

**The Samaritan Institute  
at  
The Sunshine Cathedral**

**\*Gospel of Thomas**

**A Six Week Course**

**\*Course curriculum designed and prepared by  
The Reverend Dr. Durrell Watkins.**

*"Here at the Sunshine Cathedral, we are  
seekers and students of Truth, empowered  
by Spirit, sharing the Light with the World"*

**Sunshine Cathedral  
is  
A Metropolitan Community Church  
Affiliated with The Center for Progressive Christianity**

TSI is the educational arm of the Sunshine Cathedral

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**Required Reading:**

**Any translation of the Gospel of Thomas** (some versions are even online)

Also required: A bible to compare passages from Thomas to canonical texts

*Week 1*

GTh is a so-called “Gnostic” gospel.

Gnostic comes from the word “gnosis” and means “knowledge”.

Gnostics were Christians, Jews, and others.

Gnostic Christians probably simply called themselves

“Christian”... “Gnostic” was probably used in a pejorative way by their critics against them.

GTh may be older than many books of our New Testament.

GTh is a sayings gospel, meaning it isn't a narrative with a story, but a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus. It is wisdom literature, like the Book of Proverbs. One of the reasons it may not have made it into the canon is because the councils forming the canon wanted narrative gospels (the four that we have are all narrative gospels). Additionally, some wanted only 4 gospels because they believed the world was flat, and so one gospel for each “corner” of the world was a foundational symbol.

Gnostics helped shape the “orthodox” Christian position.

While some Christians were followers of Jesus (Jesus Movements), and others venerated the Christ (Christ Cults) {discuss difference between “Jesus” and “Christ”}, still others used mythology, philosophy, and the idea that the divine light in Jesus was within all people and knowledge (gnosis) of this divine energy/presence is what was redemptive.

As the various movements grew and debated, what was finally “accepted” as “orthodox” became normative. So, even while disagreeing with some of what became “orthodox”, the Gnostics still played an important role in helping to define orthodoxy (even if it was over/against their own positions).

No group is completely homogenous, but by and large, Gnostics held at least some of the following beliefs:

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1. The God of/in Jesus was “above” the God of creation/materiality.
2. Materiality (the physical universe) is a mistake, or at least inferior to spiritual reality.
3. Salvation isn’t freedom from innate depravity, but rather, freedom from ignorance. This freedom is gained through a personal experience (knowledge) of the inward divine presence.

Elements of Gnosticism actually survived in some parts of the New Testament.

Read each verse listed from a Gospel of Thomas Text. Then read the biblical passages (including deuterocanonical texts such as Sirach and Tobit) listed next to each verse number and compare the texts. Sometimes passages from other “Gnostic” texts are cited (i.e., Gospel of the Hebrews, Dialogue of the Savior, & Gospel of Mary Magdalen). Read them if you have access to the material; otherwise, just know that those texts contain similar sayings. Discuss any similarities you find from your comparisons.

GTh:

1 – Jn. 8.51; Mk 9.1; Mt 16.28; Luke 9.27

2 – Mt. 7.8; Lk 11.10; Mary 4.7

3.1-2 – Mk 13.21-23; Mt. 24.23-28; Lk17.20-25; Job 28.12-14; Dt. 30.11-4; Sir.1.1-3

3.3a – Lk17.21b

4.1 – Mt. 11.25; Lk 10.21

4.2 – Mk 10.31; Mt. 19.30; Lk 13.30

5.2 – Mk4.22; Lk 8.17; Mt. 10.26

6.3 – Tobit 4.15

6.5-6 – Mk 4.22; Lk 8.17; Mt. 10.26

8 – Mt. 13.47-50

9 – Mk 4.2-9; Mt. 13.3-9; Lk 8.4-8

10 – Lk 12.49

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11.1 – Mk 13.31; Mt. 5.18; Psalm 102; Isaiah 34.4

13 – Mk 8.27-30

14.4 – Mt. 10.5-8

14.5 – Mk 7.15; Mt 15.11

15 – Dsav 23.2

16 – Mt. 10.34-39

16.2 – Lk 23.49

17 – 1 Cor 2.9; Isaiah 64.4

## *Week 2*

*“Gnosticism gets its name from the Greek gnosis, meaning ‘knowledge’ or ‘insight.’ It was a widespread religious movement in Antiquity, which in general terms focused on the world as a place of fallenness and evil, the illegitimate creation of a rebellious demigod. Gnostics believed that their origin is not of this world...but in a higher realm in which dwells the one true God, who, through a messenger or redeemer, has seen fit to communicate to them the knowledge (gnosis) of their true heavenly home. Armed with this gnosis, the Gnostic seeks to break free from this world and its rebellious creator, to be reunited with the Godhead in the heavenly realm...Gnosticism was very adaptable and manifested itself in numerous forms, attaching to and transforming older traditional religious systems, such as Judaism and Christianity.” (Miller, et al)<sup>1</sup>*

Read each verse listed from a Gospel of Thomas Text. Then read the biblical passages (including deuterocanonical texts such as Sirach and Tobit) listed next to each verse number and compare the texts. Sometimes passages from other “Gnostic” texts are cited (i.e., Gospel of the Hebrews, Dialogue of the Savior, & Gospel of Mary Magdalene). Read them if you have access to the material; otherwise, just know that those texts contain similar sayings. Discuss any similarities you find from your comparisons.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Miller, et al. The Complete Gospels. Polebridge Press 1992

18.2 = Note (Miller, et al): “‘The end will be where the beginning is’ – The phrase makes sense in terms of Gnostic notions of creation. Basic to most forms of Gnosticism is the notion that the world is evil, the result of a rebellious angel [or lesser god] attempting to create something apart from God. The goal of the Gnostic’s existence is to escape the created world and return to the state of perfection that existed in the ‘beginning,’ before the creation of the world.”

20 – Mk 4.30-32; Mt 13.31-32

21.1-4 – Mary 10.11 = Note (Miller, et al): “‘They take off their clothes.’ The phrase is obscure. Clues from later literature suggest several alternatives for understanding the concept. (1) Removal of one’s clothing may indicate one’s sexual indifference, sexual desire having been overcome through asceticism (2) The phrase could refer to a baptismal ritual, wherein the participants disrobe. Early Christian initiates were usually baptized in the nude. (3) It could refer symbolically to the Platonic and later Gnostic notion that upon death, the soul sheds the body (metaphorically referred to as one’s ‘clothing’) and proceeds upward to the heavenly realm from whence it came.”

21.5 – Mt. 24.42-44

21.9 – Mk 4.29

22.2 – Matt 18.3

22.5 – Gal. 3.27-28 = androgyny was considered by some Gnostics to be the original (and preferable) human condition. Some believed that “sin” came into the world when the supposedly genderless “adam” was separated into male and female. The re-union of male and female into “one” was thought to be a return to primordial wholeness/holiness.

