

CONCEIVING SPIRITS: THE MYSTERY OF VALENTINIAN SEX

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Valentinian thought and practices have been the subject of countless academic studies even prior to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi collection in 1945. In this literature, the Valentinians were characterized as elitist Gnostics who believed in the certainty of their salvation due to the existence of a particle of spirit within them, a "seed" which guaranteed the acquisition of *gnosis*. Due in part to their characterization as spiritual snobs and intellectual egotists, they have been portrayed either as libertines who believed that they could claim a certain sexual freedom denied to other Christians, or as conservatives who embraced celibacy for fear that they might be tainted by sexual pollution.

These understandings of Valentinianism were developed largely on the basis of the accounts penned by the heresiologists. However, they have persisted even after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi materials, although the latter provide us with a rich mine of information that calls these opinions into question. Actually Valentinian gnostic Christians had a highly-developed consciousness of the sacred when it came to sexual practices: one which revered the marital bed but reserved it for the advanced Christian, the gnostic Christian, and maintained that all others, Christians and non-Christians, should forsake it. This belief developed out of a certain anthropology and understanding of conception which saw the sexual act as the sacred life-giving moment at which time the Spirit of God joined with the souls of the parents and produced a child. Through contemplative sexual practices, the Valentinians hoped to conceive children whose souls would contain an elect or morally-inclined "seed" of the Spirit. Sacred marriage was essential for giving birth to such children, who in turn would bring about the redemption of the fallen Sophia and the psyche.

Initial Considerations

In order to understand Valentinian theology and sociology, we first have to get rid of a number of outdated definitions and assumptions which lead to distortions of the historical evidence. A perfect example is the

widespread opinion that Valentinianism is a Christianized version of Gnosticism. In fact, it has become increasingly clear that "Gnosticism" is a modern typological construct based upon heresiological stereotypes and is misleading as a descriptor of historical reality.¹ Scholars have come to realize that traditional concepts of Gnosticism and its corollaries (as summed up in 1966 at the first colloquium on Gnosticism, in Messina)² were built on circular assumptions, leading to the erroneous idea of a kind of umbrella religion covering a variety of "deviant" groups in antiquity. The term "Gnosticism" came to stand for a form of religiosity characterized by a negative view of the cosmos and human existence, reflecting a feeling of nihilism contrasted with the yearning for a spiritual reality. On those premises, a variety of Hermetic, apocalyptic, mystical, and encratic traditions lost their distinctiveness and were subsumed under one and the same gnostic umbrella.

In fact, the Valentinians defined themselves as Christians, as active members of the Christian Church.³ This was their self-consciousness and self-identification. How can one ignore the fact that Valentinus himself was only narrowly defeated, in his bid to become Bishop of Rome in the mid-second century, and that he was considered a leading theologian and brilliant exegete at the time?⁴ In fact, Tertul-

¹ Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*; Markschie's, *Gnosis*; King, *What is Gnosticism?*

² Bianchi, *Origini dello Gnosticismo*, XXVI-XXIX.

³ Cf. *Gos. Phil.* 52.25; 62.31.

⁴ Markschie's attempt in his *Valentinus Gnosticus?* to distance Valentinus from Gnosticism would seem to be pointing in the right direction, if it weren't for the fact that he does so by arguing that Valentinus' fragments do not contain teaching about a Demiurge and other mythological elements commonly associated with Gnosticism. Thus, his studious book only serves to reinforce the problem of interpretation. Particularly problematic is Markschie's exclusion of patristic comments on Valentinus' opinions, which seems to be done only because it serves Markschie's purpose, but at the price of founding his reconstruction of Valentinus' ideas on only a few fragments that do not allow for a complete picture. In my opinion, since Gnosticism is a modern typological construct, it is inaccurate to characterize Valentinus as either a gnostic heretic or an orthodox theologian. If one takes into account patristic comments as well as Valentinus' own fragments, it is more accurate to characterize him as an esoteric Christian who began welding a Jewish-Platonic mythology about the origins of the world that included a Demiurge, the concept of divine emanation, and angelic involvement in the creation of the human being. He believed that he and those who followed his teachings were privy to a *gnosis* of the heart, the experience of God indwelling their souls. This teaching was not considered heretical during his lifetime but fit in quite well with the teachings of other Alexandrians like Clement and Origen. This teaching continued to be developed by Valentinus' students and eventually came to be considered heretical by the Church, although not during his lifetime. I would consider it impossible to think that Valentinus did not teach a Demiurge myth, given the fact that his four

lian even uses the words “genius” and “eloquent” to describe him.⁵

Valentinus and his students did not create their own churches, like the Marcionites, but instead attended ordinary services along with other Christians. In addition to this, however, they also met as a type of “secret society” in a lodge or theological school.⁶ It appears that, along with many Alexandrian Christians, they were of the opinion that Christianity consisted of different degrees, ranging from the neophyte to the initiated. Those who studied the teachings of Valentinus considered themselves to be among the initiated, privy to the esoteric teachings of the Church. They appear to have been very successful not only as teachers, but also as ministers of the churches. One reflection of this is the homily known as the *Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI, 1), delivered by a follower of Valentinus to his church. In his address, this minister preaches to initiated and ordinary Christian alike, since both are part of his flock. Furthermore, Irenaeus tells us that a certain Marcus was a very popular minister in town, and that this made Irenaeus very upset since Marcus was gaining members at his expense, in particular one of his own deacon’s wives!⁷

The Valentinians distinguished themselves from the ordinary Christian by their claim to a certain *gnosis*, which could only be gained through esoteric study and practices. Thus, it is more accurate to call the Valentinians “gnostic Christians” than “Christian Gnostics”. For some strange reason, most scholars have misunderstood the Valentinian call for *gnosis* as a call for pursuing intellectual and philosophical knowledge when, in fact, this could not be any further from the crux of the matter. What is the *gnosis* that they seek? In the *Gospel of Truth*, Jesus, who is called “knowledge and perfection,” proclaims “the things that are in the heart” (*het*),⁸ which he has received from the Father, as “the fruit [of] his heart (*het*) and an impression of his will.”⁹ Jesus speaks “what is in the heart (*het*) of the Father,”¹⁰

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students (Theodotus, Heracleon, Ptolemy, and Marcus), who were all from different geographical locations, taught striking similar versions of a Demiurgic myth. These cannot represent independent developments.

⁵ Tertullian, *Adv. Val.* 4.

⁶ Tertullian, *Adv. Val.* 1.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 13.1–5.

⁸ Gospel of Truth 20.38–39.

⁹ Gospel of Truth 23.35–24.1.

