

# Clement of Alexandria

## *A Project of Christian Perfection*

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite the enormous popularity of Clement of Alexandria (c.150–215 CE) as a subject of academic enquiry, it seems to me that he remains a puzzle, and there are many reasons why. He is far from being the 'embodiment' of a particular ecclesiastical tradition (Roman Catholicism,<sup>1</sup> Eastern Orthodoxy,<sup>2</sup> or liberal Christianity<sup>3</sup>). He is also not a forerunner of Thomas Aquinas, who 'baptized' Aristotle in the same way that Clement was supposed to have Christianized Plato. Instead of making efforts to label Clement of Alexandria, I have tried to meet him as he was and where he was. He was a man on an intellectual and spiritual journey, who ultimately found his academic harbour in Alexandria. He was full of passion in his search for a universal route to salvation potentially acceptable to all, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, free and slaves, the poor and the wealthy. He offered his followers a theology which was an affirmation of life, potentially leading towards harmony between faith and reason. He was also a very eclectic, creative author who did not hesitate to use many threads to compose his own tapestry. Sometimes to our modern taste there are too many levels and directions in his discourse, there are too many colours in his tapestry and this may distract our attention from his main arguments. If an analogy to music can help, Clement was a very gifted musician able to play many instruments with equal ease. His works echo a great scale of sounds, and never just one, monotonous, rhythm or topic. From this symphony I have chosen to trace just one of the themes, which is

1 For this view, see F. Drączkowski, *Kościół – agape według Klemensa Aleksandryjskiego* (Lublin: KUL, 1996), p. 18. The Polish author in his introduction to his book stresses the similarities between Clement's ecclesiology, based on the relationship between the church and love, and the teaching of *Lumen gentium* 8.

2 See A. Choufrine, *Gnosis, Theophany, Theosis: Studies in Clement of Alexandria's Appropriation of his Background* (Patristic Studies, 5; New York, Bern and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 8 and n. 30.

3 See R.B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914).



fundamental to his theology: the Christian potential to achieve 'perfection' (τελείωσις).

I deal with the theme of Christian perfection from a specific angle, aiming to add a new dimension to our understanding of the ancient scholar's thought. Many previous studies have debated his dependence on various schools of Hellenistic philosophy, his use of Philo of Alexandria, his contribution to the development of Christian doctrine and his complex connection with Gnosticism (specifically with the school of Valentinus). This examination critically reviews all these leads, but its particular contribution is to highlight the influence of Hellenistic Judaism on Clement's work. He encountered this through various teachers, through the Jewish sapiential literature and later, in Alexandria, in Philo's legacy. My study shows that Clement of Alexandria respected the value of various Judaeo-Christian documents and was also well acquainted with Jewish imagery.<sup>4</sup> In my view, this esteem and familiarity did not simply appear as a by-product of his years in Alexandria. Also, his adaptation of these Jewish literary sources had a different purpose from the use made of them by his fellow Christians of the same period such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian and Origen. Clement of Alexandria, commonly labelled by modern scholarship 'a Christian Platonist', differed from them in his appreciation of the Jewish legacy within a Christian ethos. This study hopes to reveal a different image of Clement of Alexandria from the one which is commonly known.

Setting Alexandrian Hellenistic Judaism as my central reference I do not wish to repeat what has been so brilliantly said already about Clement's accommodation of Philo of Alexandria's thought. I hope to say more. Certainly recent research into Clement's adaptation of Philo's theology has inspired my own investigation, but I also contend that a larger spectrum of Jewish and Judaeo-Christian literary sources needs to be reconsidered since they inspired Clement's theological position, including his central theme of Christian perfection. However, I recognize the hermeneutical limits of my study. Unlike Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria was silent regarding the details of his own intellectual and spiritual journey towards Christianity, and failed to provide any information about the theological background of his tutors, particularly Pantaenus. Still, his writings contain enough evidence to suggest that his Christianity, theology and exegesis were inspired not only by various Greek philosophical concepts. I do not wish to dispute the commonly accepted view that these influenced Clement, but rather

<sup>4</sup> Although I use the notion 'Judaeo-Christian', I am aware of its problematic semantics, recently noted by Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 306.

to provide a fuller picture of his intellectual influences by showing the way in which his knowledge and appreciation of the Hebrew and Judaeo-Christian traditions shaped his work.

## 1. THE CLASSIC DILEMMA

The classic dilemma facing scholars in their approach to Clement's philosophical legacy may be summed up by the two following questions. Was Clement of Alexandria a Platonist, who, like Philo before him, expressed his faith in a Platonic/Hellenistic form and language? Or, was he a profound Christian who 'baptized' Platonism much as Aquinas later 'baptized' Aristotelianism? Scholars such as G.W. Butterworth, C. Lattey, J. Gross and more recently W. Baert and S.R.C. Lilla represent the first view.<sup>5</sup> But others including W. Völker, E.F. Osborn and lately M.J. Edwards and N. Russell incline towards the latter opinion.<sup>6</sup> It seems that in this dispute so far *tertium non datur*. However, my study presents and argues for a third way. My starting point is to re-examine Clement's connection with the Hellenized form of Judaism that he encountered in Athens and later through his encounter with Pantaenus and the work of Philo of Alexandria. Was Clement a 'God-fearer' himself who in the final stage of his search for a universal route to salvation turned to Christianity? There is sufficient material in Clement's oeuvre to confirm that his understanding of Christian theology, along with his project on the achievement of perfection/maturity (τελείωσις),<sup>7</sup> was not exclusively inspired by the famous Platonic postulate of assimilation to God (*Theaet.* 176 b). It is also possible to see its roots in the Hebrew

<sup>5</sup> G.W. Butterworth, 'The Deification of Man in Clement of Alexandria', *JTS* 17 (1916): 157-172; C. Lattey, 'The Deification of Man in Clement of Alexandria: Some Further Notes', *JTS* 17 (1916): 257-62; J. Gross, *La Divinisation du chrétien d'après les Pères grecs: Contribution historique à la doctrine de la grâce* (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1938); W. Baert, 'Le thème de la vision de Dieu chez S. Justin, Clément d'Alexandrie et S. Grégoire de Nyssa', *FZPhTh* 12 (1965): 39-97; and S.R.C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> W. Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Klemens Alexandrinus* (Berlin and Leipzig: Akademie-Verlag and J.C. Hinrichs, 1952); E.F. Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); M.J. Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Ashgate Studies in Philosophy and Theology in Late Antiquity; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); and N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> This crucial, multi-semantic term from Clement's vocabulary refers to the achievement of spiritual and moral maturity. Τελείωσις is one of many expressions in Clement's vocabulary which mean ultimate Christian perfection. It is a key term in my study, as it refers to the aim of the whole process of ethical and spiritual transformation. For more information on Clement's theological vocabulary related to perfection, but in the context of 'deification', see Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, pp. 122, 337-41).