22.6 – Dt 19.21

24.1 – Jn 14.1-6

24.3 – Mt 5.14-16

25.1 – Mk 12.31; Lv 19.18

26 – Mt 7.3-5

27.2 = “observe the Sabbath day as a Sabbath day’: The Coptic phrase is difficult. It probably intends observing the Sabbath with integrity. Criticism of contemporary Sabbath observance is, of course, not unknown in the Jesus tradition {Mk 2.27-28} (Miller, et al)”

28.1a – Jn 1.14

28.1b – Prov 1.20-33

29 – Gal. 5.16-18

30 – Mt 18.20 = “The Coptic version of this saying is deficient, based perhaps on a scribal error. The Greek version is closer to the original: ‘Where there are [three, they are without] God, and where there is only [one], I am with that one.’ Also, in Greek Thomas the saying continues with the words: ‘Lift up the stone, and you will find me there. Split a piece of wood, and I am there.’ The additional verses are found in the Coptic version at 77.2-3” (Miller, et al)

31 – Mt 13.57-58

32 – Micah 4.1-2

33.1 – Lk 12.3 = “in the other ear.’ This difficult phrase may well represent an instance of...a scribe’s inadvertent duplication of words already transcribed. Otherwise, it may indicate the ear of another, or perhaps one’s own inner ear.” (Miller, et al)

34 – Lk 6.39

35 – Mk 3.3.27; Mt 12.29

### *Week 3*

*“A lot of speculation has surrounded Thomas’ name [Thomas means “the twin”]. Whose twin was he? Was he anybody’s twin, or was this just another silly nickname, like calling a tall [person] ‘Shorty’ or a large [person] ‘Tiny’? ...Jesus was fond of giving out nicknames [like calling Simon ‘Peter’ – meaning ‘stone’...similar to ‘Rocky’ and calling James and John ‘sons of Thunder’]...Some have suggested that there’s more to it than that. A 3<sup>rd</sup> century book called *The Acts of Thomas*...contains a tradition that Thomas’ actual name was Judas and that he was one of the brothers of Jesus listed in Matthew 13.55. Furthermore, this Judas was actually the twin brother of Jesus himself! Scholars are divided on whether his ‘twinness’ is intended to speak of a spiritual resemblance or a physical similarity, but in either case...certain groups in the early church viewed Thomas as a significant authority.” (Matkin)<sup>2</sup>*

Thomas and Historical Jesus scholarship:

*“Some modern scholars believe that the Gospel of Thomas was written independently of the canonical gospels, and therefore is a useful guide to historical Jesus research. Scholars may utilize one of a number of critical tools in biblical scholarship, the criterion of multiple attestation, to help build cases for historical reliability of the sayings of Jesus. By finding those sayings in the Gospel of Thomas that overlap with the Gospel of the Hebrews, Q, Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, and Paul, scholars feel such sayings represent “multiple attestations” and therefore are more likely to come from a historical Jesus than sayings that are only singly attested.” (Wikipedia)*

About half of Thomas’ sayings can be found in the canonical gospels.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Michael Matkin. *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to The Gnostic Gospels*. Alpha Books 2005

## Comparison Chart of the Major Gospels

The material in the Comparison Chart is from the *Gospel Parallels* by B. H. Throckmorton, *The five Gospels* by R. W. Funk, *The Gospel According to the Hebrews*, by E. B. Nicholson & *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* by J. R. Edwards.

Item	Matthew, Mark, Luke	John	Thomas	Gospel of the Hebrews
New Covenant	The central theme of the Gospels - Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself	The central theme - Love is the New Commandment given by Jesus	Secret knowledge, love your friends	The central theme - Love one another
Forgiveness	Very important - particularly in Matthew and Luke	Assumed	Not mentioned	Very important - Forgiveness is a central theme and this gospel goes into the greatest detail
The Lord's Prayer	In Matthew & Luke but not Mark	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Important - "mahar" or "tomorrow"
Love & the poor	Very Important - The rich young man	Assumed	Important	Very important - The rich young man
Jesus starts	Jesus meets	Jesus meets	Only	Jesus meets

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his ministry	John the Baptist and is baptized	John the Baptist	speaks of John the Baptist	John the Baptist and is baptized. This gospel goes into the greatest detail
Disciples-number	Twelve	Twelve	not mentioned	Twelve
Disciples-inner circle	Peter, Andrew, James & John	Peter, Andrew, James & the Beloved Disciple	Peter	Peter, Andrew, James, & John
Disciples-others	Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Simon the Zealot, Jude Thaddaeus, & Judas	Philip, Nathanael, Matthew, Thomas, James, Simon the Zealot, Jude Thaddaeus & Judas	Matthew, Thomas, James the Just (Brother of Jesus)	Matthew, James the Just (Brother of Jesus), Simon the Zealot, Thaddaeus, Judas
Possible Authors	Unknown; <a href="#">Mark the Evangelist</a> & <a href="#">Luke the Evangelist</a>	The Beloved Disciple	Thomas	<a href="#">Matthew the Evangelist</a>
Virgin birth account	In Matthew & Luke, but <b>not Mark</b>	Not mentioned	N/A as this is a gospel of Jesus' sayings	Not mentioned
Jesus' baptism	Described	Not Mentioned	N/A	Described great detail
Preaching style	Brief one-liners; parables	Essay format, Midrash	Sayings, parables	Brief one-liners; parables
Storytelling	Parables	Figurative language & Metaphor	proto-Gnostic, hidden, parables	Parables

Jesus' theology	1st Century liberal Judaism.	Critical of Jewish Authorities	proto-Gnostic	1st Century Judaism
Miracles	Many miracles	<a href="#">Seven Signs</a>	N/A	Fewer but more credible miracles
Duration of ministry	1 year (needs citation - this assumes modern linear biographical methods, not ancient Hebraic methods)	3 years (Multiple Passovers)	N/A	1 year
Location of ministry	Mainly Galilee	Mainly Judea, near Jerusalem	N/A	Mainly Galilee
Passover meal	Body & Blood = Bread and wine	Interrupts meal for foot washing	N/A	Hebrew Passover is celebrated but details are N/A
Burial shroud	A single piece of cloth	Multiple pieces of cloth	N/A	Epiphanius Given to the High Priest
Resurrection	Mary and the Women are the first to learn Jesus has arisen	John adds detailed account of Mary's experience of the Resurrection	N/A	In the Gospel of the Hebrews is the unique account of Jesus appearing to his brother, <a href="#">James the Just</a>

.....  
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Tobit) listed next to each verse number and compare the texts. Sometimes passages from other “Gnostic” texts are cited (i.e., Gospel of the Hebrews, Dialogue of the Savior, & Gospel of Mary Magdaine). Read them if you have access to the material; otherwise, just know that those texts contain similar sayings. Discuss any similarities you find from your comparisons.

What is Thomas Trying to Accomplish?

GTh claims to be the “secret words of the living Jesus.” There is a promised blessing as well, “Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death.”

*“Jesus is presented as a teacher...who initiates his follower[s] into a new and higher realm of experience. Understanding and incorporating the teacher’s words at the deepest level of a person’s being is what brings spiritual perfection...What’s matters [to the author, and presumably to the author’s community] are not Jesus’ actions [e.g., his birth, trial, execution, miracles, etc.] or even the context of any particular saying. The sayings themselves [for Thomas are meant to stand on the merit of exactly what they say, or what one can discern from them; the sayings themselves] are the point.*

*It is interesting that this sayings collection should be named for ‘The Twin,’ since becoming like Jesus is in a sense the goal behind the teaching. The teacher seeks to reproduce himself in the follower. In a way, the Gospel of Thomas sets out to make a “Thomas” of each of its readers. The living Jesus, accessible to the follower through his sayings, becomes the model for the follower’s own self-understanding.” (Matkin)*

The task, then, is to fearlessly journey inward to discover who we are. This is what Paramahansa Yogananda called “Self Realization” and what others have called “self mastery,” “self-awareness,” and “self-actualization.” To know the “hidden” truths taught by Jesus is to then discover the hidden “truths” about ourselves, which presumably will lead to healing, growth, and fulfillment.

One difference between Thomas and those teachings that came to be thought of “orthodox” is the view of Christ and Humanity.

