THE YOKE SAYING IN THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS 90*

BY

APRIL D. DE CONICK

The study of the Yoke Saying has been the subject of a large quantity of research over the past few decades. This research, however, has dealt, for the most part, with Matthew's version of the Yoke Saying (11, 28-30) and its interpretation and redaction within Matthew's gospel. The version of this logion in the Gospel of Thomas (logion 90) has received very little attention; and when an analysis is made of logion 90, scholars largely have placed it within the framework of gnosticism and thereby have discarded it as a later and gnosticized version of the Yoke Saying. Studies of the Gospel of Thomas, however, have shown that this gospel's "gnostic" character is highly questionable if not entirely misrepresentative of the text. Far from being gnostic, the Gospel of Thomas is encratite in character and, as G. Quispel has demonstrated, is based on at least three sources, none of which are gnostic; these sources include a Jewish Christian source, an Encratite source, and a Hermetic source. In addition, the Gospel of Thomas often contains more primitive versions of sayings than those found in the canonical gospels. Taking into consideration these conclusions, the object of this essay is to isolate the "aphoristic core" of the Yoke Saying by making a detailed analysis and comparison of the two major independent witnesses to this logion: the Gospel of Thomas 90 and Matthew 11, 28-30.

For the sake of convenience, the following alphabetical and numerical labels for the stiches will be used when discussing this logion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Gospel of Thomas 90</th>
<th>Matthew 11, 28-30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Come unto me</td>
<td>A Come to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B all who labor and are heavy-laden</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1 and I will give you rest.</td>
<td>#1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cl

For I am gentle and lowly in heart,

D

for my yoke is easy and
my lordship is mild,

D1

and you will find rest for your souls,

D

for my yoke is easy, and
my burden is light.

Before beginning the analysis of the Yoke Saying, it is imperative that the genre of this logion be established. The Yoke Saying has long been recognized as belonging to the thought-world of Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Literature. Strauss was the first to suggest a relationship between Sirach 51 and Matthew 11, 25-30 as well as a no longer extant Wisdom writing as the source of Wisdom passages within the synoptic gospels. Norden, in Agnostos Theos, furthered these ideas by outlining a tri-part schema upon which the texts of Sirach and Matthew were based: 1) a prayer of thanksgiving; 2) the transmission of wisdom (gnosis); and 3) an appeal to the ignorant of heavy-hearted and -laden. Bultmann, in his analysis of this saying, has also placed it within the Wisdom trajectory; he suggests that Matthew 11, 28-30 is a quotation from a Jewish Wisdom text which has been attributed to Jesus. Parallels to this Wisdom speech, according to Bultmann, can be found in Sirach 51, 23ff.; 24, 19ff.; Proverbs 1, 20ff.; and 8, 1ff. Bousset has stated that Matthew 11, 28-30 “belongs to those passages in which words applied to Wisdom...have been transferred to Jesus.” Betz has concluded that in the Pre-Matthean tradition “Jesus has taken the place of the hypostasized Wisdom.” He goes on to say that the variants of this saying were originally independent Wisdom sayings which were gnosticized and then taken up into different versions in Matthew, the Gospel of Thomas, and Pistis Sophia. Suggs in his study of Matthew, Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew’s Gospel, has taken a further step in his analysis by proposing that not only does Matthew 11, 28-30 belong to “the familiar genre of Wisdom’s invitation,” but also in this logion he states that “Wisdom is identified with Christ.” He continues to define this statement by explaining that here “Jesus issues Wisdom’s invitation. His Ἐγγέλιος and the Ἐγγέλιος of Sophia are one.” The conclusion is drawn from these exhaustive studies that indeed this logion participates within the tradition of Wisdom Literature and represents a saying in which Jesus is speaking the wise words of wisdom as Sophia herself.