Grace in Valentinian Soteriology

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FOREWORD

The following paper is a partial outcome of a wider project of the Center for Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Texts in the Czech Republic, called "The doctrine of grace in the Bible and Patristic literature."[1] In 2003, the then director of the Center, Lenka Karfiková, asked me to elaborate the question of grace in the so-called gnostic literature, especially from the point of view of the heresiological polemic. After a preliminary research in the Nag Hammadi and heresiological sources, I focused my attention on the Valentinians who (along with the Marcionites) were among the most prominent negative contributors to the formation of Christian orthodoxies in the second and third centuries. My task, as I understood it, was to find out what role, if any, the concept of grace played in this process.

The question, of course, is loaded with presuppositions. It was natural for historians of Christian thought to see the problem of grace in Valentinianism through the prism of "the model of competition" between grace and free will, as it was developed in the Pelagian controversy. But neither the attempt of F. Mitzka to interpret the "gnostic" idea of spiritual nature as a precursor of the Pelagian teaching,[2] nor G. Quispel's view, according to which Valentinianism is "a mysticism emphasizing grace and election" in which "there is no place for the catholic concept of free will,"[3] are entirely fair to the sources. It is true that the heresiologists emphasized that faith and salvation are a matter of choice and responsibility in contrast to what they perceived as deterministic soteriology of their opponents. But it is also true that the Valentinian idea of election includes the demand for the formation of the spiritual seed which (in some versions at least) presupposes the moral perfection of the soul.

To be sure, it was not possible to abandon the anachronistic view completely, since the question itself is posited from the perspective of the later development. But for the answer to be adequate, it was necessary to formulate it in terms of conceptual oppositions justified by the sources. I started by tracing the meaning of the word *charis* (or its equivalents) in various contexts of the Valentinian literature. This analysis helped me to unearth conceptual connections of an implicit doctrine. One result of my research was that in the Valentinian soteriology grace is not defined in opposition to the idea of salvation by merits, but rather describes different possibilities of salvation from the "earthly" (generic and perishing) element of the soul inherited from Adam by all his progeny. At least some Valentinians tried to

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[1] For the project, see www.centrum-texty.upol.cz/en/projects.htm.

[2] F. Mitzka, "Gnostizismus und Gnadenlehre," *ZKTh* 51, 1927, 60-64, esp. 62-63.

[3] G. Quispel, "La conception de l'homme dans la Gnose valentinienne," in: *Gnostic Studies*, I, Istanbul 1974, 42-3.

elaborate these possibilities in a way that would do justice both to the Pauline idea of predestination and to the notion of responsibility. It was especially in the latter point that the heresiologists regarded the Valentinian solution as a failure.

Despite the original plan to analyze all Valentinian texts, I finally limited my focus to the heresiological sources, while referring to the Coptic documents only in the footnotes. This reduction is partly due to the restricted format of the Occasional Papers Series, and partly to the fact that the Valentinian texts from the Nag Hammadi collection are less directly relevant to my purpose.

In the light of the recent publication of Einar Thomassen's important monograph on Valentinianism,[4] I should like to note that even though in my source analysis I tried to distinguish between various versions of Valentinian soteriology, I did not link these variants to the heresiological distinction between the "eastern" and "western" branches of Valentinian thought. Despite Thomassen's admirable attempt, I have not been convinced that the fragmentary and questionable evidence about christological differences between the two schools provides us with a reliable and generally applicable criterion of classification of the sources. I have been especially reluctant to follow Thomassen's assessment of the soteriological implications of these differences.[5]

This essay was written in the academic year 2003/2004 when I had the privilege to enjoy the hospitality of the Institute for Antiquity and Christinity in Claremont as a grantee of the Fulbright visiting research program. An abridged Czech version was published in 2004;[6] early in 2006 it was revised and updated for the publication at the IAC. I wish to thank Lenka Karfíková, Dennis MacDonald and Birger Pearson for useful comments.

I am indeed grateful to the Fulbright foundation for their support. I would also like to thank Petr Pokorný, the pioneer of the gnostic studies in the Czech Republic, who drew my attention to Claremont and mediated first contacts; Dennis R. MacDonald, the director of the IAC, who invited me to the Institute and, along with my wife, to his incredible hut, sharing his expertise and enthusiasm with me; and Marvin W. Meyer, who invited me to his Coptic seminar at Chapman and patiently bore with my snap ideas and bad driving skills. Last but not least, I would like to give warm thanks to Leslie Hayes, the administrative assistant of the IAC at that time, without whose many-sided help nothing would be as it was. I dedicate this essay to my friend Gianluigi Gugliermetto, with whom I have often discussed the problem of the formation of desire.

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[4] Cf. E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians,"* Leiden–Boston 2006.

[5] See text, note 121. For the difference between the two schools, see text, 4.2.2.

[6] M. Havrda, "Valentinovské pojetí milosti," in: L. Karfíková–J. Mrázek (ed.), *Milost podle Písma a starocírkevních autorů*, Jihlava 2004, 110-135.

Grace in Valentinian Soteriology

Matyáš Havrda

1. Introduction

1.1 The project

The following essay is an attempt to reexamine the sources relevant to the doctrine of grace in Valentinian soteriology and to present as consistent an exposition of the subject as the material allows. Although the Valentinian doctrine might be of philosophical or theological interest in its own right, my objective is to reconstruct the Valentinian position as the background of the heresiological critique thereof. The aim of this paper is to collect and arrange the sources in a way that would provide a reliable basis for the interpretation of the heresiological arguments pertaining to the doctrine of grace.

I will elaborate the topic from three different perspectives that correspond to three interrelated aspects of the Valentinian thought, viz. the "mythico-ontological," the "anthropological" and the "theological." The Valentinian narrative about the origin and structure of the divine realm can be interpreted as a partial "mythicization" of the metaphysical speculation of the Platonic-Pythagorean type, which despite its narrative plot retains at least a trace of the ontological scheme. I will examine the role of grace within this narrative framework. The "anthropological" aspect relates to the question how grace determines and transforms the human condition. I will ask about the conditions under which grace enters human experience, the goals it envisages in human life and the part human action plays in the realization of these goals. The "theological" aspect involves the question whether the activity of grace is an expression of a divine intention, how the intention is mediated in the world and what are its goals.

1.2 The sources

Any exposition of the Valentinian thought is hindered by the variety and fragmentary nature of sources. These include:

a) Fragments and testimonies related to specific teachers whom the heresiologists describe as the followers of Valentinus,[1] and the fragments of the writings of Valentinus himself.[2]

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[1] Such as Heracleon, Marcus, Ptolemaeus and Theodotus. About other Valentinians of the second century mentioned in our sources, viz. Alexander, Axionicus, Colarbasus (?), Florinus, Secundus and Theotimus, we know very little. See the survey of evidence in E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, Leiden – Boston 2006, 491-508. For the continuity within the Valentinian school, cf. Ch. Markschies, "Valentinian Gnosticism: Toward the Anatomy of a School," in: J. D. Turner, A. McQuire (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years*, Brill 1997, esp. 426-432. For the later Valentinianism cf. K. Koschorke, "Patristische Materialen zur spätgeschichte der valentinianischen Gnosis," in: M. Krause (ed.), *Gnosis and*

b) Fragments and testimonies ascribed to "the Valentinians" in general, or to the followers of a specific "Valentinian" teacher.[3]
c) Texts not explicitly described as Valentinian, but understood as such by contemporary scholars on the basis of affinities with explicitly Valentinian material. The last mentioned group includes several documents preserved in Coptic translations in the Nag Hammadi Corpus.[4]

For centuries, paradigmatic for the exposition of the Valentinian thought have been the "classical Valentinian narratives" (henceforth CVN),[5] complicated mythico-metaphysical systems largely influenced by the Neo-Pythagorean speculation on the first principles.[6] Irenaeus of Lyons presents different versions of the narrative, ascribing one to "the disciples of Valentinus,"[7] another to Marcus,[8] still another to

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Gnosticism, Leiden 1981, 120-139. Cf. also B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, Doubleday 1987, 267-270. For the individual Valentinians cf. A. Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus. Gnostische Johannesexegese im zweiten Jahrhundert*, Tübingen 2002; N. Förster, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen 1999; W. A. Löhr, "La doctrine de Dieu dans la Lettre à Flora de Ptolémée," *RHPR* 75, 1995/2, 177-191; Ch. Markschies, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus," *ZAC* 4, 2000, 225-254.

[2] Cf. the commentary of Ch. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, Tübingen 1992; E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 417-490 (with the English translation of the fragments; cf. also B. Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 230-249).

[3] Most notably the Marcosians (Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* I,13,6; I,16,1-3; I,17-18 [?]); Ptolemaeans (ibid. I,1,1-8,5 [?]; I,12,1), or the followers of Heracleon (Origen, *Commentarius in Evangelium Joannis* XIII,20,122; XX,20,170).

[4] Cf. M. R. Desjardins, "The Sources for Valentinian Gnosticism: A Question of Methodology," *VigChr* 40, 1986, 342-347; E. Thomassen, "Notes pour la délimitation d'un corpus valentinien à Nag Hammadi," in: L. Painchaud – A. Pasquier (ed.), *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification*, Québec–Louvain–Paris 1995, 243-259.

[5] I have borrowed this expression from C. O'Regan's incisive study *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, NY 2001, 99-139. Cf. also Ch. Markschies, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus," 252, who distinguishes the doctrines of Valentinus' fragments and Ptolemaeus' *Letter to Flora* from the "'classical' Valentinian myth."

[6] Cf. A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología de la procesión del Verbo (Estudios Valentinianos I)*, Rome 1958, 3-99; H. J. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin*, Amsterdam 1964, esp. 238-264; J. D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, Louvain – Paris 2001, esp. 29-37, 345-405, and especially the discussion of E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 269-314, who also gives an overview of different versions of the CVN (see ibid. 193-268).

[7] *Adv. haer., praef.* 2: ἐντυχὼν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι τῶν, ὡς αὐτοὶ λέγουσιν, Οὐαλεντίνου μαθητῶν κτλ. The ascription of the ὑπομνήματα which became the basis of *Adv. haer.* I,1-8 (or perhaps of some other parts of Irenaeus' work, as well) is somewhat obscure. The Latin translation ascribes the whole section to Ptolemaeus (I,8,5), who is also mentioned in Irenaeus' preface (τήν τε γνώμην αὐτῶν τῶν νῦν παραδιδασκόντων, λέγω δὴ τῶν περὶ Πτολεμαῖον, [...] συντόμως καὶ σαφῶς ἀπαγγελοῦμεν). But as E. de Faye already noted, the expression οἱ περὶ Πτολεμαῖον is ambiguous, since it can be either inclusive or exclusive (*Gnostiques et gnosticisme*, Paris 1925, 102, n. 3). According to Ch. Markschies, the hypothesis that *Adv. haer.* I,1-8 reflects the teaching of the Ptolemaean circle and not Ptolemaeus himself is supported by plural forms λέγουσι, παρ' αὐτοῖς etc. employed throughout the section ("Valentinian Gnosticism," 420-421; cf. the list in F. Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne et la témoignage de Saint Irénée*, Paris 1947, 141). In an article published three years later, Markschies even suggests that the doctrine reported in *Adv. haer.* I,1-8 "has little to do with the teachings of the people around Ptolemy," and can only be ascribed to the "followers of Valentinus," to whom Irenaeus explicitly ascribed his sources ("New Research," 250-251). J. Holzhausen, "Irenäus und die valentinianische Schule," *VigChr* 55, 2001, 345-347, further contends that the explanatory clause λέγω δὴ τῶν περὶ Πτολεμαῖον is an interpolation.

[8] *Adv. haer.* I,14,1–15,3.