Many “traditional” Christians have a high Christology (seeing Christ as somehow constitutive to “salvation” – that is, spiritual liberation, wholeness, or eternally enjoying the divine Presence rather than

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somehow being eternally cut off from the divine Presence) and a low Anthropology (seeing humans as weak, flawed, sinful, leaning toward depravity, and therefore requiring some kind of Rescuer to save them from the consequences of their sinful natures and/or actions).

Thomas seems to reverse this view.

Thomas seems to have a low Christology (Jesus is a philosopher/teacher whose words, when properly understood, can liberate us from the trap of illusion and not an actor in an Atonement drama) and a high Anthropology (believing people, in their truest state, are good because they are innately spiritual and spirit is good).

Matkin states it like this: *“There are a lot of ways of oversimplifying the differences between Gnostic and orthodox Christian views of the world. Here’s one more – generally speaking, mainstream Christians look forward [to a later perfection]; Gnostics look back [to an original perfection].”*

Matkin says mainstream Christians tend to look ahead to a time when we will be better than we are. Believing humanity to be flawed, or “fallen”, these Christians imagine a day (perhaps beyond this experience of life) when we will be glorified, made better than even the original humans which somehow fell from grace (staining all humanity with brokenness ever thereafter). But, Matkin explains, *“Gnostics...are eager to get back to the Garden [primordial, original existence] at all costs. That is, if by Garden we mean our original state of [perfection]... Our physical existence is essentially meaningless in the eternal state of things [impermanent]. Nothing that happens to our fleshly bodies is going to be part of our beings when we finally return home to the presence of the Divine.”*

36 – Mt. 6.25; Lk 12.22

37 – For Thomas’ use of nudity, refer to GTh 21.4

38.2 – Jn 7.33-36

39.1-2 – Mt. 23.13; Lk 11.52

39.3 – Mt. 10.16

40 – Mt. 15.13

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41 – Mk. 4.24-25

42 – Is this meant to be taken literally? Or is this a way of saying to live in the world of chance without being mired down by circumstances?

43.2 – Can be read as a question: “Don’t you understand who I am?”

43.3 – Mt. 12.33

44 – Mk. 3.28 – 30; Mt 12; Lk 12.10

45 – Mt 7; Mt 12; Lk 6; James 3.12

46 – Lk 7.28 (“averted” is literally “broken” – the Coptic idiom is obscure – *Miller*)

47.2 – Mt. 6.24

47.3-5 – Mk 2.21-22; Mt 9; Lk 5

48a – Mt. 18.19

48b – Mt. 21.21

*Miller says 49-50 form a kind of primitive Gnostic catechism*

49 – DSav 1-2

50.3 – seems like code language and may be intentionally ambiguous; Sir. 51.26-27

51.1 – Mt. 11.28-29

51.2 – Lk 17; Mk 9; 2 Tim 1.17-18

52 – The number 24 may have numerological/magical/symbolic/esoteric significance (12 Tribes+12 Apostles, 2+4 = 6/the days of creation, 24 Elders, etc); Jn 5.39-40

53 – Rom 2.29; Phil 3.3; 1 Cor. 7.19; Gal 6.15; Col 2.11-12

54 – Lk 6.20b

55 – Mt 10.37-38; Lk 14.26-27

#### *Week 4*

*“Several of the sayings in Thomas seem to reflect the Gnostic desire to return to the beginning, and to end the current separation that dogs humankind. This separation, and the desire for its end, is sometimes expressed in gendered language. ‘Jesus said to them – When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female...then you will enter the [divine realm]’ (Saying 22). Gnostics, because of their ideas about how the physical world came to exist, felt the need to transcend divisions, particularly the division between the sexes, and return to a more primitive and simple state of being” (Matkin).*

How might this gender balanced perspective appeal to feminist sensibilities?

How might this perspective appeal to Queer sensibilities?

How might this perspective be empowering to marginalized people?

What are some examples from the canon of this perspective being shared within our tradition?

*“Ancient writers were fascinated by the idea of women becoming men [see saying 114]. Men didn’t understand women any better back then than they do now, apparently. Explaining the gender differences could be a tricky matter, given the near-universal assumption that being male was superior” (Matkin).*

The gender-bending language of this 1<sup>st</sup> century document may be due to ignorance about gender, but we who believe we have more sophisticated understandings of the gender continuum might play with the gender ambiguity and come up with something positive. How so?

*“...Thomas is...an ‘already’ kingdom document. If there is anything that the Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas has no patience for, it’s the idea that we should all be waiting around for his return from heaven. There is no Second Coming in Thomas, no anticipated return, no final judgment...and the only ones who will be left behind are those who don’t know themselves. Instead, the sayings in Thomas paint a picture of a Divine presence fully engaged in the world...The new world is already here. Resurrection is already taking place. You just have to open your eyes and see it” (Matkin).*

How is this understanding similar to or different from your understanding of the parousia (“return” of Christ), the divine presence, role of spirituality, etc.? Are we to be saved from ourselves or are we to wake up to our true selves? What’s the difference? Does it matter?

*“The funniest thing about the Gospel of Thomas is that when we really look at what it contains, it’s hard to call it ‘gnostic’... On the other hand, there are several sayings that look like they have been edited to accentuate the Gnostic leanings. And it’s possible that Gnostic editors at some point in Thomas’ history have added additional sayings that reflect their concerns” (Matkin).*

Conflicting accounts, redaction, editorializing, added pericopes, and common understandings that differ from later scientific discoveries are throughout our canon. It should come as no surprise that the same things occurred in literature that didn’t make it into our canon. Thomas may be the least Gnostic of all so-called Gnostic texts, and what seems Gnostic about it may actually be later additions. Does this make the text more or less interesting for you? Why?

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Read each verse listed from a Gospel of Thomas Text. Then read the biblical passages (including deuterocanonical texts such as Sirach and Tobit) listed next to each verse number and compare the texts. Sometimes passages from other “Gnostic” texts are cited (i.e., Gospel of the Hebrews, Dialogue of the Savior, & Gospel of Mary Magdalene). Read them if you have access to the material; otherwise, just know that those texts contain similar sayings. Discuss any similarities you find from your comparisons.

56 – Reflect on this verse. What do you think the author is trying to say?

57 – Mt.13.24-30

58 – Reflect on this verse. How is it similar to St. Paul saying we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling?

59 – Jn 7.33-36

60.2 – probably a scribal error. Could mean, “Why does that person carry around the lamb?”

61 – *if one is whole*: “The translator has emended the text here. Without the emendation the text reads, “if one is desolate” (Miller). Is desolate the same as whole? What are other words we could use? Empty? Open? Detached?

62.1 – Mk 4.10-11; Lk 10.22; Jn 3.35, 13.3-4

62.2 – Mt 6.3

63 – Lk 12.16-21

64 – Mt 22.1-10; Lk 14.16-24; Dt 20.5-7

64.12 (buyers and merchants) – Sir 26.29-27.2; Zec 14.13

65 – Mk 12.1-9

66 – Mk 12.10-11; Mt 21.42-43; Lk 20.17-18; 1 Pet 2.4-8; Ps 118.22

67 – Mt 16.26; Lk 9.25

68 – Jas 1.12

69 – Mt 5.11-12

70 – Reflect on this passage

71 – Mk 14.58, 15.29; Mt.26.61; Jn 2.19; Acts 6.14

72 – Lk 12.13-14

73 – Lk 10.2; Mt 9

74 – Reflect on this passage

75 – Dsav 19.7 (what does “alone” mean?)

76 – Mt 6; Lk 12

77 – Jn 8.12; Wis. 7.24-30; Rom.11.36; 1 Cor. 8.6

### *Lectio Divina*

Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.

**Read. Reflect. Respond. Relax.**

If you bring forth what is within you, what you have will save you.  
If you do not have that within you, what you do not have within you will destroy you.

