

THE SABBATH AS METAPHOR IN THE SECOND CENTURY C.E.

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Already in the Second Temple Period the Sabbath became a fruitful subject of spiritualization and metaphorization, a tendency that took several directions.¹

One important direction was eschatological. Psalm 90:4 (“For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past”) was useful for solving various problems, such as how Adam could live 930 years when God had said in the day that he ate the forbidden fruit he would die.² This device was easily applied to the creation week of Gen 1:1–2:3.³ One common schema that resulted was the notion of the Cosmic Week, according to which history would last six thousand years and then be followed by a millennium during which the earth will rest.⁴ Another variation was six thousand years, followed by a seventh, followed by eternity, corresponding to the septennate, followed by Jubilee. This schema led easily to the idea of a timeless, never-ending Sabbath at the end of time, inspired by Zech 14:6-7 (“On that day . . . there shall be continuous day—it is known to the Lord—not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light”; cf. Rev 22:5).⁵

Perhaps related yet different from this eschatological Sabbath is Philo’s idea of a transcendental Sabbath, according to which God in Heaven keeps Sabbath all the time:

God alone in the true sense keeps festival. . . . And therefore Moses often in his laws calls the sabbath, which means “rest [ἀνάπαυσις],” God’s sabbath (Exod. xx.10, etc.), not man’s, and thus he lays his finger on an essential fact in the nature of things. For in all truth there is but one thing in the universe which rests [ἀναπαύμενον], that is God. But Moses does not give the name

¹Robert M. Johnston, “The Eschatological Sabbath in John’s Apocalypse: A Reconsideration,” *AUSS* 25 (1987): 39-50.

²*Jub.* 4:30.

³See Jean Daniélou, “La typologie millénariste de la semaine dans le christianisme primitif,” *VC* 3 (1948): 2.

⁴Some early sources that use or assume some variation of this idea are *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, *Testament of Dan*, *Apocalypse of Moses*, *Life of Adam and Eve*, Papias, and Pseudo-Barnabas (for discussion, see Johnston, 43). In Rabbinic circles the *locus classicus* is *b. Sanh.* 97a-b.

⁵Thus it is in *2 En.* 33:1-2 and *m. Tamid* 7:4, as well as various midrashim on the superscription of Psalm 92. *Mek.* Shabbata 1 on Exod 31:13 speaks of “the World to Come, which is characterized by the kind of holiness possessed by the Sabbath of this world. We thus learn that the Sabbath possesses a holiness like that of the World to Come.”

of rest to mere inactivity. . . . God's rest is rather a working with absolute ease, without toil and without suffering. . . . But a being that is free from weakness, even though he be making all things, will cease not to all eternity to be at rest [ἀναπαυόμενοι], and thus rest [ἀνάπαυσις] belongs in the fullest sense to God and to Him alone.⁶

It will be of interest that Philo uses the word ἀναπαύω, not the καταπαύω of Gen 2:2-3 and Exod 20:11 (LXX).

These conceptions of the eschatological Sabbath and the transcendental Sabbath originated in Jewish thought, and they clearly were not felt to nullify or replace the keeping of the literal seventh day of the week. Philo, for example, not to mention the Mishnah, had much to say about the literal Sabbath and its observance. Early Christians picked up and carried on these interpretations, but they soon began to use them as a rationale for abandoning the literal seventh-day Sabbath. The earliest unequivocal example of this is the vigorously anti-Jewish tract that we call Pseudo-Barnabas, or the Epistle of Barnabas, apparently to be dated near the end of the reign of Hadrian, soon after the end of the Bar Kochba rebellion.⁷ *Barnabas* 15 makes three points about the Sabbath. First, that God's creating in six days and resting on the seventh day means "that in six thousand years the Lord will bring everything to an end, for with him a day signifies a thousand years," and when Christ comes again in judgment, he will change the heavenly luminaries, and "then he will truly rest on the seventh day" (vv. 4-5). Second, flawed human beings at the present time cannot keep the Sabbath holy because they are not holy; but in the eschaton they will be able to do so:

Accordingly then we will truly rest [καταπαύω] and sanctify it only when we ourselves will be able to do so, after being justified and receiving the promise; when lawlessness no longer exists, and all things have been made new by the Lord, then we will be able to sanctify it, because we ourselves will have been sanctified first (vv. 6-7).

Third, in place of the seventh day Christians celebrate the eighth day (Sunday).⁸

The eschatological Sabbath and the transcendental Sabbath were ideas first generated in Jewish thought but taken up by Christians, usually in a way that was destructive of literal Sabbath-keeping. The third metaphorization of the Sabbath, which I will call the existential Sabbath, is one that I have not

⁶Philo, *Cher.* 86-90, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 2:61-63.

⁷*Barn.* 16:3-4 is believed to refer to the building of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on the Temple Mount in what was now to be Colonia Aelia Capitolina, beginning in 135 C.E.