¹⁰ Gospel of Truth 31.10–12.

and his followers are admonished to understand "from the heart-(*het*)" that the light dwells within them.¹¹ This opinion is even expressed in words attributed to Valentinus himself. In his book, *The Intercourse of Friends*, he writes; "The law written in the heart (*kardia*) is the people of the Beloved—loved and loving him."¹² The *gnosis* they seek is "knowledge-how." It is experiential, and concerns mystical union with the divine, based on the love between their souls and God.

This is not to say that the pursuit of epistemological knowledge or "knowledge-that" was not vital to salvation. The Valentinians considered it important enough to write volumes of exegetical treatises and theological books exploring the nature of God and the human being, materials which they studied and discussed among themselves. In so doing, they incorporated and developed along Christian lines a Jewish-Platonic mythology about the origins of the world that included a Demiurge and the concept of divine emanation. But, like the Hermetists, the Valentinians thought that the pursuit of "knowledge-that" could only advance a person up to a certain point spiritually.¹³ The pinnacle of the spiritual journey was not "thinking about God," but the direct experience or "*gnosis*" of the Ultimate Reality; a Reality beyond the concept or idea of that Reality.¹⁴

The Valentinians, however, differed from the Hermetists and Jewish mystics in their insistence that this direct experience of God was impossible to achieve during one's lifetime as a human being. The best that one could hope for was a mediated experience of the Father through his Son, Jesus. In this, they were faithful exegetes of the Gospel of John. It was only on the eschatological plateau that direct vision and union with the Father was possible. And it was this final, ultimate experience that the Valentinians prepared for during their lifetimes.

The Psyche and the Dissemination of Pneumatic Seeds

There is no consensus among scholars about what is meant exactly by the dispersion of the pneumatic seeds, although when the subject is broached, it is usually connected to the Valentinian trification of

¹¹ Gospel of Truth 32.32–35. For the previous quotations see Attridge, *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 87, 92, 100, 102.

¹² Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.6, in Stählin, *Clemens*, 458.

¹³ See e.g. CH IX, 10; X, 5–6.

¹⁴ *Prayer of Thanksgiving* 64.8–65.2.

human beings into pneumatics, psychics, and hylics (standing for spirit, soul, and matter):¹⁵ Although academic discussions on this subject are confusing, they leave the impression that only the pneumatics are born with spiritual seeds and are completely redeemed in the End. This, however, seems to be based upon a misreading of Irenaeus' interpretation of the three natures of people. He writes:

They conceive then of three kinds of humans, pneumatic, and psychic, and material represented by Cain, Abel, and Seth. These three natures are no longer found in one person, but constitute various kinds. The material goes, as a matter of course, into corruption. The psychic, if it chooses the better part, will rest in the intermediate place. But if [it chooses] the worse, it too shall pass into destruction. But they assert that the pneumatic elements which have been sown by Achamoth, being disciplined and nourished here from that time until now in righteous souls (because when given forth by her they were yet but weak), at last attaining perfection, shall be given as brides to the angels of the Savior, while their souls of necessity, rest for ever with the Demiurge in the intermediate place. And again subdividing the souls themselves, they say that some are by nature good, and others by nature evil. The good are those who become capable of receiving the seed; the evil by nature are those who are never able to receive that seed. (*Adv. haer.* 1.7.5)¹⁶

Irenaeus tells us that the natures are represented by Cain, Abel, and Seth, respectively. He continues by saying that the material people fall into corruption. The psychic people, if they are morally good, will find rest in a place just outside the Pleroma, while those who are morally evil will be destroyed. Then he talks about the spiritual seeds sown in righteous souls, attaining to perfection as the brides of Jesus' angels.

He would therefore seem to equate this last category with the spiritual people. However, if one reads on, this picture becomes clouded since he states that *their* souls will rest outside the Pleroma and are subdivided into those who are by nature good and those who are evil. The good can receive a spiritual seed; while the evil cannot. These cannot be the pneumatics, as Irenaeus leads us to believe (see also 1.7.1).

¹⁵ For discussions of this topic, see Pagels, "Conflicting Version of Valentinian Eschatology," 35–53; McCue, "Conflicting Version of Valentinianism?" 404–416; Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfilment in Gnosticism*, 61–83. The publication of Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'*, came too late for me to incorporate in my discussion. But like other scholars, Thomassen identifies only the Valentinians as bearers of the spiritual seed.

¹⁶ Rousseau and Doutreleau, *Irenée de Lyon*, 110–112; Eng. trans. mine.

To explain this, we might assume that Irenaeus is conflating two separate traditions in this passage. He knows a tradition about the trifurcation of humanity, and he also knows a tradition about the duality of the psychics: those who live righteously, and those who do not, those who are saved through their works, and those who are not.¹⁷ If the passage is read in this light, it suggests that “righteous souls” sown with spiritual seeds refers to the psychics, and that the choice that a psychic makes determines whether such a person will become a bride of the angel or be doomed to destruction as a hylic. If this is the case, then the Valentinians were saying that *every* soul is born with a spiritual seed or the potential to receive one. Could this be the solution?

We might find the answer by investigating the function of the spiritual seed. According to the Valentinians, it is the spirit that animates or gives life to the human being.¹⁸ They speak of the inner core of the soul as the “spirit,” which exists as an embedded “seed.” These spiritual seeds are said to be the “marrow” of the soul.¹⁹ They are the factor in the human being that binds the soul to the body and makes possible a composite being. Thus the seeds are likened to “leaven,” since it is by them that two different substances are welded into one single being.²⁰ Now if this is indeed the function of the spiritual seed, then the Valentinians must have believed that everyone contained this element, or else some humans would not be able to function as a human being.

To make matters more complicated, the spiritual seed was also described as the “divine” dimension of the soul in contrast to the “material” or hylic dimension. The hylic dimension of the soul was considered a “tare” that corrupted the soul and eventually needed to be pulled out. It was also envisioned as a “seed of the devil,” since it was made of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the devil.²¹ The idea appears to have been that this demonic seed or spirit naturally corrupted every soul as it descended into the body, something hinted at in Valentinus’ letter preserved by Clement. In this letter, he discusses the descent of the soul and the appendages or spirits that have attached themselves to it. He worries that in the core of the soul, the “heart,” (*kardia*) certain evil spirits have come to dwell. This state he considers the *natural* state

¹⁷ For those two traditions, see *Adv. haer.* 1.7.5 and 1.6.4. respectively.

¹⁸ *Exegesis of the Soul* 133.31–134.5.

¹⁹ *Exc. Theo.* 52–53, in Sagnard, *Extraits de Théodote*, 74–76.

²⁰ *Exc. Theo.* 2.2, in Sagnard, *Extraits de Théodote*, 40.

