



# Sending a boy to do a man's job: Hegemonic masculinity and the 'boy' Jesus in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*

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Studies of masculinity have shown that masculinity is a socially acknowledged gender status. Rather than automatically attaining such a status simply through physical maturation, boys must 'earn' such status by matching the social conventions associated with masculinity. Boys earn such status through 'doing gender', that is, acting in ways that are assessed by others as meeting gendered norms. Failure to meet these norms can result in suggestions that boys are unmanly. For elite Romans, masculinity was attained through the domination of others, including spouse, children and enemies. Though Jesus is presented as a child in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, his actions lend themselves to interpretation in terms of expectations for elite Roman males. In this text, Jesus is described as behaving in ways normally associated with hegemonic masculinity in the Roman world. He is able to defeat opponents in violent ways through the power of his word, he is able to teach his teachers, and he is able to provide for his family. Throughout the text, Jesus is described more in terms of an adult male than a child.

## Introduction

Recently, Jerry Boykin of the Family Research Council suggested that, upon his return, Jesus would be carrying an AR-15 assault rifle (Boykin 2014; Mantyla 2014).<sup>1</sup> Though the remark, made during the WallBuilders' Pro-Family Legislators Conference, brought some laughter from the crowd, Boykin was quick to assure them that, despite what 'the theologians' might say, he was serious. Boykin went on to trace the origins of the Second Amendment of the United States of America Constitution not to the drafters of that document but to Jesus himself. In another address, Boykin speaks of Jesus as a 'man's man' who has been 'feminised' by the church (Mantyla 2013).<sup>2</sup> Such feminisation makes men (at least of the type Boykin wants 'to hang out with') unable to identify with Jesus, who was a 'tough guy'. Boykin argues that this Jesus would have smelled bad, but he would have had bulging muscles due to the intensity of the physical labour of being a carpenter.

Boykin links his understanding of Jesus to three biblical passages: Exodus 15, Luke 22:36 and Revelation 19. Exodus 15:3, unproblematically read as referring to Jesus by Boykin, calls 'the Lord' a warrior. Luke, on his part, quotes Jesus saying to his disciples '... now if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one'. Refusing a metaphorical interpretation of this saying, Boykin goes on to argue that Jesus knew that the disciples would have to fight while spreading the kingdom. By tying this saying to the origins of the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Boykin implies that Jesus' saying is directed not only to his (male) disciples then but also to those men who would take up AR-15 assault rifles in defence of Jesus' kingdom today. Boykin links the blood on the robe of the rider of the white horse in Revelation 19:13 to the blood of Jesus' enemies. Though this reading is possible, given that Revelation 19:2 does indeed refer to retribution for the blood of the saints, it more likely refers, as the word 'blood' in reference to Jesus does throughout most of Revelation, to the blood that he himself shed.

Boykin, of course, is not the first person to express some disquiet about a 'feminised' Jesus. So-called 'muscular Christianity' in the United States has been making this case for more than 100 years. Both Conant's (1915) *The virility of Christ* and Hughes's (1880) *The manliness of Christ* make this same case (though, notably, without the AR-15 assault rifle). Around the turn of the 20th century, the United States, according to some of its citizens, suffered a crisis of masculinity

1. For the full audio of his presentation, refer to 'Third great awakening: Part 1' (Boykin 2014). His speech starts at 23:36.

2. For the full audio of his presentation, refer to 'Men's breakfast with Boykin' (Boykin 2013). His speech starts at 31:23.

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for which the only (and obvious) solution was a 'return to manliness'. For those who were concerned about this crisis, familiar images of Jesus would no longer do, contributing, as they did, to the problem of effeminacy (Prothero 2003: 89).

Boykin's rhetoric is only the latest in a long line of such expressions, and it represents more a concern for 'our' masculinity than for the masculinity of Jesus. But what do we make of Jesus' masculinity? The victim of an imperial execution, Jesus hardly represents the kind of 'take-no-prisoners' man whom Boykin would have him be. Despite its place in a line of American concerns about Jesus' masculinity, Boykin's move is not without its precedents even in ancient Christian literature.

The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* is a collection of stories about Jesus, covering his boyhood from when he was 5 years old until he was 12 years old. The narrative of Jesus' youth is controversial due to the fact that Jesus performs several 'miraculous' events though not infrequently such events cause harm to others. The story details Jesus' activity with playmates, with neighbours, with teachers, with his family and finally with the teachers in the temple in a scene very much like the story of Jesus in Luke 2:41–52. Although Jesus appears throughout the text as a boy, the author of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* presents Jesus as a hegemonic, elite man, willing to use violence to overcome his adversaries and unwilling to recognise the authority of those in positions of power over him.