Scriptures, particularly in the insight from Ps. 82.6,<sup>8</sup> and some passages of the New Testament<sup>9</sup> such as Paul's theology from Galatians 3–4.<sup>10</sup> In this light, the hermeneutical position represented by Butterworth, Lattey and Lilla must be readjusted. But also the second analysis of Clement as the embodiment of an early Church Father with at most a minimal attachment to the Hebrew tradition is one-sided. It assumes a sort of separation of Christian thought during the second century CE in Alexandria from its natural connection with Hellenistic Judaism. Such a view has recently been challenged by Rajak's and Lieu's studies,<sup>11</sup> which trace more complex lines of the emergence of Christian identity in a very compelling way. These revisions of established ideas regarding Christian and Jewish communications in my view illuminate the puzzle of Clement.

Contrary to Eric Osborn's<sup>12</sup> strong statement on Clement of Alexandria's negative attitude to the Jews, what appears in many places in the ancient scholar's oeuvre is more multifaceted and astonishing. His attitude to the Jews and Hebrew theology differs from that of other contemporary sources such as Tertullian,<sup>13</sup> Melito of Sardis (*On the Pascha*) or the *Epistle to Diogenetus*. Recently Paget<sup>14</sup> has presented a more balanced assessment of Clement's relationship with the Hellenistic-Jewish ethos. In my opinion, Clement's relationship with Hellenistic Judaism and Judaeo-Christianity, represented by his acquaintance with the literature but also with individual theologians, was far from accidental, marginal or superficial.<sup>15</sup> Clement inhabited the imagery

8 C. Mosser, 'The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification', *JTS* 51(1) (2005): 30–74.

9 The term 'New Testament' should be used very carefully, as what Clement understood by it differs from our post-Athanasian meaning. On this ambiguity, see J.A. Brooks, 'Clement of Alexandria as a Witness to the Development of the New Testament Canon', *SC* 9 (1992): 41–55; and P. Balla, 'Evidence for an Early Christian Canon (Second and Third Century)' in L.M. McDonald and J.A. Sanders (eds), *The Canon Debate: On the Origins and Formation of the Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), pp. 372–85.

10 Noted by Mosser, 'Earliest Patristic Interpretations', p. 57.

11 I am particularly indebted to J.M. Lieu, *Christian Identity*, and *Neither Jew nor Greek. Constructing Early Christianity* (Studies of the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2002), esp. pp. 31–47; T. Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome, Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002).

12 See E.F. Osborn 'Philo and Clement: Quiet Conversion and Noetic Exegesis', *SPA* 10 (1988): 108–24: 'The relation between Philo and Clement of Alexandria becomes clearer when we consider Clement's negative attitude to the Jews and to literal quotation' (p. 108).

13 See the brief, but insightful remarks by G.D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (The Early Church Fathers; London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 47–51.

14 J.C. Paget, 'Clement of Alexandria and the Jews', *SJT* 51(1) (1998): 86–97.

15 Clement's connection with Judaeo-Christian imagery and theology is evidenced by his relationship with, for instance, the so-called *Letter of Barnabas* often quoted in his oeuvre, cf. O. von Stählin and U. Treu, *Clement Alexandrinus: Register* (GCS, 4; Berlin: Akademie Verlag,

of the Old Testament very well; in addition, he continually had in mind the Mosaic law which he saw in a positive light. Clement's theological assessment of God's self-revelation in and through the divine Logos was rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and sapiential literature, the metaphors and imagery of which were available to him in the Septuagint. However, it is difficult to assert that there was one dominant influence on Clement. The effort to see Clement of Alexandria just as a Christian Platonist or a Platonic Christian eliminates Hellenistic Judaism from his background, but in stressing the importance of the latter, I do not wish to deny the influence of the former. In Clement's well-integrated hermeneutics, there are some points when he is very close to Philo of Alexandria, at others he inclines towards Plato and the Pythagorean tradition, while there are also occasions when he shares common ground with some of his heterodox Christian opponents. Like Philo before him, the Christian scholar was very keen on the assimilation of various traditions. But there is a crucial difference. Philo had probably never heard of Jesus of Nazareth; therefore his theory of ascent to the transcendent God remained centred on a metaphysical meditation on the mind of God – the Logos. More than a hundred years later Clement heard about Jesus of Nazareth – although we do not know which version of the narratives about Jesus reached Clement first – and accepted Christ as the divine Logos. Therefore, from a Christian perspective, Clement took an important step beyond Philo. On the other hand, like Paul, Clement's favourite apostle,<sup>16</sup> Clement converted to Christianity while preserving a very high opinion of Hebrew wisdom. Unlike Paul, our Titus Flavius Clemens<sup>17</sup> was much better acquainted with Greek culture and more open to late-Hellenistic philosophy.

Clement's sympathy for the Hebrew scriptural ethos is revealed in a number of ways. First, there is the ubiquitous presence of the Old Testament in his oeuvre. The Hebrew biblical motifs examined by Van

1980), p. 27. Commenting on this relationship, J. Loman observes: 'Clement and *Barnabas* are to be seen as products of the same Christian environment, in the context of the varied theological climate of Alexandria during the second century' (J. Loman, 'The *Letter of Barnabas* in Early Second Century Egypt', in A. Hilhorst and G.H. Van Kooten [eds], *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen* [Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity; Leiden and Boston: E.J. Brill, 2005], pp. 247–65 (249).

16 Clement uses many respectful adjectives to refer to the apostle such as for example in the *Stromateis*: θεῖος, 'the divine' – *Strom.* II.8.4, 109.3; V.57.5; γενναῖος, 'the noble' – *Strom.* II.136.1; III.61.2; V.18.7; 80.1; VI.1.3; μακάριος, 'the blessed' – *Strom.* III.51.2; καλός, 'the honourable' – *Strom.* V.34.2; but also he stresses Paul's dependence on the Old Testament – *Strom.* IV.134.2.

17 *Tria nomina* was a sign that Clement was a Roman citizen.



den Hoek<sup>18</sup> reveal Clement's affinity to the Jewish apologetic tradition, although he maintains his independence.<sup>19</sup> Second, the Christian scholar is unusual among the early Church Fathers in professing a profound attraction to Moses as a Jewish figure and particularly as a theologian with unquestioned authority.<sup>20</sup> Third, the scholar uses *expressis verbis* terms in which he identifies himself with the Jewish tradition.<sup>21</sup> Fourth, we have the argument *ex silentio*; unlike other theologians of his time, for instance Tertullian or Justin Martyr,<sup>22</sup> he did not compose any anti-Judaic treatises.<sup>23</sup> Here, the explanation that there were no Jews in the Alexandria of his time (i.e., during the second half of the second century CE)<sup>24</sup> and he did not encounter Jews is too

18 A. Van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and his Use of Philo in the 'Stromateis': An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model* (Supplement to *Vigiliae Christianae*, 3; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988).