Valentinus himself.[9] Other (anonymous) versions of the CVN are preserved in the heresiologists[10] and the NHC.[11]

Systematic treatment of the Valentinian thought has often rested on the presupposition of a doctrinal continuity within and among the three groups of sources. This continuity, it was maintained, is marked by the CVN, a core doctrine with minor modifications and shifted emphases.[12] This presupposition, however, is problematic. It has been doubted whether some of the fragments, especially those ascribed to Valentinus himself, imply the CVN at all.[13] The relation of some "Valentinian" documents from the NHC to the CVN is also a matter of debate.[14] This does not necessarily indicate that a systematic exposition of the Valentinian thought is impossible. But it means that doctrinal continuity between the various sources traditionally labeled "Valentinian" should not be taken for granted. If it is presupposed, the continuity should be defined in a way that shows the center and the periphery of the systematic perspective and acknowledges the difference between the evident and the hypothetical claims in individual cases. This is true of the designation "Valentinian thought" itself. Ch. Markschies summarized his interpretation of the fragments of Valentinus in an aphorism, "the Valentinus of the fragments is no Valentinian," with the implication that Valentinus did not cherish the ontological myth ascribed to his followers.[15] In a similar vein, in this essay I will understand as "Valentinian" the sources that according to my judgement presuppose the CVN as their theoretical background. As a traditional paradigm I will use "La grande notice" preserved in Irenaeus,[16] and then proceed to other fragments, testimonies and texts whose affinities to the paradigmatic case can be demonstrated or reasonably supposed.[17]

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[9] Irenaeus also mentions a fragment of a system ascribed to a certain Secundus (*Adv. haer.* I,11,2). The validity of Irenaeus' report on Valentinus (*Adv. haer.* I,11,1) is radically questioned by Ch. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, 364-379. See also E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 23-27.

[10] Cf. esp. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* VI,29,1-36,4; Epiphanius, *Panarion* I,390,5-398,5.

[11] Esp. NHC I,5 and XI,2. Contrary to C. O'Regan, *Gnostic Return*, 110-118, I do not include the *Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,3 and XII,2) among the CVN. Although the traditional myth is admittedly "present at least as a trace" (*Gnostic Return*, 112), I believe that this subtle exhortation to spiritual conversion is less confusingly categorised as a "relecture" of the CVN than another version of it (cf. Ch. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, 340, n. 18). The tension between the myth and the metanarrative strategy is well described by O'Regan, *Gnostic Return*, 116: "... the overcoming of Gnostic narrative and the undoing of plot altogether is a gesture of the *Gospel*, perhaps *the* gesture, but one not fully redeemed by the text itself."

[12] Cf. e.g., K. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, San Francisco 1987, 318-325.

[13] Cf. Ch. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, Tübingen 1992, 377. The same doubts were raised in respect to Heracleon (A. Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus*, esp. 5-10; 395-6), and even Ptolemaeus (cf. Ch. Markschies, "New Research...").

[14] Concerning The Gospel of Truth and The Treatise on Resurrection cf. the careful remarks of E. Thomassen, "Notes pour la délimitation," 251-253. For the latter text cf. also the recent discussion of H. Strutwolf, "Retractatio gnostica. Die Reinterpretation gnostischer Schultradition im Dialog mit der Großkirche," in: A. Franz, T. Rentsch (ed.), *Gnosis oder Die Frage nach Herkunft und Ziel des Menschen*, Padeborn 2002, 41-64.

[15] Ch. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, 406.

[16] *Adv. haer.* I,1,1-8,5. For this designation cf. the classic study of F. Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne*.

[17] As mentioned in the foreword, this study is limited to the heresiological sources. For a full account of the Valentinian soteriology it would be necessary, of course, to include the Valentinian documents from the Nag Hammadi collection, esp. the Tripartite Tractate (NHC I,5) and the Gospel of Truth (NHC I,3). I refer to these and other Nag Hammadi texts (NHC XI,2) occasionally in the footnotes.

2. Grace as a mythological figure

2.1 "La grande notice" (*Adv. haer.* I,1-8)

In some versions of the CVN, Grace (Charis) is a name of a mythological character or a hypostatized entity. In the "grand notice" (henceforth GN), Grace is the feminine counterpart of the ultimate deity, or the Father, also called Proarche (fore-principle), Propator (fore-father), or Bythos (abyss).[18] Her other names are Sige (silence), Ennoia (intention), or Enthumesis (thought).[19] As A. Orbe puts it, the name Charis probably refers to the belief that "the gnosis of the Abyss is a gift of grace."[20]

In the GN, however, the feminine counterpart of the Abyss not only mediates the knowledge of the Father, but also restrains it.[21] The Abyss of the ultimate deity is contemplated by the Intellect, the Monogenēs, the first pleromatic emanation of the first syzygy, through whom the pleroma of the aeons was generated.[22] According to the GN, the Intellect "was thinking of communicating his Father's greatness also to the rest of the aeons, how vast and great he is, that he is without beginning, immeasurable and that he cannot be grasped by sight."[23] But at the will of the Father (βουλήσει τοῦ Πατρός), this communication was restrained by Silence, "because she [i.e., Silence] wished to bring all aeons to the intention [ἔννοια] and the desire [πόθος] to seek for their Forefather." The restriction of the Intellect by Silence brings about the "desire" to reach beyond the limits of intellectual comprehension, which can presumably only be answered by Grace.[24]

The "desire to seek for the Father" is an important connecting element in the GN. It permeates the whole pleroma from the first aeonic pair, the Intellect and Alētheia, down to the last begotten aeon, Sophia.[25] Whereas the other aeons long for their procreator "peacefully" and glorify him by generating other pleromatic beings in pairs,[26] Sophia, after being struck by the desire, refuses the embrace of her

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[18] For the possible (biblical and Middle Platonic) contexts of the concept of βυθός (or βάθος) in the Valentinian thought, cf. A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología*, 58-62.

[19] Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,1,1; 1,8,5; cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* I,391,1; I,401,5; I,427-9 (Ennoia = Sige = Charis).

[20] A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología*, 296: "... la Gnosis del Abismo es una gracia." The idea that knowledge of the ultimate deity is a gift of grace is found in other Valentinian documents (GTr 16,33; cf. also ibid. 37,11; TripTr 51,4 f.), and elsewhere in early Christian literature (A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología*, 296, refers to Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 120,3-4; cf. also *Strom.* V,71,5).

[21] Cf. A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología*, 294 ff. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 29; TripTr 55,35-6; 75,13-17. Similar thought is also expressed in GTr 18,36-19,7.

[22] In *Adv. haer.* I,1,1, the Intellect is called "the Father of all who will be after him, the principle and formation (ἀρχὴ καὶ μόρφωσις) of all the pleroma." For the origin of the term *pleroma* cf. A. Orbe, *La teología del Espíritu Santo*, 1-9; V. McDermot, "The Concept of 'Pleroma' in Gnosticism," in: M. Krause (ed.), *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, Leiden 1977, 79-86.

[23] *Adv. haer.* I,2,1. For quotations from Irenaus I use D. J. Unger's translation (ACW 55, revised by J. Dillon), with modifications.

[24] So it is not correct that the Intellect "marks the break with the ineffable mysteriousness of the ultimate foundation and/or depth of reality," as C. O'Regan contends (*Gnostic Return*, 103). It only marks the distinction between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible. The ineffable Ennoia of the Father continues to play a crucial role in the soteriological process. Cf. A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología*, 310-312, esp. n. 12.

[25] *Adv. haer.* I,2,1-2.

[26] *Adv. haer.* I,2,1; 1,2.

appropriate partner and passionately turns to the Father himself.[27] This "audacity" (τόλμη) leads to her limitless extension, on account of which her passionate "thought" (Ἐνθύμησις) must be excluded from the pleroma by the agency of the "limit" (Ὅρος) and effectively becomes the matter of the perceptible world.[28]

The feminine counterpart of the Abyss in her dual role as Grace and Silence seems to be ultimately responsible both for the origin of the desire to comprehend the incomprehensible, and for the grace of "knowledge" (γνῶσις) which invests the desire with its appropriate form. The fallen "thought" of Sophia (called Achamoth) is itself formless, but receives form from two messengers of the pleroma, who were generated by the Intellect according to the Father's forethought (προμήθεια).[29] The messengers generated after the fall of Sophia are another pleromatic pair, viz. Christ and Holy Spirit. Christ "had pity" (οἰκτείραντα) on Achamoth and formed her in substance (κατ' οὐσίαν).[30] The Holy Spirit, accompanied by pleromatic angels, formed her in knowledge (κατὰ γνῶσιν), by separating her from her passions, and providing her the contemplation (θεωρία) of the "lights" (or "angels") coming from the pleroma. From this *theōria* she gives birth to the "spiritual offspring," i.e., the pneumatic element, born after the image of the pleromatic angels.[31]

As the story goes, the separated passions of Sophia were transformed by the Holy Spirit into the "material" and "psychic" substances (οὐσία). While the material substance was created from her fear (φόβος), grief (λύπη), and perplexity (ἀπορία), the psychic substance was created from fear and conversion (ἐπιστροφή).[32] Sophia in turn gave form (μεμορφωκέναι) to the psychic substance and produced the demiurge, the ruler of both the psychic and the material elements, who is also responsible for their formation.[33]

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[27] *Adv. haer.* I,2,2.

[28] *Adv. haer.* I,2,2; 4,1-2. Τόλμα was a Pythagorean term for the Dyad, the ground of difference (ἀνομοίων αἰτία) or matter (ὕλη), also called "lack" (ἔλλειψις), or "excess" (πλεονασμός). She is further characterized as ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀόριστος καὶ ἄπειρος (Nicomachus of Gerasa, apud. Photius, *Bibliotheca* 143a39-b3 [Bekker]). For the history of the concept of *tolma* cf. N. Joseph Torchia, *Plotinus,* Tolma, *and the Descent of Being*, New York 1993, esp. 11-36. There are remarkable correspondences between the cosmology of the "grande notice" and the system of Moderatus of Gades, a Pythagorean philosopher who was active in the latter part of the first century, probably in Rome. Cf. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, London – Ithaca, NY 1977, 344-351; J. D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism*, 363-372; E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 271-275.

[29] *Adv. haer.* I,2,5.

[30] *Adv. haer.* I,4,1. After Christ formed Achamoth κατ' οὐσίαν, he left her alone "in order that she, aware of her passion which had been caused by her separating from the fulness, might desire the better things [ὀρεχθῇ τῶν διαφερόντων]" (*Adv. haer.* I,4,1). This longing, or the "scent of immortality," left in her by Christ *and* the Holy Spirit [sic], is probably the πνευματικὴ οὐσία itself. Cf. F. Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne*, 231. According to Sagnard, the double formation of Achamoth is a prototype of the formation of the spiritual persons (ibid., 215). The "first formation" (of the spiritual seed?) is also mentioned by Heracleon (Origen, *Comm. Jo.* II,21,137; quoted below, note 69). Cf. also the "first formation" of the aeons in TripTr (NHC I,5) 61,1-28, and the comm. of E. Thomassen, in: E. Thomassen–L. Painchaud, *Le traité tripartite*, Québec 1989, 296-7. For the formation of Achamoth cf. the discussion of A. Orbe, *La teología del Espíritu Santo: Estudios Valentinianos, vol. IV*, 313-321.

[31] *Adv. haer.* I,4,5. The pneumatic element is "of the same substance" (ὁμοούσιον) as the Mother. Cf. *Adv. haer.* I,5,1.6. According to A. Rousseau's emendation of the mss., Achamoth "conceived as she contemplated them" (devenue grosse à leur vue). Rousseau refers to Gen 30:38-39; Gen 30:41, and *Adv. haer.* I,29,1; II,19,6.

[32] Cf. the commentary of A. Orbe, *La teología del Espíritu Santo*, 375-427.

[33] *Adv. haer.* I,5,1.

