, then unless we find compelling contradictory evidence, we should accept what he says. Accordingly, the one distinctive Thomasine saying that we find in a second century source may not be from Thomas at all. This means that we have no firm evidence of the existence of Thomas until it is mentioned by Hippolytus and Origen in the third century. Given the eclectic nature of Thomas, a work that draws upon a host of other writings, the appearance of a saying from the Gospel of the Egyptians, along with materials from perhaps as many as one half of the writings of the New Testament should occasion no surprise.

Finally, I want to return to the point concerning verisimilitude. Three years ago, in 2006, *Jesus and Archaeology* edited by James Charlesworth was published. It is a large book, with 31 contributors, comprising some 750 pages. Several of the contributors are archaeologists, some are Jewish. In the index to Scripture and ancient literature I count more than 1,000 references to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. There are only twelve references to Thomas, all of them by one author, Bruce Chilton, all of them in reference to a literary portrait of Jesus, nothing to do with archaeology or history. The other thirty authors talking about Jesus and archaeology and history in the pre-70 setting saw no point in citing Thomas. Now, maybe they are wrong and they need to go back and restudy Thomas. But I don’t think so. Why is their neglect of Thomas justified? It is justified because Thomas provides no information about the realities of pre-70 Israel, the world in which Jesus and his disciples lived. These historians and archaeologists make use of whatever materials aid their research. They make use of Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament writings. They make no use of Thomas. I think that is a very telling point.

If Thomas has been in circulation since 70, maybe earlier, how does it stay under the radar? Nobody talks about Thomas explicitly until 220. If Thomas is as old as the New Testament Gospels, why does it not reflect the world of Jesus and his contemporaries? Why do Jewish archaeologists and Jewish historians neglect Thomas? Surely theological interests and commitments to a revered New Testament canon plays no part in their thinking. Jewish scholars, as my friend Hershel Shanks would say, “have no dog in this fight.”

Archaeologists and historians ignore Thomas because Thomas doesn’t help them. Does Thomas lack historical and cultural verisimilitude because it’s mostly sayings? One could argue this, but not persuasively. The sayings material that Matthew and Luke have in common, what is usually called Q, reflects the world of Jesus. So the fact that Thomas is comprised of sayings and not narrative does not account for its lack of verisimilitude. It lacks verisimilitude with first century Israel because it was composed in second century Syria. It is with second century Syria that we find verisimilitude.

Ideologically and critically I wouldn’t have any problem with a more positive assessment of Thomas. If Thomas has material that goes back to Jesus that we do not have in other sources, it needs to be taken into account in historical Jesus research. So methodologically, I am perfectly open to that possibility. I worry that historical Jesus research, as undertaken by some, skews the portrait of Jesus by giving too much credit to Thomas as an early and independent document. Thank you.

ROBERTS – Thank you. Alright we have some time for questions and answers.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1 – This is for both of you really. Given the lack of manuscript tradition for the Gospel of Thomas, what does this say about the early Christian church view of the Gospel of Thomas and what bearings does this have on the discussion?

PATTERSON – Well I think that speaks for itself. After the fourth century, the Gospel of Thomas was associated with Manichaeism and became part of a kind of heretical cluster of ideas. Although, the Manichaean Gospel of Thomas the testimonia refer to is a lot longer than the Thomas we have (supposedly 1300 verses), so I’m not sure if it’s the same text at all, but it’s clear that in the history of Christianity, the Gospel of Thomas does not enjoy the same status as the canonical gospels that we have. I think the last time it is referred to as one of the Manichaean gospels that circulates is in the 11th century, after that it

disappears altogether. But it just isn't part of the growing canonical tradition, so it disappears.

EVANS – Let me add something. Let me actually run to Thomas' defense on that question. There are three pieces – pieces of three Greek versions found at Oxyrhynchus. That is two more copies than have been found of Mark. That kind of evidence can cut in a lot of ways. The Christians at Oxyrhynchus read a very interesting library; they were very eclectic. So Thomas, in fact, does not fair badly in Oxyrhynchus when it comes to Christian reading lists.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2 – My question is more for information. You say there are 95 parallels between the Gospel of Thomas and the synoptic gospels. And of those, 7 or maybe as many as 16 show influences from the gospels. My question is what criteria are you using to determine if something is influenced as opposed to being a parallel?