## The study of men

Michael Kimmel, one of the leading scholars of masculinity in the North American context, suggested that masculinity as a topic of theoretical interest has long been 'invisible' in social scientific research (Kimmel 1993). He writes of American men that they 'have no history', by which he means that they '... have no history as gendered selves; no work describes historical events in terms of what these events meant to the men who participated in them as men' (Kimmel 1993:28). This invisibility is due to the taken-for-granted normalcy of the 'generic man' as representative of human development.<sup>3</sup> Such a presumption, of course, hides the fact that masculinity is socially constructed, like all other forms of identity.<sup>4</sup>

Kimmel argues that '[m]asculinities are constructed in a field of power: 1) the power of men over women; 2) the power of some men over other men' (Kimmel 1993:30). Social scientists, ranging from '... Thomas Hobbes and John Locke through Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Sigmund

Freud ... proclaim "man" as his own maker' (Kimmel 1993:31). These social scientists suggested that men made 'society', sometimes even using the notion of giving birth to describe what they did in creating society. The social notion of society and the definition of manhood in 19th-century social scientific thinking were predicated upon success in the marketplace, but with the rise of industrialisation and the mechanisation of much work and increased immigration, social scientists sought to redefine manhood in terms of biological markers. When it became impossible to sustain the biological or race-based notions of the superiority of European masculinity, social scientists turned to the '... acquisition of gender appropriate behaviour, the mastery of the male sex role' (Kimmel 1993:31). With this move, they adopted a perspective that saw heterosexual European and European American men's behaviour as the norm for such gender-appropriate behaviour to the detriment of other ethnic groups and gay people. By framing what it means to be a man in this way, social scientists suggested that sex roles were fixed both historically and cross-culturally so that what it meant to be a man is largely the same for all men everywhere in every time (Kimmel 1993:30–35). Kimmel, an historically aware sociologist, of course, rejects such a notion in favour of acknowledging masculinity itself as a social construction. Kimmel goes so far as to suggest that, in developing markers of masculinity and its stages of development, '[s]ocial science operationalized sexism, racism, and homophobia and called it masculinity' (Kimmel 1993:33).

David Gilmore assesses manhood across a number of different cultural expressions in his book *Manhood in the making*. He argues that gender roles vary considerably from one society to the next but that there are some significant ways in which gender roles show subsurface similarities across a wide range of cultures (Gilmore 1990:3–23, 222–226). Key amongst the subsurface similarities is the notion of sexual dimorphism, the assigning of sex or gender to two, and only two, distinct sets of attributes. Whilst there are a few cultures in the world that do not operate with a strictly conceived sexual dimorphism, by far the vast majority of the world's cultures do. Gilmore argues '... that manhood ideals make an indispensable contribution both to the continuity of social systems and to the psychological integration of men into their community' and that such ideals work to resolve '... the existential "problem of order" that all societies must solve by encouraging people to act in certain ways, ways that facilitate both individual development and group adaptation' (Gilmore 1990:3).<sup>5</sup> These ideals function to enable men to integrate their own personal lives into those of their society. Perhaps the most interesting finding in Gilmore's (1990) study is the following idea:

... a constantly recurring notion that real manhood is different from simple anatomical maleness, that it is not a natural condition that comes about spontaneously through biological maturation but rather is a precarious or artificial state that boys

3. Kimmel (1993:30) writes: 'A version of white, middle class, heterosexual masculinity emerged as normative, the standard against which both men and women were measured, and through which success and failure were evaluated. This normative version – enforced, coercive, laden with power – academic social science declared to be the "normal" version.'

4. Kimmel is well aware of the pioneering work of feminist scholars who introduced gender as a 'master status' alongside race and class in social-scientific work. He notes that feminist scholars, such as Catherine Stimpson, have '... rightfully focused their attention on women' (Kimmel 1993:29) as a means of redressing the focus on men that characterises most historical work. At the same time, however, Kimmel argues that we need to 'go further' to incorporate how gender ideals have influenced men's behaviour and identities.

5. Even here we see an echo in Gilmore's functionalist approach of the problem that Kimmel sets out to address. The notion of 'society' and the individual's fit within it mask the power relations that create both the notion of societal norms and the idea of the 'individual' as an independent and psychological unit.

must win against powerful odds is a universal or near universal assumption. (p. 6)

To 'be a man' is not simply an anatomical or maturational datum. In other words, one can be an adult male without being a 'man' according to gender expectations. In fact, it is really only in a context in which (despite one's anatomical and maturational status as an adult male) the failure to live up to the masculinity ideal is possible that the phrase 'be a man' makes any sense.

Gilmore suggests that, cross-culturally speaking, women do not often have the same difficulty achieving a 'gender identity' with respect to gender ideals for women:

Women who are found deficient or deviant according to these standards may be criticized as immoral, or they may be called unladylike or its equivalent and subjected to appropriate sanctions, but rarely is their right to a gender identity questioned in the same public, dramatic way that it is for men. (Gilmore 1990:11)

Following feminist thinking, Gilmore distinguishes between sex (which is 'rooted in anatomy and is therefore fairly constant') and gender (a 'symbolic category' with 'strong moral overtones, and therefore [it] is ascriptive and culturally relative – potentially changeful') (Gilmore 1990:22).<sup>6</sup>

