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35 “I Have Been Born Among You”: Jesus, Jews, and Christians in the Second Century

Recent analysis has attempted to locate the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (IGT) in a context of developing Christian thought about Jesus’ childhood, and has suggested that the author(s) imitated a popular children’s stories genre of late antiquity. The function of this genre, when applied to the infancy of Jesus, is to embellish the status of Jesus in terms of his power, wisdom, and authority. What appears to be an earlier strand of tradition in IGT, however, suggests an ideological stance that is much less complimentary of Jesus and raises a number of questions about its original context and purpose.

Research on IGT provides us with a variety of ways of reading this document. Reidar Aasgaard has argued that IGT fits the popular childhood stories genre in antiquity and late antiquity.¹ The problem, as Aasgaard admits, is that very little research has been done on childhood stories in this period, and his argument that IGT was written for children in rural village contexts, while plausible, is not entirely convincing.

Ronald Hock has suggested that the author(s) of IGT possibly imitated the infancy aspects of biographies of important figures in antiquity. Hock argues that these biographies dealt with the character of ancient figures, “and that character was assumed to have been fixed from birth.”² Hock also argues that comparing

1 Reidar Aasgaard, *The Childhood of Jesus: Decoding the Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Havertown: James Clarke & Co., 2014).

2 Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1995), 96–97. Hock writes: “Although biographies of individuals, which were decisively shaped by the prescriptions of rhetorical handbooks, dealt with ancestry, birth, childhood, and adulthood, they were not about changes and developments in their subjects’ fortunes and personalities, but about their character, and that character was assumed to have been fixed from birth. Consequently, anecdotes about birth and childhood were expected to anticipate the qualities and virtues that characterized adult life The Infancy Gospel of Thomas conforms to the patterns Wiedemann has identified for the portrayal of childhood in biographies, and in fact he mentions the infancy gospels of Jesus in passing.”

Note: It is with a profound sense of affection that I offer this analysis of a small intersection of intellectual discourse on Christology between Judaism and early Christianity to my friend and mentor Gabriele Boccaccini, *cum gratia mea*.

IGT with these biographies illuminates the purpose of IGT. The difficulty with comparing IGT with these biographies is that they typically dealt with the static character of the individual, while IGT requires the reader to expect a development of Jesus' character, from petulant child to compassionate miracle-working Savior.

Hock interacts with the work of Thomas Wiedemann who argued that the features of ancestry, birth, childhood, and adulthood consistently “appear in biographies of emperors and others throughout the imperial period.”³ Where I disagree with Hock is in his assertion that “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas conforms to the patterns Wiedemann has identified for the portrayal of childhood in biographies.”⁴ Hock must qualify his assertion for it to work, that Jesus’ “divine power is clearly, if not always correctly, displayed.” The dull edge of this qualification deserves more direct and careful attention in terms of the internal evidence for making sense of the original purpose of IGT.

Tony Burke has argued that IGT is to be read in the literary context of other Roman works that idealize the childhoods of important Roman figures.⁵ Burke has also argued that “The original author appears intent on demonstrating that Jesus is a being of power, wisdom and authority, and that these attributes must be recognized and respected—by both those who encounter Jesus in the stories and, presumably, the gospel’s readers. It is not Jesus who needs to change, but those around him.”⁶ Stephen Davis writes that IGT is to be read in the evolving contexts of transforming cultural memories.⁷ While Burke and Davis have made substantial contributions to our understanding of IGT, in particular Burke’s work on the transmission of the traditions, these works for the most part still read IGT as an idealization of the infant Jesus.

