Clement (Titus Flavius Clemens) of Alexandria

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Clement of Alexandria (*ca.* 150 – *ca.* 215) was one of the leading Christian thinkers and writers of his time. He lived and taught in the North African city of Alexandria – perhaps intellectually the most lively and stimulating city in the Roman Empire. A number of Clement's works survive and they reveal a wide-ranging mind that is able to synthesize perspectives from the Bible, Greek philosophers, the writings of the tragedians, and post-biblical Christian authors. Clement's thought has influenced Christian thinkers down through the centuries, such as John Wesley, and for modern theologians his methods represent the beginning of a long tradition of Christian philosophical reflection.

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Clement of Alexandria, Education, Knowledge, Miscellanies = Stromateis, *Logos, Perfection, Philosophy, Scripture*

An exuberant and dynamic thinker, Titus Flavius Clemens of Alexandria (*ca.* 150 - *ca.* 215) was a Biblical exegete, Platonic philosopher, polymath, and apologist for Christianity. Clement cites widely from the Bible and Greek poetry, drama, and philosophical writings.[1] He calls to Plato 'lover of the truth' and Euripides 'the philosopher of the stage' (*Misc.* 5.11.70.2). Classicists value Clement for preserving fragments of works otherwise lost, including writings of pre-Socratic philosophers and ancient plays. As the first to attempt a thoroughgoing synthesis of the Bible and Greek philosophy, Clement began a long tradition of Christian philosophical reflection. This introduction to Clement will consider: I. Clement's life and context; II. his writings; III. his theology; IV. his legacy.

1. *Clement's Life and Context*

Little is known of Clement's life or his role in the church. The only glimpse he provides of his own biography is found at the beginning of his most important work, the *Miscellanies,* where he describes his travels in search of wisdom:

> Now this book of mine is not a piece of writing artfully crafted for display, but it consists of notes stored up for my old age, as a remedy against forgetfulness. It is a mere reflection and shadow of the vigorous and animated teachings and the blessed and truly remarkable men I was privileged to hear. One of these, an Ionian, I met in Greece, others in the larger Greek world — one was from Syria and another from Egypt — still others in the East, where I met one from Assyria and another who was a Hebrew by birth. Last of all I found the most powerful teacher of all, having tracked him down in Egypt where he was hidden away. And there my search ended. He was the true Sicilian bee, who by plucking the flowers of the prophetic and apostolic meadow engendered pure knowledge in the souls of his hearers. *(Misc.* 1.1.11.1-2) [2]

Because of this passage and the extensive use Clement makes of Greek literature it is often assumed that he was born in Athens to pagan parents and later converted to

[1] According to Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 4-5, Clement cites scripture 5121 times and quotes from 348 different classical authors, including Plato 600 times and Homer 240 times.

[2] All quotations from Clement's works are my own translations, from the edition of O. Stählin et al., *GCS* vols. 12, 15, and 17. For editions and English translations of Clement's works, and abbreviated titles of them, see the Bibliography. Biblical texts are quoted after the New Revised Standard Version translation.

Christianity, but neither point is certain. Epiphanius, the only ancient witness who mentions Clement's origins, reports that some say he was born in Athens and others in Alexandria (*Heresies* 32.6.1).

The last teacher Clement mentions, the 'Sicilian bee,' must be 'our blessed Pantanios' whose exegesis of Psalm 18:6 Clement quotes with approval (*Proph. Sel.* 56.2). Eusebius, the fourth-century church historian, reports in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (*H.E.*) that Pantainos was head of the Christian 'school of sacred learning' in Alexandria (5.10.1-4), and that Clement succeeded him as director of this school and counted Origen among his pupils (6.6.1). Many scholars think, however, that an official catechetical school was not instituted in Alexandria until the time of Origen (*ca*. 202) and that Pantainos and Clement gave their lessons as private teachers.

It is frequently said that Clement arrived in Alexandria around the year 180 and left there during the persecution of Christians under the emperor Severus in 202, but the only clear evidence we have for the chronology of Clement's life is contained in two letters of Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem quoted by Eusebius. In the first, written in 211 to the church in Antioch, probably while Alexander was in Cappadocia (central Turkey), he writes: 'I am sending you these lines, my dear brothers, by Clement the blessed presbyter, a man virtuous and approved, of whom you have already heard and will now come to know' (*H.E.* 6.11.6). The second, written to Origen in 215, presupposes Clement's death. Alexander writes of Pantainos together with 'the holy Clement, who was my master and benefitted me, and all others like them. Through these I came to know you, who are the best in all things, and my master and brother' (*H.E.* 6.14.9). Taken together, these letters suggest that Clement left Alexandria no later than the year 211 and died some time between 211 and 215.

