

East and West: A Comparison of How the Apostles Interpreted the Gospel Message in Roman and Persian Cultures

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1:0: Introduction

This paper arises from my initial involvement in separate study whose focus was on an exclusively neurophysiological and psychological investigation into the development of personality and identity, including tribal identity in violent conflicts. As a consequence and with academic support, I was encouraged to develop this work to better understand how gender and sexual identities, including gender and sexually variant identities are formed. One result of this study shows that a contradiction exists between the medical and psychologically based understandings of the origin and nature of gender and sexually variant identities..... which is incompatible with the diagnosis that is dictated by the religious and theological doctrines that many present day Christian Churches enforce. Because of this I have conducted and extended social, historical and theologically based study to find out how and why this contradiction occurs. A full personal bibliography can be found at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/bibliography.htm>. The approach which I take is in the first instance is to review the equivalent interactions in first century Greek, Jewish and Roman societies without any reference to Christianity. The second step is to examine these results from a Christian perspective, using the insights gained from the neurophysiological and psychological study: I have previously reported this work in my other writing: also in a paper which is companion paper to this document: Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?*" That analysis uses the canonical texts and the more generally recognised sources³. This paper: "*East and West: A Comparison of How the Apostles Interpreted the Gospel Message in Roman and Persian Cultures*" reports the results of an explorative investigation which examines the additional insights that a study of the "*Gospel According to Thomas*" may or may not provide. In it I assess the current arguments which claim the authority of science, and I compare now attitudes to gender and sexuality formed in the early Church of the East and in the Western Church. I show that

¹ Personal biography at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SusanBiographyPapers.pdf>

² This document is available online at Gilchrist, S. (2019): "*East and West: A Comparison of How the Apostles Interpreted the Gospel Message in Roman and Persian Cultures*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/035B-EastAndWest.pdf> A further document: Gilchrist, S. (2019): "*The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/027B-ThomasAnalysis.pdf>

³ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/226P-ConsiderScience.pdf>

what began as a speculative exercise can give greater insights not only on the early developments of Christianity but how it should be interpreted in the present day world.

2:0: Thomas

The *Gospel According to Thomas* starts with the following words: “*These are the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke, and that Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down*”. The presumption is often made that the term “*Secret Sayings*” defines these as later Christian Gnostic texts in which secret keys are needed to unlock their meanings⁴. However it is argued in these investigations that the document should instead be associated with the Jewish Midrash tradition, where the Rabbis also demanded the use of secret keys to hide the meaning of their own texts⁵. This changes the whole perspective. If the Gospel was a later Christian gnostic text the perspective that it presents it would reflect a time after the Crucifixion and Resurrection had taken place. If it is a Midrash, the discernments it presents would peer backwards into the earlier history and traditions of Judaism itself.

It is not quite so simple. The *Gospel According to Thomas* is a collection of 114 sayings with no interconnecting narrative which are purported to be by Jesus. Many scholars have sought to explore the interconnection between this Gospel and what is believed to be a lost document, called “Q” which is understood to represent either an oral tradition, or to be a collection of sayings which the Apostle Thomas wrote down during the lifetime of Jesus⁶. About fifty percent of the sayings in the *Gospel According to Thomas* have parallels in the canonical Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The texts in the *Gospel According to Thomas* appear more primitive in form, from those that appear there. Mystical texts which require “*Secret Knowledge*” or Gnosis predated Christianity. Jewish Midrash fit that category, but there was also a great deal of later Christian writing which took a similarly secretive approach⁷. The reference to the “*hidden words*” which appears in the introduction to the *Gospel According to Thomas* which states that: “*These are the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke, and that Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down*” has led many to consider that the *Gospel According to Thomas* is just one such Gnostic Text. However contradictory features, such as the absence of fantastical elements and the attitudes to sex presented in the *Gospel According*

⁴ Owens, Lance S. (accessed 2018): “*The Gospel of Thomas and the Hermeneutics of Vision*”:

http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gth_hermen.htm

⁵ Price, Robert M: “New Testament Narrative as Old Testament Midrash”: http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/art_midrash1.htm

⁶ “Q” (from German the Quelle, meaning “source”), is a hypothetical written collection of primarily Jesus’ sayings (logia). It is part of the common material found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke but not in the Gospel of Mark. It has been presumed by many scholars to have been written in Greek and that most of its contents appear in Matthew, in Luke, or in both. It is believed that Luke more often preserves the text’s original order than Matthew. The Gospel According to Thomas circulated principally in the Syriac Christian traditions. Extant fragments are in Coptic or Greek but some argue that it was originally written in a Semitic language, which would have been spoken in the Jewish world. Current academic interest in the Gospel is high. <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/review/the-composition-of-the-gospel-of-thomas-original-language-and-influences>

⁷ A Midrash is a commentary on part of the Hebrew scripture which is attached to the biblical text. The term is also used of a rabbinic work that interprets Scripture in an equivalent manner. Such works contain early interpretations and commentaries on the Written Torah and Oral Torah (spoken law and sermons), as well as non-legalistic rabbinic literature (Haggadah) and occasionally Jewish religious laws (Halakha): this usually forms a running commentary on specific passages in the Hebrew Scripture (Tanakh). In Christian tradition, St Paul often used similar types of arguments in his letters by justifying his views with the words “*as it is written*,” followed by a verse of Jewish scripture (Romans 9:13, Romans 11:26, 1 Corinthians 1:19, etc). Jesus frequently adopted the same approach, for example in his Sermon on the Mount when, for example, he said: “*It has been said, ‘anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*” (Matthew. 5:31-32). In the *Gospel according to Thomas* almost every saying is prefaced by the words “*Jesus said*”. The current approach, which regards the Gospel of Thomas simply as a series of independent sayings would be unlikely in first century Judaism, for the Gospel is more likely to be presented in accordance with the contemporary Midrashim conventions, where statements in a running commentary may be connected by hidden links. Much of the public teaching of Jesus was cabalistic in nature, and Jesus had to explain privately afterwards to his disciples the message he was presenting. The Torah was considered to holy to be easily read by non-Jews, so that interpretation had to be unlocked by understanding the conventions that were used. Terms which are used in early Rabbinic Judaism describe their character as secret lore. References to eating and corpses which are found in the *Gospel According to Thomas* need to be read in the context of an allegorical approach.

to *Thomas*, suggest that it does not fit completely into either of these categories and that was one of the reasons for adopting this speculative approach.

There is also an agenda presented in the *Gospel According to Thomas* which means that this Gospel cannot simply be a selection of sayings of Jesus which were written down at the time. This again gives a further reason why many have ascribed the *Gospel According to Thomas* to somebody or some people who were writing in the name of the Apostle at a much later date. There is an additional input to be considered. By tradition the Apostle Thomas took the Gospel message to the East, where under societies more influenced by Zoroastrianism⁸ and social expectations in the Parthian or Persian Empire⁹ very different cultural values from those encountered in the Roman Empire, notably in the equalities of the relationships between men and women, which there prevailed.

2:1: Culture, History and Interpretation

According to the tradition, Thomas the Apostle took Christianity to India in AD52-53. Today many scholars consider that the Gospel may well have originated around or before this date. If Peter and Paul were to make compromises which resulted in the submission of women in Roman society, Thomas clearly did not. Sayings 21 and 61 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* present Mary Magdalene and Salome as wise confidants of Jesus, while the disciples are presented as those stumbling to understand. Saying 22 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* makes it clear that there should be no difference in treatment between men and women. In this paper and in section 8:0 of another paper: "*The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church*" I also confirm that saying 22 can only be interpreted as the fulfilling transcendence of gender; not the suppression of all sex¹⁰. In addition I show that Saying 114 must be interpreted in the context of first century societies. That is not as how we perceive it today, which is in terms of the biology of sex. In the ancient Middle Eastern world gender transformations and their threats, metaphorical or not were used as political and social weapons to manipulate people in society. Therefore, to "*Make Mary Male*" in saying 114 was to give her full equality with all of the male apostles in all activities and responsibilities, in social roles, in public and private ministries, and in every other act.

⁸ Zoroastrianism served as the state religion of the pre-Islamic Iranian or Persian empires from around 600 BCE to 650 CE. It also strongly promoted as the state religion by the various Parthian and Sassanid dynasties. This was also a cosmopolitan culture in which many other religions were worshipped. Although it had Persian origins and was a cult within Zoroastrianism, the Mithraism which became popular as a Roman cult developed its own traditions which appear in many ways to be independent of these Persian roots. In contrast to the inclusion of women in Zoroastrianism, this form of Mithraism is understood to have excluded women from its membership.

⁹ The Parthian Empire, which lasted from 247 BC to 224 AD, was also known as the Arsacid Empire. At its height, the Parthian, or Persian Empire stretched from the northern reaches of the Euphrates, almost to the Mediterranean and in what is now central-eastern Turkey, to eastern Iran. The empire, located on the Silk Road trade route between the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean basin and the Han dynasty of China, became a centre of trade and commerce. It included an amalgamation of cultures, and it was much more than modern day Persia or Iran. The ancient Medes, Persians, and Parthians were three ancient Iranian tribes in the Middle East. Together they formed the Persian Empire. During the first century the Parthians were in control. They defeated Rome in 53 BC. The Roman - Parthian Wars which lasted were a series of conflicts which waxed and waned between the two Empires from 66 BC to 217 AD. Disputes between these empires continued to promote the separation between the different sections of Christianity. The later Sassanid Empire from 224 to 651 was also frequently at war with Rome. It took a much less tolerant approach to religions other than the state religion of Zoroastrianism and during the Sassanid empire greater persecution of Christians occurred

¹⁰ From early in the Second century, encratic teaching had become a major influence in the Syrian Church. This teaching declares that salvation can only be gained through complete abstinence from sex. The focus changes from abstaining because of the asceticism demanded by Jesus for the total commitment for spreading the gospel, to one which condemns the sexual act. The name is identified with an ascetic Christian sect led by Tatian, a 2nd-century Syrian rhetorician. It represents the group's doctrine of continence. However this focus on sex is not present in the *Gospel According to Thomas*. In the *Gospel According to Thomas* the "Solitary Ones" are called the elect; in this Gospel it is clear that this form of asceticism is to ensure total commitment to the Gospel message by avoiding the distractions of blood relationships and family life: it was not the condemnation of sex. First century concerns over same-sex intercourse related to its use to enforce power and domination over people in socially unequal societies, again it was the abuses of power that gave rise to sexual abuse rather than the horror of sex. Nevertheless sexual abuse was also rife in these first century societies. In all cases that was totally and vociferously condemned. Although Encratic and Christian teaching combines all of these together, and regardless of purpose, condemns them as the evils of sex. The teaching in the Church of the East continued to emphasise asceticism as a total demonstration of commitment to the gospel message, rather than abstaining from the horrors of sex.

There is a precise counterpoint to this in the first century Greco-Roman Goddess cults, where their acts of gender disruption, together with their threats to turn men who did not behave according to their demands into women, were made. Fear of impotence and the incapacity to act as men, in a strongly male dominated society were probably sufficient. The same challenge to the social order of that male dominated and highly unequal society was highlighted by the self-castrated priests of the Goddess cults¹¹. In saying 98 of the *Gospel According to Thomas*, Thomas, like Paul, also understood that Christianity could not transform the world until the time was right. It also is notable that Jesus did not condemn gender complementarity, but he condemned the social, religious and legal enforcement of it many times. That lack of condemnation should be contrasted with the repeated statements of Peter and Paul who instead socially, religiously and legally enforced it to ensure the survival of the early Christian movement and to give it social respect. For Thomas there was no place at any time in the Gospel message where the submission of women and the enforcement of a doctrine of gender complementarity could be accepted acts.

2:2: Dispute and Division

In this investigation I identify three different approaches to gender and sex inside the Apostolic Community. Each of these has tried to interpret the teaching of Jesus in ways that fit within what their culture expects. For Peter and James the Just, that interpretation was framed by the Jewish tradition, where presenting the teaching of Jesus within the framework of gender complementarity in a Jewish context was an end in itself¹². However both Thomas and Paul appear to have recognised the full impact of the gender transcendence and the equal treatment of men and women in the teaching which Jesus presents. Paul, a Roman Citizen, had to find a way of expressing this within the social and philosophical constraints which were demanded by Roman society. In his letter to Philemon, Paul seems to describe a church community which expressed the gospel message in full inside its own membership, while deferring to the customs and demands of society outside it. That in turn meant restricting public roles for women, and his attempts to do this are roundly condemned by many people in today's world. I argue in Gilchrist, S. (2017): *"A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church"*¹³ that Paul took a pragmatic approach so that, once Christianity was established and the threats had passed, Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28: *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"*, could, and should have, found its full expression: not just within the Church but also in society around it.... and that should become the culture which embraces the world.

Saying 98 of the *Gospel According to Thomas* contains a similar sentiment. Thomas, who took the Gospel message to the East, had different constraints to deal with. Peter and Paul were bringing the

¹¹ I discuss the roles of the Goddess Cults extensively in a number of documents: These include: Gilchrist, S. (2011): *"Issues on the Sanctity of Same-Sex Relationships"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/014B-IssuesOnTheSanctityOfSame-SexRelationships.pdf>
Gilchrist, S. (2013): *"Gender, Sexuality and the Christian Church"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/015B-GenderSexualityChurch.pdf>
Gilchrist, S. (2013): *"An Unfinished Reformation"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/016B-UnfinishedReformationArticle.pdf>

¹² 1 Peter 3:1-8: *"Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives"*¹². *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers"* Gilchrist, S. (2015): *"Deuteronomy 22:5 and its Impact on Gender and Sexual Variation in the Christian Church"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/022B-Deuteronomy22-5.pdf>.

¹³ Gilchrist, S. (2017): *"A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf> See also Gilchrist, S. (2016): *"Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and Traditions of the Christian Church"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf> and Gilchrist, S. (2016): *"Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation on the Life and Teaching of Jesus"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/219P-InfluencesJesus.pdf> for more extended reads.

Christian Gospel to a grossly gender unequal male dominated society, where sexual behaviour was viewed through the prism of subjection and domination rather than the moral values of sex¹⁴. Peter and Paul repeatedly emphasised the need to conform to the social values that gave social respect to the early Christian communities inside a gender unequal Roman society. However the lack of any evidence of any such compromise on the issues of gender transcendence and equality is evident in the *Gospel According to Thomas*. No compromise was needed, since under the Parthians (247BC-224AD) in the Persian Empire, and also under the codes of the state sponsored Zoroastrian religion, the principles of gender equality were already applied¹⁵.