More recently, J.R.C. Cousland has argued that IGT must be read in its Greco-Roman literary context, in order to best understand the impetuous character of the infant Jesus. Because ancient, popular stories of personified pagan deities tell of unruly infants as well as adults, this would have resonated closely with the

3 Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

4 Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*, 97: “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas conforms to the patterns Wiedemann has identified for the portrayal of childhood in biographies [the ancient reader] would expect to read stories that anticipate the qualities of Jesus as an adult And whether Jesus is playing or helping out his divine power is clearly, if not always correctly, displayed: clay sparrows come alive ... seeds produce miraculous harvests ... and falls, accidents, snakebites, and sickness ... are all subject to Jesus’ restorative divine power.”

5 Tony Burke, *De infantia Iesu evangelium Thomae: graece* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

6 Tony Burke, “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas” in Paul Foster, ed., *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 126–38; here 131.

7 Stephen J. Davis, *Christ Child: Cultural Memories of a Young Jesus* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2014).

kinds of communities Cousland imagines as having access to the infancy traditions of IGT.⁸ I find Cousland's argument to have an element of plausibility, which I will return to later.

I would argue that IGT should be read in an entirely different light. The way in which Jesus is presented in this document is indeed less than complimentary to his character. Jesus is breaking Jewish law on several counts. He violates Sabbath. He is disrespectful to his father Joseph and to three unlucky teachers whom Joseph places in authority over him. In short, Jesus has anger management issues. And he randomly and sometimes cruelly commits murder. Without question, the IGT Jesus is not a very nice person. In various episodes of IGT, Jesus exhibits a petulant and rather arrogant disposition.

It is because of this that I am reluctant to view the purpose of IGT as an embellishment of Jesus' character simply because he is given to perform miracles as a child. Something else must be the reason for its composition. I would suggest that IGT, at least in its earliest social and religious context, was written as a satiric response to the emergence of proto-orthodox infancy traditions in the late first and early second centuries CE.⁹

If the earliest IGT tradition was written for such a satiric purpose, who would have written it? Previous scholarship has indicated that IGT says little about Jewish life and customs and therefore must have been written by someone who was not Jewish (Hock, 91). The evidence suggests, however, that the author(s) of the earliest strand of the IGT tradition could have been from a Jewish or a Jewish-Christian community, who did not accept the elevated, divine status of Jesus as it was presented in the proto-orthodox infancy-narrative traditions.¹⁰

8 J.R.C. Cousland, *Holy Terror: Jesus in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, LNTS, Chris Keith editor (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), here esp. 33–42.

9 The classic work on the emergence of infancy traditions in the canonical gospels is Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1999). For alternative views see Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) and Andrew T. Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin? Reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, Tradition, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

10 See, e.g., Frédéric Amsler, "Les Paidika Iesou, un nouveau témoin de la rencontre entre judaïsme et christianisme à Antioch au I^{er} siècle?" in Claire Clivaz, Andreas Dettwiler, Luc Devillers, Enrico Norelli with Benjamin Bertho, eds., *Infancy Gospels. Stories and Identities*, WUNT 199 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 452–58, who suggests that IGT was composed as a Jewish polemic against early Christian views of Jesus. See also Kristi Upson-Saia, "Holy Child or Holy Terror? Understanding Jesus' Anger in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas," *Church History* 82 (2013): 1–39, although Upson-Saia sees IGT as a "Christian" work, rather than a Jewish work.

Petri Luomanen lays out detailed criteria for identifying whether a document may be classified as having originated from a Jewish-Christian sect.¹¹ And I must add that he does not include IGT in his analysis. Luomanen (11–12) argues that the first two criteria are to be “considered as the most clear evidence of Jewishness.”

