

SAINT THOMAS THE
APOSTLE

in

SCRIPTURE, VISIONS, APOCRYPHA

by

Hurd Baruch

Cover Art: the icon of St. Thomas forms part of the retablo for the chapel of St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Tucson, Arizona, which Thomas A. Drain (1940-2022) was commissioned to design and paint. His inscription on the reverse side thereof reads as follows: “May the Lord remember in His Kingdom the clergy & parishioners of the church of St. Thomas, Apostle, for whom this holy image was made by my unworthy hand. Thomas Drain. Tucson, Arizona—San Francisco, CA. Easter 1998.”

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ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE— SCRIPTURE, VISIONS, APOCRYPHA

By Hurd Baruch

Our Parish's worship space at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Tucson, Arizona, is replete with images of our patron saint.

Enter the courtyard, and you are greeted by a gilded statue of him holding up a carpenter's square. Above the altar in the chapel there is a dome which has a small stained-glass "rose" window with his two iconographic symbols—the square and a spear. Surrounding the Tabernacle there is a retablo which includes a portrait of St. Thomas. As for the church building, if you leave by the door to the East, you face a large metal plaque in bas-relief showing him standing, spear in one hand and square in the other, with the outline of two hands and two feet—a large hole in each—running vertically beside him. And if you exit through the main door of the church in the narthex, above you is a very large, stained-glass lunette window depicting the most famous episode of his life—his first encounter with the risen Christ—his Lord and his God.

While we parishioners can recognize that episode from St. John's Gospel, we may not know that the carpenter's square and the spear came to be associated with St. Thomas in iconography because of the very early traditions of the Church that Thomas eventually proclaimed the Gospel in India, where he had churches constructed, and he was martyred with a spear.¹ And, except perhaps when

¹ Pope Benedict XVI noted in the chapter about Thomas in his book about the Apostles that "an ancient tradition claims that Thomas first evangelized Syria and Persia (mentioned by Origen) then went on to Western India, from where also he finally reached Southern India." *See,*

we hear a homily on his feast day (July 3rd), it is unlikely that we stop to consider just how much we really know about our patron saint, and whether there are sources of knowledge outside of Scripture which we have not tapped. What appears in the Bible is only the visible top of the iceberg, so this summary lays out what is known or has been conjectured about him, not only from Scripture, but from creditworthy visions of his life. Finally, an appendix contains short notes on the fantastic, apocryphal writings of the early centuries which were falsely attributed to, or associated with, him.

I. HOLY SCRIPTURE

The most important fact about Thomas is the one embodied in his title of ‘Apostle.’ He was one of twelve men specially chosen to serve Jesus Christ—not merely in His earthly ministry, but also in the life to come—for He told the Twelve: “Amen, I say to you that you who have followed me, in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, will yourselves sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt 19: 28).

Jesus repeatedly set those twelve men apart from the other disciples, as He went about His missionary journeys all over Israel. And, at the end, He shared with them the Last Supper at His table, when for the first time He consecrated bread and wine to be His Body and Blood. And, following His Passion, Death and Resurrection, as Jesus was ascending to His Father, He specifically commissioned the eleven remaining (after the death of Judas) to go and make disciples of all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all He had commanded; and preaching

The Apostles and Their Co-Workers, at 105 (Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division; Huntington, IN, 2007).

repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mt28:16-20; Mk16:14-18; Lk 24:47). Indeed, that is why those former 'disciples' have since been referred to as 'Apostles' (meaning "ones sent").

We know from the Synoptic Gospels that, even before His Passion, Jesus gave the Twelve authority to preach, to drive out unclean spirits, to cleanse lepers, to cure every disease and illness, and even the authority to raise the dead (Mt 10:1-30; Mk 3:14-18; Lk 6:13-15).

Also, we have specific references to Thomas as having been present at three important post-Resurrection events: at Jesus' appearance at the Sea of Tiberias [Galilee] (John 21:1-2); at the Ascension (Acts 1:10-13); and at the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-14).

It is in the Gospel of John that we find unique personal information about Thomas: four comments made by Thomas which the Evangelist thought important enough to memorialize.² The first came at a time when Jesus was headed to Judea on account of the mortal illness of His friend Lazarus. The disciples protested going there, afraid that they would be stoned by His enemies. Seeing that Jesus was undeterred, Thomas acquiesced with bravado: "Let us also go to die with Him" (Jn 11:16). Pope Benedict XVIth commented:

"His determination to follow his Master is truly exemplary and offers us a valuable lesson: it reveals his total readiness to stand by Jesus, to the

² Also, John the Evangelist twice referred to him as "Thomas, called Didymus" (Jn 11:16 and 20:24). Scholars tell us that *didymos* was the Greek nickname for 'twin', and that the name 'Thomas' is itself a transliteration of *ta'am*, the Hebrew word for 'twin.' See, Pope Benedict XVI, *supra*, n.1, at 101.

point of identifying his own destiny with that of Jesus and of desiring to share with him the supreme trial of death. In fact, the most important thing is never to distance oneself from Jesus.”³

Of course, as we know, at the critical moment when the Passion began on the Mount of Olives, Thomas’ courage temporarily failed him, and he ran away with the others—but he soon took up his cross again, as a missionary, and did in fact “die with Him” as a martyr.

The second comment of Thomas noted by St. John came in the setting of the Last Supper, when Jesus was beginning His final instructional discourses. Jesus had just told the Twelve that He was going to prepare a place for them in His Father’s house, adding, *“Where I am going, you know the way”* (Jn 14:1-4). Think about that for a moment—as those at table with Him must have.

The Twelve had been following Jesus all around Israel, even into pagan territory, and they would not have been surprised had he spoken of going next to any city known to them. But—going to His “Father’s House”??? Jesus had been talking about being put to death. Did He mean heaven??? Was He going up there, perhaps in a fiery chariot, as Elijah was believed to have done at the end of his life? Thomas could have sat there silently, uncomprehending, like the others. Instead, he was so honest and so desirous of knowledge, that he said to Jesus, *“Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?”* (Jn 14:5).

Pope Benedict XVI has commented on this question of Thomas:

“We often do not understand him. Let us be brave enough to say: ‘I do not understand you, Lord:

³ *Id.*, at 101-02.

listen to me, help me to understand.’ In such a way, with this frankness which is the true way of praying, of speaking to Jesus, we express our meager capacity to understand and at the same time place ourselves in the trusting attitude of someone who expects light and strength from the One able to provide them.”⁴

Thomas’ question prompted the unforgettable response by Jesus right at the core of our Faith: *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me”* (Jn 14:6).

That thought has been a bedrock principle of the Catholic faith ever since, requiring and justifying its evangelizing outreach to people of other religions, or none. At the same time, Jesus’ reply was a non-answer; it was an answer in spiritual terms, and did not address Thomas’ question of just how—physically—Jesus was going to go to His Father.

There is much more to relate. Thomas is most often remembered for his two post-Resurrection statements. Although the other 10 remaining Apostles and certain key disciples had reported seeing Jesus again after His crucifixion and burial, Thomas obviously thought they had seen a ghost, and he vehemently refused to believe their accounts, going so far as to tell them: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in His hands and put my finger into the nail marks, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (Jn 20:24-25).

Jesus was not physically present to hear those words, but we know that He did hear them—for the Gospels are full of examples of Jesus reading the thoughts of other people, as He often did in the case of the Pharisees who

⁴ *Id.*, at 102-03.

opposed Him (e.g., Lk 7:36-50), and even of people not with Him, for example in the case of his disciple-to-be Nathanael (Jn 2:45-49). So, it did not surprise the Apostles when, a week later, Jesus again appeared to them, this time with Thomas present, and He took hold of Thomas' hands and had Thomas probe His wounds, as Thomas had demanded (Jn 20:24-27).

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "Thomas reacts with the most splendid profession of faith in the whole of the New Testament: '*My Lord and my God!*'"⁵ *This confession (Jn20:28) was epochal, for, before this moment, the Apostles had at most acknowledged Jesus as "the Messiah, Son of the living God," (Mt: 16:15-17), or as "the Holy One of God," (Jn 6:69), and they had never actually recognized and confessed His Divinity.*

In reply, Jesus confirmed Thomas' new-found understanding of His divine nature, in that He did not deny it or warn Thomas against blasphemy. Rather, He encouraged belief in it by saying to Thomas, "*Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed*" (Jn 20:29).⁶

Thomas' doubts may seem strange to us because, when we read the Gospel of John, *in hindsight*, we repeatedly come across verses where Jesus spoke in such a way as to claim His own divinity. The Prologue to John's Gospel asserts that Jesus and His Father pre-existed the world (Jn 1:2-3, 10). That was a claim made not only by the author of the Gospel, but by Jesus Himself:

--"So now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed" (Jn 17:5);

⁵ *Id.*, at 103.

⁶ See *infra*, at II.E.2, for visions of Sister Emmerich regarding this scene.

--“... my glory which thou [Father] hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world” (Jn 17:24).

Also, there are passages where He referred to His heavenly origin:

--Jesus claimed to have descended from Heaven (Jn 3:13; 6:62), and He identified Himself as the “bread of life” (Jn 6:32);

--Jesus claimed to have come from above and from God (Jn 8:23, 42);

--Jesus declared that he spoke what “I have seen with my Father” (Jn 8:38).

And, especially, there were many, many times when Jesus used the expression “I AM”—either with or without a predicate—thereby expressing a claim to divinity. For example, “before Abraham came to be, I AM” (Jn 8:58). In that case, it is clear that His enemies understood His claim to divinity, for they picked up rocks to stone Him for blaspheming (Jn 8:59).

However, it is also clear that prior to His resurrection, His disciples never recognized Him as being divine—for example, they never knelt in adoration before Him. Perhaps there were three factors at work. First, they obviously saw Him living with them for days at a time as a fellow human being would—eating, drinking, sleeping, using the latrine, etc. Second, they were committed, believing Jews, who daily would have recited the Shema, their monotheistic confession of faith, beginning with the words: “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one. . . .” Even today, it is hard for many to accept that Jesus is “God from God.”

And third, God may have clouded their minds so that Jesus could carry out His mission with their help—for they could hardly have kept their minds on their tasks or acted naturally if they had thought that the living God was among them, physically touching them. (They would have known the passage in Exodus, wherein God said to Moses: “my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives” (Ex 33:20).) That point segues directly into the visions of the Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, for she had this to say:

“I asked myself how it was that Christ’s Divinity remained so concealed from Satan. And I received the following instruction: I understood clearly that it was the most incomprehensible advantage for men that neither they nor Satan knew of Christ’s Divinity, and that they were thereby to learn how to exercise their faith. The Lord said one word to me that I still remember: ‘*Man,*’ said He, ‘*knew not that the serpent tempting him was Satan; in like manner, Satan was not to know that He who redeemed man was God.*’ I saw too that the Divinity of Christ was not made known to Satan until the moment in which He freed the souls from Limbo.”