Many of these issues came to a head at the time of the Council of Jerusalem held in AD 48 which resulted in the Apostolic Decree issued by the early Christian Movement¹⁶. The decree, as reported in Acts 15:19–20 dealt with the arguments as to whether Gentile converts had to be circumcised: In this Peter states: *“Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood”*. Although the decree, as it is expressed in Acts 15, deals only with circumcision, the same arguments can be applied to all forms of physical transformation. A similar statement appears in Saying 53 of the Gospel of Thomas: *“His disciples said to him: “Is circumcision beneficial, or not? He said to them: “If it were beneficial, their father would beget them circumcised from their mother. But the true circumcision in the spirit has prevailed over everything.”* Paul declares in Colossians 3:11 that: *“There is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all”*. It is also worth noting that the moral attitudes of transgender people should likewise be judged on how they live their lives, and not on any physical transformations they may make. The statement Jesus made in Matthew 19:12 specifies that this would also apply to the self-castrated priests of the Greco-Roman Goddess cults.¹⁷ Many commentators also argue that

¹⁴ Male same-sex intercourse was anathema in first century Jewish Society because of its use as a tool of subjection and domination in a despotic and grossly socially and gender unequal world. Given the Zuguot (Pairs) tradition in Judaism that then prevailed, intimate relationships between pairs of rabbis were encouraged. Love and affection for each other could be expressed, but same-sex intercourse was banned. The Bible speaks freely about the love expressed between Jesus and John. That would have been unremarkable in Jewish culture at that time, however admitting even the slightest substance to any suggestion that Jesus and John might have had same-sex intercourse, regardless of purpose, would be seen as an act of subjection and domination, and that would have been totally catastrophic for early Christianity. The early Christian Church repeatedly insisted on the virginity of John, and the festival of the Virginity of John continues to be celebrated to the present day. These prohibitions continue to have considerable power in societies where gender inequality, exists and also where gender complementarity is socially, legally and religiously enforced. However in societies where gender equality is achieved or earnestly aspired to the prohibitions which interpret same-sex intercourse as acts of subjection or domination no longer exist. These social and cultural differences are leading to schisms in the present day Church.

¹⁵ Zoroastrian religion does not discriminate between men and women. Leaving aside the differences with regard to religious observances and role responsibilities, both the sexes are treated equally in the religious texts. There is no preferential treatment for male children. There is no such argument that male children are necessary for the deliverance of parents into the ancestral world. The same initiation ceremony is performed for both male and female children. Of the six Immortal Beings created by God, three are feminine and three are masculine. Both men and women have equal importance in protecting the sanctity and divinity of the world. Children are advised to honour both mother and father equally. A useful summary is given in: Ebrahimipour, Tamara: (2008): “Women's Rights in Ancient Persia”: *Iran Review*: Sunday May 18, 2008: http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Women_s_Rights_in_Ancient_Persia.htm

¹⁶ The Council of Jerusalem is generally dated to 48 AD, roughly 15 to 25 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, between 26 and 36 AD. Acts 15 and Galatians 2 both suggest that the meeting was called to debate whether or not male Gentiles who were converting to become followers of Jesus were required to become circumcised. Circumcision was considered repulsive during the period of Hellenization of the Eastern Mediterranean. The conclusion of the Council was to ask the Gentiles to conform only to the “Seven Laws of Noah”: 1. Not to worship idols. 2. Not to curse God. 3. To establish courts of justice. 4. Not to commit murder. 5. Not to commit adultery or sexual immorality. 6. Not to steal. 7. Not to eat flesh torn from a living animal. Any non-Jew who adheres to these laws because they were given by Moses is regarded as a righteous gentile, and is assured of a place in the world to come

¹⁷ These issues caused very real difficulties for the early church. The most relevant passage in the Bible which describes the attitude of Jesus to celibacy and ritual castration is that in Matthew 19:12 which states “For there are eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs, which were made eunuchs by men: and there are eunuchs, which made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it let him receive it”. The third phrase in this statement implies that this is an active act and for the social culture of the time that statement was very direct. Those who opposed ritual castration had an uphill battle against them for there was little doubt about the authenticity of the text. Throughout Christian and European history there have been many who took and taught these statements literally. They include Valentinus (whose sect was declared heretical in the mid-second century), Julius Cassianus (declared heretical in the mid-second century), Basilides (also declared heretical in the early-second century), Leontios of Antiochia, (Bishop of Jerusalem, late-fourth century), Melito “the Eunuch” (ca. late-second century), Hilarion (mid-fourth century), Marcarius “the Egyptian (late 4th century) and Origen (also declared heretical in the early-third century). These people are among the most famous of thousands that chose ritual castration. This perception was not confined to the Gnostic or fringe movements, it

Sayings 22 and 114 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* must be later interpolations. However their fit is correct when they are taken in the context of first century expectations: and before an encratic form of teaching took hold in early Christianity: this embraced the change from the focus on asceticism as a preparation for conflict to one which sought to condemn all sex.¹⁸

2:3: Origins and Sources

The origin of the *Gospel According to Thomas* is a major issue¹⁹. The *Gospel according to Thomas* possesses a very different tone and structure from the other New Testament apocrypha and also the four Canonical Gospels. Unlike the Canonical Gospels, it is not a narrative account of the life of Jesus; instead, it consists of sayings that are attributed to Jesus, sometimes these are stand-alone; at other times they are embedded in short dialogues or parables. Since its discovery, many scholars have seen it as evidence which supports the existence of a lost so-called “Q source”, which was also a collection of sayings of Jesus, without any account of his deeds or his life and death²⁰. If these are not the same, the Q source and the *Gospel According to Thomas* may have had a similar form. The earliest fragments of the Gospel that have so far been found are dated to between 130 and 250 AD²¹. It was discovered near Nag Hammadi in Egypt in December 1945²². This Coptic-language text contains 114 sayings of Jesus²³. Almost half of these resemble those found in the Canonical Gospels. It has been speculated that the other sayings were added from either Gnostic, or other oral traditions, not recorded elsewhere. Its place of origin may have been in Syria, where traditions related to the Apostle Thomas were strong. Many commentators now agree on an early date for the *Gospel According to Thomas*²⁴. Some argue that elements of it had been written by AD

became a major issue in the early church. The earliest report of the desire for castration among Christians comes from the second century writings of Justin. Self-castration was a widely practiced and it was an ancient expression of religious devotion throughout the Middle East. Several early Christian encratite and ascetic movements (centred mainly in Egypt) are known to have members who were eunuchs. The cloisters of Egypt and Syria were centres of self-castration, and Coptic monasteries continued to perform castration well into the Islamic period. Indeed, the criminalization of eunuchs in the church at the Council of Nicaea is testimony to the degree to which self-castration was practiced. For the full account see Gilchrist, S. (2012). “*Sexuality, Gender and the Christian Church*”. <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/015B-GenderSexualityChurch.pdf>

¹⁸ From early in the Second century, encratic teaching had become a major influence in the Syrian Church. This teaching declares that salvation can only be gained through complete abstinence from sex. The name is identified with an ascetic Christian sect led by Tatian, a 2nd-century Syrian rhetorician. It represents the group's doctrine of continence. However it is not present in the *Gospel According to Thomas*. In the *Gospel According to Thomas* the “Solitary Ones” are called the elect; in this Gospel it is clear that this form of asceticism is to ensure total commitment to the Gospel message by avoiding the distractions of blood relationships and family life: it was not the condemnation of sex. First century concerns over same-sex intercourse related to its use to enforce power and domination over people in socially unequal societies, again it was the abuses of power that gave rise to sexual abuse rather than the horror of sex. Nevertheless sexual abuse was also rife in these first century societies. In all cases that was totally and vociferously condemned. Encratic and Christian teaching combines all of these together and regardless of purpose, condemns them as the evils of sex.

¹⁹ Patterson, Stephen, J. (2015): “The Gospel of Thomas and the historical Jesus”: Chapter 13 in: Gregory, Andrew F; Tuckett, Christopher Mark; Nicklas Tobias (eds): (2015): “*The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*”. Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology Oxford University Press, 2015 ISBN 019964411X, 9780199644117

²⁰ Q source (also Q document, Q Gospel, Q Sayings Gospel, or Q from German: Quelle, meaning "source") is a hypothetical written collection of primarily Jesus' sayings (logia). Q is part of the common material found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke but not in the Gospel of Mark. According to this hypothesis, this material was drawn from the early Church Oral Tradition. Estimated Range of dating is between 40-80 A.D. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/q.html>

²¹ Thomas fragments: The Oxyrhynchus Papyri are a group of manuscripts discovered during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Bernard Pyne Grenfell and Arthur Surridge Hunt at an ancient rubbish dump near Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, modern el-Bahnasa.

²² For information on the Nag Hammadi sources, see: Meyer, Marvin (Ed) (2007): “*The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*” Harper Collins: ISBN-10: 0061626007: ISBN-13: 978-0061626005

²³ Gospel of Thomas: (With linear translation linked to Crum's Coptic Dictionary and Plumley's Coptic Grammar). Ecumenical Coptic Project online edition, 1998 ff. <http://freelyreceive.net/metalogos/files/thomas.html>

²⁴ Assigning any date to the *Gospel According to Thomas* is very difficult because it is hard to know precisely how its origin should be defined. Scholars argue that this is because the Gospel is a collection of sayings (logia) without a narrative framework, and individual sayings may have been added to it gradually over time. Some have proposed a date which is as early as 40 AD or as late as 140 AD, depending upon whether the *Gospel According to Thomas* is identified with the original core of the sayings of Jesus, or from the Greek or Coptic texts, or from citations in other literature. Valantasis dates Thomas to 100 to 110 AD, with some of the material coming from the earliest period, which is dated from 30 to 60 AD. Porter dates the *Gospel According to Thomas* to much later, at 250 AD. The earliest surviving written references to the *Gospel According to Thomas* are found in the writings of Hippolytus of Rome (c. 222 to 235) and Origen of Alexandria (c. 233). A statement which parallels Saying 22 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* appears in 2 Clement, which is usually given a date from AD 140-160. However that could have come from other lost Gospels, such as “The Gospel to the Hebrews” and the “Gospel of the Egyptians”, which were known to be extant at that time. Additional discussions on dating and relevance of the *Gospel*

40. There is internal evidence that much of it may date from before the death of James the Just, who died in martyrdom in 62 or 69 AD²⁵. My own analysis in *"The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church"*, gives more confirmation of an early date. There was no uniformity of viewpoint in early Christianity and there were many factions active in the early Christian movement. This included its followers in Corinth where there were arguments between those who were for Peter, Apollos or Paul. There were also divisions between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, which included those who believed that the followers of Jesus should continue to completely fulfil the Laws of the Torah and those who did not. A further division occurred between those, such as Paul, who accepted the need to interpret the Christian message in a way that met the needs of Roman Society, and those for whom no such compromise was required. The evidence for all these arguments and disagreements is present in *The Gospel According to Thomas*, even though Paul is not mentioned in it. It is therefore possible that the *Gospel According to Thomas* is an independent account which predates the canonical Gospels. If this Gospel does rely on Pauline influence and presence, it may date from between AD 49 and AD 58, corresponding to Paul's visits to Jerusalem. If Paul is not the originator of these challenges: this part of the *Gospel According to Thomas* could have an even earlier date.

2:4: The "Solitary Ones" and Sex

Another feature of the *Gospel According to Thomas* is that there is no consideration of celibacy in relation to sexual acts. Instead reference is made to *"The Solitary Ones"* who are the elect, who are charged with bringing the Gospel message to the world with a single-minded devotion that avoids the distraction of other commitments and family life. That is in accord with the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels where his rejection of the earthly family was one of complete dedication to the Gospel message and preparation for trials to come: it was not over aspects of sex. It also contrasts with the attitudes which developed very early in the Christian movement, where celibacy was promoted as a means of avoiding the distractions of sex. That paradigm shift was to become dominant in the later Church. Although Paul also defends his own celibacy in terms of complete dedication to spreading the Christian Gospel, elements of this encratic teaching appear in Paul (Galatians 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 7:1-40). In addition the advocacy of celibacy for avoiding the distractions of sex was similarly prevalent in the Greek and Roman world²⁶. That absence of this concern with sex is a further reason for assigning the authorship of the *Gospel According to Thomas* to an early date. These considerations further support the now common understanding that the *Gospel According to Thomas* is an early Christian non-canonical or apocryphal Gospel of the sayings of Jesus which many scholars believe provides insights into the early oral Christian tradition that existed before the written canonical Gospels were compiled. These topics are considered in more detail in Gilchrist, S.

According to Thomas can be found in section 2:3:4 "An Apocryphal Challenge" of Gilchrist, S. (2013): "An Unfinished Reformation": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/016B-UnfinishedReformationArticle.pdf>

²⁵ It is clear that the origin and the reliability of the *Gospel According to Thomas* has been the subject of intense discussion. Today there is a general consensus among scholars that the *Gospel According to Thomas* dates to the very beginnings of the Christian era, and that it may well have had its first appearance before any of the four traditional canonical Gospels. During the first few decades after its discovery several scholars have argued that the *Gospel According to Thomas* was a late-second or third century Gnostic forgery and some those arguments are referred to in the papers. However, most scholars now agree that because of its early date, this Gospel opens a new perspective on the first expressions of the Christian tradition.

²⁶ This also has relevance to the so-called "lobber passages" in the bible which are said to condemn all homosexual relationships. The word "Encratic" refers to self-control. Few I expect would object to this in terms of maintaining faithfulness in marriage. Paul's condemnations of same-sex intercourse are always set in the context of abuse. Roman and Jewish societies viewed sexual behaviour, and most notably male same-sex intercourse, through the prism of subjection and domination. That interpretation also applied to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, so that the condemnations of domination and abuse which were understood to be expressed in these passages in the first century have been changed into the condemnation of the sexual act. This paradigm shift has had major consequences for the understanding of homosexuality and all sexually variant behaviour. For a full discussion see: Gilchrist, S. (2017): *"A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf>

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7

(2019): *“The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church”*.²⁷

2:5: Jesus and Women

The most striking thing about the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus is that they are always present, and the continual testimony to the presence of women amongst the followers of Jesus and his serious teaching and treatment of them is a break with tradition which has been described as being without any precedent in first century or earlier Judaism²⁸. Of all of the founders of religions and religious sects, it is considered that Jesus stands alone as the one who did not discriminate against women in any way. That is the message which the Gospel presents. And Christian teaching started out using this common base. Paul’s statement in Galatian 3:28 that *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* closely matches that in Saying 22 of *the Gospel According to Thomas*. And Paul’s treatment of women was also exemplary in the early years.

The Council of Jerusalem marks a turning point in these relationships. I argue that this is the time when the early Christian movement had to find ways of bringing this radical teaching of Jesus to deeply different cultures in the ancient world. The support for women is clearly evident in the *Gospel According to Thomas*, where the female disciples of Jesus are portrayed as being those who have a better understanding of the mission of Jesus, while the disciples stumble to learn. Saying 22 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* greatly expands on what Paul states in Galatian 3:28 by making it totally clear that men and women must be treated in a completely equal way. Saying 114 demands that women must be equally able to carry out without hindrance any public or private role or function available to men, either in church or in society. These same principles are held in Zoroastrianism²⁹. For Thomas relating to a Persian empire, they also represented in full the teaching of Jesus, which could not be diminished in any way. However Peter and the Jerusalem Church failed the ideals of both Paul and Thomas when they insisted that all gentiles must follow the laws of the Torah (or at least the Noachide laws³⁰). Paul failed the ideals of Thomas when he adapted his own teaching to conform to the social demands of a strongly patriarchal and gender unequal Roman society. It would appear that these quarrels were only resolved by the expulsion of Thomas to India and his replacement, according to tradition by Addai as representative of the Eastern Church³¹. Tradition also associates Thaddeus and Bartholomew with the Eastern Church.