- 1) “Are characteristically Jewish practices such as (Jewish) circumcision, the Sabbath and purity laws observed?” On this count the Sabbath is directly an issue in IGT, and based on evidence in the Mishnah presented below I would argue that ritual purification is also an issue.
- 2) “Are characteristically Jewish ideas such as Yahweh as the only God, the temple as Yahweh’s abode, or the Torah, maintained?” I would argue that this is also an issue, since there are both direct and implied Christological challenges in IGT.
- 3) “What is the pedigree of the group/person? Jewish or not?” On this point, the identification of the author as a Jew, Thomas the Israelite, at least may indicate the possibility of a Jewish context for the composition of IGT.¹²
- 4) “What is the role of Jesus in the worship and ideology of the community? Is Jesus considered as a Jewish prophet or is he more a divine being, worshipped as Kyrios (‘Lord’), an equal to God?” Here the author of IGT, as I intend to demonstrate, actually mocks the ideology that presents Jesus as a miracle-working divine being.
- 5) “Is baptism in the name of Jesus (or the triune God) an entrance rite to the community?” The incident of the purified pools in IGT, I would suggest, are actually a polemical lampoon of Christian baptism.
- 6) “To what extent are these or other issues important for inter- or intra-group relations? What roles do they play in defining the borders and identity of the group in question?”

With regard to Luomanen’s final criteria, which to some extent drives at combining the analysis of the above five criteria, the evidence positively indicates a Jewish context for IGT.¹³

Based on Luomanen’s most important criteria 1, and 2, but also criteria 4, 5, and 6, we can confidently identify what I would call an earlier strand of IGT as a Jewish or a Jewish-Christian work that was intended to be a critical, satiric

¹¹ Petri Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae, Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language* 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

¹² Tony Burke argues that the first chapter, where this identification is made, is a later addition to the tradition. Cf. “*The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*,” 130.

¹³ Virtually all current studies on IGT locate the document in a Greco-Roman Gentile context, and all but dismiss the Jewish characteristics of the document.

response to late first- and early second- century proto-orthodox Christological developments via infancy narratives.¹⁴ Embedded within this earlier strand are more targeted polemics aimed at a failure of Sabbath observance, orthodox baptism, and certain Christological assertions that would make Jesus to be a divine child or to have an angelic nature. Identification of an earlier strand of the tradition is bolstered by conflicting portrayals of the infant Jesus' character.

Ze'ev Weisman provides us with an interesting discussion of biblical satire.¹⁵ There is a long tradition of mockery, sarcasm, and satire in the Bible and in Second Temple period literature. Satire appears in Jewish literature as criticism in the form of mockery, sarcasm, caricature, and extreme distortion of an opponent's person or ideological position—the tower of Babel story, Jeroboam's golden “calves” at Bethel and Dan, Jonah and the big fish, mockery and sarcasm in the prophets. This provides us with a broader context for recognizing satire in Jewish documents from the first and second centuries CE and on into late antiquity.

Before looking with some detail at the contents of IGT, it would be helpful to discuss briefly what others have said about the diversity of traditions that make up the document. Hock points out that IGT is made up of a series of independent traditions, and that there is not a cohesive narrative thread. Hock argues (85) that IGT is comprised of “not a lengthy and coherent narrative but a collection of largely self-contained stories that are only loosely held together by a series of indications of Jesus' age,” at five years, six years, eight years, nine years, and finally when Jesus is twelve years old. Hock writes (92) ... “the narratives themselves, being so loosely attached to the whole, were subject to quite remarkable reworking, as a comparison of the various MSS displays considerable paraphrasing, expansion, condensation, even deletion of some stories and the addition of new ones.” Tony Burke provides a concise yet detailed presentation of the manuscript traditions.¹⁶ The problem with arguing Ur-text on the basis of manuscript traditions of IGT is that these manuscripts are centuries older than what is

14 Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2 (late first and early second century CE); Infancy Gospel (Protoevangelium) of James (early second century CE); and 2 Enoch 71–72 on the miraculous birth of Melchizedek, which is not proto-orthodox, but contributes to the literary context of infancy narratives in the late first century CE.