19 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

21 For instance, talking about Jewish history, Clement states in *Strom.*, II.13.1: 'What is the point of presenting you with evidence of further examples of faith out of *our* [ἡμῶν] history?' (trans. J. Ferguson [*Stromateis: Books 1-3* (The Fathers of the Church, 85; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991)]; emphasis added). On another occasion, while commenting on the biblical concept of the creation of human beings as God's image and likeness (Gen. 1.26) Clement states: 'Is not this the way in which some of *our people* [τινὲς τῶν ἡμετέρων] accept the view that a human being has received "according to the image" at birth, but will secure "according to likeness" later, as he attains perfection?' (*Strom.* II.131.6; trans. Ferguson). While Stählin leaves this place without reference, the Polish editor of the *Stromateis* points to Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* V.6.1. However it is possible that Clement had in mind Philo's *Opif.*, 144, which as a Philonic treatise was well known to Clement and quoted in many other places. Philo thus would be one of 'our people'. Another example of Clement's self-understanding is in *Strom.* VI.27.5: 'For life would fail me, were I to undertake to go over the subject in detail, to expose the selfish plagiarism of the Greeks, and how they claim the discovery of the best of their doctrines, which *they have received from us* [παρ' ἡμῶν εἰλήφασιν]' (my trans.).

22 T.J. Horner, *Listening to Trypho: Justin Martyr's Dialogue Reconsidered* (Biblical Exegesis and Theology, 28; Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 2001), pp. 15-32.

23 Eusebius (*HE* VI.13.3), Jerome's (*De vir.* 38) and much later Photius' (*Cod.* 111) testimonies about Clement's work the *Ecclesiastical Canon* or *Against the Judaizers*, could have cautioned his fellow Christians against returning to some practices (i.e., circumcision) in the same way as Paul's warning against returning to the law and its customs in Gal. 1.6-9 and Phil. 3.1-4. I agree with Paget's observations: 'First, the tract was written against Judaizing Christians and not Jews. Secondly, Eusebius notes, and there is no reason to doubt the information he gave us, that this was a work requested by Alexander Bishop of Jerusalem. It had nothing to do with the demands of the Alexandrian Christian community' (Paget, 'Clement of Alexandria and the Jews', p. 93).

24 See Haas' radical conclusion: 'Although certain echoes of rabbinic exegesis may be found in the works of Clement and Origen, it is perhaps overstating the case to label this as "definite evidence of the presence of the Jews in Alexandria and of contacts between Jews and Christians to discuss exegetical and theological matters.'" While Clement seems to have been acquainted with at least one Jew in the city, most of his knowledge of Judaism appears

radical.<sup>25</sup> In a passage from the second *Stromata* its author expresses the purpose of the *Stromateis*:

In these terms I suppose it follows that in facing charges levelled against us by the Greeks we use a few passages of Scripture, and it may turn out that the Jew in listening to us could experience an easy conversion, on the basis of his beliefs, to the person in whom he has had no belief.<sup>26</sup>

The fifth point concerns Clement's very warm and welcoming attitude towards the Mosaic law.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the ancient theologian, here commentator, is also aware of the limits of the Jewish understanding of God, and therefore he promotes a dialectic model of Christian self-understanding as 'the third race',<sup>28</sup> which encompasses, rather than excludes,

to have been acquired at second or third hand' (C. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997], pp. 105-106). And similarly Van den Hoek: 'The problem is, however, that the Christian writers [Clement and Origen] were Greeks without a Jewish upbringing or even, in the case of Clement, much contact with a living Jewish tradition. Their knowledge of Jewish biblical interpretations, therefore, must have derived primarily from their readings, while the world of Greek grammarians provided them with some other tools' (A. Van den Hoek, 'The Catechetical School of Early Christian Alexandria and its Philonic Heritage', *HTR* 90 [1997]: 59-87 [82]).

25 Smallwood states: 'The Jews in Alexandria, however, even if quiescent for many years, were not extinct. In the late second and early third centuries they re-emerge, though now in the theological conflict with the Christians rather than in political conflict with the Greeks' (E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule from Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations* [Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity, 20; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981], p. 517). On the other hand Edwards observes: 'No city of the Mediterranean world played host to such a large population of Jews as Alexandria in the time of Origen (c.185-c.254 CE), and in his earliest works we meet allusions to a "Hebrew" who introduced him to Biblical criticism' (Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, p. 12). Edwards points to Origen, *Princ.* I.3.4 and IV.3.14. See also a very helpful note by Paget, 'Clement of Alexandria and the Jews', pp. 94-95.

26 *Strom.* II.2.1 (trans. Ferguson).

27 Van den Hoek, states: 'There is no trace of a negative attitude towards the Law in Clement. He defends the position of the law against the attacks of the followers of Marcion. He does not, moreover, echo the negative valuations that are well known from other Christian writers, nor does he interpret the law exclusively as a prefiguration of Christ.' As 'other Christian writers', Van den Hoek points to Tertullian (*Clement of Alexandria and his Use of Philo*, p. 228).

28 This concept of 'race' is not Clement's original invention, as it appears also in Hermas, *Sim.* 9.17.5; 30.3; *Diog.* 1; and *Apology of Aristides* 2.1. For a fuller account of the use of this category in early Christianity, see J.M. Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark/Continuum, 1996), pp. 164-77; and N. Denzey, 'The Limits of Ethnic Categories', in A.J. Blasi, J. Duhaime and P.-A., Turcotte (eds), *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Altamira, 2002), pp. 502-506.



Judaism and Greek culture. It is thus, in my view, within this notion of Christianity that Clement elaborates his original concept of perfection. In a section from his sixth *Stromata*, referring to the Judaeo-Christian document, the *Kerygma Petri*, Clement elaborates his idea of the new relationship with God:

God made a new covenant with us [νέαν ἡμῖν διέθετο]; the one with Greeks and with Jews are ancient. But we worship him in a new way as the third race [ἡμεῖς δὲ οἱ καινῶς αὐτὸν τρίτῳ γένει]. For clearly, as I think, he showed that the one and only God was known by the Greeks in a pagan way, by the Jews in a Jewish, but by us a new and spiritual way [καινῶς δὲ ὑφ' ἡμῶν καὶ πνευματικῶς].<sup>29</sup>

Here Clement clearly states that the Christian relationship with God surpasses the previous two ways of knowing him and leads towards the third, perfect one: καινῶς δὲ ὑφ' ἡμῶν καὶ πνευματικῶς. Within this new and spiritual Christian ethos, Clement, as we shall see, implanted his crucial understanding of growth in perfection by progressive transition from the initial introduction to Christianity to advanced knowledge, ethical maturity and ultimate assimilation to God.<sup>30</sup> Clement unveils his unique theological and philosophical position as an early Christian hermeneutist who includes Greek and Jewish values in a way that, in my view, transcends the popular, but unhelpful, alternatives of emphasizing either his 'Platonism' or his 'Christianity'.