²¹ *Exc. Theo.* 53.1, in Sagnard, *Extraits de Théodote*, 74.

of the soul, which can only be changed through the indwelling of the Son who sanctifies the heart with gleaming light.²² Since the soul languishes in this natural state of corruption, it is only by the grace of God that it can be rescued and restored.²³ This natural corruption of the soul is also mentioned in the *Valentinian Exposition*, which traces its origins to the worst of Sophia's passions: passions that the Aeon Jesus fashions into the carnal aspect of the spirit.²⁴ In the *Tripartite Tractate*, the human being is a "mixed creature" with a soul that is a composite of "those of the left and those of the right," its spirit divided between these two opposite propensities.²⁵

It appears to me that this description of the two seeds or spirits may have to do with the Jewish tradition according to which the soul is in internal conflict due to two opposite propensities, one to do good and one to sin. In rabbinic tradition, this is known as the doctrine of the two *yeseirim*, or two inclinations.²⁶ The place of the *yeseir* is in the heart, and it derives from the time of the first human being.²⁷ In the Qumran community, these "inclinations" were called "spirits,"²⁸ and it is likewise in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Testament of Judah*.²⁹ The *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*³⁰ call these spirits "angels." All this, of course, echoes the ancient assumption that certain spirits or demons invade the soul and make it suffer with passions.³¹

Baptism was considered necessary in order to remove the demons, and unction to install the Holy Spirit—the most powerful divine spirit, which would help to guard the soul from future demonic invasion.³² In fact, Valentinus himself states that "so long as the soul remains impure, it serves as an abode for many demons."³³ Further on in the same fragment, he writes that only the indwelling of the Son and the

²² Clement, *Strom.* 2.20 in Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 175.

²³ *Exeg. Soul* 127.25–32; 128.26–129.5; 131.27–132.2; 135.26–30.

²⁴ *Valentinian Exposition* 35.30–37; 37.20–28.

²⁵ *Tripartite Tractate* 106.19–25, in Attridge, *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 284.

²⁶ Moore, *Judaism*, volume 1, 479–492.

²⁷ Cf. 2 *Esdras* 4:30.

²⁸ *Rule of the Community* 4.2–10.

²⁹ *Epistle of Barnabas* 18.1–2; *Testament of Judah* 20.1.

³⁰ *Mand.* 6.2; *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* 20.2–3.

³¹ Cf. *Test. Dan.* 1.7–8; *Test. Sim.* 4.7; *Test. Jud.* 16.1; *Test. Reub.* 2.1^a–2, 3.3–6; Josephus, *Ant.* 6.8.2; *Hermas, Mand.* 2.3, 5.1, 5.2, 6.2, 9.11, 10.1; *Sim.* 9.22, 11.15; *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 9.9–12; *Clem. Alex., Strom.* 2.20.

³² *Ep. Barn.* 16.7–8; *Hermas, Mand.* 5.2; *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 9.19.

³³ Clement, *Strom.* 2.20; cf. Heracleon, *Frag.* [Brooke, .77]; Hipp., *Elench.* 6.34, in Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 175.

sanctification of the heart with “gleaming light” can rectify the situation. Certainly this is a reference to unction. This is also the picture of the soul presented in *The Exegesis on the Soul*: “when she fell down into a body and came to this life, then she fell into the hands of many robbers, and wanton creatures passed her from one to another . . . they defiled her.”³⁴ When the Father sees her in this defiled condition, he has mercy on her³⁵ and saves her through baptism and anointing, the “light of salvation.”³⁶

Things become even more complicated because, as it appears to me, the Valentinians did not believe that all spiritual seeds were equal: Some were superior to others. When describing the various aspects of the human being, the *Tripartite Tractate* states that although the “spiritual substance is a single thing and a single representation,” it takes variable “forms” that are determined by its “weakness.”³⁷ The psychic or soul substance is said to have a “double” aspect, inclined toward the good but fighting with the material body, which is weakest of all substances, thwarting the soul and driving it toward evil with its “many types of inclination.”³⁸

In the *Extracts of Theodotus*, this variation among the spiritual seeds is explained metaphorically in terms of gender.³⁹ Clement tells us that the Valentinians considered the begetting of the spiritual seed to be Sophia’s “finest emanation:” an interpretation of Genesis 1:27, “He created them in the image of God, male and female he created them.”⁴⁰ This birthing of the “finest emanation” occurred at the moment when Sophia gazed with delight upon the tribe of dazzling angels who attended Jesus in his descent from the Pleroma.⁴¹ The males are destined to become the spirits of the “elect,” including the prophets,⁴² while the females are fated to become the spirits of the “called,” members of the Christian Church.⁴³

³⁴ *Exegesis of the soul* 127.25–32.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.26–129.5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.27–132.2; 135.26–30, in Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2–7, volume 2, 144, 146, 154, 162.

³⁷ *Tripartite Tractate* 106.6–10.

³⁸ *Tripartite Tractate* 106.10–18 in Attridge, *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 284.

³⁹ Cf. *Val. Exp.* 39.25–27.

⁴⁰ Clement, *Extracts of Theodotus* 21.1–3, in Sagnard, *Extraits de Théodote*, 56.

⁴¹ *Ex. Theo.* 44.1; *Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.4.5; *Tri. Tract.* 90.24–91.10.

⁴² Cf. *Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.6.3; 1.7.2–3; *Tert. Adv. Val.* 29.

⁴³ *Ex. Theo.* 21.1, in Sagnard, *Extraits de Théodote*, 56.

The spiritual seeds mentioned by the Valentinians must be understood as “germs” of spirit. That is to say, they are not conscious or mature. The Savior has come to awaken and initiate their maturation process. Hence the type of spiritual seed a person possessed could be identified by his or her reaction to conversion to Christianity.⁴⁴ Souls with Elect or male seeds are said to be the souls of those Christians who immediately rush to embrace Jesus when they hear his voice. These are the “pneumatics.” Those who hesitate but eventually are converted to the Christian faith have Called or female seeds and are known as “psychics.” Baptism and unction are necessary for both groups since the demonic spirits that naturally corrupt the soul must be expelled, leaving a pure or clean heart for the Holy Spirit to indwell. In fact, the Valentinians thought that the Holy Spirit actually “mixed” with the spiritual seed, the heart of the soul, similar to what happens when a child is conceived from the mixture of two seeds in the womb.⁴⁵ In each soul, the Holy Spirit is on guard against future demonic invasion, and is “kindling” the seed, that is to say, giving it “life.”⁴⁶

The difference between the two gendered spiritual seeds is that the male seed is superior, containing within it already the “blueprint,” so to speak, of the Image of God. Hence it can naturally grow and transform the soul, from the heart outwards, into that glorious Image. This is what is meant when the Valentinians teach that the pneumatics are “saved” by their nature. The female seed, however, contains a less perfect “blueprint” of God’s Image, a “female” reflection of it. So more work is needed to bring it into the perfected transformed state, that is to say, to make the female into a male. In order for the soul to be thus transformed, it has to devote itself to righteous living in imitation of Jesus’ piety. This is what the Valentinians mean when they say that the psychics are saved through piety and good works. I might add here that both seeds were believed to benefit from the eucharist, which brought the soul into conformity with God’s Image, because the person was ingesting the divine man, in their words, the “Perfect Man” Jesus.