For both Kimmel and Gilmore, gender is something that is done in the public eye. Doing gender is a public performance that is rewarded with the label 'masculine' (or not), depending upon the expertise of the performer relative to the gender expectations of the group. This way of conceiving gender identity correlates well with certain features that scholars who are attentive to the social dynamics of the ancient Mediterranean world have called to our attention often during the last 30 years. Despite Kimmel's interest in masculinity in the American context, his emphasis on the evaluation of masculine performance coheres well with Gilmore's wide-ranging cross-cultural analysis. Such performance, however, should not be conceived as limited to 'gender issues' only. All human activity should be understood as gendered, in the words of West and Zimmerman (1987):

If sex category is omnirelevant (or even approaches being so), then a person engaged in virtually any activity may be held accountable for performance of that activity as a *woman* or a *man*, and their incumbency in one or the other sex category can be used to legitimate or discredit their other activities. (p. 136)

Such an approach towards gendered activity is what West and Zimmerman call 'doing gender'. They note that 'to "do" gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behaviour *at the risk of gender assessment*' (West & Zimmerman 1987:136). Such assessment is provided in many different ways, and it might come from peers, those with more power or those with less power in a society. However, the assessment relies

upon agreed-upon understandings of what makes a woman a woman or a man a man.

## Roman masculinities

Agreed-upon understandings of what makes a man a man are elements of masculinity that vary from culture to culture and even within cultures. Scholars refer to the dominant form of masculinity in any given culture as 'hegemonic masculinity' (Levy 2007). Hegemonic masculinity refers to three discreet things: '(1) a position in the system of gender relations; (2) the system itself; and (3) the current ideology that serves to reproduce masculine domination' (Levy 2007:253). The position of hegemonic masculinity with a system of gender relationships is itself a relationship, representing an 'ideal-type' of masculinity which is '... subject to contestation within a particular culture' (Levy 2007:254). In addition to hegemonic masculinity, complicit, subordinated and marginalised masculinity can exist within cultural expressions. Complicit masculinity is practiced by those who are not at the top of the system but who do benefit from the system. Such complicity allows these men to benefit from the advantages of the system and to resist the subordinate position themselves. Subordinated men are those for whom hegemonic masculinity should be possible, given that these men appear to have the necessary physical attributes to participate in hegemony, but they are not able to subordinate others. Marginalised men are those for whom their status (ethnic, physical, mental) prevents them from aspiring to hegemonic masculinity (Levy 2007:254).

In the Greco-Roman world, there were several types of masculinity. Much of what can be known about masculinity comes from sources produced and preserved by the elite. These sources should be considered expressions of hegemonic (or in some cases complicit) masculinity. The perspectives of subordinate and marginalised masculinities are rarely reflected in the preserved materials though occasionally graffiti and other material remains provide some indication of other masculinities (Richlin 2007:265–269). Key characteristics of Greco-Roman masculinity involved the idea that a proper man (read: elite citizen) was impenetrable (Richlin 2007:265–267; Walters 1997:32–35; Williams 1999:172–178). A proper man was supposed to rule over his household as a 'lord' (κύριος) or *paterfamilias* (Richlin 2007:267–268). Total obedience was expected toward these fathers, and though some ancient authors appealed to fathers to use persuasion rather than physical force for rearing their children, fathers, in the Roman world at least, had control over the life and death of their children (Bartchy 2003:135–136). Most particularly, 'men' were understood in categories in opposition to others: women, slaves, boys and foreigners (McDonnell 2006:159–180). To be a man is to be different from, and in Greek and Roman sensibilities, to stand above women, slaves, boys and foreigners. These 'others' are less honourable, less noble, not manly (McDonnell 2006:159–180).

McDonnell (2006), in his important study on *Roman manliness*, examines the word *virtus* and its shift in meaning from the

6. Here Gilmore follows the work of Baker (1980), Sanday (1981) and Otten (1985). See also the work of West and Zimmerman (1987).



period of pre-Classical Latin to the period of the Roman Republic. The word *virtus* is derived from the Latin *vir* or man. *Virtus*, from the perspective of Cicero, is the very ideal of Roman manhood and is limited to Romans themselves:

But *virtus* usually wards off a cruel and dishonorable death, and *virtus* is the badge of the Roman race and breed. Cling fast to it, I beg you men of Rome, as a heritage that your ancestors bequeathed to you. All else is false and doubtful, ephemeral and changeable: only *virtus* stands firmly fixed, its roots run deep, it can never be shaken by any violence, never moved from its place. With this *virtus* your ancestors conquered all Italy first, then razed Carthage, overthrew Numantia, brought the most powerful kings and the most warlike peoples under the sway of this empire. (Cicero, *Philippics* 4.13; quoted in McDonnell 2006:3)

Key amongst McDonnell's findings is that, in the pre-Classical period, the meaning of *virtus* was almost exclusively related to courage or courageous deeds, especially in a martial context. This usage, reflected in works such as Plautus' comedies and Ennius' *Annales*, encompasses two forms within itself. The first, and the more common, relates to aggressiveness in battle whilst the second relates to bravery in the endurance of pain and death (McDonnell 2006:12–71). 'But in pre-Classical Latin courageous virtue is more often than not an aggressive quality' (McDonnell 2006:63). In the Republican period, a second meaning of the word developed, heavily influenced by the Greek word ἀρετή, relating *virtus* to a more general ethical 'excellence'. The Greek influence on Rome in the period of the Republic can account for this shift, and it does not represent an older, indigenous understanding of the term. For Cicero, *virtus* and its plural *virtutes* came to represent a broader category that can include the four cardinal virtues (*Pro Murena* 30) or the sum of all virtuous things (*Cat.* 2.25).