This brief sketch of Clement's unique position remains incomplete, unless we try to establish who challenged his model of perfection and, indirectly, his concept of the eclectic bringing together of Greek παιδεία and Jewish wisdom from the Hebrew Scriptures. His biggest adversaries, who can be identified clearly by noting the space, time and effort devoted to challenging them, were contemporary hetero-Gnostic Christian leaders and their 'schools of thought'.<sup>31</sup> At this point, only

<sup>29</sup> *Strom.* VI.41.7 (my trans.).

<sup>30</sup> For a fuller exposition of this theme, see Chapter 5.

<sup>31</sup> I recognize the complexity of the term 'Gnosticism', which in the present study is expressed by the coinage 'hetero-Gnosticism'. My understanding of 'Gnosticism' is indebted to, for example, M. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); A. Jakab, 'Le Gnosticisme Alexandrine aux premières Temps du Christianisme', in Hilhorst and van Kooten (eds), *The Wisdom of Egypt*, pp. 356–80; and D. Brakke, 'Self-Differentiation Among Christian Groups: The Gnostics and Their Opponents', in M.M. Mitchell and F.M. Young (eds), *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vol. 1, pp. 245–60. In the present study the term 'hetero-Gnostics' refers to Clement's Christian adversaries and is based on Clement's claim that his project of perfection leads to 'true', 'real' or 'genuine' Christian Gnosticism. I accept this claim and

one remark is needed. Undoubtedly, Clement's philosophical and theological struggle with alternative hetero-Gnostic doctrines left a visible mark on his own thought. The Alexandrian context in which he developed his ideas not only shaped his sensitivity as a passionate intellectual, it also had an impact on his methodology, choice of language and arguments, his rhetorical constructions and images. Further, it strengthened his defence of the value of the Hebrew Scriptures and wisdom, as well as of marriage, sex and human freedom. For instance, it is against Marcion's type of selective approach to the Scriptures that Clement strongly defends the coherence of God's revelation and asserts the continued relevance of the Old Testament<sup>32</sup> and the law.<sup>33</sup> However, his comprehension of hetero-Gnosticism is as complex as his attitude towards Judaism and is far from being utterly negative. Lilla's rather positive account of Clement of Alexandria's encounter with the hetero-Gnostics highlighted the similarities between their theologies.<sup>34</sup> Méhat re-examined this connection and pointed to the dependence of his model of the perfect Christian, not on hetero-Gnostic sources, but rather on the Pauline ideal of the charismatic Christian (1 Cor. 12.8).<sup>35</sup> More recently, Kovacs returned to the subject of the parallels between Clementine and Valentinian exegesis, revealing the adaptation of the latter in his theology.<sup>36</sup> Clement, as we can see for instance in his *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, a commentary on a representative of the Valentinian branch of Gnosticism, is ambivalent, but not openly negative about the lines of speculations and conclusions among his opponents. He was in doubt on many occasions. Nonetheless, he adapted many hetero-Gnostic ideas and used them in his project of Christian τελείωσις.<sup>37</sup> His Christian opponents intellectually stimulated Clement to build up his project as a response to alternative competing

therefore I use the notion of 'hetero-Gnostic' in reference to his Christian rivals, assuming that Clement's position was one of 'proto-Gnostic'. The list of Clement's opponents is provided by Chadwick's introduction to J.E.L. Oulton and H. Chadwick, *Stromateis III and VII, in Alexandrian Christianity: Selected Translations of Clement and Origen with Introduction and Notes* (London: SCM, 1954), vol. 2, pp. 21–33. For a more detailed presentation of the Gnostic schools in Clement's oeuvre, see Chapter 4.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Strom.* II.29.2, 86.1-7; *Paed.* I.96.3; II.17.1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Strom.* II.34.1–35.5; III.84.1-3; *Paed.* I.60.3.

<sup>34</sup> See Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, pp. 162–63.

<sup>35</sup> A. Méhat, '“Vraie” et “fausse” Gnose d'après Clement d'Alexandrie', in B. Layton (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, March 28–31, 1978*, vol. 1: *The School of Valentinus* (Studies in the History of Religions, 41; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), pp. 426–433 (432).

<sup>36</sup> J.L. Kovacs, 'Echoes of Valentinian Exegesis in Clement of Alexandria and Origen: The Interpretation of 1 Cor 3.1-3', in L. Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana Octava* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium; Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 317–29.

<sup>37</sup> See Choufrine, *Gnosis, Theophany, Theosis*, pp. 17–76.



models, but also provided him with some new ideas. In these ways, they left a significant mark on his theology of perfection.

## 2. STRUCTURE, METHODS AND AIM OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The central assumption of my book is that Clement worked on a definition of Christian excellence that would separate his model from alternative options provided by either other Christian, sectarian groups or external competitors from various philosophical schools and religious cults. But I also argue that Clement's literary construction was directly dependent on and inspired by some scriptural ideals of 'wisdom', 'holiness', 'excellence' and 'perfection'. As noted above, I see Clement's project as being closer to certain aspects of Hellenistic Judaism than many previous studies.

I would like to highlight also another aspect of this book. Clement of Alexandria was a scholar engaged in dialogue or fervent polemic with philosophers of the past as well as with many contemporary theologians and those contacts and confrontations also played a significant role in his rhetorical endeavour. In addition to this involvement in debates about the Christian ideal, the history of ideas was also an open field for Clement, where good questions and wise answers from the past were worth reviewing. Therefore, his project of Christian perfection (τελείωσις) came into being as a form of engagement in discussions about the value, direction and the outcome (τέλος) of human life. The project was also a response to various contemporary efforts to construct a Christian identity, which began with the appearance of the earliest Christian documents. Working on his theory Clement, undoubtedly, borrowed and creatively adopted some concepts from other philosophers and theologians. He critically modified those ideas in order to fit them into his framework of Christian Gnostic perfection. Although, Clement was very open to various influences, he was aware of the danger of error, miscomprehension and 'free-style' hetero-Gnostic hermeneutics that abused the scriptural revelation.