**Read. Reflect. Respond. Relax.**

## *Week 5*

Read each verse listed from a Gospel of Thomas Text. Then read the biblical passages (including deuterocanonical texts such as Sirach and Tobit) listed next to each verse number and compare the texts. Sometimes passages from other “Gnostic” texts are cited (i.e., Gospel of the Hebrews, Dialogue of the Savior, & Gospel of Mary Magdalene). Read them if you have access to the material; otherwise, just know that those texts contain similar sayings. Discuss any similarities you find from your comparisons.

78 – Mt. 11.7-9; Lk 7.24-26

79.1-2 – Lk 11.27-28; Jn 13.17

79.3 – Lk 23.28-29

80 – Jn 4.24

81 – Mt 19.23; 1 Cor 4.8

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82 – This may be loosely based on an Aesop proverb: “Whoever is near to Zeus is near the thunderbolt.” Ancients thought encountering the gods could be dangerous; the meaning here may be that discipleship doesn’t come without risk.

83 – Refers to the indwelling Light that, while universal, remains unknown to many people.

84 – Here, “image” (unlike in 83) probably refers to a Gnostic belief that every person has a heavenly Self, or Twin image, which is imperishable. The Truth seeker is reunited with this True Self at the time of death. 84 speaks of the wonder one may experience when one discovers the Reality of the world of Spirit.

85 – Mortal beings are never “enough” to bring us enlightenment (or so the writer seems to believe)

86 – Mt 8.20; Lk 9.58

87 – This obtuse comment seems point the reader to “higher” realities, spiritual (rather than material) concerns

88 – Messengers and prophets are the ones who bring the spiritual message

89 – Mt 23.25-26; Lk 11.39-40 (This seems to be less dualistic in thought than some of the previous sayings...another indication that some of the more Gnostic bits may have been added after the original was written or at least that more than one writer contributed to the text...rather than suggesting spirit is good and matter is bad, this more monistic sounding quotes seems to suggest that rather than being separate from spirit, matter is a manifestation of spirit...inside/outside a unified whole created by the same Creator).

90 – Mt 11.28-30

91 – Mt 16.1-3; Lk 12. 54-56 (rather than longing for a perfect primordial history or a future paradise, this verse seems to acknowledge that the power that is available to us is the power we discover in the present moment)

92 – Jn 16.4-5

93 – Mt. 7.6 (redacted portion might read, “bring it to nothing and grind it to bits”)

94 – Mt 7.7-8; Lk 11.9-10; Mary 4.7

95 – Mt 5.42 (spiritual value of generosity)

96 – Lk 13.20-21

97 – What are we losing? What are we ignoring?

Discuss Omnipresence.

Discuss Omniscience.

Discuss Omnipotence.

If these words were a Trinitarian formula (for a discussion of Trinitarian theology, see our course called “Keep A True Lent”), what might they represent?

Omnipresence (God, Mind, Creator)

Omniscience (Christ, Idea, Creativity)

Omnipotence (Spirit, Expression, Creation)

Discuss Divine Substance.

Is it something in another world?

Is it something in this world?

Is it the “stuff” of this (and every) world?

Is it separate from what we call matter or is it the Source of everything?

In light of not only ancient spiritualities but also modern science, is there a separation between mind and body?

Is there separation of matter and energy?

If life is more unified than we have previously thought (and more unified than religion continues to suggest in its teachings and liturgies), what are the implications for prayer, for healing, for forgiving so-called enemies, or for achieving any worthwhile goal? How does that change HOW we pray?

Finally, if life is unified (rather than dualistic, see Col. 1.27 and Acts 17.28 and Exodus 3.14), how might we then interpret such phrases as “Our God who art in *heaven...*” and “The Most *High* God”)?

How has studying Thomas helped us look at some of these questions and how have our perceptions shifted (if indeed they have)?

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Next week:

We conclude the Gospel of Thomas

### *Week 6*

*"In this gospel, and this is also the case in the Gospel of Luke, the Kingdom of God is not an event that's going to be catastrophically shattering the world as we know it and ushering in a new millennium. Here, as in Luke 17:20, the Kingdom of God is said to be an interior state; "It's within you," Luke says. And here it says, "It's inside you but it's also outside of you." It's like a state of consciousness. It's hard to describe. But the Kingdom of God here is something that you can enter when you attain gnosis, which means knowledge. But it doesn't mean intellectual knowledge. The Greeks had two words for knowledge. One is intellectual knowledge, like the knowledge of physics or something like that. But this gnosis is personal, like "I know that person, or do you know so and so." So this gnosis is self-knowledge; you could call it insight. It's a question of knowing who you really are, not at the ordinary level of your name and your social class or your position. But knowing yourself at a deep level. The secret of gnosis is that when you know yourself at that level you will also come to know God, because you will discover that the*

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*divine is within you.*” Dr. Elaine Pagels (Professor of Religion, Princeton University)

*“What you discover as you read the Gospel of Thomas, which you are meant to discover, is that you and Jesus at a deep level are identical twins...that you are the child of God just as he is...that is really one of the themes of the Gospel of Thomas, that you must go in a sort of spiritual quest of your own to discover who you are, and to discover really that you are the child of God just like Jesus.”* Elaine Pagels

*“Now what is typical about these sayings is that in each instance, these sayings want to say that if you want to understand what Jesus said, you have to recognize yourself. You have to know yourself, know who you are...What does it mean really to know oneself? To know oneself is to have insight into one's own ultimate divine identity. You can go back to understand this to Greek models, which certainly exist. ‘Know yourself’ is a very old Greek maxim... that is, you have to know that your own soul is divine, and then you know that you are immortal...The only thing that really exists is your divine spirit or your divine soul, which is identical in its quality with God...And Jesus is the one who teaches that.”* Dr. Helmut Koester (Professor of New Testament Studies, Harvard Divinity School)

Read each verse listed from a Gospel of Thomas Text. Then read the biblical passages (including deuterocanonical texts such as Sirach and Tobit) listed next to each verse number and compare the texts. Sometimes passages from other “Gnostic” texts are cited (i.e., Gospel of the Hebrews, Dialogue of the Savior, & Gospel of Mary Magdalene). Read them if you have access to the material; otherwise, just know that those texts contain similar sayings. Discuss any similarities you find from your comparisons.

98 - ???

99 – parallels in all three synoptic gospels (Mk 3, Mt 12, & Lk 8), also in the Gospel of the Hebrews

100 – Again, parallels are in all three synoptic gospels, but GTh adds “and give me what is mine.” What is Jesus’ to receive?

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101 – Mt 10.37-38; Lk 14.26-27...what is meant by “hate”?

102 – A curse! See also Mt 23.13 & Lk 11.52 (“Woe to you...”). Why would there be “woe” for hyper-religious, legalistic people?

103 – An idiom for mustering one’s forces, resources, strength in times of challenge. See also Lk 12.39-40

104 – Mk 2.19-20; Mt 9.15; Lk 5.34-35 (“What sin have I done?” is a good question for self-reflection...we all make mistakes, but our true spirit-selves, made in the divine image, could not be flawed or imperfect...sinful actions, that is, missing the mark, does not make one sin-ful...As we used to say in the South, “You can put your boots in the oven but that don’t make’em biscuits”).

105 – “*child of a whore*”: The saying is obscure. Of possible relevance may be the charge, common in early Jewish-Christian debate, that Jesus was the illegitimate child of Mary and a certain Roman soldier” (Miller).

106 – children of Adam...returning to the primordial state.

