

myself in my heart, or that I am telling lies about the Savior?"⁷ Levi responded and said to Peter, "Peter, you have always been an angry person."⁸ Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries.⁹ But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you, then, to reject her?¹⁰ Surely the Savior's knowledge of her is trustworthy. That is why he loved her more than us.

¹¹ Rather, let us be ashamed. We should clothe ourselves with the perfect Human, acquire it for ourselves as he commanded us,¹² and proclaim the good news,¹³ not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said."

¹⁴ After he had said these things, they started going out to teach and proclaim.*

¹⁵ The Good News according to Mary.

An Introduction to the Gospel of Truth

THE GOOD NEWS OF TRUTH IS JOY" are the first words of this document, and they convey the power of the whole document, which brims with a sense of aliveness, engagement, contemplation, and inner richness. Unlike the gospels of Matthew, Mary, Mark, Luke, and John, the Gospel of Truth does not have a central story. Instead, it is like a meandering stream that bursts its banks unpredictably. As it overflows with joy, fulfillment, and sensuousness, this gospel by turns sounds like a poem, a letter, or an ecstatic sermon. For example, chapter 19 combines the ecstatic and the poetic: "The Father is sweet and within his desire is goodness. . . . The Father's children are his fragrance for they are from the beauty of his face. Because of this, the Father loves his fragrance and discloses it everywhere, and when it mixes with matter it gives his fragrance to the light" (19:1, 4-5).

The New Orleans Council was drawn to this lushness of language. Attracted especially to the way this gospel integrates beauty and desire into its picture of life with God, members of the council by and large rejected previous scholarship's allegation that the Gospel of Truth is disembodied and too focused on the knowledge of God.

The Gospel of Truth seems to offer enough different strands of early Christian teaching that it probably was not written before 80 CE and could have been written as late as 160 CE. Its general grasp of different kinds of early Christian expression makes it difficult to place in one particular milieu or culture. The Nag Hammadi collection has two copies of this gospel, and there are substantial differences between the manuscripts' contents. These differences, the broad range of perspectives in the gospel, and a reference to this document by the late second-century Christian bishop Irenaeus indicate that the Gospel of Truth was probably quite well known around the Mediterranean. Some scholars think that it was authored by the well-known early Christian thinker Valentinus (who was accused of heresy), but as no other writings of Valentinus survive, it is impossible to know. The title of the book is most likely based on the first words of the gospel about truth, a common way of giving titles to otherwise title-less works in ancient Christianity. The concept of "truth" is not particularly accentuated in the book.

Jesus in the Gospel of Truth

The Gospel of Truth's portrait of Jesus is full of old and new details and at the same time unique in the way all these details enthusiastically gush forth. One of

* There are two partial manuscripts of the Gospel of Mary, which mostly complement and reinforce one another. In this ending we have followed the longer manuscript, the Papyrus Berolinensis 8502.1. There is another, somewhat different ending in the shorter manuscript, the Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 3525. That ending goes like this: "After he had said these things, Levi left and began to announce the good news."

the major meditations on the meaning of Jesus in early Christianity, it contains many dimensions, including a strong awareness of Jesus as a teacher of parables, developed references to him as the Word in ways comparable to the Gospel of John, calling him "the Mother," an extended portrait of Jesus's cosmic role as the one whose teachings corrected the Transgression that made all humanity ignorant, and significant attention to the meaning of Jesus's death. All of these aspects relate to other early Christian traditions, but the Gospel of Truth gives each of them a poetic twist. For instance, Jesus's death on the cross is imagined with him being nailed to a tree and thus becoming the fruit of the Father's knowledge and (in another section of the gospel) as the publication of the book of life.

When speaking of Jesus as God's Son, Truth summarizes Jesus's cosmic contributions this way: "He spoke new things while speaking what is in the Father's heart and brought out the faultless Word. When the light had spoken through his mouth and voice, which gave birth to life, he gave them thought and understanding, compassion and salvation, and the spirit of power in the Father's boundlessness and sweetness. He did away with torture and torment . . ." (16:6-8).