15 Ze'ev Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, Society of Biblical Literature, SemeiaSt (SBL, 1998).

16 Tony Burke, “The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*,” 126–32.

understood to be the milieu for the document's original composition.¹⁷ With this in mind it makes sense to run through and summarize the contents of IGT.¹⁸

Ch 1 ... The introduction informs the reader that Thomas the Israelite writes to his brothers from the nations to make known the extraordinary childhood deeds of Jesus. So the author is explicitly given a Jewish identity. Previous scholarship has indicated that IGT says little about Jewish life and customs and therefore must have been written by someone who was not Jewish (Hock, 91). The evidence suggests, however, that the author of IGT could have been someone from a Jewish or a Jewish-Christian community, who did not accept the elevated, divine status of Jesus as it was being presented in the proto-orthodox infancy-narrative traditions at that time, and who disputed the spiritualization of ritual practices developing in the early church.

Ch 2 ... Jesus makes pools of water in the mud and he purifies the water. Jesus then made twelve sparrows out of soft clay ... doing all of this on the Sabbath ... “and many other boys were playing with him.” The inference is that the Sabbath-breaking Jesus was a bad influence on his playmates. A ‘Jew’ saw what Jesus was doing and told his father, Joseph, that he was violating the Sabbath. Joseph confronts Jesus ... “why are you doing what is not permitted on the Sabbath?” Jesus then clapped his hands and the birds flew away, destroying the evidence of his law-breaking behavior.

Ch 3 ... The son of Annas the scholar took a stick and drained Jesus' nicely purified pools. Jesus cursed him, causing him to wither and die.

Ch 4 ... While strolling through the village a boy ran by and bumped into Jesus accidentally. Jesus became angry and cursed him. And the boy fell down dead.

Chs 5–8 ... Zacchaeus teaches Jesus the alphabet. Jesus asserts that he is the Lord of the Jewish people and claims, “I am present with you and have been born among you.” Jesus ends up teaching Zacchaeus (6.23) about the Alpha, but he talks gibberish. What Jesus says is completely unintelligible.

Chs 9–13 ... In this section, which I consider to be a later addition, there is a series of incidents that are intended to present Jesus in a positive light, portraying the Jewish members of the community as though they were completely dumbfounded by his miraculous abilities and instantly ready to worship him. There is essentially nothing negative regarding Jesus' character here, which suggests that this might be a later development of the IGT tradition. There is also a

¹⁷ Ibid., 132–34, identifies second-century Syrian Antioch as the most likely original milieu for IGT. Also M. David Litwa, *IESUS DEUS: The Early Christian Depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 2 n.1. J.R.C. Cousland, *Holy Terror*, also argues that second-century CE Syrian Antioch is a likely possibility.

¹⁸ Here I follow the Greek text used by Reidar Aasgaard in *The Childhood of Jesus*.

simplistic portrayal of Jews in relation to Jesus, which may reflect a later context where Christians, having misunderstood the original satiric edge of the IGT traditions, naïvely portray Jesus as a miracle-working divine child irresistible to any Jew hearing this story who would immediately convert to Christianity.

Chs 14–15 ... There are two more incidents in which Joseph allows teachers to attempt to teach Jesus. Jesus kills the first teacher and the second teacher is completely enamored with Jesus' facility with the law. Because of the second teacher's admiration for Jesus, Jesus heals the first teacher.

Chs 16–18 ... Jesus performs three healing miracles that are portrayed in an entirely positive light. No bullying and no arrogance, just straight miraculous healing that results in the people of his village marveling at his abilities and speculating that he must be from heaven. Like chapters 9–13 these episodes appear to be later additions and do not fit the motif of an out-of-control infant.

Ch 19 ... The final chapter of IGT contains the Lukan tradition of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple with the addition that the scholars and the Pharisees in the temple congratulate Mary for having a child with such extraordinary glory, virtue, and wisdom. Like chapters 9–13 and chapters 16–18, the final chapter appears to have been added at a time when the out-of-control infant Jesus in the earlier strand of the IGT tradition has lost its satiric edge and is now read positively, in a way that elevates the status of the infant Jesus, probably in a later social context of anti-Jewish sentiment in the early church of the second century.