Clement's project of Christian maturity drew on many aspects of his philosophical and theological surroundings. Without re-examining these elements, it is quite hard to see either the fullness and depth of Clement's ideal or the sources of his inspiration. Therefore, Chapter 2 focuses on Clement's links with Hellenistic Judaism, Chapter 3 examines his accommodation of some philosophical themes (Middle Platonism and Neopythagoreanism) while Chapter 4 explores his attitude towards his opponents, here some Christian Gnostics. These chapters also serve to provide vital background to Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 5, I discuss

Clement's project with all its ingredients and consequences. Chapter 6 emphasizes the essential connection between the realization of this project and the Christian community. It is important to see the Christian Gnostic as a man or women<sup>38</sup> intensely engaged with the local ἐκκλησία and with the more universal heritage of, for example, Greek culture. In Clement's view, the achievement of Christian perfection produced a spiritual, mature person with a rich prayer-life and a total dependence on the divine Logos. But rather than a religious hermit or a lonely academic pursuing his scholarly goals in solitude, a person who attained τελείωσις was stylish, eloquent, knowledgeable and engaged in public life. As Peter Brown noted about Clement's vision of the Christian Gnostic:

Clement's serene Christian sage was to be no recluse. He was an active teacher, even an 'administrator'. His 'sport' was the care of souls, even the government of the church. Like Moses, the sage bore a 'kingly soul'. Nor was the Christian sage a fleshless abstraction, a mere pious ideal.<sup>39</sup>

On another occasion, Brown also said of Clement's Gnostic:

Married or unmarried, male or female, young or old, those who had remained children at heart brought into the midst of a cunning and abrasive world a touch of the original, unaffected courtesy of Adam, 'nature's gentleman' and Christ, the new Adam, who had walked among men with a childlike gentleness.<sup>40</sup>

The search for ultimate perfection thus led, in Clement's view, to the discovery of original, lost integrity. Clement guides his reader through a hermeneutical and ethical journey, aimed at returning to the primordial and essential ontological structure: being created in the *image and likeness* of the Logos-Christ. These characteristics of Clement's theory of

38 The crucial ideal of 'the Gnostic' is understood in this study as a Christian, either man or woman, who achieved ethical excellence, intellectual (philosophical) education and spiritual perfection. The Gnostic integrated all theological (faith, hope and love) and cardinal virtues and was able to demonstrate his or her perfection through activities (see *Strom.* VII.82.5-7). In my interpretation, the Christian Gnostic has much in common with the Jewish sage from the sapiential literature. The detailed characteristics of the Gnostic are discussed in Chapter 5.

39 See P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Lectures on the History of Religions, n.s. 13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 131.

40 See *ibid.*, p. 128.



Christian perfection guarantee him a unique place within patristic theology.

The reconstruction of Clement's project calls for specific methods. It is quite hard to discuss Clement's theology by reading his oeuvre in a 'systematic' way. From the first line of the first chapter to the last line of the last chapter, Clement has justly earned the reputation of being a difficult author, as he often chose to hide his thought in allegories, the specific construction of his narrative and endless indirect references to other authors. The *Stromateis* and *Excerpta ex Theodoto* in particular pose a problem for commentators. The fact that Clement was not a 'systematic theologian' by choice and nature, means that Stählin's *Register* was an essential tool in my research. In order to trace the development of Clement's project I studied his oeuvre using the *Register* to note terminology relevant to my investigation. These terms revealed various sets of issues that Clement wanted to discuss. This list of key terms or references to scriptural and other theological or philosophical documents enabled me to view Clement's model in a larger perspective. Of course, his own thought changed and matured with the years, and sadly we lack a precise chronological outline for the composition of each *Stromata*, while in the case of *Paedagogus* we do not know much about the period of Clement's life in which it was composed. Still, it is possible by careful analysis of terminology, references and literary context to come to some conclusions. My reconstruction of Clement's project takes into account the problems or questions that he was trying to address by his proposal of perfection. Therefore, the first part of the study reviews the various philosophical and theological issues that formed these questions. Then in the second part, which focuses on Clement's ideal, we see how Clement responded to these problems.

My first line of investigation is to demonstrate a direct and substantial connection between Clement of Alexandria and his cultural milieu. These two aspects are inseparable: Clement outside of Alexandria would not offer us the same theological project. But also Clement without his very personal intellectual and religious journey is less comprehensible. Therefore I try to detect the impact of both elements: a *polis* of restless tensions and theological disputes, and Clement's personal agenda in promoting specific features of Christian excellence. In the first part of the study my aim is to show what Clement knew about alternative models/postulates of achieving perfection or assimilation to God. I examine those aspects of Hellenistic Judaism, Middle Platonism and Christian Gnosticism which provoked Clement's reaction and therefore crystallized his own views.

The second line of investigation presented in Chapters 5 and 6, comprises an exposition of Clement's project of Christian perfection. I

also note the relevant borrowings from the rich cultural framework previously sketched. The sixth chapter discusses Clement's view that the Christian Gnostic needs community to encourage others to follow this path of salvation. Many previous studies have focused on Clement's ethics or theology and neglected this crucial link between the achievement of perfection and membership of the church. I try to do more justice to Clement's project. This part of the research examines Clement's concept of the church, which, compared to previous models from the Apostolic Fathers and other early Christian documents, is less institutional, and more directly guided by the divine Logos and his servants, the Christian Gnostics. The church is the spiritual habitat of all Christians at various levels of maturity, not just a society of the perfected. The church is an open, inclusive invitation to all people who respect such values as culture and reason. The church is a school of true philosophy established by the divine pedagogue.

This study aims to review all these aspects in detail holding in its centre the idea of Christian perfection. This concentration on one theme leaves outside of my attention other subjects that were important in Clement's oeuvre such as Logos-Christology, Trinitarian theology, sacramentology or his interest in some elements of the mystery religions. Other authors have presented very interesting elaborations of these themes. The purpose of my own investigation into Clement's theology is to see how his eclectic hermeneutics harmoniously synthesized very diverse components of his cultural background, particularly Hellenistic Judaism, in order to produce an inspiring project of perfection. In this way, I hope to show how Clement used the material technically and theologically available to him to create his ideal.