*Virtus* was restricted (except in extraordinary cases) to male Roman citizens. In this sense, it represents a 'hegemonic masculinity' in Roman society (McDonnell 2006:165–166). It was not associated with children, slaves or women. Further, *virtus* is public or quasi-public, related in most instances to service (and, particularly, military service) to the Republic. The one exception to the public nature of *virtus* was the relationship between fathers and sons (McDonnell 2006:169–180). Even here, McDonnell notes a tension between the absolute authority of the *paterfamilias* and the expectations of newly minted citizens of Rome who were still sons to these fathers. Even though these young men were still under the authority of their fathers, in service to the Republic, these newly made men had a way to cross '... from the private sphere of the *familia* to the public sphere of the *res publica*' (McDonnell 2006:178). In such public service, they could earn honours for military successes that would enhance not only their family name but their own name as well.

As the Roman military became more professionalised and less dependent upon individual citizens, different means of expressing *virtus*, influenced heavily by Hellenization, began to emerge in Rome. These included political achievement, oratorical performance, expertise in law, public displays

and private luxury. These luxuries were not without their critiques, and Polybius even records the reason for the Senate's approval of the war against the Dalmatians as to avoid effeminacy affecting the ranks of Roman men (*Historiae* 32.13.6).<sup>7</sup> Significantly, Julius Caesar uses the term *virtus* almost exclusively to refer to 'manly courage' over against the more generalised (and Hellenised) notion of 'excellence' (McDonnell 2006:300–19). Under the Principate, as more soldiers were professional and fewer and fewer Roman nobles had military experience, the more expansive, Hellenised version of *virtus* (as 'ethical excellence' on the model of the Greek ἀρετή) overtook the more traditional Roman understanding of *virtus* as related to martial courage (McDonnell 2006:385–389).

Many non-elite men who lived within Rome's imperial rule enacted complicit masculinities. These men benefitted from hegemonic masculinity with its valuation of men above women, Romans above foreigners and adult males above children. One of the clearest ways in which we can see such complicit masculinity is in the Roman system of honour (Barton 2001:29–87). Honour, like manhood, was something that could be won (and, consequently, lost) in competition. 'Who, with the prospect of envy, death, and punishment staring him in the face, does not hesitate to defend the Republic, he truly can be reckoned a *vir*' (Cicero, *Pro Milone* 30.82; quoted in Barton 2001:43). According to Barton, Romans lived with '... an acute sensitivity to the bonds (*religiones, obligationes, moenia, and munera*) that defined them' (Barton 2001:35). Within the agonistic Roman culture, however, such bonds were permeable, and the testing of them:

... was the act of defining one's boundaries, of determining one's share or portion ... And because in a contest culture no one's part was fixed, the *discrimen* established, momentarily one's position. (Barton 2001:35)

It was in such struggles or contests that a Roman *homo* might become a *vir*. Importantly, however, a *vir* (a 'man') was always a status that could be lost.<sup>8</sup>

Obviously, to become a *vir* in Roman society, one had to learn what it meant to be a *vir*. Boys, as we saw above, one of the oppositional categories to men, learned, through various means, to become men in Roman society. Cicero says the following about boys:

With what earnestness they pursue their rivalries! How fierce are their contests! What exultation they feel when they win, and what shame when they are beaten! How they dislike reproach! How they yearn for praise! What labors will they not undertake to stand first among their peers! How well they remember those who have shown them kindness and how eager to repay it! (*De Finibus* 5.22.61; quoted in Barton 2001:11)

7. See also, Sallust, *Bel. Jug.* 85. For a more complete discussion of the contrast between traditional (pre-Classical) Roman *virtus* and a Hellenised version of the concept, see McDonnell (2006:265–92).

8. In this sense, Gilmore's (1990:224) focus upon rites of passage into manhood in various cultures is problematic in one aspect. He defines manhood as '... the defeat of childhood narcissism', but that defeat is not necessarily a one-time accomplishment. In other words, it is possible to lose one's status as a 'man' even when one is biologically male and of adult age. This relates back to the point about the insecurity of gender identity that Gilmore himself raised early in the book.

