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The Pit and the Day from Above: Sabbath-Symbolism in the Gospel of Truth and the Interpretation of Knowledge

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This article discusses the depiction of the Sabbath in two Valentinian texts. The texts, both found in the Nag Hammadi library, are the Gospel of Truth (Gos. Truth) and the Interpretation of Knowledge (Interp. Know.).¹ New readings and interpretations of the two Sabbath passages will be presented. Whereas previous scholars have read the two Sabbath portrayals synonymously, it is here argued that we actually encounter two very different Sabbaths. Due to differences in literary genre and the social situations of the congregations addressed in the texts, different aspects of the symbolic universe of the Sabbath are highlighted. Previous interpretations are, to a large extent, resting on the preconceived notion that there was a specific “Gnostic Sabbath” and that Gnostic texts used the Sabbath to symbolize the world and the Demiurge. This position will be challenged in this article, and will instead suggest that there has never been a uniform “Gnostic Sabbath,” just as there was never *one* Jewish or *one* Christian way of portraying the Sabbath.² The argument put forward here instead supports recent studies that underline the importance of not over-

¹ The Sabbath occurs in another Nag Hammadi text that is sometimes deemed to be of Valentinian character: the Gospel of Philip (Gos. Phil.). However, the bottom of page 52 where the Sabbath is mentioned is fragmented and thus the context is very hard to determine. Furthermore, the Valentinian character of this text is all but clear. See, for example, Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). Thus, this text will not figure in the present study. For a detailed scholarly translation and commentary on Gos. Phil., see J.-E. Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Philippe* (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1967).

² How the Sabbath was portrayed and understood differed a great deal among ancient Jews and Christians. See Herold Weiss, *A Day of Gladness: The Sabbath among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

harmonizing Valentinian literature.³ Gos. Truth and Interp. Know. are probably inspired by Valentinus of Alexandria's interpretations of Christian mythologumena, or the theological systems of his followers, but we should nevertheless be careful not to reconstruct one single coherent "school of thought" from texts that actually differ a great deal.⁴

The Sabbath in the Interpretation of Knowledge

The Synoptic Gospels make it clear that the Sabbath was an unquestionable part of life.⁵ Jesus was a Jew and so were the members of the early Jesus-movement. Admittedly, Jesus and his disciples are portrayed in all three Synoptic Gospels as being in conflict with the regulatory practice of the Sabbath Law in Jerusalem at the time for picking grain in the fields⁶ and healing a man in the synagogue on the Sabbath.⁷ But this does not mean that Jesus and the disciples abolished the Sabbath Law. Jesus was giving his interpretation of the Sabbath observance just like any Jewish

³ See, for example, Geoffrey Smith, *Guilty by Association: Heresy Catalogues in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth, passim*.

⁴ There are methodological problems with the category "Valentinian" and "Valentinianism." Definitions follow a process that makes static that which by nature is dynamic, thus they often seem inherently flawed. Michel Desjardins has rightly pointed out the circular methodological problem with the term; in order to accept the "first hand" sources (the extant texts) as Valentinian, we must rely on secondary patristic sources (Michel Desjardins, "The Sources for Valentinian Gnosticism: A Question of Methodology," *VC* 49 [1986]: 342–47). Geoffrey Smith rightly points out, however, that the solution to the problem is not to abandon patristic sources, which would be unfortunate since they are full of valuable information on many early Christian groups. Instead, "the solution lies in a more focused and careful investigation into oppositional strategies of the heresiologists" (Smith, *Guilty by Association*, 170). Nevertheless, the term "Valentinian" is a heresiological construction and does not seem to have been a "self designation term" used by Valentinians themselves, who saw themselves simply as Christians. However, this does not negate the fact that a particular kind of theology evolved among followers of Valentinus of Alexandria and that Interp. Know. and Gos. Truth belong to this tradition, a tradition whose characteristics separate them more clearly from other Christians. See note 21 below for a further discussion on these characteristics. I am a great supporter of the term "Valentinianism" as a heuristic tool that enables scholars to more easily navigate the very varied landscape that is early Christianity.

⁵ One example of this is the fact that after Jesus' crucifixion, the women undertaking the task of embalming their dead master's body wait until the day after Jesus' death to commence their work to avoid breaking the Sabbath (Mark 16:1).

⁶ Mark 2:23–28; Matt 12:1–8; Luke 6:1–5.

⁷ Mark 3:1–6; Matt 12:9–14; Luke 6:6–11.

prophet would do: good works are permissible on the Sabbath. A similar attitude is found in rabbinic literature⁸ and seems to be highlighted in the Gospel of John. Here, Jesus, after healing a man on the Sabbath, answers the upset Jewish leaders with: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”⁹ Jesus is following his father’s example and encourages others to do the same.¹⁰ The earliest Jesus movement should be seen for the Jewish sect that it was, the only difference being that Christians referred to Jesus and interpreters of Jesus’ message for guidance on Sabbath observance whereas other Jews did not.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Sabbath command soon lost weight among Christians, especially in the wake of Paul’s mission to gentiles. The Sabbath was not essential for Paul’s mission,¹² but continued to be, as indeed it still is today, a patent symbolic device among early Christians used to denote many things, for example rest in general, the seventh day of the week, and the number seven.

In the years 1987–1988 Tjitze Baarda presented two articles¹³ in which he argued that the Sabbath was used in a uniform way in Gnostic texts.

⁸ Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael’s reasoning is simple: one can disregard one Sabbath to save the life of someone so that person can observe many Sabbaths (Tractate Shabbata, ch. 1). Jacob Z. Lauterbach translates it: “The Sabbath is given to you but you are not surrendered to the Sabbath.” See Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America), 1:199. This echoes Mark 2:27 where Jesus says, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

⁹ John 5:17. Jesus is following his father’s example, and humans should do the same (9:4; 14:12).

¹⁰ John 14:12. Is this a contrasting command given by Jesus, not to bother with the Sabbath command? Certainly not. If Jesus had advocated an abandonment of the Sabbath, the author of John—the most “anti-Jewish” gospel—would be the first to highlight this. Some anti-Jewish passages in John include 7:1–9; 8:37–47. As in the Synoptic Gospels, John reformulates the meaning of Sabbath observance in the spirit of the Savior’s actions on the Sabbath: good works are permissible, and even commanded, for John.

¹¹ Weiss, *Day of Gladness*, 126.

¹² I do not agree with some scholars claiming Paul took an obvious stance against the Sabbath. Robert Goldenberg writes that Paul “vehemently rejected it (the Sabbath), and expressed indifference whether people honored one day over another, or considered all days alike.” See Robert Goldenberg, “The Jewish Sabbath in the Roman World up to the Time of Constantine the Great,” *ANRW* 19.1:414–47 (442). However, indifference is hardly rejection. What Paul does is tell the congregations that Sabbath observance is not vital; celebrate if you will, but always put Jesus first. Gal 4:9–10; 4:3. There are differences of opinion among scholars of what day Paul is talking of at Rom 14:5–9, but most withhold that it is probably the Sabbath (Weiss, *Day of Gladness*, 122–23).