The formation of the lower Sophia (or Achamoth) by Christ and Holy Spirit prefigures the formation of the spiritual element in the human soul. As mentioned above, the spiritual element was born from Achamoth's contemplation of the angels of light. It was born formless, however, and Achamoth was not able to invest it with form, as it can only be formed or "made perfect" by the messenger of the pleroma, viz. the Saviour.[34] When Adam was created by the demiurge from the material and the psychic substance, Achamoth deposited the spiritual element in Adam's soul as a "seed" in a "womb," so that "it might become fit for the reception of perfect knowledge." The planting of the spiritual seed in the soul is described as an act of "unutterable power and providence," or even grace.[35] Although the implantation of the spiritual seed is not performed by the figure of Grace herself, its description as an act of providence (προνοια) suggests that it is done according to the will of the Father.[36]

We may summarize that in the GN Grace is a name of a mythological figure that constitutes the tension between the "desire" for the supranoetic deity and the "knowledge" (or formation of the desire) mediated by the Intellect (via Christ and Holy Spirit). As we will observe, a similar pattern is followed on the anthropological plane, where the operation of grace is primarily described by the metaphors of planting of the spiritual seed (the offspring of Achamoth's desire) and its formation through the Saviour.

2.2 The Marcosian version (*Adv. haer.* I,13)

The metaphor of Achamoth planting the spiritual seed into the soul of Adam is paralleled in an important passage in Irenaeus' *Adv. haer.* I,13, the colourful report on the teaching and practice of Mark the Valentinian.

Irenaeus reports that Mark understood Grace as a transcendent being and invoked her with prayers. During an eucharist-like ritual,[37] Mark "gives thanks over the mixed cup of wine, and draws out at great length the prayer of invocation [ἐπίκλησις]."[38] The cup appears to be purple or red (by magical make-believe, Irenaeus suspects), "so that it seems that Grace, who is from the regions which are above all things dropped her own blood into that cup because of his invocation, and that those who are present greatly desire to taste of that drink, so that Grace (...) might rain upon them too." Among prayers uttered by participants in the celebration the following is of special

[34] *Adv. haer.* I,5,1; I,6,1.

[35] *Adv. haer.* I,5,6; cf. I,6,4 and below, 3.2.

[36] Cf. *Adv. haer.* I,2,1.5. According to Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,6,4, the grace for the pneumatici "comes down from above, from the unspeakable and unnameable conjugal couple," which probably indicates that it comes from the Father and his paredros Charis.

[37] According to N. Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 66-69, the ritual practice described by Irenaeus was probably not intended to replace the eucharist, but represented a specific intitiation ritual of the Marcosian community. Cf. already G. Koffmane, "Die Gnosis nach ihrer Tendenz und Organisation" [1881], in: K. Rudolph (ed.), *Gnosis und Gnostizismus*, Darmstadt 1975, 130.

[38] *Adv. haer.* I,13,2. D. J. Unger, ACW 55, 203, notes that "in the ancient liturgies the epiclesis was the prayer in which God was called upon to send down the Word or Holy Spirit to effect the consecration of the bread and the wine and/or to make the Eucharistic Sacrifice and/or Communion fruitful for the faithful" (see references ibid., 203-204). According to N. Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 75-6, esp. n. 102, the liturgical meaning of the term is not attested before the third century, and Irenaeus probably used it for its magical connotations in order to discredit his opponent.

interest: "May Grace who is before all things, unthinkable and unspeakable, fill your inner self [τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον][39] and increase in you her knowledge [τὴν γνῶσιν αὐτῆς],[40] by planting the mustard seed in good ground." As F. Sagnard suggests, the mustard seed (cf. Mark 4:31 and parallels) here corresponds to the Valentinian concept of the pneumatic seed,[41] and so Grace seems to play a similar role as Achamoth in the GN.[42] On the other hand, the formula "who is before all things" (ἡ πρὸ τῶν ὅλων) suggests affinity to the Silence of the GN, since τὰ ὅλα presumably refers to the aeons.[43]

In the Marcosian version of the CVN the metaphor of sowing appears not in an exegetical, but in a ritual context, and explicitly employs the idea of grace: indeed, the spiritual element (or what is analogous to it) is sowed in human souls by Grace herself. The figure of Grace in the Marcosian version incorporates both the Silence, the paredros of the ultimate deity, and Sophia Achamoth in her soteriological role, thus making explicit the continuity between the mythical account of the first principles and the soteriological doctrine, detectable already in the GN.

3. Anthropological context of grace

3.1 Three invisible substances

In different versions of the CVN the anthropological theory is based on the accounts in the Book of Genesis about the creation of Adam. According to the version reported in Irenaeus, Adam was created by the demiurge from two invisible substances, the material and the psychic. The material creation was "after the image" (κατ' εἰκόνα), while the psychic "after the likeness" (καθ' ὁμοίωσιν) of God, i.e., the demiurge.[44]

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[39] Cf. Eph 7:16.

[40] As F. Mitzka, "Gnostizismus," 61, notes, it is rather unclear whether the genitive should be understood as objective or subjective. I follow Unger in choosing the latter alternative, assuming that the object of the knowledge is the Father, Grace being its mediator. E. Pagels, "A Valentinian interpretation of baptism and eucharist – and its critique of 'orthodox' sacramental theology and practice," *HTR*, 65, 1972, 166, chooses the first option ("the gnosis of her," viz. the grace), and interprets the knowledge of grace as the "recognition of one's own preelection."

[41] F. Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne*, 417.

[42] With the expression ἐγκαταίσπείρουσα τὸν κόκκον τοῦ σινάπεως εἰς τὴν ἀγαθὴν γῆν (*Adv. haer.* 1,13,2) compare τὰ δὲ πνευματικὰ, ἃ ἐγκατασπείρει ἡ Ἀχαμὼθ ἕκτοτε ἕως τοῦ νῦν δικαίαις ψυχαῖς (*Adv. haer.* I,7,5; for the text cf. A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, SC 263 [notes], 211). According to N. Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 86-89, Mark employs the metaphor in a different sense than the other Valentinians. Rather than to the "Pneumateile," the metaphor refers to the angels brought by Charis to the persons who already had been endowed with the pneumatic seed (earlier described as ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος). Cf. also ibid., 111-112, with reference to *Adv. haer.* 1,13,3. Probably it would be more correct to speak about the seed as the *effluence* of the angels, rather than the angels themselves. In *Adv. haer.* I,13,3 "the seed of light" (τὸ σπέρμα τοῦ φωτός) is received by the soul from her "bridegroom," viz. her angel, in the bridal chamber. A similar description is found in the *Exc. Th.* 2,1-2, where the spiritual seed inserted to the elect soul is described as the ἀπόρροια τοῦ ἀγγελικοῦ [scil. σπέρματος]. Perhaps the Marcosian version is not so different from the "standard" Valentinian doctrine: it is at least questionable whether in *Adv. haer.* 1,7,5 and elsewhere the plantation takes place "bei der Geburt" of the pneumatic person, as Förster contends (*Marcus Magus*, 98-99). See the discussion below, 3.4.1. Perhaps the expression ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος in *Adv. haer.* I,13,2 refers to the soul. Cf. Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI 34,5.7 (quoted by Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 86-87).

[43] Cf. *Adv. haer.* 1,13,6, where the "mystic Silence" who is "before all aeons" is invoked in a similar manner. Cf. also F. Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne*, 416-417; N. Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 77-97.

[44] Cf. Gen 1:26. Valentinians related the creation "after the likeness" (καθ' ὁμοίωσιν) to the psychic element presumably because in that expression they recognized the idea that it is "consubstantial" (ὁμοούσιος) with the demiurge.

The material element is further distinguished from the perceptible body, the "leather garment," in which Adam was clothed.[45] The demiurge "breathed" the psychic element into the material Adam, while Achamoth secretly inserted into him, as into a womb, her spiritual offspring, viz. the pneumatic seed, the latter element presumably being referred to as the "spirit of life" (πνεῦμα ζωῆς).[46]

An interesting parallel is presented in Clement of Alexandria's *Excerpts from Theodotus* 50-57.[47] In this passage the creation "according to the image" is related to the "earthly, material and irrational soul," as opposed to the soul "according to the likeness," consubstantial (ὁμοούσιόν τι) with the demiurge.[48] The latter soul is described as the "psychic person" (ὁ ψυχικὸς [ἄνθρωπος])[49] or the "divine soul" (ἡ ψυχὴ ἡ θεία),[50] which is "rational and just" (ἡ λογικὴ καὶ ἡ δικαία).[51] Apart from the "irrational" and the "divine" elements, Adam was also endowed with the "spiritual seed sowed in his soul by Wisdom,"[52] and lastly put on the fourth, "earthly" element, the "leather garments," viz. the perceptible body.[53]

Of the three incorporeal (ἀσώματος) elements of Adam only the "material" one is inherited by all his progeny; it seems to be proximate to the sexual impulse.[54] The higher elements, being "divine" (θεῖα γὰρ ἄμφω), are "produced through him but not by him."[55] This probably indicates that the higher elements are not inherited by sexual reproduction but infused by the demiurge or Wisdom, respectively. For this reason "many are material, but not many are psychic, and few are spiritual."[56]

3.2 Nature as the gift of grace

According to Irenaeus, the Valentinians taught that "Achamoth has been planting the spiritual [elements] into righteous souls (δικαίαις ψυχαῖς) since then [i.e., the creation of Adam] until now."[57] Tertullian's report on Valentinian soteriology suggests that this very act of implantation was understood as an act of grace: Achamoth plants the spiritual element into good souls (*in animas bonas*) not as a "natural disposition" (*natura*), but as a "gift of grace" (*indulgentia*).[58] Tertullian's

[45] Cf. Gen 3:21.

[46] Cf. Gen 2:7. For the whole section cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,5,5-6.

[47] I follow the edition of F. Sagnard, *Clément d'Alexandrie. Extraits de Théodote*, SC 23, Paris 1970.

[48] *Exc. Th.* 50.

[49] Cf. 1 Cor 2:14; Jude 19.

[50] *Exc. Th.* 51.

[51] *Exc. Th.* 54,1.

[52] *Exc. Th.* 53,2.

[53] *Exc. Th.* 55,1.

[54] Cf. *Exc. Th.* 55,3: "The material nature is active toward seed and generation, as though mixed with the seed."

[55] *Exc. Th.* 55,2.

[56] *Exc. Th.* 56,2.

[57] *Adv. haer.* I,7,5. Cf. also *Exc. Th.* 53.

[58] Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 29: "Spiritalem [Fredouille: spiritale] enim ex Seth de obuenientia superducunt iam non naturam sed indulgentiam, ut quos [Fredouille: quod] Achamoth de superioribus in animas bonas depluat." For the meaning of "indulgentia" in Tertullian cf. J.-F. Fredouille, *Tertullien. Contre les Valentiniennes*, II, Paris 1981, 332. Cf. also the discussion of G. Quispel, "La conception," 42-3.

note is supported by another passage in Irenaeus where the Valentinians ascribe to themselves "grace as a proper possession" (χάρις ἰδιόκτητος).[59]

Interestingly, the psychic salvation is interpreted in terms of grace, too. In contrast to the pneumatici (i.e., those endowed with the spiritual element), who "have grace as a proper possession (...) and so it will be increased for them [προστεθήσεσθαι]," the psychici have received grace "for loan" (ἐν χρήσει), and "so it will be taken away again [ἀφαιρεθήσεσθαι]."[60]

Whereas the grace of the pneumatici comes from Achamoth, the grace of the psychici probably comes from the demiurge.[61] According to R. Berthouzoz, the very nature of the psychici can be conceived as a gift of grace, "l' «indulgentia» du demiurg."[62] Berhouzoz recalls the above quoted passage in *Exc. Th.* 55-56, where both the pneumatic and the psychic elements are called "divine" (θεῖα), as opposed to the "hylic" (i.e., generic and perishing) nature.

