

Diskussion / Discussion

Individuality in Some Gnostic Authors: With a few remarks on the interpretation of Ptolemaeus, *Epistula ad Floram*¹

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A paper quite often starts with a few boring apologies by the author. This one also begins with some (hopefully not too boring) apologies. During the last five years my capacity to do research on Gnosticism was drastically restricted by my duties in Berlin. On leaving the University President's office at the end of last year after such a long period (and after throwing away a lot of paper), to my own surprise I found in my private study an unfinished edition of Ptolemy's letter to Flora and material for a commentary on the so-called "*Grande Notice*," the well-known exposition of a Valentinian system commonly ascribed to the same Christian teacher in Rome, to Ptolemy. During my time as President I had nearly completely forgotten that I worked for quite a long time before 2005 to finish the manuscript: for example checking some of the preserved Latin and Greek manuscripts of Irenaeus and Epiphanius in Jena and Berlin and collecting material for a commentary. But I believe it's not a pity that I was unable to publish the second volume of my *Studien zur Valentinianischen Gnosis* before 2005 under the title *Ptolemaeus Gnosticus* (without a question mark) as a continuation of *Valentinus Gnosticus?* (with a question mark). One argument to back up my impression is the following: in the first year of my presidency Einar Thomassen's *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* was published, and it would have been a pity indeed to have published *Ptolemaeus Gnosticus* without any opportunity to think about Einar's interpretations and ideas.² Other publications should be mentioned also, but my apologizing argument at the beginning of this paper is quite

¹ The article is based on a contribution presented in September 2010 at a conference entitled "Individuality in Late Antiquity" in Oxford. It was fully revised and given in Yale as the keynote lecture at the meeting of Nag Hammadi and the Gnosticism Network in May 2011.

² Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (NHMS 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006). – Cf. the reviews by Philip L. Tite, review of Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60 (2009): 755-758, and W. A. Löhr, review of Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 29 (2008): 614-620.

clear: my lateness can be an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the early phases of a major Gnostic movement, and so I apologize for being so late. Now I would like to conclude my introductory remarks by explaining the title of my paper. Although I had next to no time to spare during the last five years, I tried a little to continue research on the Valentinians and to understand better the reason behind the development of such a rich mythological system in the very first years of the movement. The question with which I began two years ago was one that I personally believe to be one of the most interesting preliminary questions for understanding the thinking of the Valentinians: How does myth function in their different texts, in their different mythological accounts? This question is in a sense far more fundamental than the later question of how to analyze the myth in different texts or different accounts and how to arrange different schools or tendencies. Einar Thomassen has done a great job analyzing the myth in different texts and different accounts, but in his *Spiritual Seed* the Gnostic myth of the Valentinians (or shall I say only one part of the myth?) is mostly briefly labeled as “protological philosophical myth”³ and categorized as the third basic dimension of Valentinianism without deeper analysis of the literary and systematic function of a myth in a doctrinal system (and the same can be said of John D. Turner’s *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*; Turner has carefully described Hans Jonas’ ideas on the matter and analyzed some Middle Platonic myths, for example Plutarch).⁴ I do not want to repeat my answer to the question on the function of the myth here, although it is rather hidden in a kind of Festschrift for the late Tübingen New Testament Scholar Martin Hengel’s 80th birthday.⁵ Similarly I will not deal with the central question of how myth is related to salvation history and history in general. Einar Thomassen is absolutely right to object in his *Spiritual Seed* to common tendencies to categorize all Valentinian thought as pure myth and to establish a fundamental difference between a Valentinian myth and salvation “history” of ancient mainstream Christianity.⁶ My topic for this paper is the attempt to analyze a structural principle of the protological myth by comparing Valentinian and Platonic texts of the Early Roman Empire. And the key question of my analysis is the following: Is there Individuality in these protological myths, and if so, which entities are thought and which are portrayed as “Individuals”? Such a rather more detailed argumentation is

³ Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see note 2), 133.

⁴ John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (BCNH, Études 6; Québec: Les presses de l’Université Laval, 2001), 20-23, 457-474.

⁵ Christoph Markschieis, “Welche Funktion hat der Mythos in gnostischen Systemen? Oder: ein gescheiterter Denkversuch zum Thema ‘Heil und Geschichte,’” in *Heil und Geschichte: Die Geschichtsbezogenheit des Heils und das Problem der Heilsgeschichte in der biblischen Tradition und in der theologischen Deutung* (ed. J. Frey; WUNT 248; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2009), 513-534.

⁶ Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see note 2), 84-85 (note 4).

also necessary in order to react to a criticism of my interpretation of the *Epistula ad Floram* recently made by Herbert Schmid.⁷

I would like to start answering these questions by quoting from the so-called “*Grande Notice*” (to use the term coined by Sagnard),⁸ from the obviously shortened and modified Valentinian source at the beginning of Irenaeus’ *Adversus haereses*, which, in most of the manuscripts of the late fourth century Latin translation, is entitled *Narratio omnis argumenti Valentini discipulorum* (*Tale of the complete story of the disciples of Valentinus*).⁹ The quotation runs as follows:

Thus, then, they (i.e. the Valentinians) tell us that the Aeons (or perhaps better: the eternities) were constituted equal to each other in form and sentiment (οὕτως τε μορφῇ καὶ γνῶμῃ ἴσους κατασταθῆναι τοὺς αἰῶνας λέγουσι).

With these words Irenaeus concludes the second paragraph of his famous account on those Gnostics who regard themselves as followers in the tradition of the Roman theologian Valentinus.¹⁰ This account, which is probably based on one ὑπόμνημα (or better on some ὑπομνήματα that Irenaeus had in hand when writing his *Exposure and Subversion of the falsely so-called Knowledge* in the eighties of the second century, is in my view the earliest preserved protological myth of the Valentinians. Based on a line in the Latin translation of late Antiquity that seems rather dubious under critical examination, Sagnard and some scholars have attributed the account to Ptolemy, a pupil of Valentinus: *Et Ptolemaeus quidem ita*.¹¹ In fact the authors of the ὑπομνήματα, which Irenaeus probably paraphrased more than cited (despite the once-used formula αὐταῖς λέξεσι λέγοντες οὕτως),¹² were pupils of Ptolemy claiming to be pupils of Valentinus.¹³ Those who are declaring themselves Οὐαλεντίνου μαθηταὶ are in fact οἱ περὶ Πτολεμαῖον; one should not establish a difference here, as Einar Thomassen has rightly pointed out;¹⁴ sometimes Irenaeus follows this conventional self-designation of his contemporary opponents, sometimes he used the term “Valentinians” with a different meaning, which causes confusion for both

⁷ Herbert Schmid, “Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?,” *ZAC* 15 (2011): 249-271. Schmid is referring to Christoph Marksches, “New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus,” *ZAC* 4 (2000): 225-254.

⁸ François-M.-M. Sagnard, *La Gnose Valentinienne* (Études de Philosophie Médiévale; Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1947), 31-50, 140-232.

⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,1,1 (SC 264, 28,1-2 Rousseau/Doutreleau).

¹⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,2,6 (46,225-226 R./D.).

¹¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,8,5 (136,189 R./D.); cf. “Notes Justificatives,” in SC 263, 218 Rousseau/Doutreleau): *Et Ptolemaeus quidem ita*; on the discussion of the philological problems, cf. Marksches, “New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus” (see note 7), 249-253.