Sadly, however, if a seed was female, this meant that there was also the potential for continued tragedy. Because of its double inclination, it had the free choice to refuse God’s grace and damage itself with

⁴⁴ *Tri. Tract.* 118.15–119.16.

⁴⁵ *Exc. Theo.* 17.1–4; in Sagnard, *Extraits de Théodote*, 52–54.

⁴⁶ *Exc. Theo.* 3.2, in Sagnard, *Extraits de Théodote*, 40.

sinful living. In the case of the hylics, the third group of humans, these souls lost the battle against their demons. The Holy Spirit never infused them, and their spiritual seeds withered and died among the "tares." Thus the Valentinians believed that these people would be destroyed at the Eschaton.

Contrary to what has long been thought, the Valentinians were not elitists concerned only about their own salvation. On the contrary, their concern was for the entire Christian Church, and this is what they were trying to explain by means of their mythology. They were brilliant exegetes, particularly of the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul.⁴⁷ They wished to explain Paul's concept of universal salvation, while also taking into account his mention of those "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."⁴⁸ They believed wholeheartedly in the grace of God and his love, from which all believers, gnostic Christians and ordinary Christians alike, would never be separated.

The Valentinians were not focused on their own election as those who *uniquely* embodied spiritual seeds. Rather they worried over the integration of spirit and soul during the time that the soul or psyche suffered in an embodied state of exile, filth, and corruption. The systematic theology of the Valentinians seems to me to have been developed around this core belief. Its starting point is the human condition, the material body and soul. Even though the Valentinians were of the opinion that the soul had fallen into a corrupt state, they did not believe that it was completely lost or estranged from God. In fact, *the main point of their mythology appears to have been the teaching that some type of "seed" of the spirit dwells in every soul, and that the spirit is therefore integral to the human soul even in its corrupt state, because it enlivens the soul and integrates it with the body.*

They were teaching that the Real Self is not the physical body nor the rational soul, but a deeper aspect of the person, an aspect of the heart, an inner core of the soul. This Self was God in Exile. It needed to be awakened and cultivated. It needed to be transformed from its germinal state into a glorious being so that it could be united with its angelic twin. Finally it could become whole through marriage in the great eschatological Bridal Chamber, the Pleroma itself, on the Last Day. It is in these beautiful terms that its homecoming was imagined.

⁴⁷ Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*; Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul*; Pagels, "The Mystery of the Resurrection," 276-288; Pagels, "The Valentinian Claim to Esoteric Exegesis," 241-258.

⁴⁸ Romans 8:29.

*Spiritual Intercourse*⁴⁹

As we have seen, the Valentinians taught that the soul's condition is pre-existent, and that from the time of its creation it already contains two seeds, one spiritual and one demonic. Thus Clement remarks that they believed that the human soul consists of three substances: a pneumatic seed (which in some writings was understood to be either "male" or "female") and a demonic seed that infused the psychic substance.⁵⁰ Over this human soul was laid the human body, the "garments of leather" mentioned in the Genesis story.

Explaining the creation of Adam, the first human, along these lines was of particular importance to the Valentinians. They taught that Sophia had planted the male spiritual seed in Adam and the female in Eve; But this spiritual seed laid dormant, sleeping: a reference to Adam's fall into a deep sleep before Eve (along with the female seed) was cut from his side.⁵¹ In fact, Valentinus himself explained in a letter that the angels were afraid of the first human being because of "the being in him who had invisibly communicated a germ of the supernal essence." This being was "the pre-existent man." So the angels "speedily marred the work," apparently by enfleshing it, a process which involved its further descent and degradation through the appropriation of demonic spirits.⁵²

This is the juncture in the story where the Valentinians saw tragedy, and this tragedy concerns the immediate subject of the present volume: sex. We are informed by the Church Fathers on several occasions that according to the Valentinians, three natures were produced by Adam: the irrational one represented by his offspring Cain (hylics), the rational one represented by his son Abel (psychics), and the spiritual one represented by Seth (pneumatics).⁵³ This trifurcation was tragic, we are told, due to the unfortunate fact that Adam acted sexually out of his material nature as well as out of his spiritual and psychic aspects.⁵⁴ Adam's sexual behavior determined the type of spiritual seed the soul received: an elect seed (Seth) or a less mature seed (Cain and Abel). It

⁴⁹ This section is dependent upon my previous publication, "The Great Mystery of Marriage," 311-312, 315-316.

⁵⁰ *Exc. Theo.* 55.1.

⁵¹ *Exc. Theo.* 22.2.

⁵² Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.8 in Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 132.

⁵³ Cf. *Exc. Theo.* 56.2; *Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.7.5; *Tert. Adv. haer.* 29.

⁵⁴ *Exc. Theo.* 56.2.

was this less mature seed which generated the tragic potential; since it had free choice to advance toward salvation (Abel) or doom (Cain).

So due to Adam's sexual behavior, the spiritual seeds began to be dispersed in such a way that there were generated the spiritual or elect, who are said to be saved by their nature, the rational or psychic, who must work for their salvation, and the irrational or hylic, who are doomed. What exactly did Adam do to cause that situation? The answer to this question depends upon our understanding of Valentinian attitudes toward marriage, sex, and procreation. In my previous publications on that subject, I was under the false impression that the Valentinians taught only the infusion of spiritual seeds in their own souls, rather than in those of all human beings.⁵⁵ In what follows I will present a revised interpretation that reflects the actual Valentinian teaching about gradations of spiritual seed that infused all humanity and led to three types of people:

Previous scholarship is divided on the subject of Valentinian marriage practices, with some scholars advocating that the Valentinians were engaged in "spiritual" or "celibate" marriages, while others argue that their marriages allowed for sexual activity.⁵⁶ Elaine Pagels is even of the opinion that the Valentinians did not have a consistent practice at all: "Some of them ate meat offered to idols; some attended pagan festivals and were sexually active (which Irenaeus took to mean promiscuous); others claimed to live as ascetics, either in celibate marriages or in solitude."⁵⁷

These differing opinions appear to result from the fact that the Valentinian texts were written for "insiders:" people who already understood the mythology and terminology. Modern interpreters, like

⁵⁵ DeConick, "The True Mysteries," 225-261; "The Great Mystery of Marriage," 307-342.