PATTERSON – Well, that's a great question; it goes right to the heart of method. The debate usually goes something like this. In order to show that text A is dependent on text B, you have to find editorial spurs from text B in text A. Now, most of this work presupposes the two source hypothesis. So you take Mark as the source for Matthew and Luke, and then you study how Matthew and Luke have rendered a particular saying in Mark, that is, how they have editorialized the saying. Then you look at the Gospel of Thomas and ask "Does Thomas pick up any of the editorial fingerprint that Matthew or Luke left on the originally Markan text?" If Thomas does, then you can say that Thomas is clearly being influenced by Matthew or Luke. Now, in the case of those texts where you have a Markan parallel, with Matthew and Luke editing Mark, or sometimes just Matthew and sometimes just Luke—if in these cases you ask: how many times does Thomas actually hit a Matthean or Lukan editorial spur? Out of twenty-six times, it's three. Now some scholars will argue that this shows that Thomas is dependent on the canonical gospels. Others, like me, will say: Well, no it doesn't because that's just not enough to suggest dependence at the compositional level. I think you can account for those small numbers through textual corruption of one sort or another. Nicholas Perrin I think rightly asks in his recent book on this: for Patterson, how many *would* be enough? I never say, and I guess I don't know, but it would have to be more than three, because I know that in the fourth century when the scribe who created our text was making a translation into Coptic, he had a Sahidic New Testament over here and he was consulting it. When he got to a place he didn't know how to vocalize something right, or he did not know how exactly to express a

phrase, he took a look; maybe the way you translate Greek sometimes, right? So I know that he's looking at those texts and getting help. If that was the case, then we don't have to suppose that Thomas was drawing on the synoptic gospels at the compositional level back in the second century or first century or whenever it was written. If the synoptic texts were in fact a major source of material for the original author of the Gospel of Thomas, it would be very hard for me to understand why out of 95 parallels, 79 of them have no trace of the synoptic editorial work at all. Why is that? Is it as some will say: Well, Thomas was erasing what was in the editorial work of the synoptic. That's possible but I just don't find it very probable. But anything is possible, I mean, this is history. Strange things happen. I just don't think it is the most probable way of accounting for the data.

EVANS – I'd like to add to those comments. Dr. Patterson is right. What has complicated things is that Christians in the first and second centuries often quoted from memory. They did not always have documents in front of them. Justin Martyr is a great example of this. He does have the gospels and yet when he writes, he often quotes from memory. He will say, "Here is the word of the Lord," and he makes it sound like as a single saying and yet he has blended together sayings from two or more gospels. Justin harmonizes often, even when he is not consciously thinking of himself as producing a harmony. You see this in his *Dialogue with Trypho* and in his *Apology*. And so this is what obscures the data somewhat. So we ask if this is a distinctive Matthean form for a distinctive Lukan form. It is difficult to determine because of these harmonizing tendencies. If I may return to the Syriac language and the gospels. If one could only read and speak Syriac, say in the year 175, then one would not have access to the gospels, except as they are harmonized in Tatian's *Diatessaron*. We do not know, apart from the few quotations, if the gospels were available in Syriac prior to Tatian. There is no evidence of Syriac gospels prior to the third century. So one's only access to the dominical tradition, that is, the teaching of Jesus and his story, is through the *Diatessaron* until, of course, the Greek gospels eventually were translated into Syriac as individual gospels in the third century. So in other words, I am arguing the evidence suggests that the author of Thomas is accessing a blended, harmonized Syriac gospel tradition. That would explain why there are so many distinctive elements in Thomas that cohere with Syriac forms of the sayings of Jesus.