2:6: Forced Departure

Common tradition accepts that Thomas the Apostle took the Christian message to India from AD 52 and remained there to the time of his martyrdom in AD 72. According to tradition the departure of Thomas to India in AD 52 was not voluntarily made. An early 3rd-century Syriac work known as

²⁷ Gilchrist, S. (2019): *“The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church”*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/027B-ThomasAnalysis.pdf>

²⁸ The Staggs note that the synoptic Gospels of the canonical New Testament contain a relatively high number of references to women (Stagg, Evelyn and Frank. (1978): *“Woman in the World of Jesus”*. Westminster John Knox Pr, 1978. ISBN 978-0-664-24195-7). Gilbert Bilezikian also agrees and notes that this is exceptional by comparison with other literary works of the same epoch (Bilezikian, Gilbert. (1989): *“Beyond Sex Roles”*. Baker, 1989. ISBN 0-8010-0885-9 p.82).

²⁹ There are some limits which did not influence everyday life

³⁰ The Noachide Laws, are a set of imperatives which, according to the Talmud, were given by God as a binding set of laws for the “Children of Noah” or all of humanity, According to Jewish tradition, non-Jews who adhere to these laws because they were given by Moses, are said to be regarded as righteous gentiles, who are assured of a place in the world to come. The Seven Laws of Noah include prohibitions against worshipping idols, cursing God, murder, adultery and sexual immorality, theft, eating flesh torn from a living animal, as well as the obligation to establish courts of justice.

³¹ According to Eastern Christian tradition, Addai was one of the seventy (or seventy two) disciples of Jesus initially sent out to spread the Gospel

the *Acts of Thomas*³² states that Thomas was at first reluctant to accept this mission. However the Lord appeared to him in a night vision and said: “Fear not, Thomas. Go away to India and proclaim the Word, for my grace shall be with you.” But the Apostle still demurred, so the Lord overruled the stubborn disciple by ordering circumstances so compelling that he was forced to accompany an Indian merchant, Abbanes, as a slave to his native place in northwest India”. Although the *Acts of Thomas* cannot be relied on as a historical account, the same or equivalent traditions are supported elsewhere³³.

This enforcement does not have the hallmark of an ordinary mission: it has all of the elements of a kidnapping and a row. There is other evidence to suggest that as we presently have it, the *Gospel According to Thomas* is a product of these quarrels. In it, Peter is demoted to the role of “Wise Messenger”, instead of being as in the Canonical Gospels; “The Rock upon the Church is built”. In place of being the Doubter in the Canonical Gospels, in the Thomasine traditions, Thomas becomes the supreme confidant instead. The close correspondence between the date of Thomas’s departure to India and that of the Apostolic Decree suggest that there may be a connection between them. Before it was annihilated by Islam the Church of the East was more widespread and larger than the Western Church. After its demise much of its literature, theology, doctrines and evidence for its history and for its existence were systematically destroyed by Western Christianity. A detailed study of what remains of the literature, theology, history and doctrines of the Apostolic Church of the East is needed to create a better understanding of how it developed. This study should provide greater knowledge about how these should be applied in present day.

2:7: Reliability

In my paper: “*The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church*” I examine the historical backgrounds of the “Apostolic Church of the East” and I conduct a line by line critique of the *Gospel According to Thomas*. In this I show the Gospel is written in a style which is appropriate to a Jewish Midrashim text, I examine how it may relate to the early lost document “Q” which may be the collection of the sayings of Jesus that the Apostle Thomas is understood to have prepared, and I demonstrate that additional passages within the *Gospel According to Thomas* confirm an early date. A further

³² The “*Acts of Thomas*” (<http://gnosis.org/library/actthom.htm>) is a purported account of the activities of Thomas in India. One thing deserves note is the emphasis the Thomas gives on charity to the poor and needy. It was written around the first half of the third century. It is in the form of a pseudepigraphic text which relates the adventures of the apostle Judas Thomas. It identifies Thomas with an ascetic or encratite form of Christianity. However that should not be confused with the earlier *Gospel According to Thomas* in which, (as is shown in this analysis, the encratite element is absent). Literal interpretations are also not appropriate since in this type of document facts, and imagined accounts are combined. However independent research may be used to identify the factual elements that are present (see McGrath, James F: (2008): “History and Fiction in the Acts of Thomas: The State of the Question” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* (2008): 297-311. Available at: http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/6). Thomas, arriving as a slave in India, came under the service of King Gundaphar. The existence of King Gundaphar is independently confirmed through coins and inscriptions. With a single exception, scholarship on Indian and Parthian history seems to unanimously date his reign to the period from 21 C.E. until at least 46 C.E: that is contemporary with the journey of Thomas to India. The Western or Northwest Indian tradition also holds that Thomas arrived by sea with an Indian trader to King Gundaphar, whose reign allegedly extended parts of India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Punjab. As the story in the “Acts of Thomas” goes, the king requires Thomas to build him a palace and the apostle gives all the funds for the project to the poor, building the king a palace that Gundaphar may see “when thou dost depart this life” (Acts of Thomas 21). Instead of being killed for his disobedience, as Gundaphar had intended, Thomas was saved by a miraculous act. When Thomas redistributes the king’s money to the poor, people report to the king that: Neither has he built a palace or done anything else of what he has promised to do, but he goes about the towns and villages, and if he has anything he gives it all to the poor, and he teaches a new God . . . his works of compassion, and the healings which are wrought by him without reward . . . and the quality of his faith, show that he is righteous or an apostle of the new God whom he preaches. On a later occasion the then king, Misdeus (or Mizdeos), was infuriated when Thomas converted the queen Tertia, the king’s son Juzanes, sister-in-law princess Mygdonia and her friend Markia to Christianity. Misdeus led St Thomas outside the city and ordered four soldiers to take him to the nearby hill, where the soldiers speared to death. This is generally assumed to have happened in AD 72. What is important in these accounts is not the accuracy or factuality of these stories. It is in the nature of the ministry of Thomas that no compromises were made with those in authority, and no compromises with the teaching of Jesus were made.

³³ Strain, Janna Y. (2013): “*This I say not as one doubting*”: *Traditions of the Apostle Thomas from the Beginning of the Common Era through 800 CE*” Janna Y. Strain Illinois Wesleyan University: Digital Commons @ IWU https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1025&context=religion_honproi

concern I address is over later interpolations that may have taken place, or the impact of the sayings that could have been subsequently added. Although they fit correctly when interpreted in the first century context, sayings 22 and 114 appear the most obvious of these. The remaining sayings could have been written down before the crucifixion took place. Therefore the question to be asked is: *"Who might have made any interpolations or may be adding additional sayings?"* The very first saying in the *Gospel According to Thomas* attributes it directly to the Apostle Thomas. Given the early dates ascribed to the Gospel, the date of the Council of Jerusalem and any rows associated with it and also, with the knowledge that Thomas lived to AD 72. It might be concluded that the only person who would be able to make interpolations that would be accepted by other people is Thomas himself.

2:8: Warfare and Strategy

Jesus was a disappointment to those Jews who advocated a violent uprising against the Romans. In Matthew 22:21 he said *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."* Paul, in Romans 13:1 said *"Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God and those which exist are established by God"* and in Saying 98 Thomas states: *"The kingdom of the Father is like a person who wanted to kill a powerful person. He drew the sword in his house (and) stabbed it into the wall to test whether his hand would be strong (enough). Then he killed the powerful one."* These make it clear that there must be no compromise to the teaching of Jesus, but the Kingdom of God is to be won through people's hearts and minds and not by violent acts. The Christian message is one that must be spread by conversion, not by compulsion, and that is reflected in these statements. Saying 98 of the *Gospel According to Thomas*, shows that Thomas, like Paul, understood that Christianity could not transform the world until the time was right. This demands that the Gospel is listened to and heard by as many people as possible, and this imperative empowered the missionary zeal of the early Church.

Paul receives a great deal of disapproval for his attempts (or from the actions of those who wrote in his name) to impose the social normalities demanded by a patriarchal and grossly gender unequal society on the fledgling Christian Church. However by taking a pragmatic approach: (which I discuss in Gilchrist, S. (2017): *"A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church"*³⁴), Paul avoided, as Jesus did, the destruction by violence that could otherwise have occurred. Instead of mounting a direct attack on the social structure of Roman society this means that, as the letter to Philemon suggests, the true vision of the Christian Gospel as understood by Paul should be able to shine outwards from the fledgling movement into Roman society, and bring people to it as a beacon of light.

That requires that the Church continues to present the Gospel message without compromise and in full to the world. Although Jesus did not condemn gender complementarity, he condemned the social, religious and legal enforcement of it in absolute and uncompromising terms. If Paul, as a pragmatist, was following the same teaching of Jesus, then this teaching, as Thomas similarly expressed it, should be the teaching of the present day Church. That this has not (yet) happened should be regarded as a failing of the Church, and in part 4:0 of this document I examine why this has not occurred.

2:9: Overview

³⁴ Gilchrist, S. (2017): *"A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf> See also Gilchrist, S. (2016): *"Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and Traditions of the Christian Church"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf> and Gilchrist, S. (2016): *"Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation on the Life and Teaching of Jesus"*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/219P-InfluencesJesus.pdf> for more extended reads.

In this section I have examined the provenance of the Gospel According to Thomas and I conclude it has an early date. For Thomas there was no place at any time in the Gospel message where the submission of women and the enforcement of a doctrine of gender complementarity could be accepted acts. That should be contrasted with the repeated statements of Peter and Paul who socially, religiously and legally enforced gender complementarity to ensure the survival and respect of the early Christian movement in the Roman world. Saying 22 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* is totally unambiguous in its demand for absolute equality between men and women. Saying 114 demands that the same degree of equality is required for all activities; social roles; public and private ministry and in every other act. As with the teaching of Jesus, it does not condemn gender complementarity, but the social, religious and legal enforcement of it is condemned in the strongest terms that can be made. That means that a transformation in teaching has occurred.

It is now time to challenge the social religious and theological conventions which the institutions of the Church and society have created and to restore this radical teaching of Jesus to present day society, and the present day Church. According to this analysis it should not be surprising that the attitude to the teaching of Jesus which is presented in the *Gospel According to Thomas* is one which would be perfectly acceptable in the present day Western world.

I have separately investigated these contradictions and the consequent transformations in my previous research. It should also be noted that that work has been carried out independently of this study on the *Gospel According to Thomas*; nevertheless the same conclusions are reached. This study of the *Gospel According to Thomas* is therefore an additional and exploratory investigation, part of which is intended to give greater insights into the way these transformations have occurred, instead of the need to prove the transformations itself.

3:0: Gender and Sex

In the introduction I have already noted that the work reported in this paper is part of a research programme which involves two separate investigations. The first of these is a scientific and neurophysiologically based study into the development of personality and identity. This shows that gender and sexually variant conditions are driven by the search for identity and not reward. This means that a moral duality must exist in which gender and sexually variant people who express their true attractions and identities in ways that conform to the highest moral standards of their own societies should be highly regarded while those who misuse these relationships ought to be very severely condemned for their acts. The vociferous and intense way in which the Christian Church rightly attacked these abuses of sex means that all awareness of that moral duality has been lost and this is one of the reasons why the paradigm shift in Christian teaching has occurred.

Western Christianity had to survive in a strongly despotic and patriarchal Roman society in which any departure from the male and female stereotypes demanded by these societies, regardless of purpose or morality, disrupts the social order. Therefore any type of expression which does not conform to these stereotypes regardless of purpose can be regarded as an intrinsically disordered act. This is another major reason for the contradiction and for all of these reasons, every form of gender and sexually variant behaviour, regardless of purpose, have traditionally come to be regarded as intrinsically disordered acts of immorality and grave depravity which seek the rewards of misdirected sex. By identifying these as reward driven conditions traditional Christian teaching medically misdiagnoses them. That arises because Christianity, and also some radical feminist groups, consider that these conditions should be treated as perversions or disruptions to normal development, whereas the present and overwhelming scientific consensus requires that management methods appropriate to personality variation must be used. It is this misdiagnosis

which is causing the present furore about the appropriate approach to taken for transgender children³⁵. An approach which is regarded as compassionate by one side is inevitably regarded as coercion by the other. As the methods of managing reward driven and identity driven characteristics and conflicts are almost opposite to each other; great harm can be done when the incorrect diagnosis is made³⁶

I have therefore conducted a second, and separate, historical, scientific, social and theological investigation with the aim of discovering why the contradiction between science and theology has occurred. This involves an extended analysis of the attitudes to gender and sexuality in first century society. The insights which are gained as a result of the neurophysiological and psychological study are used in an examination which has considered, not just Christianity, but also the attitudes to these issues in Jewish, Roman, Greek, and other societies. The cultural clashes are analysed and it is demonstrated that a major driving force behind the Christian condemnations were the abuses of power by Roman society, which gave permission for abuses of sex. The adaptations which Peter, Paul and the early Church had to make to survive and to take the Gospel message to the world are considered. It is shown that the paradigm shift arises because the first century condemnations of same-sex intercourse, which were based on these abuses of power, purpose and hospitality.... and would have been known to Jesus, have been turned into the unchangeable condemnation of the sexual act. This paradigm shift creates the contradictions between the scientific and experiential evidence and the traditional teaching of the Christian Church.

3:1: Ideology and Doctrines

Evidence of the harm that can be done in medically misdiagnosing these conditions can be found in the recently issued document: *“Male and Female He Created Them” Towards a Path of Dialogue On The Question Of Gender Theory In Education* published as an official document by the Congregation For Catholic Education of the Roman Catholic Church³⁷ together with statements such as those by Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, who said in an interview regarding his new book: *“Gender Ideology is a Luciferian Refusal of the Sexual Nature Given to Us by God”* which *“denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female”*.³⁸ According to this doctrine which Cardinal Sarah presents, gender identity is a God-given feature which, unless diversion or disruption occurs, must always align with biological sex. That is challenged by recent neurological research on brain structure and function which has shown that the human brain is a mosaic of male and female characteristics. These results are used by radical feminist groups to argue that gender identity is an entirely socially constructed phenomenon... and that is the *“gender ideology”* which is condemned by the Catholic Church. Although they come from opposite viewpoints, these religious and feminist sources consider that gender and sexually variant identities arise as a consequence of reward driven activities. In both cases the legitimacy of transgender identities are denied and male to female transsexuals in particular are condemned either for seeking power over women or in pursuit of morally dubious acts.