II. VISIONS OF THOMAS AS A DISCIPLE AND AN APOSTLE

A. The Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich as a Visionary

Much additional information about Thomas’ deeds as a disciple and Apostle appears in the thousands of pages recording mystical visions of the life of Christ which a stigmatic nun—*recently beatified*—had 200 years ago. Anna Katherina Emmerick (rendered in English as Anne Catherine Emmerich), was born in Germany in 1774. From

her earliest childhood she had immense spiritual gifts which, for most of her life, were neither recognized nor admired. These included repeated visions of the entire history of Salvation beginning with the fall of the bad angels, the creation of the earth, and the original sin of Adam and Eve. Following that were visions of certain key events and people of the Old Testament, leading up to the Essene ancestors of St. Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The closer the time envisioned was to that of Jesus on earth, the more extensive were her visions, and she was able to describe most of the three years of His public ministry almost day-by-day— everything from where He was, to who was with Him, what topics He preached on, what types of healings or other miracles He performed, how He was received, and what His enemies were doing to thwart Him.

Anne Catherine Emmerich grew up as a peasant girl, almost without education, working on her family's farm and as a seamstress until, at age 28, she finally was allowed to enter an Augustinian convent in Dülmen. Her sisters in religion looked down on her for her poverty, extreme piety, and ill-health. By the time the convent was forcibly shut nine years later by the anti-clerical civil authorities, she was so physically ill that she was thereafter confined to a sick bed in spartan rented lodgings, dependent upon charity.

If she had neither seen nor related anything extraordinary, Sister Emmerich's life would still have been notable, for she was a *stigmatic*—a person marked supernaturally with the five wounds of Christ (hands, feet and side). In addition to these, she bore visible wounds in the form of a Crown of Thorns and two crosses on her body, and an invisible wound on her right shoulder (recalling the abrasion Christ had from carrying His cross). Bleeding from

the visible marks was very pronounced during Lent and the penitential days on the Church's calendar.

She was observed to subsist for months at a time on no food at all, other than an occasional consecrated Host and teaspoon of beef tea. Whether awake or asleep—if her ecstatic state at night could be called sleep—she engaged in spiritual labors for sinners alive and dead, helping free the latter from Purgatory. Her vocation was to suffer for Christ and the Church, and she embraced that vocation wholeheartedly, expressing dissatisfaction only that her marks were visible and that she had become, against her will, the object of public attention.

Although the basis for her beatification in 2004 was her personal sanctity, it has been her mystical visions that have brought her to the attention of the world. Right away, a disclaimer is in order: as is the case with almost all private revelations, the Church has not taken an official position as to whether hers are worthy of belief. The Church keeps in mind that the holiness of the recipient of a vision is no guarantee that he or she did not err in what was perceived, or in how those perceptions were interpreted and then retransmitted by the recipient. For her part, Sister Emmerich did not claim that her visions had the accuracy of Scripture—only “a human and defective value.”

She herself wrote nothing. Her visions would have been lost to posterity were it not for the good fortune that a noted German poet, Clemens Brentano, spent years at her bedside transcribing her sporadic and unorganized dictations. Eventually they were put in order and published in a series of volumes.⁷ I have studied them at length, and

⁷ The various volumes of her visions translated into English are: *The Life of Jesus Christ and Biblical Revelations from the Visions of the Venerable Anne Catherine Emmerich as Recorded in the Journals of Clemens Brentano*, vols 1-4 (TAN Books and Publishers; Rockford, IL,

tried to verify what I could, and have greatly summarized (and commented on) them in my own books, *Light on Light* and *The Coming of the Messiah*.⁸

B. How Sister Emmerich's Visions Led to the Discovery by the Church of Our Lady's Home, on a Mountain Outside Ephesus

A good reason to credit Sister Emmerich's visions is that they led directly to the discovery by the Church of the house in which, after the Resurrection, the Blessed Virgin Mary resided for most of her remaining life. It had been prepared for her by St. John the Apostle, in a mountain wilderness near Ephesus, which was then in the Greek province of Asia Minor (now part of Turkey). The site was unknown to the outside world for 18 centuries, albeit it was always known by Christians living in the nearby hills, and had for centuries been a place of pilgrimage by them annually, on August 15th. Muslims living nearby, too, had venerated the site for centuries, as they revered the Mother of Jesus.

The story of its discovery by the outside world, in brief, is as follows. In the late 1800's, Sister Emmerich's

1986); *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (TAN Books and Publishers; Rockford, IL, 1983)(this volume contains much of the text of volume 4 of *The Life of Jesus Christ*, together with a biography of Sister Emmerich's life; it is available online at ecatholic2000.com); and *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the Visions of Anne Catherine Emmerich* (TAN Books; Charlotte, NC, 1970). In addition, there is a two-volume biography of her life: *The Life of Anne Catherine Emmerich* (TAN Books and Publishers; Rockford, IL, 1976). It was written by Msgr. Carl E. Schmöger, C.S.S.R., who pieced together for publication most of the notes taken by Brentano at her bedside.

⁸ *Light on Light: Illuminations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the Mystical Visions of the Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich* (2d ed. 2023; available from Amazon.com); *The Coming of the Messiah: Illuminations of the Infancy Narratives in the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the Mystical Visions of the Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich* (2021; available from Amazon.com).

visions were set forth in print, and in 1891, two priests in Smyrna (now Izmir), although they were not disposed to believe in mysticism or visions, decided to try to find Mary's house, three-and-a-half hours away from Ephesus, which Sister Emmerich had described in considerable detail. Small parts of her description read as follows:

"Near Ephesus, John built the Blessed Virgin Mary a small stone house, divided into rooms by movable wicker screens. She lived there alone with a maid, and was visited by the Holy Women, John, and, from time to time, various Apostles and disciples. She spent a great deal of time in devotions, especially a Way of the Cross which she marked out near her home. . . .

"In the neighborhood of her dwelling, the Blessed Virgin had herself erected the Stations of the Holy Way of the Cross. I saw her at first going alone and measuring off all the special points of the bitter Passion according to the number of steps which, after the death of her Son, she had so often counted. At the end of each definite number, she raised a memorial stone in remembrance of the special suffering there endured by her Divine Son. I saw her with a sharp instrument, a stylus, recording what there had taken place and how many steps it was to it. If a tree happened to be standing on that particular spot, she marked it as one of the Stations, of which there were twelve. The way led to a grove, and there was the Holy Sepulchre represented by a cave in the side of a hill. After all the Stations were definitively marked, the Blessed Virgin made the Holy Way with her maid in silent meditation. . . . The sides and base of all [twelve markers] bore similar inscriptions in Hebrew characters"

The priests set off trying to find a site high up above the ruins of Ephesus which matched the description given by Sister Emmerich of what could be seen of the local geography by a person standing at that location; it was a spot from which one could see both the city down below, across a little river, and also the Mediterranean Sea. With Turkish guides, they went up a path into the wilderness on *Bülbül Dag* ("Nightingale Mountain"), and they quickly found a site which was known to the locals as *Meryem Ana Evi* (the House of Mother Mary), and previously known long ago, when it was a monastery, as *Panaghia-Capouli* (the "Gate of the All Holy," or the "Door of the Virgin"). They also found Mary's Way of the Cross, whose stones were marked with Hebrew lettering, as Sister Emmerich had seen in a vision, and also the ruins of a castle, mentioned by her, very nearby.

Although the site as it was found did not quite match the description given by Sister Emmerich, archaeological work, including unearthing a hearth, soon established that the structure conformed exactly to the description given by her of the rooms of Mary's dwelling. In 1961, Pope John XXIII granted a plenary indulgence to pilgrims to Our Lady's House in Ephesus, and Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI have all offered Mass in the chapel newly built beside Mary's dwelling.⁹

Sister Emmerich's visions leading to the discovery of the final home of Mary, and of her holy death and burial, form the predicate for the intriguing and significant visions which Sister had of the role of Thomas in discovering

⁹ A complete account of the finding of Mary's house near Ephesus is Donald Carroll's engagingly written and lavishly illustrated book, *Mary's House* (Veritas Books; London, 2000). Short accounts appear in: Nan R. Rohan, "Pilgrimage to *Meryem Ana Evi*," *New Oxford Review*, July-Aug 2008, at 32; and Marc Conza, "Our Lady's House at Ephesus," *Garabandal Journal*, May-June 2012, at 14 (with pictures of the site).

evidence supporting one of the dogmas of the Catholic faith: the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which occurred very shortly after her burial.

The importance of these visions cannot be overstated, for they show the reason why belief in the Assumption began right away after the event, among the earliest Christians—a belief from actual observation rather than from theological reasoning.

C. Visions of How Thomas Discovered the Empty Tomb of the Blessed Virgin Mary—Which Led Immediately to a Belief in Her Bodily Assumption into Heaven

Sister Emmerich saw in a vision that the Apostles were present in Ephesus at Mary's death, except, of course for Judas Iscariot, and for James the Greater, who had already been murdered, and also except for Thomas, who had been in India, and could not reach Ephesus in time.¹⁰ His lateness led to a providential discovery the next day, set forth below.

According to Sister Emmerich's visions, the Blessed Virgin Mary truly died, and did not merely fall asleep, in her sixty-third year, corresponding to 48 A.D.¹¹ "A burial place was prepared by the men in the grotto which had been designated to represent the Holy Sepulcher at the end of Mary's Way of the Cross. The women, including John Mark's

¹⁰ She specifically mentioned by name nine as being present for Mary's burial, including Matthias, who had been chosen to replace Judas. Matthew was not listed either as being there or as missing. Paul had not been invited.

¹¹ For centuries it has been unclear exactly *when* Jesus was born, given conjectures about the reign of Herod and known astronomical events, but the latest work places His birth at the end of 1 B.C. See, "When Was Jesus Born? Italian Researcher Puts Christ's Birth in December, 1 B.C.," www.ncregister.com/blog/liberato-de-caro-nativity.

mother, washed and embalmed the body. When they were finished, Peter anointed the forehead, hands and feet. A wreath of white, red and blue flowers was placed on her head, and a transparent veil over the face. Her light body, wrapped in linen, was lowered into a wooden coffin, which was carried on a litter by the Apostles to the gravesite. After depositing the coffin in the grotto, the tomb was shut by a wicker screen, in front of which blooming flowers and bushes were immediately planted."

Sister Emmerich had this mystical vision of the ascent of Mary's soul to heaven directly following her death: "Many holy souls, among whom I recognized Joseph, Anne, Joachim, John the Baptist, Zachary, and Elizabeth, came to meet her. But up she soared, followed by them, to her Son, whose wounds were flashing light far more brilliant than that which surrounded Him. He received her and placed in her hand a scepter, pointing at the same time over the whole circumference of the earth. At last I saw, and the sight filled me with joy, a multitude of souls released from purgatory and soaring up to heaven, and I received the surety that every year, on the feast of Mary's assumption, many of her devout clients are freed from purgatory."