Human Fulfillment, Joy, and Engagement

The Gospel of Truth takes seriously human pain and error but concentrates on affirming the ways the goodness and beauty of life continue to overflow everywhere. The Son revealed to people who God is, which "became a way for those who strayed and knowledge for those who were ignorant, discovery for those searching and strength for those who were shaken, purity for those who were defiled" (16:10). The results are that "the Father is within them and they are in the Father. They are full and undivided from the one who is truly good. They need nothing at all, but they are at rest, fresh in spirit, and will listen to their root" (27:6-8). For the Gospel of Truth this is not a beatific vision of heaven, but one of humans fully alive in the present moment.

This allows them to become engaged and hear the gospel's mandate: "Speak of the day from above which has no night and of the perfect light that does not set. Say then from the heart that you are the perfect day and within you dwells the light that never ends. Speak of the truth with those who seek it and of knowledge with those who have sinned through their transgressions. Strengthen the feet of those who stumble and stretch your hands to those who are weak. Feed those who are hungry and give rest to the weary" (17:10-14).

Without ignoring issues of conflict and difficulty, the Gospel of Truth is perhaps the most joyous and ecstatic book from early Christianity. It provides a stunning contrast to the kinds of twenty-first-century Christianity that feature condemnation and dark prophecies.

A Note on Chapter and Verse Numbering

Since this text is so "new," no version of the otherwise standard chapter and verse format exists. So we have had to add our own chapter and verseification to this edition. The Gospel of Truth has been made available to the public in various formats and translations without chapter and verse over the past thirty years. We do think it also very important that there be a chapter and verse system, because it breaks up the text into units that belong together. We do, however, want to alert readers that the availability of this text in non-chapter and verse form or in the ancient manuscript form of simply noting the column and line numbers of the original document does not match our new chapter and verse format.

Recommended Reading

Harold Attridge and George MacRae, "The Gospel of Truth: Introduction," in *The Coptic Gnostic Library*, Volume I

Ronald Cameron, editor, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts*

Helmuth Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*

Jacqueline Williams, *Biblical Interpretation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth from Nag Hammadi*

The Gospel of Truth

1 ¹ The good news of truth is joy for those who have received grace from the Father of the truth, that they might know him through the power of the Word which has come from the fullness and is in the thought and mind of the Father. ² They speak about this one as "Savior," the name given to the work he is to do to redeem those who had not known the Father. ³ And the name "good news" is the revelation of hope, for this is the discovery of those who seek him.

Transgression and Forgetfulness

2 ¹ All things have searched for the one from whom they have come. ² All things were within him — the uncontainable, incomprehensible one who surpasses all thought. ³ Ignorance of the Father produced disturbance and fear, and disturbance enveloped like a mist so that no one was able to see. ⁴ In this way Transgression found strength, and she fashioned materiality with emptiness. ⁵ She did not know the truth and became a molded form, preparing — in power and beauty — a substitute for truth. ⁶ This was not humiliating for the uncontainable, incomprehensible one, for disturbance and forgetfulness and molded forms are lies, while the established truth is unchanging, undisturbed, and beyond beauty. ⁷ Therefore, disregard Transgression because this one has no root. ⁸ She was in a mist concerning the Father, preparing the works of forgetfulness and fear, and by them, to gather the ones in the middle and take them captive.

3 ¹ The forgetfulness of Transgression was not revealed; it was not with the Fa-

ther. ² Forgetfulness did come from the Father, though if it came into being it was because of him. ³ What comes into being in him is knowledge, which appeared so that forgetfulness might be dissolved and the Father might be known. ⁴ Forgetfulness came into being because the Father was not known, so when the Father comes to be known, forgetfulness, from that time on, will not exist.

The Good News and Hidden Mystery of Jesus

4 ¹ This is the good news of the one whom they seek, revealed to those filled through the mercies of the Father. ² Through the hidden mystery, Jesus Christ shone to the ones in the darkness of forgetfulness. ³ He enlightened them and showed them a way. The way he taught them is truth. ⁴ Because of this Transgression was angry with him and pursued him. She was distressed by him and left barren.