¹³ Tjitze Baarda, “The Sabbath in the Parable of the Shepherd: Evangelium Veritatis 32.18–34,” *NedTT* 41 (1987): 17–28; Tjitze Baarda, “If You Do Not Sabbatize The Sab-

The Sabbath denoted the Demiurge and the Cosmos, claimed Baarda. Baarda's view chiefly rested upon the mention of the Sabbath in Apocryphon of John (Ap. John), Interp. Know. and Gos. Truth, texts he considered to include the "Gnostic myth."¹⁴

The Sabbath is only mentioned once in Ap. John, right after the seven archons are discussed. These archons are identified with the planets and we read:

ΤΑΙ ΤΕ ΤΜΕ ΤΜΕΖΣΑΩΦΕ
 ἸΠΣΑΒΒΑΤΟΝ ΝΑΙ ΝΕΕΤΑΜΑΖΤΕ
 ἸΠΚΟΣΜΟΣ

This is the sevenness of the Sabbath, these are the ones who rule the world.¹⁵

The Sabbath is here unquestionably associated with the hebdomadal (sevenfold) structure of the cosmic realm, but not the Demiurge Ialdabaoth. The seventh archon is in the BG-version named *Sabbataios*, the Hebrew name for Saturn, the planet of Kronos. The seven planets are identified with the weekdays and the movement of time and the seasons.¹⁶ The Sabbath in Ap. John is thus intimately associated with everything that formulates the cosmic prison of the human condition: time, movement, change, matter and the rule of these inflictions. That a variant of the "classic Gnos-

bath ...': The Sabbath as God or World in Gnostic Understanding (Ev. Thom., Log 27)," in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Roelof Van den Broek, Tjitze Baarda and J. Mansdelf (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 178–201.

¹⁴ Later, Baarda applied his findings on the Sabbath logion in Gospel of Thomas 27 and had plans to do the same with the Gos. Phil. (plans he never completed). He writes in the 1987 article "The Sabbath in the Parable of the Shepherd" that he would show in a forthcoming article that the word "Sabbath" in Gos. Phil. "may have a negative aspect." However, this article was never published. In a reprinting of the article in his anthology *Essays on the Diatessaron*, he concludes that "the EvPhil 8 is mutilated to such an extent that it is difficult to make firm conclusions with respect to the use of *Sabbaton*" (Tjitze Baarda, *Essays on the Diatessaron* [Leuven: Peeters, 1994], 157). Baarda seems here to follow other scholars who had an interpretation close to his imagined one, like the one we find in Ménard's *L'Évangile selon Philippe*, where the Sabbath is interpreted negatively. For a discussion of the Sabbath in Gospel of Thomas, see Paul Linjamaa, "Savoring Life with an Unsympathetic World View: Sabbath as Rest and Contemplation in the *Gospel of Thomas*," *Numen* (forthcoming).

¹⁵ BG 42.7–10. We can read almost exactly the same in the other three versions of Ap. John: Codex III 18.7–9; Codex II 11.34–35; and most likely in the fragmented parts of Codex IV 18.24–25 which runs: [---]ΘΕΒΔΟΜΑ[---].

¹⁶ See also A. J. Welburn, "The Identity of the Archons in the "Apocryphon Johannis,"" *VC* 32 (1978): 241–54 (245).

tic myth” is also found in Interp. Know. is probable.¹⁷ This text is the first in Nag Hammadi Codex XI,¹⁸ one of the most damaged codices of the collection.¹⁹ Nevertheless, a somewhat clear theology can be established, as well as many comments and interpretations on texts from the New Testament.²⁰ Interp. Know. is thought by most scholars to be a Valentinian

¹⁷ The most recent and thorough text-critical works on the text, and the scholars whom I will be discussing most in the present article, include John Turner (notes together with Elaine Pagels) in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. Charles W. Hedrick (Leiden: Brill, 1990); Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *Die Auslegung der Erkenntnis (Nag-Hammadi-Codex XI, 1)* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1996); Wolf Peter Funk, Louis Painchaud and Einar Thomassen, *L'interprétation de la gnose: NH XI, 1* (Quebec: Peeters, 2010); and Einar Thomassen in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. Marvin Meyer (New York: Harper One, 2007). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁸ The title is found, as is usual in Nag Hammadi texts and other ancient manuscripts, at the bottom of the last page (21): ⲉⲣⲙⲏⲙⲓⲁ ⲛⲧⲣⲏⲱⲟⲥⲓⲥ (“The Interpretation of Knowledge”).

¹⁹ Ismo Dunderberg writes that only 7.5 % of the text is readable (Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle; and Society in the School of Valentinus* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2008], 147, 253–54 n. 1). This estimation he presents by referring to Stephen Emmel’s calculation that only about 60 lines are preserved, out of about 800 original lines (Stephen Emmel, “Exploring the Pathway that leads from Paul to Gnosticism: What is the Genre of The Interpretation of Knowledge [NHC XI, 1]?” in *Die Weisheit: Ursprünge und Rezeption*, ed. M. Fassnacht et al. [Münster: Aschendorff, 2003], 257–76). However, the 60 lines Emmel refers to are 60 that are more or less *completely* preserved. Dunderberg does not seem to include in his calculations the lines that are to a large part preserved. There are a multitude of lines where only a few letters are missing and to count these as part of the *lost* and unreadable part of the text is unreasonably pessimistic. The bottom one-third of pages 10–21 is to a very large extent readable using text-critical method to fill the small lacunas. This is closer to 18 % of the text which is more or less fully readable, not 7.5 %. See James M. Robinson et al. (eds.), *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codices XI, XII and XIII* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 16–27. Take for example page 14, line 28–38. Every line here has at least one letter missing, except line 30 which is complete except two letters that are faintly readable. With careful text-critical methods, this passage can be recreated with reasonable certainty. The following is Thomassen’s translation, in which I have marked with brackets all the words where a letter (or more) is missing: “When the ol[d]er son, then, had been sent after his li[t]tle brothers, he unfolded the decree of the Father and read it out, taking his stand against the wh[o]le world. And he annulled the old document of debt, [th]at of condemnation. This i[s] what [the] decree said: those [who] were made slaves and w[e]re condemned through Adam have been br[ou]ght out of death, have obtained the re[mi]ssion of their sins, and have been saved by.” This passage, and those like it on pages 10–21, should not be understood as part of the “lost” sections of the text.

²⁰ For example, on page five the passage in Matt 13:1–9 is interpreted, and on the next page Luke’s parable on the Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37). For an extensive survey of other passages see Elaine Pagels’ introduction to John Turner’s translation in Hedrick, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*.

work.²¹ The first half is badly damaged but seems to contain much mythological material, while the second half contains more paraenetic material. On the first pages, we encounter mentions of what are likely to be protological characters: a Logos who withdraws after “knowing” a Virgin, “although not carnally” (3.26–28). On pages 8–10 the Soul is described as becoming trapped in the material realm of the cosmos, a place that is on the very first page described as “a place of unbelief and death” (1.26–38). The second part is somewhat different; here we encounter more paraenetic material. The author rebukes the congregation for displaying jealousy of other members’ spiritual gifts and hatred toward those lacking understanding (15.34–35; 16.31–38).