I have already suggested, on the basis of recognizing an earlier IGT tradition and a later development of the IGT tradition, that because these two trajectories of IGT are so different, they must have been written for different purposes. The later strand of the tradition simply seeks to embellish the divine, miracle-working status of the infant Jesus. The earlier tradition, however, does not fit that trajectory. And this is where my reading of IGT is different from pretty much every other reading.

The earlier strand of the IGT tradition presents a petulant, anger-management-deprived infant, one who abuses the powers he was born with. He breaks the Sabbath. He disrespects his father Joseph and his teachers. He commits murder. He disregards purity halakhah, and makes himself out to be, or at least implies himself to be, the divine son of God. In short, he is breaking commandments all over the place.

Because of IGTs portrayal of Jesus' callous disregard for the commandments, and not just the ones concerning Sabbath and purity, but especially the prohibition against murder, I am reluctant to view the purpose of IGT as an embellishment of Jesus' character, simply because he is given to perform miracles as a child. Something else must be the reason for its composition. Cousland writes:

Why would Christian detractors bother to represent Jesus as a child in order to denigrate him? Celsus, an early pagan critic of Christianity, attacks the adult Jesus directly (Origen, *Cels.* 2.76). Wouldn't others have done likewise? Why would they need to invent oblique and dubious stories about Jesus's infancy to condemn him? Children were popularly regarded as imperfect and irrational beings by nature, so it would have been no great victory to denigrate a child.¹⁹

I would suggest that IGT, at least in its earliest social and religious context, was written as a critical, satiric response to the developments of proto-orthodox Christology via infancy narratives in the late first and early second century CE. It is the very nature of satire “to invent oblique and dubious stories” to target the claims of one's ideological adversary. The purity issues obliquely addressed in IGT give us tangible clues.

Thomas Kazen provides a discussion of purity issues that arise in the canonical gospels.²⁰ It is Kazen's discussion of what the early church did with purity issues that most interests me here, because it has some bearing on the argument I am making about IGT. According to Kazen, Jesus was not indifferent to purity halakhah, and that what the early church did was to spiritualize and moralize halakhah, and Christians eventually developed the idea that Jesus did too. Kazen writes that:

Within a few decades, an increasing part (although still not a majority) of the Christian movement was developing standpoints which were far from normal Jewish practice. Not only were purity practices neglected, but forbidden meat was gradually accepted and even circumcision and sabbath-keeping were successively abandoned. The list of practices finally set aside amounts to more or less every important identity marker of Judaism, except monotheism itself. (Kazen, 347)

This is precisely the kind of development that would have invited serious tensions between non-Jewish Christians and Jewish Christians, as well as Jewish communities who did not follow Jesus but remained in some sort of contact with early Christian communities.

Kazen argues that the early Christians who leaned in this direction undoubtedly took Jesus as an authority for this development, even though Jesus himself practiced purity halakhah. “Jesus' attitude to the cult and the halakhah

¹⁹ J.R.C. Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 31. Celsus did in fact attack the proto-orthodox claim of Jesus' divinity by attacking the tradition of the virgin birth of Jesus. I am arguing that IGT attacked the proto-orthodox claim of Jesus' divinity from a different angle, i.e., in the immediate context of emergent proto-orthodox infancy narrative traditions.

²⁰ Thomas Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

was not one of outright spiritualization, especially not if spiritualization is understood as a metaphorical use of ritual language” (Kazen, 348). According to Kazen, “... as the Christian movement encountered various cultural environments and social strata ...” the development from the practice of ritual purity to spiritualization

created new fellowships and social networks, involving mutual obligation between people of various backgrounds. Although these new social structures were held together by certain common beliefs, they were seriously threatened by conflicting paradigms, and at times broken apart by some insisting on strict purity practices... The end result looked very different from Jesus’ behavior. (Kazen, 348–349)

If we have a context for the composition of the earlier strand of IGT tradition that would embrace a characterization of the infant Jesus in an unfavorable light—breaking Sabbath, impuning purification halakhah, disrespecting his father Joseph, and committing murder—then it makes sense to entertain the possibility that what we have in the early IGT tradition is a Jewish or a Jewish-Christian polemical attempt to discredit late first and early second century CE claims about the divinity and the miracle-working nature of Jesus, criticizing a trajectory that also had exchanged halakhic practice for metaphorical, spiritualized meaning.