⁵⁶ Segelberg, "The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel according to Philip," 198; Janssens, "L'Évangile selon Philippe," 79-133; Tripp, "The 'Sacramental System' of the Gospel of Philip," 251-260; Williams, "Realized Eschatology in The Gospel of Philip," 1-17; Williams, "Uses of Gender Imagery in Ancient Coptic Gnostic Texts," 196-227; Williams, "'Gnosis' and 'Askesis,'" in *ANRW* 2, 22; Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 148, 295 n. 34; Grant, "The Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip," 136-137; Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Philippe*, 50; Eijk, "The Gospel of Philip and Clement of Alexandria," 104; Quispel, "The Birth of the Child," 285-309; Quispel, "Genius and Spirit," 164-167; Quispel, "The Study of Encratism," 74-75; Quispel, "The Original Doctrine of Valentinus the Gnostic," 334; Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfillment in Gnosticism*, 121. See also her "A Cult-Mystery in the Gospel of Philip," 569-581.

⁵⁷ Pagels, "The 'Mystery of Marriage' in the *Gospel of Philip* Revisited," 454.

some of the Church Fathers, have created ambiguity by imposing their own definitions of various phrases on the texts, often assuming that the meaning of these phrases is consistent across different groups. In order to rediscover the Valentinian meaning, it is necessary to recontextualize the phrases within the larger Valentinian myth, while taking into account the more general mentality of the period. The phrases must make sense within the broader second-century worldview as well as within the larger theological framework of Valentinian musings about the human plight. In doing so, historical interpretation must be combined with literary analysis.

What do the Church Fathers and the Valentinians say about marriage and sexual activity? First, they state very clearly that it is a “great mystery” or sacrament reflecting the conjunctions within the Pleroma.⁵⁸ For instance, Irenaeus explains that the Valentinians interpreted Ephesians 5:32 (“This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church”) to refer to “the conjunctions within the Pleroma” and apparently associated Christ with the Anthropos aeon and Church with his aeonic spouse Ecclesia. Thus when Paul described the nature of “the conjugal union in this life,”⁵⁹ the Valentinians, according to Irenaeus, believed that he understood these conjugal unions to be a “great mystery” reflecting the conjunctions within the Pleroma.⁶⁰ This idea is repeated by Irenaeus later, when he mentions the Valentinian “bridal chamber.” He writes that some Valentinians claim to participate in “spiritual” marriages after “the likeness of the conjunctions above.”⁶¹

Clement uses this idea to contrast the Valentinians with several encratic groups that he vehemently opposes because they have a “hatred for the flesh,” which leads them to reject “the marriage union.”⁶² He applauds the Valentinians because they “take delight in marriage” for the reason that marriage is the syzygy brought down from the “divine emanations above.”⁶³ Does this marriage include sexual activity? Or is it a celibate “spiritual” marriage of the kind that is common in early Christianity? If we interpret this passage *within the context* of Clement’s

⁵⁸ Iren., *Adv. haer.* 1.8.4; 1.21.3; cp. *Gospel of Philip* 64.31–32.

⁵⁹ Rousseau and Doutreleau, *Irenée de Lyon*, 128.

⁶⁰ Iren., *Adv. haer.* 1.8.4.

⁶¹ Iren., *Adv. haer.* 1.21.3 in Rousseau and Doutreleau, *Irenée de Lyon*, 299.

⁶² *Strom.* 3.7.60.

⁶³ Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 195.

rampage against encratic groups, it is fairly plausible that he means to say that Valentinian marriage involves sexual relations, since he uses the Valentinians' position on marriage as a contrast to the encratic celibate option.

Clement contrasts the Valentinians with the Carpocratians, who he thinks participated in licentious sexual acts because they believed that by doing so they were imitating the primordial powers who had intercourse with one another in order to create the universe.⁶⁴ Clement is not upset by the fact that they are having sex with each other because they believe they are imitating the primordial powers (even the Valentinians do this; he infers), but because these relations are "carnal and wanton" rather than "spiritual."⁶⁵ He states that, "if these people performed spiritual intercourse (*pneumatikas koinonias*) like the Valentinians, perhaps one could accept their view."⁶⁶

What did Clement mean by "spiritual intercourse?" Certainly not sex generated by carnal desire, since he abhors such relations. And not celibate marriage either, since Clement portrays this encratic option negatively throughout his tract. This leaves us with a third option, which Clement tries to promote and contrast with the encratic position and which appears to depend on Stoic teachings:⁶⁷ marital sex for the purpose of procreation, controlled by the will rather than by lust. He tells us that Christians should

do nothing from lust (*epithumia*). Our will is to be directed only towards that which is necessary. For we are children not of lust but of will (*thelematos*). A man who marries for the sake of begetting children must practice self-control so that it is not lust he feels for his wife, whom he ought to love, and that he may beget children with a chaste and controlled will.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *Strom.* 3.29.

⁶⁵ Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 209.

⁶⁶ *Strom.* 3.29, in Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*; 209.

⁶⁷ For Clement's dependence on Stoic teachings for his view on marriage, see Pohlenz, "Klemens van Alexandria und sein hellenisches Christentum," 144; Spanneut, *Le stoïcisme*, 259–260; Noonan, *Contraception*, 46–49, 76–77; Broudéhoux, *Mariage et famille chez Clément d'Alexandrie*, 115–137. According to Eusebius, Clement's teacher, Pantaeus, was a former Stoic (*Eccl. Hist.* 5.10.1–11.2). On the connection between Musonius and Clement, see Wendland, *Quaestiones Musonianae* and his review of *Musonii Rufi reliquiae*, 197–202; Pomeroy Parker, "Musonius in Clement," 191–200. For an overview of Stoic positions on marriage and sexual behavior, see Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 50–107.

⁶⁸ *Strom.* 3.58, in Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 222.

*Contemplation and Procreation*⁶⁹

Are the mysterious marriages of the Valentinians similar to the procreative but self-controlled marriages that Clement prefers? Given their mythology of aeonic relationships which they believed to be procreative, it would certainly be accurate to state that they saw human marriage in procreative terms as well. Moreover, they describe aeonic procreation in terms of contemplative and intellectual acts, that is to say, the object of their thoughts during the procreative moment determines the nature of the beings that they generate. For instance, Sophia's focus on her desire and passion to "know" the Father resulted in an amorphous nasty miscarriage. Sophia's focus on the beauty of Jesus' attendant angels resulted in the production of spirit beings that were reflections of the angels. And so forth.

The connection between contemplation and procreation is very ancient: it stems back as far as the time of ancient Israel and even influenced husbandry practices. According to Genesis 30:37-39, Jacob placed peeled branches near his herd's water trough so that, when they bred in front of them, the flock would bear striped, spotted, and speckled offspring. Reproductive theories from at least as early as the fifth century B.C.E. in Greece reflect this concept. Empedocles, a Greek scientist and philosopher of the fifth century B.C.E., is credited with the opinion that the embryo is shaped by the imagination of the mother at the moment of conception.⁷⁰ This is proven to him by the fact that women who have fallen in love with statues often give birth to children that resemble them.⁷¹ Hence it was commonly accepted among the ancients that the characteristics of a child would be largely determined by the thoughts of the parents, particularly the mother, at the time of intercourse. For instance, in Soranus' *Gynecology* he remarks,

What is one to say concerning the fact that various states of the soul also produce certain changes in the mold of the fetus? For instance, some women, seeing monkeys during intercourse have borne children resembling monkeys. The tyrant of the Cyprians who was misshapen

⁶⁹ This section is based on my previous publication, "The Great Mystery of Marriage," 331-333.