These boys learned how to behave as men and to care about honour. There were two principle ways in which boys (especially elite boys) learned to become honourable Roman citizens. The first way was imitation of their fathers. Fathers undoubtedly taught their children, both through their actions and through their instruction, proper ways of behaving. The *paterfamilias* was expected to keep his children in line. A second way in which young Roman boys were taught to be (elite) men was through the school practices of declamation and the adoption of *personae* (Bloomer 1997:57–78). Declamation was part of the secondary level of schooling, almost certainly restricted to boys (Bloomer 1997:74–75). In the practice of declamation, boys learned how to speak on behalf of others by adopting the *personae* of people who might find themselves accused of misdeeds and illegalities. The purpose of the practice of declamation, according to Bloomer, was to learn how to speak on behalf of those to whom a boy would eventually serve as a *paterfamilias*. 'He speaks like a patron or paterfamilias speaking on behalf of and speaking as his social subordinates' (Bloomer 1997:57). The Roman boy learned to speak on behalf of those who were denied the right to speak publicly, including women, children and slaves:

As a creation of categories and of role playing, it was a part and not a reflection of social practice. It intersects significantly with the social construction of gender, and does so in ways overtly concerned with the possibility and appropriateness of speaking by and for women. (Bloomer 1997:70)

Another feature of schooling that taught boys how to be elite Romans was writing narratives of their days. Such exercises taught the boys how to command slaves. Bloomer (1997) claims:

The narrative of the day is in fact a series of imperatives: starting with the dawn the boy orders his slave to wash him. Clothe me. Feed me and so on. (p. 72)

At the same time, by practicing the *salutatio* toward his teachers and by learning how to greet family members when he returns home, the boy learned how to conduct himself in the public world of Roman honour. In such displays of honour, both in declamation and in writing these exercises:

... the student plots a verbal dueling. This is a textual and may even be an intellectualist reduction of violence. The schoolyard fight (in Roman terms the encounter in the street) is written and learned as a verbal duel. (Bloomer 1997:73)

What can be seen in the declamation exercises is the beginning of the passage from boyhood into manhood for Roman boys. In this passage, these boys were subject to their teachers rather than their fathers, but they were also learning how to become masters, *patresfamilias*.

## Masculinity and the Jesus movement

Scholarship on masculinity within early Jesus groups, like scholarship on masculinity generally, is a relatively recent

phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> This is hardly surprising since masculinity studies itself is only about 30 years old. There have been a number of interesting studies that have raised questions about the way in which Jesus' manhood had been presented by the authors of the Gospels and other early Jesus group members. Space prohibits a full discussion of such matters here though a few comments are in order. In general, there are two types of tension in the Jesus material regarding Jesus' masculinity. Firstly, there is the obvious fact that Jesus was crucified, and the authors of all our accounts of Jesus found within the New Testament have to treat this fact. Jesus, as a pierced (penetrated, though not sexually) male, is not hegemonically masculine in Roman terms. Such a public execution, and the inability to escape such a fate, were markers of shame in Roman society (Neyrey 1994:131–32). Secondly, Jesus asks his disciples not to perform tasks that would garner them honour in terms of hegemonic masculinity such as violence and retaliation (Anderson & Moore 2003:76; Liew 2003: 123–35; Neyrey 2003:53–66; Thurman 2003:153–161). At the same time, Jesus himself displays strength, both by dispatching unclean spirits and by using the violence of curse (Clines 1998:355–358). Jesus also regularly operates in outdoor contexts, a key sign of masculinity according to the gender-divided spatial conception of the Greeks (Neyrey 2003:44–53), and he regularly defeats his opponents in honour-laden challenge-riposte encounters (Anderson & Moore 2003:79–81; Liew 2003:104–113; Neyrey 2003:59–65). Further, Jesus enacts his own kinship group amongst whom, according to Liew, he rules as *paterfamilias* (Liew 2003:104; Moxnes 2003:46–124). Finally, Jesus represents masculine virtue in his self-mastery (Anderson & Moore 2003:69; Neyrey 2003:53–64).

Whilst this is certainly not a detailed list of characteristics of Jesus' masculinity and challenges to it in the Jesus traditions found within the New Testament, one of the most difficult aspects of presenting Jesus as a hegemonic male, rather than a subordinated or marginalised male, is the fact of his crucifixion. What makes the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* interesting in this regard is that there is no need to treat this episode of Jesus' life in a story about his childhood. Though Jesus is a 'boy' throughout the text of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the fact that his death is not narrated there leaves the author free to present Jesus as a hegemonic man.

## Jesus' masculinity in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*

The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (IGT) was likely written sometime in the 2nd or 3rd century CE (Chartrand-Burke 2003:144). Most modern editions and translations depend upon Tischendorf's Greek text, a document containing 19 chapters. Earlier versions of the document, however, lack some of the chapters found in this later text. Chapters 1, 10, 17 and 18 are omitted from the earliest Greek manuscripts

<sup>9</sup>Some important works on Jesus and masculinity include Anderson and Moore (2003), Clines (1998), Conway (2008), D'Angelo (2002), D'Angelo (2010), Liew (2003), Moore (2003), Moxnes (2003), Neyrey (2003), Thurman (2003), Thurman (2007). This list is not in any way meant to be exhaustive.

and early translations of the text (Chartrand-Burke 2003).<sup>10</sup> The *IGT* contains stories about Jesus between the ages of five and twelve. Included are stories about Jesus' relationship with Joseph, initial attempts to school Jesus and various interactions with neighbouring children. What is striking about the text is that Jesus killed some of his neighbours, provided for his father rather than the other way around and instructed his teachers rather than being instructed by them. These are all markers of elite, hegemonic masculinity, and throughout the *IGT*, Jesus possesses them.