The two pages preceding the Sabbath passage discuss the nature of the world, likening it to forgetfulness and death, while the nature of humanity is light from the true Father above (9.21–31; 10). It is worth reminding

²¹ Pearson writes, perhaps somewhat overconfidently: “While its Valentinian orientation has been questioned by some scholars, there is no reason to doubt that it is a work of a Valentinian teacher of the Eastern school of Valentinian Gnosis” (Birger Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Tradition and Literature* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 181). However, as Joel Kalvesmaki has argued, the designation “Eastern” can indeed, and should, be questioned. See Joel Kalvesmaki, “Italian versus Eastern Valentinianism?” *VC* 62 (2008): 79–89. Plisch has also called for a note of caution in identifying the text as Valentinian at all. He writes, however, that the author is clearly a “Christian Gnostic” following Pauline tradition (Plisch, *Die Auslegung*, 4). It is not clear what Plisch means with “Gnostic.” However, most scholars identify the text as Valentinian. See Einar Thomassen, “Notes pour la délimitation d’un corpus valentinien à Nag Hammadi,” in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification*, ed. L. Painchaud and A. Pasquier (Quebec: Peeters, 1995), 243–59; Painchaud, *L’interprétation*, 42–49, 279–83; Turner and Pagels, *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, 21–30, 77–88. I agree, the text is most likely Valentinian, for the following reasons: references to Sophia (12.29–33), the Pleroma (19.22) and rulers and authorities (6.32–33; 20.22–23); the way the Church is portrayed (for example on page 19); the fairly negative view on creation and corporeality (1.36–38; 9.35–37); humans as a Seed (11.29–30); the mutual participation of the Savior in salvation (10.27–34; 12.14–29); the creation of the Savior’s body by Sophia (12.29–33); and as Matthew Twigg points out, the use of “Cross” on 13.25–29 is likely to be the Valentinian term for indicating the limit that separates the Pleroma from the corporeal world (see Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.2.4, 3.5; Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 42.1; for more, see Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the “Valentinians”* [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 279–83; Matthew Twigg, “Temple-Mystical Background to a Valentinian Saying of the Saviour: The Interpretation of Knowledge [NHC XI, 1] 10.18–38,” *Correspondences* 1.2 [2013]: 35–73). Taken alone, none of these amounts to much, but considered together they form a reasonable basis for considering the text as Valentinian. These details are also identified as Valentinian traits by many heresiologists and they are also found in other extant sources, for example in Nag Hammadi treaties like Tripartite Tractate, Gos. Truth and Valentinian Exposition.

ourselves we are dealing with a fragmentary text whose gaps have been filled through guesswork and whose translation must ultimately be viewed as tentative. 11.16–38 can be read as follows:

ρ̅ñ π[τ̅ρ̅ϕ̅α]π̅ϕ̅ ḿñτ̅ε̅ς̅ι̅μ̅[ε̅]
 ρ̅α̅π̅ρ̅ι̅ññ[ϕ̅ ḿ̅ π̅ρ̅ι̅ς̅]ε̅ ḿñ
 π̅ς̅[α̅]β̅β̅[α̅]τ̅ον̅ ε̅τ̅ε̅ π̅ε̅[ε̅ι̅ π̅ε̅
 π̅κ̅ο̅]ς̅μ̅ο̅ς̅ α̅[β̅α̅λ̅ ḿ̅]γ̅α̅ρ̅ ρ̅ñ
 π̅τ̅[ρ̅ϕ̅π̅ϕ̅ μ̅]ñ̅ π̅ε̅ι̅ω̅[τ̅ ρ̅ñπ̅]ρ̅ι̅ññϕ̅
 α̅[ϕ̅ñ̅ α̅λ̅λ̅α̅ π̅ñ̅τ̅]ον̅ ḿñ̅ [π̅ε̅ι̅]α̅β̅α̅λ̅
 ρ̅ñ̅ π̅[κ̅ο̅ς̅μ̅ο̅ς̅ ḿ̅]ñ̅[θ̅]ñ̅ρ̅[ι̅ο̅ñ...]
 α̅β̅α̅λ̅ ḿ̅θ̅[ñ̅ρ̅ι̅ο̅ñ] ḿ̅γ̅α̅ρ̅ [π̅]ε̅
 π̅κ̅ο̅[ς̅μ̅ο̅ς̅] α̅γ̅ω̅ ο̅γ̅[θ̅ñ̅ρ̅ι̅ο̅ñ] π̅ε̅.
 ε̅τ̅β̅ε̅ π̅ε̅ε̅ι̅ π̅[ñ̅] ε̅τ̅ς̅α̅ρ̅ḿ̅ α̅[β̅α̅λ̅
 ο̅γ̅ε̅]π̅ι̅β̅ο̅γ̅λ̅ο̅ς̅ ε̅[ñ̅ π̅ε̅] α̅β̅α̅λ̅ ḿ̅Δ̅ε̅
 [ρ̅ñ̅ ñ̅θ̅ñ̅ρ̅ι̅ο̅ñ ḿ̅τ̅α̅ρ̅ι̅ α̅β̅[α̅λ̅].
 α̅γ̅χ̅ο̅ α̅χ̅ω̅[ϕ̅ ḿ̅ο̅γ̅]ω̅τ̅η̅ñ̅ ḿ̅τ̅ε̅

By [being counted]²² together with the Female, sleep [brought weariness] and the Sabbath which is this world. For [being counted] together with the Father [while in sleep, he instead brought rest]²³ and [the exit] from the world of [beasts ...], because the world is from beasts and it is a [beast].²⁴ Therefore [he] who wanders astray [is] not an enemy, but came forth from the beasts.²⁵ They put upon [him

²² This emendation was first suggested by Turner. The other instances this verb (απ / ωπ) occurs in the text are at 8.26 and 15.24 (possibly also 10.19). This was not an unusual way to express “belonging” in Coptic; see Walter E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 526a. See, for example, Tri. Trac. 86.31, 109.16; Treat. Res. 45.15; Gos. Truth 29.36.

²³ Here, Turner fills the lacuna with α[ϕñ̅ π̅ς̅α̅β̅β̅α̅τ̅]ον̅ so that it reads: “from being counted with the Father sleep brought the Sabbath and the exodus from the world.” But that sleep brings about the world’s beginning and then also its end is unlikely. Plisch suggests π̅μ̅γ̅ς̅τ̅η̅ρ̅ι̅ο̅ñ̅ or α̅γ̅α̅θ̅ο̅ñ̅ but none of these fit well with the overall context of the passage. Instead, I suggest that the lacuna contains the words α̅λ̅λ̅α̅ ḿ̅τ̅ον̅. The lacuna most likely contained about 7 letters, which would fit this suggestion nicely. See Robinson et al., eds., *The Facsimile Edition*, 17. A more literal translation would be α̅[β̅α̅λ̅ ḿ̅]γ̅α̅ρ̅ ρ̅ñ̅ π̅τ̅[ρ̅ϕ̅π̅ϕ̅ μ̅]ñ̅̅ π̅ε̅ι̅ω̅[τ̅ ρ̅ñ̅π̅]ρ̅ι̅ññϕ̅ α̅[ϕ̅ñ̅̅ α̅λ̅λ̅α̅ π̅ñ̅τ̅]ον̅, and would run like this: “for by being counted with the father, [in sleep, instead he brought re]st” or, more colloquially, “while in sleep, the father instead brought rest.” With the word ḿ̅τ̅ον̅ we get a rhetorically effective dualism between sleep and true rest, between ignorance and knowledge, between the Female’s sleep which is a false rest meant to prompt inactivity (see also Gos. Truth 32.16–39) and the Father’s rest from the motions that are associated with the Female.