But what exactly is the difference between the two kinds of grace? The expression ἐν χρήσει seems to suggest a temporal loan used for a given purpose.[63] We may conclude from *Exc. Th.* 54f. that the "psychic element," viz. the "rational and just nature," is given as an opportunity for rational and moral improvement.[64] This opportunity should presumably be understood as a loan that could freely be used for the good of the soul ("incorruptibility"), or spent uselessly.[65] By contrast,

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[59] *Adv. haer.* I,6,4. It is possible that Tertullian deduced his report from this very passage. G. Quispel, "La conception," 50, thinks that Tertullian draws on Valentinian sources unknown to us, perhaps on oral tradition. But he could have simply combined two passages in Irenaeus' report and explain the sowing of Achamoth in *Adv. haer.* I,7,5 in terms of χάρις ἰδιόκτητος in *Adv. haer.* I,6,4. In fact, he uses *Adv. haer.* I,6,2-4 right in the next paragraph (*Adv. Val.* 30; cf. the commentary of J.-C. Fredouille, *Tertullien, Contre les valentiniens*, Tome II, Paris 1981, 335-8).

[60] Cf. Matt 13:12; 25:29; Luke 12:2; 19:26: "For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away (ἀρθήσεται)." A similar concept is found in GPhil (NHC II,3) 64,25-29. See also GTr (NHC I,3) 40,9-10 (with the comm. of H. W. Attridge, NHC I, notes, 127). Irenaeus' testimony is somewhat obscure, but it does seem to speak against Quispel's interpretation of the Valentinian opposition of "psyche" vs. "pneuma" in terms of "nature" vs. "grace." In Quispel's view, "in the Valentinian mysticism nature is opposed to grace, the immanent 'psyche' to the transcendent 'pneuma,' the world to God." ("La conception," 57). Cf. the criticism of R. Berthouzoz, *Liberté et grace suivant la théologie d'Irénée de Lyon*, Paris 1980, 105.

[61] This should not mean, however, that the psychic grace originates with the demiurge. In fact, everything demiurge does is secretly instigated by his mother (cf. *Adv. haer.* I,5,1). For the role of Christ in the psychic salvation cf. below, 4.2.2.

[62] R. Berthouzoz, *Liberté et grâce*, 106.

[63] Cf. F. Mitzka, "Gnostizismus," 63.

[64] For the "normative" concept of nature cf. the pioneering study of H. Langerbeck, "Die Anthropologie der alexandrinischen Gnosis," in: *Aufsätze zur Gnosis*, aus dem Nachlaß herausgegeben von H. Dörries, Göttingen 1967, esp. 63-75. Cf. also below, 3.3.

[65] Cf. also Heracleon's discussion of decision (γνώμη) and deeds (ἔργα) in connection with John 8:44: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do." (*Comm. Jo.* XX,24,214-216). Origen attests that Heracleon connected this passage with the psychic persons: "After that Heracleon says [φήσιν] that this was not addressed to those who are the sons of the devil by nature [φύσει], the hylics, but to the psychics, who have become the sons of the devil by adoption [θέσει] — so that [ἀφ' ὧν] some people can also be called the children of God by nature and some by adoption" (*Comm. Jo.* XX,24,213); cf. C. Blanc, SC 290, 262-263. Although the conclusion (referring to the distinction between the pneumatici and the psychici) probably goes back to Origen, it is stretched to suppose that he also invented the premise (against H. Langerbeck, "Die Anthropologie," 69, whose example of Origen's paraphrase in *Comm. Jo.* XX,20,168 is not really a parallel, as it is not introduced by φήσιν). If the argument should have any value, the distinction φύσει vs. θέσει must have been already present in Heracleon's exegesis. Cf. B. Aland, "Erwählungstheologie und Menschenklassenlehre," in: M. Krause (ed.), *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, Leiden 1977, 180. In this famous passage Heracleon

the χάρις ἰδιόκτητος given by Achamoth, viz. the spiritual element, cannot be wasted, or taken away, but only more or less perfectly cultivated or formed.[66]

3.3 Two kinds of conversion

We have seen that at least some versions of the Valentinian soteriology distinguished between two kinds of grace that correspond to two anthropological types. Each type is characterized by a specific kind of "nature," i.e., a specific possibility of perfection. While the possibility is already described as a gift of grace, grace is also involved in its fulfillment. The first step in this process seems to be the "conversion" of the soul from the original situation characterized as ignorance or sinfulness towards the goal of the psychic or spiritual development.[67]

According to Origen's report, the two kinds of conversion are described in Heracleon's commentary on the Gospel of John.[68] The psychic conversion is explained with the help of the Johannine narrative about the healing of the centurion's son (John 4:46 f.). The centurion is interpreted as the demiurge, and his son as the one who belongs to him (ὁ ἴδιος αὐτοῦ ἄνθρωπος), i.e., the psychic person.[69] The "malady" of the son signifies that he was "ignorant and sinful," i.e., in a state that did

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distinguishes three ways of being somebody's child: φύσει, γνώμῃ, ἀξίᾳ. According to Heracleon, the addressees of the gospel passage have not become "children of the devil" by their decision (γνώμῃ), but by their "deeds," i.e., ἀξίᾳ (*Comm. Jo.* XX,24,215-216), which probably implies that γνώμη is always directed to the good (cf. H. Langerbeck, "Die Anthropologie," 67-68; A. Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon*, 346-350). Therefore if Heracleon writes that one way to become somebody's child is γνώμῃ (viz. ὅτε τὸ θέλημά τις ποιῶν τινος διὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γνώμην τέκνον ἐκείνου οὗ ποιεῖ τὸ θέλημα καλεῖται), he seems to indicate that the right decision can lead to υἱοθεσία. Against E. Mühlenberg's view that γνώμῃ refers to "pneumatische Kindschaft" (E. Mühlenberg, "Wieviel Erlösungen kennt der Gnostiker Herakleon?," *ZNW* 66, 1975, 172; cf. already H. Langerbeck, "Die Anthropologie," 69), I would contend that γνώμῃ and ἀξίᾳ describe two eschatological options for the soul: to become a child of God, or a child of the devil. Cf. A. Castellano, *La exégesis de Orígenes y de Heracleón a los testimonios del Bautista*, Santiago de Chile 1998, 106-109, who refers to TripTr (NHC I,5) 119,22-121,14. Φύσει then presumably refers to both groups *not addressed* in John 8:44, viz. the χοικοί ("consubstantial with the devil": cf. *Comm. Jo.* XX,20.170. 24,213), and the πνευματικοί.

[66] Cf. *Exc. Th.* 57. For the concept of grace as a proper possession cf. also GTr (NHC I,3) 36,30-32, and below, note 80.

[67] According to the GN, "conversion" (ἐπιστροφή) is the substance of the soul, its archetype being the conversion of the fallen Sophia herself (cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,2,2.3; 4.1-2.5; 5,1.4). For the Valentinian concept of conversion (in the context of CVN), cf. A. Orbe, *La teología del Espíritu Santo*, 406-415. For the sq. discussion cf. the excellent article of J. Holzhausen, "Die Seelenlehre des Gnostikers Herakleon," in: J. Holzhausen (ed.), *ψυχή - Seele - anima*, FS Karin Alt, Stuttgart, Leipzig 1998, 279-300.

[68] I follow the Sources chrétiennes edition of C. Blanc, *Origène: Commentaire sur S. Jean*, I (livres I-V), SC 120, Paris 1996[2]; II (livres VI, X) SC 157, 1970; III (livre XIII) SC 222, 1975; IV (livres XIX-XX), SC 290, 1982.

[69] That the son of the centurion symbolizes the psychic person is in my view clearly indicated in the following references: *Comm. Jo.* XIII,59,416 (ὁ ἴδιος αὐτοῦ ἄνθρωπος); 59,419 (τὸ "ἐὰν μὴ σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἴδητε, οὐ μὴ πιστεύσητε" λέγεσθαι φησιν οἰκείως πρὸς τὸ τοιοῦτον πρόσωπον δι' ἔργων φύσιν ἔχον καὶ δι' αἰσθήσεως πείθεσθαι καὶ οὐχὶ λόγῳ πιστεύειν); 60.424 (πρὸς τὴν ἑβδόμην ὥραν λέγει ὅτι διὰ τῆς ὥρας χαρακτηρίζεται ἡ φύσις τοῦ ἰαθέντος). In *Comm. Jo.* XIII,61.431 Origen paraphrased 59,419 (quoted above) as though its object was the ψυχικὴ φύσις of the person, rather than the person himself (ἐπείπερ τὴν ψυχικὴν φύσιν ᾠήθη δι' ἔργων καὶ αἰσθήσεως πείθεσθαι οὐχὶ δὲ λόγων). This probably reflects his understanding of φύσις as a facticity, rather than a possibility of improvement, or Heilsimperativ (Schottroff). For Heracleon's concept of nature cf. H. Langerbeck, "Die Anthropologie," 67-73; E. Mühlenberg, "Wieviel Erlösungen," esp. 171-186. For other references cf. A. Wucherpfenning, *Heracleon Philologus*, 333-334 (cf. also ibid. 353-357). It is possible that Heracleon did not clearly distinguish between the different connotations of the term himself, however: cf. E. Mühlenberg, "Wieviel Erlösungen," 177.

not accord to his nature.[70] Heracleon's statement that sinfulness does not accord with the psychic nature reminds us of the above mentioned characterization of the psychic nature as "rational and just" (*Exc. Th.* 54,1).[71] In the *Excerpta*, the psychic element "has the capacity [ἐπιτηδειότητα] for both faith and incorruptibility, as well as for unbelief and corruption" (56,3). Similarly, according to Heracleon, the soul itself is not immortal, but "has capacity [ἐπιτηδείως ἔχουσα] for salvation," being "the corruptible that puts on incorruptibility and the mortal that puts on immortality, when 'death is swallowed up in victory.'"[72] The soul can be "healed" by the Saviour, who "descended to the sick and healed him from his malady, i.e., from sins, and by forgiving the sins he brought him to life."[73]

The "spiritual" conversion is demonstrated by the example of the Samaritan woman in John 4:19 f.[74] Before her encounter with the Saviour, she lived in "the depth of matter" (ἐν τῇ βαθείᾳ ὕλῃ) and "adultery" (πορνεία), since she was ignorant of God and failed to worship him in an appropriate way.[75] Although

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[70] *Comm. Jo.* XIII,59,416. As E. Mühlenberg, "Wieviel Erlösungen," 174, notes, in this passage the term φύσις seems to be understood in the sense of an ideal ("ist hier etwa als Ideale verstanden"). In Mühlenberg's view, this ideal is not the "psychic nature," but rather the spirit. In effect, the φύσις (or "Seinsweise") of the "psychic" and the "spiritual" persons is ultimately the same ("Wieviel Erlösungen," 186-192; cf. already H. Langerbeck, "Die Anthropologie," 72). A similar reading was proposed by E. Pagels, who did not deny the distinction between the two kinds of conversion, however: "What the pneumatics experience as a present reality, the psychic Christians only anticipate as a future hope" (E. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, New York 1973, 97). Pagel's reading is supported by the description of the eschatological restoration of the psychics in the TripTr (NHC I,5), 133,1-6 (Attridge & Pagels trans.): "[t]hey will receive the vision more and more by nature (ⲛ̀ⲛⲓ ⲟⲩ ⲫⲩⲥⲓⲥ) and not only by a little word, so as to believe only through a voice." Cf. Heracleon's distinction between voice and *logos* in Origen, *Comm. Jo.* VI,20,108 (cf. XIII,58,363). Mühlenberg's view was recently corroborated by A. Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus*, cf. esp. 276-291; 333-353. Although the interpretation of φύσις in such passages as *Comm. Jo.* XIII,59,416 in terms of "pneuma" (= the spiritual grace: cf. E. Mühlenberg, "Wieviel Erlösungen," 191) is perhaps possible, it is in my view not supported by evidence, and conflicts with such fragments as XIII,59,419 and 60,424 (quoted above, note 69). I submit that the nature of the psychic person is more plausibly explained as the possibility of moral perfection.