### Jesus' violent behaviour in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*

Perhaps the greatest reason for scandal concerning the *IGT* is that the young Jesus killed, blinded and maimed on multiple occasions. This type of behaviour is not what Christians normally associate with Jesus. Such behaviour was, however, reflective of hegemonic masculinity in the Roman world. Obviously, when *virtus* was demonstrated in battle, the death or incapacitating of one's opponent was one of the certain signs of manliness. Jesus' violent action toward those who dishonoured him should best be understood in such a context.<sup>11</sup>

When the son of Annas the scribe used a stick to undo the pools of water Jesus has collected in a stream as he was playing (*IGT* 2.1), Jesus caused him to become withered simply through his word (*IGT* 3.2–3). When another child bumped into Jesus, Jesus said to the child, 'You shall go no further on your way' (*IGT* 4.1),<sup>12</sup> whereupon the child immediately died. When those who witnessed these things approached Joseph, Joseph 'admonished' (ἐνουθέτει) Jesus privately (*IGT* 5.1). Jesus, however, was able to see that the complaint did not come from Joseph, and he said to Joseph in reply: 'But those others will bear their punishment' (*IGT* 5.1). When Jesus had said that, the ones accusing him immediately became blind (εὐθέως οἱ ἐγκαλοῦντες αὐτὸν ἀπετυφλώθησαν *IGT* 5.1). These masculine displays on Jesus' part both caused consternation on the part of Jesus' neighbours and served to increase his fame or honour. Due to these events, and even though their effects were undone by Jesus' word (*IGT* 8.2),<sup>13</sup> '... no one dared to anger him from that time on, fearing he might cripple them with a curse' (*IGT* 8.2).

There is only one more instance in which Jesus actually caused harm to a person (the second teacher who attempts to instruct him, a text which will be discussed further below), but in

10. These earlier versions also contain somewhat different wording in a number of the remaining chapters. The text used here, found in Ehrman and Pleše (2011), is based upon Tischendorf's a text, but I have chosen to exclude information from chapters 1, 10 and 17–18 in the interest of discounting potential medieval additions to the text. For the major Greek textual witnesses and their translations, see Burke (2010:293–539).

11. It is significant to note that Jesus' violence was limited to verbal expression, such as cursing, and does not involve the physical overcoming of opponents. In other words, Jesus, though He was capable of defeating all of his enemies, does not participate in battle.

12. Translation is that of Ehrman and Pleše (2011:11). All quotations from the *IGT*, unless otherwise noted, are taken from this translation.

13. It is unclear whether those who are healed in 8.2 are only those who were cursed in 5.1 or whether they include both the withered son of Annas and the boy whom Jesus had killed by his word.

*IGT* 9, Jesus was accused of killing his playmate Zenon. Jesus had to raise Zenon in order for him (Zenon) to exonerate Jesus with his parents (*IGT* 9.3).<sup>14</sup> The end result of this episode was that the parents of Zenon 'glorified God' (ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεόν) and 'did obeisance'<sup>15</sup> to Jesus (προσεκύνησαν τῷ Ἰησοῦ) in response to this sign (*IGT* 9.3). What is clear throughout the text is that Jesus' word is effective; what he said happened (*IGT* 4.1). In this sense, Jesus was very much portrayed as an ideal elite Roman man who was able to cause his will to be done simply by saying the word.

### Jesus and Joseph in *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*

Instead of being the obedient son to Joseph, the *paterfamilias*, Jesus corrected or chastised Joseph, instructed Joseph and provided for Joseph and his family. The encounters between Jesus and Joseph in the text concerned three major items: Joseph's concern for the reputation of his family, Joseph's inability to produce the things necessary for the family and Jesus' rebukes toward Joseph. There is one instance in the text in which Joseph acts as a father to James rather than to Jesus. In this case (*IGT* 16.1), Joseph 'sent James to bundle some wood'. James, a dutiful and obedient son, carried through with the required task. Although the scene ended with James' needing Jesus' miraculous healing due to a snakebite he received while retrieving the wood, Joseph looked very much like a typical *paterfamilias*: He commanded and his son obeyed.

Joseph also seemed like a typical *paterfamilias* in his concern for the family's reputation. In *IGT* 2, Joseph asked Jesus why he was doing what was prohibited on the Sabbath (*IGT* 2.4) after it had been reported to him by a 'certain Judean'<sup>16</sup> (*IGT* 2.3) that Jesus was playing on the Sabbath. Jesus' activity was pooling water from the stream and fashioning sparrows from mud. Accused in this way, Jesus '... clapped his hands and cried to the sparrows, "Be gone!" And the sparrows took flight and went off, chirping' (*IGT* 2.4). In this case, Jesus simply did not respond to Joseph, an indication that Jesus did not consider Joseph's status high enough to warrant a response. After Joseph was blamed for Jesus' withering of Annas' son (*IGT* 3.3) and killing another boy (*IGT* 4.2), he took Jesus aside and admonished Him, appealing specifically to the reputation of the family: 'These people are suffering, they hate us and are persecuting us!' (*IGT* 5.1). In other instances, Joseph 'ordered' (παρήγγειλε) Mary to keep Jesus within the house '... for those who anger him die' (*IGT* 14.3). Here Joseph not only did act as a good *paterfamilias* in attempting to protect the reputation of the family, but he also was able to command the woman to whom he was

14. It is not clear whether it says anything in particular about Jesus being able to leap down from the same roof from which Zenon fell to his death without any apparent difficulty.