⁸*Barn.* 15:8-9.

been able to trace to Jewish roots.⁹ It seems to have originated in Christian circles.

Matthew 11:25-30 is a Synoptic logion¹⁰ so uniquely Johannine in tone and flavor that it could be parachuted into the Fourth Gospel without causing the least disturbance.¹¹ R. McL. Wilson called the saying “a Johannine thunderbolt in the Synoptic sky.”¹² The second part of the logion is one of the most often quoted passages in the NT: “Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest [ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς]. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest [ἀνάπαυσιν] for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28-30).¹³

Unfortunately, an artificial chapter division obscures the fact that these words form the prelude to the Sabbath controversies in the next chapter (Matt 12:1-14), where Jesus defends the lawfulness of his liberal use of the Sabbath day. Human need, he says, may legitimately be succored on the holy day, for “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matt 12:12). As in Mark, Matthew’s Jesus claims to be the final authority on the subject of Sabbath-keeping: “for the son of man is lord of the Sabbath” (Matt 12:8).¹⁴ It appears

⁹At least I could not find it in Tannaitic sources or earlier. In later centuries, something like it in the form of odes to the Sabbath rest seeps into Jewish liturgical language.

¹⁰Evidently from Q; the first part is closely paralleled in Luke 10:21-22.

¹¹Besides the content of the logion itself, even the form is reminiscent of the Fourth Gospel. The use of ἀποκρίνεσθαι in this location to introduce this saying is somewhat unexpected, though not quite unique. One would expect this word to introduce a formal reply to a charge or a challenge (as in John 5:17), but here no one has said anything for Jesus to reply to, for Matt 11:7-24 is pure monologue. The word is characteristically, though not exclusively, used to introduce Jesus’ replies in controversies, especially in the Fourth Gospel. A simple count of occurrences of the word in all contexts yields fifty-five times in Matthew, thirty times in Mark, forty-six times in Luke, and seventy-eight times in John.

¹²Cited in Jan Helderma, *Die Anapausis im Evangelium Veritatis: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung des valentinianisch-gnostischen Heilsgutes der Ruhe im Evangelium Veritatis und in anderen Schriften der Nag Hammadi-Bibliothek* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 60. Helderma notes, however, the striking fact that the word ἀνάπαυσιν is lacking in the Fourth Gospel is perhaps because the author wanted to avoid a word that had developed Gnostic associations, using instead the words χαρά and εἰρήνη.

¹³The words are probably a parody of Sir 6:23-31 and 51:23-27, where Wisdom is the speaker. Cf. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 349. The Matthean passage is distinguished from those in Sirach in two crucial respects: Jesus is identified with Wisdom, and the Rest (ἀνάπαυσιν) is connected to the Sabbath by its contiguity with Matt 12:1-14.

¹⁴Cf. Mark 2:27-28. It is remarkable that Matthew, like Luke, omits the first part of the apophthegm, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,”

that the original issue was not whether the Sabbath was to be kept, but *how* it was to be kept.

In the LXX, ἀναπαύω and ἀνάπαυσις are Sabbath words.¹⁵ Often these words are used to translate the Hebrew שָׁבַת, as well as other words associated with the Sabbath, such as מַנוּחַ, although they also are used for rest in a more generic sense. Frequently, this rest is a gift of God, as in Isa 25:10 (LXX), a fact that is a significant background of Matt 11:28. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison see the verse as dependent upon the Lord's word to Moses in Exod 33:14, "My presence will go with you, and I will give rest."¹⁶

What is important to see is that Jesus in Matt 11:28-30 introduces a new dimension to the idea of the Sabbath.¹⁷ The idea that is introduced here has no parallel in Jewish literature that I have been able to find, though it is not incompatible with the ideas of the eschatological and the transcendental Sabbaths. I have called this rest that Matthew's Jesus gives to the soul the "existential Sabbath."¹⁸ By placing the two passages in contiguous relationship with each other Matthew links the interior experience with the day.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to note yet another variation because of its later Gnostic development in relation to the foregoing concept. In Rev 14:13, 11, we are told that they who die in the Lord will rest (ἀναπαύσονται) from their toil, in contrast to the worshipers of the beast, who will have no rest (ἀνάπαυσιν), day or night, from their torment. The

which is regarded as the earlier part. See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 2:304, 315.

¹⁵This can easily be seen by surveying the dozens of occurrences listed by Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament (Including the Apocryphal Books)*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 80-81. See, e.g., Exod 16:23; 23:12; Lev 23:3; Deut 5:14. This point was laid out carefully in an unpublished paper presented by Elizabeth Talbot, "Rest, Eschatology and Sabbath in Matthew 11:28-30: An Investigation of Jesus' Offer of Rest in the Light of the Septuagint's Use of *Anapausis*?" (presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature, New Orleans, 2009). Καταπαύω and κατάπαυσις are synonyms of ἀναπαύω and ἀνάπαυσις.