[71] This interpretation of the psychic nature is supported by the above quoted passage in *Comm. Jo.* XIII,59,419: this kind of person (τὸ τοιοῦτον πρόσωπον) obtains his nature through works and his faith through senses (δι' ἔργων φύσιν ἔχον καὶ δι' αἰσθήσεως πείθεσθαι). Cf. A. Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus*, 303. For the role of senses in the education of the psychic element cf. *Adv. haer.* I,6,1: ἔδει γὰρ τῷ ψυχικῷ καὶ αἰσθητῶν παιδευμάτων.

[72] *Comm. Jo.* XIII,59,418 (cf. 1 Cor 15:53-4); cf. *Comm. Jo.* XIII,44,294.

[73] *Comm. Jo.* XIII, (LX) 421. Cf. E. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel*, 83-5, and the detailed commentary of A. Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus*, 247-331.

[74] Origen, *Comm. Jo.* XIII,15,91 ff. In his SC edition C. Blanc calls this passage "Héracléon: péché et conversion de la nature spirituelle" (Origène, SC 222, 79). That the Samaritan woman symbolizes the "pneumatic" person is stated by Origen in *Comm. Jo.* XIII,11,73-4; 25,149; 31,190, not by Heracleon himself, as J. A. Trumbower wrongly claims ("Origen's exegesis of John 8:19-53: The struggle with Heracleon over the idea of fixed natures," *VigChr* 43, 1989, 138-154). Origen's interpretation is supported by the following passages, however: *Comm. Jo.* XIII, 15,92 (Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐπαινεῖ ὡς πρεπόντως τῇ αὑτῆς φύσει ποιήσασαν τὴν Σαμαρεῖτιν κτλ.); 25,148 (αὐτοὶ τῆς αὐτῆς φύσεως ὄντες τῷ πατρὶ πνεῦμά εἰσιν κτλ.); 50,341 (καὶ ἐπισημαίνεταί γε τὸ "Πολλοὶ" ὡς πολλῶν ὄντων ψυχικῶν · τὴν δὲ μίαν λέγει τὴν ἀφθαρτον τῆς ἐκλογῆς φύσιν καὶ μονοειδῆ καὶ ἑνικήν). In Origen's view the concept of the spiritual nature should imply that the spiritual person has never sinned. Cf. *Comm. Jo.* XIII,11,72-4, where he reproaches Heracleon for inconsistency. This reflects the usual (most probably wrong) interpretation of the Valentinian soteriology to the effect that the spiritual person has always been saved and does not need to repent. Cf. the same misunderstanding (and the same reproach) in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* II,115,1-2, in respect to the concept of "salvation by nature" ascribed to Valentinus; cf. Ch. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, 80-82.

[75] Origen, *Comm. Jo.* XIII,11,72.

Heracleon does not explicitly call her sinful,[76] this conclusion seems inevitable.[77] Her situation before the conversion is characterized as ephemeral, defective and "worldly" (κοσμικός).[78] But when she encountered the Saviour she immediately recognized him and "demonstrated unwavering [ἀδιάκριτος] faith that accords to her nature." Her nature is symbolized by the vessel in which she came to receive the "living water" of the Saviour and which she then left with him. It is explained as "the disposition for life and the notion of the power coming from the Saviour."[79] After her conversion she received the "grace and gift of our Saviour." This grace is characterized as ἀναφαίρετος (not to be taken away), since "it never perishes nor gets spoiled in the one who participates in it."[80] The expression reminds us of the above mentioned doctrine of the "grace as a proper possession," i.e., the idea that the spiritual grace cannot be wasted or taken away.[81] It does not deprive the spiritual conversion of its *telos*, however, viz. the "formation" (μόρφωσις) of the spiritual seed, as Heracleon himself attests.[82]

3.4 Predestination and choice in the spiritual formation

G. Quispel famously described Valentinianism as "a mysticism emphasizing grace and election."[83] This characterization is supported by predestinarian language employed in Valentinian soteriology, a feature highlighted in some Nag Hammadi documents related to Valentinianism.[84] However, it seems that some Valentinians strove to reconcile the doctrine of predestination with the notion of choice and moral responsibility. In the following section, I will at least touch upon the difficult problem

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[76] Cf. E. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel*, 88; M. Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism*, 60.

[77] Cf. E. de Faye, *Gnostiques et gnosticisme*, Paris 1925, 92-93; E. Mühlenberg, "Wieviel Erlösungen," 170-193, esp. 173, n. 12. 178 ff.; B. Aland, "Erwählungstheologie," 168-172; J. Holzhausen, "Die Seelenlehre," 293 ff. That the situation of the pneumatici before conversion was understood as sinful is supported by a report about the teaching of Theodotus in *Exc. Th.* 35,2-3: Jesus, on leaving the pleroma, brought with him "angels of the superior seed," namely "for the correction [διόρθωσις] of the seed." These angels "beg remission for us [the superior seed], that we may enter [pleroma] with them." Whereas "correction" (διόρθωσις) implies that the seed was not perfect from the beginning, "remission" (ἄφεσις) probably means that it was sinful. This is the most obvious implication of the term in the early Christian context: cf. W. Bauer, *Worterbuch*, s.v. ἄφεσις, 2; see also Origen, *Comm. Jo.* XIII,59,421. It is surprising that M. R. Desjardins does not mention this passage in his dissertation *Sin in Valentinianism*, Atlanta 1990. Nevertheless, according to him "the Valentinians claimed that gnosis from the Father removed the power of sin" (132).

[78] *Comm. Jo.* XIII,10,57.

[79] *Comm. Jo.* XIII,31,187 (John 4:28-29): ζωῆς διάθεσις καὶ ἔννοια τῆς δυνάμεως τῆς παρὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος. Cf. the Greek philosophical discussions abut the origin of the "notion of the divine," as reflected e.g. by Dio Chrysostomus, *Orationes* XII,47 (ἡ ἔννοια περὶ θεῶν), or Origen, *Contra Celsus* IV,14 (ἡ φυσικὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἔννοια).

[80] *Comm. Jo.* XIII,10,60: ἀναφαίρετος γὰρ ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ δωρεὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν καὶ μὴ ἀναλισκομένη μηδὲ φθειρομένη ἐν τῷ μετέχοντι αὐτῆς. The idea might have had a philosophical background; cf. Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 36,13-15 (Pistelli): "... the only good that really cannot be taken away is the one that they [i.e. gods] allow the notion of the good to comprehend" (μόνον τοῦτο ὄντως ἀγαθὸν ἀναφαίρετον, ὃ δὴ περιέχειν συγχωροῦσι [scil. θεοὶ] τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἔννοιαν).

[81] Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,6,4 (cf. above 3.2 and notes 60 and 66). C. Blanc, SC 222, 62-64, n. 4, does not refer to this passage.

[82] *Comm. Jo.* II,21,137: Αὐτὸς [scil. ὁ λόγος] γὰρ τὴν πρώτην μόρφωσιν τὴν κατὰ τὴν γένεσιν αὐτοῖς [scil. τοῖς πνευματικοῖς, acc. to Origen] παρέσχε, τὰ ὑπ' ἄλλου σπαρέντα εἰς μορφὴν καὶ εἰς φωτισμὸν καὶ περιγραφὴν ἰδίαν ἀγαγών καὶ ἀναδείξας. Cf. J. Holzhausen, "Die Seelenlehre," 284-285.

[83] "La conception de l'homme," 42-43: "... une mystique qui met l'accent sur la grâce et élection."

[84] Cf. esp. GTr (NHC I,3) 21,18-25; TrRes (NHC I,4) 46,25-27.

of predestination and free choice in Valentinianism. I will focus on the soteriology of the "spiritual" person, viz. on the question of whether and in what sense her salvation is predestined and what, if any, the role of free choice plays in the process of the formation of the spiritual element.

3.4.1 The doctrine of predestination

According to Irenaeus, the Valentinians understand themselves as "the spiritual persons who possess the perfect knowledge about God, and have been initiated into the mysteries of Achamoth."[85] Whereas the psychic persons "are made steadfast by works and bare faith," and cannot be saved otherwise, they "will be saved absolutely and in every case," not by works, but because they are "by nature spiritual."[86]

The claim of "salvation by [one's spiritual] nature" is derived from the status of the spiritual element.[87] The Valentinians of Irenaeus designate themselves as "the seeds of election" (σπέρματα ἐκλογῆς), which indicates that they identify themselves with the spiritual seeds.[88] A person (i.e., a certain psycho-somatic unity) could obviously describe herself as "being saved by [her own] nature" only insofar as she thought of herself as being endowed with a spiritual seed.

The transference of the status of the spiritual seed to a specific person is among the most puzzling mysteries of the Valentinian soteriology. There is certainly no indication in our sources that the spiritual person has enjoyed that status since birth, or, in other words, that the spiritual seed is inborn.[89] As we saw earlier, while the "earthly, material and irrational soul" is inherited from Adam, the two "divine" elements, viz. the "rational and just" soul and the "spiritual seed," come from above.[90] It is possible that at least the spiritual element enters the soul "from outside" in the

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[85] *Adv. haer.* I,6,1: οἱ τὴν τελείαν γνῶσιν ἔχοντες περὶ Θεοῦ καὶ <τὰ> τῆς Ἀχαμώθ μεμυημένοι μυστήρια.

[86] *Adv. haer.* I,6,2: αὐτοὺς δὲ μὴ διὰ πράξεως. ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ φύσει πνευματικοὺς εἶναι. πάντῃ τε καὶ πάντως σωθήσεσθαι δογματίζουσιν. Irenaeus' report is clearly malevolent; cf. the description of their amoral conduct in *Adv. haer.* I,6,3, which contradicts Irenaeus' own account in *Adv. haer.* III,15,2: "There are those among them who say that it is appropriate that the person who has 'descended from above' exercise noble behavior." Cf. M.A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism,'* Princeton 1999, 116. It is possible, of course, that some adherents of the Valentinian doctrine caricatured it themselves, both in theory and in practice. Irenaeus may not have invented his reports, but he would have picked up discrediting examples, much like Celsus in his polemic against Christians. The core of the doctrine reported by Irenaeus is confirmed by other sources, however. For the concept of "salvation by nature" cf. the references collected by A. H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, Edinburgh 1996, 241, n. 12. Although the expression does not necessarily indicate that the spiritual persons will be saved πάντῃ τε καὶ πάντως (*Adv. haer.* I,6,2), it is probable that some Valentinians designated themselves prospectively as "perfect" (τέλειοι), as Irenaeus attests (*Adv. haer.* I,6,1.4). Cf. the prospective self-designation ⲛⲉⲧⲭⲏⲕ in GTr (NHC I,3) 18,13-14; cf. also Valentinus' fragment 4 (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* II,89,1-3).

[87] In *Exc. Th.* 56.3 the spiritual element is φύσει σωζόμενον, as opposed to the psychic element, described as αὐτεξούσιον. In *Strom.* II,10,2 Clement claims that οἱ φύσει σωζόμενοι was a self-designation of "the followers of Valentinus" (οἱ ἀπὸ Οὐαλεντίνου), and in *Strom.* IV,89,4 and V,3,3 he ascribes the doctrine to Valentinus himself (cf. Ch. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, 146-149).

[88] The term ἐκλογή could refer to the seeds themselves (cf. *Exc. Th.* 58,1; 41,2), or (more probably) to their angelic counterparts (cf. *Exc. Th.* 21,1; 39). With the second option σπέρματα ἐκλογῆς in *Adv. haer.* I,6,4 would be understood as the genitive of origin.

[89] Against N. Förster, *Marcus Magus*, 98-99.