### 3. THE CENTRAL THEME AND ITS RELEVANCE

The book focuses on one of the principal themes in Clement of Alexandria's theology: the attainment of perfection as 'the aim' (τέλος)<sup>41</sup> of the Christian/Gnostic life. Traditionally, this postulate was linked with the famous Platonic motive of ὁμοίωσις (*Theaet.* 176A–B) that is attaining likeness to God as far as humanly possible (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν), which, as noted by Dillon, via Eudorus of Alexandria, became

41 That is, the goal of life in the Aristotelian sense, which as a postulate was also known to Clement of Alexandria: 'If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good' (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1094A 18–22).



the main purpose of philosophical life.<sup>42</sup> Soon this postulate was also taken up by theologians representing other religions, such as Philo of Alexandria, who were inspired by its ethical significance,<sup>43</sup> and it was still around in Clement's period. My study discusses various stages of progress towards this noble purpose. To Clement, Christian and Gnostic perfection was neither inherited by nature, nor achieved by a sudden, rather misty experience of 'awakening'. On the contrary, the road to perfection had many ethical stages, was long and needed the right tutor as well as a persistent candidate. It did not rely solely on human effort based on the potential of our nature, but was a response to God's invitation and grace. It led towards a new perception and understanding, culminating in the most profound relationship with the Logos-Christ and the highest vision of the incomprehensible God. It offered a foretaste of eternal happiness.

The traditional, dominant or even 'classical' opinion saw in Clement's elaboration of this theme of perfection an early Christian adaptation of the Platonic leitmotif of ὁμοίωσις. Recently, however, some scholars have pointed to other possible sources of Clement's inspiration. First, Patterson convincingly argued about the influence of the Irenaeian *Cur Deus homo* on Clement, since two early papyrus fragments of *Adversus haereses* have been dated to around Clement's time in Alexandria.<sup>44</sup> The Irenaeian imaginative, attractive idea of the divine becoming human in order that human may become divine may have had a substantial impact on Clement's initial understanding of human life and its τέλος. Secondly, the even more recent studies of Russell<sup>45</sup> and Mosser<sup>46</sup> have highlighted the role of Ps. 82.6<sup>47</sup> in Clement's view of the objective of

<sup>42</sup> J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London: Duckworth, 2nd edn, 1996), p. 44.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, Helleman discusses in detail the theme of ὁμοίωσις in Philo's writings, see W.E. Helleman, 'Philo of Alexandria on Deification and Assimilation to God', *SPA* 2 (1990): 51–71. Helleman examines three aspects of ὁμοίωσις. These are: 'assimilation to God' as a process of transition; the Philonic understanding of 'God'; and, finally, kinship between man and God. He concludes: 'Philo affirms "assimilation to God" as a legitimate and proper goal of human life. Such assimilation involves a choice based on knowledge and reason, a choice to pursue goodness, and to cultivate the virtues which are in turn imitations of divine virtues or powers. Crucial to such a process of assimilation is the kinship which exists between the human individual and the divine cosmic mind' (*ibid.*, p. 70).

<sup>44</sup> L.G. Patterson, 'The Divine Became Human: Irenaeian Themes in Clement of Alexandria', *SP* 31 (1997): 497–516. The author notes: 'Yet it is equally clear, precisely when familiarity with the Irenaeian *dictum* is assumed, that Clement has adapted it to fit his own conception of the way to human perfection' (p. 500).

<sup>45</sup> Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, pp. 121–40.

<sup>46</sup> Mosser, 'Earliest Patristic Interpretations', pp. 54–58.

<sup>47</sup> Here, I would like to note that in the case of Clement's adaptation the motif of deification denotes the transformation of the human being after baptism into a dwelling 'place' of God. This indwelling by the divine means also a profound, unceasing

human development, education and realization of perfection. This Hebrew prophecy suggested the idea of participation in the divine life/perfection which was not only an important inspiration to Jewish theology and mysticism but also found a central place in the patristic imagination, including that of Clement. These recent contributions add important and welcome voices to the debate about the Christian fascination with the notion of 'deification' or 'divinization', and have exerted an important influence on my study.

It is worth remembering that previously there were two dominant opinions about the source of this preoccupation. First, there was the position held by, for example, Harnack and Bousset, in which 'deification' as the purpose of Christian perfection was an example of borrowing from Graeco-Roman philosophy, the mystery religions and the imperial cult.<sup>48</sup> As Mosser notes, the concept was understood as the climax of the Hellenization of Christianity. Secondly, there is a view represented by modern theologians who see the concept of deification as a genuinely biblical idea. The revision of the vocabulary of Clement of Alexandria's oeuvre, carried out by Russell<sup>49</sup> and Mosser<sup>50</sup> shows that he used terms such as θεοποιέω to denote not the equality of human beings with God, or the achievement of the same status, but rather the final stage of transformation from imperfection to perfection, from spiritual childhood to maturity of adulthood.<sup>51</sup> Careful research of the theme of perfection shows that while Clement was undoubtedly inspired by the Greek philosophical tradition, it is rather biblical – Jewish and Christian – exegesis that is most significant in his theory of perfection.<sup>52</sup> Clement's contact with Hellenistic Judaism before he arrived in Alexandria and during his time in the *polis* offers a better insight into his theory of τελείωσις.

At this stage one important remark must be made. Clement's project of τελείωσις does not suggest the human element 'dissolves' into the divine. That is, 'deification' does not imply an amalgam of human and divine. There is no indication in the whole of his oeuvre that Clement understands this transformation as the equation of humanity with divinity. The perfect Gnostic who develops his or her virtues under

relationship with God based on love and other virtues. Therefore Clement's view on 'deification' does not suggest that human and divine elements are amalgamated at the end of this transformation. For more details, see Chapter 5.

<sup>48</sup> For more detailed account, see Mosser, 'Earliest Patristic Interpretations', p. 33, nn. 10, 11.

<sup>49</sup> See Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, p. 122.

<sup>50</sup> See Mosser, 'Earliest Patristic Interpretations', p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> All these and many more of trajectories of Clement's theology of perfection will be discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>52</sup> See Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, p. 140.



God's guidance and with his grace achieves the highest level of likeness to God still a remains human being: a saint, but human. Even at the end of the gradual and scrupulous process of detachment from the sensations of the body, which interfere with the governance of the reason, the purified Gnostic is fully human, and never receives the status of a demigod. It is important thus to understand that Christian perfection leads to the elevation of the best parts of what Clement understood as human nature: intellectual ability and activity.<sup>52</sup> Here, Clement of Alexandria interprets Gnostic perfection as participation in God's immortality. Clement's strong and ubiquitous apophatic theology about God's essence points to the divine Logos-Christ as the crucial facilitator of the whole ethical transformation. The realization of perfection is thinkable and possible only through the contact of the divine Logos. Christology provides the foundation of the whole process and special, although limited, attention will be given to it in the second part of this study while discussing Clement's project.

