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Was Gnosis Necessary to the Gnostic after His Death? A Few Remarks on NHC V, 3: 32,28–35,26 from *The First Apocalypse of James*

Abstract. In this paper I would like to examine whether the Gnostic should demonstrate, in his posthumous ascent, knowledge of gnosis. The basic source of my analysis is *The First Apocalypse of James* (NHC V, 3) but also another Gnostic text, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V,5) as well as the polemical evidences: the *Against Heresies* by Irenaeus of Lyon and *The Excerpta ex Theodoto* by Clement of Alexandria. The answer to the title question is important because, among others, the sources and the scholars often emphasize the significance of magical and ritual means during the ascent of the Gnostic through individual heavenly spheres.

Keywords: posthumous ascent of soul, Gnosticism, gnosis, mythical narrative

In *The First Apocalypse of James* (NHC V, 3: 24, 10–44,10), the Coptic text which come from the Nag Hammadi discovery,¹ we find a passage – which is frequently commented and even considered the most important in the whole work – talking about the ascent of the soul through heavenly spheres and about obstructing this activity by the archons. The mentioned description was presented by resurrected Jesus Christ (named “the Lord” or “Rabbi”) to

¹ The Greek original of *The First Apocalypse of James* was probably written at the end of 2nd century and its translation into Coptic was made in the second half of 3rd century or in the first half of the 4th century (Myszor, 2000, p. 59; Pearson, 2007, p. 232; Schoedel, 1979, p. 67).

James the Just (NHC V, 3: 32, 2–3; the edition: Schoedel, 1979, pp. 65–103), which is presented by the Christian tradition as “a leader, special disciple of Jesus, confidant of his mysteries” (Myszor, 2000, p. 58).² What makes progressing of the soul on its path difficult, in the vision presented by Jesus to James, are questions asked the soul by the archons. This questioning we can divided into two sessions. In the first (NHC V, 3: 33, 15–34, 20) the archons-collectors (ΤΕΛΩΝΗC; NHC V, 3: 33, 8) ask following questions and James (his soul), as a model Gnostic, should answer as follows:

“Who are you or where are you from?”
 “I am a son, and I am from the Father”.

“What sort of son are you, and to what father do you belong?”
 “I am from the Pre-[existent] Father, and a son in the Pre-existent”.

[“What did you come for?”]
 [“I came] in the [Pre-existent One] that I might [see ours ones and these] that [are alien”.]

„[] [of] alien ones?”
 „They are not entirely alien, but they are from Achamoth, who is the woman. And these she made as she brought this generation down from the Pre-existent One. So then they are not alien, but they are ours. They are indeed ours because she who is mistress of them is from the Pre-existent One. At the same time they are alien because the Pre-existent One did not have link with her, when she later made them.”

“Where will you go?”
 “To the place from which I have come, there shall I return.”³

² According to source analysis by Wincenty Myszor, James the Just was a bishop of Jerusalem and martyr, who is mentioned by the sources as the brother of the Jesus. Christ revealed himself to James after his resurrection in a special way. The latter represented a Judeo-Christian circle associated with Judaism, Myszor, 2000, p. 58. Moreover James the Just is included in the so-called “the brothers of the Lord” i.e. who have proximal or further kinship with Jesus (Jakub, Jakub brat Pański, 2002, p. 129).

³ ΝΤΚ̄ ΝΙΜ Η̄ ΝΤΚ̄ ΟΥΕΒΟΛ ΤΩΝ·
 ΑΝΑΚ ΟΥΩΗΡΕ ΑΥΩ ΑΝΟΚ ΟΥΕΒΟΛ ΖΜ̄ ΠΙΩΤ·
 ΝΤΚ̄ {ΠΑ}ΑΥ ΝΩΗΡΕ· ΑΥΩ ΝΤΚ̄ ΠΑΝΙΜ ΝΕΙΩΤ·
 ΑΝΟΚ ΟΥΕΒΟΛ ΖΜ̄ ΠΙΩΤ ΕΤΡ̄ ΩΟΡΠ̄ [ΝΩΟΠ·] ΟΥΩΗΡΕ ΔΕ Ε4ΖΜ̄
 ΠΕΤ[Ρ̄] ΩΟΡΠ̄ ΝΩΟΠ[·]

ΑΥ[
 ΖΜ̄ ΠΗ[χε ειε[[·.]ΕΤ[
 [[Ν̄]ΝΙΩΜΜΟ·

The second session of questioning the soul by the archonts (NHC V, 3: 34,20–35,26) is – besides description of the circumstances in which this happens – a statement of James to three archons-detainers (ϲΕϲΑΜΑΖΤΕ; NHC V, 3: 34, 22); I quote only the statement:

[I am] a vessel [which is precious] much more than [a woman] [which] [] of the one (fem.) whom you [] for [] her root. You (pl.), too, will be sober []. But I shall call [upon] the imperishable knowledge/gnosis, which is Sophia, who is in the Father (and) who is the mother of Achamoth. Achamoth had no father nor male consort, but she is a woman from a woman. She made you (pl.) without a male, since she was alone (and) in ignorance as to what [lives through] her mother because she thought that she alone existed. But [I] shall cry out to her mother⁴.