¹⁶Davies and Allison, 2:288. Against this, however, is the fact that Exod 33:14 (LXX) has κατάπαυειν, not ἀνάπαυειν.

¹⁷See n. 12, above.

¹⁸According to one possible interpretation, the same or a similar conception is seen in Heb 4:1-10, where the καταπαύω word group is used because the passage is a homily based on Ps 95:7-11, where that is the word that is used. See, e.g., Otfried Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief*, WUNT 11 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970); Judith Hoch Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Gospel of Truth: Early Christian Homiletics of Rest*, SBLDS 166 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 25-32.

future tenses used in this passage point to its eschatological fulfillment.¹⁹ But in contrast to the eschatological Sabbath seen earlier, the emphasis here is not on cosmic chronology, but on human destiny. Similarly in *2 Clem.* 5:5 ἀνάπαυσις is a synonym for eternal life in the coming kingdom (ἀνάπαυσις τῆς μελλούσης βασιλείας καὶ ζωῆς αἰωνίου).²⁰

The question may be raised whether these spiritualized understandings of the Sabbath supersede the literal seventh-day Sabbath. A negative answer can be given in the cases of the eschatological Sabbath and the transcendental Sabbath, for both the Rabbis and Philo carefully kept the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath. But what is the relationship of the ἀνάπαυσις of Matt 11:28-30 to the literal seventh-day Sabbath that is the topic of discussion in the following passage in Matthew 12?

I would argue that a close analogy can be seen in the antitheses of Matt 5:21-32, where Jesus deals with the commandments “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” He intensifies their force by underlining their interior meaning. By showing their spiritual and larger meaning he does not nullify their literal meaning. Similarly the deeper meaning of the Sabbath in Matt 11:28-30 does not negate the significance of the literal seventh-day Sabbath for Jesus, as indeed we see in the controversies that follow in the next chapter. The idea seems to be that the weekly Sabbath day is ideally the school of Christ for receiving the rest of soul to which the day points. Thus this logion does for the Sabbath commandment what Matt 5:21-32 does for the commandments against murder and adultery.²¹

¹⁹Cf. Johnston, 47; Helderman, 60.

²⁰This may be the meaning of Rest also in *Odes Sol.* 11:12, but it could be speaking of a present experience. Such is the nature of the Ode that the metaphor is ambiguous.

²¹The antitheses of Matthew 5, when formally analyzed, have three parts: (1) the *protasis*, which states the conventional teaching, “You have heard it said” (e.g., Matt 5:21); (2) the *epitasis*, in which Jesus contrasts his own teaching, “but I say unto you” (e.g., 5:22); and (3) the *catastasis*, in which he reinforces his teaching in various ways such as practical examples, “Therefore . . .” (e.g., 5:23-26). The passage in Matt 11:28–12:13 does not follow this neat pattern, but its elements are there by implication. The *protasis* is the Pharisaic rules about Sabbath-keeping. Thus *m. Šabb.* 7:2 forbids reaping and threshing, a reasonable deduction from Exod 34:21. When the disciples of Jesus plucked ears of grain and rubbed off the husks to satisfy their hunger, it was seen as breaking this rule. Although the *halakab* permitted the Sabbath to be overridden in the case of a life-threatening emergency (i.e., the principle of פקדוה נפשו, mortal danger; see e.g., *Mek.* Shabbata 1 on Exod 31:13), Jesus, in Matt 12:9-13, healed a chronic affliction that was not life-threatening, as was the case in nearly all of his Sabbath healings. The implied *epitasis* was: “I, who am the Lord of the Sabbath, give rest from your burdens by alleviating human physical need that distracts from devotion to God and that symbolizes spiritual need. The Sabbath is a day for physical and spiritual healing and doing good.” The *catastasis* is illustrated by the two examples of applying

According to the Matthean Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees in disputation with Jesus were missing this meaning of the Sabbath. They had the Sabbath day, but not the Sabbath experience. They kept the Sabbath outwardly, but not inwardly. From his perspective, they represented one kind of error²² regarding the Sabbath: they separated the day from the experience and discarded the experience. But in making this point, Matthew opened up the possibility of committing the opposite error of replacing the literal day with a vague spiritualization.

This opposite error is represented by the Gnostics.²³ They also separated the day from the experience, but discarded the day. If the Pharisees put too much emphasis on externals (using Matthew's perspective as the reference point), the Gnostics despised externals. Their radical dualism meant a rejection of everything material and physical and of everything literal, for the literal meaning of the Scriptures was, like the body, without value. The only thing of value is the spirit and the "spiritual" meaning of the text.²⁴ Accordingly,

this insight in 12:1-13.

²²The word "error" implies a value judgment, but I intend it in a historical sense: I am taking what I believe to be Matthew's perspective as the point of reference, and hence the standard by which other views are being compared.