⁵ He was nailed to a tree and became the fruit of the Father's knowledge. ⁶ It did not cause destruction when it was eaten, but it caused those who ate it to come into being and find contentment within its discovery. ⁷ And he discovered them in himself, and they discovered him in themselves — the uncontainable, the unknowable Father, the one who is full and made all things. ⁸ All things are in him and all things have need of him.

5 ¹ Though he kept their fullness within himself, which he did not give to everything, the Father was not jealous. ² For what jealousy is there between him and

his members? ³ For if the generations had received their fullness, they would not be able to come to the Father. ⁴ He kept their fullness within himself, giving it them to bring back to him with full, unified knowledge. ⁵ He is the one who ordered all things and all things are in him. ⁶ Everything was in need of him, like someone who is not known but desires to be known and loved. ⁷ For what do all things need if not knowledge of the Father?

6 ¹ In their hearts the living book of the living was revealed. ² It was written in the thought and mind of the Father and, since the beginning of all things, was in his incomprehensibility. ³ This book was impossible to take because it was placed there for the one to take it to be killed. ⁴ No one would have appeared from among those who trust in salvation if that book had not appeared. ⁵ Because of this, the compassionate, faithful Jesus was patient. ⁶ He accepted sufferings until he took up that book, since he knows that his death is life for many. ⁷ Like a will not yet opened, the fortune of the dead master's house is hidden; so too all things which were hidden while the Father of everything was invisible, but which come from within him, from whom every way comes forth. ⁸ Because of this, Je-

sus appeared and clothed himself in that book. ⁹ He was nailed to a tree and published as the Father's edict on the cross. Oh, what a great teaching! ¹⁰ He drew himself down from death, clothing himself in never-ending life. ¹¹ He stripped off the perishable rags and put on imperishability, which no one can take away from him.

7 ¹ When he entered empty ways of fear, he passed through those stripped by forgetfulness. ² He is knowledge and fullness, and he promises the things that are in the heart and teaches those who will learn. ³ And those who will learn are the living who are written in the book of the living. ⁴ They learn about themselves and receive instruction from the Father and return to him again. ⁵ Since the fullness of all things is in the Father, all things must go up to him. ⁶ Then, if they have knowledge, they receive what is their own and he draws them to him. ⁷ For they who are ignorant are in need and their need is great, since they need what will fill them. ⁸ Since the fullness of all things dwells in the Father, all things must go up to him and each one receives what is hers. ⁹ He already inscribed these things, having prepared to give them to those who came from him.

The Father Calls the Names of Those with Knowledge

8 ¹ Those whose names he already knew were called at the end, so that those who have knowledge are the ones whose names the Father recites. ² For those whose names have not been spoken are ignorant. ³ How could they hear if their names had not been called? ⁴ For those who are ignorant until the end are creatures of forgetfulness and will dissolve with it. ⁵ If not, why do these arrogant

them. ¹² And there was empty ignorance as if they were sleeping and found themselves in disturbing dreams — running someplace or powerless while pursued, coming to blows or themselves beaten, falling from heights or flying through air without wings. ¹³ Or sometimes as if people are trying to kill them or they are killing their neighbors, smeared with their blood. ¹⁴ Until the time, after having all these dreams, they awaken. ¹⁵ Those in the midst of all this confusion see nothing for these things are nothing.

15 ¹ Such are those who cast ignorance from themselves like sleep. ² They do not consider it anything or its works as real things, but leave them behind like a dream in the night. ³ Knowledge of the Father they value as the dawn. ⁴ Each one acted as if asleep when he was without knowledge. ⁵ And this is the way he comes to knowledge — as if awakened. ⁶ Good for the one who returns to one's self and awakens. ⁷ Blessed is the one who has opened the eyes of the blind. ⁸ And when this one awakened, the Spirit pursued in haste. ⁹ Having given its hand to those spread on the ground, it set them on their feet — for they had not yet arisen.