* * *

In this paper I would like to examine whether the Gnostic – represented in the analysed writing from Nag Hammadi by James – should demonstrate, in his posthumous ascent, knowledge of gnosis. I divided my research proceedings into three parts. In the first of them, I will determine whether in the discussed writing from Nag Hammadi it is talking about the posthumous ascent indeed. In the second one, I will deal with the issue whether the answers, given by the soul of the Gnostic to the archons, required knowledge of the mythical narrative. And in the final one, I will study whether we can define the Gnostic mythical narrative as gnosis.

ΖΕΝΩΜΜΟ ΑΝ ΕΠΤΗΡΪ ΝΕ [Α]ΛΛΑ ΖΕΝΕΒΟΛ ΖΝΝ Α[ΧΑ]ΜΩΘ ΝΕ· ΕΤΕ ΤΕCΖΙΜΕ· ΑΥΩ ΝΑΪ ΑCΤΑΜΙΟΥΥ ΕCΕΙΝΕ ΜΠΙΓΕΝΟC ΕΠΕCΗΤ· ΕΒΟΛ ΖΜ ΠΗ ΕΤΡ ΨΟΡΠ̄ ΝΨΟΟΠ̄· ΑΡΑ ΖΕΝΩΜΜΟ ΑΝ ΝΕ· ΑΛΛΑ ΝΕΤΕ ΝΟΥΝ ΝΕ· ΝΕΤΕ ΝΟΥΝ ΜΕΝ ΝΕ· ΧΕ ΤΕ ΤΟ ΝΧΘΕΙC ΕΡΟΥΥ· ΟΥΕΒΟΛ ΤΕ ΖΜ ΠΕΤΡ ΨΟΡΠ̄ ΝΨΟΟΠ̄· ΖΕΝΩΜΜΟ ΔΕ ΝΕ ΚΑΤΑ ΠΕΪ ΧΕ ΠΕΤΡ ΨΟΡΠ̄ ΝΨΟΟΠ̄ ΜΠΕϲΡΚΟΙΝΩΝΙ ΕΡΟC[·] ΤΟΤΕ ΕCΝΑΤΑΜΙΟΥΥ·

ΕΚΝΑΒΩΚ ΕΤΩΝ·

ΕΠΜΑ ΕΤΑΪΕΪ ΕΒΟΛ ΜΜΑΥ ΕΪΝΑΒΩΚ ΟΝ ΕΜΑΥ·, NHC V, 3: 33, 15–34, 20. In the quotation I omitted the phrases connecting the proper parts of the dialogue. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, pp. 85, 87, 89, with my small amendments in which I used supplements of the text from Polish translation: Myszor, 2000, p. 65).

⁴ []Κ ΟΥCΚΕ[Υ][ΟC]ΖΟΥΟ Ν[[]·Ο Π[] ..[]ΤΕ ΝΤΕ ΤΕΤΕΤ̄.Ε. [...] CΕ ΓΑΡ [ΝΑΤ̄Ν [...] Ε ΤΕCΝΟΥΝΕ· ΝΤΩΤ[Ν ΖΩΤ]ΤΗΥΤ̄Ν ΤΕΤΝΑΡΝΕΦΙ ΑΝ[...] ΑΝΟΚ ΔΕ Τ̄ΝΑΩΨ ΕΡΑΪ [ΕΧ̄Ν] Τ̄ΓΝΩCΙC ΝΝΑΤΤΑΚΟ ΕΤΕ [Τ] CΟΦΙΑ ΤΕ ΤΗ ΕΤΨΟΟΠ̄ ΖΜ ΠΙΩΤ· ΕΤΕ ΤΜΑΑΥ ΤΕ ΝΤΕ ΑΧΑΜΩΘ· ΜΠΕ ΕΙΩΤ ΨΩΠΕ ΝΝΑΧΑΜΩΘ· ΟΥΤΕ [ΟΥCΥ]ΖΥΓΟC ΝΖΟΥΥΤ· ΑΛΛΑ [Ο]Υ[CΖΙ] ΜΕ ΤΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΝΝ ΟΥCΖΙΜ[Ε Α]CΤΑΜΙΕ ΤΗΥΤ̄Ν ΕΧ̄Ν Ζ[ΟΟ]ΥΤ ΕCΨΟΟΠ̄ ΟΥΑΑC·ΕCΕ ΝΝΑΤΜΜΕ ΕΝΕΤ[Ο]Ν̄Ζ [ΖΝ] ΤΕCΜΑΑΥ· ΕCΜΕΕΥΕ ΧΕ ΝΤΟC ΟΥΑΑC ΠΕΤΨΟΟΠ̄ [ΑΝΟ]Κ ΔΕ Τ̄ΝΑΧΙ ΨΚΑΚ ΕΡΑΪ ΟΥΒΕ ΤΕCΜΑΑΥ·, NHC V, 3: 34,26–35,19. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, pp. 89, 91, with my small amendments in which I used supplements of the text from Polish translation: Myszor, 2000, p. 66).

