

Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press. Paperback, 275 pages. Price: US\$26.95

**Reviewer: Rev J M Strijdom**

In this book, published as a revision of his 1988 dissertation, Stephen Patterson argues for the authorial independence of the Gospel of Thomas from the Synoptics (Part I), constructs a social-historical context in which Thomas Christianity would fit in its relationship to other early Christianities (Part II) and finally shows the relevance of his conclusions for historical Jesus research (Part III). His arguments are presented in a clear and systematic way, and are always developed on the basis of the primary texts and in constant dialogue with views of researchers similar and contrary to his own.

In Part I Patterson puts forth his reasons for the thesis that Thomas, in writing his gospel, did not rely on the written logia in the Synoptics. By carefully comparing the individual Thomas sayings with their synoptic parallels; he demonstrates that neither in terms of content nor in terms of sequence does Thomas show conclusive signs of literary dependence on the Synoptics. The few instances where verbal influence is clearly apparent are explained as due to later scribal harmonization with the canonical gospels (especially Matthew), whereas the occasional correspondence in order is ascribed to earlier oral clustering, which was taken over by Thomas as well as the Synoptics. For the greatest part, however, the Thomistic logia betray neither the unique tendencies nor the distinctive vocabulary of the Synoptics and should therefore be considered an autonomous tradition for which a distinctive social form of Christianity should be imagined.

Part II first proposes a social-historical description of this hypothesized Thomas Christianity and then attempts to situate this particular form of Christianity within the context of its contemporary Christianities (Patterson dates the more-or-less final form of Thomas as we have it to the 70's CE and locates it in eastern Syria). From the content of the sayings, Patterson infers that Thomas Christians valued and practised a life of itinerant social radicalism. These Christians were, in his opinion, wandering charismatics who, in imitation of their Jesus logia by their lifestyles, radically challenged the conventions of their society. They rejected their own families and local pieties, were homeless, took poverty on themselves willingly, begged, and criticized the political powers fundamentally. In contrast to this type of Christianity, there developed, however, settled house communities with local leaders. The domestication of Jesus sayings in the synoptic gospels is adduced as part of the evidence for this very process, while it is argued that Didache 11-13, the Epistle of James and 3 and 2 John provide clear evidence that conflict ensued in the latter part of the first century between radical itinerants on the one hand and local authorities of settled house communities on the other. He furthermore advances the hypothesis that the anticosmic aspect of Thomas' gnosticizing tendency is directly related to this social-historical

development: as Thomas Christians perpetuated their lifestyle of itinerant social radicalism in opposition to settled Christian communities with local leaders, they developed and became more committed to their own gnostic view of the world (i.e. their own anticosmic theology) which they 'found' in Jesus' secret sayings.

Part III, by way of conclusion, puts forward a few suggestions on the implications of this study for historical Jesus research. Since Thomas presents in Patterson's argument attestation of Jesus logia independent from the synoptic tradition, this gospel offers, in his view, an invaluable contribution to our critical rethinking of the historical Jesus. Not only does Thomas offer a perspective from which to delineate unique tendencies in the synoptic tradition (especially the extent to which the synoptic parables and aphorisms were reinterpreted allegorically, kerugmatically and apocalyptically), but conversely too, the Synoptics highlight the distinctive characteristics of Thomas (specifically its non-allegorical, non-kerugmatic and gnosticizing/anti-apocalyptic tendency). He concludes that the common ground between the two trajectories probably provides us with the best data to construct a picture of the historical Jesus. Since both Q's first layer (as formulated by Kloppenborg) and Thomas portray an unconventional, non-kerugmatic and non-apocalyptic Jesus, Patterson holds that 'it is becoming ever more difficult to imagine a Jesus who reflected upon his own death, and preached an imminent apocalyptic judgement to be visited upon the world' (p 231) and instead proposes an itinerant and homeless Jesus, who abandoned his family, challenged the conventional purity codes of his society by his eating habits and criticized the unjust socio-political and religious systems of his time.

Although this work certainly represents an important advance in Thomas research, the study leaves some important questions unanswered. Most important among these are questions of stratification and dating. What is early and what is late in Thomas? And how do we go about making these distinctions and according dates to the detected layers? It is encouraging to see that these questions are now being addressed as a joint project on the Internet (Stevan Davies offers a moderated survey of the discussion at <http://www.epix.net/~miser17/arnal.html> and the full discussion is available from the Ioudaios-L archive at <ftp.lehigh.edu>). Those who wish to familiarize themselves with the debate on the Gospel of Thomas, its place within the diverse forms of early Christianity and its relevance for Jesus research will need to take Patterson's work seriously and will be well advised to follow the discussion of these issues on the Internet.