Catholics believe that not only the soul, but also the physical body, of the Blessed Virgin Mary did not long remain in the tomb; rather, it was "assumed" into Heaven. Sister Emmerich had a mystical vision of this assumption of the body of the Blessed Virgin Mary taking place after her soul came back down from heaven and was reunited with her body—*just such a reunion as Sister Emmerich had, in a vision, seen happen in the case of Jesus following His death:*

"I saw on this night several of the Apostles and holy women in the little garden, praying and singing Psalms before the grotto. I saw a broad

pathway of light descend from heaven and rest upon the tomb. In it were circles of glory full of angels, in the midst of whom the Resplendent soul of the Blessed Virgin came floating down. Before her went her Divine Son, the marks of His wounds flashing with light. . . . The blessed soul of Mary, floating before Jesus, penetrated through the rock and into the tomb, out of which she again arose radiant with light in her glorified body and, escorted by the entire multitude of celestial spirits, returned in triumph to the heavenly Jerusalem.

“Next day when the Apostles were engaged in choir service, Thomas made his appearance with two companions. One was a disciple named Jonathan Eleasar, and the other a servant from the most remote country of the Three Holy Kings. Thomas was greatly grieved when he heard that the Blessed Virgin was already buried. He wept with an abundance of tears quite astonishing to behold, for he could not forgive himself for coming so late. Weeping bitterly he threw himself with Jonathan at his side on the spot upon which the blessed soul of Mary had left her body, and afterward knelt long before the altar. The Apostles, who had not interrupted their choir-chanting on account of his coming, now gathered around him, raised him up, embraced him, and set before him and his companions bread, honey, and some kind of beverage in little jugs. After that they accompanied him with lights to the tomb. Two disciples bent the shrubbery to one side.

“Thomas, Eleasar,¹² and John went in and prayed before the coffin. Then John loosened the three straps that bound it, for it rose high enough above the troughlike couch to admit of being opened. *They stood the lid of the coffin on one side and, to their intense astonishment, beheld only the empty winding sheets lying like a husk, or shell, and in perfect order. Only over the face was it drawn apart, and over the breast slightly opened. The swathing bands of the arms and hands lay separate, as if gently drawn off, but in perfect order.*

“The Apostles gazed in amazement, their hands raised. John cried out: “She is no longer here!” The others came in quickly, wept, prayed, looking upward with raised arms, and finally cast themselves on the ground, remembering the radiant cloud of the preceding night. Then, rising, they took the winding sheet just as it was, all the grave linens, and the coffin to keep as relics, and returned to the house by the Holy Way, praying and singing Psalms.”

Fanciful accounts of the Assumption appeared in fourth century written apocrypha, though they probably were circulating widely orally no later than in the third century.¹³ Belief in the event has been widely held since at least the middle of the seventh century, when a feast was established, to be celebrated on August 15th. The dogma of the Assumption was arrived at by a slow process of

¹² According to Sister Emmerich’s visions, Eleasar “always remained with Thomas, and I saw him dragging immense stones when Thomas was building a chapel. “

¹³ See Joseph Duhr, S.J., *The Glorious Assumption of the Mother of God*, at 41-46 (P.J. Kennedy & Sons; New York, 1950); Montague R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, at xix, 194-227 (Clarendon Press; Oxford, 1986) (the Assumption of the Virgin). The same tales are told in the 13th century work by Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 2:77-97 (Princeton U. Press; Princeton, NJ, 1993).

reflection, on the part of the laity as well as the clergy, involving reasoning such as the following:

“Her leaving the world ought to answer to her entering the world. Immaculate in her Conception and spotless in her life, it is becoming that the Virgin be preserved, not from death, but from the decomposition of the tomb which is properly the punishment for sin. United as she was during her life to her divine Son by the closest union and associated with all the mysteries of His life, how would she be separated from Him after death? Her virginity, confirmed by her admirable Motherhood, calls for the same privilege. For this body which has given birth without corruption to the body of Christ cannot become the prey of worms.”¹⁴

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin was a singular participation in her Son's Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians. In 1950, Pope Pius XII issued the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, which proclaimed as a divinely revealed dogma that: “the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”¹⁵ Months later, the Pope declared the site of Mary’s house to be an official shrine for pilgrims.

¹⁴ J. Duhr, *supra*, n. 13, at 65-66 (quoting a sermon given by an outstanding Scholastic theologian of the late Middle Ages).

¹⁵ *Munificentissimus Deus*, at §44. More fully, the Church teaches that: “[T]he Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death.” Catechism of the Catholic Church, at §966 (*Urbi et Orbi Communications*; New Hope, KY, 1994).

I have researched whether the visions which Sister Emmerich had on this matter could have been influenced by the “testimonies, indications, and signs of this common belief of the Church [concerning the Assumption, which] are evident from remote times,” and which Pope Pius XII referred to in *Munificentissimus Deus*. I concluded that they could *not* have been so influenced by any purportedly factual account of the event.

St. Epiphanius (315-403 A.D.), a Bishop of Salamis, Cyprus, wrote that Mary’s final home had been in Ephesus. However, this early writing was later ignored in favor of fanciful tales of Mary’s death/dormition [falling asleep] in Jerusalem, and her burial as being in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Dr. Stephen J. Shoemaker, a noted scholar of early Christian and Jewish beliefs, has written a comprehensive treatise about these so-called “dormition narratives” which emerged in the late fifth, and the sixth, century, regarding Mary’s death and Assumption. He noted that:

“Only a very few themes are common to all (or almost all) the earliest narratives, and these include Mary’s death in Jerusalem; the involvement of at least a few of the Apostles; Christ’s reception of his mother’s soul; the transfer of Mary in body and/or soul to Paradise; and the imagined hostility of the Jews toward Mary.”¹⁶

Based on her visions, Sister Emmerich explained the source of the misunderstanding as to the place of Mary’s death. According to her, three years after Mary had left

¹⁶ See, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption*, at 2 (Oxford University Press; New York, 2002).

Jerusalem to reside in Ephesus (which was six years after the Ascension), Mary journeyed back to Jerusalem to be present when the Apostles were meeting in a Council. Then, a year and a half before her death, Mary made a second journey back to Jerusalem, where she fell ill. Her friends thought she might die there, and so a beautiful tomb was prepared for her on Mt. Olivet. Even though she recovered and returned to Ephesus, the site was held in reverence, and St. John Damascene wrote from hearsay that Mary was buried there. In 1896, based on the discovery of Mary's house in Ephesus, Pope Leo XIII removed the plenary indulgence which had long been extended to pilgrims to Mary's reputed tomb in Jerusalem.

The dormition narratives were greatly embellished over time and were given a wide audience by the publication circa 1260 of a pious work by Jacobus de Voragine (a friar, and later the archbishop of Genoa): "The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints." It was (in the words of the recently reprinted book's dustjacket) "perhaps the most widely read book, after the Bible, in the late Middle Ages, . . . depicting the lives of the saints in an array of both factual and fictional stories—some preposterous, some profound, and some shocking." The author's purpose was "to captivate, encourage, and edify the faithful, while preserving a vast store of information pertaining to the legends and traditions of the church."¹⁷

My researches into this matter, including correspondence with Dr. Shoemaker, were summarized in my affirmative article, *Did Mary's Assumption Really Occur?*, in the July-August 2008 issue of the New Oxford Review. I concluded that Sr. Emmerich's visions, which saw Mary dying and being buried in Ephesus, could not have been

¹⁷ See, J. de Voragine, *supra*, n. 13. The Golden Legend, chapter 119, in vol. II, at 77 et seq., relates various tales of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

based upon the dormition narratives (which she may never even have heard of), in light of the strong dissimilarities in details between her visions and all other accounts. Especially, (a) the fundamental difference as to where Mary died and her burial occurred, and (b) the fact that Sister Emmerich's account is not marred by strongly anti-Semitic scenes concerning attempted interference with the burial of Mary by Jewish men, scenes which are contained in most of the dormition narratives.

There are only two real points of agreement between her visions and those of tradition. First, that most of the Apostles were with Mary when she died. But, in the mainstream "Palm of the Tree of Life Tradition," the Apostles were brought to her miraculously, while in Sr. Emmerich's account, they were merely summoned by angels (as in the account by St. Paul of a vision he had had, in which he was miraculously summoned to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10)).

The second point of agreement is not with the mainstream dormition narratives, but rather a partial agreement with only some of the non-standard outliers, in regard to a detail which scholars refer to as the "late apostle tradition." Supposedly, a late-arriving Apostle, usually Thomas, demands to have the tomb opened for him to venerate, and thereby, from the unexpectedly empty coffin, all are given to understand that the Blessed Virgin Mary has been taken bodily to heaven.

Even as to the latter event, there is a marked difference between Sister Emmerich's account and those of the others. The latter purport to depict "proof" of Mary's Assumption by way of Thomas receiving from the hand of an angel, or from Mary herself in heaven, the outer girdle

which had encircled Mary's body.¹⁸ This vignette was enshrined in mystery plays and was a subject beloved by Italian painters—the *Madonna della Cintola* by Benozzo Gozzoli (c. 1450) is particularly well-known. To this day, two churches in India claim to possess portions of this relic, which they call the "Holy Soonoro."¹⁹

D. Visions Concerning the Calling of Thomas, and His Work as a Disciple Before the Passion

1. Jesus Calls Thomas to Be a Disciple—and a Future Apostle

According to Sister Emmerich's visions, Thomas came from the town of Apheca, situated in a region to the north of Israel, very near the Mediterranean.²⁰ She also

¹⁸ The story was told in an apocryphon in the form of a purported narrative by Joseph of Arimathea. See, James, *supra*, n.13, at 216. See also, J. de Voragine, *supra*, n. 13, at 2-82.

¹⁹ St. Mary's Jacobite Syrian Cathedral in Manarcad, Kerala, India (<https://manarcadpally.com/home>); and St. Mary's Jacobite Syriac Orthodox Church in Naigon-Vasia, Maharashtra, India (<https://smyansonline.wixsite.com>). The folklore/tradition concerning St. Thomas' activities in India is discussed herein in part III—Apocrypha.