1. The Posthumous Ascent

The first issue which I want to explain is what ascent are we talking about: posthumous one or during the lifetime of the Gnostic? Although, according to the opinion of some scholars (Lewis, 2009, pp. 543–545; Pearson, 2007, p. 230), this is the posthumous ascent, it is worth to study the text of the *Apocalypse of James* itself and a place in the treatise *Against Heresies* (*Adversus Haereses*) by Irenaeus of Lyon (*Adv. haer.* I, 21, 5; the edition: Irénée de Lyon, 1979) where passage which we know from the *Apocalypse of James* is quoted almost literary.

The part about questioning the soul by the archons is preceded by a passage about the passion (in the docetic version), death and resurrection of Jesus (NHC V, 3: 30, 13–32, 12) as well as about future martyrdom of James himself: „The Lord said to him: James, thus you will undergo these sufferings, but do not be sad. For the flesh is timid, it will receive what has been ordained for it. But as for you, do not be [timid] or afraid.”⁵ Moreover the beginning of an account about the ascent of the soul of James says that we will talk about salvation: „The Lord [said] to [him:] [James,] behold, I shall reveal to you your redemption.”⁶ So, we can assume that such a general semantic context (martyrdom–death–salvation) suggests that the soul of James will ascend through heavenly spheres after his death. This conclusion is well proven by the evidence of Irenaeus of Lyon:

There are others who redeem the dead at their last moment, pouring oil and water on their heads, or the aforesaid ointment with water and aforesaid invocations, so that they may become incomprehensible and invisible to the Archons and Powers and their inner man may ascend above the invisible regions, abandoning the body to the created universe and leaving the soul with the Demiurge. And they teach them to say when they come to the Powers after death.⁷

⁵ ΠΕΧΕ ΠΧΟΕΙC ΝΑϞ ΧΕ ἸΑΚΩΒΟC ΖΩCΤΕ ΚΝΑΧΙ ΝΝΕΙΜΚΟΟZ· ΑΛΛΑ ΜΠΡϞΙ ΩΝΖΗΤ ἸCΑΡΑΞ ΓΑΡ ΟΥΘΑΒΖΗΤ ΤΕ· CΝΑΧΙ ΠΕΝΤΑΥΤΑΩϞ ΝΑC· ΝΤΟΚ ΔΕ ΜΠΡΡ [ΘΑΒ]ΖΗΤ· ΟΥΤΕ ΜΠΡΡ ΖΟΤΕ, NHC V, 3: 32, 16–22. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, p. 85, with my small amendments).

⁶ [ΠΕΧΕ] ΠΧΟΕΙC ΝΑ[Ϟ] [ΧΕ ἸΑΚΩΒΟC ΕΙC] ΖΗΤΕ ἸΝΑΘΩΛἸ ΝΑΚ ΕΒΟΛ ΜΠΕΚCΩΤΕ, NHC V, 3: 32, 28–33, 1. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, p. 85).

⁷ Alii sunt qui mortuos redimunt ad finem defunctionis, mittentes eorum capitibus oleum et aquam, siue praedictum | unguentum cum aqua et supradictis inuocationibus, ut incomprehensibiles et inuisibiles Principibus et Potestatibus fiant, et ut superascendant super inuisibilia interior ipsorum homo, quasi corpus quidem ipsorum in creatura mundi relinquatur, anima uero proiciatur Demiurgo. Et praecipunt eis uenientibus ad Potestates haec dicere, posteaquam mortui fuerint, *Adv. haer.* I, 21, 5. (The translation: Grant, 1997, pp. 65–66).