52 One clear example of this way of thinking is in *Strom.* II.102.6.

Chapter I  
 CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA AND HIS BACKGROUND  
 PART ONE

I. LIFE AND WORDS RE-EXAMINED

Unlike Origen, whose biographical sketch is presented in detail by Eusebius of Caesarea,<sup>1</sup> Clement of Alexandria did not have a formal biographer to pass on an account of his life or so. Thus Flavius Clemens, who became known later as Clement of Alexandria, did not come from Alexandria. Already a hundred years after his death, Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Annals* records two contradictory traditions concerning Clement's birth place: one that he was born in Athens, the second that he came from Alexandria.<sup>2</sup> The first view has been generally accepted, although in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* the scholar recorded the opinion Alexandria or Alexandrian as distinct had from another Christian who wrote a century earlier and is known as *Chronicon Paschicum*.<sup>3</sup> The Christian theologian himself does not mention the place of birth, nor does he refer to any biography. He merely gives some fragmentary information about his direct teachers (Strom. I.II.1):

According to Michel, it is possible that Clement was born a pagan or pagan parents,<sup>4</sup> and later as a young man was initiated into the

1. Eusebius, *Annals* 1.1.1-2. The great value of the *Ecclesiastical History* is that the work presents a unique biographical record of the history of the church in the first three centuries. Michel, *op. cit.* p. 10. It is to be noted that Eusebius' work represents a particular point of view, and it has also an ideological purpose. Eusebius presents an interpretation of the events being himself seriously engaged in a theological conflict and clearly expressing his own position (i.e., pro-Origen). He is also very interested towards Clement of Alexandria and his work and role in the church.

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## CONCLUSION

This study has revealed Clement's intention to endorse a particular ideal of Gnostic excellence that led to ethical transformation, resulting in a mature coexistence of faith and reason/knowledge. I have scrutinized Clement's answer to a crucial question, which has a resonance far beyond patristics: *how can a human being attain the divine?* Clement's answer harmoniously combined gradual stages of ethical, intellectual and spiritual growth in faith and understanding. His work appealed to readers in antiquity, shaping their self-understanding in the context of many alternative models of perfection. The project offered a new understanding of Christian life, not lived in isolation from visible reality but embracing it. As has been shown, Clement's eclectic approach blended Jewish and Greek theological ideas and at the same time responded to the challenge from hetero-Gnostic schools, while assimilating some of their metaphors. Clement's work shows that during his lifetime Alexandrian Christianity was rich and diverse, and was not alienated from its original Jewish ethos. This reconstruction of Clement's complex model reveals its originality as well as its limitation to its urban, academic and Alexandrian context. This is its strength and also paradoxically its weakness.

As has been shown, there were two key elements in Clement's composition. First, he gathered ideas and materials from various theological and philosophical sources and wove them intelligently into his theory. The first three chapters of my book illustrate this process, highlighting the use he made of Jewish and Greek ideas. Second, he shaped his project in response to competing concepts of perfection and the philosophical life. I analyse his response to the hetero-Gnostic challenge in Chapter 4. This chapter refers to some parallel ideas found in the Coptic Gnostic library, when these references elucidated either Clement's or his opponents' positions.

Clement of Alexandria, though he had a strong inclination towards various schools of philosophy, particularly towards Stoicism, Neopythagoreanism and Platonism in its Middle Platonic version, was



mainly a commentator on the Scriptures, as to him they reflected the fullness of divine revelation. He was primarily an exegete and commentator of that revelation, not a speculative theologian or a philosopher passionate about metaphysics. As I have shown, Clement had a deep knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and some acquaintance with other Jewish sources. The former in particular had a profound influence on his thinking. It shaped not only his choice of imagery, but also his understanding of the relationship between the human and the divine. In stressing the importance of Hellenistic Judaism in Clement's thinking, I have aimed to create a more balanced picture of the scholar, and not to dismiss the significance of the other influences on his work.

Above all, Clement's project responded to the pedagogical need to educate his fellow-Christians. It was created to provide them with secure guidance to a higher understanding of the divine as well as towards greater integrity between the various aspects of their lives (external) and virtues (internal). As Clement's anthropology saw each human being as a microcosm, it was necessary to invent a project of Christian education that would take into account the specific relationship between a person's inner life of faith and their attitudes and actions towards other people and culture. Clement's project aimed to produce a particular balance between these dimensions in order to facilitate further growth in wisdom. This aspiration originated in an intellectual framework that had an impact on its final form, content and the method of proclamation.

While the first part of the study examined the philosophical and theological framework of Clement's model, the second focused on the details of Clement's idea of Christian perfection. Perfection was understood by Clement in an original way that brought together scriptural values (e.g., 'fear of the Lord', 'search for divine wisdom') with more philosophical ideas (e.g., the role of virtues), combined to produce a Gnostic maturity, inspired by love and marked by a harmony between faith and reason. But the Gnostic man or woman, wealthy or poor, as Clement saw it, was not a static, semi-divine, partially embodied, partially liberated spirit. In Clement's view, the Gnostic was a sage who valued the current world *sub luminae aeternitatis*. He or she achieved a higher degree of perfection under the guidance of the divine teacher, other Gnostics and within an ecclesiastical context. Clement's ecclesiology is an integral part of his theory of perfection. An important contribution of the research presented here is to explain the connection between the Christian Gnostic and his or her local community, as well as Clement's understanding of the specific nature of the church. In Clement's elaboration, this church is an inclusive, open community guided by the divine Logos and the Gnostics rather than by 'clerics'.

The research shows that Clement of Alexandria was one of the first Church Fathers who presented an original, coherent and inspiring project of progress in maturity of faith. This truly Christian *modus vivendi* was offered to all followers of the divine Logos, regardless of their gender, social status or form of ministry in the church. It also promised the highest achievable level of the communion with the apophatic God. Clement's project addressed all the main aspects of life and highlighted the importance of Christian engagement with the legacy of previous philosophical and theological masters. The originality of Clement's project can be seen not only by comparison with other theories of human perfection of his time. Clement's theology of perfection was based on a very positive and optimistic anthropology. Clement led his disciples from one stage to another of that progression towards maturity emphasizing that Christianity is, as a particular love of wisdom, the culmination of a natural passion for truth so well known by sages of many traditions. To him, the Christian ethos offered what neither classical Judaism nor the ancient Greek masters could deliver: realization of the best aspects of human nature and the most profound relationship with the ineffable, apophatic, holy God of the Jews and the absolute of the Greeks. Clement of Alexandria endorsed his version of Christianity as the universal way of salvation, open to all.

My account of Clement's theory of Christian excellence begs one important question: if this project offered so many positive values to Clement's fellow-Christians, why did it not survive his lifetime?