Up to now I have mostly assumed that there is a satiric edge in an earlier strand of tradition of IGT and I have not yet fully explained why I see it there. Take just a few of the incidents in what I consider to be the earlier strand of IGT as examples.

The incident of chapter 2 has the “Jew” confronting Joseph and then Joseph confronting Jesus about doing what is not permitted on the Sabbath by making the pools and bringing the clay birds to life. This, it seems to me, reflects the kind of tension that existed between church and synagogue, a tension that eventually became a more explicit expression of anti-Judaism in late antiquity, as we have, for example, in Ignatius of Antioch, the Epistle of Barnabas, Justin Martyr, and Origen.

The pools purified out of mud, I would suggest, are satiric jabs at Christian baptism. In the confrontation involving the pools of water Jesus had formed pools, in the plural, which suggests that the pools were small. The Mishnah’s Tractate Mikvaoth gives us a number of detailed prescriptions regarding the purity of water collected for use in immersion pools.

The first confrontation with Jesus over the 12 birds he made from soft clay hint at the material from which he formed his pools. The Mishnah distinguishes various kinds of clay for making immersion pools. Road clay was prohibited. According to Tractate Mikvaoth, “... in such mud none may immerse himself, nor

may he immerse himself while it is on his skin” (m.Mik. 9.2).²¹ Road clay was prohibited because it was one of the materials identified as forming a barrier between the water and a person’s skin, preventing purification.

Another of the Mishnaic legal requirements for purification pools was that they be large enough for a person to be fully immersed. It does not appear to be a legal requirement as much as it is a matter of certainty of one’s purification. “More excellent is the water of a rain-pond before the rain-stream has stopped” (m.Mik. 1.6). “More excellent is a pool of water containing forty seahs; for in them men may immerse themselves and immerse other things” (m.Mik. 1.7). “... if there were two pools, the one holding forty seahs but not the other; and he immersed himself in one of them but he does not know in which of them he immersed himself, his condition of doubt is deemed unclean” (m.Mik. 2.1).

The account in IGT has Jesus make pools that would have been hardly large enough for immersion. (They were drained with the drag of a willow twig.) According to Tractate Mikvaoth, “If an immersion pool was measured and found lacking, any acts requiring cleanness that had theretofore been done following immersion therein, are deemed to have been done in uncleanness, whether [the condition of doubt arising thereby concerned] a private domain or the public domain” (m.Mik. 2.2). According to Jewish halakhah, the size of the pools mattered.

The location of the pools mattered as well. Jesus made his pools at the ford of a rushing stream; in other words, he was playing at a shallow place where people in the community regularly crossed the flowing stream. According to the Mishnah:

The water in ponds, the water in cisterns, the water in ditches, the water in caverns, rain-ponds after the rain-stream has stopped, and pools holding less than forty seahs are alike in this, that while the rain continues all are deemed clean, but after the rain has stopped they that lie near to a city or pathway are deemed unclean, and they that lie far off are deemed clean unless a multitude of men have passed by. (m.Mik. 1.4)

The application to IGT is that Jesus was making pools from running water near a place where the people in the community crossed the stream. People used these kinds of pools, located in the vicinity of public access, to relieve themselves, although at m.Mik. 8.1 it indicates it is because people also did their laundry there. So they were considered useless for purification. And in ancient practice urine and laundry have a long history together.²²

²¹ All Mishnah references are to Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1933).