106.2 – Mk 11.22-23; Mt 17.19-20; Lk 17.5-6 (trusting in our unity with the divine presence/power, we can achieve amazing things!)

107 – Mt 18 & Lk 15 (Loves the wanderer more? What could this mean?)

108 – Comparing wisdom to water, of which recipients drink to satisfaction, is common in ancient wisdom literature. Bizarre imagery is not uncommon in scripture (drinking from mouth)...as can be seen in Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation, etc.

109 – Wisdom is likened to hidden treasure in ancient wisdom traditions (see Prov. 2.1-5 and Sirach 20.30-31). We have access to more divine grace than we usually let ourselves know or experience.

110 – Mk 10

111 – recurring theme of finding our True Self

112 – a condemnation of duality? See John 3.6 and Galatians 5.16-18

113 – The kin-dom is already HERE

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114 – The Petrine tradition is not particularly affirming of women (1 Peter 3.1-6). In the Gnostic texts, Peter and Mary are seen as sort of rivals, or philosophical opponents. “Make her male” might mean, through the bias of male privilege, that she is after all “good enough” or “equal to” her male counterparts. Or, it might be a misogynistic addition (114 is after all a later addition to the text) saying that for Mary to be credible she would have to become male, but that does contradict the notion that separation of gender was problematic and the primordial human was genderless. If the text is to be taken literally, then it is in disagreement with earlier affirmations of androgyny as the ideal state.

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**Bonus Material:**

In the following pages learn about some important thinkers, including the Gnostics, who have contributed to the development of progressive spirituality.

**Some Progressive, Positive, & Practical Thinkers  
Who Have Paved the Way For Us**

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**Authors of the Book of Proverbs** (as far back as 3000 BCE) can't be identified with certainty. Some parts of Proverbs (found in the Hebrew scriptures) are identified with King Solomon, but this claim can't be verified. Some of the sayings in Proverbs are almost identical to Sumerian texts from 3000 BCE. Some of the sayings may have been collected during the reign of Solomon, others were clearly not written down until a couple of hundred years after Solomon's death. One (or more) of the contributors to the Proverbs glorify Wisdom as being a divine quality which is personified and understood to be feminine. Wisdom is said to be God's companion, and She offers well-being, happiness, longevity, peace, and abundance (salvation) to those who seek Her. Wisdom is God's first "begotten" and through Her God is said to have created the heavens and the earth. Those who find Lady

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Wisdom find Life! (See chapters 2-4 and 8 of Proverbs). Notice how the verbiage used for Lady Wisdom is later applied to Christ in the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel!

**Lao Tzu** (circa 600 BCE, China) believed simplicity to be the path to freedom and happiness. He taught people to learn from the laws of nature, to develop intuition, to be loving, and to avoid using force. The teachings attributed to Lao Tzu (an honorary title, meaning something like “Wise Old Teacher”) are found in the *Tao te Ching*.

**Sidhartha Gautama, the Buddha** (circa 560 – 480 BCE) means “Awakened.” He was born in what is today Nepal and he died in India. The Buddha is said to have had a dramatic experience whereby he became “awake” (or enlightened), and then set about teaching others how they, too, could learn to live as fully awake beings. Many Buddhists speak of the “Buddha Nature” that is latent within all of us; as we achieve enlightenment (or awakening), we express that Buddha Nature. The Buddha is regarded as the model, or supreme Buddha, but others have been thought to achieve enlightenment. Compare this to the belief that some have that Jesus demonstrates the Christ Principle that is latent within all people.

The Buddha taught that suffering is caused by ignorance. Attachment and craving are symptoms of ignorance. By learning the Truth (and practicing what we learn), we can change our thoughts and attitudes, that is, we can control our cravings and thereby limit suffering. Buddha taught and practiced meditation and gave an 8-fold righteous path to follow, which included right understanding, right thinking, right speech, and right action.

**Heraclitus** (circa 535 – 475 BCE) is known for his teaching that change is central to the universe, summarized by his statement, “You cannot step into the same river twice.” He said that all things come to be in accordance with the Logos (that is, “word,” or “reason”). Notice that Heraclitus lived half a millennium before Jesus, almost 600 years before the writer of the Gospel of John (who opens his Gospel with, “In the beginning was the Logos...[and] all things came to be through [the Logos], and without [the Logos] nothing came to be”). Logos philosophy was alive and well long before the Church applied it to Jesus.

**Socrates** (469 – 399 BCE) believed in the mind/body connection. He said, “One ought not to attempt to cure the body without the soul.” He also believed in the continuity of life beyond the death of the body. Rather than focusing on the Greek gods of his time, Socrates believed in tending to an “Inner Voice.” He was executed (by poison), but said, “You can kill my body, but you cannot kill *me*.” The story of a noble teacher who is executed but who cannot stay dead is also found, of course, in the Christian gospels!

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**Plato** (427 – 347 BCE ) taught that there was a definite energy that emerged out of the cosmic nothingness of “mind.” He suggested that this energy was the product of thought and it resulted in ideas which precede manifest form. In fact, Plato believed ideas were the source of life, purpose, and meaning. He believed souls (self-aware consciousness) pre-existed before their human incarnation and that they came to this life with prior knowledge. He believed that everything existed in relation to its resemblance to a Universal Form.

**Aristotle** (384 – 322 BCE) believed the universe is governed by [spiritual] law. He defined God as “the first cause and the final cause of all being.” Believing in the perfection of God, Aristotle also believed that everything in the world aspires to share in that divine perfection.

**Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary** (circa 4 BCE – 29 CE) is understood in a variety of ways. What one believes about Jesus has to do with how mystically/spiritually/allegorically oriented one is, or how “concrete” (or literalist) one tries to be. Historical criticism would point out that what we know of Jesus is at best second hand (and sometimes more removed than that), and that words attributed to him are never written in his own hand, but are written by people decades after his execution. His original followers saw him as a teacher and a healer. He was clearly a charismatic person who was able to draw crowds and impact people very deeply. Some people came to view him as the long awaited and hoped for messiah (a leader who would re-establish the independent Jewish state). After his death, people glorified him all the more (as people do with slain heroes), and within a hundred years of his death some were remembering him as “God” in human flesh (similar to the Greek, Egyptian, and Roman gods of the time). In any case, he was someone who profoundly impacted human history and who continues to inspire people thousands of years after his death. People experienced and remembered him as being somehow God-filled, though the explanations of the experiences vary widely.

From the evidence we have, it seems that Jesus’ message was that all people are children of God and that the Realm of God is actually within the human spirit. He also seemed to believe that God was more concerned with people’s character, motivation, and true desires than with their religiosity or conformity to tradition or even to scripture. His teachings helped people feel liberated in spite of political oppression and whole in spite of physical maladies. A word often used for this wholeness and liberation is “salvation.”

Jesus, or so our stories about him suggest, was not opposed to reinterpreting old religious views to fit new realities and to include more people into the experience of God’s love and grace. He believed the most important commandment was simply to love, and he taught the Golden Rule,

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which is to do unto others as you would have others do unto you. He scandalized people of his time by eating with people outside his social group, by being friendly with presumably corrupt tax collectors as well as with prostitutes, by healing even the enemies of his people (and healing at times when any work, including healing was forbidden), and by intentionally reaching out to and speaking well of Samaritans (who were often despised by his community).

**Philo** (circa 20 BCE – 50 CE) taught that it is our duty to offer love and kindness towards others. He seemed to be able to harmonize Plato's philosophy with teachings of the Hebrew scriptures. He believed that God directs all activity through the Logos (the power of Ideas, Reason, Wisdom).