⁷⁰ This belief seems very ancient and widespread. Cf. Kahn, *Das Versehen der Schwangeren in Volksglaube und Dichtung*, 42.

⁷¹ Empedocles, A 81.

compelled his wife to look at beautiful statues during intercourse and became the father of well-shaped children; and horse-breeders during covering, place noble horses in front of the mares. Thus, in order that the offspring may not be rendered misshapen, women must be sober during coitus because in drunkenness the soul becomes the victim of strange fantasies; this furthermore, because the offspring bears some resemblance to the mother as well, not only in body but in soul. Therefore it is good that the offspring be made to resemble the soul when it is stable and not deranged by drunkenness.⁷²

He goes on to remark that a woman must remain very calm and sensible throughout her pregnancy. If she does not, she risks not only miscarriage but may even produce a child that is malformed in body and mind because of her anxieties.⁷³

In addition to statues, paintings were also suspect, as we see in Heliodorus' *Ethiopian Story*. The birth of a white daughter to black parents is explained in these words:

During intercourse with my husband the picture of Andromeda (painted on the bedroom wall) presented her image to my eyes, showing her entirely nude, just as Perseus was taking her down from the rock, and it had thus by ill fortune given to the seed a form similar in appearance to that of the heroine.⁷⁴

In fact, the physician Galen did not allow images to be painted in bedrooms because "a monster... can be caused by a special action of the imaginative power of a woman having sex. It is possible that when such a figure springs to mind, the fetus will be disposed in accordance to it."⁷⁵

Certainly these ideas are based on a combination of two ancient beliefs, one having to do with ancient theories of the vision, the other with ancient theories of conception. A predominant understanding of vision stated that the image beheld was captured by the eye, traveled along the optic nerve, and literally stamped itself on the soul, transforming it: "The pleasure which comes from vision enters by the eyes and makes its home in the breast; bearing with it ever the image... it impresses it upon the mirror of the soul and leaves there its image."⁷⁶ This idea is as old as Plato, who suggested that the vision of the object

⁷² Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.39.

⁷³ Soranus, *Gynecology* 1.47.

⁷⁴ Heliodorus, *Ethiopian Story* 4.8.

⁷⁵ Pseudo-Albert's citation of Galen in Lemay, *Women's Secrets*, 116.

⁷⁶ Achilles Tatius, *Clitophon and Leucippe* 5.13.

touched the eye and was transmitted to the soul.⁷⁷ In fact, he uses the image of the soul as a block of wax upon which a vision received is imprinted like the stamp of a signet ring.⁷⁸

As for theories of conception, these were developed largely to explain family resemblances and to give function to some of the anatomical structures the ancients knew about. One popular theory held that the father implants his seed into the female, much like a farmer sows seed in the ground. The mother's uterus provides the environment for the seed to grow and be nourished by her menses.⁷⁹ There were a few authorities who thought that the mother actually provided seed from her own "testicles" and that it contributed to the formation of the child. These authors generally talked about the womb being a battleground for the two seeds, with the outcome of the battle determining whether the child more resembled the father or the mother.⁸⁰ This meant that the balance of four elements, qualities, and humors in the body of the parents would ultimately contribute to the formation of the fetus. In fact, the child's sex could be influenced by the parents' diet and even by the temperature and frequency of the baths the parents might take. At any rate, it was believed from both these perspectives that the condition of the mother's physical and mental state throughout pregnancy would impact the fetus' development.

*The Mystery of Valentinian Marriage*⁸¹

Given this reproductive theory, it should not be surprising that the Valentinian Christians prescribe a "correct" way for the aeons to procreate: they must work together as a couple, a *syzygy*, usually envisioned as a masculine and feminine pair (or, as in the case of the Marcosian version, as an androgynous being). Because the "fruit" of their intercourse reflects the attitude of their minds, when the aeons focus on the Father during their coupling, they will produce perfect offspring.

⁷⁷ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 22–23.

⁷⁸ Plato, *Theaetetus* 191a–196c.

⁷⁹ Aristotle, *GA* 4.1, 763b30.

⁸⁰ Cf. Hippocratic Corpus, *Nature of the Child* 4.1 [VII: 474]; *On Generation* 4; Galen, *Usu part.* 14.6.

⁸¹ This section is based on my previous publications, "The Great Mystery of Marriage," 333–338, and "The True Mysteries," 250–252.

This means that there is an "incorrect" way for the aeons to procreate as well. In this scenario, an aeon who acts without its spouse, brings forth offspring through a solitary act of procreation. The offspring will always be less than perfect because it has only one parent. And horrendous problems may occur when the single parent is also procreating out of lust: the offspring will then reflect that passion, having neither form nor beauty.

Since the Valentinians believed that the universe and all it contained was an "image" or reflection of the Pleromic world above, it is not surprising that they understood their human physical marriages to be "images" of the aeonic intellectual marriages. Therefore, the Valentinians appear to have envisioned two types of human marriage, parallel to those of aeonic marriage. Human marriage was procreative, but one form of it produced more perfect offspring than the other. The higher form of marriage included some sort of consciousness-raising during sexual relations to insure that the children would resemble God. Physical intercourse was not driven by lust, but was a matter of the will or intention. The lower form of marriage was less desirable, or rather, it was undesirable. It was a form of human marriage in which sexual relations were carnal, based on the lustful feelings of the couple. It did not involve consciousness-raising and thus the offspring that it produced was thought to be defective in some way. Better for the couple to remain celibate than produce such error!

It is not surprising that in the background of Irenaeus' polemic against the Valentinians we find fragments of this very ideology of marriage and sexual activity. He claims that the Valentinians believe themselves "to be perfect," "the elect seed," because they possess "grace" which has "descended from above by means of unspeakable and indescribable intercourse." Thus the Valentinians maintain that "in every way it is always necessary for them to practice the mystery of intercourse." But for the non-elect, sexual intercourse is dangerous because it is not performed as a sacral union but as an expression of sexual lust. Irenaeus quotes them as saying:

Whosoever being *in* this world does not so love a woman as to become one with her, is not of the truth, nor shall attain to the truth. But whosoever being *of* the world has intercourse with a wife, shall not attain to the truth, because his intercourse with his wife resulted from lust (*epithumia*).⁸²

⁸² Iren., *Adv. haer.* 1.6.4, in Rousseau and Doutreleau, *Irénée de Lyon*, 99.