²⁰ In my efforts to corroborate the wealth of details in her visions, it has been my custom to take a detail like that place name and try to run it to ground. The map in the front of volume two of the *Life of Christ* shows Apheca as a small town a few miles southeast of Ptolemais (previously named Acco), which was on the coast north of what we call Mount Carmel (and the city of Haifa). Obviously, Sister Emmerich did not draw the map, and the cartographer is not identified. The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday; New York 1992) has an entry for Apehekah (vol. i, at 277), which says that its location is not well known, but most probably was southwest of Hebron in the central hill country of Judea—thus not the town in question. However, the *Atlas of the Bible Lands*, at B-11 (Hammond Incorporated; Maplewood, NJ 1977), shows a town of Apehek as an unconquered Canaanite city, just south of Acco in the days of the early Israelite settlements. The same map and maps of later times show another town also named Apehek, this one northeast of Joppa, in

noted that his family owned rafts “in the port” (presumably the port of Ptolemais). Five disciples who had first followed John also came from there. Thomas had a brother (perhaps a twin?), and two step-brothers. She described him as being thick and short of stature, with reddish-brown or auburn-colored hair.

Sister Emmerich never described Thomas’ occupation other than a brief mention that, when Thomas first met Jesus, it was in Dothan,²¹ at the home of a wealthy merchant, Issachar, who was hospitable to Jesus, and who knew Thomas because of “his commercial pursuits.” Clearly, Thomas was not one of the fishermen, from Galilee.

At the same time, there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that Thomas was a carpenter or a builder, so we have to assume that the iconographic symbol of a carpenter’s square, and later his “patronage” of architects, was assigned to him due to his reputation from tradition and apocryphal stories as a church-builder in India. His other iconographic symbol, a spear, was similarly prompted by tradition and the apocryphal stories of his having been killed by a spear in India. But, note that Sister Emmerich’s visions confirm both his church building activity and his martyrdom there.

Though Thomas had friends among the disciples, he had not yet spoken with Jesus. Here is how Sister Emmerich described their first meeting, in Dothan:

Samaria. The same two towns named Aphek can be found in Joseph Rhymer’s *Atlas of the Biblical World* (Greenwich House; New York 1982), on a map of the early times of the Hebrews in Canaan. The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* lists five possible towns named Aphek, including the one near Ptolemais. (ABD, vol. i, at 275-76.)

²¹ Dothan appears as a town in the middle of Israel, southeast of Megido and Taanach, on a map of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the *Atlas of the Bible Lands*, at B-15.

“Next morning when Jesus and the disciples went to walk outside the city, Thomas approached and begged Jesus to admit him to the number of His disciples. He promised to follow Him and fulfill all His commands for, as he said, by His preaching and by the miracles he had witnessed, he was convinced of the truth of what John and all the disciples of his acquaintance had said about Him. He begged, also, to be allowed a part in His Kingdom. Jesus replied that he was no stranger to Him and that He knew that he, Thomas, would come to Him. But Thomas would not subscribe to that. He asserted that he had never before thought of taking such a step, for he was no friend to novelty, and had only now determined upon it since he was convinced of His truth by His miracles. Jesus responded. ‘Thou speakest like Nathanael. Thou dost esteem thyself wise, and yet thou talkest foolishly. Shall not the gardener know the trees of his garden? the vine-dresser, his vines? Shall he set out a vineyard, and not know the servants whom he sends into it?’ Then He related a similitude of the cultivation of figs upon thorns.”

Following that introduction, Thomas was one of the disciples who accompanied Jesus from Dothan to Endor, receiving instruction enroute:

“After a journey of about five hours, and night having set in, Jesus and the disciples arrived at a lonely inn where only sleeping accommodations were to be found. Nearby was a well that owed its origin to Jacob. The disciples gathered wood and made a fire. On the way Jesus had had a long conversation with them, intended principally for the instruction of Thomas, Simon, Manahem, ‘Little Cleophas’ [Nathanael], and the others newly received. He spoke of their following Him, and through the deep conviction of the worthlessness of

earthly goods, of their leaving their relatives without regret and without looking back. He promised that what they had left should be restored to them in His Kingdom a thousandfold. But they should reflect maturely whether or not they could break their earthly ties.”

2. Jesus Explains to Thomas Why Judas Iscariot (and Thomas Himself) Was Chosen as a Disciple—Such Was the Will of God the Father

“To some of the disciples, and especially to Thomas, Judas Iscariot was not particularly pleasing. Thomas did not hesitate to say plainly to Jesus that he did not like Judas Simonis, because he was too ready to say *yes* and *no*. Why, he asked, had He admitted that man among His disciples, since He had been so difficult to please in others? *Jesus answered evasively that from eternity it was decreed by God for Judas, like all the others, to be of the number of His disciples.*”

3. Thomas Participates in Ministry at a Baptism of Converts by Jesus

Sister Emmerich’s description of a baptism which Jesus conducted included the first act of ministry in which she saw Thomas engaged:

“Next morning, Jesus repaired to the garden in the neighborhood of Peter’s house. It was enclosed by a hedge, and in it all the preparations for baptism had been made. There were several circular cisterns, formed in the ground and surrounded by a little channel into which the water of a stream running nearby could be turned. A long arbor could by hangings and screens be divided into little compartments for the convenience of the neophytes

when disrobing. An elevated stand had been erected for Jesus. The disciples were all present and about fifty aspirants to baptism, among the latter some relatives of the Holy Family

“All the neophytes were clothed in penitential robes of gray wool, a four-cornered kerchief over their head. Jesus instructed and prepared them for baptism, after which they retired into the arbor and put on their baptismal garment, a white tunic long and wide. Their head was uncovered, the kerchief now thrown round their shoulders, and they stood in the channel around the basins, their hands crossed on their breast. Andrew and Saturnin baptized, while Thomas, Bartholomew, John, and others imposed hands as sponsors. The neophytes with bared shoulders leaned over a railing around the edge of the basin. One of the disciples carried a vessel of water that had been blessed by Jesus, from which the baptizers scooped some with the hand and poured it thrice over the heads of those being baptized. Thomas was sponsor to Jephthe, the son of Achias.²² Although several received baptism at the same time, yet the ceremony lasted until nearly two o'clock in the afternoon.”

4. Thomas Exhibits Zeal in Ministry

At one point, Jesus along with certain disciples was teaching in Saphet,²³ but planning to go back to Judea:

²² Sister Emmerich reported that Achias was a Centurion, whose son Jephthe had been miraculously cured by Jesus. (He was different from the Centurion Cornelius, whose slave Jesus had cured.) Jephthe later became a disciple of the Apostle Thomas.

²³ The map in volume 2 of the *Life of Christ* shows Saphet as a town east northeast of Ptolemais, close to the towns of Bethanat and Apheca, where Thomas was raised. I have found no atlas record of Saphet, but

“I saw that Thomas showed great pleasure at the prospect of this journey, because he anticipated opposition on the part of the Pharisees and hoped to be able to dispute with them. He expressed his sentiments to the other disciples, but they did not appear to share his satisfaction. Jesus reproved his exaggerated zeal, and told him that a time would come when his own faith would waver. But Thomas could in nowise understand His words.”

Nevertheless, even before leaving Saphet, Thomas precipitated a dispute with a Pharisee:

“Saphet could boast of many Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and simple Levites. There was a kind of religious school here, in which youths were educated in all the Jewish liberal arts and in theology. Thomas, a couple of years before had been a student at this school. He went now to visit one of the head teachers, a Pharisee, who expressed his wonder at seeing him in such company. But Thomas silenced him by his zealous defense of Jesus' actions and teachings.”

5. Jesus Reveals the Thoughts of the Apostles and Strengthens Them

“I saw [Jesus] in the region of Giskala²⁴ placing The Twelve in three separate rows and revealing to each his own peculiar disposition and character. Peter, Andrew, John, James the Greater, and Matthew stood in

Bethanath appears as an unconquered Canaanite town (exactly in that region) in the Atlas of the Bible Lands.

²⁴ The name appears in the Anchor Bible Dictionary as ‘Giscala.’ It is shown as ‘Gischala’ on a map of Palestine in New Testament Times in the Atlas of the Bible Lands, at B-26, directly north of Chorazin and the Sea of Galilee.

the first row; Thaddeus, Bartholomew, James the Less, and the disciple Barsabas, in the second; Thomas, Simon, Philip, and Judas Iscariot, in the third. Each heard his own thoughts and hopes revealed to him by Jesus, and all were strongly affected. Jesus delivered at the same time a lengthy discourse upon the hardships and sufferings that awaited them, and on this occasion, He again made use of the expression: 'Among you there is a devil.'

"The three different rows established no subordination among the Apostles, one to another. The Twelve were classed merely according to their disposition and character. Joses Barsabas stood foremost in the row of the disciples, and nearest to The Twelve; consequently, Jesus placed him also in the second row with the Apostles, and revealed to him his hopes and fears. On this journey Jesus further instructed The Twelve and the disciples exactly how to proceed in the future when healing the sick and exorcising the possessed, as He Himself did in such cases. He imparted to them the power and the courage always to effect, by imposition of hands and anointing with oil, what He Himself could do. This communication of power took place without the imposition of hands, though not without a substantial transmission. They stood around Jesus, and I saw rays darting toward them of different colors, according to the nature of the gifts received and the peculiar disposition of each recipient. They exclaimed: 'Lord, we feel ourselves endued with strength! Thy words are truth and life!' And now each knew just what he had to do in every case in order to effect a cure. There was no room left for either choice or reflection."

6. Jesus Sends Thomas on Various Missions, and Tells Him of Missions to Come

Thomas was sent by Jesus on missions with other apostles and/or disciples. On one occasion, he and Thaddeus and James the Less went to Achzib,²⁵ to the tribe of Asher. On another occasion, Thomas was sent with a troop of disciples to Asach, which Sister Emmerich described as a Levitical city in the country of the Gergesans.²⁶

Immediately before the events of the Passion, Jesus taught His disciples at length in the Temple area. Part of His discourse reported by Sister Emmerich was as follows:

“Jesus spoke with much emotion. He touched upon the near fulfillment of His mission, His Passion, and the speedy approach of His own end, before which, however, He would make a solemn entrance into Jerusalem. He alluded to the merciless treatment He would undergo, but added that He must suffer, and suffer exceedingly, in order to satisfy Divine Justice. He spoke of His Blessed Mother, recounting why she too was to suffer with Him, and in what manner it would be effected. He exposed the deep corruption and guilt of mankind, and explained that without His Passion no man could be justified. . . .

“In this instruction He made some allusion.... to the Cenacle, to the house in which the Last Supper was to be eaten and in which later on they were to receive the Holy Spirit. He spoke of their assembling in it and of partaking of a strengthening and life-

²⁵ Achzib shows up as a town on the Mediterranean in between Tyre and Acco, on a map of Canaan, in the Atlas of the Biblical World, at 52.

²⁶ I have been unable to find a map showing the town of Asach, but assuming it was in Gergesan territory, it was on the east bank of the Sea of Galilee, across from Magadan.

giving Food in which He Himself would remain with them forever. . . .