³⁵ Gilchrist, S. (2019): *“Disputes in the Development of Personal and Transgender Identities in Early Life”*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/243P-DisputesBehaviourSelfIdentity.pdf>

³⁶ For details of this research see: Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf> Gilchrist, S. (2013): "Personality Development and LGB&T People: A New Approach": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/201P-PersonalityDevelopmentAndLGBTPeople.pdf>

³⁷ Congregation For Catholic Education (2019) *“Male and Female He Created Them” Towards a Path of Dialogue On The Question Of Gender Theory In Education* published 10 June 2019 as an official document by the Congregation For Catholic Education of the Roman Catholic Church <https://www.newwaysministry.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Male-and-Female-Document-June-10-2019.pdf>

³⁸ Shine, Robert: (2019): *“Transgender Surgeries are a “Luciferian Refusal of God’s Will” Says Top Cardinal”*: New Ways Ministry 11 April 2019: <https://www.newwaysministry.org/2019/04/11/transgender-surgeries-are-luciferian-refusal-of-gods-will-says-top-vatican-cardinal/>

3:2: Medical Evidence and Current Research

However these viewpoints, and the diagnoses which must be made because of them, are contradicted by the experiential evidence held on a worldwide basis by nearly all the professional medical institutions, and also the conclusions of my own research. I discuss the current arguments in Gilchrist, S. (2019): *"Disputes in the Development of Personal and Transgender Identities in Early Life"*.³⁹ On both counts I confirm that these conditions are driven by a search for identity instead of reward. The emerging view in science is that the differences which can be attributed directly to sex are small in comparison with the variations in human psychology that also occur. The overlap in behaviour and the contagion of early development means that some male newly born babies will behave and interact more like female babies and vice versa. Although sexual differentiation does take place before birth, gender differentiation depends on making relationships with others. For this reason I argue that gender identification cannot happen until after birth. I also show that the limited neural co-ordination and contagion of these early development processes means that once development starts in a particular direction it can be very difficult to stop. This means that for everyone, including transgender people, the development of gender identity starts in the same way. A consequence is that transsexuals develop a gender allegiance which is contrary to their biological sex, but this is at least as firmly held as those for whom their gender identity and allegiance follow a normal path, indeed it may be argued that the gender allegiance and identity which is felt by transsexuals should be even stronger because it has had to be fought for at all times. The failures or the inability to identify with the expected behaviour patterns and the corresponding attitudes to social issues, including aggression and competition also means that attitudes and behaviour should correspond with the gender identity that is actually possessed. Male to female transsexuals are therefore men who interact with society in emotions and attitudes in harmony with women. This also means that the core gender identity that is created will usually, but need not always follow that which is predicted by biological sex.

A further issue to consider is the strength of the identities that are created, and the ferocity with which transgressions are denied. In this study I have demonstrated that all of the physiological, neurological and psychological aspects of brain development act together to form a finely tuned system in which the maximum amount of individuality, possessiveness, intelligence and inquisitiveness, together with the minimum degree of energy expenditure are formed. However a further consideration is the need for constancies of personality which are required for an ordered life. As a consequence of the need for stability while maximising human individualities and potentials, boundaries are set. These enable constancies of personality to be formed. These constancies may simply be sufficient for the same person to be recognised if two people meet again after being separated for a number of years. However constancies are also needed for love and marriage to be sustained, including family life. Barring physical brain injury or dementia, these also remain fixed for life.

3:3: Conflicting Views on Early Development

It goes without saying that there is an enormous amount literature published, and research work undertaken on child development, and how gender identities are formed. That research shows that children identify with a gender before they learn the social roles. My investigation differs from others in that it takes full account of the innate, internally generated and contagious neurophysiologically based forces which dominate early development. I show that the development of personality and identity is characterised by continuing and intense struggles between the inbuilt, contagious, internally focussed, feed-forward and physiologically driven forces which are present from infancy,

³⁹ Gilchrist, S. (2019): *"Disputes in the Development of Personal and Transgender Identities in Early Life"*.
<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/243P-DisputesBehaviourSelfIdentity.pdf>

acting against the controlling, feed-back and externally moderated processes of cognitive development, which explode into action a median age of around two years. The lifetime interactions between the feedforward and adventurous forces of physiology and the feedback and restraining forces of cognition are also shown to provide the stimulation whereby the highest achievements of humanity and individuality are obtained. There are massive changes in learning and development patterns over the first three to four years of life. By examining these changes I show that the usually unconscious core sense of gender identity, which simply defines where one fits in society, is fixed at the latest by the age of three years. Contagion, tribal influences and changes in the pattern of neural development then lock this in place. The process occurs far too early for masculine and feminine identities to be created, however in traditional psychology and psychiatry and in the feminist based explanations for transgender conditions, these are ignored. Therefore identification precedes socialisation and explanations which rely entirely on how the social roles develop can only act as overlays on what has already been formed.

In my “*Disputes*” paper I conduct a detailed critique of the 2019 book by Angela Rippon: “*The Gendered Brain: The new Neuroscience that shatters the myth of the female brain*”⁴⁰ and I show that there is an active attempt to dismiss the significance and existence of these developmental changes in early life. As a consequence, the diagnoses which are adopted by those who pursue more radical feminist viewpoints are based entirely on symptoms of particular conditions while avoiding the cause. Instead of identifying these as identity driven conditions it presumes that all transgender people are driven by disruption, suspect behaviour or by a search for power and reward. Therefore a medical misdiagnosis is made. Only male to female transsexuals are considered; the rest, which includes the great range of transgender conditions, is almost invariably ignored. The plight and distress of those transgender people who desperately try to live according to the gender role that biology expects: often for many years and outwardly with great success, is disregarded. I also demonstrate that the development of gender identity is not through the pursuit of masculinity or femininity as these theories predict. In place of living to roles which others expect, the search is for identity instead. I further note that male to female transsexuals are men who interact with society in emotions and attitudes in harmony with women. After transition many merge invisibly into society and live ordinary everyday lives. Of course natal women and transgender women do have different histories and backgrounds but the commonality of their interests, identities, behaviours and concerns means that instead of fighting each other, they should be allies in any feminist cause. Transsexual people are not men who want to become women, and vice versa. Transgender people are men and women who want to live according to their own identities, and be true to themselves in everyday life.

3:4: Behaviour

People disrupt gender and sexuality for many reasons. For acceptability it is essential that gender and sexually variant people police the own communities in the same way as all other groups are required to do. However that requires that the moral duality is recognised, where gender and sexually variant people who express their true attractions and identities in ways that conform to the highest moral standards of their own societies can be highly regarded while those who misuse these relationships ought to be very severely condemned for their acts. The vociferous and intense way in which the Christian Church rightly attacked these abuses of sex means that this policing becomes impossible, because all awareness of that moral duality has been lost. Therefore transgender people become universally condemned because “*Gender Ideology is a Luciferean Refusal of the Sexual Nature Given to Us by God*” and because medical diagnoses that are based on a theology, not science, which demands that gender identity must always align with biological sex. This means that any expression of any transgender identity regardless of purpose is

⁴⁰ Rippon, Gina. (2019); “*The Gendered Brain: The new Neuroscience that shatters the myth of the female brain*”: Penguin Random House, London 2019: ISBN 9781847924759.

considered a morally dubious act. Instead of genuinely listening and responding to the real life experience and concerns of transgender people, agendas are set, science is distorted and diagnoses are made to fit each group's own feminist or religious cause.⁴¹ Sadly the vitriol expressed in some of these disputes has gone beyond responsible debate. The scientific consensus and the viewpoint expressed on a worldwide basis by the great majority of the professional medical institutions is either attacked as irresponsible science, or is dismissed or ignored.⁴² These are major concerns and I discuss these issues in more detail in a separate paper Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice: It Need Not Conform to Biological sex*".⁴³ In my other writing and in two earlier papers I deal with the same issues more from the sexually variant perspective.⁴⁴ However the major focus in this paper is on gender issues, their social interactions, and how these were managed by the Apostles and the Church.

3:5: Scapegoating or Inclusion

It is notable that Jesus did not condemn gender complementarity, but he condemned the social, religious and legal enforcement of it many times. That lack of condemnation should be contrasted with the repeated statements of Peter and Paul who instead socially, religiously and legally enforced it to ensure the survival of the early Christian movement and to give it social respect. For a powerless group in a powerful society that was a necessary adjustment which was endorsed by early teaching, but it could only be tolerated until the time was right. Instead of implementing the teaching of Jesus in full when it had the power to do so, the Western Church has institutionalised the social, legal and religious enforcement of gender complementarity and turned it into a doctrine of the Church. However the compromises which this demanded swapped the most radical teaching of Jesus on gender and sexuality for the respectability of the Church⁴⁵. These transformations have brought the Church to collude with the secular demands of society rather than to challenge them⁴⁶. Not only has this collusion reinforced the secular prejudices of such discriminatory societies; it gave and it still gives religious legitimacy to them: one only needs to look today at the behaviour of Daesh and Boko Haram to see how extreme this can become. The persecution and slaughter of gender and sexually variant people, not just in Christianity but in Islam, Judaism and all other religions, states and cultures which have drawn their teachings from it has been enormous. In many African countries extreme penalties against homosexual behaviour are being advocated or applied⁴⁷. I also

⁴¹ For previous writing on these matters see: Gilchrist, S. (2019a): "*Divisions: Self-Declaration and Gender Variant People*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/243P-DivisionsSelfDeclaration.pdf>, Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*Gender and Sexual Malpractice and Abuse in the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/236P-Malpractice.pdf> also Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*Religious and Secular Scapegoating of Transgender People: and its impact on the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/238P-SecularScapegoating.pdf>

⁴² This experiential and scientific consensus is adopted for example by the British Royal College of Psychiatrists, the British Psychological Society and parallel United Kingdom organisations. Equivalent positions are taken by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association. Other international mental health organizations, including the World Health Organization have followed. All of these organisations are signatories to the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, whose standards provide the consensus view, and whose guidelines are endorsed by virtually all of these major professional bodies. It is further supported by the latest Memorandum of Understanding on the care and treatment of gender and sexually variant people, including transgender people, issued jointly by all except one of the major medical and psychological professional institutions in the United Kingdom. The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the Institution which has not signed the memorandum: however it has issued its own statement which fully supports this view. These statements universally condemn both "Gay Cures" and "Reparative Therapy" as being totally inappropriate for their harmful and destructive effect.

⁴³ Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice: It Need Not Conform to Biological sex*". <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>

⁴⁴ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/226P-ConsiderScience.pdf> Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf>

⁴⁵ See: Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and Traditions of the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf>

⁴⁶ See for example: Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf>

⁴⁷ This is not just a theological point of view. In all of today's interpretations little account is taken of contrast between the privileges of power exerted in dominant societies and the oppression of submission in conquered ones: both in terms of the cultural differences that are established, and in the use and abuse of sex. Evidence of the high degree of trauma and distress that these power conflicts create is present today: it is seen with the Taliban, Islamic State and Boko Haram. In history it extends from the Christian practice of slavery in the

show in section 4:6 of this document, how that has led to the gross gender inequalities practiced by the fourth century Church. Transgender people are also condemned by their very act of transgressing the boundaries of the male and female stereotypes demanded in societies where gender complementarity is socially, legally and religiously enforced.⁴⁸ The social and legal enforcement of gender complementarity gives power to the powerful and makes the weaker more weak. It is therefore concluded that the source of these contradictions must come from changes in the theology of the Church.

The correct restoration can only be made if the moral duality identified in the neurophysiological study and in the teaching of Jesus is used. This demands that the same criteria of use and abuse are applied to all aspects of gender and sex, and that all men and women are treated alike. Saying 22 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* is totally unambiguous in its demand for absolute equality between the sexes. Saying 114 equally demands that the same degrees of equality must be applied to all activities and responsibilities, in social roles, in public and private ministries, and in every other act. In section 2:2 of this account, I show that the moral attitudes of transgender people should be judged on how they live their lives, and not on any physical transformations they may make. As with Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28, these require that all transgender people, transsexual lesbian, gay, heterosexual and bisexual people who attempt to live their lives in ways that fulfil the love of Christ, and who seek to express their own identities in roles that are true to themselves; must be accepted in their own right. Because of these arguments and also in line with the teaching of Jesus as expressed in the New Covenant, all sexual and cross-gender behaviour is governed by the purity of intention. There is no toleration of abusive sex and there is no automatic condemnation of any cross-gender or same-sex act. Instead of making all gender and sexually variant people the scapegoats for sexual abuse, the correct role for the Christian Church should be that of combatting all forms of abusive sex.

4:0: History

The Catholic Church claims that it derives its teaching, authority and doctrine in a direct line from St Peter and much of the evidence supports this. However in section 2:2 of this paper I have already shown that at the time of the Apostolic Decree, the early Christian movement could have gone any of three ways in terms of its teaching on gender and sex. That there was disagreement between different sections of the early Church about whether Gentile Christians needed to fully comply with the Law of Moses is most clearly evident in Chapter 2 of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. The arguments at Antioch showed that there was a disagreement between Peter and Paul as well⁴⁹. If the provenance of the *Gospel According to Thomas*, as described in this article is accepted, there was also disagreement between Peter and Thomas. As I have previously noted: the Apostles Peter, James the Just and the Jerusalem Church sought to interpret the teaching of Jesus in ways which completely fulfilled the Laws of the Torah. I also argue that this clashed with the views of Thomas, who considered that the radical teaching of Jesus on gender and sex should be implemented immediately and no compromise should be considered; and also Paul who appears to have accepted the need to compromise with Roman Society (seemingly as a temporary measure) until the Gospel could be expressed in full when the time was right. In this section I examine some of the consequences of Peter's approach, including Peter's understanding of it, and with the comments

Americas to the Empires of the ancient world. No examination of Christian theology and its attitudes to all forms of gender and sexually variant behaviour can be complete without taking full account of the relationships between power and sex. Sadly, and in part because of this absence, many in Christianity, Judaism and Islam have colluded with the discrimination that has occurred.

⁴⁸ Gilchrist, S. (2017): "Religious and Secular Scapegoating of Transgender People: and its impact on the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/238P-SecularScapegoating.pdf>

⁴⁹ See: Epistle to the Galatians 2:11–2:14 "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group"

that are made in 1 Peter 3:1-8. Some of Peter's conservatism and his implicit criticism of Paul (or at least that which is attributed to Peter), appears in 2 Peter 3:15-16⁵⁰. I consider some of the consequences of these differences in terms of their history and how they were interpreted in both the Apostolic Church of the East and in the Western Church.

4:1: The Church of the East and the Western Church

The Church of the East claims to be an apostolic church which is traditionally considered to have been established by the Apostles Thomas, Thaddeus and Bartholomew. It is argued that St Peter blessed to the Church of the East at the time of a visit to Babylon: evidence for this appears in the statement that: *"The elect church which is in Babylon, salutes you; and Mark, my son, which appears in 1 Peter 5:13. However much of the information that would establish the early origins of the Church of the East and its early history has been destroyed.*

The Church of the East is sometimes called the Nestorian Church by the Western Churches, but that ascription has always been vehemently denied.⁵¹ In 1298 the distinguished East Syriac scholar Abdisho bar Brika⁵² wrote in his *"Book of the Pearl"*⁵³ that the East Syriac Christians had *"never changed their faith and preserved it as they had received it from the apostles, and are called Nestorians unjustly, especially since Nestorius was not their patriarch and did not understand their language"*⁵⁴. Despite this condemnation and other protestations, the use of this name by the Western Church, (which in the fifth century was used to condemn the Church of the East as a heresy, and also as an attempt to deny its previous existence), has continued down to the present day⁵⁵. Among many commentators these presumptions continue to be made and many sources still claim that the Church of the East was founded at the time of Nestorian schism and the Council of Chalcedon in 451⁵⁶.