²⁴ Thomassen’s translation (Thomassen, *Nag Hammadi*, 657–58): “From [his union] with the woman, sleep [came into being], and the [Sabbath]. And this [is the] world. For as a result of the [oblivion about] the Father [trough] sleep, [the Sabbath was observed. After that, the] beasts [issued] from the...for the [world] is [oblivion] and [sleep].” This translation is also one possibility, but I present the above version as an alternative that emphasizes the interplay between the Father’s rest (ḿ̅τ̅ον̅) and the negative sleep that results in ignorance of the Father.

²⁵ Turner fills the lacunas with: ε̅τ̅β̅ε̅ π̅ε̅ε̅ι̅ π̅[ε̅ε̅ι̅] ε̅τ̅ς̅α̅ρ̅ḿ̅ α̅[γ̅α̅π̅ϕ̅ α̅π̅ε̅]π̅ι̅β̅ο̅γ̅λ̅ο̅ς̅ ε̅[ρ̅ε̅π̅η̅] translating as: “Therefore he that is lost has been reckoned to the crafty one ...” Thomassen and Plisch fill the lacunas as shown above. Thomassen ends the sentence after π̅ι̅β̅ο̅γ̅λ̅ο̅ς̅

τκατ[α]δικη νεμ[ντε τε]ριμε
 نگار كελαγε نگبصوغ [εσχ]ο
 αχωϷ μπεσσπερμα ειμητ[ι
 α]π[ε]ντασωρππ νντϷ Ϸν
 πσαβ[β]ατον μνηριον γαρ
 ωοπ Ϸμ [π]αιων μαρεπωτ
 نگار ρσαββατο[ν] αλλα εφρϷωϷ
 απωηρε αυω Ϸιτ[μ] πωηρε
 αφοϷωϷ ατοοτϷ εφτν ν[ε]Ϸ
 νναιδων ουντε πωτ
 Ϸνστο[ιχ]ειον νλογικον ευαανϷ
 νεει [α]βαλ νρητοϷ εφτ ϷιωϷ
 νναιδων ν]νϷϷοϷ.

a] garment of condemnation, for [the] Female [had no] other clothes [to put] on her seed except that which she first brought out on the Sabbath. In fact, nothing beastly exists in [the] Aeon. For the Father does not observe the Sabbath. Rather, he works for the Son and through the Son.²⁶ Moreover, he gave him the Aeons: the Father possesses living rational elements by which he clothes him with the [Aeons] as garments.

The identity of the Female in this passage is unclear, but as I have argued elsewhere, I believe we have astrological references that deserve close attention here.²⁷ I believe Thomassen’s hunch is right; the portrayal of the

ε[ν νε] and starts a new paragraph. I choose to continue, and explain why the humans are wandering in weariness with the following sentence: αβαλ νδε [Ϸν νιη]ριον νταρι αβ[αλ], “but came forth from the beasts.” I believe σαρι α[βαλ has cosmological references, influenced by the image of the planets. The Greek equivalent of σαρι is πλαναν (Crum, *Coptic*, 355a). The rest of the passage on page 11 is almost word for word influenced by Thomassen’s translation (Thomassen, *Nag Hammadi*, 658).

²⁶ Turner translates μαρεπωτ نگار ρσαββατο[ν] αλλα εφρϷωϷ απωηρε “For the Father does not keep the Sabbath but actuates the Son,” and Thomassen translates “he works *in* the Son.” If Interp. Know. is of Valentinian origin, which is likely, we might here have an instance of “mutual participation,” where the Savior needs saving as well. This passage could thus very well be translated as: “he works *for* the Son,” in light of David Litwa, “The Wondrous Exchange: Irenaeus and Eastern Valentinians on the Soteriology of Interchange,” *J ECS* 22 (2014): 311–41. Here, Litwa argues that mutual participation is apparent in Interp. Know. (based on exegesis of 10.27–34 and 12.14–29). I thus suggest the alternative translation “for the Son.”

²⁷ Paul Linjamaa, “The Female Figures and Fate in *Interpretation of Knowledge*, NHC XI, 1,” *J ECS* 24 (2016), forthcoming. Here I argue that the first part of Interp. Know. contains a Valentinian creation myth and that Sophia appears in several epithets, as “the Mother” and “the Virgin.” The Female is the personification of the cosmic predicament. She is the darkness that brakes of the Virgin in the moment creation ensue and she clothes humans to the body. In the Female’s system Fate rules, Fate who is mentioned on page 13. Plisch reads page 11 as an exegesis of Genesis 2–3, since the Female brings sleep and work (with which Plisch translates ϷιϷε), two activities which are connected to Eve in Genesis 2. Adam sleeps when Eve is created from his rib, and in Genesis 3 Eve offers Adam fruit from the Tree of Knowledge which causes their expulsion from paradise and Adam having to

Female is influenced by reinterpretations of Platonic cosmology, where a mother of “becoming” appears.²⁸ The *sleep* of forgetfulness inflicted on humans in the first sentence echoes Gen 2:21 and is also encountered in Gos. Truth (28.32–30.16; 32.32–33.8) and Ap. John, where it is interpreted similarly to the above passage; Adam encounters a “lack of perception,” a clear connection to the concept of sleep (BG 58.17–59.1).²⁹ The Sabbath is called the World and the world is a beast, we read. These are probably references to the cosmic planetary system, the Hebdomad/Sevenness, as in Ap. John. The Sabbath was often used by Jews as a synonym for the number seven, for the week, and for the seventh day (Saturday). Theophilus of Antioch wrote that “most know not that what among the Hebrews is called the ‘Sabbath’ is translated into Greek as the ‘Seventh’ (ἡ ἑβδόμη).”³⁰ In ancient times the planets were thought to be deities, or to be ruled by heavenly powers often portrayed zoomorphically as beasts (as some of the zodiac signs attest). The Sabbath in Interp. Know. is the beastly, illusory state resulting in the opposite of rest. However, if one belongs to the Father one is rewarded with rest from the false sleep of the cosmos.

But what role does the very negative portrayal of the Sabbath play within the larger framework of the text? There is some debate concerning the genre of the text.³¹ Some identify it as a homily, a commentary or a

work (Plisch, *Die Auslegung*, 113–15). The parallel is definitely important, but one is left to question what Eve has to do with the Sabbath that is called “the world” and a “beast.”

²⁸ Thomassen writes that the Female is like the World Soul in Hermetic texts. See Thomassen, *L’interprétation*, 134.