²³About Gnosticism, there is now a vast literature. It probably arose from within Christianity, as the existence of a pre-Christian Gnosis has not been proved, but it is not impossible that it arose phoenix-like from the ashes of Jerusalem among disillusioned Jews after A.D. 70. Besides being radically dualistic, it was antinomian and typically anti-Judaistic. It was stoutly opposed by the Christian writers who were subsequently adjudged orthodox, but not without their being consciously or unconsciously affected by it. Some modern treatments of Gnosticism include Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983); R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986); Simone Pétrement, *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990); Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of an Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 2d ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); Edwin Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

²⁴Our knowledge of ancient Gnostic thought has been greatly expanded by the discovery and publication of the trove of fourth-century Coptic language codices discovered near Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. The most authoritative English translations with introductions are those in James M. Robinson, gen. ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). To the Nag Hammadi codices are added two other manuscripts from the separately discovered Berlin Papyrus 8502. The various modern translators are not consistent, however, in their translation of ἀνάπαυσις (the Greek term is carried over unchanged into the Coptic): some have "rest"; others translate it "repose." For this reason, I will use an

the true Sabbath rest is not a literal day, but an exalted experience or mystical state. So for the Gnostic Christians the ἀνάπαυσις of Matt 11:28-30 became a point of departure for doctrines that would have been recognized by neither Jesus nor Matthew.

The process of transition from “literal” to “spiritual” is illustrated in perhaps the best known work in the Nag Hammadi collection, the so-called *Gospel of Thomas*, in Codex II. It is of special interest for several reasons, but two stand out:

First, fragments of the work in the original Greek, discovered at the site of Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, have been known for more than a century.²⁵ The earliest of the Greek fragments comes from the second century, and when compared to the fourth-century Coptic version, they reveal that the text was somewhat fluid, undergoing various modifications. It is possible to detect a subtle intensification of the Gnostic flavor with the passing of time and indeed, even in its Coptic form, it lacks some Gnostic features.²⁶

Second, the work consists of a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus, without any narrative setting and without any obvious logical order.²⁷ The discovery of this document gave credence to the reality of the putative Q source, assumed to have been used by Matthew and Luke, and which was also a collection of dominical sayings. Many of the sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* have parallels in the canonical Gospels, but many do not.²⁸ Scholars have long debated whether the *Gospel of Thomas* is dependent on the canonical Gospels, therefore secondary to them, or whether it represents an independent witness to the transmission of Jesus’ sayings. It is the second view that has largely prevailed.²⁹ The picture that we are getting is that there was an original Jewish-Christian collection of the teachings of Jesus,³⁰ quite likely dating from the

eclectic translation where necessary and consistently render ἀνάπαυσις (“rest”).

²⁵Pap. Oxy. 1, 654-655.

²⁶Translations of the Coptic version and the Greek fragments are laid out in parallel columns by J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 135-141.

²⁷Modern editors have numbered the sayings, finding 114 of them. Consequently, we now refer to the work in terms of the logion number.

²⁸Elliott, 133-135, supplies a complete list of parallels. See also A. Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel According to Thomas: Coptic Text Established and Translated* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 59-62.

²⁹Thus Helmut Koester, “Introduction to the Gospel of Thomas” in Robinson, 125; Marvin Meyer, trans. and ed., *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 13. This does not mean, however, that everyone agrees with Koester’s judgment that the *Gospel of Thomas* transmits a more original version of the sayings than the canonical Gospels.

³⁰Even in its fourth-century form, the *Gospel of Thomas* still bears marks of its

first century, which, in the hands of people with a Gnostic orientation, suffered transformation into a document setting forth their views. This is not unlike what other Gnostic literature does with canonical Scriptures.

The Jesus of the *Gospel of Thomas* is a dispenser of enigmatic wisdom. As Marvin Meyer aptly says, “In contrast to the way in which he is portrayed in other gospels, particularly New Testament gospels, Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas performs no physical miracles, reveals no fulfillment of prophecy, announces no apocalyptic kingdom about to disrupt the world order, and dies for no one’s sins.”³¹ Salvation does not come by his blood, but by understanding his mysterious sayings: “Whoever finds the interpretation [*hermeneia*] of these sayings will not taste death” (*Gos. Thom.* 2, brackets original).