⁵⁰ 2 Peter 3:15-16 . . . consider that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation -- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

⁵¹ This is often called the "Nestorian Church". The Apostolic Church of the East separated officially from the Western Church at the time of the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. Western Traditions even today claim that the Church of the East was founded because of the declared heresy of Nestorius and this is often used to hide the validity of any earlier traditions. That denial is not correct. The already existing Apostolic Church of the East was simply a place where the followers of Nestorius found a natural home after being condemned as heretics by the Western Church. Although the council of Chalcedon marked the official separation from the beginning, the Eastern and Western branches of the Church were developing their own distinctive theologies and the continuing wars between the Roman and Persian empires also restricted the interaction that could take place. I discuss these issues in more detail in: Gilchrist, S. (2019): *"The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church"*: <http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/027B-ThomasAnalysis.pdf>. Nestorianism is attributed to Nestorius (386–450) who was the Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431. Nestorius's teachings brought him into conflict with other prominent church leaders, most notably Cyril of Alexandria, who criticized especially his rejection of the title Theotokos ("Mother of God") for Mary the mother of Jesus. The concerns of Nestorius were principally about the growth of doctrines of Mariology of the Church. His teachings were eventually condemned as heretical at the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451. See: Winkler, Dietmar, Baum, Wilhelm: (2003): *"The Church of the East: A Concise History"*: Volume 1 of *Central Asian Studies*: Routledge, 2003 ISBN 1134430191, 9781134430192

⁵² Died 1318

⁵³ Full text of *"The Book of the Pearl"*: https://archive.org/stream/bookofpearlhisto00kunz/bookofpearlhisto00kunz_djvu.txt

⁵⁴ For an overview of Nestorian Theology see: Dickens, Mark: (1999): *"Nestorian Theology"* at <http://www.oxuscom.com/theology.htm>

⁵⁵ The Synod of Beth Labat in 484 declared the Church of the East to be "Nestorian". Nestorius is still venerated in the Assyrian Church of the East as one of the Greek Fathers, but he did not found the church, and his teaching did not become the adopted teaching of the Church. What was adopted instead is Cyril of Alexandria's (376-444) Christological formula which holds that in the person of Jesus Christ, divine nature and human nature are united in a compound nature the two being united without separation, without mixture, without confusion and without alteration

⁵⁶ Nestorius spoke of Christ as one person (prosopon) in two natures (physis), human and divine. The Monophysites spoke of him as one person (hypostasis) and one nature (physis), both God and man. The council of Chalcedon referred to Christ as one person (hypostasis) in two natures (physis). In essence this is a compromise between the Nestorian and Monophysite positions. The Monophysite position was and is still largely followed by the Coptic and the Oriental Orthodox churches. The Nestorian bishops, in a statement drawn up in 612, stated: *"There is a wonderful connection and indissoluble union between [Christ's] human nature, which was assumed, and God the Word who assumed it, a union existing from the first moment of conception. This teaches us to recognize only one Person (parsopa), our Saviour Jesus Christ, Son of God, begotten in the nature of his Godhead by the Father before all ages, without beginning, and born finally in the nature of his Manhood of the holy Virgin, the daughter of David"*. This Nestorian teaching has equivalence to the attitudes to Mariology in the Protestant churches of the present day. These differences in detail may lie in the theology, but all too often it is the politics that get in the way. An interesting perspective on these developments is given in the paper by Mar Aprem: Aprem, Mar: (2017): *"Is*

The council of Chalcedon marked the official separation of the two Christian movements. However from the beginning of Christianity, the Eastern and Western branches of the Church had already been developing their own distinctive theologies appropriate to their different empires. In addition to this the continuing wars between the Roman and Persian Empires also restricted the interaction that could take place. At its height the Church of the East was larger and more widespread than the Western Church. It was annihilated with the coming of Islam and large parts of the literature containing information on its history, theology and background has been destroyed by the Western Church. In this analysis I give particular emphasis to an examination of how the Apostolic Church of the East developed: and before the schism occurred.

In my discussion reported in section 2:0 of this document and from a consideration of the internal and external evidence, I have concluded that the *Gospel According to Thomas* is of an early date. The teaching of Jesus was cabalistic in nature, and the style of writing of the *Gospel according to Thomas* is more in the form of a Jewish Midrash rather than a later Christian Gnostic text. There is also an absence of markers which would define it as a later document, such as its lack of concern with sex⁵⁷. However the texts as we have them also reflect the passions of the writers and the interpolations that were made.

Using the available literature I have conducted a full critical analysis of the Church of the East, which I report this in my paper "*The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church*". A summary of that work is presented in this paper "*East and West: A Comparison of How the Apostles Interpreted the Gospel Message in Roman and Persian Cultures*". Here I look more specifically at the development of attitudes to gender and sex in pre-Christian Judaism, and in the early stages of the Christian movement, both in the Church of the East and the Western Church. More specifically I examine how Thomasine doctrine and theory, as expressed in the *Gospel according to Thomas*, may have influenced the teaching and doctrines of this Church of the East. I also discuss how these experiences have differed in the Church of the East and the Western Church.

4:1: Women in the Early Christian Movement

In section 2:5: on "*Jesus and Women*" I note that the most striking thing about the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus is that they are always present, and the continual testimony to the presence of women amongst the followers of Jesus and his serious teaching and treatment of them is a break with tradition which has been described as being without any precedent in first century or earlier Judaism⁵⁸. Of all of the founders of religions and religious sects, it is considered that Jesus stands alone as the one who did not discriminate against women in any way.

There are many studies which have shown the important roles that women played in early Christianity. From the beginning of his ministry, Jewish women, which included Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, accompanied Jesus during his ministry and they supported him out of their private means (Luke 8:1-3).⁵⁹ In the parable of the Lost Coin and the parable of the Leavened

the Theology of the Assyrian Church Nestorian? Pro Oriente Foundation. (His Beatitude Mar Aprem is the Metropolitan of Malabar and India); available at: <http://theorthodoxchurch.info/blog/news/is-the-theology-of-the-assyrian-church-nestorian/>

⁵⁷ Anything cabalistic has a secret, hidden meaning. A book of ancient, mystical texts can be considered cabalistic. Any society or practice that's secretive and somewhat spiritual or mystical could also get the cabalistic label. The root is ultimately from Hebrew "Qabalah", defining something handed down.

⁵⁸ The Staggs note that the synoptic Gospels of the canonical New Testament contain a relatively high number of references to women (Stagg, Evelyn and Frank. *Woman in the World of Jesus*. Westminster John Knox Pr, 1978. ISBN 978-0-664-24195-7). Bilezikian agrees, noting that this is exceptional by comparison with other literary works of the same epoch (Bilezikian, Gilbert. *Beyond Sex Roles*. Baker, 1989. ISBN 0-8010-0885-9 p.82).

⁵⁹ King, Karen L. "Women in Ancient Christianity: The New Discoveries." <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/women.htm>

Bread, Jesus relates his own work, as a man, to the growth of the Kingdom of God by using the model of a woman and her domestic work.⁶⁰ In the account of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42), Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and she listened to his teaching and religious instruction. The challenge which this story made to the social conventions of the time can easily be underestimated by present day society⁶¹. Not only does this passage show that Mary chose the "good part," but Jesus related to her in a teacher-discipleship relationship, and he commended her for her choice. The account of the woman at the well in Samaria is highly significant for a number of reasons. By talking openly with this woman, Jesus had crossed a number of barriers which normally would have separated a Jewish teacher from a person such as this.

Jesus did three things which were highly unconventional and astonishing for his cultural and religious situation: As a man he discussed theology openly with a woman, as a Jew he asked to drink from the ritually unclean bucket of a Samaritan, then finally he did not attempt to avoid her, even though he knew her marital record of having had five former husbands, and was now living with a man who was not her husband (John 4:1-42). The story of the Syrophenician woman (Matthew 15:21–28 and Mark 7:24–30) shows that Jesus was capable of taking a critical stance towards women. When he did this he is also demonstrated his respect for her self-affirmation when she boldly challenged his remarks. The Gospel of Luke is unique in declaring that there were many women who not only benefited personally from Jesus' ministry, but they also ministered to him and with him, even to the point of accompanying him and the twelve disciples during his evangelistic journeys (Luke 8:1–3). Along with the disciple John, there were only women disciples at the foot of the cross. In all four of the Gospel accounts, women were the first people to be given the sign of Jesus' resurrection and to report it to others. The most prominent woman in the ministry of Jesus is Mary Magdalene⁶². Not only was she the first "witness" of Resurrection, she was also described as a "messenger" of the risen Christ⁶³.

By the time Paul began his missionary movement, women were important agents in spreading the Gospel message. Paul's informal greetings to his acquaintances give clear indications about the status of Jewish and Gentile women who were prominent in the movement. His letters give vivid clues about the kind of activities which women did⁶⁴. He greets Prisca, Junia, Julia, and Nereus' sister, who worked and travelled as missionaries in pairs with their husbands or brothers (Romans 16:3, 7 & 15). He also sends elaborate greetings to Tryphena, Tryphosa, who "*Labour for the Lord's work*", and to the mother of Rufus. (Romans 16:12–15). Priscilla (or Prisca) is expressly mentioned six times in the Bible, as the wife of Aquila, and as a missionary partner with the Apostle Paul. When Paul refers to Priscilla and to Aquila, Priscilla is usually the first to be listed, which has suggested to some scholars that she was the head of the family unit.⁶⁵ Mary and Persis are commended for their hard work (Romans 16:6 & 12). Chloe, who is a prominent woman from Corinth, appears to be the head of a household of an extended family (1 Corinthians 1:11). Euodia and Syntyche are also called his fellow-workers in the gospel. (Philemon 4:2–3). Karen King concludes that these biblical reports seem to provide credible evidence of women Apostles active in the earliest work of spreading the Christian gospel inside the ancient world.⁶⁶

⁶⁰These parables follow the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Mustard Seed, and they express the same messages in the same way as these male-identified equivalents. (Witherington, Ben. (1987): "Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A study of Jesus' attitudes to women and their roles as reflected in his earthly life", Cambridge University Press, 1987, ISBN 0-521-34781-5, p. 39–41.)

⁶¹ Such an action was not permitted for a rabbi, nor was it acceptable for a Jewish woman. Jewish women were not allowed to touch the Scriptures and they were not taught the Torah itself, although they were instructed in accordance with it for the proper regulation of their lives.

⁶² King, Karen L. (2003): "The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle": Polebridge Press: 01 November 2003. ISBN 13: 9780944344583 ISBN 10: 0944344585

⁶³ Ingrid Maisch (1998). Mary Magdalene: the image of a woman through the centuries. Liturgical Press. ISBN 978-0-8146-2471-5

⁶⁴ FRONTLINE: from Jesus to Christ - the first Christians: Paul's mission and letters. PBS. Retrieved on 2011-02-13.

⁶⁵ Achtenmeier, P.J. (1996). HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (revised ed.). HarperCollins. p. 882. ISBN 0-06-060037-3.

⁶⁶ King, Karen L. "Women in Ancient Christianity: The New Discoveries." PBS Frontline. Frontline is produced by the WGBH Educational Foundation. WGBH is a major producer of programs for PBS, the U.S. public television network <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/women.html>

Information from early Christian writings is also of interest. The authorship of one of the apocryphal gospels, the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, is attributed to this, the most famous of Jesus' female apostles⁶⁷. In Chapter 96 of the Pistis Sophia⁶⁸, Jesus is reported to say; *"Where I shall be, there will be also my twelve ministers. But Mary Magdalene and John, the Virgin, will tower over all my disciples and over all men who shall receive the mysteries in the Ineffable. And they will be on my right and on my left. And I am they, and they are I."* In Matthew 23 Jesus reveals his view of the hypocrisy of the Jewish establishment in no uncertain terms. More importantly Jesus had given the ownership of Christianity to women as well as to men. However through the later search for conformity and respectability the ownership by women was lost. Gender differentiation was a foundation stone of the first century Middle Eastern societies. Not least because of these attitudes to women, the Gospel of Jesus had challenged the entire social structure of society. What sayings 22 and 114 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* do is to make this totally explicit. To *"Make Mary Male"* was to give her, and all women, full equality with all of the male apostles, in social roles and responsibilities, in public and private ministry, and in every other law, regulation and act.

4:2: Disagreements

Saying 22 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* has also been the subject of major disagreements for it could hardly be more specific in stating that the teaching of Jesus either transcends or condemns all gender and sex: The saying is: *"Jesus saw infants being suckled. He said to his disciples: "These little ones being suckled are like those who enter the kingdom." They said to him: "Then will we enter the kingdom as little ones?" Jesus said to them: "When you make the two into one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below - that is, to make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female will not be female and when you make eyes instead of an eye and a hand instead of a hand and a foot instead of a foot, an image instead of an image, then you will enter the kingdom".* This saying in the *Gospel According to Thomas* dictates that there is full equality between all men and women, therefore one cannot act in submission to the other. The statement by Paul in Galatians 3:28, agrees with this. The same principles *"that the male and female become one"* are found in other early Christian writing⁶⁹. However that understanding is broken by Peter in 1 Peter 3:1-8 where the wife is defined as the weaker partner in the relationship. Further statements which declare the Peter had difficulty in accepting women as full equals appear in other early Christian writing. It also appears in Saying 114 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* itself.

Saying 22 could be interpreted in one of two ways. One of which it argues that the Gospel represents an ascetic philosophy which condemns all forms of sexual expression. That has led some investigators to conclude that the *Gospel According to Thomas* is a product of later gnostic teaching which demands the condemnation of all sex. This extreme position would not appear to be supported in saying 112 when it states: *"Woe to the flesh that depends on the soul. Woe to the soul that depends on the flesh"*. That demands a much more measured approach. The early date for the Gospel of Thomas also precludes an interpretation of saying 22 which condemns all forms of sex⁷⁰. Furthermore when Thomas describes the *"Solitary Ones"*, he refers exclusively to the readiness to fulfil the Gospel message, he does not link this in any way to the prohibition of sex. Finally when the Gospel is considered as a whole, its emphasis is on redressing the unequal treatment of men and women, in particular the female followers of Jesus. Therefore I conclude that this Gospel focusses on gender issues and not on sex. In this study I consider how Christianity has been moulded and

⁶⁷ Gospel of Mary http://www.maryofmagdala.com/GMary_Text/gmary_text.html

⁶⁸ Pistis Sophia. Translated with Commentary by G. R. S. Mead; J. M. Watkins Revised Second Edition, 1921 (The first edition was published in 1896) <http://gnosis.org/library/psoph.htm>

⁶⁹ Gilchrist, S. (2013): *"An Unfinished Reformation"*: <http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/016B-UnfinishedReformationArticle.pdf>

⁷⁰ For more information on provenance, see section 2:3 of this document

adapted to fit the societies in which it has had to exist. Given the tenets of Zoroastrianism and Persian society, with their own endorsements of gender equality and gender complementarity, it is not surprising that the attitude to the teaching of Jesus which is presented in the *Gospel According to Thomas* is one which would be perfectly acceptable in the present day Western world.

4:3: Keeping the Vision

Instead of the freedoms that were available to Thomas and the Church of the East, Peter and Paul also had to deal with a powerful Roman Empire where sexual behaviour was measured through the prism of subjection and domination. For Peter, Paul and the Roman church the challenge in a difficult environment was to hold fast to the vision that this teaching presents. Any religion which did not respect the authority of the Emperor and who was not prepared to recognise him as a God could be in great danger. The Jews and Christians were persecuted for this reason. Although Jesus attacked the Jewish establishment without any restraint, to attack the Roman authorities in the same way would have led to the destruction of the Christian movement: Indeed Paul in Romans 13:1 argues that this Roman authority is God given: and he demands that the early Christians give it their support.