²² For public use of Roman *fullonica*, see, e.g., Yaron Eliav, “The Material World of Babylonia as Seen from Roman Palestine,” in *The Archaeology and Material Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, ed. Markham J. Geller, IJS Studies in Judaica 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 153–85; here 173, which provides a number of primary source citations from classical antiquity.

The pools purified out of mud, as I have suggested already, are a satiric jab at Christian baptism. And the incident of the son of Annas draining Jesus' miraculously purified pools could very easily be a parody of the kind of social conflict over ritual purification that would have most certainly existed in the late first and early second centuries between synagogue and church.²³

And this is only about the pools and not to say anything really about Jesus killing the son of Annas the scholar. According to the episode in IGT, Jesus killed him. This is not the kind of miraculous act that would normally redound to one's character, even if one is living in the increasingly anti-Jewish environment of the second-century church.²⁴

There really is a lot more to IGT, and what I would call the earlier strand of IGT tradition. Jesus teaching gibberish about the Alpha could very likely be a Jewish lampoon of Christian ignorance or Christian pseudo-intellectualism with regard to the scriptures, or even possibly a localized expression of Christians dabbling in Roman magic. While it gives the appearance of an esoteric teaching, it is in fact nonsensical. Zachhaeus' response at the end of this episode in chapter 7 is illuminating: "What great thing he is—god or angel or whatever else I might call him—I do not know" (IGT 7.11; see also 17.4). Zachhaeus' agnosticism mocks the Christological assertions of the early church that Jesus was divine. It also mocks angelomorphic Christological constructs from this same period.²⁵

What I have analyzed to this point indicates the ideological intersections between the details of some of the episodes in IGT, Sabbath observance, Jewish purity halakhah, and Christological disagreements from the late first and early second centuries CE. The question is, what to make of it.

²³ Stephen Davis, *Christ Child*, 130–39, has an interesting discussion of possible ways IGT reflects ideological intersections of Jewish and Christian communities in a section titled "Signs of Christian-Jewish Tension in the *Paidika*." Davis (130) writes: "The contents of the *Paidika* give hints that at least some of the stories may have taken shape in the midst of early sibling tensions between ancient Christians and their Jewish neighbors." Although Davis (131) also claims that "in the *Paidika*, the signs of such tensions are more muted." Davis' discussion suggests Christian criticism of Jews in IGT. I am arguing that the criticism runs in the direction from Jews to Christians.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 151–60, provides an interesting discussion of Christian-Jewish scribal polemic in Late Antiquity and how this is reflected in the development of the IGT manuscript traditions. Kristi Upson-Saia's research confirms that the behavioral issue of anger would not have been an acceptable character for a child or anyone else in the ancient world; see "Holy Child or Holy Terror?" Which indicates a substantial critique of J.R.C. Cousland's thesis in *Holy Terror*.

²⁵ See Jarl Fossum, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology*, NTOA 30 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995). Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, AGJU 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998). Kevin P. Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament*, AGJU 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

According to my analysis I see two basic layers of tradition in IGT—an earlier layer that presents a petulant, out-of-control infant Jesus, and a later redaction (or better, series of redactions) that presents a more amenable, compassionate infant Jesus who is focused not on his own desires but on the needs of those around him. Without these two layers of tradition, we are left to rationalize away a very uncomfortable dissonance between these two very different presentations of the infant Jesus in this document.

Hock (86) writes: “The story at times recalls incidents and language from the canonical stories, but what is most noticeable is a strikingly different Jesus from the one in the canonical portraits—a vindictive, arrogant, unruly child ‘who,’ as J.K. Elliott puts it, ‘seldom acts in a Christian way.’” Or as Aasgaard (105) writes: “Jesus appears as violent, and to a degree that cannot easily be justified from the offenses made toward him.” Aasgaard then rationalizes: “We should note, however, that Jesus’ violence is defensive; he is always first provoked and does not use his strength to infringe upon the integrity or position of others.” When the infant Jesus is angrily and vindictively slaying his playmates and teachers, it is impossible to see how these acts do not “infringe upon the integrity or position of others” as Aasgaard inexplicably claims.