**The Apostle Paul** (d. circa 64 CE) was presumably born in Tarsus and much of the New Testament writings are attributed him. As a point of fact, of the 13-14 books often attributed to him (depending on whether or not one attributes the book of Hebrews to Paul), only 7 or 8 were actually written by Paul (the others were written well after his death). Though St. Paul is often quoted to justify the most conservative, legalistic, and exclusionary religious claims, the truth is that Paul praised women ministers, worked hard to include non-Jewish people into what had begun as a Jewish movement (and evolved into what we now call Christianity), was open to mystical experiences, and actually spoke against religious legalism on many occasions. He never met the historical Jesus, but trusted his mystical experience of the "risen Christ" and it was that experience that he believed gave him the authority to teach. He spoke eloquently about the mystical Christ, but said very little about the historical Jesus. Paul used imagery of "unity" or "oneness" when he spoke of the unified "body of Christ," which was for him the spiritual community. Perhaps his most inclusive statement is found in his letter to the Galatians: "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free person, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ."

**Clement of Alexandria** (circa 150 CE – 215 CE) had a capacity for blending Christian Thought, Platonism, and Stoic philosophy. His thinking contributed to Christian Gnosticism. Clement believed that Jesus was the Logos, and as the Logos was the supreme quality, Jesus was the supreme expression of God. Clement believed that faith, *knowledge*, and love were needed for a full experience of the Realm of God.

**More about the Gnostics.** Gnostics believed evil could be overcome by knowledge of the Truth, and "salvation" is obtained by knowledge of the divine. They had a mystical Christology, believing Christ to be an emanation from the First Cause. Gnostics pressed other Christians to define their terms more clearly (e.g., what did they mean by "spirit" or "faith"). It wasn't until the early 4<sup>th</sup> century that a church conference of bishops (a council) declared

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Jesus to be the “same as” God rather than merely being “like” God. The Gnostics lost the battle of orthodoxy, and a more Roman Christology (that is, an understanding of Christ that looked rather like the Roman and pre-Roman views of god-men/god-women) prevailed. A significant number of faithful Christians in the Mediterranean would come to be called “gnostic” (for their belief in the salvific power of gnosis, which is, knowledge). Though the Gnostics didn’t prevail as the dominating force of Christianity, there were early, faithful Gnostic communities whose writings are as old or older than some of the writings that made it into the New Testament.

**Ammonius Saccas** (mid-third century CE???) was an exponent of Neo-Platonism which was pantheistic (belief that the divine is all pervasive... God is all or is in all...not to be confused with panentheism, the belief that all is in God). Saccas believed that God is the only creator and that the ultimate reality of the universe is an infinite, unknowable, perfect ONE. It may have been Saccas who first used “Word” to define “Logos.”

**Maimonides** (1135 – 1204) a Jewish rabbi and philosopher (sometimes called by his admirers the “second Moses”). He is considered the premier Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages. Maimonides sought to harmonize faith and reason, and was open to elements of Neo-Platonism. He interpreted the bible allegorically and minimized anthropomorphic (human) characterizations of God.

**Nichiren Daishonin** (1222 – 1282) a Japanese Buddhist monk who taught that serenity, happiness, well-being, and enlightenment were available to everyone and could simply be attained through mantra meditation. The mantra he offered was “Nam Myoho Renge Kyo” (referring to a Buddhist text which Nichiren believed contained all that was needed for enlightenment. The text was believed to be so powerfully true that simply chanting its title would impart its benefits). Nichiren Buddhism is now a major Buddhist school of thought.

**Meister Eckhart** (circa 1260 – 1328) a German Dominican theologian, believed that the abundant love of God gives birth to the Child of God in each of us. Similar to Buddhist doctrines, Eckhart spoke of detachment and he believed in the absolute goodness of God. Quotes attributed to Eckhart include: “All God wants from humans is a peaceful heart”, “Every creature is a word of God”, “Let God be God in you”, “God is at home; it is we who have gone out for a walk”, “The knower and the known are one”, and “The outward work will never be puny if the inward work is great.” Meister Eckhart is one of the medieval thinkers who have influenced Creation Spirituality exponent and Episcopal priest, Matthew Fox. Fox’s Creation Spirituality lifts up “original blessing” (rather than original sin), and the Cosmic Christ (rather than limiting the Christ Nature to a single individual).

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**Julian of Norwich** (1342 – circa 1416) was an English Benedictine nun who at age 31 experienced a dramatic healing after having visions of Jesus and Mary. She was less dualistic than other Christian thinkers of her day and spoke of the joy of God in us and of the motherhood of God. Many know her as the one who gave this now famous affirmation: “All shall be well, all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.” She trusted the infinite reach of divine Love and she believed that God is “in our sensuality” as well as in our “substance” and that body and soul are both beneficial to our experience of wholeness.

**Giordano Bruno** (1548 – 1600) taught that God is everywhere imminent throughout the universe. Bruno was an Italian poet and philosopher who wrote, “God is the Principle of unity in all activity and is the Principle of Oneness...” Referring to divine Mind, he held that Mind and matter are one.

**Rene Descartes** (1596 in France – 1650 in Sweden) wrote, “God is the First Cause which must have produced the idea of God in the thinker.” Of course, his most famous quote is, “I think, therefore I am.” He believed that Mind knows Itself before anything else. He encouraged methodic doubt, saying it “is necessary for honest thought.”

**George Fox** (1624 – 1691) was the founder of the Society of Friends, aka “Quakers.” Fox was born in Puritan England. When he started preaching his understanding of the Christian message, he often found himself being persecuted for his dissenting views. He believed religious rituals could be ignored in favor of an inward experience. He believed in the priesthood of all believers (men, women, and children) and he insisted that ministry was empowered by the holy Spirit and not by ecclesiastical institutions. He called worship centers “steeple houses” rather than churches, believing that God’s presence could be experienced anywhere. And while he was familiar with scripture and used it to make his arguments, he insisted that it was not necessary to rely on any particular interpretation of scripture, that instead, people could trust their own consciences.

Fox experienced an Inner Voice in moments of prayer and instructed people to remain inwardly calm and serene. He believed that God “did not dwell in these temples that [humans] had commanded and set up, but in people’s hearts...” Followers of Fox’s movement believe in an Inward Light, an inspiring Presence, “That of God” in every person.

**Baruch Spinoza** (1632 – 1677) was born in Amsterdam because his father had been exiled from Portugal. He was a student of the Jewish Talmud and the Torah, as well as of Kabala. Spinoza was also influenced by Maimonides and Descartes. A pantheist, he believed God to be the very Substance of the

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Universe. He also challenged people to think in abstract ways, saying, “God is not only the process of thinking, God is also the thought itself.”

**George Berkeley** (1685 – 1753) was an Irish philosopher and Anglican bishop. He believed that God is spiritual substance, and everything that is must be made of the same spiritual substance. He wrote, “What [humans] thought to be substance is actually an idea in the mind of God.”

**Emanuel Swedenborg** (1688-1772) was a Swedish philosopher and scientist who had a spiritual awakening. He believed actions counted as much as professed faith and he taught that the Trinity existed in Jesus. He claimed to have dreams and visions and even said that he could visit the after-life at will. He believed in angels and he offered an allegorical interpretation of scripture that influenced many of the teachers in the **New Thought** movement. His works were highly regarded by Blake, Balzac, Yeats, Jung, and William James. The Church founded on his theology, the New Jerusalem Church (or Swedenborgians) may have appealed to Hellen Keller.

**Immanuel Kant** (1724 – 1804) was born in Prussia and became a professor of logic and metaphysics. He separated the historical Jesus and the mystical Christ.