As a powerless movement inside a powerful society Christianity also needed to gain that society's respect. That required Roman Christianity to preach the Gospel message in a way which transformed it rather than mounting a direct attack. However, if Peter and Paul were to stay true to the Gospel message they must have believed that the authority to do this came from the teaching of Jesus himself. That is seen in Matthew 22:21 where Jesus said: "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's*". In Saying 98 Thomas also states: "*The kingdom of the Father is like a person who wanted to kill a powerful person. He drew the sword in his house (and) stabbed it into the wall to test whether his hand would be strong (enough). Then he killed the powerful one.*" These statements are evidence for a pragmatic approach. There must be no compromise to the teaching of Jesus, but the Kingdom of God is to be won through people's hearts and minds and not by violent acts.

These statements would have been one source for giving authorisation to Peter and Paul to work within society to change it. However there is another. This is in the passage in Matthew 19 where Jesus discusses the issues of marriage and the place of eunuchs in the Church. The radical approach of Jesus is spread throughout the Gospels but some of the most challenging elements to first century society are presented in Matthew 19:12. That was not only because of this society's serious mistrust and condemnation of eunuchs, but also because of the attacks on social order created by the gender disruptive behaviour of the Goddess Cults and through their self-castrated male priests. An extended discussion and analysis is published by the author elsewhere⁷¹. The statement which follows this discussion: "*He who is able to receive this, let him receive it*" is unique in the way that it qualifies the teaching which Jesus presents. That could have been a direct comment on the abhorrence of self-castration in Jewish society, or it could have meant that Jesus was aware of the difficulties that would later be likely to occur, or it could have been added later to deal with the changes that were required. Whatever way it is taken, it allowed the Church to move forward and gain acceptance in the Roman world. However this was not just a statement of compromise. It was also the command for the Christian Church to express in full the radical teaching of Jesus on gender and sex as soon as it had the power to do so.

⁷¹ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation on the Life and Teaching of Jesus*":
<http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/219P-InfluencesJesus.pdf>

That is abundantly clear in the statement Thomas makes. Keeping a vision alive also demands a common purpose and a common mind, and I suggest that this unity was not present in the early church. A source of the failure I argue was the disagreements between Peter Paul and Thomas which came to a head at the time when the Council of Jerusalem in AD 49. As we have seen Thomas argued that the radical teaching of Jesus on gender and sex should be implemented immediately, and no compromise should be considered; Paul who appears to have accepted the need to compromise with Roman Society (seemingly as a temporary measure), and Peter who held more closely to the Jewish traditions which meant that, while changes in interpretation were essential, no such challenge to the underlying principle of gender complementarity should be made. The early Christian Church was vociferous and exemplary in its attacks on sexual abuse and promoting the role of women. However what was adopted as a necessary compromise can too easily become the doctrine of the Church. In the Roman world an even greater reversal was required because Christianity quickly had to separate itself from the politically motivated social and gender challenging behaviour of the Goddess cults in order to obtain respectability it sought.⁷² This meant that instead of just adopting the social structures and the gender divisions that were a cornerstone of Greco/Roman society, Christianity had to be seen to take a proactive role in its enforcement of them and that led to gross discrimination in the later church.

One example of this discrimination against women is expressed by Tertullian⁷³, who writes on women as⁷⁴ *"Do you not know that you are Eve? The judgment of God upon this sex lives on in this age; therefore, necessarily the guilt should live on also. You are the gateway of the devil; you are the one, who unseals the curse of that tree, and you are the first one to turn your back on the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the devil was not capable of corrupting; you easily destroyed the image of God, Adam. Because of what you deserve, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die."* Sadly the example of Tertullian was not the exception, it was a general rule.⁷⁵ I consider this in more detail in section 3:3 of: Gilchrist, S. (2013): *"An Unfinished Reformation"*.⁷⁶

⁷² Christian teaching simply regards the Goddess Cults as being simply repositories for sexual licence and abuse. However they had a much broader role. Instead of promoting maternal interests or simply being repositories for sexual abuse the Goddess Cults were political movements who used their threats of gender disruption to keep the worst activities of a grossly unequal male dominated and sexually abusive society in check. As a consequence they had great popularity amongst slaves and the underclasses in Roman society, who had no other voice. In the terms of their own social messages, both Christianity and the Goddess cults shared some key elements in common. This was because they both represented minority groups inside the dominant societies. Early Christianity did not simply challenge gender inequality through its actions and the importance and esteem which it gave to women. It also challenged the moral precepts and the perceptions upon which such a patriarchal society was based.

⁷³ Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, anglicised as Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225 AD), was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. He is the first Christian author to produce an extensive corpus of Latin Christian literature. He also was a notable early Christian apologist and a polemicist against heresy. Tertullian has been called "the father of Latin Christianity" and "the founder of Western theology." Though conservative, he did originate and advance new theology to the early Church. He is perhaps most famous for being the oldest extant Latin writer to use the term Trinity (Latin, trinitas), and giving the oldest extant formal exposition of a Trinitarian theology. Other Latin formulations that first appear in his work are "three Persons, one Substance" as the Latin "tres Personae, una Substantia" (itself from the Koine Greek "treis Hypostases, Homooousios"). He wrote his trinitarian formula after becoming a Montanist. However, unlike many Church fathers, he was never canonized by the Catholic Church, as several of his later teachings directly contradicted the actions and teachings that were adopted by the Church. (Although Montanism came to be labelled a heresy, the movement held similar views about the basic tenets of Christian doctrine to those of the wider Christian Church. It was a prophetic movement that called for a reliance on the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit and a more conservative personal ethic. Parallels have been drawn between Montanism and modern day charismatic movements such as Pentecostalism movement). (see Wikipedia).

⁷⁴ 'De Cultu Feminarum,' section I.I, part 2 (trans. C.W. Marx)

⁷⁵ A few more for the collection! Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogues* II, 33, 2: "With women the very consciousness of their own nature must evoke feelings of shame". Origen, *On the Apparel of Women*, chapter 1: "And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert--that is, death--even the Son of God had to die." St. Augustine, *Soliloq. I* 10 "I consider that nothing so casts down the manly mind from its heights as the fondling of women, and those bodily contacts which belong to the married state." St. John Chrysostom "The whole of her bodily beauty is nothing less than phlegm, blood, bile, rheum, and the fluid of digested food... If you consider what is stored up behind those lovely eyes, the angle of the nose, the mouth and cheeks you will agree that the well-proportioned body is merely a whitened sepulchre." St. Jerome, *Commentary on Ephesians*, III ch.5 "As long as a woman is for birth and children she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman, and will be called man." St. Albert the Great, *Quaestiones super de animalibus* XV q. 11 "Woman is a misbegotten man and has a faulty and defective nature in comparison with his. Therefore she is unsure in herself. What she herself cannot get, she seeks to obtain through lying and diabolical deceptions. And so, to put it briefly, one must be on one's guard with every woman, as if she were a poisonous snake and the horned devil.... In evil and perverse doings woman is

However the citation of this condemnation by Tertullian in isolation fails to do justice to the genuine complexities of the situation⁷⁷. For example, Tertullian in his earlier writings seems to recognize the presence of women in ecclesiastical orders⁷⁸. He believes that widows should also be ranked alongside the Clergy and he argues for the individual priesthood of all believers⁷⁹. In the particular circumstances which are outlined by Tertullian, women are able to preach, teach and baptize in the Church. In his later work all that is gone. By then he had changed his mind about the priesthood of all believers and the right of all male and female followers to baptize, to teach and to offer the Eucharist. Tertullian was married and two of his books were dedicated to his wife⁸⁰. In his book *“On the Veiling of Virgins”* (ca. 213) which is later than *“On Exhortation to Chastity”* (ca. 204-212) Tertullian says. *“It is not permitted to a woman to speak in the church; but neither (is it permitted her) to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to claim to herself a lot in any manly function, not to say (in any) sacerdotal office.”*⁸¹ As I have noted frequently, that latter statement is a direct contradiction of the teaching of Jesus where, although he did not condemn gender complementarity, he condemned the social, religious and legal enforcement of it many times. Karen Jo Torjesen describes Tertullian’s perception of the church as an essentially Roman institution. She says: *“Tertullian’s description of the Christian community dramatically marks the transition of the model of the church from the household or private association to the body politic. With him the church became a legal body unified by a common law (the law of faith) and a common discipline (Christian morality). Tertullian and his compatriots therefore conceived the structure of the church as being analogous to Roman society, divided into distinct classes or ranks, which were distinguished from one another in terms of honour and authority so that. “Only those who were full members of the political body could possess the legal right to teach and the legal right to baptize”.* Women could not be full members. Therefore they were excluded from the clergy and in the laity they could only occupy a submissive role⁸². The idea that women have an instant sex change when they die, in order to enter heaven as men, was also of common parlance in the Western church. Augustine devoted one complete chapter to the topic in his work, the *“City of God”* (*This discussion is found in Chapter 17 of book XXII - Whether the Bodies of Women Shall Retain Their Own Sex in the Resurrection*)⁸³. However Augustine did not agree with this proposition on the grounds that lust and sexuality could not exist in heaven. Redemption was still available for women, but it came only through the blessings of childbirth or through the total rejection of femininity and the refusal of all earthly sexual passions or acts. The standard view was that women were subordinate in all ways to men, although few people would take this doctrine to Augustine's extremes. For Augustine, and for his contemporaries in the Western Church, equality for women occurs in heaven but not on earth.

4:4: Church of the East

The problem with any study of the Apostolic Church of the East is that a large amount of the material which would have been of great value in assessing its theology and doctrines has been destroyed or suppressed. The literature and records of the Thomasine church in India were almost

cleverer, that is, slyer, than man. Her feelings drive woman toward every evil, just as reason impels man toward all good." St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q. 92 a. 1 "Woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence, such as that of a south wind, which is moist."

⁷⁶ Gilchrist, S. (2013): *“An Unfinished Reformation”*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/016B-UnfinishedReformationArticle.pdf>

⁷⁷ According to the Church: Ironically, even though it is the woman who represents corruption personified, it is through the male issue that the Original Sin is actually transmitted: for it is the semen which is the bearer of death. Therefore in creating a new creature, it is the woman who provides the body from her substance, but it is the man who gives the soul through his semen, which is already corrupt. This theory is called Traducianism.

⁷⁸ Tertullian. *On Exhortation to Chastity*, Chapter XIII and Thomas in *Saying* 96

⁷⁹ Tertullian. *On Exhortation to Chastity*, Chapter VII

⁸⁰ Tertullian and Women in Ecclesiastical Orders By Susanna Krizo Published: January 28, 2010

⁸¹ Tertullian. *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Ch IX

⁸² Karen Jo Torjesen, *When women were priests* (Harper San Francisco, New York, 1993) 162-3

⁸³ Augustine. *City of God* Book XXII Chapter 17. - "Whether the Bodies of Women Shall Retain Their Own Sex in the Resurrection".

Accessed <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers2/NPNF1-02/npnf1-02-28.htm> Accessed 19 December 2012.

completely destroyed by the Portuguese around 1552, after they had invaded in 1496. Except for one almost full copy, manuscripts of the “*Gospel according to Thomas*” exist only in fragments and that survives only because it was buried to avoid destruction from a purge that occurred⁸⁴. However an assessment of how the Church of the East may have developed can help to give some indication of the dependability of the interpretation of the *Gospel According to Thomas*, as it is presented in this study. The early history of the Church of the East is the subject of a much more extended study which I report in Gilchrist, S. (2019): “*The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church*”⁸⁵. My aim is to provide greater insights into a Church that has developed to a significant degree independently of Western Christianity, and also beyond the influence of the Council of Nicaea, which had codified and formulated the teaching and doctrine of the Western Church.

There is fortunately enough material available to make an attempt. As Schaff notes, Ephraim (c306-393) and Aphrahat (c280-c345), “*are the earliest Syriac authors of whom any considerable remains survive; and they both represent the religious mind of the Syrian Church, but little affected by influences from without, other than the all-pervading influence of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures*”.⁸⁶ *A significant number of Jewish practices and rituals also continued to take place in the Church of the East*⁸⁷. Some vestiges of these practices may be seen today in the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church. Both the Church of the East and Western Christianity accepted all of the major Gospel texts. However the first Council of Nicaea in AD 325, which had a profound influence on the theological development of Western Christianity, had little impact on the Church of the East, in part because of the tension and suspicion between the different empires in which they were based⁸⁸. The adaptations that were needed for Christianity to develop in each of these empires were also different. Therefore a study of the literature and resources which do remain can give hope of providing greater insights into how the early development of Christianity took place. A brief statement describing some of the theology of the Church of the East is given in the “*Hymn of Praise*”, composed by Mar Babai the Great in the sixth century A.D.⁸⁹

*“One is Christ the Son of God,
Worshipped by all in two natures;
In His Godhead begotten of the Father,
Without beginning before all time;
In His humanity born of Mary,
In the fullness of time, in a body united;
Neither His Godhead is of the nature of the mother,
Nor His humanity of the nature of the Father;
The natures are preserved in their Qnumas⁹⁰,
In one person of one Sonship.
And as the Godhead is three substances in one nature,*

⁸⁴. In 367 AD, Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, issued a decree known as the Festal Letter, banning the use of alternative Christian writings. He also outlined an accepted canon of orthodox scripture. In reacting to this censorship, some monks, (probably from the St Pachomius Monastery in Upper Egypt), smuggled out the codices and buried them in the nearby sands. These 52 texts were discovered in 1945 close to the town of Nag Hammadi, were hidden in the jar where they remained buried for almost 1,600 years. Among them was the Gospel of Thomas.

⁸⁵ Gilchrist, S. (2019): “*The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church*”: <http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/027B-ThomasAnalysis.pdf>

⁸⁶ Schaff, Philip. (1819-1893) (Editor): “*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Series 2 Volume 13 Gregory, Ephraim, Syrus and Aphrahat*”: Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf213.pdf>

⁸⁷ Rouwhorst, G: (1997): “*Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity*”: *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 51, No.1 (Mar 1997), pp. 72-93

⁸⁸ Although the emperors Constantine and Sapor II were nominally at peace with one another at the time of Nicaea, the Sassanid Persian Empire was much less tolerant of Christianity than the Parthians who had preceded them, and the continued wars and tensions between the two empires would have made it very difficult for the Church of the East to acknowledge any such influences from the Roman World.

⁸⁹ Babai the Great (551- 628) was an early church father of the Church of the East. He set several of the foundational pillars of the Church, revived the monastic movement, and formulated its Christology in a systematic way

⁹⁰ Qnuma, is an Aramaic word. The nearest equivalent is the Greek “hypostasis”, in Latin “substantia” and in English “substance.”

*Likewise the Sonship of the Son is in two natures, one person.
So the Holy Church has taught”.*

This provides an alternative doctrine of the Trinity which avoids the difficulties encountered in the Roman Church over the Arian controversy and the Nicene Creed since it argues from the start that the key elements of the Trinity are formed outside time⁹¹. That also provides direct links to the *Gospel According to Thomas*: Sayings 3 to 6 in this Gospel implies that the Kingdom of Heaven is beyond all physical representation. It is within us, outside of us and also outside time. This is also a constant theme which is referred to in Sayings 11, 18, 19, 22, 50, 77, and 103.