2. The Gnostic mythical narrative

The next issue which I want to raise in the context of the posthumous ascent of the Gnostic's soul is whether the answers given by this soul to the archons required knowledge of the mythical narrative. It should be added that although Irenaeus's account communicates very accurately answers which we find in the *Apocalypse of James*, it do not give questions of the archons; but with the perspective our analyse it does not matter.

James, the model Gnostic, during the first session should answer that he is a son who is from the Pre-existent Father. More precise explanation of this filiation is found at the beginning of discussed writing when Jesus says that James is his spiritual brother („my brother not according to matter”⁸) and subsequently that „two (come) from Him-who-is. (And) as for me, [I] am before you.”⁹ As regards the Pre-existent Father, in the text of the *Apocalypse of James* we find the following clarifications: “nothing existed except Him-who-is”¹⁰ – he is the only being as well as “he is unnameable and ineffable”¹¹ – he is impossible to understand using language. Irenaeus confirms account of the mentioned writing, citing the following statement of the ascending soul about the Father: „I am a son from the Father, the pre-existent Father, and a son in the Pre-existent.”¹²

Subsequently, James as the model Gnostic, should answer that he came in connection with the name of the Pre-existent Father in order to see “ours ones” and “aliens”. “Ours ones” are sons of the Pre-existent Father. In the next answer James explains, in turn, who are these “aliens”. He claims that they come from Achamoth who brought them into existence or put them “down from the Pre-existent One”, that is below the Pleroma. He shows also ambiguity of this “generation” (ΓΕΝΟC), because on the one hand they are “aliens” since they were brought into existence without intercourse with the Pre-existent One, but on the other hand they are “ours ones” since Sophia-Achamoth comes from the Pre-existent One indeed. Also here the evidence of Irenaeus of Lyon does not differ from account of the *Apocalypse of James* (*Adv. haer.* I, 21, 5).

⁸ ΠΑCΟΝ ΖΡΑΪ ΖΝ̄ ΘΥΛΗ ΑΝ, NHC V, 3: 24, 15–16. (My translation).

⁹ ΖΝCΝΔΥ [ΕΒ]ΟΛ ΖΜ̄ ΠΕΤΨΟΟΠ· ΑΝΟΚ ΔΕ [†]ΨΟΟΠ ΖΑΤΕΚΖΗ, NHC V, 3: 24, 24–26. (My translation).

¹⁰ ΝΕΜΝ̄ ΛΑΔΥ ΨΟΟΠ ΝCΑ ΠΕΤΨΟΟΠ, NHC V, 3: 24, 19–20. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, p. 69).

¹¹ ΟΥΑΤ† ΡΑΝ ΕΡΟC ΜΝ̄Ν ΟΥΑΤΨΑΧΕ ΜΜΟC ΠΕ, NHC V, 3: 24, 20–21. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, p. 69).

¹² Ego filius a Pater, Patris qui ante fuit, filius autem in eo qui ante fuit, *Adv. haer.* I, 21, 5. (The translation: Grant, 1997, p. 66).

Finally, James, as a type of the model Gnostic, says – in response to the final question of this part of questioning – that destination of his journey through heavens is the place from which he came. In other part of the *Apocalypse of James* we find more precisely defined destination of this journey. There Jesus says to James: “and then you will reach Him-who-is”¹³ and James asks Jesus: “then, Rabbi, in what way shall I reach Him-who-is.”¹⁴ So, the purpose of the heavenly ascent of the Gnostic’s soul is the Pre-existent Father. As for the purpose of the ascent of the soul, Irenaeus’s treatise confirms account of the Nag Hammadi text (*Adv. haer.* I, 21, 5).

The second session of questioning of James is in fact longer statement of the ascending one towards the guards-archons. He emphasises his value: he is “a vessel which is precious”. Then he refers to Sophia: she has a direct relationship with the Father (“Sophia, who is in the Father”) and she is “imperishable knowledge/gnosis”. He also talks about the guards-archons that they “will not be sober”, that is: at present they remain in ignorance. Moreover, Achamoth – mother of the archons – similarly like them, “was in ignorance”, that is, without consciousness of the pleromatic world. Irenaeus confirms the statement from the *Apocalypse of James* that the soul of the ascending Gnostic posthumously is more important than the archons because it knows its own origin whereas they and their mother – do not (*Adv. haer.* I, 21, 5).