**George Hegel** (1770 – 1831) was a German philosopher and believer in Oneness who developed the dialectic process of thought: Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis. He actually became famous for this theory. He believed that in thinking we develop a thesis, then question it and develop its opposite, and finally put the two together to form a unity. The whole concept is of course greater than any of its individual parts. Synthesis always transcends dichotomy. It is the idea that is absolute, or real...only the idea is really real. He also believed in the unity of spirit and matter, of the divine and human. He wrote, “God is the system of relationships in which all things move and have their being and their significance. In [humans], thought, realizing itself as part of the absolute, transcends individual limitations and purposes and catches underneath universal strife the hidden harmony of all things.”

**Phineas Quimby** (1802 – 1866) was born in New Hampshire (USA) and is generally considered the father of the **New Thought** movement. He spoke of the “Christ Principle” and considered Jesus to be an inspired soul. He said that mind as matter and mind as invisible essence (or solution) are controlled by a Superior Wisdom, which Jesus understood. Long before Einstein discovered that energy and mass are equal, identical and interchangeable, Quimby was saying that mind as form and mind as solution (or essence) was the same thing. Quimby was known as a healer. He reasoned that dis-ease is really a belief and beliefs can be changed. To change the underlying

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thought is to change the condition. He described his healing hypothesis in these words, “the trouble is in the mind, for the body is only the house for the mind to dwell in . . . If your mind has been deceived by some invisible enemy into a belief, you have put it into the form of a disease, with or without your knowledge. . . I come in contact with your enemy and restore you to health and happiness.” Julius A. Dresser and Annetta Seabury Dresser were patients of Quimby and may have been the first to effectively organize what has since been called New Thought. Warren F. Evans (see below) was also a patient of Quimby’s and became the first to give literary form to Quimby’s New Thought ideas and methods of healing.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803 – 1882) was born in Boston and was graduated from Harvard at the age of 18. He was a Unitarian minister, poet, and essayist. He wrote, “There is one mind common to all individual[s] . . . Every[one] is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. Of the universal mind, each individual is one more incarnation.”

**Warren F. Evans** (1817 – 1889) was born in Vermont and became a Methodist minister until he discovered the works of Emmanuel Swedenborg. He later had a healing experience (after visiting Phineas Quimby) and he became an exponent of the **New Thought** movement. He supposedly once said, “When the chatter of the mind ceases in real meditation, then the nothing that you think meditation is the greatest something there is.”

**Mary Baker Eddy** (1821 – 1910) was born in New England and became the founder of the Christian Science Church. She wrote *Science and Health with Keys to the Scriptures* (the text, along with the bible, of Christian Science). Her philosophy is not unlike in some ways the writings of Kant, Hegel, and Quimby. Christian Science is concerned with healing, and its founder, MBE, is believed to have been a student of Quimby’s, though there was later debate about whether he borrowed her ideas or she borrowed his.

**Malinda Cramer** (1844 – 1906) was the founder of Divine Science. Her family were Quakers. Malinda was an unhealthy teenager, and she later moved to California hoping the weather would improve her health. It did not. One morning in 1885, Cramer reportedly was sitting in prayer and simply asked, “Is there a way out of my condition? Is there a Power in the Universe that can heal me?” She experienced “illumination,” and realized the Omnipresence of God right in that moment. She was healed from the belief that her condition controlled her, and consequently, her condition improved as well! She studied with Emma Curtis Hopkins and became a teacher and healer herself. She realized that the Power for healing was God, *Omnipresence*.

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Cramer founded a school and started a magazine in 1888, and she organized the International Divine Science Association in 1892 (the forerunner to the **International New Thought Alliance**). In 1898 Cramer ordained Nona Brooks. Shortly after (and possibly because of) the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, Malinda Cramer died. Many records of Cramer's were lost in the earthquake. She had connected with kindred spirits in Colorado (Nona Brooks and her sisters) who started to call their work Divine Science also, and Colorado became the new home of the Divine Science movement.

**Thomas Troward** (1847 – 1916) was a judge in British occupied India. He studied the scriptures of Islam, Hinduism, as well as the bible and he wrote about Judeo-Christian scriptures and on metaphysics. His work influenced Ernest Holmes and is still read by **New Thought** students.

**Emma Curtis Hopkins** (1853 – 1925) studied to be a school teacher and later a Christian Science Practitioner. She and Mary Baker Eddy had a parting of the ways and Hopkins opened her own **New Thought** seminary in Chicago. She taught a "Mrs. Bingham" (who taught Nona Brooks). Hopkins also taught Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, Annie Rix Miltz, Malinda Cramer, and after she retired, Ernest Holmes. Because she influenced so many New Thought leaders, she is called "the teacher of teachers." One of Hopkins' affirmations that is still widely used is, "There is Good for me and I ought to have it!"

**The Fillmores** (Charles, 1854 – 1948; Myrtle, 1845 – 1931) were **New Thought** leaders who founded The Unity School of Practical Christianity in the Midwest. The Fillmores believed in prayer and communion with God. Charles Fillmore said, "Go within...seek, ask, know, meditate, pray...and you cannot miss God." The Fillmores also believed in the healing power of affirmative prayer. Charles defined the Trinity "metaphysically" as Mind, Idea, Expression.

**Annie Rix Miltz** (1856 – 1924) was the founder of both the **New Thought** publication *Master Mind* magazine and the Homes of Truth movement. She was a student of Hopkins and a friend of the Fillmores. ARM offered a very progressive and non-violent understanding of atonement. She wrote, "The Atonement is the process and the truth and the state of being ('the Way, the Truth and the Life') that heal the sense of separation such as belief in the first place, that [humans are] separate from God; in the second place, that [humans are] separate from [one another]; and third, that [a person] can be separate from himself [or herself]. All three of these are healed by the Way, the Truth and the Life, Jesus Christ, who came walking the Way, announcing the Truth and living the Life that heals every sense of separation."

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**Nona Brooks** (1861 – 1945) was born in Kentucky to a Presbyterian family at the start of the Civil War. The family moved to Colorado, and when Nona's father died, the family was left in a financial hardship. Family members, including Nona, developed health challenges, but Nona was encouraged by her friend "Mrs. Bingham" to attend a class she was teaching. Mrs. Bingham had taken lessons from Emma C. Hopkins and had experienced a healing and was now sharing what she had learned. Mrs. Bingham kept stressing "Omnipresence", that is, that God is everywhere, including right where we are. Hearing that God was Good and God was always present, Nona finally discovered that she had been healed of her particular malady.

Brooks (with her sisters Fannie James and Althea Small) had taken to teaching **New Thought** classes and offering healing prayer in their community. Fannie began corresponding with Malinda Cramer of San Francisco, who as it turns out was teaching the same principles (she had experienced a spiritual awakening during a time of prayer and had studied with Hopkins). Cramer called her system "Divine Science" and Brooks and her sisters adopted the term. Fannie thought this made sense as the principles were "scientific", that is, they could be systematically taught, repeated, and demonstrated, and they were obviously "divine" as they were based on the idea that God is everywhere and equally present. Cramer visited Brooks and her sisters in Colorado and apparently the sisters and Mrs. Cramer continued to cooperate with each other. Nona was a pastor, a lecturer, and the president of the Divine Science College in Denver.

**Albert Grier** (1864 – 1941) was graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in science. He then studied for the ministry and was ordained a Universalist minister. He founded the Church of Truth and taught **New Thought** healing principles as well as the early Christian message of wisdom and love. He viewed Jesus as a teacher who demonstrated that the Christ Consciousness was within each of us, and by following Jesus' teachings we could become aware of that indwelling Christ Consciousness and demonstrate it as Jesus did. Grier said, "Jesus' achievement was this - he discovered the Principles on which Life is being carried on . . . that each human being is the [child] and heir of God . . . inheriting by divine right the powers of God. And to become perfectly at-one with God is the purpose of all evolution, of all development."