At the time Alexander writes, the word 'presbyter' could mean either priest or bishop. Alexander's use of the title suggests that Clement had an official position in the church. In addition, it has been argued that Clement's use of a such large number of Jewish and Christian writings implies he had access to a Christian library, which in turns suggests that there was in his time an institution of Christian education in Alexandria.[3] If this is correct, the picture Eusebius gives of Clement's role in a 'catechetical school' may not be so far off the mark. Whatever Clement's ecclesiastical status may have been – layman or priest, private teacher or offical head of catechetical instruction – his writings are the earliest surviving works whose connection with Alexandrian Christianity is certain. Our picture of the origins of the church in Alexandria before his time is shadowy indeed.

While we know little about Clement's biography, we are better informed about his intellectual context. Alexandria was a large, cosmpolitan city, which was home to many diverse ethnic groups: Egyptians and other native Africans, Greeks, Romans, and Jews. The city was prominent in trade and known for its culture and its educational institutions, the museum and library.[4] In addition to his wide knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy, Clement knew the Bible well. He quotes or alludes to most biblical books, as well as early Christian works such as *Barnabas*, the *Didache*, the *Shepherd of Herm*as, *1 Clement*, and works no longer extant such as the

[3] A. van den Hoek, 'The Catechetical School of Early Christian Alexandria and its Philonic Heritage,' *HTR* 90 (1997), 59-87.

[4] For a recent overview of social, cultural, and religious milieu in Alexandria at the time of Clement, see H. Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 15-70.

Gospel of the Egyptians. He gives considerable attention to Old Testament books and also knew post-biblical Jewish works such as the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Ben Sira, and the *Antiquities* of Josephus.[5] He learned much from the Jewish allegorical exegete, Philo of Alexandria (*ca.* 20 BCE - *ca.* 50 CE), whose writings use philosophical categories to interpret the Old Testament.[6]

Among the Greek philosophers, Clement's favorites are Plato and Heraclitus. Like Albinus, Eudorus, and other Middle Platonists, he combines Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic ideas. Opinion is divided about the extent to which Clement's synthesis was dependent on that of earlier Middle Platonists.[7] Among the ideas he shares with the Platonic tradition are the sharp contrast between physical (or sensible) reality (*to aistheton*) and intelligible reality (*to noeton*) and an emphasis on the need for purification from sensible things in order to achieve 'likeness to God' and a life of contemplation. The influence of Stoic ideas is particularly evident in Clement's ethics, for example in the importance he attaches to healing the passions (i.e. emotions and desires) and his description of the final goal of the moral life as *apatheia*, which means 'imperturability' or the total eradication of the passions.

Alexandria was home to some of the earliest Christian gnostic teachers.[8] Walter Bauer argued that Christianity first reached Egypt in a gnostic form[9] — a hypothesis that is less popular today than when it was first proposed. In any case we know that in the latter half of the second century Basilides and Valentinus both taught there. Clement quotes brief passages from these teachers, sometimes with approval and sometimes to refute their ideas, and he is the primary source for the little we know about their teachings. That he has a particular interest in the teachings of the followers of Valentinus is further attested by his *Excerpts from Theodotus*, which appears to be a personal notebook in which he copied portions of a number of their writings and added a few of his own comments.

Clement is known as a particularly irenic thinker, who affirms seeds of truth wherever he finds them. Nonetheless, his writings contain many polemical passages. His theology was formulated in critical conversation with several groups: 1) Greeks who cling to the old religion; 2) simple believers who oppose the use of Greek philosophy to interpret Christian teaching; 3) Marcion and Christian gnostics such as Basilides and Valentinus and their followers. Following Justin and other apologists, and anticipating Origen's *Against Celsus*, Clement provides a spirited defense of Christianity addressed to its pagan critics. Disputing the charge that Christians were 'atheists', he argues that the true 'Gnostic' — that is the ecclesiastical Christian who has achieved maturity in his practice and his understanding — is in fact the only truly pious one. He expresses the hope that 'when the philosophers learn what the true

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[5] On the importance of Hellenistic Judaism for Clement's project, see P. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria: A Project of Christian Perfection* (London/New York: T&T Clark International – A Continuum imprint, 2008), 39-78.

[6] A. van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and his Use of Philo in the* Stromateis (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

[7] S. R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria. A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), *passim*; D. Wyrwa, *Die christliche Platonaneignung in den Stromateis des Clemens von Alexandrien*. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), *passim*.

[8] To avoid confusion, I used the word 'gnostics' (with lower case 'g') to speak of groups such as the followers of Valentinus and 'Gnostic' (with upper case 'G') to refer to Clement's ideal Christian, who comes from the majority church.

[9] *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, tr. by Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, R. A. Kraft and G Krodel, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971; German original, 1934; 1964), 44-60.

Christian is like, they will condemn their own stupidity in rashly and indiscriminately persecuting the name of Christian' (*Misc.* 7.1.1.1).