15. Here Ehrman and Pleše read 'worshipped', but 'did obeisance' is a more literal translation of the action, and it is not clear whether such action should be regularly interpreted as 'worship' or more simply as 'bowing down to'. The context here does not provide a definitive answer, but nowhere in this text is Jesus identified ontologically with God, and it does not seem that the author of the text views him as such. 'Worship', therefore, seems a harder translation to sustain.

16. Here Ehrman and Pleše read 'certain Jew'. I have chosen to retain the ethnic and geographic meaning of 'Judean'. See Elliott (2007).



married. Finally, in Jesus' encounter with his third teacher (more about this point below), Joseph 'ran to the school' to make sure that nothing terrible had happened to the teacher (*IGT* 15.3), who happened to be 'a close friend of Joseph' (*IGT* 15.1). Though Joseph was concerned to protect the reputation of his family in the *IGT*, he was unable to do so because he could not control Jesus.

Jesus' abilities sometimes came in handy to provide for the family in situations in which Joseph seems unable to do so. In one episode, Joseph planted a crop while Jesus '... sowed a single grain of wheat' (*IGT* 12.1). Jesus' yield, however, turned out to be 'a hundred large bushels' which he used to feed the poor of the village, '... and Joseph took what was left of it' (*IGT* 12.2). Joseph, seemingly in need of the extra grain from Jesus' miraculous yield, was unable to provide for the family as a *paterfamilias* should. His work had to be supplemented by the 8-year-old Jesus. In the very next scene in the *IGT*, Joseph inadvertently cuts short a cross beam for a bed he had been commissioned to make for 'a certain rich man' (*IGT* 13.1). Jesus told Joseph to place the correctly cut beam and the shorter one next to one another, and Jesus then lengthened the shorter beam (*IGT* 13.2). Joseph acknowledges that he was '... blessed that God has given me this child' (*IGT* 13.2). In both these cases, Jesus was able to provide something for his family that Joseph was not. As *paterfamilias*, Joseph ought to be the one to provide these things, but instead it is the 'boy' Jesus, prototypically masculine, who became provider.

In the one scene in the *IGT* in which Jesus was rebuked by Joseph, Joseph also engaged in violent behaviour toward Jesus. After Joseph admonished Jesus for having withered Annas' son and killed the other, unnamed boy, Jesus replied to him, 'I know these are not your words; nevertheless, I will be silent concerning you.'<sup>17</sup> But those others will bear their punishment' (*IGT* 5.1). The violence of the blindness that befell the others has been discussed above, but here it has to be noted that, on the one hand, Jesus seemed to acknowledge Joseph's rebuke ('I will be silent concerning you'), and on the other hand, he cursed more people even without an explicit expression of a curse. It is possible that this is a (veiled) threat against Joseph since Jesus' words have shown the power to cause harm to people several times already in the *IGT*. This reading would account for both Jesus' short statement after his agreement to silence and for the distinction between Joseph and 'those others'. Jesus had not promised to speak no further but rather not to speak against Joseph. When Joseph saw that Jesus had caused blindness to more people, 'he rose up, grabbed his [Jesus'] ear, and yanked it hard' (*IGT* 5.2). This act of violence, though relatively mild, was the kind of behaviour one might expect from a *paterfamilias* toward a defiant son. Jesus' response to Joseph, however, involved his irritated reply, 'It is enough for you to seek and not find; you have not acted at all wisely. Do you not know that I am yours?'

17. Here Ehrman and Pleše read 'I also will keep silent for your sake'. I have translated ὁμῶς σιγήσω διὰ σέ with 'I will be silent concerning you'.

Do not insult<sup>18</sup> me' (*IGT* 5.3). Jesus' response both insulted Joseph ('you have not acted at all wisely') and rejected Joseph's authority over him ('Do not insult me'). Rather than play the part of the obedient son (as he does later in *IGT* 19.5, part of a passage that has a Lucan parallel), Jesus here acted independently of Joseph, who was called his father earlier in the text (*IGT* 2.3). He is not under the authority of any human male, a key marker of elite Roman masculinity.<sup>19</sup>

## Jesus and the teachers in *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*

Jesus' relationship to his teachers also portrays a reversal of the normal pattern of expectation. As we have seen above, ordinarily boys learned to be men through various school exercises, practicing at adopting the *personae* of those whom they would one day oversee as *paterfamilias* and learning to acknowledge their teachers' honour in the practice of *salutatio*. In fact, the first teacher, Zachaeus, who intended to teach Jesus in the *IGT*, said to Joseph:

You have a bright child with a good mind. Come, hand him over to me that he may learn his letters, and along with the letters I will teach him all knowledge, including how to greet all the elders and to honour them as his ancestors and fathers, and to love children his own age. (*IGT* 6.2)