Saying 44 further states: “*Jesus says: Whoever blasphemes against the Father, it will be forgiven him; and whoever blasphemes against the Son; it will be forgiven him, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither on earth nor in heaven.*” Corresponding Texts in the Bible are: Matthew 12.31: “*Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 12.32 And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come*”. Mark 3.28 “*Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; 3.29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin*”. Luke 12.10: “*And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven*”⁹². In all of these biblical texts, the section in Thomas which says: “*Whoever blasphemes against the Father, it will be forgiven him*” is left out. I cannot help wondering if this has happened because its inclusion would have been too challenging to the authority of the Emperor Constantine who called the first Council of Nicaea together to affirm the theology of the Western Church. In large part it is the differences over the content of Nicene Creed which led to the split between the Church of the East and the Western Church.

When he was writing about the first phases of the Monastic tradition in the Church of the East, Aphrahat (c280 - c345), states: “*For those who do not take wives will be served by the Watchers of heaven: the observers of consecrated holiness will come to rest at the sanctuary of the Exalted One. The Ihidaya who is from the bosom of the Father will gladden the ihidaya. There will be neither male nor female, neither slave nor free, but all are sons of the Most High*”⁹³. Both Aphrahat and Ephraim repeat the statement Paul made in Galatians 3:28 many times, citing it as a current doctrine of the religious communities; of which they were almost certainly members. Their repeated

⁹¹ The Nestorian Schism arose because of disagreements about the nature of the incarnation of Jesus. Nestorius argued for a dyophysite doctrine that accepted the distinctiveness of the divine and the human natures of Jesus. The opposing monophysite view is that after the union of the divine and the human in the historical incarnation, Jesus Christ, as the incarnation of the eternal Son or Word had only a single “nature” which was either divine or a synthesis of divine and human. Although it is unclear about the position the Church of the East had adopted before the Nestorian schism, the influx of supporters of Nestorius would certainly have pushed it towards the diophysite position. However that did not occur. Instead a miaphysite position was adopted. This is Cyril of Alexandria’s (376 – 444) Christological formula which holds that in the person of Jesus Christ, divine nature and human nature are united in a compound nature the two being united without separation, without mixture, without confusion and without alteration. It is also of interest to note that the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church, which today maintains features encountered in the Apostolic Church of the East, such as Jewish centred styles of worship and maintaining the rule of St Pachomius for its religious communities, describes itself as a miaphysite Church. Although the Church of the East was willing to welcome followers of Nestorius into its membership, theologically it did not accept the Nestorian theological position. The view that the divine nature and human nature in Jesus Christ are united in a compound nature the two being united without separation, without mixture, without confusion and without alteration is present in the 6th Century hymn of praise by Mar Babai. Oriental Orthodoxy uses the term “Miaphysite” to describe its theological position since 1142.

⁹² In Jewish law the only form of blasphemy which is punishable by death is blaspheming the Ineffable Name (Leviticus 24:16)

⁹³ Aphrahat (c. 280–c. 345) was a Syriac Christian author of the third century from Adiabene in the Asōristān (Assyria) province of the Sasanian Empire who composed a series of twenty-three expositions or homilies on points of Christian doctrine and practice. All his known works, the Demonstrations, come from later on in his life. He was an ascetic and celibate, and was almost definitely a son of the covenant (an early Syriac form of communal monasticism). Called the Persian Sage; Aphrahat witnesses to the concerns of the early church beyond the eastern boundaries of the Roman Empire. For more detailed descriptions including definitions of *Ihidaya* and *ihidaya* see Winkler, Dietmar, Baum, Wilhelm: (2003): “The Church of the East: A Concise” History”: *Volume 1 of Central Asian Studies*: Routledge, 2003 ISBN 1134430191, 9781134430192 and Schaff, Philip. (1819-1893) (Editor): “*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Series 2 Volume 13 Gregory, Ephraim, Syrus and Aphrahat*”: Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf213.pdf>

use of the term “*the Solitary Ones*” additionally reflects the emphasis on asceticism as described by Thomas where these “*Solitary ones*” are given high respect for their devotion to duty, rather than evils of sex. In his “*Disposition on Monks*”, Aphrahat repeats the type of condemnation of women for causing the downfall of men in a similar way to that which occurs in the Western Church.^{94 95} However atonement for this considered to have occurred through the coming of the Virgin Mary, so that by this action: “*the thorns are uprooted, the sweat wiped away, the fig-tree cursed, the dust made salt, the curse nailed to the cross, the edge of the sword removed from before the tree of life and it given as food to the faithful, and Paradise promised to the blessed and to virgins and to the saints*”. Therefore, according to this doctrine, women are free to live on earth as full and equal members of the Christian communities without having to do any penance for the sins of Eve.

That is in total contrast to the Western church which required women to live their earthly lives in submission and penance for Eve’s sins. Redemption was still available for women, but only through the blessings of childbirth or through the total rejection of femininity and the refusal of all earthly sexual passions or acts. The statement by Tertullian; cited earlier: “*The judgment of God upon this sex lives on in this age; therefore, necessarily the guilt should live on also*” is a terse reminder of what that meant. Although asceticism was very strongly emphasized in the religious institutions and traditions of the Church of the East, no such differentiation between the sexes was made. High esteem was placed on the “*Solitary Ones*” and this was sought in terms of devotion to Christ rather than denial of sex. Religious communities involved both sexes. The decision that obliged the monks and priests of the Church of the East to marry; which was made at the Synod of Beth Lapat in 484, was reversed in 553⁹⁶. These differences in attitude between the Church of the East and the Western Churches can be observed to considerable effect by comparing the communal and the sexually cohesive traditions of the order created in Egypt by St Pachomius (286-346) with the asceticism of Antony and the Desert Fathers, founded by St Antony around 305. The two types of monasticism existed side by side⁹⁷. In 571 Abraham the Great of Kashkar, founded a new monastery on Mount Izla⁹⁸. The third abbot of this monastery, Babai the Great, 551-628, finally drove out the married monks from the monasteries on this mount. As the “*Visitor of the Monasteries of the North*”, he also ensured that the alternate type of monastic ideal pioneered by Antony and the Desert Fathers, was taken seriously throughout northern Mesopotamia rather than that of St

⁹⁴ Page 612 in Schaff, Philip. (1819-1893): Therefore, brethren, because we know and have seen that from the beginning it was through woman that the adversary had access unto men, and to the end he will accomplish it by her—for she is the weapon of Satan, and through her he fights against the champions. Through her he makes music at every time, for she became as a harp for him from the first day. For because of her the curse of the Law was established, and because of her the promise unto death was made. For with pangs she bears children and delivers them to death. Because of her the earth was cursed, that it should bring forth thorns and tares. Accordingly, by the coming of the offspring of the Blessed Mary the thorns are uprooted, the sweat wiped away, the fig-tree cursed, the dust made salt, the curse nailed to the cross, the edge of the sword removed from before the tree of life and it given as food to the faithful, and Paradise promised to the blessed and to virgins and to the saints. So the fruit of the tree of life is given as food to the faithful and to virgins, and to those that do the will of God has the door been opened and the way made plain.

⁹⁵ For Aphrahat a “Christian life must be a life of unrelenting warfare between believers and the devil. The most dangerous instrument of satanic temptation is a woman; the safest path for man, therefore, is to renounce the love of a woman, and live alone for Christ. As for women, their highest calling is to espouse virginity and thus rob the devil of his tool for temptation. Since it was not possible for all to remain celibate, Christians may marry, but if they do, it might be best to marry before baptism”. In his address to the monks he recommends that “if a monk desires, that a woman bound by celibacy, should dwell with him, it would be better for both parties to marry and live openly together” (Demonstrations VI.4).

⁹⁶ In 486 at the Synod of Beth Lapat the Church rejected celibacy and affirmed the rights of all Christians to marry including ordained priests or even bishops. The decisions were clearly aimed at pleasing the Zoroastrian Persian kings, who were at constant war with the now Christian Byzantine Empire. Zoroastrians viewed family life sacred and abhorred the monastic movement of the Christians.

⁹⁷ The foundations of St. Pachomius were governed by an elaborate rule. The members lived in dormitories instead of separately in caves and huts and had their meals and prayers in common. Dual monasteries existed which included both men and women. The abbot of the motherhouse was the superior of all the other convents whether of men or women, appointed their superiors, visited them periodically, and presided at a general chapter held annually at the motherhouse. Time not spent in prayer was spent in work. Each monastery had its own farmlands and craft workshops and was largely self-sufficient. Pachomian monasticism flourished until the Muslim conquest of Egypt, when it entered into a long decline; and it is now almost extinct except in Ethiopia. The Rules of St Pachomius (286-346) continue to today regulate the monastic life of Ethiopia, despite having disappeared from Egypt and other areas centuries ago.

⁹⁸ Mount Izla is a low mountain or ridge near Nisibis in what once was Sassanid Persia, but is now South Eastern Turkey, close to the border with Syria

Pachomius and Basil the Great.⁹⁹ Some of the more extreme ascetic practices from this tradition date from that time. At various periods other splits and divisions occurred. One which has already been cited took place at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. This led to the creation of the Chaldean Catholic church which is in communion with Rome, and continuing elements of the Church of the East which are not. Probably the present day “Assyrian Church of the East” is the one which claims the most direct line with the Apostolic Tradition¹⁰⁰.

In their descriptions of the early Indian Church, Thomas Aykara and John B. Chethimattam state that: “The apostle [Thomas] would not have met the challenges faced by missionaries in the Greek, Roman, and Jewish world: Saint. Paul had to fight the Judaisers on the one hand and the highly developed philosophical ideas of the Greeks on the other. Against the Jews he had to show how Christ’s salvific work marked a complete break with the legalistic approach of Judaic religion while against the Greeks he had to show that the Cross of Christ which was foolishness for them was God’s wisdom .. In India St. Thomas did not have any such special challenges to meet”. According to stories in the “Acts of Thomas” it is in the nature of the ministry of Thomas that no compromises were made with those in authority, and no compromises with the teaching of Jesus were made.¹⁰¹ However other failings could occur. The Thomasine Churches supported and endorsed the caste system on the Indian subcontinent. However most Thomasine Christians in India today belong to the Dalit: or the “Untouchable” caste.

4:5: Engagement

The message that Jesus brought was one of love. That is described in the commandments Jesus gave when he said that the greatest commandment is: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31). However that is only the first part of the Gospel message. An equally strong message within the gospels is the attack by Jesus on those institutions, people and organisations which prevent that love being expressed. The attacks by Jesus on the scribes and Pharisees recorded in the Gospels of Luke 11:37-54 and Matthew 23:1-39. Mark 12:35-40 and Luke 20:45-47 cannot be described as being moderate in tone. The mission of Jesus is also clear in Luke 4:18 he says “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has

⁹⁹ All Christian monasticism stems, either directly or indirectly, from this period in Egypt. Both Pachomius (286-346) and Basil the Great, (c329-379) are remembered as the fathers of communal monasticism. In addition to his work as a theologian, Basil was known for his care of the poor and underprivileged. He is considered a saint by the traditions of both Eastern and Western Christianity. Early Celtic monasticism in Ireland also developed independently, but in a similar way.

¹⁰⁰ Unlike most other churches that trace their origins to antiquity, the modern Assyrian Church of the East is not in communion with any other church. The website for the Holy Catholic Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East is at: <https://www.assyrianchurch.org/>

¹⁰¹ The Gospel of Thomas is understood to have circulated principally in the Syriac Christian Community. There are strong traditions which indicate that Thomas brought this Syriac Christian tradition to India and that he was martyred there in AD 72. Unlike Paul, who needed to make these adaptations for Roman society, in Syria and India, and in line with the gospel of Thomas, the immediate adoption of the Gospel Message was sought.. (See: Strain, Janna Y (2013): “This I say not as one doubting”. *Traditions of the Apostle Thomas from the Beginning of the Common Era through 800* Illinois Wesleyan University). As a story in the “Acts of Thomas” goes, king Gundaphar requires Thomas to build him a palace and the apostle gives all the funds for the project to the poor, building the king a palace that Gundaphar may see “when thou dost depart this life” (Acts of Thomas 21). Instead of being killed for his disobedience, as Gundaphar had intended, Thomas was saved by a miraculous act. When Thomas redistributes the king’s money to the poor, people report to the king that: Neither has he built a palace or done anything else of what he has promised to do, but he goes about the towns and villages, and if he has anything he gives it all to the poor, and he teaches a new God . . . his works of compassion, and the healings which are wrought by him without reward . . . and the quality of his faith, show that he is righteous or an apostle of the new God whom he preaches. On a later occasion the then king, Misedeus (or Mizdeos), was infuriated when Thomas converted the queen Tertia, the king’s son Juzanes, sister-in-law princess Mygdonia and her friend Markia to Christianity. Misedeus led St Thomas outside the city and ordered four soldiers to take him to the nearby hill, where the soldiers speared to death. This is generally assumed to have happened in AD 72. What is important in these accounts is not the accuracy or factuality of these stories. It is in the nature of the ministry of Thomas that no compromises were made with those in authority, and no compromises with the teaching of Jesus were made. https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1025&context=religion_honproj. Also: Aykara, Thomas A. and Chethimattam John B. (1989): “Church of St. Thomas in India: It’s History, Problems, and Hopes.” *The Journal of Dharma* 14.1 (1989): 62-73. Also: Aykara, Thomas A. and Chethimattam John B. (1986): “Living Flame: Church of St. Thomas in India : Its History, Problems and Hopes” Editor Thomas A. Aykara Contributor John B. Chethimattam Publisher: Syro-Malabar Religious Conference (SMRC), 1986

anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed". He was also attacked. Because Jesus claimed to talk with authority (John 7:35) and not as the scribes (Matthew 7:29; Mark 1:22), he was repeatedly attacked, opposed, and challenged. Their most bitter opposition came because of his claim of a unique relationship with God; i.e. He "*made Himself equal with God*" (John 5:18; 7:33). The Jews were "*uniformly and strongly against Him* (John 5:15, 16; cf. Matthew 12:14; Mark 9:6; Luke 6:11). The Sadducees were the religious sceptics of Christ's day. An analysis of the Gospels lists the Sadducees in the role of protagonists and opponents of Christ in Matthew 16:1, 6, 12; 22:23; Mark 12:18; and Luke 20:27. They denied the resurrection and immortality of the soul. Opposition to Jesus was not only religious: it was also political attacks coming from the Jewish group known as the Herodian's. Jesus did not promise peace. According to Matthew 10 he says:" *Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'* This is not withdrawal: it is engaging with the world.

Monasticism in the Church of the East existed in two phases. The earliest evidence of the first version of Syrian monasticism was the B'nai Q'yama and the B'nat Q'yama (the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant), an ascetic group which began in the third century and gained ascendancy in the Church of the East in the fourth¹⁰². The second phase reflects a fundamental shift toward the later Egyptian models and the Desert Fathers, which had gained an irresistible prestige and momentum throughout Christendom. The concentration on asceticism in the Church of the East, rather than sex led to extreme expressions of this by some people during the second phase. Unlike the second phase which looked for separation and withdrawal, the first phase involved engagement instead. The "Solitary Ones" were only solitary because of their commitment to the Gospel: otherwise they were fully engaged with the world.