PATTERSON – Craig, would you suppose then that in Syrian Christianity there was no gospel until the *Diatessaron*?

EVANS – Yes, I think so; unless there is some work we do not know about. I am sure Christians knew stories and were told things. some of these things were written down, but we do not know of the gospels translated in full, in the Syriac language until the *Diatessaron*. If one could read Greek, one would have access to the Greek gospels. But Christians who only read and spoke Syriac did not have the gospels until the *Diatessaron* was produced.

PATTERSON – But any gospel?

EVANS – Or any gospel, that's right.

PATTERSON – That kind of strikes me as implausible: that a highly literate place like Edessa would get on for 70, 80 years without any kind of written gospel text.

EVANS – There were no written gospel texts, so far as we know, in Syriac. Written gospels were circulating in Greek.

PATTERSON – Thomas would fill that gap. Possibly... it's speculation.

EVANS – I'm just going by what evidence we have. That's all.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3 – My question is for either scholar on the stage. As to the specific type of genre given to this writing of Thomas, it's being called a gospel. I know that we have one gospel according to Matthew, according to Mark, and according to Luke, and according to John. This is one gospel that is according to four different writers, and in order for this type of genre to be considered even a gospel it must constitute the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ, and especially his death, his burial, and his resurrection - resurrection from the dead. And the gospel of Thomas is wanting of those requirements even if you read the epistles of Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, he reminds the reader of the gospel - what constitutes a gospel? It is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and Thomas is lacking these elements. Why not call the Gospel of Thomas the "Proverbs of Jesus according to Thomas?" Why not call it "101 things that Thomas said about Jesus?" Why do we call it a gospel because for it to be called a gospel, it must talk about those things, the death of Jesus and that he rose from the dead. Thomas lacks these ideas.

EVANS – Well, I will say very briefly I think it's a confusion of the content of the Christian message. That's what Paul is summarizing in 1 Corinthians 15. The gospel, the good news of what God has accomplished in Christ, who died and was buried, all of this according to the scriptures, and on the third day was raised up. And then he goes on and makes his argument about how important the resurrection is. But as a genre, I'm not sure when it occurred, but probably not until the second century is there an actual genre that we call gospel. Perhaps it is because Mark uses the word *euangelion* in its opening verse. Perhaps there was another factor. But in any case, whenever Thomas was written, Thomas calls itself a gospel. The Greek loan word, even though it's the Coptic translation, the Greek loan word *euangelion* is used. Your question is an interesting one and it would require a long an extended discussion of the issue, but I think that is part of the answer. It's just two things: there is content, and eventually this summary of the content, the message of the gospel becomes the name of a genre, namely a story about Jesus. Want to add to that Steve?

PATTERSON – No, I would only say that we call it the Gospel of Thomas because the text we have comes with an actual title. It says the Gospel of Thomas.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #4 – Is there any evidence that the church fathers were aware of the Gospel of Thomas at the time the canon of scripture was determined?

EVANS – The difficulty of course is saying when the canon of scripture was determined. If you as early as the late second century say: Irenaeus has it all figured out in 180-182, but he does not know of Thomas. He mentions Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Four, no more, this is it, and gives his reasons why, and some of his reasons are quite curious as to why it must just be these four. And then he talks about other gospels, some by name and sometimes he refers to groups, but Thomas is not mentioned or quoted by Irenaeus. So, I don't know. By the time you get to the great councils in the fourth and fifth centuries, of course Thomas is known by then.

PATTERSON – One of the problems is that the Gospel of Thomas is probably an eastern gospel. It's a Syrian, or eastern Syrian gospel, and so it did not circulate widely in the west, and I think that is because the theology of the Gospel of Thomas would have been lacking for people who lived in the Roman Empire, as I said in my final remarks. That is, our canon is a western canon and it's a canon that grew up and developed

as relevant for Christians in the Roman Empire, and it makes a lot of the death of Jesus and martyrdom and those themes because early Christians living in the Roman Empire as dissidents related very strongly to that aspect of Jesus' life and faith. In the east, in eastern Syria that was not the case, not until the third century. In the second century you don't find any interest in Jesus' death, resurrection, or martyrdom. And so Thomas, whether it was composed at the beginning of the second century or the later part of the second century, just wasn't a text that was relevant for Christians in the west and so it didn't gain currency in the west. I think the reason it's not in our canon is largely that our canon is a western canon and shaped very strongly by that experience of being a dissident of the empire.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #5 – This is for Dr. Evans. Forgive me if you've already answered this or clarified. What convinces you that Thomas knows more than half of the New Testament specifically?