The knowledge of how to honour (τιμᾶν) the elders as his forefathers and fathers did is precisely the kind of knowledge one might expect the young Jesus<sup>20</sup> to learn from a teacher. Jesus, instead of submitting to the authority of Zachaeus, questioned whether Zachaeus ought to teach letters since he did not know the meaning of the alpha (*IGT* 6.3), at which point Jesus himself explained to Zachaeus the meaning of the alpha (*IGT* 6.4). Zachaeus acknowledged Jesus' superiority by telling the assembled crowd that he had 'shamed myself' (ἐμαυτῷ αἰσχύνην *IGT* 7.1) and further 'I have been defeated by a child' (ὅπῳ παιδίου ἐνίκηθην *IGT* 7.3). Instead of showing deference to the teacher, Jesus 'defeated' him through superior knowledge, a key indication of Jesus' superior honour status. The episode ends with a short saying by Jesus after which those whom he had blinded earlier in the text (*IGT* 5.1) were able to see again. This happened as soon as Jesus stopped speaking and apparently by the power of his word (*IGT* 8.2).

Jesus' second encounter with a teacher came at Joseph's instigation. At this point in the story, Jesus was 8 years old (*IGT* 12.2). When Joseph saw that Jesus was 'starting to mature' (*IGT* 14.1), he took him to a teacher in order that Jesus might learn to read and write. The teacher promised Joseph that he would teach Jesus 'to read Greek, and then Hebrew' (*IGT* 14.1). Jesus challenged the teacher to 'tell me the power of the Alpha, and I will tell you the power of the Beta' (*IGT* 14.2). The teacher struck Jesus on the head, and Jesus, being

18. Here Ehrman and Pleše read 'grieve'. I have chosen 'insult' as the more colloquial translation of λυπέει.

19. The *IGT* makes no claim of God being Jesus' father in chapter 5. The only section where such a claim is made is 19.3, in a phrase and chapter clearly modelled on Luke 2:41–52.

20. In chapter 2, Jesus is said to be 5 years old. In the absence of any other age marker, the reader is left to assume that he is still 5 years old in this encounter.



hurt, responded by cursing him, '... and immediately he fainted and fell to the ground on his face' (IGT 14.2). Here again, we see the power of Jesus' words. Not only did he not submit to the teacher's authority, he responded in kind when the teacher used violence against him. His word of curse caused violence to befall the teacher.<sup>21</sup> The violence from Jesus, however, was accomplished solely through the power of his word in cursing the teacher.

Jesus' final encounter with a teacher, this time a 'close friend' of Joseph, involved the teacher's attempted use of flattery to encourage Jesus to learn. When Jesus entered the school 'with confidence', he found an open book. Rather than read from the book, he spoke 'in the Holy Spirit' (IGT 15.2). The onlookers were '... amazed that he could speak such things though he had still not come of age' (ὄτι νήπιον ὄν IGT 15:2).<sup>22</sup> The teacher recognised Jesus' 'grace and wisdom' (IGT 15.4) and recommended that Joseph take him home. In response to this recognition, Jesus healed the second teacher whom he had struck down with a curse (IGT 15.4).

The final chapter of the *IGT* rehearses the scene of Jesus in the temple which is paralleled in Luke 2:41–52. In the case of the *IGT*, however, the crowd was not amazed by Jesus' questions and understanding (as in Lk 2:46–47) but at the fact that '... he silenced the elders and the teachers of the people' though he was 'a child' (IGT 19.2). Whilst these elders and teachers did not seem to be trying to teach Jesus anything in the text, again Jesus' lack of submission to the teaching authorities was highlighted. Jesus did not need education in order to act like an elite male. He was able to 'defeat' his first teacher, curse his second teacher and cause him physical harm, and he was the subject of flattery from his third teacher. Unlike the Roman boys for whom school made them into men, Jesus needed no such training, even at the age of five.

## Conclusion

The description of Jesus in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* coheres very well with hegemonic masculinity in the Roman world. Jesus was not a victim of crucifixion in this text. What he spoke happened, and violence against his opponents is a regular feature of the text. He lacked nothing, and he did not need Joseph, whose authority over him Jesus questions. He was not in need of teaching, given that he already knew the meaning of the letters that his teachers were attempting to teach him, but more than that, he stood in no need of the socialisation into manhood that education represented in the Roman world. Jesus was not under anyone's authority in the text, and the ones under whose authority he should have stood, in fact, were under Jesus' authority. He had authority over Joseph by means of the power of his words and deeds to provide for the family. He stood in authority over his teachers by virtue of his superior knowledge, and he stood in authority over his opponents by his ability to do violence

21. On cursing as an act of violence, see Clines (1998:356–358).

22. Here Ehrman and Pleše read 'though still an infant'. νήπιον here likely has the meaning of one who has not come of age, rather than an infant. It is unlikely that ancient people would have considered an 8-year-old boy an infant.

to them. Jesus, in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, despite being a 'boy,' a category usually opposed to the masculinity of the adult, Roman male, represented hegemonic masculinity better than anyone else in the text. In this way, Jesus represents the Jesus of Boykin's imagination who will return toting an AR-15 assault rifle. The odd thing for Boykin is that, due to the power of Jesus' words, he would not need such a weapon.

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