**Mikao Usui** (1865 – 1926) was the founder of the complementary healing technique known as "Reiki" (universal life-force energy). Reiki practitioners allow themselves to be a channel of Universal Life-force Energy, imagining symbols as they place hands on or near certain spots of a person's body (they also give "distant treatments" for people far away). Practitioners share the energy but remain detached from the outcome. They trust the energy will flow freely to accomplish whatever is most needed. The principles Reiki

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practitioners try to live by are simply: “Do not be angry. Do not worry. Be grateful. Work with diligence. Be kind to people.” Reiki is not a religion and can be practiced by people of any or no faith tradition.

**Fenwicke Holmes** (b. 1883) earned a B.A. from Colby College and attended Hartford Seminary and was ordained a Congregationalist minister. In addition to assisting his brother (Ernest Holmes) in the Science of Mind movement, he also served as the pastor of a Divine Science church. He was helpful in spreading **New Thought** philosophy in Japan through his collaboration with Seicho-No-Ie’s founder, Masaharu Taniguchi. Fenwicke’s books include: *Being & Becoming* (1925), *The Law of Mind in Action* (1926), and *The Truth About Matter* (1944).

**Kahlil Gibran** (1883 – 1931) was born in Ottoman Syria (now Lebanon) and was the grandson of a Maronite Catholic priest. The Gibran family moved from the Middle East to Boston (USA) where he flourished as a poet, artist, and philosopher. He later studied in Paris and lived in NYC where he wrote and painted. His most famous work is *The Prophet*. His writings were very popular in the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s. Here are some of his inspiring words: “All that spirits desire, spirits attain”, “An eye for an eye, and the whole world would be blind”, “Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror”, “Faith is a knowledge within the heart, beyond the reach of proof”, and “I existed from all eternity and, behold, I am here; and I shall exist till the end of time, for my being has no end.”

**Ernest Holmes** (1887 – 1960) was the younger brother of Fenwicke Holmes, born in New England. Holmes studied the bible, world religions, and the works of such great metaphysicians as Emerson and Troward. He was ordained in the Divine Science movement, founded the Institute of Religious Science & School of Philosophy (later Church of Religious Science, now Centers for Spiritual Living), and wrote the Religious Science textbook, *The Science of Mind*. Like other **New Thought** teachers, Holmes believed that we live in an intelligent Universe governed by spiritual laws, and that we can change our experiences and the quality of our lives by changing our thoughts. He called his form of affirmative prayer “Spiritual Mind Treatment” which includes Recognizing the divine Presence, knowing our unity with It, affirming our Good, expressing gratitude and releasing the prayer-treatment to the activity of the Law of Mind.

**Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893 – 1952) was born in India and at age 17 became a disciple of Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri. After graduating from Calcutta University in 1915, he took monastic vows and began his work of teaching about God and the yoga tradition. In 1920 he founded the Self-Realization Fellowship. To his most dedicated students, he taught the spiritual science of Kriya Yoga. He believed in and taught that each person

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could have his or her own personal experience of the divine. His direct disciple, Roy Eugene Davis, is still writing and teaching today. Davis is a leader in the **International New Thought Alliance**.

Because of Yogananda's continual, unbroken communion with the divine, it is said that at the time of his death he made a "God-illuminated...conscious exit from the body." A notarized statement signed by the mortuary director states that Yogananda's body had no visible physical disintegration even three weeks after his death.

**Masaharu Taniguchi** (1893 – 1985) founded Seicho-No-Ie in Japan where it has over 5 million members. SNI has become a world-wide **New Thought** movement. SNI doesn't ask people to give up any religious affiliation to be part of their system; in that way, they are inter-religious and transdenominational.

Taniguchi came to realize: "All evil things are nothingness. They could never be the product of Divine Will but of [the human] deluded mind", "Everything that occurs in [one's] environment is a reflection of his [or her] mind. The same is true with [one's] physical body", "The Phenomena are non-existent. That which is truly real and eternal is only God and [God's] manifestations. [The human-being] is truly a child of God [and] is already immaculate and redeemed." People claimed to be healed of diseases simply by listening to Taniguchi lecture.

SNI calls the impermanent and ever-changing world of appearances the "phenomenal world." Shinsokan is the meditation technique taught to help people experience the Universal Reality commonly called "God." "True Image" is what SNI calls one's true Self, one's Real identify, the harmonious and divine essence of All That Is.

**J. Krishnamurti** (1895 – 1986) was born in India and adopted by Theosophist Dr. Annie Besant. Dr. Besant declared that Krishnamurti would become a global teacher whose coming had been predicted by Theosophists. The Order of the Star in the East was formed and the young Krishnamurti was to be its head. But in 1929, Krishnamurti renounced the role that was prophesied for him and dissolved the Order. For the next six decades he traveled around the world speaking to large audiences (as a global teacher after all!) about the need for a change in humankind. Rather than promoting any particular religion, he simply spoke of our universal longing for happiness and the need to release internal anger and fear which keep that happiness from us. He understood both the power of the mind and of contemplative spirituality.

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**Agnes Sanford** (1897 – 1982) was the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries and the wife of an Episcopal priest. She became a world renown healer, and taught that the bible was more than information...it contained the energy of faith which could work miracles. She believed that healing was possible if we would “pray down” our doubts and expect something good to happen. Her first book, *The Healing Light*, teaches her beliefs about healing through prayer. She acknowledged that effective prayer principles were universal, not limited to any one religion and she firmly believed that “experience comes before theology.” Visualizing success, affirming our Good, giving thanks for our Good, imagining healing energy flowing through us, and quoting affirmative bible verses were among the prayer techniques she offered.

Sanford described God in non-anthropomorphic ways, such as the “medium” in which we live and the “Breath of life.” She called divine Life “a flow, living water, love vibrating through us, an active electricity.” She described the need to re-educate the subconscious mind so that it will work on our behalf instead of against our interests. Teaching ourselves **new thought** habits was essential, she believed, to experiencing miracles. She also believed the return of Christ had happened at Pentecost, and that Christ continues to return every time we extend love, kindness, or forgiveness in our world.

Though her background was Protestant and her theology was very compatible with the **New Thought** movement, she also had charismatic experiences.

**Norman Vincent Peale** (1898 - 1993) was apparently influenced by Divine Science minister Emmet Fox and was a contemporary and acquaintance of Religious Science founder Ernest Holmes. Methodist turned Dutch Reformed minister Dr. Peale wrote the popular self-help classic, *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

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*There are many other thinkers in history and who are still living who weren't included in this list because of space constraints (Howard Thurman, Peter Abelard, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Paul Tillich, Alan Watts, Goddard Neville, Marcella Althaus-Reid, Carter Heyward, Delores Williams, John Hick, Matthew Fox, John S. Spong, Paul Knitter, Chung Hyun Kyung, Troy Perry, Louise Hay, Johnnie Coleman, Barbara King, Wayne Dyer, Deepak Chopra), but this very incomplete list shows you how strong, how deep, and how powerful our progressive, positive, and practical tradition really is. These great thinkers continue to help us change our thinking in ways that can change our lives for the better.*

**Works Consulted for  
Some Progressive, Positive, & Practical Thinkers  
Who Have Paved the Way For Us**

Rev. Dr. Durrell Watkins

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*Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Lawrence Boadt, Paulist Press 1984)

*The Healing Light* (Agnes Sanford, Ballantine Books, 1947 & 1972)

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