Knowledge of the Father and Revelation of the Child

16 ¹ Knowledge of the Father and the revelation of his Child gave them means of knowing. ² For when they saw him and heard him, he let them taste him and smell him and touch the beloved Child. ³ When he appeared, telling them about the Father — the uncontainable one — he breathed into them what is in the thought, doing his will. ⁴ When they received the light, many turned to him, for the material ones were strangers, and they did not see his image and did not know him. ⁵ For

he came in the form of flesh and nothing blocked his path, for incorruptibility is ungraspable.

⁶ He spoke new things while speaking what is in the Father's heart and brought out the faultless Word. ⁷ When the light had spoken through his mouth and voice, which gave birth to life, he gave them thought and understanding, compassion and salvation, and the spirit of power in the Father's boundlessness and sweetness. ⁸ He did away with torture and torment for they caused those needing compassion, those in transgression and bonds, to stray from his face. ⁹ He dissolved them with power and reproached them with knowledge. ¹⁰ He became a way for those who strayed and knowledge for those who were ignorant, discovery for those searching and strength for those who were shaken, purity for those who were defiled.

The Parable of the Sheep

17 ¹ He is the shepherd who left behind the ninety-nine sheep that had not strayed, and went and searched for the one who had gone astray. ² He rejoiced when he found it; for ninety-nine is a number in the left hand which holds it. ³ When the one is found, the whole number moves to the right hand. In this way, what is in need of one — that is, the whole right hand — draws that which it needs and takes it from the left hand and moves it to the right so the number becomes one hundred. ⁴ This is the sign of the sound of the numbers. This is the Father.

⁵ Even on the sabbath he worked for the sheep he found fallen in the pit. ⁶ He saved the life of the sheep — he brought it up from the pit. ⁷ Understand this in your hearts, children of the heart's knowledge. ⁸ For what is the sabbath? ⁹ A day on which it is inappropriate for salvation to be idle. ¹⁰ Speak of the day from above which has no night and of the per-

fect light that does not set. ¹¹ Say then from the heart that you are the perfect day and within you dwells the light that never ends. ¹² Speak of the truth with those who seek it and of knowledge with those who have sinned through their transgressions. ¹³ Strengthen the feet of those who stumble and stretch your hands to those who are weak. ¹⁴ Feed those who are hungry and give rest to the weary. ¹⁵ Raise those who wish to arise and awaken those who sleep — for you all are understanding drawn forth. ¹⁶ If strength does these things, strength becomes stronger.

18 ¹ Be concerned with yourselves. ² Do not be concerned with things you have cast from yourselves. ³ Do not return to eat what you have vomited. ⁴ Do not be rotten. ⁵ Do not be worms, for you have already shaken it off. ⁶ Do not become a place for the devil, for you have already left him barren. ⁷ Do not strengthen barriers that are falling away for support. ⁸ For the lawless one is nothing. ⁹ Treat one as this more fiercely than the just. ¹⁰ For the lawless person does his works as a lawless one and the just person does his work among others. ¹¹ Do then what the Father desires, for you are from him.

The Father's Sweetness

19 ¹ For the Father is sweet and within his desire is goodness. ² He knows what is yours in which you might find rest. ³ For by the fruits one knows what is yours. ⁴ The Father's children are his fragrance for they are from the beauty of his face. ⁵ Because of this, the Father loves his fragrance and discloses it everywhere, and when it mixes with matter it gives his fragrance to the light. ⁶ And in his tranquil-

ity he makes it surpass every form and every sound. ⁷ For ears do not smell the fragrance, but it is breath and spirit* that smells and draws the fragrance to itself, is immersed† in the Father's fragrance. ⁸ It harbors it and takes it to the place it came from, from the first fragrance which has become cold — something in psychic form. ⁹ It is like cold water which has flowed into loose earth. ¹⁰ Those who see it think it is simply earth. ¹¹ Afterward, it evaporates and dissolves again; when a breath of wind draws it, it becomes warm. ¹² So the cold fragrances are from division. ¹³ Trust came for this reason — to dissolve division. ¹⁴ And it brought the warm fullness of love so that the cold might not return and that there might be a unity of perfect thought.