“He touched upon many things that would take place after His return to the Father. . . He predicted the persecutions that would arise against Lazarus and the holy women and told the Apostles whither they should retire during the first six months after His death: Peter, John and James the Less were to remain in Jerusalem . . . *Thomas and Matthew were dispatched to Ephesus, in order to prepare the country, where at a future day Jesus' Mother and many of those that believed in Him were to dwell.* They wondered greatly at the fact of Mary's going to live there.”

7. The Last Days Before the Passion

Sister Emmerich recounted these scenes at Lazarus' house, after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, immediately before His Passion:

“After Jesus and the disciples had prepared themselves for the Sabbath, that is, put on the garments prescribed and prayed under the lamp, they stretched themselves at table for the meal. Toward the end of it, Magdalen, urged by love, gratitude, contrition, and anxiety, again made her appearance. She went behind the Lord's couch, broke a little flask of precious balm over His head and poured some of it upon His feet, which she again wiped with her hair. That done she left the dining-hall. Several of those present were scandalized, especially Judas, who excited Matthew, Thomas, and John Mark to displeasure. But Jesus excused her, on account of the love she bore Him. She often anointed

Him in this way. Many of the facts, mentioned only once in the Gospels, happened frequently.

* * *

"Jesus spent the whole of this day at Lazarus's with the holy women and the Twelve Apostles. In the morning He instructed the holy women in the disciples' inn. Toward three o'clock in the afternoon, a great repast was served in the subterranean dining-hall. The women waited at table, and afterward withdrew to the grated, three-cornered apartment, to listen to the instruction. In the course of it, Jesus told them that they would not now be together long, they would not again eat at Lazarus's, though they would do so once more at Simon's, but on that last occasion, they would not be so tranquil as they now were. He invited them all to be perfectly free with Him, and to ask Him whatever they wanted to know. On hearing this, they began to ask numerous questions, especially Thomas, who had a great many doubts. John too, frequently put a question, but softly and gently."

8. The Last Supper

Sister Emmerich described the events of the Last Supper in pages of minute detail, such as the following:

"The lamb was then bound, its back to a little board, with a cord passed around the body. It reminded me of Jesus bound to the pillar. Simeon's son held the lamb's head up, and Jesus stuck it in the neck with a knife, which He then handed to Simeon's son that he might complete the slaughter. Jesus appeared timid in wounding the lamb, as if it cost Him pain. His movement was quick, His manner grave. The blood was caught in a basin, and the

attendants brought a branch of hyssop, which Jesus dipped into it. *Then stepping to the door of the hall, He signed the two posts and the lock with the blood, and stuck the bloody branch above the lintel. He then uttered some solemn words, saying among other thing: 'The destroying angel shall pass by here. Without fear or anxiety, ye shall adore in this place when I, the true Paschal Lamb, shall have been immolated. A new era, a new sacrifice are now about to begin, and they will last till the end of the world.'* Finally, Jesus consecrated the Cenacle as a place for worship."

The picture of the Last Supper painted in the Synoptic Gospels is explicitly that of a Seder—a ritual meal held by Jews to celebrate the Passover. The Gospel of John, however, is somewhat unclear on this point, in that John placed the Last Supper on the evening *before* Passover (with Jesus' trial being on the morning of the Passover ceremonies), and he did not refer to the ceremony itself. Because of this apparent contradiction, some biblical scholars have expressed doubt that the Last Supper was really a Seder.²⁷ The visions of Sister Emmerich, however, show that indeed it was, with Jesus presiding over the

²⁷ See, John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, at 1:390-401 (Anchor Bible Reference Library-Doubleday; New York 1991); Jonathan Klawans, "Was Jesus' Last Supper a Seder?," *Bible Review* (October 2001), at 24; Baruch M. Bokser, "Was the Last Supper a Passover Seder?," *Bible Review* (Summer 1987), at 24. In an attempt to answer the timing objection, some scholars have theorized that Jesus was following a solar calendar, rather than the traditional lunar calendar. See, e.g., the entry for "Calendars" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, at 1:810, 820. Also, Paolo Sacchi, "Recovering Jesus' Formative Background," and Rainer Riesner, "Jesus, the Primitive Community, and the Essene Quarter of Jerusalem"—both essays appearing in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (James H. Charlesworth, ed., at 128-29, and 217-18 (Doubleday; New York 1992). The problem with this hypothesis is that it would leave a very large gap in the Evangelists' accounts of the events between the Last Supper and the Crucifixion.

traditional meal and the men standing in traveling clothes, staff in hand, chanting and eating their lamb, unleavened bread, garlic and herbs in haste. There were three separate groups of men (the women ate in a side-court): Jesus and the Twelve Apostles ate in the main hall; Nathanael and twelve disciples were in a room on the side, while Heliachim (a son of Cleophas and Mary Heli) ate with twelve more disciples in another room.

Sister Emmerich's visions provide a convincing explanation of how the Synoptic Gospels can be harmonized perfectly with that of St. John: Jesus was killed before the night of the Passover, but He and His Apostles had already celebrated the Passover meal. At the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas, when Jesus was accused of having eaten the Paschal lamb ahead of time, and Caiaphas demanded that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea explain why they had allowed that irregularity to occur in their building, they responded by proving that there was an ancient privilege which Galileans had of celebrating the Pasch one day early. This custom had grown up in order to spread out the crowds attending Temple ceremonies and traveling the roads from and to Galilee.

Moreover, Sister Emmerich's visions answer the objection that the Last Supper as portrayed by St. John was not a Seder meal, but instead was a wholly new ceremony. She saw three separate events following one after another: the traditional Seder meal; the washing of the feet; and then the farewell love-fest ceremony at which Jesus instituted the Blessed Sacrament. St. John, while mentioning a meal in passing, described only the latter two events.

In her description of the Last Supper, Sister Emmerich made only one reference specifically to Thomas, namely where he was seated:

“The table was narrow and only high enough to reach one-half foot above the knee of a man standing by it. In form it was like a horseshoe; and opposite Jesus, in the inner part of the half-circle, there was a space left free for the serving of the dishes. As far as I can remember, John, James the Greater, and James the Less stood on Jesus' right; then came Bartholomew, still on the right, but more toward the narrow end of the table; and round the corner, at the inner side, stood Thomas and next to him Judas Iscariot. On Jesus' left, were Peter, Andrew, and Thaddeus; then as on the opposite side, came Simon; and round at the inner side, Matthew and Philip.”

9. The Arrest of Jesus on the Mount of Olives

In Sister Emmerich's visions, there is a brief mention of Thomas in the activities following the Last Supper and before the Passion—moments when he was on the Mount of Olives. Jesus had gone up to the wild olive garden on the top together with Peter, James and John, leaving the other Apostles (of course minus Judas Iscariot) lower down in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas came on the scene, leading the troops sent to take Jesus into custody. Small parts of the visions were as follows:

“About this time, perhaps a quarter after eleven, the eight [lesser] Apostles were again in the arbor in the Garden of Gethsemani. They spoke together for a while and then fell asleep. They were unusually faint-hearted, discouraged and in sore temptation. Each had been looking out for a place of safety and anxiously asking: ‘What shall we do when He is dead? We have abandoned our friends, we have given up everything, we have become poor and objects of scorn to the world, we have devoted ourselves entirely to His service—and now, behold

Him crushed and helpless, with power to afford us no consolation! . . .

“When Jesus with the three [major] Apostles went out upon the road between Gethsemani and the Garden of Olives, there appeared at the entrance, about twenty paces ahead, Judas and the band of soldiers, between whom a quarrel had arisen. Judas wanted to separate from the soldiers and go forward alone to Jesus, as if he were a friend returning after an absence. They were to follow, and act in such a way as to make it appear that their coming was altogether unknown to him. But they would not agree to his proposal. They held him fast, exclaiming: ‘Not so, friend! Thou shalt not escape us, until we have the Galilean!’ And when they caught sight of the eight Apostles who at sound of the noise came forth from the Garden of Gethsemani, they called up four of the archers to their assistance.

“But this Judas by no means assented to, and a lively dispute arose between him and the soldiers. When Jesus and the three Apostles by the light of the torches distinguished the armed and wrangling band, Peter wished to repel them by force. He exclaimed: ‘Lord the eight from Gethsemani are close at hand. Let us make an attack on the archers!’ But Jesus told him to hold his peace; and took a few steps with them back on the road to a green plot. Judas, seeing his plans quite upset, was filled with rage and spite. Just at this moment, four of the disciples issued from the Garden of Gethsemani and inquired what was going on. Judas began to exchange words with them, and would fain have cleared himself by a lie, but the guards would not allow him to go on. These four last-comers were James the Less, Philip, Thomas, and Nathanael. . .

With the exception of these four, all the disciples, were straggling around in the distance, furtively on the lookout to discover what they could.”

E. Visions of Thomas’ Reactions to Christ’s Passion

1. Thomas During the Week Following Christ’s Resurrection

Sister Emmerich noted Thomas’ presence or absence several times during the days immediately following the Resurrection, beginning with the first “Love Feast” (Communion) among the Apostles:

“In the open entrance hall outside that of the holy Last Supper, Nicodemus prepared a repast for the Apostles, the holy women, and the disciples. Thomas was not present at it. He kept himself in absolute retirement. All that took place at this feast was in strict accordance with Jesus’ directions. During the holy Last Supper, He had given Peter and John, who were sitting by Him and whom He ordained priests, detailed instructions relative to the Blessed Sacrament, with the command to impart the same to the other Apostles along with some points of His early teachings.”

Early the next morning, the Apostles, this time including Thomas, held a Communion service in the same room, using bread and wine which had been consecrated by Jesus the week before, and then Thomas went off to Samaria, taking a disciple with him.

Not long after, Luke, who had been an avowed disciple only a short time, and Cleopas departed for Emmaus—and they met Jesus along the way. When they recognized Him in the inn at the breaking of the bread, they

hurried back to Jerusalem. There, many of the disciples and all of the Apostles except Thomas were assembled with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea in the hall of the Last Supper. They were holding a prayer service, when Jesus entered. He showed them his wounds, and taught and imparted strength to them.

Still later, a number of the Apostles met at an inn outside a town which Sister Emmerich called Thanath-Silo.²⁸

“Thomas also with two disciples joined them as they were gathered at a meal prepared for them by Silvan's father, who had care of the inn. The Apostles told Thomas the apparition of the risen Saviour in their midst. But he raised his hands to silence them, and said that he would not believe it until he had touched His wounds. He did the same before the disciples when they declared to him that they had seen the Lord. Thomas had kept a little aloof from the followers of Jesus, and was thereby somewhat weakened in faith.