There are many reasons why this intriguing theory was forgotten very soon after death of its author. First, it shared the fate of the whole of Clement's theology. Although Clement was later held in high esteem by some theologians of the next generations such as Alexander of Jerusalem, Eusebius of Caesarea and the Cappadocian Fathers (especially Gregory of Nazianus), he did not leave a group of fervent disciples who could continue and develop his theology. Clement's association with Origen remains a mixed blessing, to say the least.<sup>1</sup> Although according to Eusebius' well-known testimony the relationship between these two scholars was that of teacher-pupil, it is difficult to detect any direct influence of Clement's theology on Origen's thought. It is possible to talk about some general parallels (for instance in exegesis) and differences (for instance in Origen's more positive view on the knowability of God), yet this theological link is too vague. Clement's chronological closeness to Origen raises problems too. It is not easy to be a predecessor of a theological genius such as Origen. His controver-

<sup>1</sup> H.F. Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginning of Christian Apophaticism* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 254.



sial theology, dramatic circumstances of life, enthusiastic disciples and equally fervent enemies waged war for many centuries to come. It was Origen and his thought that took centre stage for some time and therefore Clement's own voice was eclipsed by Origen, and later by Origenism. The phenomenon of Origen is one of main reasons of Clement's, if not disappearance, at least fading.

The second reason why Clement's theory of perfection did not play a more important role in the later patristic era was that this ideal was a specific product of the Alexandrian, intellectual environment, which very soon lost its appeal to a larger audience of the forthcoming generations. Soon, the Great Church, and particularly eastern Christianity, needed another ideal. During and after the Arian crisis, the Christian ideal was required to support the dominant political and ecclesiastical party. The model of Christian excellence was no longer a sage/philosopher with subtle tastes in literature and poetry, but rather an anchorite or theologian-warrior who demonstrated a particular strength of the soul and readiness to chase demons, philosophers and heretics.<sup>2</sup> This new request was very well recognized and satisfied by Athanasius' eulogy of St. Anthony. The *Life of Anthony*, as noted by Clark, had a remarkable impact on contemporaries' understanding of Christian perfection.<sup>3</sup> The comparison of Clement's model of Gnostic perfection with the perfection represented by a saint such as Anthony would be a fascinating subject for a different study. However, even a brief examination of both models side by side, shows how different were the pastoral, pedagogical, theological and political needs of Christian community in Clement's and Athanasius' times. Clement's model of Christian perfection was now too complicated, too unsystematic, and doctrinally and terminologically suspect. Eastern Christianity and the Greek Fathers during and after the Arian crisis were searching for a sharper example of struggle and victory with the ubiquitous powers of 'evil' embodied by rival political and ecclesiastical parties. Instead of Clement's vision of a Christian married gentleman and a person acquainted with allegory, there was a need to canonize a radical, almost Manichean type of a saint. Rather than using philosophical debate based on argument, proponents of the new models of Christian perfection persuaded their audience by reference to countless spectacular miracles which were signs of superior wisdom. Of course, the new hero was able to carry out wonders as his life was one, long example of marvellous

<sup>2</sup> For more details, see E.J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 177–81.

<sup>3</sup> G. Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society* (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 61.

events. It was this sort of saint that conquered the imagination of Christians for many centuries to come. Certainly Athanasius' authority as a leader of an anti-Arian ecclesiastical and political party played an important part in that promotion.

Thirdly, as has been so well noted by Williams,<sup>4</sup> Clement's theology of God passed on a legacy to Arius, first and foremost the apophatic theology of God<sup>5</sup> and the theology of the Logos as δύναμις of God, that hinted at the possible subordination of the former to the latter. But Clement's ideal of the Gnostic, the spiritually mature teacher able to discern the truth, also provided Arian theologians with a useful excuse to highlight the independence of theological research from the ecclesiastical authorities, and promote the idea that possession of God's wisdom and understanding did not come with a place within the hierarchy of the church, but was a result of God's gift. Again, it is significant that Athanasius' 'Anthony' was a διδάσκαλος but not trained in intellectual subjects and he was rather suspicious, if not hostile to Greek philosophy. It is not difficult to guess whom Athanasius had in mind while painting the portrait of the Egyptian solitary hermit in his *Life of Anthony*. While Clement's ideal was a city-based pedagogue absorbed in intellectual activities, well acquainted with philosophical ideas and able to comment analytically on the Scriptures and other documents, Athanasius carefully avoided calling his hero 'a teacher', as this term was too reminiscent of Arius.<sup>6</sup>

The fourth reason for the waning influence of Clement's project, in my view equally significant as those mentioned above, was that Clement's theory of Christian perfection was strongly connected with the Hellenistic Jewish and Judaeo-Christian heritage and values such as γνῶσις.<sup>7</sup> Sociologically, the next generation of Christians were less and less dependent on Jewish concepts, metaphors and literature. Changing fashions and sensibilities meant that metaphors which held a great deal of meaning for Clement were no longer attractive to them. Clement's illustrations of Christian perfection such as for instance 'the high priest' or Moses lost their rhetorical power and resonance. Now Christians were searching for a *vir ecclesiasticus* not for a complex metaphor deeply rooted in Hebrew imagery. One remark made by Daniélou must be quoted in this place, as it refers directly to Clement of Alexandria:

<sup>4</sup> R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: SCM, 2nd ed, 2001), p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> J.W. Trigg, 'Receiving the Alpha: Negative Theology in Clement of Alexandria and its Possible Implications', *SP* 31 (1996): 540–45.

<sup>6</sup> Watt, *City and School*, p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> J. Daniélou, *The Development of Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, vol. 1: *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (trans. J. Baker; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), pp. 365–69.



The *Odes of Solomon* present the possession of the gnosis in a threefold light, as knowledge, teaching and enthusiasm; and these are the three aspects which, according to Clement and Origen, should characterise the true Gnostic, who is to be a theologian, a teacher and a mystic. Moreover, this gnosis is connected with Baptism; it is the entering into possession of the eschatological good things, which are already present realities.<sup>8</sup>

Clement's project of perfection was not only rooted in this kind of background and imagery but also aimed to reaffirm that 'the joy of heaven' (eschatology) could be experienced on earth. This assumption was not so openly upheld by later developments of Christian eschatology, the understanding of the sacraments (e.g., baptism, Eucharist) and the understanding of the mission of the Great Church. One of Clement's central themes of Christian  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  soon lost its appeal as well as value within the Christian ethos. In my view, the project of Christian perfection elaborated by Clement of Alexandria was too embedded in the complex cultural milieu of Alexandria to be able to flourish outside of its place of birth. Through this project we have a specific 'window' into the flavour of Alexandrian theological debate of the second century, which concerned the themes of growth in wisdom and virtue promoting progress in integrity of faith and knowledge, mystery and certainty about the divine.

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<sup>8</sup> Daniélou, *The Development of Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, vol. 1, p. 369.