The Good News of Fullness

20 ¹ This is the Word of the good news of the discovery of fullness for those who await the salvation coming from above. ² Their hope, toward which they stretch, is stretching toward them — they whose image is light with no shadow in it. ³ Then, at this time, fullness is about to come. ⁴ The need of matter did not come through the boundlessness of the Father, who came to give time to need. ⁵ Of course no one is able to say that the imperishable one would come in this way. ⁶ The Father's depth was multiplied and Transgression's thought did not come through him. ⁷ It is a thing that falls and a thing easily set up-right in the discovery of the one who has (already) come to that which he wants to return. ⁸ For the return is called repentance. ⁹ This is the reason imperishability breathed out. ¹⁰ It followed the one who

* The Greek word here, *pneuma*, expresses both "breath" and "spirit."

† The Coptic word here, *ōris*, can be associated with baptism.

sinned so that the sinner might rest. ¹¹ For forgiveness is what remains for the light in the midst of need, the Word of fullness. ¹² For the physician rushes to the place where there is sickness because that is the physician's desire. ¹³ The one in need, then, does not hide it — for one has what the other needs. ¹⁴ So fullness — which has no need but fills need — gives from itself to fill each person's need so that she might receive grace. ¹⁵ When one was in need she had no grace. ¹⁶ Because of this, a contracting happens in the place where there was no grace. ¹⁷ When that which was contracted was received, it was revealed that the one in need was fullness. ¹⁸ This is the discovery of the light of truth which rose upon one like this — that it is unchanging.

21 ¹ For this reason, they said of Christ the Anointed One, in their midst: "Seek, and those who are troubled will return, and he will anoint them with ointment." ² The ointment is the mercy of the Father, who will have mercy on them. ³ Those who are anointed are full. ⁴ For full jars are the ones that are usually coated. ⁵ But when the coating of one is dissolved, it is emptied and the cause of its lack is the place where the ointment is released. ⁶ For a breath of wind, and the power with it, draws it. ⁷ But from the one not lacking, no coating is removed nor is it emptied, but what it lacks the perfect Father fills again. ⁸ He is good. He knows his seedlings for he sowed them in his paradise. And his paradise is his place of rest. ⁹ This is the fullness of the Father's thought, and these are the words of his meditation. ¹⁰ Each of his words is the work of his one desire in the revelation of

his Word. ¹¹ Since they were in the depths of his thought, the Word — which was the first to come forth — revealed them along with mind, which speaks the one Word in silent grace. ¹² It was called "thought" since they dwelled in it before being revealed. ¹³ It happened that he was first to come forth when the desire of the one who desired willed it. ¹⁴ And desire is what the Father rests in and what pleases him.

22 ¹ Nothing happens without him nor does anything happen without the Father's desire, but his desire is incomprehensible. ² His footprint is desire and no one can know him nor does he exist for people to observe in order to grasp him. ³ But when he desires, what he desires is this — even if the sight does not please them in any way before God — the desire of the Father. ⁴ For he knows the beginning of all and their end — for at their end he will greet their faces. ⁵ And the end is the acceptance of knowledge about the one who is hidden. ⁶ And this one is the Father, from whom the beginning came and to whom all will return. ⁷ They have come forth from him and appeared for the glory and joy of his name.

The Name of the Father

23 ¹ The name of the Father is the Child. ² It was he who, in the beginning, gave a name to the one who came from him, who was himself. ³ And he birthed him as a child. ⁴ He gave him his name which belonged to him. ⁵ All that exists with him belongs to the Father. ⁶ The name belongs to him; the child belongs to him. ⁷ It is possible to see the Child, but the name

cannot be seen for it alone is the mystery of the invisible, which comes to ears completely filled with it by him. ⁸ For they do not speak the Father's name, but it is revealed through a child. ⁹ In this way, the name is great.