EVANS – It's partly a cumulative argument. I mean if it is simply an echo here and there, then one is on very thin ice. It is the number of clear quotations, allusions, and parallels that encourage us to recognize the less obvious allusions. I suppose I would have to invite you to look at the 60 pages or so of parallels that I and Bob Webb and Rick Wiebe assembled in the book mentioned earlier. We do that for the entire Nag Hammadi corpus. The book is not focused on Thomas. However, we noticed when we examined Thomas we found a great many parallels. And as I said we do not necessarily assume that a parallel points to Thomas being dependent on a particular source. And I want to reiterate, I'm not talking about Thomas directly dependent on Matthew, Mark, Luke, John or necessarily other sources. Thomas has knowledge of material we find in the writings that in time became the New Testament, however he acquired it. That is all that I am saying. I am not saying that the author of Thomas has read 14 or 15 New Testament books; he just has knowledge of them. And that suggests to me, Thomas was composed much later than the New Testament gospels. By the way, the death of Jesus is emphasized very early in Christian writings. Paul emphasizes it in his earliest writings as early as the late 40's into the 50's. Christians were not being killed then; they were persecuted in the synagogue or in Jerusalem, perhaps, but Rome was not rounding them up and persecuting them. So well before serious Roman Imperial persecutions, the death of Jesus is very important to the early Christian movement.

PATTERSON – I think it's an important point, at least to me it's important. I think the death of Jesus is important for Paul because he is

getting kicked around. And when he talks about the death of Jesus, it's almost always in a context where he's reflecting on his own career as someone who's been arrested and flogged and put in prison and these things. I think that there is a very close correlation between Paul's interest in the death of Jesus and his own experience as a dissident within the Empire. Now to be sure, there was no systematic persecution of Christians in the first century because they're simply still below the radar, but when they hit the radar, they take it in the chin. But Paul is certainly a good example of the fate enjoyed by earlier Christians living as dissidents in the empire.

EVANS – Would you not agree that what ignited the Christian church, what turned Jesus' movement into a rapidly expanding church is the resurrection? And in the telling of the resurrection the passion story must also be told. Or are we to think that somehow Jesus dies and then the church recovers, or his following recovers, and then the church then grows up, stimulated and comforted by his teaching, but with little interest in his death and resurrection? I find that highly implausible.

PATTERSON – I think that that is certainly true for the church in the west and certainly true for Paul. It's true for their canonical gospels, but I don't think it's true for Syrian Christianity. It certainly isn't true as reflected in the Gospel of Thomas. Tatian would be an interesting question because the oration of the Greeks has no reflection on that. Bardaisan also does not, I think, speak about the death and resurrection of Jesus either. And so I think it's interesting to consider the differences between Christianity east and west and where they choose to focus and why. Remember that Paul thinks the opponents in 1 Corinthians are wrong and deficient precisely because they don't take the cross seriously enough. And that is, I think, evidence that there's some difference or diversity about proper focus in early Christianity.

ROBERTS – May I add one comment here? I've been biting my tongue for most of the night. It seems like the reason that Paul did get kicked around was because he preached a crucified Jewish resurrected Messiah. That was the crux in the controversial point of his message. And I don't think the fact that he got kicked around was why he then preached the message. He preached the message first then he got kicked around. So that would be basically my response to his own thinking here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #6 – Thank both of you gentlemen for being here tonight. A lot has been mentioned tonight about the evidence for or against the Gospel of Thomas, but then you made this interesting

statement that I wanted to pick up on. Essentially you said that you were sympathetic, that's the word, toward Crossan's preference for an early date for the authorship of the Gospel of Thomas. But then you said that establishing an early date was unwarranted specifically by any compelling proof. My question is: if the manuscript support for Thomas is not particularly compelling and if the evidence for an early date is not particularly compelling, then why would you as a historian be so optimistic about an early date and sympathetic to Crossan's view?