[90] *Exc. Th.* 50-54.

course of personal development and under specific conditions.[91] Valentinian fragments do support the latter interpretation and also specify the conditions under which the "plantation" of the spiritual seeds takes place.

In *Exc. Th.* 53, the exposition of the origin of the spiritual seed starts with the traditional Valentinian exegesis of the creation of Adam: "Adam without his knowledge had the spiritual seed planted in his soul by Wisdom." And so, the text continues, "Wisdom puts the seeds forth into becoming [εἰς γένεσιν], where they are ministered by angels, as soon as they [i.e., the seeds] are allowed to come to being [καθὸ ἐγχωρεῖ γίνεσθαι]." This probably means that the paradigmatic planting of the spiritual seed into Adam has been repeated ever since.

A parallel formulation is found in Irenaeus' report, according to which "Achamoth has been planting the spiritual [elements] into righteous souls [δικαίαις ψυχαῖς] since then [i.e., the creation of Adam] until now."[92] The characterization of the souls receiving the seeds as δίκαιαι seems to specify the condition for the planting. The passage is probably an allusion to the synoptic parable of the "good ground" (Mark 4:8 and parallels) and recalls the above quoted Marcosian formula: "May Grace who is before all things, unthinkable and unspeakable, fill your inner human and increase in you her knowledge by planting the mustard seed in good ground." Marcosian prayer is obviously addressed to adults, whose "ground" (i.e., soul) is worthy of the seed.[93]

Another interesting parallel is provided in Hippolytus' report on the Valentinian doctrine.[94] According to Hippolytus, the fruit of the pleroma (i.e., the Saviour)[95] and Sophia together produced seventy *logoi*, i.e., heavenly angels.[96] These *logoi* are "planted" by them into the psychophysical human body (ἐν σώματι χοικῷ μετὰ ψυχῆς), "when no demons live with the soul."[97] As Hippolytus' source explains, the body is a dwelling place either for the soul alone, or for the soul and the demons, or for the soul

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[91] Cf. a remote parallel in Aristotle, *De gen. anim.* 736b: "It remains, then, that the intellect alone enters from outside [τὸν νοῦν ... θύραθεν ἐπεισιέναι] and is alone divine." In the first century doxography the idea that the intellect enters into the soul "from outside" is considered to be a philosophical commonplace; cf. Aetius, apud Stobaeus, *Anth.* 1,48,7 (Wachsmuth, Hense): "Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, Xenocrates, Cleanthes [say] that the intellect penetrates the soul from outside [θύραθεν εἰσκρίνεσθαι τὸν νοῦν]."

[92] *Adv. haer.* 1,7,5. Cf. also Heracleon's exegesis of the metaphor of sowing and gathering in John 4:36-8 (Origen, *Comm. Jo.* XIII,49,322-324). According to Heracleon, the planter in John 4:37 denotes the Son of Man, who sows above the place (τόπος), i.e., the region of the demiurge (cf. *Exc. Th.* 34,1-2; 37; 38,1-3; 39; 59,1-2.). The reaper denotes the Saviour, who is also the Son of Man. He "reaps and leads the reapers, i.e., the angels designated by his disciples, each to their souls." Origen notes that the relation between the two Sons of Man is not clear in this text, but we may be reasonably sure that the planter is a parallel image to Wisdom or Logos in other Valentinian sources in her/his role as the planter of the spiritual seeds. Heracleon emphasizes the successiveness of the two phases, viz. sowing and gathering. At the same time, however, he maintains that both the planter and the gatherer are active "at present" (ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος). The passage is discussed by B. Aland, "Erwählungstheologie," 164; cf. also E. Pagels, "A Valentinian interpretation," 166; *The Johannine Gospel*, 106-107.

[93] The proximity of the Marcosian formula and *Adv. haer.* 1,6,1 is underlined by the motif of grace mentioned in *Adv. haer.* I,6,4, and in Tertullian's paraphrase of this report (*Adv. Val.* 29). See above, 3.2.

[94] Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,34,3-6. I follow the edition of M. Marcovich, *Hippolytus: Refutatio omnium haeresium*, Berlin–New York 1986.

[95] Also called Jesus or "second Christ": *Ref.* VI,36,3-4; cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1,2,6-3,1.

[96] Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,34,3.

[97] Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,34,6: ὅταν δαίμονες μὴ συνοικῶσι τῇ ψυχῇ.

and the *logoi*. The condition for the *logoi* to be planted in the soul[98] is that no demons are present. This can hardly be understood as anything but a demand of purification,[99] and so it seems to be another indication that at least in some versions of the Valentinian soteriology the implantation of the spiritual seed could take place in the course of an adult life.[100]

The question *when* in the course of life the spiritual seed is planted, or more precisely, what exactly are the conditions under which the implantation takes place, is extremely difficult to answer, however.[101] The comfortable idea that righteousness or "cleanness" of the soul are prerequisite for a person to be "chosen" is disturbed not only by dubious accusations of licentious behaviour, but also by more reliable accounts of the spiritual conversion discussed above. As we saw, the Samaritan woman was immersed "in the depth of matter" before her disposition to receive grace from the Saviour was fulfilled.[102] In his summary of the Valentinian teaching, Hippolytus refers that "Christ came in order to save the spirit that went astray" (ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ τοῦ ἀποπλανηθέντος πνεύματος). The spirit went astray after it had already been settled in the soul (or the inner human), which according to the same report should had been cleansed of all demonic influences by then.[103] In *Ref.* X,13,3 the narrative of the "lost sheep" type apparently overshadows the "exhortative" message of *Ref.* VI,34,6, as well as *Adv. haer.* I,6,4 and the Marcosian formula.

The paradox could be resolved if the condition for the planting was not the actual righteousness of the soul, but the righteousness envisaged by providence.[104] A fragment of the Valentinian anthropology preserved by Clement of Alexandria suggests that the spiritual seed is implanted by Logos "in the elect soul while it is asleep" (τῇ ἐκλεκτῇ ψυχῇ οὔσῃ ἐν ὕπνῳ).[105] If the *oratio obliqua* in this difficult passage reproduces its source correctly,[106] here is a clear testimony of a soteriology in which the divine choice anticipates the salvation of the soul prior to her conversion. If we venture to generalize this doctrine, we might read the various descriptions of the conditions of the spiritual sowing — "righteous soul," "good ground" or "soul alone" — as indicating the prospect of grace on the "psychic" (i.e., ethical) level: only that soul is endowed with the spirit whose "righteousness" is envisaged by providence.[107]

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[98] Soul is "the inner human" (*Ref.* VI,36.5-7; X,13,3). Cf. Marcus in Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,13,2.

[99] Cf. the fragment of Valentinus quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* II,114,3-6, where the heart inhabited be demons is cleansed by illumination through the Son. The fragment is probably alluded to in Hippolytus' source material; cf. Ch. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, 74.

[100] Cf. the discussion of H. Langerbeck, "Die Anthropologie," 65-67.

[101] As R. Marcus, "Pleroma and Fulfilment," *VigChr* 8, 1954, 207, notes, "[u]nfortunately, the sources available to us do not tell us very clearly at what point in his career the seed is implanted in man." Cf. already G. Quispel, "La conception," 50.

[102] Cf. above, 3.3.

[103] Hippolytus, *Ref.* X,13,3; cf. VI,34,6.

[104] For the idea of providence cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,5,6; Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. Th.* 74,2.

[105] *Exc Th.* 2,1. It is based on the exegesis of Gen 2:21.

[106] *Exc. Th.* 2,1-2 reproduces the teaching of some "followers of Valentinus." It is closely framed by Clement's commentary (1,3 and probably as early as 3,1), in which he describes the spiritual seed as a spark kindled by the Saviour.

[107] Cf. also *Adv. haer.* I,7,3: "They say that the souls endowed with the seed of Achamoth are better than the other ones. Therefore the demiurge loves them more, not knowing the reason, but thinking that they are like that because of him."

But of course, this interpretation does not resolve the question of when in the life of an individual this act of election takes place.[108]

3.4.2 Do the pneumatici have the freedom of choice?

According to G. Quispel, the essential difference between the Valentinian position and that of Clement and Origen consists in the respective concepts of free will and grace. In Quispel's view, the Valentinian concept of the pneumatic redemption implies "an absolute passivity" in which there is no place for free will: "The spiritual person is not saved by a decision of a free will, but because the Saviour rouses in him a memory of the spiritual world; in this anthropology there is no place for the catholic concept of a free will."[109] In her well-known article "Animae naturaliter salvandae," L. Schottroff accepted G. Quispel's evidence that the spiritual nature has the character of grace, but criticized his concession to the heresiological (and Bultmann's) view that "salvation by nature" excludes free decision.[110] Schottroff thinks that this traditional "misinterpretation of gnosis" is partly due to the malevolent view of Christian opponents, and partly due to the attempt of Valentinians to demonstrate the "χάρις character" of salvation, as against the concept of "salvation by deeds," ascribed by them to the psychic Christians.[111]

Schottroff draws attention to the fact that the pneumatici in the Valentinian description are not devoid of the psychic nature. According to Irenaeus, "the pneumatic element must join the psychic to be formed and educated along with it in its behaviour."[112] Again, in *Adv. haer.* I,7,1 it is stated that in the eschaton, before entering the pleroma, the pneumatici will put off their souls (τὰς ψυχάς), which implies that they will have had them.[113] Since psyche is definitely αὐτεξούσιος, i.e., endowed with the freedom of choice,[114] it follows that "the pneumatic is not exempted from the role of the psychic, he must decide on the basis of free will for salvation or its opposite."[115] Schottroff admits that one who received the pneuma is φύσει σωζόμενος, which means that he will necessarily be saved.[116] This expression, however, does not describe "a substantial activity of the pneuma," but only "an

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[108] The simplest explanation of the incongruities of our accounts would be that they reflect different versions of Valentinian soteriology, or that the soteriological doctrines were not entirely consistent. This might actually be the case in Hippolytus, *Ref.* X,13,3, as opposed to ibid., VI,34,6.

[109] G. Quispel, "La conception," 43: "... l'homme spirituel n'est pas sauvé par une décision du libre arbitre, mais parce que le Sauveur éveille en lui souvenir du monde spirituel; dans cette anthropologie il n'y a pas de place pour la conception catholique d'une volonté libre."

[110] L. Schottroff, "Animae naturaliter salvandae," in: W. Eltester (ed.), *Christentum und Gnosis*, Berlin 1969, 83 ff. Cf. also E. Pagels, "The Valentinian Claim to Esoteric Exegesis of Romans as Basis for Anthropological Theory," *VigChr* 26,1972, 241-242, who refers in this connection to R. Bultmann's classic commentary *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Göttingen 1941, 21-24; 96f.; 114.

[111] Schottroff, "Animae," 93.95-7.

[112] *Adv. haer.* I,6,1. Cf. also ValExp (NHC XII,2) 37,28-31.

[113] Cf. *Exc. Th.* 63,1; 64.

[114] Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,6,1; Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. Th.* 56,3; cf. 57,1; 52,2. See Schottroff, "Animae," 90 f.

[115] Ibid.: "... der Pneumatiker ist ja der Rolle der Psychikers nicht enthoben, er muß sich auf Grund eines freien Willens für Heil oder Unheil entscheiden."

[116] Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. Th.* 56,3; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,6,2.

absolute certainty of salvation" or "an indicative of salvation," which is to be understood as "the imperative of salvation" at the same time. In Schottroff's view, the pneumatic is not deprived of his psychic nature, i.e., of freedom to decide for or against salvation. In effect, he is "both φύσει σωζόμενος and αὐτεξούσιος."[117]

Although the sources explicitly deny the implication of Schottroff's argument that the spiritual person could fail to follow the "imperative" of the seed,[118] they never indicate that the pneumatici do not possess the freedom to choose, either. From Irenaeus' account it would seem that for the pneumatics, too, the "works" based on decision are important, since they enable the spiritual element to "take on form."[119] Now, if *morphōsis* amounts to the salvation of the pneumatic seed,[120] we must agree with Schottroff that the pneumatic salvation must, at least to some extent, depend on works. This is also the opinion of A.H.B. Logan, who points to the paradox of the Valentinian pneumatic soteriology: although the pneumatics "are assured by the grace of revelation that they are by nature elect and divine," they still "have to work out their own salvation [in terms of formation and perfection], a process not complete until the consummation [ἀποκατάστασις]."[121]

3.5 Summary

In Valentinian soteriology both the spiritual and the psychic elements can be interpreted as gifts of grace transcending the merely "material" inheritance of the

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[117] Schottroff, "Animae," 92-93.97.