¹⁰ Who, then, can recite his name — the great name — except for him alone to whom the name belongs, and the children of the name, in whom the Father's name rests and in turn who rest themselves in his name? ¹¹ Since the Father is not begotten, he alone is the one who birthed him to himself as a name before he set the generations in order, so that the name of the Father might have authority over them as Lord. ¹² This is the name of truth which is secure in his command in perpetual power. ¹³ For the name is not simply words or name-making, but his name is invisible.

24 ¹ He gave a name to him alone for he alone saw him. ² It is he alone who has the power to name him. ³ For one who does not exist has no name — for what name is given to one who does not exist? ⁴ One who exists also exists with his name — he alone knows it and alone has given him a name. ⁵ "The Father is the Child" is his name. He did not hide it in himself, but it existed. ⁶ The Child alone gave a name. The name, then, belongs to the Father, as the name of the Father is the Child. ⁷ Since there would compassion find a name outside the Father?

⁸ No doubt they will say to their neighbor, "Who gives a name to the one who existed before himself? ⁹ Do children not receive names from the ones who birthed them?" ¹⁰ First, we should think about this — what is the name? It is the name in truth. ¹¹ It, then, is the name from the Father for it is the decisive name. ¹² He did not receive the name on loan, like others, according to the form in which each one is created. ¹³ This is the decisive name. There is no

one else who gave it to him. ¹⁴ But he is unnamable, indescribable, until the time when the one who is full spoke of him alone.

25 ¹ He is the one who has power to speak his name and see him. ² It pleased him that his beloved name should be his child and gave the name to him who came forth from the depths. ³ He told his secret, knowing that the Father is without evil. ⁴ Because of this, he brought him forth to speak about both the place and his resting place from which he had come, and to glorify the fullness, the greatness of this name, and the sweetness of the Father.

The Place of Fullness and Rest

26 ¹ Each one will speak about the place he came from and will hasten to return again to the place he was made to stand, and to taste from that place, receiving nourishment and growth. ² This place of rest is his fullness. ³ All the Father's bounties are fullnesses — the root of his bounty is in the one who caused all of them to grow from within himself. ⁴ He gave them their destinies. Each one appears so that through her own thought they might be filled. ⁵ For the place to which they send their thought — that place is the root, which takes them above all the heights to the Father.

⁶ They hold his head, which is rest for them, and they grasp him, approaching him as if to receive kisses from his face. ⁷ But they do not reveal this. For they did not exalt themselves or need the Father's glory. ⁸ They did not think of him as small or bitter or wrathful. He is without evil, tranquil, and sweet. ⁹ He knows all ways before they exist, and has no need of instruction.

27 ¹ This is the way of those who hold something of the immeasurable great-

* The Coptic word here, *iōhs*, expresses both "anointing" and "pouring" or "smearing," connecting the covering or sealing of the jars with anointing.

ness from above. ² They stretch toward the full one alone, who is a Mother for them.* ³ They do not descend into Hades nor do they have envy or groaning. ⁴ They do not have death within themselves, but they rest in the one who rests. ⁵ They are not troubled or twisted around the truth, but they are truth. ⁶ And the Father is within them and they are in the Father. ⁷ They are full and undivided from the one who is truly good. ⁸ They need nothing at all, but they are at rest, fresh in spirit, and will listen to their root. ⁹ They will concern themselves with those things in which they will find their root and not suffer loss to their souls. ¹⁰ This is the place of the blessed. This is their place.

¹¹ May others in their places know that it is inappropriate for me, having come to the place of rest, to say another thing. ¹² It is there I shall dwell and be engaged in every moment with the Father of all things and the true brothers and sisters upon whom the love of the Father flows and in whose midst no need of him exists. ¹³ They are the ones who appear in truth and dwell in true and never-ending life. ¹⁴ They speak of the perfect light, filled with the Father's seed, which is in his heart and in the fullness. ¹⁵ His spirit rejoices in it and glorifies the one in whom it dwells. ¹⁶ He is good and his children are full and worthy of his name. ¹⁷ For he is the Father and it is children like this that he loves.

THE WRITINGS OF PAUL AND AN INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

* Or "who is there for them."