²⁹ I believe it more likely that this passage views the sleep as causing ignorance of the father, not the other way around as has been some scholars’ contention. Magnusson writes that “the Sabbath results from the ignorance of the father and the sleep that is caused by it” (Jörgen Magnusson, *Rethinking the Gospel of Truth: A Study of its Valentinian setting* [PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2006], 165). However, I think it more likely that this passage is an exegetical reading of Gen 2:21 (like the one in Ap. John) and thus that sleep is inflicted on Adam which then results in an ignorance which is like living in a drowsy sleepy state.

³⁰ Theophilus, *To Autolytus*, 2.12; trans. Marcus Dods, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867). The Hebdomad, furthermore, was a common metaphor for the cosmos (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.5.4; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6.32.7; Ap. John, BG 42.7–10).

³¹ The genre is debated and is sometimes identified as a homily, a commentary or sermon to be conveyed to the congregation following mass or scriptural readings. Pearson and Pagels both conclude this and many scholars have followed suit. See Pearson, *Ancient*, 181; Elaine Pagels in the introduction to Turner’s translation in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990); Thomassen, *Nag*

sermon to be conveyed to the congregation following mass or scriptural readings.³² This view has come under critique as of late. According to Philip Tite the designation “homily” is not analytically useful, and he instead argues that the text should simply be understood as a moral exhortation due to the many paraenetic sections.³³ Emmel questions the assumption that the text is addressed to a community since it is written in the second person singular. It could very well be addressed to a single individual and Emmel cautions against any designation of the text at all.³⁴ We might never know the exact genre of the text or its social background, but it is clear that the author is addressing a problem of jealousy. Ismo Dunderberg insightfully suggested that the use of the Pauline material might give us some clues as to how the text has been utilized. Dunderberg rightly questions whether the text should have been written as a letter to an individual; there are no formal indications of this in the end part of the text as one might expect.³⁵ He instead argues, somewhat in line with Tite, that the text partly functions as deliberative rhetoric, a rhetoric discourse meant to ease the dissent in the congregation. The passage quoted above might also be influenced by Rom 13:13–14, which deals with being “clothed” in the Savior and which also portrays a congregation that is in conflict with stronger and weaker members.³⁶ I am less sure of Dunderberg’s hypothesis that the text specifically tries to re-establish the rule of

Hammadi, 652. Other suggestions include Tite, who argues that the text should be viewed as a moral exhortation due to the many paraenetic sections. According to Tite, the designation “homily” is not helpful analytically (Philip Tite, “An Exploration of Valentinian Paraenesis: Rethinking Gnostic Ethics in the ‘Interpretation of Knowledge’ [NHC XI,1],” *HTR* 97 [2004]: 275–304). Koschorke reads the text as a community rulebook on the organization of a “Gnostic Church,” a view which is today abandoned, partly due to the lack of any rules mentioned in the text. See K. Koschorke, “Gnostic Instructions of the Organization of the Congregation: The Tractate Interpretation of Knowledge from CG XI,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 2, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 757–69.

³² Pagels concludes this in the introduction to Turner’s translation in Hedrick, *The Coptic Gnostic Library*, 22. Pearson and Thomassen have followed suit (Thomassen, *Nag Hammadi*, 652; Pearson, *Ancient*, 181).

³³ Tite, “An Exploration,” 275–304.

³⁴ Emmel, “Exploring the Pathway,” 257–76.

³⁵ Dunderberg, *Beyond*, 147–57.

³⁶ “So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Rom 13:13–14; see also 14:1–4).

those with leader positions because the metaphor of Christ being the *head* of the congregation is emphasized, unlike the Pauline writings which instead focus on the equal value of the parts of the body of Christ.³⁷ Furthermore, neither Dunderberg's description of the text as deliberative rhetoric nor Tite's view of the text as moral exhortation takes the first half of the text into account. Where do the first fifteen pages, which seem to a large part to be dealing with mythological exhortations, fit into the deliberative rhetoric? Here I would argue that they fit well into the pattern of a paraenetic and/or deliberative rhetoric structure where the clash within the congregation is kept in mind. Building up to the paraenetic sections in the second half, the congregation is flooded with information about prehistoric time and strife (3–7), about the Soul's downward journey (8–10), and the nature of the cosmos (11–13). Focusing on the collective mythological and cosmological predicament that the whole congregation have in common could very well function in a unifying way considering the very negative evaluations of these parts of the text. In a way, the author redirects the attention of the arguing congregants to a common enemy. The cosmic system, symbolized by the hebdomadal structure, that is the Sabbath, thus supports the admonitions not to be jealous of each other because they are, after all, all subjected to the same cosmos.

The Sabbath in the Gospel of Truth

Scholars have noticed similarities between *Interp. Know.* and other Valentinian works, especially the second text of the Jung Codex, *Gos. Truth*.³⁸ The authorship and nature of *Gos. Truth* has been widely discussed. Many scholars believe *Gos. Truth* could be a product of the famous Valentinus of Alexandria himself. Pseudo-Tertullian tells us that Valentinus had “a

³⁷ I agree with Dunderberg that the body metaphors in the text differ from the Pauline writings and that these differences possibly depend on the form of the genre (in the second part of the text at least). See Dunderberg, *Beyond*, 147–57. Dale Martin has shown that in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses a body metaphor to lift the status of the lower class. See Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Dunderberg instead argues that *Interp. Know.* uses the metaphor as it is most commonly used in ancient time: to admonish the lower classes to fall in line and heed the social leader's rules and command (Dunderberg, *Beyond*, 149–56).

³⁸ A second version of *Gos. Truth* is also found in Codex XII but it is severely fragmented and unfortunately does not lend itself to the discussion here. See Thomassen, *Spiritual*, chs. 11 and 17, for more on these texts.

Gospel of his own”³⁹ and Irenaeus mentions that Valentinians used a text they called “the Gospel of Truth.”⁴⁰ The authorship of the text will probably never be more than a hypothesis, though very few scholars refute the text being Valentinian.⁴¹

The text mixes mythological exhortations with ethical and soteriological admonitions. It preaches the saving attributes of the knowledge of the Father of truth, given to us by his Name, the Son Jesus (38.6–32). Knowledge obliterates the reign of terror and forgetfulness that the character Error (πλάνη)⁴² imposes on humans. Knowledge allows for the reintegration into the Father, and the rest (ἄρα) that that entails.⁴³ Preceding the passage that mentions the Sabbath is a long exhortation on the differences between those who know (the children of light who Jesus comes to save), and the material ones who do not recognize Jesus’ divinity and are strangers to his message (30.32–31.14). This is page 32, lines 16–39:

³⁹ Pseudo-Tertullian, *Haer.* 4.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.9: “... those who are from Valentinus, being, on the other hand, altogether reckless, while they put forth their own compositions, boast that they possess more Gospels than there really are. Indeed, they have arrived at such a pitch of audacity, as to entitle their comparatively recent writing “the Gospel of Truth,” though it agrees in nothing with the Gospels of the Apostles ...”