[118] Schottroff admits that her interpretation conflicts with *Adv. haer.* 1,6,2-4 where sharp distinction is drawn between the pneumatici, who "will be saved entirely and every case," and the psychici, who can only be saved by good conduct. She thinks that this passage contorts Valentinian and other gnostic soteriologies, and must have been written by a different gnostic author for polemical reasons. Schottroff suggests that it should not be used for the interpretation of the Valentinian teaching ("Animae," 96).

[119] In the *Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI,2) the spiritual seeds have their origin in Sophia, and being at first "incomplete and formless" (ⲁⲙⲟⲣⲫⲟⲥ), they must be perfected and formed. This perfection takes place in the world created by the Demiurge, which is accordingly called "school [ⲥⲭⲟⲗⲏ] for doctrine and form" (ValExp 37,28-30). See also TripTr 104,18-25, and E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 55.

[120] This is suggested esp. by Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. Th.* 78-9; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1,21,4.

[121] A. H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth*, 213. According to E. Thomassen, "How Valentinian is the *Gospel of Philip*?" in: J. D. Turner, A. McQuire (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years*, Brill 1997, 259-260, in the "western" version of the Valentinian soteriology the spiritual people "do not need redemption," because the salvation of the spiritual is a "preestablished reality, and only the psychics remain as an object of cosmic salvation history." Recently Thomassen has developed this view in *The Spiritual Seed*, cf. esp. 60-61, 68, 74, 78-79, 81. Apart from the difficult concept of the "salvation by nature" (see above, 3.4.1), the interpretation is based on one sentence in Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1,6,1 ("For this reason too, they maintain, the world was created, and the Saviour is said to have come to the psychic, since it possessed free will, in order to save it") and the statement in Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,36,3, that "the Saviour who was born through Mary came to set right the passions of the soul" whereas "the things above had been set right" even before he was born (cf. also ibid. 36,4). It should be noted that neither passage indicates that the coming of the Saviour is soteriologically irrelevant for people in the world invested with the spiritual element. In *Adv. haer.* 1,6,1 it is not necessarily implied that the Saviour came *only* to the psychic element (and the immediate context speaks against this interpretation), while in *Refutatio* the cleansing of the soul from passions seems to be a prerequisite for the plantation of the *logoi* (*Ref.* VI,34,6; see above, 3.4.1). Although Thomassen admits that according to the "western" version the spirituals are in the world "to be educated" (*The Spiritual Seed*, 60), he assumes that this process has nothing to do with redemption. Cf. also ibid., 396-397. Contrast Thomassen's own discussion of the idea of *morphōsis* in TripTr (*The Spiritual Seed*, 52-57, esp. 55).

"earthly" Adam.[122] The "material" element, created "according to the image," does not refer to bodily existence, but to irrationality and sexual impulse.[123] The psychic element, created "according to the likeness" of the demiurge, is the propensity for "rationality and righteousness," faith, incorruptibility and freedom from the passions of the "material" nature.[124] The spiritual element, created "separately" (κατ' ἰδίαν),[125] is the offspring of Wisdom,[126] born from her desire for the fulness of the divine life. It is also called the offspring of Seth, the third son of Adam, who symbolizes the "spiritual nature" implanted by Wisdom.[127]

Before their conversion, the recipients of grace are enslaved by the "material" inheritance and their condition is described as "ignorance" and "sinfulness." In the case of the "psychic" conversion, the encounter with the Saviour heals the "sick" soul, i.e., the soul enslaved by passions,[128] and opens the opportunity for faith and incorruptibility of the soul.[129] Some Valentinians understood this opportunity as a "loan" that can be used for the salvation of the soul by means of good "works."[130] On the spiritual level, the encounter with the Saviour fulfils the "disposition" (διάθεσις) of the soul to receive the eternal life and understand the power coming from the Saviour.[131] This opens the process of the "formation" of the spiritual element. This process is not opposed to the "righteousness" of the soul, but presupposes it, and transcends it.[132]

4. Theological context of grace

4.1 The Father

According to the GN, the formation of the spirit in the human experience is the last phase of the formative process which started in the pleromatic realm after the fall of Sophia. In order to prevent a similar rupture in the future, the aeons were perfected

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[122] *Exc. Th.* 55,2.

[123] *Exc. Th.* 54,1; 55,3. In the version reported by Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,34,4-6, the hylic element is identified with the perceptible body, whereas the irrational movements of the soul are depicted as "demons." For this concept cf. esp. Barnabas, *Epist.* 16,7, and Ch. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, 70-72. Cf. also the analysis of M. A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, 135 and 291, n. 50. Interestingly, according to Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,34,5, the visible body has been fashioned from the "diabolic substance" (διαβολικὴ οὐσία). If Hippolytus refers correctly, this is a rare testimony that some Valentinians understood the visible body as substantially evil.

[124] *Exc. Th.* 54,1; 56,3; 57.

[125] *Exc. Th.* 54,2.

[126] In *Exc. Th.* 2,1, the seed is described as the "angelic effluence." Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,13,3. In the GN the seed was conceived by Sophia as she contemplated the angels (*Adv. haer.* I,4,5). In Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,34,3, the seed is produced by Sophia and the Saviour.

[127] *Exc. Th.* 53,5.54,2-3; Tertullian, *Adv. Val.* 29. In *Exc. Th.* 2,1 the seed is implanted by Logos; cf. Heracleon in Origen, *Comm. Jo.* XIII,49,322-324; TripTr (NHC I,5) 105,10-35.

[128] Cf. also Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,36,3: "... the Saviour came to set right [διορθώσασθαι] the passions of the soul." Cf. ibid., 32,4.

[129] Cf. above, 3.3.

[130] *Adv. haer.* I,6,4; 6,2.

[131] *Comm. Jo.* XIII,31,187.

[132] *Adv. haer.* I,6,1-2; cf. also *Exc. Th.* 61,8.

(καταρτισθῆναι) through Christ and Holy Spirit, a "conjugal couple" (συζυγία) produced by the Intellect.[133] The "perfection" amounted to the instruction about the nature of the Father, which met the desire permeating the whole pleroma from the start.[134] It was the desire to have the same communion (κοινωνία) with the Father as the Intellect (the Monogenes), who was the only aeon to comprehend the "immeasurable greatness" of the Abyss.[135] Although the Intellect did want to communicate (ἀνακοινώσασθαι) the Father's greatness to the rest of the aeons, he was restricted by Silence (Σιγή), the Father's feminine counterpart, "because she wished to get them all to have the intention and the desire to seek" after the Father.[136]

But when this uninstructed desire led to the fall of Sophia into formlessness, the Intellect "in accord with Father's forethought" gave birth to Christ and Holy Spirit, who instructed the aeons and "introduced them to perfect rest."[137] Christ revealed to the aeons that the "Father's incomprehensible nature is primarily the cause for their permanent existence [τὸ αἴτιον τῆς αἰωνίου διαμονῆς]," but "what can be comprehended of him, viz. the Son" (i.e. the Intellect) "is the cause of their origin and formation [μόρφωσις]."[138] In other words, the instructor distinguished between the Intellect, the formal cause of existence, and its supranoetic origin. As a fragment from the *Exc. Th.* 31,3 puts it, through the passion of Sophia the aeons came to know what they are, viz. "the ineffable Name, form and knowledge," while recognizing "that they are what they are by the grace of the Father."

The subsequent phases of the narrative — the creation of the world from the passions of Sophia, the education of the soul and the formation of the spirit — reenact the same formative process on lower planes, in order to correct the remaining consequences of the "audacity" of Sophia, and her uninformed desire to comprehend the incomprehensible.[139]

4.2 The Saviour

The role of the Saviour in the soteriological process is emphasized by all versions of the Valentinian myth. As mentioned above, in his commentary on John 4:19 ff. Heracleon noted that "the grace and gift of our Saviour never perishes (...) in the one who participates in it."[140] This formulation refers to the "spiritual" conversion, but in

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[133] *Adv. haer.* I,2.5.

[134] The desire which lead to the fall of Sophia, "began among those around the Intellect and Truth" (*Adv. haer.* I,2,2).

[135] *Adv. haer.* I,2,1-2.

[136] *Adv. haer.* I,2,1. According to other versions, this desire originates in the Father himself. Cf. *Exc. Th.* 7,1: "Therefore, the Father, being unknowable, wished to be known by the aeons." Heracleon applies the same principle to humans, cf. Origen, *Comm. Jo.* XIII,38,248: "He said that it is the will [θέλημα] of the Father that the humans get to know [γνῶναι] the Father and be saved." Cf. GTr 19,13; TripTr 55,30 f.; 57,27-29, and the comm. of E. Thomassen, in: E. Thomassen – L. Painchaud, *Le traité tripartite*, 285, who points to parallels in the Hermetic literature (CH I,31; X,15) and elsewhere. C. O'Regan, *Gnostic Return*, 104, rightly notes that "the audacious attempt by Sophia to comprehend the mystery of the Forefather" is not to be understood as "an Eve-like etiological account of evil projected into the divine sphere. Searching into the mystery seems to be positively encouraged by the Forefather."

[137] *Adv. haer.* I,2,6.

[138] *Adv. haer.* I,2.5.

[139] For the doctrine of formation in the soteriological process cf. A. Orbe, *La teología del Espíritu Santo*, 189-233.

[140] *Comm. Jo.* XIII,10,60.

Heracleon's view the Saviour instigates both the pneumatic and the psychic conversion, and so, presumably, both kinds of grace are mediated by him. In the following section we will explore the role of the Saviour more closely.

4.2.1 Spiritual formation

In the GN the formation of the spirit, the offspring of Achamoth, is mediated by Jesus, "the perfect fruit" of the pleroma. In Jesus

> the entire pleroma of the aeons, with one will and mind, and with the consent of Christ and Spirit, and the approval of their Father, collected and combined whatever most beautiful and brilliant each one has in himself (...) To the honour and glory of the Abyss they made this emission [πρόβλημα], the most perfect beauty and star [ἀστήρ] of the pleroma, the perfect fruit [τέλειος καρπός], Jesus.[141]

Along with Jesus (the Saviour), angels of the same nature (ὁμογενεῖς) were produced.

The formative role of the Saviour and his angelic escort is discussed in several Valentinian sources. According to *Exc. Th.* 53,3, the spiritual seeds put forth into "becoming" (εἰς γένεσιν) by Wisdom are "ministered [ὑπηρετέω] by angels," which probably indicates the latter's educational (or formative) role. Similarly, in Heracleon's exegesis, the "gatherers" in John 4:38 are explained as angels led by the Saviour "each to his soul," presumably to cultivate the inherent "seeds" of the elect.[142]

The salvific role of angels was elaborated in detail by the Valentinian Theodotus.[143] According to his version of the narrative,[144] when Jesus left the pleroma ("having emptied himself": cf. Phil. 2:7), he "lead out the angels of the superior seed [τὸ διαφέρον σπέρμα] with him," viz. "for the correction [διόρθωσις] of the seed." These angels "plead remission [ἄφεσις] for us, that we may enter with them," viz. to the pleroma.