¹² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,8,5 (129,909f. R./D.); interestingly the plural is used here.

¹³ For more detail on this: Marksches, “New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus” (see note 7), 249-251.

¹⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1 prol. 2 (22,35 and 23,44 R./D.); cf. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see note 2), 11, with note 6.

ancient and modern readers.¹⁵ It remains uncertain whether this Ptolemy is identical to the second century Roman teacher of the same name whose martyrdom in the capital is mentioned by Justin with deep respect – one of the famous, somewhat radical hypotheses stemming from Adolf von Harnack’s so-called “Hypothesenschmiede” (forge of hypotheses). But careful analysis of the preface to Book 1 of Irenaeus’ *Adversus haereses* makes it quite clear that the *Grande notice* is thus a work by the second generation of Roman “Valentinians,” if one follows my reconstruction of this movement’s history, and if one does not count the heresiarch (who gave it its name and probably slipped away to Cyprus at some point in the second half of the century and was regarded as *Heros Eponymos* of the movement ever since because he couldn’t defend himself in person any more) as the first generation, but in fact his pupil Ptolemy as the first generation and οἱ περὶ Πτολεμαίου or *qui sunt circa Ptolemaeum* as the second generation.¹⁶ This fits perfectly with the probable period of time in which Irenaeus’ great anti-heretical work was written; we are, therefore, dealing with the *Grande Notice* with a reasonably contemporary text, probably to be dated to the 70s of the second century.

But enough of introductory remarks – what mainly concerns us here is the question of whether this specific Gnostic movement – at this stage of development in the 70s of the second century – possessed a concept of individuality in their protological myth; with reference to the quotation mentioned earlier, this seems to be the case only to a very limited degree: “Thus, then, they (i.e. the Valentinian Gnostics) tell us that the eternities were constituted equal to each other in form and sentiment”; οὕτως τε μορφῇ καὶ γνώμῃ ἴσους κατασταθῆναι τοὺς αἰῶνας λέγουσι. As we have said, the second paragraph of Valentinian cosmogony rendered by the *Grande Notice* concludes with this thought. And the authors do not omit a single rhetoric device to drum, as it were, the de-individualization of the eternities into their readers. The eternities were equalized (here we find the Greek verb ἐξισόω, which usually refers to a technical dimension of adjustment and only gains a metaphysical dimension in a Christian context¹⁷), they became equal to each other (ἴσος) in “form and character,” μορφῇ καὶ γνώμῃ – i.e. with regard to outer as well as inner dimensions.

¹⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1 prol. 2 (22,35 and 23,44 R./D.); cf. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see note 2), 11, with note 6.

¹⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1 prol. 2 (23,44 and 22,44 R./D.).

¹⁷ Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Revised and augmented by H. St. Jones with the assistance of R. McKenzie with a revised supplement; 10th ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v., 595; Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), s.v., 497; and Erich Trapp, ed., *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität besonders des 9.-12. Jahrhunderts* 1 (A-K) (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 238/250/276/293 = Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Byzantinistik 6/1-4; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001), s.v., 539.

And just in case the readership hadn't quite understood yet, the authors of the *Grande Notice* made their point yet again (which makes us think about a former catechetical *Sitz im Leben* of the *Grande Notice*):¹⁸ "And all (sc. male eternities) became a mind, and a word, and a human, and a Christ. Accordingly, the female eons all became a truth, and a life, and a spirit, and a Church". As I have written elsewhere (and thus do not want to repeat here), the "eternities" mentioned earlier are clearly Christian-Gnostic "contrafacts" of the Platonic ideas, which again are the thoughts of God according to common Middle Platonic belief. I am, incidentally, employing the musical term "contrafact" for the first time in this paper, and I do so deliberately, since – by reworking the lyrics and maintaining the melody – it actually indicates the use of a secular song for a sacral hymn. And so, within the Gnostic contrafact of Plato's Theory of Forms, many features of the Platonic theory remain as a theory of "eternities" (αἰῶνες). As it is the case with most Christians of the imperial period, though, the term "idea," clearly seeming heathen, is avoided¹⁹ and replaced by biblical terms referring explicitly to the prologue of the Gospel of John as the protological text of the New Testament – e.g. "Word" λόγος, "Christ," "Truth," "Life," "Spirit," and "Church."

By means of the contrafact of the Theory of Forms and for missionary purposes in the capital of the Empire, Valentinian (or rather: Ptolemaic) Christians now had at their disposal the conceptual framework of a Platonizing protology of all the events in the heavenly sphere before all time which – at least according to themselves – could easily rival contemporary philosophy (we know the Platonists thought differently on this matter). The concept of the *Grande Notice*, eminently bringing to mind the term "contrafact," includes one detail added by the authors of the *Grande Notice* to underline once again the de-individualization of the eternities already accentuated by the text: the choir of eternities, by now uniformly shaped and brought into line, is offering a hymn to the primordial father, the transcendental God, who – again put very Platonically – is joining in their rejoicing (πολλῆς εὐφρασίας μετασχόντα).²⁰ And moreover, the thus standardized – and so de-individualized – choir of eternities presents a joint gift, and again heaps of words pile up to make sure that the readers fully grasp the unity of the choir of ideas: the eternities offer βουλῆ μιᾶ καὶ γνώμῃ, with one design and desire, and with the concurrence of Christ and the Spirit (συνευδοκεῖν), the Father also setting the seal of his approval on their conduct (συνεπισφραγίζω). If one lists the manifold literary themes of de-individualization in Irenaeus' text, of course one cannot but repeat

¹⁸ Which supports the idea that it really was didactic literature from which Irenaeus quotes here.

¹⁹ M. Baltes, "Idee (Ideenlehre)," *RAC* 17 (Stuttgart, 1998): (213-246) 245. Baltes gives Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius Areopagita as examples.

²⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,2,6 (47,231-232 R./D.).

that the above-mentioned row of names of these eternities also acts in a de-individualizing manner – and indeed was meant to do so. According to the account of the Gospel of John, “Word” λόγος, “Truth,” “Life,” and “Spirit” are *per se* not separate identities and individualities; their abstractness – again according to the fourth evangelist – obtains, in fact, concreteness in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. They are not individuals but the one Christ of the Father.²¹ Seen from this point of view, the sharp difference between two types of pleromatology A and B distinguished by Einar Thomassen (a first group “characteristically does not specify the individual names of the eons and the numerical constitution of the Pleroma” and a second group “details the names and the numbers of the eons”)²² is perhaps more a literary than a systematic differentiation, because we have to ask whether the eternities or eons in type B are really “independent beings” (as Thomassen labeled them).²³ To answer correctly, one must carefully observe the related or alleged philosophical background: The first and principal Tetrad, which consists of the eternities “Depth,” “Silence,” “Reason,” and “Truth,” is named by Irenaeus in the *Grande Notice* a “Pythagorean Tetrad”: καὶ εἶναι ταύτην πρῶτην καὶ ἀρχέγονον Πυθαγορικὴν Τετρακτύν, ἣν καὶ ῥίζαν τῶν πάντων καλοῦσιν (*et hanc esse primam et primogenitam pythagoricam Quaternationem, quam et radicem omnium dicunt*).²⁴ But this “Pythagorean Tetrad” must be understood against the background of such writings as Pseudo-Iamblichus’ *Theologia Arithmetica* (*Theologumena Arithmeticae*), where the Pythagorean theories of numbers are seen from a Platonic perspective and interpreted against the background of the cosmogony of Plato’s *Timaeus* (esp. 35 b/c). Einar Thomassen has convincingly explained the later parts of the Valentinian ὑπομνήματα that Irenaeus excerpted (especially the origin of matter) with texts by Moderatus of Gades.²⁵ But such sources also help us to understand the very first paragraphs and, so to speak, early beginnings of protology. Moderatus tries to unify the δόγματα of the Pythagoreans and the νεώτεροι in terms of the numbers.²⁶ And Nicomachus of Gerasa, one of the ancestors of this Platonic reading of Pythagorean theories of numbers, already

²¹ With regard to “Church” one might ask oneself whether Pauline and Deutero-Pauline conceptions of Christ as the head of the Church should not be used here and were also in the background in the case of the Valentinians.

²² Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see note 2), 193.

²³ Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see note 2), 193.

²⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,1,1 (30,90-92 and 30,17-19 R./D.).

²⁵ Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed* (see note 2), 270-297.

²⁶ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 1 prooem. 8-9 (ed. O. Hense, *Ioannis Stobaei anthologii libri duo priores qui inscribi solent Eclogae physicae et ethicae* [vol. 1 of *Iohannis Stobaei Anthologium*; ed. C. Wachsmuth and O. Hense; 3rd. ed.; Berlin: Weidmann, 1974], 21,8-25); cf. Eduard Zeller, *Die nacharistotelische Philosophie* (vol. 3,2 of *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*; 5th ed.; Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1923), 129-130, and Christian Tornau, “Die Prinzipienlehre des Moderatos von Gades,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie, Neue Folge* 143 (2000): 197-220.

conceptualized in his “Introduction to Arithmetic” numbers as πλῆθος ὠρισμένον, as παράδειγμα ἀρχέτυπον in God’s mind pre-existing and pre-figuring creation.²⁷ But, by definition, the ideas in God’s own mind cannot be interpreted as “independent beings.” I am convinced, therefore, that the first and principal tetrad in the ὑπομνήματα of Ptolemy’s followers must be understood as the first offspring of the pure transcendent ἔν, not as a polytheistic fourfold cluster of gods (which sounds more like Tertullian polemic than an adequate interpretation of Valentinian texts). And I am reading the Valentinian sources from an idea by Nicomachus expressed in the *Theologia Arithmetica*, that the μονάς implies all numbers potentially and to this extent σπερματικῶς ὑπάρχοντα πάντα τὰ ἐν τῇ φύσει ὄντα.²⁸

At this point I would like to call to mind that, according to a Platonic Theory of Forms or Ideas adapted by Judaism and Christianity, the standardization and de-individualization of the eternities must be understood not only as a contribution to understanding protology (and especially the notorious problem of how τὰ πάντα was derived from τὸ ἔν), but also as the ideal model of eschatology – thus shaping both the beginning *and* the end of all things. To this extent, the paragraph mentioned earlier shows very clearly how the Valentinians imagine eschatology: as perpetual divine service and the constant singing of hymns by the de-individualized, who are perhaps even hymnologically forced into line and who are, with regard to the Heavenly Host, uniformly shaped spiritual beings. Eternity in its form of “Wisdom” (σοφία), which was referred to earlier, and its salvation are clearly to be understood as a prefiguration of the mundane fall of man on the level of the celestial prototype; the late Münster colleague Matthias Baltes (and Barbara Aland following in his footsteps) have repeatedly suggested that such a Platonization of the Fall of Man – a topic central to the Valentinian form of Gnosticism – constituted a borrowing of Platonic *Philosophumena* against their originally intended understanding and thus failed to arouse enthusiasm amongst imperial philosophers²⁹ – e.g. Plotinus, to name but one. And if we realize the implicit eschatological dimension of our protological myth, we should be careful with the label “protological myth”: τὰ πρῶτα ὡς τὰ ἔσχατα καὶ τὰ ἔσχατα ὡς τὰ πρῶτα (cf. *Letter of Barnabas* 6,13).

²⁷ Nicomachus of Gerasa, *Introductio in Arithmetica* 1,6,1 (ed. and transl. M. L. D’Ooge, *Nicomachus of Gerasa: Introduction to Arithmetic* [New York: Macmillan, 1926], 189); cf. D’Ooge, *ibid.*, 89-110.

²⁸ Pseudo-Iamblichus, *Theologumena arithmeticae* (BSGRT, 3,2-3 de Falco/Klein); cf. Zeller, *Die nacharistotelische Philosophie* (see note 26), 134-135.

²⁹ Barbara Aland, “Die frühe Gnosis zwischen platonischem und christlichem Glauben: Kosmosfrömmigkeit versus Erlösungstheologie,” in eadem, *Was ist Gnosis? Studien zum frühen Christentum, zu Marcion und zur kaiserzeitlichen Philosophie* (WUNT 239; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2009), (103-124) 104-111.

So far, so good. The Platonizing tendency of the protological and simultaneously eschatological myth of the Roman Valentinians is evident; such a concept – of individuality existing only as a short-lived momentum in the process of self-perception of the Divine and at its end being dissolved again into the higher unity of the one God – no doubt constitutes a central point of certain versions of Platonism in the Early Empire – especially this concept of ἐν καὶ πᾶν, which – from the beginning of Plato’s so-called “secret teachings” (reconstructed according to the Tübingen school of Gaiser and Krämer) to certain Middle Platonists – coined Neo-Platonism and then was re-born in the philosophy of German idealism. Allow me to put it a little more pithily: individuality – in the most radical variety of this type of Platonic philosophy – is just a temporary, intermediate phase in the process of forming a unity (regarding itself, despite all diversity, as unity), and thus again constitutes itself as unity, albeit a unity of a higher order. But such a concept was evidently behind the ὑπομνήματα of Ptolemy’s followers, which Irenaeus cited. To put it even more pithily, in the case of these Valentinians we are therefore dealing with a kind of individuality which – with regard to the character of individuality – in structure distinguishes only the (good) tendency of de-individualization and the (evil) tendency of individualization. I shall refrain from making obvious remarks on the political consequences of such a concept of individuality – certainly, to follow such a concept will never lead us to Sir Karl Popper’s idea of an Open Society. Back to the Valentinians in Rome in the seventies of the second century: these Gnostics simply adopted the Platonic concept of an only-temporary individuality from the philosophers – and the paragraphs in question here from *Adversus haereses* of Irenaeus are a wonderful proof-text.

Hence, even if I have many doubts about this whole concept, it is easy to understand why Adolf von Harnack, who regarded the “infinite value” of the single human soul as one of the three central elements of the message to Jesus from his father,³⁰ saw in this Platonizing de-individualization of the Gnostics a “Hellenizing” of the new religion,³¹ going far beyond Jesus’ initial message, and a “foreign infiltration” of the message of Jesus, highly suspicious to critical reading. If, following Christian Nottmeier, one regards this accentuation of an individualization raised far above all things earthly and separated from them as the crucial punch line – where

³⁰ In the lectures on “The Essence of Christianity” the importance of the concept is marked with a separate heading: “God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul”: Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums: Sechzehn Vorlesungen vor Studierenden aller Fakultäten im Wintersemester 1899/1900 an der Universität Berlin gehalten* (ed. C.-D. Osthövener; 2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2007), 43.