* * *

“Peter taught till late at night in the school of Thanath-Silo. He spoke out quite freely of how the Jews had dealt with Jesus. He related many things of His last predictions and teachings, of His unspeakable love, of His prayer on Mount Olivet, and of Judas's treachery and wretched end. The people

²⁸ The map in volume 2 of the Life of Christ shows the town east-southeast of Sychar. I have seen no evidence of it in the standard atlases, but it appears there as Thanat-Silo on one of the detailed maps of Jesus' travels as reconstructed by Helmut Fahsel, which appear in Robert A. Powell's book, "Chronicle of the Living Christ," at Map 8 (Anthroposophic Press; Hudson, NY 1996).

were very much amazed and troubled at all they heard, for they loved Judas who in Jesus' absence, had assisted many by his readiness to serve them, and had even wrought miracles. Peter did not spare himself. He recounted his flight and denial with bitter tears. His hearers wept with him. Then with still more vehement expressions of sorrow, he told of how cruelly the Jews had treated Jesus, of His rising again on the third day, of His appearing first to the women, then to some of the others, and lastly to all in general, and he called upon all present that had seen Him to witness to His words.

“Upwards of a hundred hands were raised in answer to his call. Thomas however remained silent and responded by no sign. He could not bring himself to believe. Peter then called upon the people to leave all things, to join the new Community, and to follow Jesus. He invited the less courageous to go to Jerusalem where the Faithful would share all they had with them. There was, he said, no reason to fear the Jews, for they were now themselves afraid. All were very much impressed by Peter's words, and many were converted. They wanted the Apostles to remain longer with them, but Peter said that they must go back to Jerusalem.”

2. Thomas Is Moved to Utter the Profound Words: “My Lord, and My God!”

It was soon thereafter, when the Apostles had returned to Jerusalem, that the conversion of “doubting Thomas” took place (Jn 20:26-29). Sr. Emmerich saw it happen in her visions and described it at length:

“After the close of the Sabbath, the Apostles having laid aside their robes of ceremony, I saw a

great meal spread in the outer hall. . . Thomas must have celebrated the Sabbath somewhere in the neighborhood, for I did not see him come in till after the meal, when they had again returned to the Supper Room. It was still early in the evening, the lamps were not yet lighted. Several of the Apostles and disciples were in the hall, and I saw others entering. They robed themselves again in long, white garments, and prepared for prayer as on the preceding occasion. Peter, John, and James again put on the vestments that distinguished them as priests.

“While these preparations were being made, I saw Thomas entering the Supper Room. He passed through the Apostles who were already robed, and put on his own long, white garment. As he went along, I saw the Apostles accosting him. Some caught him by the sleeve, others gesticulated with the right hand as they spoke, as if emphatically protesting against him. But he behaved like one in a hurry to vest and as if he could not credit the account given him of the wonderful things which had happened in that place.

* * *

“After some time there was a pause in the assembly, an intermission of prayer, or as if prayer was at an end, and they began to speak of going to the Sea of Tiberias and of how they would disperse. But soon they assumed an expression of rapt attention, called up by the approach of the Lord. At the same moment, I saw Jesus in the courtyard. He was resplendent with light, clothed in white garments and a white girdle. He directed His steps to the door of the outer hall which opened of itself before Him and closed behind Him. The disciples in

the outer hall saw the door opening of itself, and fell back on both sides to make room. But Jesus walked quickly through the hall into the Supper Room and stepped between Peter and John who, like all the other Apostles, fell back on either side.

“Jesus did not enter walking properly so called, that is, in the usual way of mortals, and yet it was not a floating along, or hovering as I have seen spirits doing. It reminded me, as I saw them all falling back, of a priest in his alb passing through a crowded congregation. Everything in the hall appeared to become suddenly large and bright. Jesus was environed with light. The Apostles had fallen back from the radiant circle, otherwise they would not have been able to see Him.

“Jesus’ first words were: ‘Peace be to you!’ Then He spoke with Peter and John, and rebuked them for something. They had departed a little from His directions, in order to follow their own ideas about something and consequently, they had not met with success. It related to some of the cures they had sought to effect on their return from Sichar and Thanath-Silo. . . .

"Jesus now slipped under the lamp, and the Apostles closed around Him. Thomas, very much frightened at the sight of the Lord, timidly drew back. But Jesus, grasping his right hand in His own right hand, took the forefinger and laid the tip of it in the wound of His left hand; then taking the left hand in His own left, He placed the forefinger in the wound of His right hand, lastly, taking again Thomas' right hand in His own right, He put it, without uncovering His breast, under His garment, and laid the fore and

middle fingers in the wound of His right side. He spoke some words as He did this.²⁹

“With the exclamation: ‘My Lord, and my God!’ Thomas sank down like one unconscious, Jesus still holding his hand. The nearest of the Apostles supported him, and Jesus raised him up by the hand. That sinking down and rising up had some peculiar signification.

“When Jesus grasped Thomas's hand, I saw that His wounds were not like bloody marks, but like little radiant suns. The other disciples were very greatly touched by this scene. They leaned forward without, however, crowding, to see what the Lord was allowing Thomas to feel. I saw the Blessed Virgin during the whole time of Jesus' stay, perfectly motionless, as if absorbed in calm, deep interior recollection. Magdalen appeared more agitated, yet manifesting far less emotion than did the disciples.”

3. What Followed Thomas' Confession of Faith

“Jesus did not disappear immediately after Thomas' declaration of faith. He still continued to speak to the Apostles, and asked for something to eat. I saw a little oval dish brought to Him again from the partitioned recess in which the table stood. It was not precisely like that presented to Him the first time. There was on it, something that looked like a fish, of which He ate, then blessed and distributed what was left to those around Him beginning, with Thomas.

²⁹ The scene is familiar to many from the famous painting in chiaroscuro by Caravaggio: “The Incredulity of St. Thomas.”

“Jesus then told them why He stood in the midst of them, although they had abandoned Him, and why He did not place Himself nearer to those that had remained faithful to Him. He told them also that He had commissioned Peter to confirm his brethren, and explained why He had given him that charge. Then turning to them all, He told them why He wished to give them Peter for a leader, although he had so recently denied Him. He must, He said, be the shepherd of the flock, and He enlarged upon Peter's zeal.

“John brought on his arm from the Holy of Holies the large, colored, embroidered mantle, which James had received from Mary and on which, in those last days, the holy women had worked at Bethania. Besides that, he brought also a hollow, slender staff, high and bent at the top like a shepherd's crook. It was shining and looked like a long pipe. The mantle was white with broad red stripes, and on it were embroidered in colors wheat, grapes, a lamb, and other symbols. It was wide and long enough to reach to the feet. It was fastened over the breast with a little four-cornered metal shield and bordered down the front with red stripes which were crossed by shorter ones on which were letters. It had a collar and a kind of hood, of a sky-blue color, which could be drawn up over the neck and head.

“Peter next knelt down before Jesus, who gave him to eat a round morsel, like a little cake. I do not remember seeing any plate, nor do I know where Jesus got the morsel, but I do know that it shone with light. I felt that Peter received with it some special power, and I saw also strength and vigor poured into his soul when Jesus breathed upon him. This action of Jesus was not a simple, ordinary breathing. It was

words, a power, something substantial that Peter received, but no merely spoken words. Jesus put His mouth to Peter's mouth, then to his ears, and poured that strength into each of the three, It was not the Holy Spirit Himself, but something that the Holy Spirit was to quicken and vivify in Peter at Pentecost.

“Jesus laid His hands on him, gave him a special kind of strength, and invested him with chief power over the others. Then He placed upon him the mantle that John, who was standing next to Him, was holding on his arm, and put the staff into his hand. While performing this action, Jesus said that the mantle would preserve in him all the strength and virtue that He had just imparted to him, and that he should wear it whenever he had to make use of the power with which he had been endued.

“Peter addressed the assembly in his new dignity. He had become as it were a new being, a man full of vigor and energy. His hearers were greatly moved, they listened with tears. He consoled them, alluded to many things that Jesus had before told them, and which were now being fulfilled. He told them, as I still remember, that Jesus during His Passion of eighteen hours, had borne insult and outrage from the whole world. In that discourse mention was made of how much was wanting to the completion of Jesus' thirty-four years.

“While Peter was speaking, Jesus vanished. No alarm, no exclamations of surprise broke in upon the attention with which Peter's words were received. He appeared to be endowed with strength entirely new. The discourse ended, they sang a Psalm of thanksgiving.”

4. Thomas Speaks Boldly After His Enlightenment

Sister Emmerich described in detail the appearance of Jesus to the Apostles, including Thomas, who had been fishing at the Sea of Galilee. Her next mention of Thomas related to when the Apostles were assembled in Bethania [Bethany]:

“About fifty soldiers, the same that seized the Lord on Mount Olivet, came from Jerusalem to Bethania. They were guards belonging to the Temple and the High Priests. Some deputies also of the Sanhedrin made their appearance at the Council House in Bethania, and summoned the Apostles before them. Peter, John, and Thomas presented themselves and replied boldly and openly to the charge, that they convened assemblies and occasioned disturbance among the people. Soldiers were placed at Lazarus's. The deputies from Jerusalem interrogated the Apostles publicly before the Council House. The magistrates of Bethania opposed them, saying that if they knew anything against those men, they ought to take them into custody, but that they must not disturb the peace of the place by the presence of soldiers. Peter, in order to avoid giving offence, dismissed one hundred and twenty-three of the assembled Faithful. Those from the greatest distance were directed to remain at the dwellings in the neighborhood, for they already had all things in common. The fifty women also withdrew and lived together in separate abodes. Peter gave orders for all to return to Bethania before the day of Christ's ascension.”

5. Sights on the Day of Pentecost

Sister Emmerich had extensive visions of the events on the day of Pentecost, small portions of which were as follows:

“Toward morning, I saw above the Mount of Olives a glittering white cloud of light coming down from Heaven. . . It floated over the city like a luminous mass of fog until it stood above Sion and the house of the Last Supper. It seemed to contract and to shine with constantly increasing brightness until at last with a rushing, roaring noise as of wind, it sank like a thunder cloud floating low in the atmosphere Afterward there shot from the rushing cloud streams of white light down upon the house and its surroundings. The streams intersected one another in sevenfold rays and below each intersection resolved into fine threads of light and fiery drops. The point at which the seven streams intersected was surrounded by a rainbow light, in which floated a luminous figure with outstretched wings, or rays of light that looked like wings, attached to the shoulders . . . The assembled Faithful were ravished in ecstasy. Each involuntarily threw back his head and raised his eyes eagerly on high, while into the mouth of everyone there flowed a stream of light like a burning tongue of fire. It looked as if they were breathing, as if they were drinking in, the fire, and as if their ardent desire flamed forth from their mouth to meet the entering flame . . . The flames descended on each in different colors and in different degrees of intensity. . . .

“In the house of the Last Supper, Peter imposed hands on five of the Apostles who were to help teach and baptize at the Pool of Bethsaida. They were James the Less, Bartholomew, Mathias, Thomas, and Jude Thaddeus . . . Before departing for

the Pool of Bethsaida to consecrate the water and administer baptism, they received on their knees the benediction of the Blessed Virgin.”