Six sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* speak of Sabbath or Rest (ἀνάπαυσις): 2, 27, 50, 51, 60, 90. One uses the word “Sabbath,” and the others “Rest.” The *Gos. Thom.* 27 survives in both Coptic and Greek (Pap. Oxy. 1).³² The Greek has: “Unless you fast to the world, you shall in no way find the Kingdom of God; and unless you sabbatize the sabbath [ἐάν μὴ σαββατίσητε τὸ σάββατον], you shall not see the Father.” The only significant difference in the Coptic is the change of “Kingdom of God” to simply “Kingdom,” which represents a closer conformity with Gnostic thought. The Coptic translator also apparently had difficulty with the expression “sabbatize the Sabbath” (which is indeed awkward also for the English translator!) and so rendered it (roughly) as “keep the Sabbath as Sabbath.”³³

Tjitze Baarda has studied this saying very intensively,³⁴ acknowledging that the saying may go back to a Jewish-Christian form criticizing the wrong observance of the Sabbath, “so that the sense may be ‘If you do not truly keep the Sabbath,’ or ‘If you do not keep the true Sabbath,’ or also ‘If you do not make the Sabbath a real Sabbath.’”³⁵ This would be in line with what Jesus

Jewish-Christian roots. Thus in saying 12, when the disciples ask Jesus who will be their leader after he departs, Jesus says: “Wherever you have come, you will go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.” Parallels to this manner of speaking are common in the Rabbinic literature. See, e.g., *b. Sanh.* 98b.

³¹Meyer, 10.

³²Pap. Oxy. 1 dates from the second century and is the oldest of the three Greek fragments.

³³A similarly awkward passage occurs in *Ign. Magn.* 9:1, μηκέτι σαββατίζοντες ἀλλὰ κατὰ κυριακῆν ζῶην ζῶντες.

³⁴T. Baarda, “‘If You Do Not Sabbatize the Sabbath. . .’: The Sabbath as God or World in Gnostic Understanding (Ev. Thom., Log. 27),” in *The Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. R. Van den Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfeld (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 178-201.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 199. Baarda cites authors supporting each of these renderings. The first part of the saying, he says, may have originally come from an encratite or ascetic source. Meyer, 81, says “keeping the sabbath a[s] sabbath seems to imply that one

apparently meant in Matt 11:28-30. But Baarda concludes that, whatever the saying may have meant in its original source, the *Gospel of Thomas* as we have it has transformed the meaning of the saying so that its significance is quite different.

Baarda concludes that the two parts of the saying make a parallelism and thus say the same thing.³⁶ “Fasting from the world” means the same thing as “Sabbatizing the Sabbath,” and “world” and “Sabbath” are equivalent. But the *Gospel of Thomas* opposes literal fasting (*Gos. Thom.* 6, 14, 104). “These passages demonstrate that within a Gnostic setting there is a rather critical attitude towards religious duties or ceremonial prescriptions commonly found in Judaism and early Christianity. . . . [These] are merely outward expressions of religion which the Gnostic believer due to his interiorization of faith or knowledge, does not value.”³⁷ Fasting from the world is, therefore, a metaphor for “the total denial of present reality of the Cosmos and its Creator to enable the finding of the true reality of the Kingdom and the Father.”³⁸

Thus Baarda finds that “Sabbath” is almost synonymous with “world” and its creator, Yaldebaoth, the demiurgic god of the Jews, the god of this world. To sabbatize the Sabbath means to come to rest with respect to the Sabbath/world,³⁹ that is, to become fully detached from it. So “Sabbath” represents a negative thing. But “Rest” (ἀνάπαυσις) is, on the contrary, the ultimate goal of the Gnostic. Thus the Gnostics radically separated and placed in opposition to each other Sabbath and Rest, just as they separated body and spirit, and Jesus and Christ.

We now turn to *Gos. Thom.* 2, which also has been preserved in both Greek (Pap. Oxy. 654) and Coptic. As we compare the versions, we find that the Coptic drops the reference to Rest. The Greek reads as follows: “[Jesus said]: Let him who seeks not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds he shall wonder; having wondered he shall reign βασιλεύσει, and reigning he shall rest ἀναπαύσεται.” The Coptic has: “Jesus said: Let him

should rest in a truly significant way and separate oneself from worldly concerns.” Uwe-Karsten Plisch, following a suggestion from Peter Nagel, takes σάββατον in the sense of “week” and translates: “If you do not take the (entire) week into a Sabbath, you will not see the Father” (*The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, trans. Gesine Schenke Robinson [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008], 93).

³⁶Baarda, 195-199.

³⁷Ibid., 198. Cf. Rudolph, 263.

³⁸Baarda, 199. As is well known, Gnostics despised the creation of the material world and its creator god, who (in their view) is a bungling inferior god or demiurge. The God of light, the Father, is not responsible for the mess that is the material world, or for the physical bodies in which the spirits have been entombed. For a comprehensive account of Gnostic teachings, see Rudolph, 53-272.