PATTERSON – I should clarify. I'm not sympathetic to Crossan's early date for Thomas. That is, I think I was clear. For me, the Gospel of Thomas as we know it probably came into existence in the late first century or early second century, sometime in that time frame. Crossan dates it considerably earlier and in part on the basis of some things that I said in my early work on the Gospel of Thomas. He and I have talked about that and I do not really support the firm date he makes for Thomas in the 60s or 70s. I am sympathetic to the way he works with Thomas in his work on the historical Jesus—very sympathetic. And more crucial for that point is the question of whether Thomas is dependent on the synoptic gospels or not. And as I said before, I think the evidence is compelling that it is not dependent on the synoptic gospels. That means that you should be able to use the Gospel of Thomas to do traditional historical work on the sayings of Jesus. That is, they can help you get a little critical purchase on the sayings as they developed over the first century. So you need not rely simply upon the Gospel of Mark or the canonical gospels to present the sayings of Jesus and then guess about what was the original. Thomas just gives us another critical tool to work with and I think that is very very important. Now, some have objected that this gives too much weight to the Gospel of Thomas, too much importance to Thomas in the discussion of the historical Jesus, and that may be true. But I should point out- and I believe Craig said something like this in his remarks--outside of the synoptic parallels in the Gospel of Thomas, scholars have been very reluctant to attribute anything else in the Gospel of Thomas to Jesus. There are a handful of sayings unique to Thomas that Jeremias thought could go back to Jesus, and Johannes Bauer thought a few more could go back to Jesus. But the Jesus seminar, for example did not vote red or pink any saying from the Gospel of Thomas that did not have a synoptic parallel. (Saying 42 and 98 are printed in pink, but behind that lie a number of votes, some of which were gray – we struggled back and forth with these.) What does that mean? I think it means that scholars still have a kind of canonical prejudice, to tell you the truth. But it probably also points to the

importance of multiple independent attestation in the whole debate about what goes back to Jesus.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #7 – This question is for Dr. Patterson mainly. You focus a lot of time demonstrating how the Gospel of Thomas fits within the context of Syrian Christianity especially in the context of Edessa. As Jesus and the first followers were Palestinian Jews, I am wondering what evidence you would have that would connect the Gospel of Thomas with a Palestinian Jewish perspective.

PATTERSON – Well there are 95 parallels, with Q and Mark mostly, in the Gospel of Thomas. Those are all sayings that I assume go back to a Palestinian milieu, or at least a western Syrian milieu, where Mark would have been written. Consider those overlaps. I have to argue that something like “Blessed are the poor for yours is the kingdom of heaven” or “Blessed are those who are hungry because you will be filled” - I think those go back to Jesus. Now, somewhere, somehow those sayings that Jesus spoke in Galilee in the first half of the first century were taken to other places, including Edessa, where they turn up in the Gospel of Thomas and other gospels. I think that the Gospel of Thomas gives us a plausible way of accounting for the transmission of the Jesus tradition into Edessa. The presence of so many synoptic-like sayings in Thomas, together with the presence of a lot of what I would call Platonizing or esoteric sayings, something more characteristic of eastern Syrian Christianity, gives us a kind of, I don’t know, I guess a fingerprint of both early Palestinian Christianity and then later Syrian Christianity. So there’s the evidence for the movement of this tradition from Palestine to eastern Syria. The other thing is that I think the sociology reflected in the Gospel of Thomas, that is, all these sayings also found in the synoptic gospels that talk about leaving family and home and becoming beggars and voluntary poverty, all those things that make up the socially radical sayings of Jesus in the synoptic tradition—they also indicate a connection to the earliest phase of the Jesus movement in the Galilee. This is what I argued years ago in my Claremont thesis. In Syrian Christianity, very interestingly, the prototypical apostolic figure is that ascetical, wandering sage—the Jesus imitator. I think that it’s reasonable to conclude from this that some people from the Jesus movement in fact went to Syria. They crossed the Euphrates and went on to live with Jews in Edessa and they preserved that early sense of the ideal apostle as someone who leaves house and home, lives without family, lives as a loner. They preserved that and it became a kind of ideal there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #8 – This was also a question for Dr. Patterson and actually it's more of a point of clarification to determine whether or not I actually have a question. I believe I misheard you but it sounded like you said at one point that you felt that in 1 Corinthians Paul seemed to be borrowing from some Thomas principles. Did I hear that correctly?