F. Visions Concerning Thomas’ Works as an Apostle

1. Thomas at a Council in Jerusalem Held Six Years After the Ascension

“After Mary had lived three years in the settlement near Ephesus, she conceived a great desire to visit Jerusalem, so John and Peter escorted her thither. [This was her second visit to Jerusalem after having moved to Ephesus.] “Several Apostles were there assembled, of whom I remember Thomas. I think it was a Council, and Mary assisted the Apostles with her advice.” “It was then that the Apostles “drew up the Creed, made rules, and relinquished all that they possessed, distributed it to the poor, and divided the Church into dioceses, after which they separated and went into far-off heathen countries.” “On her arrival, I saw her in the evening twilight visiting before she entered the city, the Mount of Olives, Mount Calvary, the Holy Sepulchre, and all the Holy Places around Jerusalem. The Mother of God was so sad, so moved by compassion, that she could scarcely walk. Peter and John supported her under the arms.”

2. Thomas’ Mission to the Lands of the Three Kings—The “Magi”

Sister Emmerich in a vision saw Thomas baptizing two of the three kings (the “Magi”) in a visit to their lands three years after the ascension of Christ. The third king was dead, but “had had the baptism of desire.”³⁰ Before that, she

³⁰ In his *Golden Legend*, Jacobus de Voragine reported that St. Isidore [of Seville], in his book *On the Life and Death of the Saints*, wrote that

had had visions of the Epiphany event itself, a part of which was:

“Mensor, the brownish, was a Chaldaean. His city, whose name sounded to me something like Acajaja, was surrounded by a river, and appeared to be built on an island. Mensor spent most of his time in the fields with his herds. After the death of Christ, he was baptized by St. Thomas, and named Leander. Seir, the brown, on that very Christmas night stood prepared at Mensor's for the expedition. He and his race were the only ones so brown, but they had red lips. The other people in the neighborhood were white. Seir had the baptism of desire. . . Theokeno was from Media, a country more to the North. It lay like a strip of land further toward the interior and between two seas. Theokeno dwelt in his own city; its name I have forgotten. It consisted of tents erected on stone foundations. He was the wealthiest of the three. He might, I think, have taken a more direct route to Bethlehem, but in order to join the others he made a circuitous one. I think that he had even to pass near Babylon in order to come up with them. He also was baptized by St. Thomas and named Leo.”³¹

Thomas had preached the Gospel to the Parthians, the Medes, the Persians, the Hircanians, and the Bactrians. *See, The Golden Legend, supra*, n. 13, vol. I, at 35.

³¹ A map in *Life of Christ* suggests that the city whose name sounded like ‘Acajaja’ was on the Tigris River in the area of the former city of Accad. The names Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar may have been assigned to the Magi by St. Bede, an early Church Father. *See, What You May Not Know About the Magi*, by Joe Tremblay, an article appearing on the Catholic News Agency website, on December 30, 2011 (available online at catholicnewsagency.com). According to Sister Emmerich, “the names Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar were given to the Kings, because they so well suited them: for Caspar means ‘He is won by love’; Melchior, ‘He is so coaxing, so insinuating, he uses so much address, he

Apparently, Thomas' post-Resurrection acts of visiting and baptizing the Magi was an early tradition, for St. John Chrysostom (Bishop of Constantinople, circa 400 A.D.) asserted it.³²

3. The Works and the Death of Thomas in India

According to Sister Emmerich: "Thomas did not return to Tartary after Mary's death. He was pierced with a lance in India. I have seen that he set up a stone in this last-named country, upon which he knelt in prayer, and upon which the marks of his knees remained impressed. He told the people that when the sea would reach that stone, another would here preach Jesus Christ."

The Church has accepted the ancient tradition that Thomas came to India in about 52 A.D., and was martyred there with a spear about 20 years later.³³ According to tradition, he established seven churches in what is now the state of Kerala. Five of these churches lie close to the

approaches one so gently'; Balthasar, 'With his whole will he accomplishes the will of God.'

³² See, John Chrysostom, Homilies on St. Matthew, No. vi (available online at earlychurchtexts.com).

³³ In a speech given on September 27, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI said that "Thomas first evangelized Syria and Persia and then penetrated as far as western India, from where Christianity also reached South India." This statement upset bishops in the Indian state of Kerala, a tract of land running north to south along the Malabar Coast, in southwestern India, because of the local belief that Thomas had come all the way to their area and founded churches there. The Vatican quickly amended the Pope's remarks to read: "Let us remember that an ancient tradition claims that Thomas first evangelized Syria and Persia then went to western India from where he also reached southern India." See, Ishwar Sharan, "Pope Benedict Denies St. Thomas Evangelised South India," available online at ishwarsharan.com [*an anti-Christian website*]; Gaspar Almeida Sun, "Pope No Longer Doubts Thomas Reached India," available on Goanet at mail-archive.com.

southwest coast—at Kodungallur, Kollam, Palayoor, Kottakkavu and Kokkamangala; and two lie inland—at Niranam and Nilackal. Also according to tradition/legend, he last founded churches in what is now the state of Tamil Nadu, southeast along the Coromandel Coast.³⁴

It was there that Thomas reputedly met his death, and was first buried at St. Thomas Mount Church in Chennai (Madras). According to tradition, his remains were removed to the principal church for the area, which is now the St. Thomas Cathedral Basilica in the Mylapore neighborhood of Chennai. They were next taken, in the third century, to Edessa in Cappadocia (now the city of Urfa in Turkey). At a later time, his skull was removed and taken to the Greek Island of Chios. In 1258, his remaining bones were taken to Ortona, Italy, where, a century later, they were interred in the Basilica of San Tomasso Apostolo. In December 1953, Cardinal Eugene Tisserant, Dean of the Sacred College of Cardinals, brought a piece of the right arm bone of Thomas from the Cathedral in Ortona to the Cathedral of St. Thomas in Chennai, as a gift. Certain other churches in India claim to have relics of the saint.

APPENDIX: APOCRYPHA— TRADITIONS & PIOUS FICTIONS

Among the dozens of early apocryphal writings which the Church early rejected as not having any foundation in fact, or as clearly being heretical, there are five outright fictions ascribed in some way to Thomas the Apostle. The three primary ones are: the Acts of Thomas; the Gospel of Thomas; and the Book of Thomas the

³⁴ Information on these churches can be found in M. Jaikumar's book, *St. Thomas the Apostle: Faith Beyond Doubt* (available at Amazon.com; 2023).

Contender [or Athlete]. They are all readily available in print, and online in the Gnostic Society Library (www.gnosis.org). There is no reason at all to read any of these works, albeit doing so does leave one with an appreciation of the work done by the early Church in preventing them from being incorporated into the Canon of sacred scripture.

A. The Acts of Thomas

This is a collection of 14 fairy-tale like stories of the doings of the Apostle Thomas in India. It probably dates from the early part of the third century, and, like the Gospel of Thomas and Book of Thomas, probably was written in Syria. The tales begin after the Resurrection, when by lot the missionary territory of India is assigned to Thomas, and the Lord asks him to go there. When Thomas refuses on the ground of his inadequacy, Jesus, representing Thomas to be a carpenter, sells Thomas into slavery to an Indian merchant. The merchant had been seeking a carpenter to take back to India on behalf of King Gundaphorus. Various adventures in India are then recounted showing Thomas in the capacity of a carpenter/builder/architect. While accepted tradition is the basis for Thomas' connection with the symbols of a carpenter's square and of a lance, and while 'Gondaphernes' was the name of a king who reigned over parts of Asia south of the Himalayas circa 20-46 A.D., the tales in the Acts of Thomas are fictional.³⁵

There is no quick way to sample for you the various literary devices, including hymns, in this work of 90 pages, so I will instead briefly summarize one of the miraculous tales: Thomas convinced King Gundaphorus that he was a

³⁵ The Acts of Thomas can be found in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, W. Schneemelcher, *ed.*, vol. 2, at 442 *et seq.* (Westminster Press; Philadelphia 1963), and in M.R. James, *supra*, n.13, at 364 *et seq.*

skilled architect and builder, and the king paid him a great sum to build a palace, before going away on a journey. Thomas instead distributed the money to the poor. When the king found out, he had Thomas cast into prison, planning to put him to a terrible death. However, the king's brother died and was shown the palace which Thomas had built in heaven for the king. The brother was then restored to life, and told the king the story, prompting the king to release Thomas.

You can get a fuller idea of the work from a few quotations from a scholarly commentary introducing a translation of the work (which refers to the text as the *ATH*):

"The *ATH* are a Christian-Gnostic variety of the Hellenistic-Oriental romance. The elements and motifs abundantly employed in this literature may be recognized in a body in the *ATH*, although frequently in a popular and coarser form: the journey of a hero into a foreign wonderland, the linking of history with that of historical figures, the description of fantastic works of power by the hero and of astonishing prodigies, the partiality for erotic scenes and the developed inclination toward the tendentious, and in addition the stylistic methods of the novel and of the narrative art of fiction.

"Just as clear in the Acts, of course, is the connection with Biblical material and narrative motifs. In thirteen Praxeis [practical applications of a branch of learning], whose center of interest is the Apostle Thomas, the book relates his works of wonder, the stories of the conversion of numerous individuals, and finally the Apostle's sufferings down to his martyrdom.

“All the narratives are interspersed with numerous liturgical pieces, sermons, prayers and hymns The speeches, prayers and hymns in the Acts allow us to recognize beyond mistake how the narratives were intended by the author: as legendary clothing for the mystery of redemption.

*“The view of redemption which lies behind the Acts is that of Gnosticism. . . . The frequent stories about demons in the ATh are also made to serve the Gnostic doctrine of redemption. . . . the demons represent the power of darkness, for the conquest of which the Redeemer has descended, to snatch the darkness the stolen ‘light-souls’ and even now to bring into effect the definitive separation of the ‘natures’ of light and darkness.”*³⁶

The episodes end with Thomas’ death; at the orders of another king, King Misdai/Misdaeus, soldiers spear him to death. This work of fiction found new life centuries later, when two of the tales were embodied in “The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints.”³⁷

B. The Gospel of Thomas

From its name, the “Gospel of Thomas” would appear to hold the greatest promise for added enlightenment. In form, it is a “sayings Gospel,” which purports to be a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus which were written down

³⁶ Hennecke, *supra*, n.35, vol. 2, at 428-29. (Emphasis added.) However, a lengthy essay on this work in the Anchor Bible Dictionary rejects classifying it as gnostic: “[I]t lacks the cosmogonic myths characteristic of Gnosticism in the strictest sense. The work basically represents the mixture of theology, liturgy and ascetical piety characteristic of Syrian Christianity of the 2d and 3d centuries.” See, The Anchor Bible Dictionary, *supra*, n.20, vol. vi, at 531 et seq.