An account in the *Exc. Th.* 21-22 (partly ascribed to "the Valentinians," but probably reflecting the teaching of Theodotus) further explains the relation between the "superior seed" and the "angels" against the background of Gen 1:27: "He created them in the image of God, male and female created he them." According to this particular exegesis, the "male" refers to the angels, while the "female" to the superior seed. The superior seed must "become male" in order to unite with the angels and ascend to the pleroma.[145]

The process of "restoration" is explained in the baptismal context. The angels themselves were "baptized" in the "redemption of the Name which descended upon Jesus in the dove (Mark 1:10 and parallels) and redeemed him." This Name is the

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[141] *Adv. haer.* I,2.6 (Unger's trans., slightly modified).

[142] Origen, *Comm. Jo.* XIII.49,324. Cf. above, note 77.

[143] Cf. the commentary of A. Orbe, *La teología del Espíritu Santo*, 654-686.

[144] *Exc. Th.* 35,1-4.

[145] For the doctrinal background of this passage see E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 377-383.

"invisible part" of Jesus (τὸ ἀόρατον, scil. τοῦ Ἰησοῦ), viz. the only-begotten Son (ὁ Υἱὸς ὁ μονογενής).[146] Through baptism, the angels took part in the redemption of Jesus, in order that the "superior seed," through their baptism, could take part in the redemption of the angels (λύτρωσις ἀγγελική).[147] Those who are baptized "for the angelic redemption" are baptized in the same Name in which their angels had been baptized before them.[148]

The doctrine of the baptism in the divine Name renders a similar idea as the concept of *morphōsis*. In a passage which probably refers to the teaching of Theodotus, the Name is described as "the Son, i.e., the form [Μορφή] of the aeons."[149] This reminds us of the above-quoted description of Jesus as the "perfect fruit" of the pleroma.[150] The redemption in the divine Name then amounts to the participation in the divine form, the pleroma of the aeons, embodied by Jesus. Accordingly, we read in reference to the baptism: "So long as the seed is yet unformed, it is the offspring of the female, but when it is formed, it is changed to a man and becomes a son of the bridegroom," viz. the Son.[151]

4.2.2 The psychic Christ and the demiurge

According to Irenaeus' report, the Saviour came in order to save both the spiritual and the psychic elements. For this reason "he put on the first fruits from those whom he was going to save."[152] Some versions of the narrative depicted the salvific effect of Christ on the psychic level by the image of the "psychic" Christ.[153] The continuity with the educative function of the ruler of the psychic elements is expressed by the idea that the psychic Christ was generated by the demiurge[154] and sits on his right hand side.[155] The right side of the demiurge probably symbolizes the limit of the psychic perfection.[156] The soteriological role of the psychic Christ seems to consist in his ability to save the soul from passions and raise it to rationality and righteousness.[157] By his death and resurrection, "he destroyed death and raised up the

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[146] *Exc. Th.* 26,1.

[147] *Exc. Th.* 22,5.

[148] *Exc. Th.* 22,5. For the sacramental context of the doctrine of '(apo)lutrōsis' (redemption) cf. the ritual formulae quoted in Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1,21. In the concluding (very lacunous) section of the *Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI,2) the idea of the perfection of the spiritual seed is again developed in the sacramental context (cf. E. Pagels, comm. ad NHC XI,2 43,21-22, p. 172). The participants of the sacrament are called "perfect" (ϩⲏⲕ: probably equivalent to the Greek τέλειοι) "[in] every (spiritual) gift (ⲭⲁⲣⲓⲥ) and [every] purity." For the ritual framework of Valentinian soteriology see the detailed discussion of E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 330-414.

[149] *Exc. Th.* 31,4. Theodotus is quoted shortly before (30,1) and shortly after (32,2) this passage.

[150] *Adv. haer.* I,2,6. Cf. also Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,34,3-6.

[151] *Exc. Th.* 79. Cf. also *Exc. Th.* 68: "As long as we were children of the female only (...) incomplete, childish, senseless, weak and without form (...), we were children of the woman, but when we received form from the Saviour we have become children of a man and a bridal chamber."

[152] *Adv. haer.* I,6,4; cf. *Exc. Th.* 59,3.

[153] Cf. *Adv. haer.* I,7,2; *Exc. Th.* 47,3; 59,3; 62,1-2.

[154] Cf. *Adv. haer.* I,7,2; *Exc. Th.* 47,3.

[155] *Exc. Th.* 62,1.

[156] Cf. *Adv. haer.* I,5,1-2, where the psychic elements are called "right"; cf. also *Exc. Th.* 47,2. The parallels in *Exc. Th.* 34,1 and 40 are discussed below.

[157] Cf. *Exc. Th.* 54,1; 56,3; 57. Cf. above, 3.3.

mortal body which had put off passion. In this way the psychic elements are raised and are saved."[158]

A well-known remark in Hippolytus' *Refutatio* suggests that some Valentinians did not enjoy the idea of the psychic Christ.[159] In a version of the narrative that possibly corresponds to the teaching of Theodotus, a different plot ensures the continuity between the "psychic" and "spiritual" types of education. Here the "excellent seeds," meant to be formed by their angelic counterparts, are distinguished from the "right" powers (δυνάμεις) that probably correspond to the psychic elements.[160] According to Clement's account, the demiurge, metonymically designated as "the place" (τόπος),[161] holds sway over the "righteous" (δίκαιοι) descendants of Adam who "make their way through created things."[162] This is probably a parallel to the idea of the psychic persons whose education, according to Irenaeus, takes place "through visible means."[163] When Jesus was called (παρακληθεὶς) as the Saviour, continues Clement, he sat on the throne with "the place," so that "the spirits[164] remain where they are and do not rise before him," i.e., probably to prevent a premature rebellion of the "excellent seed" against the demiurge, who is loathed by their Mother because of his severity.[165] By doing this he "tamed" (ἡμερόω) the "place," and "provided the seed with the passage to the pleroma."[166] It is interesting that in this version the role of Christ in the salvation of the psychic elements is not mentioned. But the fact that Jesus does not abolish the power of the demiurge but joins him on his throne (in order to "tame" his severity) seems to indicate continuity in the "psychic" type of education after he came with his angelic escort.[167]

4.3 The prospect of grace (eschatology)

The goal of the soteriological process is described in two parallel accounts of the CVN in Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. According to Irenaeus' report, the spiritual seeds were sown by Achamoth into the righteous souls, in order to be "disciplined and nourished" (παιδευθέντα καὶ ἐκτραφέντα), because "they were sent forth immature" (νήπια). Only when they "become worthy of perfection," they are given as "brides" to the angels of the Saviour.[168]

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[158] *Exc. Th.* 61,7-8.

[159] Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI,35,4-7, according to whom the doctrine about the psychic body of Christ marked the difference between the "oriental" and the "Italian" schools. Hippolytus' reference, combined with the remarks of Tertullian (*De carne Christi* 10,1; 15,1) and Clement of Alexandria's reports on the teaching of Theodotus have become the basis of E. Thomassen's attempt to identify the christological and soteriological differences between the schools and classify all Valentinian documents accordingly. Cf. *The Spiritual Seed*, 28-129, esp. 39-45.

[160] Cf. *Exc. Th.* 34,1; 40.

[161] Cf. the commentary of R. P. Casey, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto*, London 1934, 134.

[162] *Exc. Th.* 37.

[163] *Adv. haer.* I,6,1; cf. Origen, *Comm. Jo.* XIII,59,419.

[164] Following Schwartz's emendation. The ms. reads "things" (πράγματα).

[165] Cf. *Exc. Th.* 33,4.

[166] *Exc. Th.* 38,3.

[167] Cf. *Exc. Th.* 35,1-2.

[168] *Adv. haer.* I,7,5.

In *Exc. Th.* 61,8-65,2, the souls of the pneumatici are described as "wedding garments" (ἐνδύματα γάμων: cf. Mt 22,12). Before the consummation (συντέλεια), the spiritual elements rest in the eighth sphere, the Ogdoas, along with their mother, having their souls as "garments." But when the last day comes they put off their "garments," i.e., souls, and

> together with the Mother who leads her bridegroom [i.e., the Saviour], they lead their bridegrooms, i.e., their angels, and pass into the bridal chamber within the limit [i.e., the pleroma], and having become intellectual aeons [Αἰῶνες νοεροί],[169] they attain to the spiritual vision [ὄψις][170] in the intellectual and eternal marriage of the conjugal couple.[171]

The whole pleroma becomes one "bridal chamber" of the bride, i.e., Sophia Achamoth, the outcast desire for the Father, and the bridegroom, the Saviour, produced by all aeons as their form.[172]

The goal of the psychic education is less sublime, but still exceedingly joyful: the "faithful souls" (πισταὶ ψυχαί) of the demiurge will remain in the seventh sphere (Hebdomas) until the consummation, when they will ascend to the eighth sphere, right before the pleroma. They will remain "before the bridal chamber," just as the "best man" in John 3:29, not attaining to "vision," as the spiritual seeds, but able to "hear" the voice of the bridegroom. This will be the fulness of their joy and repose (ἀνάπαυσις).[173]

5. General summary

This paper is an attempt to reconstruct the doctrine of grace in Christian texts of the second century that according to my judgement presuppose the "classical Valentinian narrative" as their theoretical background. I approached the topic from three different but interrelated perspectives. From the "mythico-ontological" perspective, as represented by the GN and related texts, Grace is a name of a feminine counterpart of the absolute beginning (fore-principle) who instigates the desire of the eternal beings to know the "unknowable" and probably also mediates the intellectual formation of the desire, thus constituting a pattern that can be *mutatis mutandis* discerned on the lower levels of the mythical universe. From the "anthropological" perspective, grace is a disposition (it remains unclear whether inborn or acquired) to achieve some kind of perfection, the "righteousness" of the soul or the "formation" of the spirit, and it is also a force that makes the fulfillment of the disposition possible. From the "theological" perspective, grace is active in the world through the Son, the communal

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[169] According to a parallel description in *Adv. haer.* I,7,1, the spiritual elements in the pleroma become "intellectual spirits" (πνεύματα νοερά).

[170] τὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ὄψιν. With Stählin's emendation (also accepted by Sagnard) we would read "the vision of the Father" (τὴν τοῦ Πατρὸς ὄψιν).

[171] *Exc. Th.* 64.

[172] *Adv. haer.* 7,1; 4,1; *Exc. Th.* 31,4.

[173] *Exc. Th.* 63,2; 65,1. Cf. John 3:29: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled."

form of the fulness, and his angels, in order to correct the consequences of the original split in the realm of the eternal beings, a split caused by their insufficient knowledge concerning the nature of the absolute beginning.

In conclusion, it might be useful to sketch, in a preliminary manner, some implications of the Valentinian concept of grace that seem to have played a part in the way the Valentinian doctrine was evaluated by its critics and contributed to the specific accents of their thought.

First, the continuity between the "righteousness" of the soul and the "formation" of the spirit does not seem to be safeguarded sufficiently. To be sure, if my reading is correct, the spiritual seed is planted in a soul whose righteousness is anticipated by grace, the righteousness being the condition for the formation of the seed. The moral world of the demiurge (the world of "works") does play an important part, but the highest value of this world, righteousness, is merely a means to a higher goal, viz. formation (= knowledge). In light of this higher goal the demands of the moral world seem to be too trivial to deserve much attention, so that it may appear that they have no significance at all. This impression is reinforced by the remarkable fact that in the Valentinian soteriology the spiritual gift cannot be wasted or taken away, which can easily lead to the conclusion that some people have a licence to wantonness.

Second, although the idea of the psychic and the spiritual elements does seem to include the demand for responsible conduct, the theory that these possibilities of perfection are not given to everybody could be used as a pretext for moral and intellectual indolence.

Third, determination to overcome the inheritance of the earthly Adam might be further undermined by the mythico-ontological context of the idea of grace. Everything that happens in the world from the moment of creation, through the coming of the Saviour, up to the eschatological return of the elect, is described as a side effect of a divine drama, which places the center of its plot elsewhere.

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