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**The Gospel of Thomas and Plato. A Study of the Impact of Platonism on the “Fifth Gospel.” ,
 written by Ivan Miroshnikov**

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Ivan Miroshnikov. *The Gospel of Thomas and Plato. A Study of the Impact of Platonism on the "Fifth Gospel."* NHMS 93; Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2018. Pp. ix + 324. €121 / \$146. ISBN: 978-90-04-36728-9.

Even a brief glance at the *Nag Hammadi Bibliography Online* shows that the Gospel of Thomas is the most studied document from the Nag Hammadi collection, discovered around 1945. Why has this tiny assemblage of fragments attributed to "the living Jesus" received so much attention? Ivan Miroshnikov's book, *The Gospel of Thomas and Plato*, does not attempt to give an answer to this question.

The volume under review is published with Brill in the prestigious collection *Nag Hammadi and the Manichaean Studies*, dedicated to the assemblages of fragments discovered near Nag Hammadi. This book is Miroshnikov's revised doctoral thesis defended at the University of Helsinki in 2016. As clearly stated in the title, this book suggests an expansion of Patterson's idea that the voice of Thomas is Platonic. One can read here how and why Thomas has suffered from the "impact" of one of the most influent and dominant trends of thought in the history of human thought.

Miroshnikov's volume has eight chapters and approximately each chapter develops and envelops a topic identified in exactly 16.666% of the fragments of Thomas, namely 4, 7, 11, 16, 18, 22, 23, 29, 49, 50, 56, 61, 75, 80, 83, 84, 87, 106, and 112. Within the useful insights offered by the author, the reader has the opportunity to encounter a tripartite display. First, a quasi-philological treatment of concepts such as the world, the body and the soul, oneness, stability, immutability and indivisibility. Secondly, a review on the analysis of the "Thomasine metaphysics of the Image," and thirdly, a layer of analysis which provides a thoroughly and careful analysis of the "Platonist Background" of Thomas.

The author enjoys displaying the presumable scene, offering an introduction and giving a shape to the complex world of Middle Platonism colliding with the nascent Christianities. Strategically, there are condensed summaries of some of the most recent results from the scholarship on Platonism, Middle Platonism, and "the impact" of Platonism on the early Christian literature. Assessments are predominantly from the perspective of New Testament scholarship's readings of the Greek philosophical tradition. The author's position is in-between the views under scrutiny and remains unspecified until the end of the volume. In chapters two and three he deals with "the Platonist impact on the Thomasine views of the phenomenal realm" (3), namely the world as a body and bodily existence in general (45).

For the next four chapters, he has a more comprehensive strategy, namely, to "deal with Thomasine and Platonist views on ultimate reality and assimilation

to the divine" (3). In the last chapter, he allotted space to discuss "the impact" of Platonism on the Thomasine metaphysics of the image, because "the image" is relevant in the process of understanding the Thomasine views on the mundane and the divine (3–4). One can notice the constant repetition of the word "impact." The author intends to persuade his readers that "the impact" was decisive. The reader has to ask why does the author assume that Thomas' *similarity* with other ancient textualities is relevant in this particular case? However, by emphasizing possible parallels with the Platonist tradition, the author does not clarify or explain at all the reasons behind such 'similarities.' Miroshnikov is in a methodological loop and is repeating what other scholars have already claimed. One can ask how it is possible to read this textual assemblage as a whole (his research takes into consideration only 16.666 % of Thomas) if one focuses only on the so-called 'influences' that this textual assemblage has supposedly suffered? The analysis on the 'Platonizing tendencies' (1) on Thomas is not solved in this volume. It remains as an incomplete hypothesis. The reader remains with the promise of a 'better insight thereto' (2).

For the author, Thomas "intends" to engage in a debate with the Platonist tradition and it "agrees" with the Platonists on several issues (50). However, even if he walks the reader through a systematic arrangement of summaries of particular aspects of ancient philosophy, the intended connection with Thomas's background remains just an undeveloped scholarly conjecture (60–62). The author brings no arguments and does not demonstrate how Thomas "uses" Platonist premises in order to engage in a dialogue with Platonism (69). It seems that for Miroshnikov, without clarifying the nature of this textual assemblage, the layered textuality that Thomas shows is not something original to its milieu. This content is for him definitely Platonic. Why? If this can be demonstrated, what does one gain? Furthermore, how fertile would this approach be for further research on Thomas? Even if the main hypothesis about the importance of Platonism for the further understanding of Thomas is compelling, the author does not manage to really solve the puzzle of Thomas and emphasize the path from the surrounding Platonism to its internal structure.

The image that this volume paints is limited only to a reading in a one-way direction, namely from Platonism to Thomas. What one can identify here is the author's attempt to impose a conventional and proximate influence on an unconventional textual assemblage. The author has no dialogue whatsoever with Thomas, he just reads Platonism. Besides, it is odd to assume that we have here "a careful reading" and that would make a compelling case for the author's viewpoint (81). The play with all the hypotheses already at work in Thomas's scholarship does not provide the author with any advantage point in his own inquiry on the Thomas anthropology, cosmology, or soteriology.

The conjectured “indebtedness” of Thomas to Platonism is a plural path, designed to show parallels, differences, or similarities but not to build on it. A text “denotes” multiplicities of meanings for its readers, but how can one be so sure, as one can read in this volume, that Thomas stands for “a” Platonist idea? Should the multifold meanings suppose similarity or not, what the reader will come to realize from this approach is that each reading brings up new layers of meanings.

For the author, Thomas “borrows” notions from the Platonist tradition, but the reader has no opportunity to perceive a deconstructed apparatus able to emphasize the inner motion of such ideas. What does it mean to claim that Thomas “speaks the same language” as any major trends of thought? How should the reader assimilate this idea and at which point could he start with this process? The author does not offer explanations for the plural context from which he has described the philosophical texts and ideas that were temporally and spatially disseminated (214).

The author states that Thomas is “neither philosophical nor a Platonist one” (257). What is Thomas for Miroshnikov? It is not compelling enough that “some” of the Thomas sayings could be better understood through the lenses offered by Platonism. The 16.666 % of Thomas that the author has analyzed should consequently dissuade one to speak about Thomas “as a whole,” and to disseminate conjectures as possible general “testimony” for all 114 fragments. Nor can that percentage point to anything relevant about the presumed fact that “certain individuals acknowledged de facto that the Platonist tradition possessed theoretical principles, concepts, and terminologies that could adequately describe the nature of ultimate reality” (259). Thomas has the peculiarity of being elusive for scholarly approaches that defy multiplicities in favor of locked and narrow readings.

However, this book presents itself as a possible break with the old ways of reading and writing about Thomas. The fact that the author deliberately avoids writing about the old obsessions related to this assemblage sets the volume on a different trend of research and unveils a new type of approach dedicated to Thomas. Maybe this could be a way in which one can profitably battle with the hypotheses already at work in the dense and fossilized scholarship of early Christianities.

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