³⁷ See, citation *supra*, n. 13.

by the Apostle Thomas. The first *caveat* is that it was the custom in early centuries to try to dignify and give weight to fictional accounts about Christian figures by ascribing their authorship to named Apostles, or by otherwise indicating that the information came from central actors at the time of Christ.³⁸ And so there were “Gospels” attributed not only to Thomas, but also to the Apostles Philip, Matthias, Judas, and Bartholomew, as well as Gospels attributed to the Twelve as a group, and many, many other similar works such as the Gospel of the Nazareans or the Gospel of the Hebrews.

The second *caveat* is that there is almost nothing in the Gospel of Thomas specifically referring to Thomas, except a few lines of dialogue including a short interlude when Jesus took Thomas aside, and those are worthless:

--"When Thomas came back to his friends, they asked him, 'What did Jesus tell you?'"

--"Thomas said to them, 'If I tell you even one of the things he told me, you will pick up rocks and stone me. Then fire will come forth from the rocks and devour you.'" ³⁹

The third and most serious *caveat* is that it is through-and-through non-Christian work, which appeared sometime in the first three centuries. For those interested in an extended, orthodox review of the teachings in this “Gospel,” an analysis is presented by Prof. Larry Hurtado, whose summary points in his magisterial work on earliest Christianity include the following:

³⁸ This was a practice previously employed by Jewish writers, for example in ascribing four apocalypses to Baruch, the scribe of Nehemiah.

³⁹ See, Marvin W. Meyer (*tr.*), *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels*, at 21 (Random House; New York, 1984).

"Gos. Thom. Rejects the emphasis on the unique importance of the *human person* of Jesus that is promoted in numerous early Christian writings [including the Gospel of John], presenting instead a picture of Jesus as the otherworldly mouthpiece of a body of esoteric teachings. Also, *Gos. Thom.* Emphasizes that these teachings offer devotees an insight and a spiritual status far beyond what is available to other Christians through the ordinary (and inferior) channels of preaching and instruction."⁴⁰

The Gospel of Thomas is really a Gnostic work, which in recent years has been touted by people who have an interest in finding supposed *alternate Christianities* in early Apocrypha, to lessen the authority of the Gospels and other texts approved by the Church. It was even featured in a book titled, "The Five Gospels: the Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus," a product of the so-called "Jesus Seminar."⁴¹ The effort of the Seminar was to debunk reliance on the four acknowledged Gospels in two ways: first by challenging almost every verse in them as not being authentic—but rather literary products; and second, by pairing the Four Gospels with the Gospel of Thomas. Interestingly, they found not a single verse in the Gospel of John as being unequivocally a saying of Jesus, and only one line as probably being His. Needless to say, they treated the Gospel of Thomas with far more respect.

The latter "Gospel" was promoted also by Elaine Pagels, in her book, "Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of

⁴⁰ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, at 452 *et seq.*, 470-71 (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, MI 2003).

⁴¹ Apart from the Jesus Seminar, listed authors were R.W Funk and R.W. Hoover (Macmillan Publishing Co.; New York, 1993).

Thomas.”⁴² She is a scholar who has championed it and argued that the Church was wrong to suppress it. Well, the reason that the Church did so was that the Gospel of Thomas was an attempt by Gnostics to co-opt Jesus as part of their dualist philosophy. According to them, He was not a god but a spirit sent by the pure spirit-God to help mankind escape from the evils of materiality (including earthly bodies), so as to enter the spirit world. So, the Gnostic authors embedded sayings from their “secret knowledge” in about the same number of sayings from the true Gospels here and there, to give the whole work a patina of verisimilitude. This was necessary because the Gnostic parts were pure twaddle, as shown by the example above. Here are three additional examples:

(#37) “His disciples said: On what day wilt thou be revealed to us, and on what day shall we see thee? Jesus said: ‘When you unclothe yourselves and are not ashamed, and take your garments and lay them beneath your feet like little children, and tread upon them, then [shall ye see] the Son of the living One, and ye shall not fear.’”

(#56) “Jesus said: ‘He who has known the world has found a corpse, and he who has found a corpse, the world is not worthy of him.’”

(#114) “Simon Peter said to them: ‘Let Mary go forth from among us, for women are not worthy of the life.’ Jesus said: ‘Behold, I shall lead her, that I may make her male, in order that she also may become a living

⁴² Published by Random House, New York, in 2003. *See also*, her book, *The Gnostic Gospels* (Random House, New York, 1979). For a scathing critical appraisal of her work as unscholarly, *see*, Paul Mankowski, S.J., “The Pagels Imposture,” *The Catholic World Report* (May 2006), at 38.

spirit like you males. For every woman who makes herself male shall enter the kingdom of heaven.”⁴³

C. The Infancy Story/Gospel of Thomas

There is another manuscript which is sometimes referred to as the Gospel of Thomas, or “The Account of Thomas the Israelite Philosopher Concerning the Childhood of the Lord, but which is better titled the “Infancy Story of Thomas.”⁴⁴ It is a narrative, supposedly by Thomas, about the miracles worked by Jesus as a child, aged five to twelve years, ending with his appearance in the Temple. It is not Gnostic at all, but rather the work of an inventive Christian, although the miracles are not religious ones, such as fashioning sparrows from clay and causing them to come to life and fly off—or worse, causing other children who annoyed Him to wither-up or die. And it has an anti-Jewish character.⁴⁵

D. The Book of Thomas the Contender

In form, this short work is a question-and-answer dialogue between Jesus and Judas Thomas, the purported twin brother of Jesus, which supposedly occurred in between the Resurrection and the Ascension. The writing probably dates to the second century, and like the Gospel of Thomas, was part of the writings together referred to as the “Nag Hammadi Library” (a collection of gnostic and Christian texts probably buried about 400 A.D. but not found until 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt). Thomas is described as a contender (or athlete) because of his

⁴³ Hennecke, *supra*, n.35, vol.1 at 515-16, and 522. *See also*, the Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. vi, at 535 et seq., for a general analysis of the work.

⁴⁴ Hennecke, *supra*, n.35, vol.1, at 388 et seq.; and James, *supra*, n.12, at 49 et seq. *See also*, the Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. vi, at 540 et seq., for a general analysis of the work.

⁴⁵ *See*, Hurtado, *supra*, n.40, at 449 et. seq.

struggles against the desires of the flesh. In a lengthy analysis of this work appearing in the Anchor Bible Dictionary, it is proposed that the work is “broadly ascetic rather than gnostic,” and that “the doctrine of this work is Christian(ized) wisdom with ascetic application; the wisdom themes of seeking, finding, being troubled, resting, and ruling are distinctly present.”⁴⁶ Two examples of the dialogue follow:

--"Thomas answered and said to the Savior, 'Tell us about these things that you say cannot be seen but are hidden from us.'

--The Savior said, 'All the bodies of humans and animals are irrational from birth. . . Beings that come from above, however, do not live like the creatures you can see. Rather, they derive their life from their own root, and their crop provides nourishment for them. These bodies you can see, on the other hand, feed on creatures like themselves, and for this reason they are subject to change. Whatever is subject to change will perish and be lost, and has no more hope of life, because this body is an animal body.'"

--"Thomas said, 'Lord, why does this visible light that shines upon people rise and set?'

--The Savior said, 'Blessed Thomas, this visible light shines upon you not to keep you here, but to make you leave. When all the chosen ones lay aside their animal nature, this light will withdraw to the realm of its being, and its being will welcome it because of its fine service.'"⁴⁷

E. The Apocalypse [Revelation] of Thomas

⁴⁶ Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. vi, at 529-30.

⁴⁷ See, M.W. Meyer, *supra*, n. 39, at 42 et seq.

The so-called Apocalypse [Revelation] of Thomas is in the form of a purported epistle from Jesus to Thomas detailing the woes which were to come in the last days.⁴⁸ This was not a gnostic work, but a pious Christian invention. By the beginning of the sixth century, it was recognized as spurious, but, according to an article in Wikipedia, it “inspired the Fifteen Signs before Doomsday, a list of fifteen signs given over fifteen days announcing Judgment Day, a visionary list which spread all over Europe and remained popular possibly into Shakespeare’s day.”

F. Other Mentions of Thomas

(1) There are many Coptic fragments which may have come from apocryphal gospels, including the following summary of one such passage, set following the event of the feeding of the 5,000:

“Thomas then says that he wishes to see the power of Christ displayed in the raising of the dead from their tombs, not only from the bier, as at Nain. Jesus replies in a long and rhetorical address of many clauses, beginning ‘Come with me, Didymus, to the tomb of Lazarus.’ Then the raising of Lazarus is told”⁴⁹

(2) Finally, the Psalms of Thomas (or Thom) are wholly gnostic works which were found appended to a Coptic Manichean Psalm book. It is not clear whether the Thomas (or Thom) referred to actually is Thomas the Apostle or, rather, the disciple Thomas of Mani, the leader of a Gnostic sect, but there is nothing to link these writings to the Apostle.

⁴⁸ It can be found in James, *supra*, n. 35, at 555 et seq.

⁴⁹ See, James, *supra*, n.13, at 147-48.

THE END

Sister Emmerich's birthplace in Coesfeld, Germany is holding a celebration in 2024 commemorating her birth 250 years ago and her death 200 years ago. Information is available on two websites. **Emmerichhaus** is the site for pictures of her birthplace. <https://whichmuseum.com/museum/anna-katharina-emmerick-haus-coesfeld-29260>

Anna-katherina-emmerik is the site for a brochure in German mentioning the various commemorative events and their locations, mainly in Dulmen, Germany.

<https://www.anna-katharina-emmerick.net/index.php/jubilaum/68-jubilaumsjahr-2024>

HURD BARUCH received degrees from Hamilton College, Yale Law School and the Columbia University Graduate School of Business. He was elected to membership in Phi Beta Kappa, the Order of the Coif, and Beta Gamma Sigma. He practiced law for more than forty years, in the fields of corporate and securities law and litigation, including investigating corporate wrongdoing in this country and abroad. He served as an official in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (1962-1964), and at the Securities and Exchange Commission (1969-1972), where he authored *Wall Street: Security Risk* (Acropolis Books 1971, Penguin Books 1972), a book about the near collapse of the brokerage industry at that time. He also authored a legal treatise, and articles in the Harvard Business Review.

Since retirement, he has authored more than a dozen articles and book reviews for the New Oxford Review. Also, four books available from Amazon.com. Two are works of religious fiction—a novel, *The Stigmatist*, and a play about Christ’s agony in the Garden—*A Night Unlike Any Other*. Two are works based on the mystical visions of the stigmatic nun Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich—*Illuminations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the Mystical Visions of the Venerable Anne Catherine Emmerich* (2d ed. 2023), concerning her visions of the years of public ministry of Christ; and *The Coming of the Messiah: Illuminations of the Infancy Narratives in the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the Mystical Visions of the Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich*.