⁴¹ For the arguments for the text being Valentinian see Thomassen, *Spiritual*; Magnusson, *Rethinking*. A protological myth and the situation of the Aeons, characteristics that are often used to identify Valentinian texts, are not widely discussed in this text. The picture drawn of the creation is likened to the confusion of man upon earth: the Aeons are unaware of their origin and nature that they, just like man, stem from the father, and the evolvement of the protological myth ends in the coming to knowledge of their situation much like the human predicament is resolved. The body of the Savior (church/living book of the living) is paramount for salvation and resembles those of the humans who are targeted to be saved. In Tripartite Tractate, the body of the Savior is the Church, while Gos. Truth uses a metaphor of the “living book of the living” Jesus is clothed with. Through the body of the Savior, one finds the means for salvation. For a thorough survey of this kind of Valentinianism, see Thomassen, *Spiritual*, 146–65; Magnusson, *Rethinking*, 20–29, 178. This kind is also called “Eastern” Valentinianism. For a relevant critique of the division into East versus West doctrine see Kalvesmaki, “Italian.”

⁴² Recently, Geoffrey Smith has argued that this character is a version of Sophia, influenced by Ben Sira 24 and John’s Prologue. See Geoffrey Smith, “Constructing a Christian Universe: Mythological Exegesis of Ben Sira 24 and John’s Prologue in the *Gospel of Truth*,” in *Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. Jenott and S. Kattan Gribetz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 64–84.

⁴³ “Since oblivion came into existence because the Father was not known, then if the Father comes to be known, oblivion will not exist from that moment on” (18.10–11); “... when the Father is known, from that moment on deficiency will no longer exist” (24.30–32); “... he (the Father) brought him (the Son) forth in order to speak about the place and his rest from which he had come forth” (40.30–33).

ΚΑΝ Ζῆ ΨΑΒΒΑΤΟΝ ΕΠΕΣΑΥ
 ἸΤΑϞΙΝΤῆ ΕΑϞΖΑΕΙΕ ΑΠΙΖΕΤ
 ΑϞΡῆΩΒ ΑΡΑϞ. ΑϞΤῆΖΟ ἸΠΕΣΑΥ
 ΕΑϞΝΤῆ ΑΖΡΗΙ Ζῆ ΠΙΖΙΕΙΤ. ΧΕΚΑΣΕ
 ΕΡΕΤΝΑῆΜΕ ἸΖΗΤ ἸΤΩΤῆ ΝΕ
 ΝΙΩΗΡΕ ἸΤΕΠῆΜΕ ἸΖΗΤ ΧΕ ΕΥ ΠΕ
 ΠΣΑΒΒΑΤΟΝ. ΠΕΕΙ ΕΤΕΜΕΩΩΕ
 ἸΤΕΟΥΧΕΕΙ ΟΥΩΣῆ ἸΖΗΕϞ.
 ΧΕΚΑΣΕ ΕΡΕΤῆ{Α}ΩΕΧΕ ΑΒΑΛ Ζῆ
 ΠΙΖΩΟΥ ΕΤῆΖΡΗΕΙ ΠΕΕΙ ΕΤΕΜῆΤΕϞ
 ΟΥΩΗ ἸΜΕϞ ΟΥΑΖῆ ΑΒΑΛ Ζῆ
 ΠΟΥΑΕΙΝ ΕΤΕΜΑϞΩΤῆ ΧΕ ϞΧΗΚ
 ΑΒΑΛ. ΩΕΧΕ ΣΕ ΑΒΑΛ Ζῆ ΦΗΤ ΧΕ
 ἸΤΩΤῆ ΝΕ {ΠΕ}ΠΙΖΩΟΥ ΕΤΧΗΚ
 ΑΒΑΛ ΑΥΩ ΕϞΟΥΗΖ Ζῆ ΤΗΝΕ
 ἸΒΙΠΟΥΑΕΙΝ ΕΤΕΜΑϞΩΧῆ

Even in the Sabbath he labored over the sheep which he found fallen into the pit. He kept the sheep alive having brought it out of the pit, in order that you might understand interiorly,⁴⁴ you the children of interior knowledge,⁴⁵ what the Sabbath is, this, on which it is not fitting for salvation to be idle. Thus you should speak from the Day from Above, which has no night, and from the light, that does not set, because it is perfect. Thus, speak from the heart, for you are the perfect day and the light that does not set resides in you.

Here a point is made that the Sabbath does not mean being inactive in good works. This we also saw in *Interp. Know.* as the Father did not observe the Sabbath but worked through the Son. We find something similar in the Valentinian text *Letter to Flora*, where Ptolemy mentions the Sabbath in connection with the law that is to be kept figuratively. To keep the Sabbath is to be “idle concerning evil works,” not idle of physical labor.⁴⁶ This also reminds us of Matthew 12:11–12 where Jesus meets the allegations of Sabbath violation by likening his deeds to a shepherd who lifts one of his fallen sheep out of a pit: good works are permitted.⁴⁷ The Sabbath is thus partly used synonymously with *being idle*. This is the most

⁴⁴ ΧΕΚΑΣΕ ΕΡΕΤΝΑῆΜΕ ἸΖΗΤ. Literally this translation might appear awkward, but I think it makes an important point to highlight the use of the preposition ἸΖΗΤ because it contrasts knowledge of the outside and the inside. The Sabbath of the outside, contrasted by the use of the preposition ἸΖΗΤ is the false Sabbath which one meets if one lets Error dominate one’s life and just relies on one’s five senses: motion, toil, and everything that belongs to the world. The Sabbath that one is, here, encouraged to get to know, is that one which lingers *inside* (ἸΖΗΤ) oneself, the Day from Above which the Gnostic himself is identified with: “for you are the perfect day.”

⁴⁵ Could this be an example of the self-designation *Gnostic* that is often thought *not* to be present in the Nag Hammadi Library? Here the Coptic word for “to know” is used as a noun, as “knowledge,” that is, ΝΙΩΗΡΕ ἸΤΕΠῆΜΕ ἸΖΗΤ “sons of the knowledge (from) inside.”

⁴⁶ Ptolemy, *Letter to Flora* in Epiphanius, *Pan.* 33.5.12.

⁴⁷ In Luke 14:5 it is a child rather than a sheep that has fallen down a pit.

obvious argument against the thesis that the Sabbath denotes the world in Gnostic writings in general. Baarda does not discuss the portrayal of the Sabbath in *Letter to Flora* which has nothing to do with the cosmos, let alone the Demiurge. In Gos. Truth it is Jesus who does the work (32.17–35), while in Interp. Know. it is the Father, and it is perhaps no accident that good works are discussed in both texts in association with the Sabbath, thus adopting John 5:17: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” This also echoes Jesus’ deeds on the Sabbath as they are portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels: good works are permissible. The message in Gos. Truth is also plain: good deeds and salvation should not be idle, especially on the Sabbath.⁴⁸ Here, however, the similarities regarding the use of Sabbath-symbolism within Interp. Know. and Gos. Truth diverge. Interp. Know. also portrays the Sabbath as the world, but Gos. Truth mentions another day, “the Day from Above.” I would argue that the positive Sabbath connotations—that of a day of light, rest and (as Jesus thought of it in the Synoptic Gospels) a day of good deed—has been retained in Gos. Truth and transferred to “the Day from Above.”