³⁹Baarda, 200-201.

who seeks not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds, he will be troubled, and when he has been troubled, he will marvel and he will reign over the All."⁴⁰ Helmut Koester and Elaine Pagels see the saying as presenting "an eschatological timetable. . . . The disciples have sought and found and marveled, but their ruling and resting will come only in the future. At the present time, they still carry the burden of the flesh."⁴¹

The idea is somewhat unpacked in another work from Nag Hammadi, called the *Dialogue of the Savior*.⁴² In *Dial. Sav.* 49-50, Judas says, "Behold! The archons⁴³ dwell above us, so it is they who will rule over us!" The Lord says, "It is you who will rule over them!" In *Dial. Sav.* 65-66, Matthew says, "Why do we not rest right now?" The Lord says, "When you lay down these burdens." This will happen "when you abandon the works which will not be able to follow you, then you will rest" (*Dial. Sav.* 68). (It is difficult not to see here a deliberate contradiction to Rev 14:13.) We find here, then, the meaning of ruling and resting. The Gnostics will overcome the rule of the Archons and will find rest. When? Ultimately, when at death they are liberated from the flesh born of woman. Using a metaphor also found in the *Gospel of Thomas* (21, 37), *Dial. Sav.* 85 says the release will come when they strip off their bodies: "But you, as children of truth, not with these transitory garments are you to clothe yourselves. Rather, I say to you that you will become blessed when you strip yourselves!" Then they will find Rest in him who is always at Rest.

When the soul of the Gnostic rises from the world to return to the Realm of Light, from which it had been separated and cast into a stinking body, it is interrogated by the Archons, which it must pass. In *Gos. Thom.* 50, Jesus coaches them about what to say:

If they say to you: "From where have you originated?" say to them "We have come from the Light, where the Light has originated through itself. It stood and it revealed itself in their image." If they say to you: "Who are you?" say "we are His sons and we are the elect of the Living Father." If

⁴⁰For a discussion of the composition of this and parallel sayings, see Ernst Bammel, "Rest and Rule," *VC* 23 (1969): 88-90.

⁴¹Helmut Koester and Elaine Pagels, "Introduction to Dialogue of the Savior" in Robinson, 245.

⁴²*Dialogue of the Savior* is commonly referred to in terms of its location in the Nag Hammadi library: Codex number, page number, line number, thus: III, 121.4. But it is susceptible to being divided up into logia of Jesus and his disciples; this has been done by its modern editors. I shall thus refer to it, using the saying numbers in Robinson, 246-255.

⁴³In Gnostic thought, the Archons are the principalities and powers that, together with the god of this world, rule over the world and the souls imprisoned in it, imposing onerous law and fate.

they ask you: “What is the sign of your Father in you?” say to them: “It is movement and Rest [ἀνάπαυσις].”

That is, they have internalized the attributes of the God of Light, who always lives and rests.

The *Gos. Thom.* 51 introduces another dimension: “His disciples said to him: ‘When will the Rest of the dead come about and when will the new world come?’ He said to them: ‘What you await has already come, but you know it not.’” We find here the Gnostic-realized eschatology. Because the Gnostic knows that the Father is Rest, he himself is already resting in the Father, he is already resting with respect to this world and its creator/sabbath.⁴⁴ It is a case of “already-but-not-yet,” a future hope, yet a present experience. The Kingdom of the Father is known to the Gnostic, though the world sees it not. The Gnostic knows that he came from the Kingdom and will return to it, and because of this enlightenment he has the Rest. It is within him. The *Gospel of Truth*, a Valentinian Gnostic work, explains it thus:

Since the deficiency came into being because the Father was not known, therefore, when the Father is known, from that moment on the deficiency will no longer exist. As in the case of the ignorance of a person, when he comes to have knowledge [γνώσις], his ignorance vanishes of itself, as the darkness vanishes when the light appears, so also the deficiency vanishes in the perfection” (*Gos. Truth* 24-25).

By dying to the world through knowledge, the Gnostic is already perfect, already at rest. By definition, he cannot sin. He is free from all law because he is no longer subject to the Archons and the Demiurge. He is not of the material world, and he is not wedded to his body.⁴⁵ He is detached from all of that.

The *Gos. Thom.* 60 uses an extravagant metaphor: “You too, look for a place for yourselves within Rest, lest you become a corpse and be eaten.” As Kurt Rudolph remarks, “Repose and safety are expressions for the possession of redemption which is attained already in this world.”⁴⁶

Finally we come to the *Gos. Thom.* 90: “Jesus said, ‘Come unto me, for my yoke is easy and my lordship is mild, and you will find Rest for yourselves.’” Gnostic use of the saying in Matt 11:28-30, whether quotation, allusion, or parallel, was frequent.⁴⁷ Here Jan Helderma points out an important difference from the canonical version that should not be overlooked. In Matthew, Jesus gives Rest (11:28), but the Gnostic *himself* achieves Rest

⁴⁴Baarda, 201.

⁴⁵One is struck by the similarity of the concept of ἀνάπαυσις in Gnosticism to the concept of Nirvana in Buddhism and classical Hinduism.

⁴⁶Rudolph, 221.