The recognition of at least two different layers of tradition, one that is an earlier satiric critique of the proto-orthodox Jesus, and one that is later and an embellishment of the character of Jesus, allows us to make sense of the different ways Jesus is presented in IGT. I would even suggest that the later layer of tradition was developed at a time when the earlier social and religious context of tension between synagogue and church had been forgotten, and the satire of the earlier strand of the tradition was largely (if not completely) lost and therefore reinterpreted in a positive light.

We have examples of later, altered understandings of satire in our present-day culture. When I hear Bruce Springsteen’s song “Born in the USA” I imagine in my mind drill teams twirling flags on high school football fields at halftime, celebrating American patriotism. Even Ronald Reagan mistakenly saw Springsteen’s popular hit as a shining example of American patriotism, when in fact the song is a satiric social criticism of American war politics of the 1970s and 1980s.

Mel Brooks’ film *Blazing Saddles* is an outrageously funny (and stingingly vulgar) satire targeting the bigotry and social disease of racism prevalent in American culture of the 1970s (and sadly still today). If you have watched reruns of *Blazing Saddles* recently, you will have noticed that the censor police have sanitized the film to the point where the biting satiric vulgarities have been scoured from the screen.

So it is possible that once the original social and religious context is lost, the satiric meaning of a text also can be lost, and for a narrative then to be recast to fit later cultural norms and beliefs.

Aasgaard suggests that family and household gatherings best fit the original setting for IGT, in which these stories served to entertain and inform the listener about the character of Jesus. I am proposing a different setting, one in which there was a developing tension between Jewish communities and early Christian communities, a location such as gave rise to the anti-Jewish Gospel of Peter, for example, or the Epistle of Barnabas. It could even possibly reflect a context where so-called Jewish-Christians who lived within early Christian communities or had their own communities alongside non-Jewish Christian communities, at the end of the first and the beginning of the second centuries CE. You will notice that the addressees of IGT are *πᾶσι τοῖς ἐξ ἔθνῶν ἀδελφοῖς*. This can be translated “to all the brothers from the Gentiles,” or “to all the Gentile brothers,” as Aasgaard translates or as Hock renders it: “to all my non-Jewish brothers and sisters.”

The author intended to make the distinction. And if this is a non-Jewish Christian author who intended to embellish the status of Jesus, then IGT must be read in a straightforward, essentially literal way and the distasteful need for harmonizing the inconsistencies remains. But if this is a Jewish or Jewish-Christian author who was responding to the emerging Christological traditions of infancy narratives at the end of the first century and beginning of the second century CE, then the earlier layer of IGT may very well be read as a satiric response to these emerging traditions. The reality may be even a bit more complicated than this, which is why I find Cousland’s argument partly plausible. For the Jewish author of the early IGT tradition to include the more rogue elements of the mythical treatments of Greco-Roman deities as also characteristic of the infant Jesus, this is not only to write with contextual sensitivity for its Gentile Christian readers as Cousland suggests,²⁶ but it is also to further poke the satiric finger in the eye of those who would elevate Jesus to the status of divinity by making a “divine” Jesus out to be no better than a pagan god.²⁷

What all of this points to is that this particular reading of IGT suggests a time and a sociological context when Jews and Christians were engaging with one another over the identity of Jesus. For Christians Christology was developing in the direction of identifying Jesus as the divine son of God, and for Jews this was not a tenable proposition. In its earlier iteration, IGT appears to have been a direct contribution to this lively and no doubt very difficult discussion.

²⁶ J.R.C. Cousland, *Holy Terror*, 33.

²⁷ I differ with Cousland, who argues that the petulance of the infant Jesus in IGT may be excused on the basis of the principle that all childhood petulance must be excused.