Possibly in the present day context it might be better to regard the members of this first phase of monasticism as somehow equivalent to friars instead. Men and women existed in common orders. The decision which obliged the monks and priests of the Church of the East to marry which was made at the Synod of Beth Lapat in 484, was to some degree forced upon the Church by Zoroastrian beliefs and state enforcement, which held the unmarried monks and priests in contempt and considered celibacy to be a cause of weakness in the empire. Extolling the virtues of virginity was therefore an irritation and a challenge to state authority. There are accounts of nuns being forced out of monasteries to be married and who were put to death if they refused This movement against the enforced celibacy of the clergy did not last and the decision was reversed in the sixth century¹⁰³

4:6: Context

Throughout this paper I have noted that although Jesus did not condemn gender complementarity, he condemned the social, religious and legal enforcement of it many times. That approach should be contrasted with the repeated statements of Peter and Paul who instead socially, religiously and legally enforced it to ensure the survival of the early Christian movement, and also with the aim of giving it social respect. I also show that this is in line with the type of approach which Jesus adopted

¹⁰² "*The sons and daughters of qyama were the ordinary baptized laity or a group of virgins within the Church: some living at home, others in small communities, but not isolated from the laity. They were not proper monks or nuns (sic) but they represent the early Syriac practice of virginity*". Maniyattu, Pauly (2007): "*East Syriac theology : an introduction*" Ephrem's Publications St. Ephrem's Theological College P.B. No.26, Satna 485 001 M.P., India

¹⁰³ In 486 at the Synod of Beth Lapat the Church rejected celibacy and affirmed the rights of all Christians to marry including ordained priests or even bishops. The texts mention social and cultural factors for this verdict. But the state also pressured the church to change its stance on celibate clergy. Zoroastrians held the unmarried clergy in contempt and considered celibacy as a cause of weakness in the empire. The virtue of virginity irritated them and there are accounts of nuns forced out of monasteries to be married and, who were put to death if refused. This movement against the enforced celibacy of the clergy did not last and the decision was reversed in the sixth century

in his own life and Thomas supported in Saying 96. Although Paul may have recognised this as a necessary compromise, I conclude that Peter did not. Peter's support for the Jewish approach to the enforcement of gender complementarity (which I describe in Gilchrist, S. (2015): "*Deuteronomy 22:5 and its Impact on Gender and Sexual Variation in the Christian Church*".¹⁰⁴), as with his argument for the protection of women as the weaker sex (in 1 Peter), together with the attacks which Thomas makes on Peter's views, and the reports on the difficulties which Peter had in accepting the equality of women that are present in the early Christian non-canonical literature, all have features which strongly suggest that he did not. As these passages also demonstrate, that does not mean that Peter gave women any lesser esteem. Peter's devotion to his wife is clearly indicated in early Christian literature and his motives may have been driven instead by a passionate concern for the protection of women and families in a grossly unequal society.¹⁰⁵ Any society which fulfils the aspirations of Paul in Galatians 3:28, where there is "*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" needs more than just a moral code. The enforcement of any form of gender complementarity makes the stronger more strong and the weaker more weak: Inequalities in power and influence between men and women are created so that sexual abuse can be more common and gender discrimination takes place. That has been the history in many religions and it has been true of the Christian Church. In Britain there was to be a wait of at least 1600 years, before a landmark decision by the Privy Council on October 18th, 1929 restored the situation. This at last stated that "*Women were declared to be "persons" under the law*": Instead of women being treated as belonging to their husbands, it enabled women to become once again their "*Own persons*" by absolute right.¹⁰⁶

It is almost impossible to underestimate the extent to which the development of the early Western Christian Church has been studied, interrogated and dissected in attempts to map how the teaching of Jesus has been interpreted or modified by the later Western Church. In comparison there has been little study of the Church of the East, in part because of the condemnation of it by the Western Church as a Nestorian heresy, which has meant that its earlier history has been ignored, but also because of its obliteration through the rise of Islam, and the destruction of much of its writings by the Western Church. Even though there is a great deal of existing scholarship which shows how the radical teaching of Jesus on gender and sex has become transformed into the present Church teaching and doctrine, the impact of this has largely been disregarded outside the academic circles in which it exists. Moreover much of the teaching and doctrine which is presently presented pays no regard to the historical context in which it was created, and this, in some if not in many cases, contradicts the teaching of Jesus himself.

Traditionally the Catholic Church has regarded its teaching to be in the direct line of St Peter. While there is sufficient evidence and tradition to substantiate this, the presumption that in these matters

¹⁰⁴ Gilchrist, S. (2015): "*Deuteronomy 22:5 and its Impact on Gender and Sexual Variation in the Christian Church*":

<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/022B-Deuteronomy22-5.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Marriage and sex may have been second best to the Apostles them, but neither was prohibited. The apostles Peter and Philip were married and also had children. Clement also reported that Peter's wife was martyred before him, and that the apostle had encouraged her as she was led to her death. Eusebius further describes the relationship between Peter and his wife using these words, "Such as the marriage of these blessed ones, and such was their perfect affection" Clement of Alexandria, Ante-Nicene Fathers. 2.541 (c. 195). Accessed at: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/> Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book III, Chapter XXX. This excerpt was found in Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 4, p. 49. Accessed at: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/>.

¹⁰⁶ On October 18th, 1929, a landmark decision changed the face of British and Canadian politics. Women were declared "persons" under the law and were granted the right to be appointed to the Senate. Their victory was the result of an arduous struggle by five Alberta women. By 1929, Alberta's women had secured many of the liberties commonly withheld because of gender, but surprisingly, women could not be appointed to the Senate because The British North America (BNA) Act declared, "women are persons in matters of pain and penalties, but are not persons in matters of rights and privileges." The women initiated an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada to make changes to The BNA Act. The women asked the question "does the word 'person' in Section 24 of The British North America Act include female persons?" The decision from the Supreme Court stated that individuals must be "fit and qualified" to be appointed to a public office and therefore only men were eligible. Relentless in their quest for reform, the women approached the Privy Council of England - at that time Canada's highest court of appeal. On October 18, 1929, the Lord Chancellor of the Privy Council declared, "Women are eligible to be summoned and may become Members of the Senate of Canada." <http://www.albertacentennial.ca/news/viewpost.aspx-id=364.html>

the approach taken by St Peter is the correct is challenged in this analysis. A foundation for that challenge lies in the reassessment of the *Gospel According to Thomas* which I provide in this account. That reassessment is described not only in this paper but in a further document Gilchrist, S. (2019): "*The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church*".¹⁰⁷ In this document I give a full analysis which describes the Jewish background, together with a detailed critique of *the Gospel according to Thomas*. In this critique I compare each saying with the relevant Gospel texts. I also include a study of the Church of the East and how the theology of this Church and the *Gospel According to Thomas* agrees or disagrees with the present day understandings of Christianity, including the impact the enforcement of gender complementarity has had on the Church. I show that in form and structure the Gospel of Thomas follows a Jewish Midrash tradition rather than a later Christian Gnostic text. However this text has also been subject to later interpolations which arise from disagreements between the Apostles Peter, Thomas and Paul themselves. I also indicate how these came to a head at the Council of Jerusalem in AD 48. Taking these interpolations into account I also examine the statement made in the first saying in the Gospel, which declares that; "*These are the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke, and that Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down*" to see how well it satisfies that claim. Nevertheless it is important to note that this is an exploratory investigation which examines the influence that the *Gospel according to Thomas* has had, both on the Church of the East, and on the Western Church, regardless of who the author was. It is also well known from the bible itself that there was a disagreement between Peter, James the Just and the other "*Judaisers*" at the time of the Council of Jerusalem, who would require the gentile Christians to conform to the laws of the Torah to the fullest possible extent and those who opposed this, like Paul and Thomas. One of the effects of including the *Gospel according to Thomas* in this argument is to make explicit, rather than implicit, knowledge that already exists¹⁰⁸

4:7: Consequences for Today

There are many societies today where gender complementarity is socially, legally and religiously enforced. Yet Jesus condemned the social, religious and legal enforcement of it many times. However: what Jesus did not do, was to condemn gender complementarity. Therefore society and the world should delight in its affirmation through relationships, love marriage and family life. For most people maintaining this complementarity is the most natural way for them to live their lives. However the social legal and religious enforcement of it destroys opportunities that might otherwise be available; and true equality is denied. The statement by Paul in Galatians 3:28 demands true equality for all people. Sayings 22 and 114 in the *Gospel According to Thomas* make it clear that this demands complete equality between all men and women in all activities and responsibilities, in social roles, in public and private ministries, and in every other act. Excluding any man or any woman from any role or activity because of gender on its own, regardless of their moral attitudes or their competences or their ability to carry out any role or act, is making a tribal distinction which is based on identity alone, and that is and should be under attack. This is more than just about gender equality. There are many churches in the world today which earnestly seek to give women equal esteem and are also horrified by sexual abuse, but if they adopt any form of gender complementarity which gives only men the public and organising role, they give men the power and authority, and make women just the accompanying act.

The Gospel message which Jesus brought was not just one of Christian Love. It was a message which attacked the abuses of power in society. Jesus could hardly have spoken more clearly on this

¹⁰⁷ Gilchrist, S. (2019): "*The Gospel of Thomas: Its Origins and Consequences for Understandings of Theology, Gender and Sex in the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/027B-ThomasAnalysis.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ The way in which Peter responded to the admonition of Paul at Antioch does not suggest that he was the prime mover in these arguments, rather someone who was uncertain in his approach. See Galatians 2:11–2:14

when he said (Luke 4:18): *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed"*: and in section 4:3 of this document. The involved attacks made without compromise on the abuses of power by religious institutions, the abuses of power in grossly unequal societies the abuses created when men exert power over women, the abuses of power which give permission for the abuses of sex. It was a Gospel where Jesus stood alongside those who were oppressed and all who were condemned by these actions. Yet that allegiance was deserted when for its own survival in a gender unequal society the early church replaced challenge with co-operation, in order to gain society's respect.

How that transformation occurred is seen in the contrast between the condemnations by Jesus of those in authority in Matthew 23:33: *"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"* and Paul's view of the authorities in Romans 13: *"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God"*. Also the contrast between Paul's early and exemplary approach to women, as I describe in section 4:1 and in the later approaches: *"As in all the congregations of the Lord's people. Women should remain silent in the churches, they are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."* (1Cor. 14:33-35): *"But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head - it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man"* (1Cor 11:3-9): *"Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint"* (1Tim. 2:9-15). I am well aware that some of these descriptions may be by later authors writing in Paul's name, but the need to gain respect for the Church in Roman society has created a Gospel whose social message has remained undiminished, but a Gospel where the attacks on the institutional inequities and abuses in this Roman society, and also in any other gender unequal society, have been vanquished by this need for respect.

Many commentators attribute this transformation to gradual evolutionary processes as the Church came to recognise the realities of the situation it faced. However I suggest that this may not be the case. According to the biblical texts, the Council of Jerusalem was called to discuss whether Gentile Christians should have to obey the Laws of Moses and be circumcised. Despite this reporting, the Gospel of Thomas gives us a hint that much more was at stake. When some members of the Jerusalem Church came to Antioch to check on what Paul was doing it was not circumcision they were concerned with, it was about eating together as one group. I argue that the major focus of the Jerusalem Council was to decide how the early Christian movement as a whole should present the Christian Gospel to the outside world. I also suggest that little agreement was reached. Evidence for that would appear in the antipathy between Peter and Thomas, also the treatment of the female disciples of Jesus, as expressed in the gospel of Thomas. There was also a major difference in approach: where Peter supported the enforcement a form of gender complementarity that was

derived from Judaism while Thomas demanded gender equality in which men and women were given equal esteem and responsibilities in all activities, in social roles, in public and private ministries, and in every other act.

Paul's attitude to women suggested that he sided with Thomas but he also recognised that compromise was needed if the Church was to survive in Roman society. His later teaching does not show much sign of any compromise but in his letter to Philemon, which is generally accepted as having been written to Paul, he describes his ideal of a Christian community; inside which the true vision of the Christian Gospel where "*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*", can find its full expression. That should shine outwards from the fledgling movement into Roman society, and bring people to it as a beacon of light. Once Christianity was established and the threats had passed, not just within the Church but also in society around it, this should be the culture which embraced the world. The nature of Paul's later teaching, which echoed that of Peter, and the subsequent abuses of gender which developed in the fourth century church, suggest that this vision was lost.

To the present time this was the only history of the development of Christianity that has been available. However at the same time, and with the same apostolic authority, a much more gender equitable form of Christianity was developing in the Church of the East, however this was not unique, since a broadly equivalent form of Celtic Christianity was developing in the Ancient Irish Church. The attitude to gender complementarity is the litmus test which defines the position that should be adopted by the Church. Should it stand alongside men, including Peter and the Jerusalem church, with its acceptance of gender complementary as a doctrine to be enforced as the permanent teaching of the Church? Should it stand alongside women, including Thomas, the Celtic Church, and the Church of the East which demands that all men and all women must be given full equality in all activities and responsibilities, in social roles, in public and private ministries, and in every other act? Does it stand alongside Paul who recognised that some compromise was needed for the survival of the Church, but that also demands that the Gospel message must first be implemented in full within its own membership; and then in society at large at the time when it has the power to change the world?

The present teaching of many of the churches in these countries not only support this; it sanctions it and far too often it condones the abuses and discrimination that may occur. This is more than just a demand for equality

For a powerless movement in a powerful society it was necessary to make adjustments to accommodate the gender inequalities in Roman society by enforcing a social, legal and religious form of a gender complementarity that satisfied these needs. This may be necessary as a temporary measure. However instead of challenging the social and structural inequities of that society, it makes the Church complicit in pursuing its demands. In the previous section I have shown how this occurs: and how that also led to the gross inequities encountered in the fourth century Church. The claim made by the Catholic Church that it derives its teaching directly from St Peter may well be correct, but this has transformed the teaching of Jesus..... which had condemned the social, legal and religious enforcement of gender complementarity into the doctrine of enforcement instead. For as long as that doctrine continues, in any society at any time, the same problems may arise. Even though the social message of the Christian gospel may be fully expressed, and gender equality genuinely and vigorously pursued, the ability to challenge the social and structural elements

of society which provide the framework for gender and sexual abuse is denied. The attacks which Jesus made on the Jewish priests and authorities were made without compromise, but his attacks on the social and legal enforcement of gender inequality and gender complementarity were equally strong

However I argue that Paul took a pragmatic approach. In his letter to Philemon he suggests that the true vision of the Christian Gospel should shine outwards from the fledgling movement into Roman society, and bring people to it as a beacon of light. Once Christianity was established and the threats had passed, Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28: "*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*", could then find its full expression: not just within the Church but also in society around it: and that vision should be the culture which embraced the world. There were several instances when: as it must be emphasised, entirely hypothetically and in theory alone; this transformation might have occurred. One was the change in power structure that took place when Ambrose the Bishop of Milan required the emperor Theodosius to do penance for a massacre that took place. A second occurred after the Albigensian Crusade, when the military defeat of the Cathars affirmed the supreme secular authority of the Church. That such a change did not happen, and also the reason why this became extremely unlikely to happen, is due to the loss of this vision, and changes in the outlook of the Church.

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