⁴⁷For references, see Helderma, 114.

through his renunciation and forsaking of the material world.⁴⁸ The Matthean ἀνάπαυσις is a gift, not an achievement.⁴⁹

Ἀνάπαυσις, as Helderman abundantly demonstrates, is a major motif in the *Gospel of Truth*,⁵⁰ but here I must limit myself to one passage that explicitly mentions the Sabbath:

He is the shepherd who left behind the ninety-nine sheep which were not lost. He went searching for the one which had gone astray. He rejoiced when he found it, for ninety-nine is a number that is in the left hand which holds it. But when one is found, the entire number passes to the right hand. As that which lacks the one—that is, the entire right hand—draws what was deficient and takes it from the left-hand side and brings it to the right, so too the number becomes one hundred. It is the sign of the one who is in their sound; it is the Father. Even on the Sabbath, he labored for the sheep which he found fallen into the pit. He gave life to the sheep, having brought it up from the pit in order that you might know interiorly—you the sons of interior knowledge—what is the Sabbath, on which it is not fitting for salvation to be idle, in order that you may speak from the day from above, which has no night, and from the light which does not sink because it is perfect.⁵¹

This is an interesting passage for several reasons. It is partly, as I have argued elsewhere,⁵² a permutation of an apocalyptic passage. But here we are concerned to know what the Gnostics understood by it.

It is part of a passage dependent upon Matt 12:11 and possibly John 5:17, exhorting the spiritual Gnostics to do the “mission work” of awakening the imprisoned spirits to their true nature. It holds up no less an example than the Son as Savior. He was active on the Sabbath, but with what meaning? The *Gospel of Truth* goes on to say, “Say, then, from the heart that you are the perfect day and in you dwells the light that does not fail” (32:311-333). Baarda argues for the implication that the Sabbath, by contrast, is not the perfect day (indeed, the “perfect day” is not a day), and the passage describes the saving

⁴⁸Ibid. Of course, if one took only Matt 11:29 without v. 28, the case would not be as clear. However that may be, Helderman, 114, is correct in pointing out that after the Gnostic has received the enlightening revelation it is up to him.

⁴⁹Augustine, however, overstated matters when he said, “Christ is the true Sabbath” (cited in Davies and Allison, 2:287). Jesus does not say that he *is* the Rest, but that he *gives* the Rest.

⁵⁰The *Gospel of Truth* probably dates from the middle of the second century, and whether or not it was written by Valentinus himself, it certainly represents the Valentinian brand of Gnosticism. It exhibits a reconceptualizing of the NT writings upon which it is based. See the introduction by Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae in Robinson, 38-39.

⁵¹*Gos. Truth* 31.36–32.31.

⁵²Johnston, 49.

activity of the Savior of the world. The Sabbath is identified with the created world and the creator demiurge, as Baarda interpreted it in *Gos. Thom.* 27. He is able to cite other Gnostic references, such as the *Interp. Know.* 11, where spiritual slumber brought labor and “the Sabbath which is the world.”⁵³

All this be as it may, whether the Sabbath represents something positive (like the Pleroma), or something negative (like the world or the demiurge god of the Jews who created it), it can be agreed that it is being used in Gnostic literature as a metaphor for something that is not a day of the week. It is also clearly not identical with the Rest (ἀνάπαυσις), which is reabsorption into the Father of Light who is always at rest.

There are a great number of other relevant passages that we cannot review here, nor is it necessary to do so.⁵⁴ They will only reinforce what we have already seen in the Gnostic literature. Basically, this can be summarized as follows. The Sabbath and the Rest are quite different things. Whether literal or metaphysical, the Sabbath is representative of this dark world. The Rest to which the Savior summons the spiritual people (Gnostics) is the Rest from which they primordially fell. It is a return to the Father’s Realm of Light, so that which was lost from the Deity is restored. They came from it and they return to it. Rest is thus an eschatological goal, but it is not only that. Even before liberation from the body it can be experienced now when the enlightened soul spiritually detaches itself from the world, the flesh, and the demiurge, and all their works. It is thus both a future destiny and a present experience. Gnostics have heaven in their hearts. In modern terms, eschatology and psychology are one. The Sabbath day means nothing good; the Rest (ἀνάπαυσις) is everything to hope for.

Now we may turn back to the Great Church, represented by the great early defender of the faith, Justin Martyr. Justin flourished in the middle of the second century, at the same time as the great Gnostic teachers Valentinus and Marcion. He knew about them, and even wrote a tract against them.⁵⁵ But he breathed the same air as they, and it is not surprising to find similarities as well as differences.

⁵³Robinson, 476; cf. Baarda, 189-190.

⁵⁴Helderman, 85-231, lists and examines all the relevant passages of the *Gospel of Truth*, as well as others (see also 282-330).

⁵⁵Justin, *1 Apol.* 26. After attacking the Simonians and Marcion, specifically for deploring the doctrine that the Creator God is inferior to another Great God, he concludes: “But I have a treatise against all the heresies that have existed already composed, which, if you wish to read it, I will give you.” He repeats his attack in chap. 58. The tract that he mentions has not survived, but it was apparently used by Irenaeus in his massive *Against Heresies*, wherein great attention is given to the Valentinians (*Haer.* 4.6.2). In his *Dial.* 35, Justin specifically lists Marcionists, Valentinians, Basilidians, and Saturnalians.