Those *in* the world but *not of* the world, are the Valēntinians who will attain to the Pleroma. They are expected to be involved in sacral sexual practices as married couples. The psychics or ordinary Christians, however, are *of* the world. To be redeemed, they must practice “continence and good works.”⁸³ If they are sexually active, even during their marriages, they are involved in impurity and sin because their minds might be focused on fulfilling their lustful desires. Similarly, Tertullian reports that the pneumatics,

for the purpose of honoring the celestial marriages, [are required] to contemplate and celebrate the mystery always by cleaving to a companion, that is to a woman; otherwise (they account any man) degenerate and a bastard to the truth, who spends his life in the world without loving a woman or uniting himself to her.⁸⁴

The psychics are advised to bear the “yoke of discipline,” growing in the works of “holiness and justice.”⁸⁵ Epiphanius states, tongue in cheek, that the pneumatics can do anything whatsoever without concern or fear, because they will be saved from anything, while the psychics save themselves “by labor and just deeds.”⁸⁶

We should not be surprised that the *Gospel of Philip* identifies the “mystery” of marriage with procreation: “Great is the mystery of marriage! For [without] it the world would [not exist].”⁸⁷ Like Irenaeus and Tertullian, *The Gospel of Philip* knows of two kinds of human marriage, one that he calls the “marriage of purity”⁸⁸ and another that he calls the “marriage of impurity.”⁸⁹ The ideal human marriage is based on “pure” thoughts rather than mere “carnal” (*sarkikon*) activity, “belonging not to desire (*epithumia*), but to the will.”⁹⁰ Even in the carnally-based marriage, the marriage of impurity, the private moment of procreation is a “mystery.” If this is so, how much more mysterious then is conception between partners who enjoy marriages of purity where procreation is a matter of will rather than desire: “If there is a hidden quality to the marriage of impurity, how much more is the marriage of purity a true mystery.”⁹¹

⁸³ *Adv. haer.* 1.6.4, in Rousseau and Doutreleau, *Irénée de Lyon*, 98–100.

⁸⁴ Tert. *Adv. Val.* 30.

⁸⁵ Tert., *Adv. Val.* 30.

⁸⁶ *Pan.* 31.7.8–9.

⁸⁷ 64:31–32, in Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex*, 170.

⁸⁸ 82:5.

⁸⁹ 64:36–37; 82:5. Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex*, 170 and 204.

⁹⁰ 82:9.

⁹¹ 82:4–6.

The Gospel of Philip states that, in the “marriage of purity,” during sexual intercourse the thoughts of the couple must not be adulterous, focusing on another lover. For if this is unfortunate enough to happen, the child conceived will resemble the lover rather than the spouse: “The children a woman bears resemble the man who loves her.”⁹² Nor must the couple’s thoughts be focused on the world, for if this happens, the child will resemble the world.⁹³ Instead, *The Gospel of Philip* advises the couple to direct their love to God, so that the child will resemble the Lord: “Now you who live together with the son of God, love not the world, but love the Lord, in order that those you will bring forth may not resemble the world, but may resemble the Lord.”⁹⁴

“To resemble the Lord” was a redemptive concern based on a Christological premise. The Valentinians were very advanced in their discussions of the binitarian problem, compared to many other second-century Christian theologians. They had carefully pondered the nature of the relation between the human and divine aspects of Christ and had differing opinions or emphasized different aspects of the equation. From the literature we have, it seems that the discussions among them focused on a Jesus of Nazareth who was made up of a combination of things: he had a corporeal body but one that had apparently been transformed by his *enkrateia* to such a degree that it was not necessary for him to defecate.⁹⁵ He had a psyche or soul given to him by the Demiurge. He had an elect spiritual seed implanted in his soul by Sophia. And either at his birth or his baptism—the Valentinians disagreed about this point—the Holy Spirit, the aeon from the Pleroma, had entered him.⁹⁶ When the Valentinians write that they want to birth children who “resemble the Lord,” what they seem to mean is that, if possible, they want to bear children whose souls, like that of Jesus, contain superior spiritual seeds.

This important passage in *Philip* continues: when the husband and wife had focused their minds on God rather than on the passion of the moment, it was believed that they would draw a spirit or thought

⁹² 78:14.

⁹³ 78:20–25.

⁹⁴ 78:20–25, in Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex*, 198.

⁹⁵ Clem. Alex., *Strom.* 3.59.

⁹⁶ Cf. Clem., *Strom.* 3.59; Iren., *Adv. haer.* 1.7.2, 3.16.6; Tert., *De Carne Christi* 15; Tert., *Adv. Val.* 26–27; Hipp., *Ref.* 6.35.7; Epiph., *Pan.* 31.7.3, 31.4.3–5; *Exc. Theo.* 59.1–4, 61.7–8; *Treat. Res.* 44.22–26; *Gos. Tr.* 20:10–14; *Tri. Tract.* 115:5–11, 116:29–10.

or light or angel down from the heavens; which would then join their own spirits or thoughts or light or angels:

Spirit mingles with spirit, and thought consorts with thought, and [light] shares [with light] . . . If you become [a spirit], it is the spirit which will be joined to you. If you become thought, it is thought which will mingle with you. If you become light, it is the light which will share with you. If you become one of those who belong above, it is those who belong above who will rest upon you.⁹⁷

Thus *The Gospel of Philip* states, regarding this mysterious moment of conception, that “[i]t belongs not to the darkness or the night but to the day and the light.”⁹⁸ During intercourse, the mingling of the parent’s spirits or angels together with the spirit or angel from above somehow resulted in the actual conception of the child’s spirit-seeded soul. This is alluded to in *The Exegesis on the Soul* too. When the soul adorns itself in beauty, she “enjoys” (*mate*) her beloved bridegroom, the son sent by the Father. As she is loved by him (*me*) at the moment of intercourse when he ejaculates his seed into her, she receives from him “the life-giving spirit,” so that by him she bears “good children.” This is called “the great, perfect marvel of birth.”⁹⁹

The language of this last-mentioned passage suggests to me that the Valentinians may not have been opposed to *eros*. The Coptic term *me* can render the Greek *eros*. So the Valentinian lovers appear to have made a distinction between *eros* and *epithumia*, between sexual pleasure and lust, between lovemaking and hedonism. They were certainly opposed to carnality, but perhaps not to sexual pleasure between married partners. In the Valentinian texts we do not encounter anything reminiscent of Augustine’s reproach of *eros*, the idea that sex should ideally be no more than a handshake. For the Valentinians, sex seems to have been understood as a delightful and sacred experience at the same time, when the souls of the parents mingled with the heavenly powers, resulting in the conception of a spiritually superior child, one that would be morally-inclined and redeemable, if not elect.

⁹⁷ 78:29–79:5, in Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex*, 198–200.

⁹⁸ 82:9–10.