As regards the second session – and maybe as for the whole questioning – we find remark about the archons: “and then they will fall into confusion (and) will blame their root and the race [of] their mother.”¹⁵ The Irenaeus’s treatise repeats this sentence almost precisely: „will be greatly troubled and will blame their source and the race of their Mother.”¹⁶

* * *

As we could see, in answers or statements of the soul of the ascending Gnostic posthumously, mentions appear, suggesting that the whole situation is clearly connected with any religious knowledge or narrative. These terms are above all: “the Pre-existent Father”, “the Son”, “Sophia”, “Achamoth”, “the archons”, “ours ones and aliens”. Because opinions of contemporary scholars (Myszor, 2000, pp. 59, 60–61; Pearson, 2007, pp. 189, 232; Schoedel, 1979, pp. 66–67),

¹³ ΑΥΩ ΤΟΤΕ ΕΚΝΑΚΑΤΑΝΤΑ ΕΖΡΑΪ ΕΠΕΤΩΟΟΠ, NHC V, 3: 27, 6–7. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, p. 75).

¹⁴ ΑΡΑ ΟΥΝ ΖΡΑΒΒΙ ΝΑΩ ΝΖΕ †ΝΑΚΑΤΑΝΤΑ ΕΖΡΑΪ ΕΠΕΤΩΟΟΠ, NHC V, 3: 27, 13–15. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, p. 75).

¹⁵ ΑΥΩ ΤΟΤΕ ΕΥΕΩΤΟΡΤΡ ΕΥΕΘΝ{ΘΝ} ΟΥΖΩΒ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΤΕΥΝΟΥΝΕ ΜΝ ΠΓΕΝΟ[C Ν] ΤΕΥΜΑΑΥ, NHC V, 3: 35, 19–23. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, p. 91).

¹⁶ Ualde conturbari et reprehendere suam radicem et genus Matris, *Adv. haer.* I, 21, 5. (The translation: Grant, 1997, p. 66).

and primarily the evidence of Irenaeus of Lyon (*Adv. haer.* I, 21, 5), connect *The First Apocalypse of James* with Valentinian current, we should find explanation of the mentioned topoi undoubtedly in this religion and spiritual tradition. It should be added that the versions of Valentinian narrative are well confirmed by both the original sources (*Tripartite Tractate*, NHC I, 5; *A Valentinian Exposition*, NHC XI, 2), and by the polemical evidence of Irenaeus of Lyon (*Against Heresies*, first of all: I, 1–8). We also have contemporary attempts of the reconstruction of this myth (Jonas, 1979, pp. 194–211; Pearson, 2007, pp. 156–160; Myszor 2010, pp. 56–57). So, let us try put the isolated terms from the answers of the Gnostic's soul in the context of Valentinian narrative.

The Pre-existent Father. In *The First Apocalypse of James*, The Pre-existent Father is the only true being and he is unknowable. In Valentinian narrative we find the Forefather/Depth (*Bythos*), who is unbegotten, inconceivable and ineffable. He gave out from herself aeons, i.e. the spiritual beings which made the Pleroma (the Fullness) because he wanted to be known by them. The Pleroma is arranged in fifteen pairs of aeons, in each pair there is a male and female aeon.

The Son (of the Pre-existent Father). In the *Apocalypse of James* the son of the Pre-existent Father is Jesus Christ, a communicator of revelation, as well as James, a recipient of it and the model Gnostic; more important of them is, of course, Jesus Christ. According to Valentinian myth, The Only Son is the first eon which was brought into existence. Moreover only he can contemplate or understand the Pre-existent Father, whereas the other aeons participate in the greatness of the Forefather only thanks to his mediation.

Sophia. According to the *Apocalypse of James* Sophia exists in the Pre-existent Father, she is gnosis and is also mother of Achamoth. For Valentinians she is the central figure of their narrative. In fact, it is thanks to her that mythical story unfolds, and on the other level: it is created the visible cosmos. Sophia, the last of aeons, was without contact with her male partner. Because of love, she decided to get to know/to understand the Forefather without mediation of the Son. Her action caused confusion in the pleromatic world and suffering for herself. The spiritual being Horos (the Limit) convinced her of inconceivableness of the Father, strengthened her and restored to her pair in the Pleroma. However passion and suffering, which were appeared in Sophia, became an independent creature. Horos removed it outside the world of aeons and thus Achamoth appeared. The mention in the *Apocalypse of James* that Sophia “is in the Father” may refer to two facts: 1. Sophia belongs to the Pleroma, often including the Forefather too; 2. Sophia may be here also a representative of female element, i.e. the figure associated with the Thought (*Ennoia*) who, according to Valentinian narrative, existed somehow with her Forefather all the

time. The words that Sophia “is gnosis” we can explain in this way that she is the first hypostasis/deity of Valentinian narrative who existed in two worlds: pleromatic one (where she came from) and demiurgic one (which, in fact, was created by her) – thus she has full knowledge of the dualistic universe of the Gnostics.