PATTERSON – Let me clarify. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is engaging a certain group of partisans in the community at Corinth with whom he has some serious disagreements. The argument he has with these partisans comprises the gist of the letter. Much effort, of course, has been expended trying to flesh out what that position was that he is arguing against. And my view is that the position of those partisans as described, say, by Birger Pearson or Richard Horsley or any number of people, who would basically characterize them as Hellenistic Jewish wisdom theologians—I think that their description meshes very well with what I have said about Thomas Christianity. Now, I don't think that they were reading the Gospel of Thomas, but I do think that you see in Corinth the kind of understanding of Jesus that does emerge in the Gospel of Thomas, and this says to me that this understanding of Jesus was part of the early Christian debate, if you will. These ideas about Jesus did not arise for the first time in second century eastern Syria. We need to take cognizance of that when trying to understand the place of Thomas and its ideas in the early history of Christianity.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #8 – Then that means that I do have a question. Without actual archaeological evidence that gives us a solid date, like the Dead Sea Scrolls give us an early time line, without an actual archaeological date set to an early manuscript of the Gospel of Thomas, would it not be just as safe to assume that Thomas borrows from those ideas that Paul puts out in 1 Corinthians, that Paul does not in fact borrow a Thomasine idea, but rather Thomas or the author of the Gospel of Thomas borrows from 1 Corinthians to come up with those statements?

PATTERSON – I don't argue that Paul is borrowing from the Gospel of Thomas, and neither would I argue that Thomas is reading 1 Corinthians. I don't think that the parallels are there. The ideas are there but the textual parallels—namely, 1 Cor. 2:7—may be accounted for in other ways. I should add, however, that Simon Gathercole has recently argued just as you have suggested – that Thomas is quoting from Paul, not the other way around. He makes that argument to counter what he believes is my position, that Paul quotes Thomas. But that is not my position. Simon's arguments are well-stated, and I commend them to you; but I

am not persuaded. To your point about archaeology, I want to just remind us, and I think Craig would agree with this, that we don't have archaeological evidence for any of our gospels. All of our texts are late copies of copies of copies of copies. Archaeology just does not give us the kind of information that would help us establish exactly when and where any of our gospels were written—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, or Thomas. We're really speculating on the date and place for all of these gospels—or making educated guesses. As you can see, sometimes we'll agree and sometimes we'll disagree.

EVANS – If I could just add one brief word on that. Paul deals with some issues and we see them reflected in 1 Corinthians. He's writing that in the 50s. Forty years later the issues are still percolating at Corinth and *1 Clement* addresses them again. That is an interesting point. There were some issues in Corinth in the 50s; there were still issues in the 90s, how much later these issues continued I don't know. And as for when gospels are written, well at least we have a Papias, a dateable person from a dateable time who is talking about four gospels/evangelists by name. That is my point there. There is not much doubt about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John dating to the first century. I like to hang my theories on pegs, and the pegs in this case are people who really lived and talked and tell us information, or documents that we find. People moved around, things moved around. I am talking about the document that was composed, as it is extant in three Greek fragments and one Coptic version. The evidence as we have it suggests that it is a late second-century composition. Thank you.