⁹⁹ 133.31–134.5.

*The Embodiment of Souls and Redemption*¹⁰⁰

These ideas about conception may seem far-fetched to us today, but they actually reflect knowledge of ancient theological, philosophical and medical discussions. There were at least three prevailing theories about the origin of a person's psyche or soul.¹⁰¹ The most common theory among Greek theologians was creationism: each individual soul was created independently by God at the moment of its infusion into the body.¹⁰² Another theory was traducianism: each soul was believed to be generated from the souls of the parents, somehow transmitted through the semen which functioned as the "channel" (*traducem*).¹⁰³ The third theory was pre-existence: all souls had been created by God and existed prior to their assignment to individual bodies.¹⁰⁴

The Valentinians held to this last view: the psychic and the pneumatic stuff were pre-existent and, in fact, pre-cosmic. After the Demiurge had fashioned the physical and psychic bodies, Sophia (or the Logos) implanted pneumatic seeds into them, apparently with the help of an angel or holy spirit. It appears that, again, we are dealing with ancient theories about the origin of the soul. Clement of Alexandria speaks of angels who assist at procreation:

An old man said that that which is in the belly is living. For the soul enters the womb, which has been prepared for conception by purification [menstruation] and is introduced [into the womb] by one of those angels provided to oversee birth, who know in advance the time of conception to push the woman toward intercourse, and when the seed has been deposited, as it were, the *pneuma* which is in the seed is adapted and this takes part in the formation [of the embryo]... And if the angels bring good news to barren women, so also do they infuse souls at conception. In the gospel, 'the babe leapt' [means that it is] ensouled... And because of this barren women are barren, since the soul is not infused, accompanying the depositing of seed for the retention of conception and birth.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ This section contains material from "The Great Mystery of Marriage," 338-341.

¹⁰¹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 344-346.

¹⁰² Cf. Cyril Hieros, *cat.* 4, 18-19; Epiph., *ancor.* 55; Cyril Alex., *in Ion.* 1, 9; Pelagius, *libellus fidei* 9.

¹⁰³ Cf. Tert., *De anima* 9, 20, 27; *Adv. Marc.* 2, 15; *Test. Animae* 3; Greg. Nyssa, *De hom. opif.* 28-29; Aug., *de Gen. ad litt.* 10, 23-end; *ep.* 166, 6-12; 190, 14-15; *De lib. arbit.* 3, 56-59.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Origen, *De Princ.* 1.8.3-4; 2, 9, 2; 3, 4, 1; Didymus the Blind, *Comm. In Iob.* 3, 3-5; Leo, *ep.* 15, 10; Victorinus, *In Eph.* 1, 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ecl.* 50.1-3.

The angels; according to Clement, encourage the woman to have intercourse with her husband when the time of conception draws near. After the semen has been ejaculated into the womb, the angels then deposit the soul at the moment of conception. In fact, barrenness is due to the absence of angelic intervention, not to some problem with either parent!

Why were the Valentiniāns so concerned about conceiving souls implanted with a superior spirit like the Lord's, one that might be "elect" or, at least, inclined to live morally? Because this would increase the number of souls that had the opportunity to convert to Christianity and be redeemed. The *Excerpts of Theodotus* tells us that procreation must continue in order to ensure that the pneumatic seed will be incarnated in souls that might become Christian converts. The Valentiniāns supported this doctrine with their exegesis of Jesus' saying to Salome that death will reign as long as women bear children. They said that Jesus did not "reproach" birth because birthing "is necessary for the salvation of the believers;" it must continue until all of the "seed" has incarnated. The "birth" Jesus referred to was the generation of the formless substance as the result of Sophia's suffering in the Pleroma: Before Jesus' descent from the Pleroma, humans were called "children of the female only." These children were born out of "base intercourse" and were "incomplete," "infants," "senseless," "weak," "without form," and "brought forth like abortions." But because Jesus came to earth "to separate us from suffering" and grant humans "form" just as he had done with Sophia, the Valentiniāns stated "we have become children of a husband and a bridal chamber."¹⁰⁶ A little later in *Excerpts of Theodotus*, Clement speaks of the advent of Jesus in similar terms, highlighting the transformation of the female seeds. As long as the "seed is immature, it is the child of the female." But after Jesus came, "it was formed, it was changed to a man and becomes a son of the bridegroom."¹⁰⁷ The "woman" is said to be changed into a man, and the Church here on earth into "angels."¹⁰⁸

At the Eschaton, when the Pleroma would open up as the fantastic Bridal Chamber, a great communal wedding was imagined, including a banquet, at which all the saved souls would be transformed into

¹⁰⁶ *Exc. Theo.* 67, Sagnard, *Extraits de Théodote*, 190–192.

¹⁰⁷ *Exc. Theo.* 79, Sagnard, *Extraits de Théodote*, 202.

¹⁰⁸ *Exc. Theo.* 21.3.

perfected bodies. The Elect or male spirits, and the Called or saved female spirits, would be equalized so that all the pneumatic seeds, as "brides" and matured "intelligent spirits," would enter the Bridal Chamber on the arms of their grooms, Jesus' attendant angels¹⁰⁹ or the Logós himself.¹¹⁰ Their souls would be worn as glorious "wedding garments."¹¹¹ These garments would then be stripped off and left at the door of the Pleromic bedroom, so that the brides and grooms could enter the nuptial chamber naked and join in the full ecstasy of aeonic embrace and marriage, an idea which Tertullian attributes to Valentinus himself.¹¹² Their entrance is described by Tertullian as "the angels of the males" together with the female seeds who will be received by Jesus and become a unity in the Pleroma.¹¹³

Thus the Eschaton and entrance into the Pleromic Bridal Chamber would correct what Adam had perpetuated in the beginning: the dispersion of the spirit in immature form within the corrupted soul. Since Adam had procreated from his material aspect, he had been acting from carnality, from lust. Therefore the child he bore, Cain, had a soul inclined toward evil, one whose spiritual seed was easily overcome by the presence of powerful demons and passions. The conception of Abel, on the other hand, was believed to have taken place in such a way that he acquired a soul with a pneumatic seed, but one that was able to respond positively, to live righteously and be redeemed. Seth's soul, finally, was endowed with an elect spiritual seed because his conception was marked by Adam's spiritual aspect, that is the raising of Adam's soul to the heights of heaven as he lovingly embraced Eve. It was this form of lovemaking that the Valentinians considered sacred and believed would lead to their own redemption, which was nothing less than the redemption of God himself.

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¹⁰⁹ Iren., *Adv. haer.* 1.7.1; 1.7.5.

¹¹⁰ *Exc. Theo.* 21.3.

¹¹¹ *Exc. Theo.* 61.8.

¹¹² *Adv. Val.* 32.

¹¹³ *Val. Exp.* 39.22-39.

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