Achamoth. In the text of the *Apocalypse of James*, Achamoth refers, first of all, to the lower world, demiurgic one and to ignorance; she is mother of the archons, i.e. the guards of heavenly spheres. She is the most important figure for Valentinian narratives. She is hypostasis of passion and suffering of Sophia who could not know the Father; in other words: he is lower Sophia. Achamoth exists beyond the Pleroma and although she – being aware of her origin – wants to enter to the world of aeons, Horos, however, preserves her from doing it because there was still a passion in her, like in her mother, Sophia. Inability to achieve the Pleroma, causes that the negative feelings arise in Achamoth. Experiencing these emotions, he begs aeons to be able to enter the Pleroma. They send to her the savior with his angels into order he helps her. He separates the negative emotions from Achamoth and she, in turn, experiences happiness because of the Savior’s view. What is important, the emotions of Achamoth – like these of Sophia – manifest as the separate beings, making three substances which are basis of the visible world and the man. And thus matter originated from the negative emotions, psychical substance (substance of the souls) from repentance and pneumatic substance from happiness because of the Savior. In the Valentinian universe, Achamoth is located in the Ogdoad (this is kind of the eighth heaven: don’t confuse with a primary Ogdoad of aeons) that is in the place between the visible world and the Pleroma.

The archons. According to the *Apocalypse of James*, the archons disturb at salvation of James, the model Gnostic (NHC V, 3: 25, 20–21; 40, 16–17), they are the rulers of seven heavenly spheres (NHC V, 3: 25, 25; 25, 29) or of heaven as an ascent path to the Pleroma, in general (NHC V, 3: 26, 23; 39, 10). What is important, the text emphasises that they live in ignorance and oblivion (NHC V, 3: 28, 7–10). The archons, who ask the James’s soul questions, are named “collectors” or “detainers”. Understanding the archons by the author of *the Apocalypse of James* corresponds very well with Valentinian narrative and even with Gnostic one in general.

“Ours ones” and “aliens”. In the *Apocalypse of James*, “ours ones” are are, in fact, children of the Existent One; in the strict sense, these are the spiritual beings who originate from the Pre-existent One and from Sophia in her aspect connected with the Pleroma; in the broad sense, these are all entities who were brought into existence because everything, in fact, originates from the Pre-existent One. “Aliens”, in turn, are who originate from lower Sophia (i.e. from

Achamoth) and are ignorant – like her – concerning the pleromatic world, thus they are convinced about existence of the visible world only. The archons belong in “aliens” too. In the context of the *Apocalypse of James* we should refer to the mythical narrative of the Valentinians about three kinds of people whose specificity is connected with three substances-basis of the visible world: material one, psychical one and pneumatic/spiritual one. These substances, originated from Achamoth, are the result of manifestation of her feelings/states provoked by her ambition to enter the Pleroma. Thus hylics are linked with matter, psychics with the soul and pneumatics with the pneuma/spirit. The first of them are sentenced to destruction along with the material world; the second ones: if they receive gnosis, they will be able to partial liberation themselves from the visible world; and finally the third ones: they will return to the Pleroma because they will realize their pneumatic/spiritual nature after receiving gnosis. Thus “ours ones” should be understood as pneumatics with salvific knowledge (gnosis), a spiritual “generation” returning to the Pleroma. Whereas “aliens” – as we should think – they are not only hylics and psychics without gnosis but also the archons, so those who belong to the lower world and have no knowledge of the higher, pleromatic reality.

Based on this analysis, we can say that *topoi* which we found in answers of the Gnostic’s soul from *The First Apocalypse of James* place very well in Valentinian narrative.

3. The Gnostic mythical narrative and gnosis

Now, I want to go to the next stage of our research proceedings, namely to check how the original and polemical sources let us understand gnosis and what is the relationship between gnosis and the mythical narrative of the Gnostics.

Even *Apocalypse of James* itself gives us important information how the Gnostics (here: the Valentinians) understand gnosis:

Rabbi, if they arm themselves against you, then is there no blame? You have come with knowledge/gnosis, that you might rebuke their forgetfulness. You have come with recollection, that you might rebuke their ignorance.¹⁷

In the above quote we can see that gnosis is otherworld knowledge (that is knowledge coming from the pleromatic world), it is the opposite of ignorance

¹⁷ ΠΕΧΕ ΙΑΚΩΒΟΣ ΧΕ ΖΡΑΒΒΙ· ΕΨΧΕ ΣΕΝΑΖΟΚΟΥ ΟΥΒΗΚ· ΕΙΕ ΜΝ ΔΡΙΚΕ ΑΚΕΙ ΖΝ ΟΥΓΝΩΣΙΟ· ΧΕ ΕΚΕΟΖΕ Ν ΤΕΥΒΩΕ· ΑΚΕΙ ΖΝ ΟΥΜΝΗΜΗ ΧΕ ΕΚΕΑΖΕ ΤΕΥΜΝΤΑΤΟΟΥΝ, NHC V, 3: 28, 5–10. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, pp. 75, 77).