Justin deprecates external observances that are devoid of interior experience (as did Pseudo-Barnabas⁵⁶ and the Gnostics), such as he charges the Jews with. Thus in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, a Jew, Justin writes:

For what is the use of baptism which cleanses the flesh and body alone? Baptize the soul from wrath and from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; and lo! the body is pure. For this is the symbolic significance of the unleavened bread, that you do not commit the old deeds of wicked leaven. But you have understood all things in a carnal sense.⁵⁷

This desire to spiritualize at the expense of what Justin regards as “a carnal sense” carried over to his understanding of the Sabbath, about which he says:

The new law requires you to keep perpetual sabbath, and you, because you are idle for one day, suppose you are pious, not discerning why this has been commanded you: and if you eat unleavened bread, you say the will of God has been fulfilled. The Lord our God does not take pleasure in such observances: if there is any perjured person or thief among you, let him cease to be so; if any adulterer, let him repent; then he has kept the sweet and true sabbaths of God.⁵⁸

For Justin, then, true Sabbath-keeping is not ceasing from labor, but ceasing from sin. The literal seventh-day Sabbath, like other fleshly observances of Judaism, had been merely a temporary accommodation to the spiritual weakness of the Jewish nation, which needed such things as reminders.⁵⁹ Now that the spiritual reality has come, the outward ritual has no value.

Justin differs from the Gnostics in that he does not give the word “Sabbath” a negative connotation, representing the world or an inferior Jewish god. Neither does he believe that a spiritual enlightenment about one’s true identity and destiny places a person beyond sinning or accountability to law. But he does resemble them in completely spiritualizing the Sabbath, giving it a meaning somewhat analogous to the Gnostic ἀνάπαυσις: true Sabbath-keeping is an interior experience of the soul, divorced from any external observance such as being idle on a fixed day of the week; but it does have

⁵⁶Justin was preceded by Pseudo-Barnabas, for whom the Sabbath is a rest that can be experienced only in the eschaton, as noted above. See *Barn.* 15:6-7. From *Barn.* 15:4-6, it appears that the Sabbath referred to is a millennial or eternal one. The word used for rest there is not ἀνάπαυω, but κατὰπαυω, which is the word used in Hebrews 4.

⁵⁷Justin, *Dial.* 14.

⁵⁸Ibid., 12:3. Justin also argues that the OT patriarchs, like nature itself, did not “sabbatize” (chaps. 19, 23).

⁵⁹Ibid., 18:2, 3; 19:2; 21:2. Among the other outward rituals discarded by Justin are the water ablutions, which he calls baptisms (e.g., *Dial.* 14). While he thus deprecates these physical acts, it does not seem to occur to him that the same thing could be said of the Christian rites of water baptism and the eucharist.

behavioral consequences—one no longer sins. One attains to the Rest not by γνώσις, but by repentance.

Justin does not look like a radical innovator. He is probably representative of many in his generation who were seeking to establish Christian identity in distinction from Judaism, on one side, and from Gnostic modes of thought, on the other. In fleeing from one, they could run into the arms of the other.⁶⁰ Looking back we can see now that both the Scilla and the Charybdis involved divorcing external from internal, Sabbath day from Sabbath experience. Having separated them, they discarded one or the other.

Many years ago F. Crawford Burkitt made a striking observation. In the third century, Tertullian wrote a long refutation of the doctrines of Marcion. Shortly afterward either Tertullian or someone closely associated with him compiled a treatise against the Jews. The interesting thing is that about half of the treatise against the Jews was copied out of *Against Marcion*, book three. “The important thing is that the same arguments that were thought appropriate to use against the Jews were thought appropriate to use against Marcion the anti-Jew. Surprising as it seems at first sight, the Church had to a great extent the same controversy with both opponents.”⁶¹

Perhaps we can draw an analogy to this in respect to the Sabbath. Matthew would have had the same controversy with both Pharisees and Gnostics: both separated the day from the experience and discarded one or the other. But from his perspective, soul rest and sabbath-day rest must be laminated together.

⁶⁰Irenaeus is a complex case. On one hand, he held a high view of the Decalogue and upheld the Matthean ethos of Sabbath-keeping (*Haer.* 4.8.2-3; 4.12.1-5; 4.13.1). On the other, he partly followed Justin in spiritualizing the Sabbath: “The Sabbaths taught that we should continue day by day in God’s service” (*Haer.* 4.16.1-2), and he may have even equated it (or the ἀνάπαυσις τοῦ θεοῦ) with the Kingdom (*Haer.* 4.16.1), although it is unclear what the original Greek (which lies behind the Latin translation in which form alone this part of his work comes down to us) may have said (see n. in *ANF* 1:481).

⁶¹F. Crawford Burkitt, *The Gospel History and Its Transmission*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907), 306-307.