³¹ For an explanation of the presumably well-known term of “Hellenization,” cf. Christoph Marksches, *Does it make sense to speak about a “Hellenization of Christianity” in Antiquity?* (Dutch Annual Lectures in Patristics 1; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 8-13.

Harnack is thinking along the lines of his teacher Albrecht Ritschl³² –, then it doesn't come as much of a surprise when what Harnack called *Gnosticismus* quickly became a prime example of the *akute Hellenisierung* (Hellenization) of Christianity.³³ On the other hand, however, one can also understand Harnack's protest against the de-individualization of each Christian, which is rooted in philosophy and begins with protology and the eternities – but only until one realizes that the last image of a congregation unified in hymn-singing and presenting Eucharistic offerings is not an invention of wicked Platonists, but an imagery taken from contemporary Judaism, and a very traditional eschatological one, which naturally also influenced authors of mainstream Christianity like Eusebius or Gregory of Nyssa and a lot of liturgical texts (and to this extent the personal piety of a large number of ancient Christians). In other words, Gnostic de-individualization of the individual as seen by the Valentinians – which starts with the de-individualization of the eternities – simply enforces the already de-individualized character of Judaeo-Christian eschatology: anyone who takes part in the eschatological choir cannot very well follow his own little tune.³⁴

At this point I would like to take a step back and ask how the de-individualization of ideas in contemporary Platonism – which can hardly be doubted considering the basic inclination towards metaphysics of oneness, ἓν καὶ πᾶν – takes shape in philosophy. This will enable us to further our comparison between imperial Platonists and Valentinians. First of all, ideas (although not independent beings) are to a certain extent individuals, and not only according to the Gnostic contrafact of eternities. The *Placita philosophorum* (a doxographical source reconstructed by Hermann Diels and attributed to the early imperial philosopher Aetius, which is currently being edited by Oliver Primavesi and Christoph Rapp) leaves no doubt that ideas are above all individuals: “The idea is an incorporeal substance that actually exists out of itself” (αὐτῆ μὲν [μῆ] ὑπεστῶσα καθ' αὐτήν).³⁵

³² Christian Nottmeier, *Adolf von Harnack und die deutsche Politik 1890-1930* (BHTh 124; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2004), 71-76.

³³ Eginhard P. Meijering, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums im Urteil Adolf von Harnacks* (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, deel 128; Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1985), 68-72; Johanna Jantsch, *Die Entstehung des Christentums bei Adolf von Harnack und Eduard Meyer* (Habelts Dissertationsdrucke, Reihe Alte Geschichte 28; Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1990), 134-139.

³⁴ In his commentary on the “Grande Notice” Sagnard names neither the background in intertestamentary Jewish literature nor the Platonic dimension: Sagnard, *La Gnose Valentinienne* (see note 8), 241-242. This is further confirmation that it should be rewritten.

³⁵ *Placita philosophorum* (Hermann Diels, *Doxographi Graeci* [collegit, recensuit, prolegomenis indicibusque instruxit Hermannus Diels; Berlin: Reimer, 1879; repr., Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965 (1976)], 308a16-17 = Matthias Baltes in cooperation with Friedhelm Mann, *Der Platonismus in der Antike* 5 [Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1998], Baustein 127,1, p. 14). One can refer to Platon, *Symp.* 211b or *Tim.* 37b to document that this is a summary of core Platonic thought.

In his great, but unfortunately unfinished commentary *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, Matthias Baltes demonstrated how this definition, and thus the representation of the individuality of ideas, was again and again transcribed and quoted, in various doxographical transmissions to imperial Platonism. But literary devices and philosophical strategies to confine and limit, if I may say so, this individualism of ideas already abounded in the era of imperial Platonism. The north-African author Apuleius of Madaura, who died approximately around the time the *Grande Notice* was written, tells us that the idea was *simplex*, single.³⁶ But if we conceive individuality as reciprocal, differentiated complexity, then this is nothing else but de-individualization. Syrianus, a late neo-Platonist philosopher of the fifth century, makes it even clearer that ideas are “single, indivisible and unique” (τελέως ἀπλᾶ καὶ ἀμερῆ καὶ μονοειδῆ)³⁷. The sources of imperial Platonism today available to us do not sufficiently consider how their distinctive feature – i.e. measuring measureless matter and at the same time the whole cosmos (the famous *Didascalicus* by Albinus/Alcinous, a small textbook of Middle Platonism, describes the participation of things in ideas that constitute this thing)³⁸ – relates to the fact that, as thoughts of God, they are simultaneously also structures of the mind of god (or: of God, insofar as he is νοῦς) – who can only be thought of one as who, uniform in each single part, is at least at the start and the end of the process of self-differentiation. Furthermore, the tension described earlier between the necessary individuality of the idea and the just-inevitable de-individualization of ideas, considering their identical structure as thoughts of the one God, has not been settled in any convincing way. Sextus Empiricus explains at one point a very precise neo-Pythagorean distinction between identity (αὐτότητος), that is identified with the One (τὸ ἓν resp. the μονάς), and the otherness (ἑτερότητος), which is identified with the “unlimited Dyad”, that proceeds from the One (ἄοριστος δυάς), but which has to be differentiated from the simple contrary.³⁹ As far as I can see, this distinction has never been used for the theory of ideas (forms) in contemporary Platonism.

³⁶ Apuleius of Madaura, *De Platone et eius dogmate* 1,6 (BSGRT *Opera quae supersunt* 3, 93,19 Moreschini = Baltes, *Der Platonismus in der Antike* 5 [see note 35], Baustein 127,3, p. 18).

³⁷ Syrianus, *In Metaphysica commentaria* (ed. Wilhelm Kroll [*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* 6,1; Berlin: Reimer, 1902; repr., Berlin: de Gruyter, 1960], 106 = Baltes, *Der Platonismus in der Antike* 5 [see note 35], Baustein 127,7, p. 26).

³⁸ Albinus/Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 9 (CUFr, 163,11-164,6 Whittaker/Louis = Baltes, *Der Platonismus in der Antike* 5 [see note 35], Baustein 127,4, p. 20).

³⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* 10,261 (BSGRT, 357 Mutschmann); cf. on this Porphyrius, *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes* 39 (BSGRT, 47,3 Lamberz), and Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed* (see note 2), 286-287 and idem, “The Derivation of Matter in Monistic Gnosticism,” in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts* (ed. John D. Turner and R. Majercik; SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000), (1-17) 9-10.

Instead, these assertions remain largely thetic; I am thinking, for instance, of Plutarch, who says ideas οὐδεμία διαφορὰν ἔχουσι πρὸς ἀλλήλας, “do not differ from each other” (not least due to the fact that they are missing qualities such as color and quantities such as number),⁴⁰ but who also asserts that a human’s idea is just what a human being is (αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος), the idea of a table *is* what a table is, and so on.⁴¹ This tension between the individuality of an idea on the one hand and its individuality-transcending unity on the other is perhaps most beautifully described by someone mocking as Lucian. In his *Philosophies for sale*, the protagonist – a client interested in buying a philosopher – asks Socrates in the market place where precisely the ideas, which supposedly exist outside this world (ἔξω τῶν ὄλων), were to be found. The philosopher answers a little mischievously: “Nowhere. Were they anywhere, they were not what they are” (εἰ γὰρ που εἶεν, οὐκ ἂν εἶεν). Little wonder the customer is keen on buying such a knowledgeable and wise philosopher from Mercury for two talents.⁴² One does not have to be an Aristotelian (or a Wittgensteinian, for that matter) to see the immense problems in the conceptual details of Plato’s Theory of Forms, certainly not just due to any lack of quantity or quality of the sources (which are actually not too bad). To consider individuality leads right to the central philosophical problem of the Theory of Forms.