Baarda asserts that the adherents in Gos. Truth are identified with the Ogdoad, the eight level above the sevenness of the cosmos, and that the Day from Above is this Ogdoad which stands in opposition to the sabbatical Hebdomad. However, this is to project general Valentinian theology on the text. Gos. Truth never mentions the Ogdoad.⁴⁹ The Sabbath appears

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Williams writes that Rev 21:23–27 is behind the view of the Sabbath which has taken on an eschatological significance: the Sabbath is the new Jerusalem, the city that does not need light because it has Jesus to light it up. See Jacqueline A. Williams, *Biblical Interpretation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth from Nag Hammadi* (Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988), 126–28. A similar interpretation has been put forward by Elaine Pagels: the Sabbath is to be understood eschatologically. See Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 145–46. But I do not believe we have an eschatological understanding here. Instead, the Sabbath is used to highlight the human condition by contrasting a cosmic demiurgic illusory Sabbath with the true Sabbath inside every human who has reached knowledge. The passage here is a prelude to the subsequent paraenetic section and not a reference to end times.

⁴⁹ Neither does Gos. Phil., which Baarda uses as an intertext for his Sabbath interpretation (Baarda, “The Sabbath,” 144–45). A “middle” is mentioned once in Gos. Truth as a place for a particular kind of human. The word *μητρε* appears several times, most often to denote a place “among” something or in “the midst of” some group. See for example 19.19; 20.9; 43.8. In the beginning of the text, Error is described as trying to capture “those of the middle” (17.34–35). But as Magnusson points out, these are probably the people with a

in a passage that belongs to a long paraenetic section that stretches from pages 32–33, where the readers/listeners are repeatedly encouraged to do good and spread the truth. The adherents are identified with “the day of light” and it is through “the Day from Above” that one is to spread the message of truth, because “you are the perfect day” and the truth lingers inside. The idea that a specific day is identified as particularly beneficial for a certain activity is no foreign theme.⁵⁰ The Sabbath was, for many Jews, a day centered on free and easy discourse and a day in which one read, discussed and preached scripture, and contemplated and spoke the word of God.⁵¹

“root” who have not yet come to know the Father. The eighth level is in some Valentinian material called “the middle” (μητρε), the place between the Pleroma of the Father and the lower cosmos (Magnusson, *Rethinking*, 79). The concept of the Ogdoad, or a middle level, is not at all clear or uniform in Valentinian systems. In Epiphanius’ retelling of one Valentinian “book” the Ogdoad is rather pictured as a group of eight characters and there are, moreover, two different eight-fold groups, one higher and one lower which strive for a spiritual union. In Gos. Phil. the “middle” is pictured very negatively, which is unusual. See Thomassen, *Spiritual*, 120–21, 222–30; Einar Thomassen, “How Valentinian is the Gospel of Philip?” in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years*, ed. John Turner and Anne McGuire (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 251–79 (278–79). Thus, it would not fit well with the overall purpose of the text, which seems to be to instill confidence in a restless congregation (that is already aware of the illusion of the Demiurge), and to equate the Day from Above with the “middle,” a place where humans have not yet come to know the Father. The Day from Above, on the contrary, designates a place and status of salvation, one’s true nature and not a state where Error is a danger for the one lingering in it. Furthermore, the escape from the Hebdomad (the pit) is likened to a return to the One (the root) rather than a step up (to an Ogdoad).

⁵⁰ For more on this see Linjamaa, “Savoring Life,” *passim*. This is also apparent among gentiles. Slaves in antiquity were sometimes allowed liberties during certain festive days, like on the holiday Saturnalia. One of these liberties was the liberty to speak freely and openly to one’s master. Athenaeus writes about this practice in his *Deipnosophists*. For a discussion of this see Dana Farah Fields, *The Rhetoric of Parrhesia in Roman Greece* (Charleston: Bibliobazaar LLC, 2011), 63–65. This day is also, Macrobius tells us, partly to be devoted to serious conversation. Macrobius writes in his work *Saturnalia* that the festive day should not be spoiled by not engaging in serious conversation but should, with the example of philosophers of old (like in Plato’s dialogue *Symposium*), be devoted to, at least in part, serious conversations. Mornings are especially suitable for learned men to converse whereas the banquet at night is suited for more jovial converse (*Saturnalia* 1.1.1–4). The holiday was celebrated in December in honor of Saturn, and interestingly enough has many associations to the Sabbath. The planet Saturn was called *Shabbetai* among Jews and in both Jewish and Christian literature the word *Sabbath* is used interchangeably to refer to the celebratory day, the seventh day (Saturday) and also for a full seven day week.

⁵¹ Philo held that through the Sabbath human beings had an opportunity to access the existence beyond the limitations of the human body and the material restrictions. For an overview of Philo and his writings on the Sabbath, see Weiss, *Day of Gladness*, 32–52.

Reading the Day from Above as the Sabbath day, when one should spread the good news of Jesus, also fits the overall makeup of the text. Jörgen Magnusson, one of the scholars who have worked most thoroughly with the Gos. Truth, provides a very insightful assessment of the style and the message in the text. In an article from 2012, Magnusson maintains, and he is not alone,⁵² that a version of the Demiurge-myth is present throughout the text (or perhaps more likely the Sophia-myth).⁵³ Magnusson also argues that the author is preaching to a congregation where fear has taken hold; fear is threatening the congregation that is supposed to have already left the path or Error behind it. The text does not question the effects of Error (πλανε): “ignorance of the Father brought about anguish and terror, and the anguish grew solid like a fog, so that no one could see. For this reason Error became powerful, it worked on its matter foolishly ... it set about with creation” (17.10–20). But in the next sentence we read that “they were nothing, the anguish and the oblivion ... for this reason, ignore Error” (17.23–29). Thus, people’s predicament on earth is the result of their own focus on illusion instead of truth. I would argue that the pit allegory in Gos. Truth, also used in Interp. Know.,⁵⁴ strengthens Magnusson’s insightful thesis that the toils in the cosmos are to be understood as illusory. The pit is much like the existence of the humans chained to the cavern wall in Plato’s cave allegory. However, like Baarda, Magnusson reads the Sabbath of the Gos. Truth as in Interp. Know., as the pit/cosmos.⁵⁵ But this reading fits poorly with his overall understanding of the text. We read that Jesus has come down so “that you might understand interiorly, you the children of interior knowledge, what the Sabbath is.” It

The same attitude is found in Eusebius’ retelling of Philo’s predecessor Aristobulus who said “the seventh day is ordained for us by the Law, to be a sign of that which is our seventh faculty, namely reason, whereby we have knowledge of things human and divine.” See *Praep. ev.* 13.12.

⁵² See for example Attridge and MacRae in H. W. Attridge, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex I (the Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 77–78.

