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Summary

D Litt (Ancient Languages, Greek)

Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria

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Title: The Infancy Gospel of Thomas as a heroic myth of the child-god Jesus within the context of Ebionite early Christianity

By: Andries G van Aarde

This investigation of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* focuses on the question why the author of this infancy gospel narrated the mighty deeds – either received as blessings or as curses – as though the child Jesus were an adult. A possibility is that the author could have been inspired by tales from antiquity in which the heroic deeds of gods, emperors and philosophers were projected to their infancy. The study purports that the answer to this question is rather to be found in the combination of myth interpretation and societal expectations with regard to children in a Hellenistic-Semitic context.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the history of the Greek manuscripts and the translation history of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* as a second century infancy gospel, secondly to identify as the most authentic text the eleventh century version thereof in *Codex Sinaiticus* (Gr 453) and to translate it into Afrikaans.

The study demonstrates that the most likely context within which this Greek manuscript of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* was communicated most significantly was Ebionite early Christianity. By identifying and examining quotations from and allusions to the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* in works by the church fathers and by comparing the Greek expressions and phrases in the Greek manuscript in *Codex Sinaiticus* (Gr 453) with those of versions in other Greek manuscripts and early translations, a Gnostic tradition in the message can be ruled out, while Ebionite

traditions can be confirmed. The child Jesus is depicted as interacting positively with his biological family which signifies salvation for other Israelites. Such salvation manifests in the identification and recognition of the child's divinity by the Israelite teachers.

The study argues that the Greek version of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* in *Codex Sinaiticus* (Gr 453) represents the genre of a discursive-biographical gospel type and as a result, the narrative and argumentative structure of this infancy gospel is of great importance. So too is the phenomenon that the narrative argument of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* is cast in the form of the ancient god-child myth. In this myth the child acts as if he were an adult. This adult-like behaviour of the child Jesus is not interpreted in an *allegorically* way. Rather, as myth, the message is interpreted in a *tautegoric* manner and explained in a social scientific way.

Key Terms:

- The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*
- Greek manuscripts of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*
- Early translations of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*
- Childhood in antiquity
- Ebionite early Christianity
- Gnostic early Christianity
- Theory of myth
- God-child myth
- Allegory and tautegory