Calling to mind the immense philosophical problems of the Theory of Forms, the Valentinians, who once wrote the ὑπομνήματα transmitted by Irenaeus, do not come off too badly in comparison with other treatises as can be found in the *Didascalicus* or in the *Placita philosophorum*. On one hand, they can enhance the individuality of ideas via their names for the eternities – in imperial Platonism the concept of ideas remains rather blank; we only get to know whereof there are no ideas, but unfortunately not exactly *what* ideas are, how many ideas there are, and so forth. On the other hand, the Valentinians clearly limit the individuality of the eternities through the eschatological perspective of their unification. They introduce the theme – taken from Judaic apocalypticism – of a common Holy Service of the eternities before the throne of God in which all join in the same hymn of God’s glory. To put it differently, they add to the Platonic ambivalences regarding the Theory of Forms an imagery and a clarity, if only on a literary level, that is, if I may say so, better than nothing. Moreover, one should recall to mind that even the few lines of Plato on the “interweaving” of ideas (*Soph.* 259e) – obviously consisting

⁴⁰ Plutarch, *Quaestiones Platonicae* 3,1 (1002 A) (BSGRT *Plutarchi Moralia* 6,1, 119,11-24 Hubert/Drexler), cf. 3,2 (1002 D) (120,18-121,4 H./D.).

⁴¹ Plotin, *Ennead* 2,4,9 (SCBO *Plotini Opera* 1, 173,5-6 Henry/Schwyzler) and Baltes, *Der Platonismus in der Antike* 5 (see note 35), 237 (commentary on Baustein 127,3).

⁴² Lucian, *Vitarum auctio* 18 (SCBO *Luciani Opera* 2, 38,12-17; 39,1-9 Macleod = Baltes, *Der Platonismus in der Antike* 5 [see note 35], Baustein 131,1, p. 58); of course a reference to Platon, *Phaedr.* 247c.

in the fact that the more general ideas encompass the more specific ones (*Soph.* 253d and *Phaedr.* 247e) – that these lines describe a problem that confronts every concept of individuality: my own individuality as well as that of my wife are – if I may put this in cautious terms – in some way encompassed by the individuality of our family or the individuality of German federal society. Bearing in mind their disposition for contrafacts, it does not come as a surprise that the Valentinians haven't been able to offer a convincing solution; too humble is what we can call the scholarly and sociological background of these first Christian theologians (to speak with Harnack once again).

There now remains only one argument to discuss and examine its relevance for the main picture, namely the argument that unlike what we stated earlier, neither the individuality of the eternities in Valentinian Gnosticism nor the individuality of the Valentinian Gnostic himself disappears as much as one might expect at first glance.

It is, if I am not mistaken, no coincidence that this argument was advanced precisely by one of the great Hegelians among the great scholars of Gnosticism, i.e. Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860) from Tübingen. In his treatise on "Christian Gnosticism" from 1835, Baur employs the philosophical concept of individuality to analyze the Valentinian sources. He suggests that the individuals in need of salvation behave as individuals not only for the time of their earthly existence. This really requires a longer discussion of the so-called Valentinian doctrine of distinct classes of humans. However, we will not pursue this line of thought for the time being. According to Baur, Valentinian Gnostics – unlike the Ophites (i.e., as Baur says, the Gnostic groups today often referred to as Sephians) – preserve the *Idee der geistigen Individualität* (idea of spiritual individuality) in a purer sense than others. This corresponds to their own *geistig-ideellen Charakter* (spiritual character). As is well known, and as Baur wrote in his "History of the Christian Church of the First Three Centuries," written in 1860, Baur regarded Valentinian Gnosticism – in line with his Hegelian views – as the system that allows the deepest insight into the *eigenthümlichen Charakter der Gnosis*,⁴³ the very peculiar character of the Gnosis. According to Baur, and, again, in comparison to the Ophites, the Valentinians preserved the *Idee der geistigen Individualität* better, because they understood πνευματικοί, i.e. people "who have attained the perfect knowledge of God and been initiated into the mysteries of Achamoth"⁴⁴ – not simply according to the Manichean principle of light but as independent individuals.

As proof of this interpretation, Baur refers to the description of Valentinian eschatology in the very *Grande Notice* we were discussing earlier. There we find an account of how the Redeemer does not pull the souls

⁴³ Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Geschichte der christlichen Kirche 1: Kirchengeschichte der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (3rd ed.; Tübingen: L. F. R. Fues, 1863), 203.

⁴⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,6,1 (92,608-93,611 R./D.).

towards himself like rays of light, but how the Redeemer follows the redeemed into *Pleroma*:⁴⁵

The pneumatics then are divested of their souls and become intelligent spirits (πνεύματα νοερά). In an irresistible and invisible manner they enter in within the divine fullness (πλήρωμα) and be bestowed as brides on those angels who wait upon the savior.⁴⁶

I must confess that, in contrast to Baur, I don't consider this proof enough of the conservation of an idea of spiritual individuality in Valentinianism. We are instead looking at a colorful imagery of Judaic apocalyptic eschatology which was then simply – but not necessarily just in its Gnostic aspects – adopted by Christianity. If one really wanted to suggest the concept of a stable and separated individuality for Valentinianism, one would have to take a much closer look at the discussion on the so-called doctrine of distinct classes, i.e. follow Hermann Langerbeck and question the teachings on the φύσις of the human being to Platonism, and also discuss the objections raised by Barbara Aland⁴⁷ and others.⁴⁸ To suggest this for Valentinian eschatology, as Baur does, is, I think, still problematic. The ideas – anachronistically speaking – of an individual way of salvation of the people of spirit up to a celestial wedding and their eschatological existence as brides of the angels are not sufficient, since the angels have to be presented as a homogenous choir that follows liturgy (according to exactly the scheme of the second paragraph of the *Grande Notice*).⁴⁹ One could simply ask whether the idea of eschatologically restituted or newly configured couples of angels – the Valentinians adopt these couples of angels in their idea of couples of eternities, of συζυγοί – is a form of traditional Judaic apocalypticism preferred by the Valentinians, or rather

⁴⁵ Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religionsphilosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Tübingen: Osiander, 1835; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 197; cf. also *ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,7,1 (100,675-102,684 R./D.).

⁴⁷ Hermann Langerbeck, "Die Anthropologie der alexandrinischen Gnosis: Interpretationen zu den Fragmenten des Basilides und Valentinus und ihrer Schulen bei Clemens von Alexandrien und Origenes," in *Aufsätze zur Gnosis, aus dem Nachlass* (ed. H. Dörries; Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 69; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), (38-82) 73 and 77; by contrast, critical remarks by Barbara Aland, "Erwählungstheologie und Menschenklassenlehre: Die Theologie des Herakleon als Schlüssel zum Verständnis der christlichen Gnosis?," in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers Read at the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies* (NHS 8; Leiden: Brill, 1977), 148-181.