⁵³ Jörgen Magnusson, “Bortom vägs ände, eller klarsyntheten som förblindade,” *SEÅ* 77 (2012): 225–54. Whether πλανε should be understood as a version of the Demiurge or Sophia is for our purposes not a pressing issue, although I favor Smith’s reading of πλανε as a version of the Sophia-myth (Smith, “Constructing”).

⁵⁴ 10.27–34: “I became very small, so that through my humility I might take you up to the great height, whence you had fallen. You were taken to this pit. If now you believe in me, it is I who shall take you above, through this shape that you see. It is I who shall bear you upon my shoulders.”

⁵⁵ Magnusson, “Bortom,” 248; Baarda, “The Sabbath,” 17–28.

would not make sense for an author whose writing purpose is to encourage the recipients to step away from preoccupation with the world and Error, to then highlight the terror and fear by saying that the reason the Savior has come to earth is to let people know of the terrors of the Sabbath. On the contrary, in Gos. Truth Jesus does not come to spread the message of the terrors of the cosmic Sabbath—this people know—but “in order that you might understand *interiorly* (δεκας ερετναμμε νεητ) what the Sabbath is.” The Sabbath is *not* the idleness of the cosmos but actually the Day from Above, from where the congregants are supposed to work in order to keep their minds off the pit of Error and illusion. The Sabbath-passage tells us that it is not “fitting” (ωωε) for salvation to be idle on the Sabbath, and this is repeated in the last passage of Gos. Truth: “it is not fitting (ωωε) for me, having come to be in the place of rest, to speak of anything else” (42.39–43.2). I believe that the positive attributes of the Sabbath have been transferred to the Day from Above. The pit of the cosmos offers a false *illusory* existence in which salvation is idle but the Savior is present to show people “what the Sabbath is.” It is a day when good deeds are permissible, and even required. Gos. Truth says that “it is not fitting for salvation to be idle” and “having come to be in the place of rest” one cannot be idle but one must not “speak of anything else” (42.39–43.2). This echoes Jesus’ words about the Sabbath in John 5:17: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”

Gos. Truth thus presents a *reinterpretation* of the Sabbath, not a rejection of it as Interp. Know. People are called upon to work for an *active* salvation through the Day from Above (42.39–43.2). People think that keeping the Sabbath means being idle, but Jesus came to tell us that it is not “fitting for salvation to be idle,” especially on the Sabbath, just as he does in the Synoptic Gospels. Thus the Sabbath is not a rest in the mundane sense of the word. The association of rest with idleness and inactivity is interesting to note here because it strikes a chord with ongoing philosophical debates concerning God’s rest, a debate I believe Gos. Truth attaches itself to. Severe criticism was directed by Aristotle against Plato’s idea of a created eternal world: nothing created could be eternal. Neither could Aristotle imagine a God first being active and then leaving his creation to lower beings. Rather, God was most likely an “unmoving mover”

who constantly sustained the world.⁵⁶ This critique occupied Middle Platonists who interpreted *Timaeus* metaphorically.⁵⁷ Cicero retells a sarcastic remark in the discussion between Velleius and Cotta. Velleius declares that the God of Platonists must be a most lucky God who can just retire to rest after creation and who pities the Stoic God who must constantly toil to keep the world moving.⁵⁸ Alexandrian Jews also engaged in this debate on the nature of God's activity versus God's rest and applied Peripatetic thought to biblical exegesis.⁵⁹ Did God really *rest* like Genesis 2:3 tells? What did Plato's creator Demiurge do after creation? Did God succumb to idleness after creating the world, leaving it to lower powers and Fate (εἰμαρμένη)? According to Aristobulus, who embraces the Peripatetic notion of perpetual activity, God was never inactive, not even on the seventh day of creation. The Sabbath was thus seen from a new light; Sabbath-rest was not the literal inactivity of God but just a different kind of activity, surpassing human understanding. Aristobulus likened it to the notion of wisdom and light that should guide humans on their life's journey. The Sabbath was a return to a primordial state and the seventh day was when this first light was introduced, creating a joy and a wisdom through "which all things might be contemplated."⁶⁰ Both Josephus and Philo also attest that the Sabbath was a favorable day to engage in different activities: reading the law, studying the Torah and preaching the message of God.⁶¹

My contention is that these positive Sabbath connotations are all found in the Day from Above and used by the author of Gos. Truth to instill confidence in a congregation stricken with fear. The positive side of the Sabbath discourse is highlighted when Jesus says that he comes to make humans realize what the Sabbath is *interiorly*. The true Sabbath is not a day of sleepy inactivity but a day of activity, light and *true* rest. The

⁵⁶ Discussed by Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1063b36–1064b14. See Maren R. Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 71–74.

⁵⁷ See, for example, John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to 220* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

⁵⁸ Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.20–21.

⁵⁹ Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*, *passim*.

⁶⁰ Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 13.12.

⁶¹ For a summary of Jewish activity on Sabbath see Heather A. McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

power of that day actually lingers inside every believer, that is, interiorly. We must “speak from the heart, for you are the perfect day and the light that does not set resides in you” (32.31–34).

Conclusion

Interp. Know.’s preoccupation with a negative portrayal of the Sabbath is understandable if one reads the Sabbath symbolism from the perspective of the ostensive social condition portrayed in the text. Something scholars generally agree upon is that the text addresses a community in conflict (especially 15.34–35; 16.31–38) and that a main theme throughout the text is the mediation of this dissension. Pauline writings seem to be inspirational in these sections where the author preaches that all members are part of the same body with Christ as the head.⁶² Focusing the attention against a “common enemy” was probably very useful in the dissent of Interp. Know. By accentuating some associations of the Sabbath, the preacher reminds the congregation that they are all brothers and sisters of the same imprisonment, an imprisonment fashioned as the beastly hebdomadal structure symbolized by the Sabbath. This must have been a most effective way of countering the overconfidence of some members while at the same time suppressing the jealousy that seems to have inflicted a part of the congregation (17.27–34). There is nothing to be jealous of because the beastly Sabbath imprisons all humans regardless of the level of spiritual gift they possess. In Gos. Truth the situation of the congregation is different, as argued by Magnusson, and we also encounter a very different Sabbath symbolism. In Gos. Truth the congregation is encouraged, not reprimanded. They are not overly confident, on the contrary. The positive connotations in the symbolic universe of the Sabbath are activated unlike those associated to the hebdomadal structure of the cosmos (although they might be played upon). In Gos. Truth the true Sabbath is the Day from Above, a day that is full of light, and a day on which one should work in a similar way to that of Jesus who performed good deeds on the Sabbath in the Synoptic Gospels.

This study has shown that the portrayal of the Sabbath in these two Valentinian works does not follow a fixed “Gnostic pattern.” In fact, the above study shows how misleading the notion of a “Gnostic Sabbath” is.

⁶² Page 13 onward reminds us of Rom 12:4–8; 1 Cor 12:12–31; Eph 4:15–16; Col 1:18; 2:19.

The terms “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism” if left undefined are of little use in detailed analysis, particularly when discussing the portrayal of the Sabbath in Valentinian texts. But neither can one speak of a fixed “Valentinian Sabbath.” Rather, the social and literary context determines what aspects of the Sabbath in the broad symbolic universe were utilized.