(that is of knowledge of the demiurgic world only) and it is brought by the pleromatic being such as Jesus Christ.

The another passage is worth to cite in which Jesus says to James as follows:

[James,] behold [gave you] everything [] from anyone [] For you have received [the firstfruits] of knowledge/gnosis. [And] [] that what is the [] go [].¹⁸

This statement shows the another feature of gnosis, namely that it was communicated by a pleromatic messenger (Jesus) to a representative of humankind or its selected group (James). In the summary we can say that *The First Apocalypse of James* understands gnosis as a salvific revelation begins a certain tradition.

As for understanding gnosis, it is worth referring to the another writing from Nag Hammadi, namely to *The Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V, 5) which belongs to Sethian current. It talks about a revelation whose the content are the repeated and ineffective attempts to destroy a peculiar human “generation” by god-pantocrator. This is the end of the said text:

These are the revelations which Adam made known to Seth his son. And his son taught his seed about them. This is the hidden knowledge of Adam, which he gave to Seth, which is the holy baptism of those who know the eternal knowledge/gnosis through those born of the word and the imperishable illuminators, who came from the holy seed: Yesseus, Mazareus, [Yesse]dekeus, [The Living] Water.¹⁹

In the above passage we could clearly see that gnosis is a revelation which was communicated by Adam (who received it, in turn, from “three man”, i.e. messengers from the pleromatic world; NHC V, 5: 65, 26–34) to Seth (i.e. to the progenitor and the eponymous of a Gnostic current known as the Sethians), who makes it a tradition (“his son taught his seed about them”). Reference to baptism, presented here, is probably an element of comparison than an allusion to a real ritual.

The motive of a baptismal ritual will appear in the last example which will be presented. I want to refer to a passage of the polemical text, but which is

¹⁸ [ΕΙC] ΖΗΤΕ Α[] ΝΖΩΒ ΝΙΜ· Α[] ΕΒΟΛ ΖΝ ΛΑΛΥ Α[] .Ε· ΑΚΧΙ ΓΑΡ Ν[. . . .] Η ΝΤΕΟΥΓΝΩCΙC· ΑΥ[Ω ΝΟΥ ΧΕ ΑΩ ΠΕ Π[ΜΟΩ[Ε]. , NHC V, 3: 42, 5–12. (The translation: Schoedel, 1979, p. 101, with my small amendments in which I used supplements of the text from Polish translation: Myszor, 2000, p. 67).

¹⁹ ΝΑΙ ΝΕ ΝΙΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙC ΕΤΑ[Α] ΔΑΜ ΒΑΛΠΟΥ ΕΒΟΛ ΝCΗΘ ΠΕCΩΗΡΕ· ΑΥΩ ΑΠΕCΩΗΡΕ ΤΑΜΕ ΤΕCΠ[Ο]ΡΑ ΕΡΟΥ· ΤΑΙ ΤΕ ΨΓΝΩCΙC ΝΝΑΠΟΚΡΥΦΟΝ ΝΤΕ ΑΔΑΜ ΕΤΑΥΤΑC ΝCΗΘ· ΕΤΕ ΠΙΧΩΚΜ ΕΤΟΥΑΒ ΠΕ ΝΝΗ ΕΤCΟΥΝ ΝΨΓΝΩCΙC ΝΕΝΕΖ ΕΒΟ[Α] ΖΙΤΟΟΤΟΥ ΝΝΙΑΟΓΕΝΗC Μ[Ν] ΝΙΦΩCΤΗΡ ΝΑΤΤΑΚΟ ΝΗ [ΕΤΑΥ]ΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΝ ΨCΠ[Ο]ΡΑ ΕΤΟΥΑ[ΑΒ] ΙΕCCEΥC ΜΑ[Ζ]ΑΡΕΥC [ΙΕCCE]ΔΕΚΕΥC [ΠΙ]ΜΟΥ ΕΤΟ[ΝΖ], NHC V, 5: 85, 19–31 (the edition: *The Apocalypse of Adam*, G.W. MacRae (ed.), in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2–5 and VI...*, pp. 151–195; the translation: *ibidem*, p. 195).

close to the original sources, namely to *The Excerpta ex Theodoto* by Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE). It is a notebook of this Church Father which includes quotations from the writings of Theodotus, a Valentinian Gnostic,²⁰ with his (i.e. Clement) commentaries.