⁴⁸ Jens Holzhausen, "Zur Seelenlehre des Gnostikers Herakleon," in *ΨΥΧΗ – Seele – Anima: Festschrift für Karin Alt zum 7. Mai 1998* (ed. J. Holzhausen; Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 109; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998), 279-301; Ansgar Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus: Gnostische Johannesexegese im zweiten Jahrhundert* (WUNT 142; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2002), 8, 34, 59 and 82-85.

⁴⁹ See above note 12, cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,2,6 (46,225-226 R./D.).

maybe a novelty based on traditional material;⁵⁰ unfortunately, here and now I cannot pursue this exciting question of the Judaic roots of the Valentinian Gnosis any further. What we have said so far, at any rate, does not appear in a different light when seen through the glass of Baur's arguments. The problem of how God can be "everything in everything" (1Cor 15:28) and how at the same time the individuality of the redeemed can be preserved in eschatology (accentuated further in the monotheistic aggravation of Valentinianism by an unknown teacher⁵¹ about whom Irenaeus informs us later in *Adversus haereses*) remains, as we have seen (certainly as regards criteria of structure) a variation on the problem of the individuality of ideas, and is not limited to Valentinianism.

One last question: Is it possible – following Baur *ad bonam partem*, as it were – to nevertheless introduce the criterion of greater or smaller de-individualization as a category of distinction of Gnostic systems? Is it even possible to use this criterion to determine the (degree of) "Christianity" of certain Gnostic systems or, contrariwise, (the degree of) their "Gnosticity"? A long line of great scholars of the Gnosis have suggested exactly this – but a closer look into their line of reasoning shows how problematic the interpretations supporting it really are today. I'll concentrate on two examples from the main text – very characteristic ones, at least in German-speaking-Europe – and for further examples I would like to refer to the annotations. Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), for instance, mingles the suggestion that the identity of the heavenly *Urmensch* and individual soul of Man represented the classical Gnostic myth with "the Gnostic myth of the primordial man" – unsparingly deconstructed by Carsten Colpe – and a more-than-misleading chronology of Manichaean sources, that Lietzmann has proven wrong but Bultmann still relied on.⁵² Bultmann's student, the

⁵⁰ An initial examination of the relevant texts suggests the hypothesis of a Gnostic special education.

⁵¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1,11,3 (172,44-174,56 and 173,1-174,13 R./D.); cf. on this Christoph Markschie, "Der religiöse Pluralismus und das antike Christentum – eine neue Deutung der Gnosis," in *Querdenker: Visionäre und Außenseiter in Philosophie und Theologie* (ed. M. Knapp and Th. Kobusch; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 36-49 = Christoph Markschie, *Gnosis und Christentum* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2010), (53-83) 75-78.

⁵² Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums," *ZNW* 24 (1925): (100-146) 104; cf. Hans Lietzmann, "Ein Beitrag zur Mandäerfrage," *Sitzungsberichte der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch Historische Klasse 1930* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1930), 596-608 = Hans Lietzmann, *Studien zur spätantiken Religionsgeschichte* (vol. 1 of *Kleine Schriften*; ed. K. Aland; TU 67; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1958), 124-140 (on this debate, cf. Christoph Markschie, "Heis Theos? Religionsgeschichte und Christentum bei Erik Peterson," in *Vom Ende der Zeit: Geschichtstheologie und Eschatologie bei Erik Peterson* [ed. B. Nichtweiß; Symposium, Mainz; Religion – Geschichte – Gesellschaft 16; Münster: Lit, 2001], [38-64] 54-59). – Like Bultmann, Kurt Rudolph also defines the "soul" of the individual as part of the world soul: Kurt Rudolph, *Die Gnosis: Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion* (4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 128. The description of the journey of the soul to *anapausis* can be found in

philosopher Hans Jonas (1903-1993), also describes the *Daseinshaltung der Gnosis* only in very general terms and does not indicate certain schools of Gnosticism or certain branches of certain schools – for instance when he says that only a “residuum” remains of the self which is alien to the world after salvation, “a nucleus which is removed from individualization” (*dass vom in der Welt fremden Selbst nach der Errettung nur ein “Ichresiduum” übrig bleibt, ein “der Individuation entzogene[r] Kern im Menschen”*).⁵³ While Jonas, like his doctoral supervisor Bultmann, here still regards de-individualization as the one criterion of Gnosis, many years later, referring to a sermon discovered in Nag Hammadi and affiliated with Valentinism (called *Evangelium Veritatis* [NHC I,3])⁵⁴ with regard to its first editors), he declared that in Valentinianism most terms (such as unity or reunification, multitude and diffusion) each featured universal as well as an individual aspect.⁵⁵ Considering the abundance of chronological uncertainties in Gnostic systems, as well as the almost inevitable systematic uncertainties of a concept of individuality, I would like to refrain from constituting and using such a criterion for the moment – to me, at least, it seems that the time is not ripe for this, if it is possible to do so at all. To do so, one would have to analyze further Gnostic texts with regard to the respective concept of individuality, and – similar to what we tried earlier while looking at Irenaeus’ *Grande Notice* – to do so by means of a “Thick Description”. Zostrianus (NHC VIII,1⁵⁶), for example, seems to

Rudolph under the heading “Individual eschatology” (p. 186). – I am very grateful to my PhD student Henrik Hildebrandt for several ideas in the following passages.

- ⁵³ Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist 1: Die mythologische Gnosis* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 51, Neue Folge 33; 4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 170-171.
- ⁵⁴ Michel Malinine, Henri-Charles Puech and Gilles Quispel, eds., *Evangelium veritatis: Codex Jung f. VIIIv - XVIv (p. 16-32) / f. XIXr - XXIIr (p. 37-43)* (Hauptband; Studien aus dem C.-G.-Jung-Institut, Zürich 6; Zürich: Rascher, 1956), Michel Malinine, Henri-Charles Puech, Gilles Quispel and Walter Till, eds., *Evangelium veritatis: Codex Jung f. XVIIr - f. XVIIIv (p. 33-36)* (Supplementum; Studien aus dem C.-G.-Jung-Institut, Zürich 6; Zürich: Rascher, 1961), and Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, “NHC I,3: The Gospel of Truth,” in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introduction* (ed. H. W. Attridge; Introductions, texts, translations, indices; NHS 22; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 55-122; and Harold W. Attridge, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Notes* (NHS 23; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 39-135.
- ⁵⁵ Hans Jonas, *Gnosis: Die Botschaft des fremden Gottes* (2d ed.; Frankfurt/M.: Insel Verlag, 2000), 88-89. – Jan Helderma also emphasizes that the individuality of the pneumatic who has arrived at the *Pleroma* is maintained in the *Evangelium Veritatis*, stating that there is no “evaporation” through which this individuality might be lost. Instead, his name is known to God, the pneumatic is said to have his “own,” and furthermore he continues to exist united with his angel: *Die Anapausis im Evangelium Veritatis* (NHS 18; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 342. Helderma also speaks of an individual eschatology (*ibid.*, 339). The pneumatic has a special interest “in his individual experience of salvation” (*ibid.*, 341).
- ⁵⁶ John H. Sieber and Bentley Layton, “NHC VIII,1: Zostrianos,” in *Nag Hammadi Codices VIII* (ed. J. H. Sieber; NHS 31; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 7-225.

me especially interested in the formation of human individuality and its fate while returning to the One.

