

Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary* (Texts and Editions for New Testament Study II; Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2014). Pp. 723. € 193.00. US\$ 250.00. ISBN 978-90-04-19041-2

ANNA ORACZ

Institute of Biblical Studies, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
address: Aleje Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland, e-mail: aoracz@wp.pl

The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary is the second monograph written by Simon Gathercole on the Gospel of Thomas. Contrary to the first one (*The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences*, 2012) in which he dealt with the comparison of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas with the synoptic gospels, now he is focused on presenting this document within the other apocrypha in the second century context. What is also important is that, in this volume Gathercole interprets all Greek and Coptic versions of this document together. This gives rise to several issues requiring clarification which are, along with some others, elucidated in the introduction.

The first part of the book (Introduction) covers 186 pages. It consists of the following twelve sections: Manuscripts (pp. 3-13); A Comparison of the Greek and Coptic texts (pp. 14-23) with appended note: Thomas as a “Rolling Corpus”? (pp. 24-34); Named Testimonia to Thomas (pp. 35-61); Early References to the Contents of Thomas (pp. 62-90); The Original Language of Thomas (pp. 91-102); The Provenance of Thomas (pp. 103-111); The Date of Thomas (with Authorship) (pp. 112-127); The Structure of Thomas (pp. 128-136); The Genre of Thomas (pp. 137-143); The Religious Outlook of Thomas (pp. 144-167) with appended note: Is Thomas Gnostic? (pp. 168-175); Thomas, the New Testament and the Historical Jesus (pp. 176-184); The Plan of the Commentary (pp. 185-186).

In this part Gathercole first makes the case as to why, despite the differences, one can treat all four witnesses we have for the GThom (the three fragmentary pieces in Greek and one entire text in Coptic) as testimonies of the same work. Gathercole appeals here to: (1) the substantial common order in Greek and Coptic texts (the POxy 1 differs from the Coptic text only in that the logion 30 is followed by 77. 2-3), (2) the substantial common material in these texts (here only logion 37 differs significantly, namely, the

Greek version is much longer than the Coptic) and (3) the common Greek and Greco-Coptic vocabulary (Gathercole lists 27 Greek loan-words which appears in Coptic when the texts overlap).

In contrast to these scholars who are keen to analyze individual sayings separately, Gathercole emphasizes that Thomas can be treated as a relatively consistent work. The catch –word connection provides clear evidence of conscious editorial activity at the final stage of the redaction of Thomas. The synchronic attitude allows Gathercole to present the main theological angle in Thomas. Gathercole, following Uro Risto, asserts that Thomas primarily should be interpreted on its own terms (p. 144). Chapter 10 entitled “The Religious Outlook of Thomas” is, without doubt, one of the most interesting parts of this book. In it Gathercole elaborates on specific concepts such as for instance: the Father, the Kingdom, creation and the fall, the world, salvation *et cetera*, and describes how they are referred to in Thomas. Afterwards he discusses the concept of discipleship and social practices in Thomas, as well as the attitude of Thomas towards its rivals. Gathercole emphasises not only a soteriological and individualistic orientation of this document but also its insistence on self-knowledge and unification as the requirements for entering the kingdom.

As far as the date of Thomas is concerned, both the Named Testimonia, where Thomas is mostly mentioned in the apocryphal context and the fact that the Coptic GThom was found physically in such a context (i.e. it is placed on the Codex II between the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Philip followed by other works with a Gnosticising vein) can point to its secondary position over and against the canonical Gospels. To be sure Gathercole is aware, however, that these arguments are not decisive, as they can indicate only that Thomas was able to be exploited by different heretical groups.

The second part of the book is the Commentary, which covers 430 pages. It is the verse-by-verse analysis of 114 of Thomasine logia. It is basically tripartite and encapsulates: the text of logion followed by interpretation and notes. Occasionally this structure is fortified by textual comment, when there are Greek and Coptic witnesses for the logion or other problems in the text (e.g. mistakes, corruptions) which require explanation. Appended notes are also added. Gathercole also provides a bibliography for each saying (where this exist).

Since it is essentially difficult to pinpoint the proper cultural context for the exegesis of the GThom, Gathercole glosses that there are two main criteria for choosing documents within which to analyze it. These are: closeness in time and partially similar theological approaches. So the relevant documents are for instance: the Gospel of Philip, the Dialog of the Saviour, the Gospel

of Judas, the Gospel of Mary, the Epistle of Ptolemy to Flora, the Epistle of Barnabas, or the Tripartite Tractate (p. 167). For reasons of space, I would like to give a short insight into Gathercole's account of the one logion, which because of its oddness seems to be particularly interesting. It is logion 114.

The final logion of the GThom (logion 114) concerns the women. The main point of this logion is as follows: after Peter asking Jesus and the other disciples [them] to remove Mary from the community because of her being female and on this basis being unworthy of life, Jesus answers that he himself will make her male so that she could become the living spirit like males and enter the kingdom of heaven. At first, in the textual comment, Gathercole kindly deflates Davies's cumulative argument for taking this logion as a latter accretion, and then he moves on to present the two approaches for interpreting it: 1) as an ironical statement and 2) as a biphasic process of salvation for women (→ becoming male → becoming a living spirit). Each of these approaches he discusses critically. Providing an explanation for this logion, among other things, he examines what the "making male" could refer to here. Gathercole quotes the five main interpretative opinions of scholars from those who think it may point to the fact that both man and woman should become like Osiris to the others who think that this is about complete transformation from woman to man, a kind of "lobotomy of the female self" (Nash "The Language of Mother Work", 175; Gathercole, 612). The somewhat different issue which is addressed by Gathercole is how to relate this logion to logion 22 which relativizes the importance of gender differences. On this point Gathercole provides the text of Tripartite Tractate, which also combines these two perspectives. Another interesting parallel recalled by the scholar, however, in a different regard, can be the Gospel of Mary. This document is relevant because of including similar ending and the negative attitude of the apostle Peter to Mary Magdalene, the latter is also present in the Pistis Sophia.

Although Gathercole himself modestly states that the main contribution of the commentary in question is its complete list of the named testimonia to the Gospel of Thomas (p. 35), it must be said that the usefulness of this volume goes far beyond this. What has to be underscored as a great advantage of this commentary is the clear presentation of the assumptions made. This is not always clear in studies of the Gospel of Thomas and obviously has resulted in several misunderstandings. It must be recognised also that Gathercole is trying to stick to the facts in regard to Thomas. It is visible not only through the quite precise description of the manuscripts and codex on which the text is preserved at the point of departure, but also by his refraining from giving straightforward answers, when it is difficult to say something with certainty.

Another advantage of this commentary is a concise critique of some scholarly opinions in regard to specific logia. It might be a little bit disappointing that it is much easier to express reservations about other opinions than to provide a clear key for interpretation of this text. Some issues related to this document (as for instance its purpose) remain unsolved in the Gathercole's book, but it has to be said that it is clear why these issues remain unresolved. To conclude, it is fascinating reading, recommended for everyone interested especially in the Gospel of Thomas and in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* in the early Christianity period or more generally in the New Testament and the beginnings of Christianity.