Until baptism, they say, Fate is real, but after it the astrologists are no longer right. But it is not only the washing that is liberating, but knowledge/gnosis of who we were, and what we have become, where we were or where we were placed, whither we hasten, from what we are redeemed, what birth is and what rebirth.²¹

According to the above passage, gnosis is not only baptism but also answers to eight basic questions concerning present, retrospective and prospective situations of the Gnostic. They can arrange themselves into a certain narrative whole, so here we can seek gnosis understood as the mythical narrative.

In the summary of the above analysis, it should be said that **gnosis in opinions of the original and polemical evidences appears as a revelation** (i.e. otherworld knowledge coming from the pleromatic world) **which is brought by a otherworld being** (Jesus or other messengers of the pleromatic world), **and it becomes a starting point for a certain tradition. This tradition may be preserved as a mythical narrative which may be, in turn, used in ritual practices.**²² For our purpose, it is important that – from a certain point of view – we can understand the mythical narrative of the Gnostics as gnosis.

The conclusions

The research proceedings presented in this paper led us to the following conclusions. (1) The text of *The First Apocalypse of James* suggests that in this case we are dealing with the posthumous ascent of the Gnostic's soul, and the treatise *Against Heresies* by Irenaeus of Lyon makes that there is no doubt about it. (2) Then, in the answers of the ascending soul of the Gnostic we were able to isolate a few characteristic terms: “the Pre-existent Father”, “the Son”, “Sophia”, “Achamoth”, “the archons”, “ours ones and aliens”. As a result of analysis of the

²⁰ On *The Excerpta ex Theodoto* see e.g.: Casey, 1934, pp. 3–38; Pearson, 2007, pp. 165–167.

²¹ Μέχρι τοῦ βαπτίσματος οὖν ἡ Εἰμαρμένη, φασίν, ἀληθής, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο οὐκέτι ἀληθεύουσιν οἱ ἀστρολόγοι. ἔστιν δὲ οὐ τὸ λουτρὸν μόνον τὸ ἐλευθεροῦν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ γνῶσις, τίνες ἦμεν, τί γεγόναμεν · ποῦ ἦμεν, ἢ ποῦ ἐνεβλήθημεν · ποῦ σπεύδομεν, πόθεν λυτρούμεθα · τί γέννησις, τί ἀναγέννησις, *Exc. ex Theod.* 78. (The edition and translation: Casey, 1934, pp. 88–89).

²² It is worth noting that Birger A. Pearson talks in similar way about the role of myth in Gnosticism: “One of the chief characteristics of Gnosticism is mythopoeia [underlining: B.A. Pearson], the construction of elaborate myths through which revealed gnosis is transmitted. In giving expression to their basic beliefs, the Gnostics put into story form their insights into the human predicament and the means of salvation” (Pearson, 2007, p. 14).

Gnostic myth, it was found that these *topoi* place very well in mythical matter of Valentinian narrative. (3) Finally, on the basis of the original and polemical texts we could sketchily define how the sources of this period understand gnosis. It turned out that we are talking about a complex religious phenomenon because gnosis, according to the mentioned evidences, is a revelation which was brought by otherworld (pleromatic) beings and it begins a certain religious and spiritual tradition. This message may be preserved as a mythical narrative and this, in turn, may be connected with ritual practices, e.g. baptism.

To sum up, it should be said that the answer to the title question of this paper (“was gnosis necessary to the Gnostic after his death?”) is “yes”, at least in the context of a certain Valentinian current from which the writing *The First Apocalypse of James* originates. However the above conclusion, in the perspective the sources and studies, is not as obvious as it seems at first glance. The point is that the scholars much more emphasize magical and ritual means to neutralize the archons guarding individual heavenly spheres²³ than knowledge connected with the religious narrative of the Gnostics.

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²³ See e.g.: “The description of the menace to be encountered on the journey is a central theme in numerous gnostic traditions, as is also that of the overcoming of these obstacles. At this point magic and cult intrude for a number of gnostic schools, media which really run counter to gnostic self-understanding, but which do show that such practices also have their own decisive importance in Gnosis”, (Rudolph, 1987, p. 172). And also: “The ascent of the soul to the divine realm could only take place if it knew the passwords or possessed the seals that permitted it to pass the hostile rulers of the seven heavens” (van den Broek, 2005, p. 411). Such opinions are based, most of all, on the evidences of the Gnostic *The Second Book of Jeu* (ch. 52) and the polemical *Contra Celsum* by Origen of Alexandria (VI, 27; VI, 30–31; VII, 40).

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