In contrast to this it was recently suggested that, according to the Gospel of Thomas which was also discovered at Nag Hammadi and further scripts from the second codex,⁵⁷ the term μοναχός is virtually “a technical term for the eschatological state of being in which the individual features of human existence cease to be. According to this, the μοναχός is the perfect Gnostic who has returned to the divine μόνος in which he originated.”⁵⁸ Such ambivalences would first have to be precisely described: the literary strategies of reinforcing or weakening individuality would have to be analyzed, as well as tradition-historical aspects and individual problem solving.

Now this opens up a panorama which we will certainly not be able to fully discover here. But what we have seen here is that this curious indetermination of most Gnostic groups with regard to their respective concept of individuality⁵⁹ is closely linked to general problems within every concept of individuality, and furthermore to the evident exacerbation of the problems arising from the development of a concept of individuality within the framework of Plato’s Theory of Forms.

At the same time, our observations on individuality in Valentinian texts have a certain amount of significance for our understanding of the history of this variety of Gnosticism and for our reconstruction of its previous history. Up to now – if we disregard the great reconstruction by Einar Thomassen⁶⁰ – we lack a comprehensive history of more recent Valentinianism that interprets the different source categories (such as material that has been passed down in the context of contemporary pagan, Jewish and other Christian comparative texts) and dares to attempt a chronological classification of the material. For this reason, many seemingly self-evident statements on Valentinianism, its writings and its luminaries are quasi-hypotheses on a relatively narrow source base and formulated with the assistance of fun-

⁵⁷ Bentley Layton, “NHC II,2: The Gospel according to Thomas,” in *Gospel according to Thomas, Gospel according to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes* (vol. 1 of *Nag Hammadi Codices II,2-7, together with XIII,2**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P. Oxy. 1*, 654, 655; ed. B. Layton; NHS 20; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 52-93, and Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *Das Thomasevangelium: Originaltext mit Kommentar* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

⁵⁸ Enno Edzard Popkes, *Das Menschenbild des Thomasevangeliums: Untersuchungen zu seiner religionsgeschichtlichen und chronologischen Einordnung* (WUNT 206; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2007), 165. – The concept of individuality is the key to Popke’s analyses in general.

⁵⁹ Carsten Colpe, for example, says that, in view of the type of “soul” in the Gnostic world of thought, a single “condensed spiritual individuality” can rarely be singled out: Carsten Colpe, “Die ‘Himmelsreise der Seele’ außerhalb und innerhalb der Gnosis,” in *Le origini dello gnosticismo: Colloquio internazionale sulle origini dello gnosticismo, Messina 1966* (ed. Ugo Bianchi; Studies in the History of Religions 12; Leiden: Brill, 1967), (429-445) 430. “This is why it repeatedly has its difficulties with the individuality of the Gnostic soul” (ibid., 440).

⁶⁰ Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed* (see note 2).

damental statements made by others on this form of Gnosticism. We have tried to look at the category of *individuality* in order to gain a new criterion for an analysis of Valentinian source texts and to reconstruct dependency relationships of chronology and content. As we have seen, the Valentinian sources characteristically differ in their efforts to emphasize the individuality of heavenly and earthly entities. Some texts de-individualize in order to lay greater stress on the belief in the one God. Other texts tell a story of individual entities for the sake of the literary structure of a philosophical artificial myth, but without affirming their separate individuality on the ontological level. In other words, the apparently polytheistic individuality of heavenly figures in various types of Valentinian Gnosticism is a literary characteristic used by these groups' philosophical or philosophizing artificial myths, but certainly not an identity-forming characteristic of the systems. It is just that the ancient Christian heresiologists would like us to believe such a concept of polytheistic individuality. The fundamental rule of always considering individuality in divine figures as a literary, stylistic device of mythological speech and not as an ontological characteristic of the Valentinian principles theory applies, of course, not only to the system of Ptolemaeus's disciples as handed down to us by Irenaeus in the *Grande Notice*, but even more so to the interpretation of the texts and fragments of Valentinus and Ptolemaeus, which must always also be interpreted in the context of an overall history of Valentinian protology and eschatology compiled from the sources.⁶¹

In the light of current events we close these thoughts, as announced in the title, with a few remarks on the interpretation of the above-mentioned *Epistula ad Floram*, the letter to the Roman matron Flora written by the urban Roman Christian teacher Ptolemaeus and handed down by the late-antique heresiologist Epiphanius. Any interpretation of this letter from Ptolemaeus to Flora must always also be part of an overall history of the teachings of the disciples and second-generation disciples of the urban Roman teacher Valentinus Nongnosticus (or Gnosticus).⁶² Recently, as mentioned, Herbert Schmid attempted a more text-based analysis of this letter. The author would like to show that Ptolemaeus (like later Valentinians) already distinguished between a savior figure (σωτήρ) and a creator figure (*demiurge*).⁶³ At the same time he emphasizes that the letter's system is "essentially monistic".⁶⁴ Yet he does not even answer the immediately

⁶¹ At the same time, of course, texts that are passed on separately must initially be interpreted as far as possible on their own merit, cf. Schmid, "Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?" (see note 7), 253, with Marksches, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus" (see note 7), 227.

⁶² See p. 412-414.

⁶³ Schmid, "Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?" (see note 7), 257-271. He thus contests the identification of the two figures in Marksches, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus" (see note 7), 242-245.

⁶⁴ Schmid, "Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?" (see note 7), 268.

obvious question of how profound the distinction is between the savior and the demiurge in the *Epistula ad Floram* and in classical Valentinian systems: is it a similarly weak identity as the one attributed to eons and other divine figures by classical Valentinianism? Is the demiurge a mode of existence that only acts independently in literary myth, or is it a shadow of the one divinity? Or is he indeed a separate, ontologically independent second entity alongside the one, first God and his derivatives? Schmid does not ask these questions. Rather, he analyzes both the classical Valentinianism of the *Grande Notice* according to Irenaeus and the *Epistula ad Floram* against the background of the classical anti-Valentinian clichés of their orthodox opponents, who accused this entire form of Gnosticism – probably wrongly – of being a kind of disguised, un-Christian polytheism and confused dualism. Schmid calls the system behind Ptolemaeus's *Epistula ad Floram* “more complex” than a simple Platonizing doctrine of three gods.⁶⁵ However, he hardly discusses or explains the extent to which the doctrine of Ptolemaeus he reconstructs is perhaps just a simple four-god doctrine.⁶⁶ Instead, he justifies his interpretation of the savior and demiurge as two seemingly separate individualities with an interpretation (that he himself only calls “more probable”) of a certain passage in the letter (i.e. 3,6).⁶⁷ However, the context (3,5) – a grammatically unambiguous reference to the Prologue of John's Gospel – shows very clearly that the savior and the demiurge (contradicting Schmid's interpretation) are connected by *some kind of* relationship of identity (I am deliberately cautious in my choice of words here),⁶⁸ notwithstanding the fact that Ptolemaeus possibly at times also ascribed a certain separate individuality to them – for example for purposes of a philosophizing artificial myth. Interestingly, however, this is precisely what he does *not* do in his letter. Rather, he clearly leaves the question open as to whether the two figures are identical or whether each has an individual existence. However, this textual openness must not

⁶⁵ Schmid, “Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?” (see note 7), 255.

⁶⁶ Of course, I did not yet do this myself in my interpretation of the letter that was published in 2000; this had to wait until the article published here. Cf. Markschieß, “New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus” (see note 7), 242-245.

⁶⁷ Epiphanius, *Haer.* 33,3,6 (GCS *Epiphanius* 1, 451,14 Holl = SC 24bis, 52 Quispel). – Linguistically it is not very likely that ἰδιῶν relates to one of the following people, as Schmid suggests: Schmid, “Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?” (see note 7), 257-259. The linguistically normal case is the reference to the preceding sentence that I assume: cf. Markschieß, “New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus” (see note 7), 242-245 (also Thomassen and Rasimus, cf. Schmid, “Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?” [see note 7], 258-259).

⁶⁸ Ansgar Wucherpfennig has characterized the relation between Logos and Demiurge in Heracleon's commentary on John as “strukturierte Handlungseinheit”: Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus* (see note 48), 158-160 and 414: “Der höchste Gott und sein Logos, der Erlöser, und der Demiurg bilden durch ihre Kooperation . . . eine strukturierte Handlungseinheit, nicht zwei einander dualistisch entgegengesetzte Prinzipien.”

be eliminated, as it were, by modern interpretation – as Schmid does.⁶⁹ One can also speak of “fussy borders of identities” (which the author does not define in more detail, at least not in this introductory, exoteric and isagogical text) with regard to the three principles in Ptolemaeus’s *Epistula ad Floram*. However, this openness was probably also a feature of Ptolemaeus’s esoteric texts, which were meant for the inner circle of the school, because overall (like his students, according to Irenaeus) he assumed individualities for the principles and divine entities which were ontologically very underdeveloped. The fact that Ptolemaeus attributes an “otherness” to the demiurge (more precisely: “another being and nature” ἑτέρας οὐσίας τε καὶ φύσεως)⁷⁰ in his *Epistula ad Floram* must, of course, be interpreted in the context of Pythagorean number theory (as also alluded to by Irenaeus, speaking of the above-mentioned passage by an unknown Valentinian teacher, which we had interpreted analogously above).⁷¹ In a Platonic context, otherness, ἑτερότης, is a fundamental characteristic of the nature of the *second* God, as it is a characteristic of the number two. Like other Valentinians, Ptolemaeus is here simply following a widespread philosophical guideline theory in his explanation of his principles theory. At the same time, of course, if there is such a Pythagorean, Platonizing number theory of principles in the background, it cannot be claimed that no kinship exists between the divine principles, as is constituted, for example, by an emanation process. According to Schmid, the savior already differs from the demiurge, because, unlike the latter, he shares a common nature with the Sole Good God and Father. Yet precisely this is *not* stated in the text. Rather, it is not explicitly stated anywhere that the savior is “of one and the same being” with the Sole Good God (ὁμοούσιος); Schmid himself has to admit that there are only passages which, in his opinion, “suggest” this.⁷² He writes: for Ptolemaeus “the nature of the Father and the nature of the Son [are] similar, perhaps even interchangeable”.⁷³ In truth, therefore (and Schmid has to admit this⁷⁴), there is no explicit, categorical contradiction expressed in the text between the statements of the letter on the nature of the savior and the demiurge. The nature of the demiurge is as different from the nature of the Sole Good God and Father

⁶⁹ This needs to be stated more clearly than I did this in the essay I wrote in 2000: Markschies, “New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus” (see note 7), 242-245.

⁷⁰ Epiphanius, *Haer.* 33,7,6 (457,3 H. = 70 Q.).

⁷¹ See p. 424 (note 51).

⁷² Schmid, “Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?” (see note 7), 264.

⁷³ Schmid, “Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?” (see note 7), 264.

⁷⁴ Of course, the methodological doubts vanish dramatically in the course of the essay because of the unambiguousness of his own interpretation: towards the end, what was still uncertain before, is suddenly certain: “Such an equation cannot, however, be proved either by the interpretation of 3.6 or by comparing the statements on Soter, perfect God and demiurge.” Schmid, “Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?” (see note 7), 267. In truth, Schmid, too, can only provide probabilities to back up his interpretation, as he himself has to admit several times in the previous pages: 259 and 262.

as the natures of the highest principles can be different from each other in Platonic systems. Even so, one can speak of a similarity of principles on the basis of the generic, emanatory relationship. There is no contradiction (as constructed by Schmid) between the two sets of statements: in the interpretation of the letter the savior and the demiurge must not necessarily be reconstructed as two strictly separate individualities, and probably the author Ptolemaeus did not mean them to be. Creation and redemption are different actions⁷⁵ which, in mythological speech, can be distinguished as different modes of being of one and the same divine entity. By introducing the individuality of divine figures so weakly and changeably, Ptolemaeus uses a design principle for his theory that will play a key role in many future Valentinian systems and represent no small problem for the coming Trinitarian and Christological debates of the majority church. Like the fragments of his assumed teacher Valentinus, of course, Ptolemaeus's *Epistula ad Floram* belongs to the history of the development of Valentinian Gnosticism which is yet to be written – especially after the challenges posed by Einar Thomassen's attempt. To this extent, the thoughts presented here are certainly preliminary in nature.⁷⁶ And at this point we must – and can – stop this train of thought.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Um die Systembildungen der valentinianischen Gnosis angemessen zu verstehen, muss man sich fragen, inwieweit die in den philosophierenden Kunstmythen dieser Schulrichtung erwähnten Figuren "Individuen" sind. Zu diesem Zweck wird zunächst die sogenannte *Grande Notice* bei Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1,1,1-1,8,5 part.) vor dem Hintergrund mittelplatonischer und neupythagoreischer Texte untersucht. Es zeigt sich dabei, dass die sogenannten "Ewigkeiten" (Kontrafakturen der platonischen Ideen) wie auch die Ideen nicht als "unabhängige Individuen" verstanden werden können. Ein solches, klassisch gewordenes Verständnis entspricht vielmehr der häresiologischen Strategie der antignostischen Mehrheitschristen, Gnostiker als nichtchristliche Polytheisten zu denunzieren. Diese Interpretation wird sodann auf den Brief des stadtrömischen Valentinianers Ptolemaeus an die Matrone Flora angewendet. Es wird dabei deutlich (gegen die von Herbert Schmid jüngst in dieser Zeitschrift [ZAC 15,2 (2011): 249-271] vorgetragene Deutung), dass in diesem Text Erlöser und Weltschöpfer "in irgendeinem Verhältnis der Identität" stehen. Eine schlichte Interpretation als zwei separierte Identitäten, wie sie Schmid vorträgt, wird jedenfalls dem Text und seinem erkennbaren Hintergrund in der platonisch-neupythagoreischen Zahlentheorie nicht gerecht.

⁷⁵ Of course, the critical objection that the savior would be repealing his own law if the savior and the demiurge were to be regarded as identical also applies to an entire direction of majority theology when it pits Jesus' teaching against the law of Mount Sinai; it is therefore not an objection to identification: Schmid, "Ist der Soter in der *Epistula ad Floram* der Demiurg?" (see note 7), 266. – As Schmid also admits, I myself had conceded a certain degree of differentiation between the savior and demiurge: *ibid.*, 243.

⁷⁶ Especially the relation between Ptolemy and Heracleon's concept of a *strukturierte Handlungseinheit* (Ansgar Wucherpfennig) of Logos and Demiurge I would like to analyze in future in a broader sense (see note 68).