Clement's translation of the teachings of the Bible into philosophical terms was challenged by simple believers who insisted on 'bare faith' (*Misc.* 1.9.43.1) and claimed that philosophy was from the devil (*Misc.* 1.16.80.5). In their turn, the followers of Valentinus depreciated the faith of the Christian majority – the group with which Clement allies himself — for its lack of *gnosis*, that is superior knowledge (*Misc.* 2.3.10.2). Clement worked hard to counter this charge, and he also responded to Valentinan views on the god of the Old Testament, the law, the role of fear in the religious life, and martyrdom. He disputes the claim that Valentinus and Basilides were the true heirs of the apostles Peter and Paul (*Misc.* 7.17.106.3-107.2). Book three of his *Miscellanies* is devoted to refuting the ideas of Marcion and various gnostic teachers about marriage and sex. Here Clement takes issue with both libertines and radical ascetics. The nineteenth-century translators of Clement's works for the *Ante-Nicene Library* regarded this book as too sensational for the average reader — apparently because of Clement's description of libertine views on sexuality — so they translated the Greek text into Latin instead of English!

Clement's own position *vis-à-vis* these diverse fronts is complex. Despite his admiration for Greek culture and philosophy, he sharply attacks Graeco-Roman religion, especially the mystery religions, accusing them of error and immorality (see especially his *Exhortation*). Although he identifies with the Christian majority and defends the great church against the criticisms of Valentinian gnostics (see, e.g., *Instructor* 1.6.25-52; *Misc.* 4.13.89-93), he is at times quite critical of simple believers. His stance toward many gnostic teachers is unreservedly critical, but he affirms Valentinian teaching on marriage (*Misc.* 3.1.1), and he has clearly learned much from Valentinian teachers, especially in his exegesis of scripture and his portrayal of the path to perfection.[10] One obvious indication of this indebetedness is his use of the term 'Gnostic' to designate the ideal Christian who has achieved moral and spiritual perfection — a usage that is clearly polemical.

2. *Clement's Writings*

Clement is known primarily for a trilogy: the *Exhortation* (*Protreptikos*), an invitation to the Christian faith modeled on Greek invitations to the philosophical life and intended for educated pagans, the *Instructor* (*Paidagogos*), a treatise on the Christian way of life addressed to new believers, and the seven books of his *Miscellanies* (*Stromateis)*, his most advanced surviving work of theological reflection. This last work, whose Greek title means something like 'Patchwork Quilts,' is made up of individual chapters on a wide variety of topics, woven together like different-colored threads in a tapestry. Among the many subjects it takes up are: that philosophy is a divine gift to the Greeks (*Misc.* 1, chap. 2); that faith is the way to wisdom (2, chap. 2); those who say intercourse and birth are evil blaspheme Christ, who shared in human birth (3, chap. 17; that women should lead a philosophical life, just like men (4, chap. 8); why scripture conceals the truth in figurative language (5, chap. 4); that

[10] 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.* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 317-29; *eadem*, 'Clement of Alexandria and Valentinian Exegesis in the *Excerpts from Theodotus*,' *Studia Patristica* 41, F. Young, M. Edwards, P. Parvis, eds. (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 187-200; Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria*, 109-146.

the true Gnostic who becomes free from the passions is equal to the angels (6, chap. 13); that Christians are not atheists, as pagan critics assert (7, chap. 1).

Clement, like Plato, worried that to commit his most advanced teaching to writing might mean that it would reach people who were not ready for it and consequently would be harmed by it. It is for this reason, he says, that he writes the *Miscellanies* in a deliberately obscure style which both conceals the truth from the unprepared and reveals it obliquely to those who are sufficiently advanced.

In the most important manuscript of the *Miscellanies*, the eleventh-century codex *Laurentianus V 3*, books 1-7 are followed by an eighth *Miscellany*, which appears to be a collection of notes rather than a book intended for publication, then the *Excerpts from Theodotu*s, and a fragmentary work called *Selections from the Prophets* (*Eklogai Prophetikai*). Another writing, a homily on the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-31 entitled *Who is the Rich Man Who shall be Saved* (*Quis Dives Salvetur*), is preserved in a twelfth-century manuscript. Like the *Instructor*, which deals with such matters as proper behavior in the baths and at dinner parties and instructs Christian women not to wear gold, elaborate hair-dos, or fancy make-up, this sermon reveals that the intended audience of Clement's works included wealthy Christians. Clement argues that Jesus' command to the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions is not to be taken literally but understood as a counsel to detach the soul from unworthy thoughts. His command to 'give to the poor,' however, is to be carried out through generous giving of alms.

Eusebius lists several other writings of Clement: *Sketches* (*Hypotyposes*), *On the Pascha, On Fasting, On Slander, To the Newly Baptised*, and the *Ecclesiastical Canon* or *Against the Judaizers*, adding that the last named work was dedicated to Alexander, the bishop whose letters he had quoted earlier (*H.E.* 6.13.1-14.7). Maximus the Confessor quotes a few sentences from Clement's *On Providence.* These works are either entirely lost, or extant only in small fragments. According to Eusebius, Clement's *Sketches* (*Hypotyposes*) contained brief explanations of selected texts from all of the Christian scriptures. The surviving fragments include comments on the Psalms, the Catholic letters, and 1 John.

Clement's writings reflect the seriousness with which he takes his vocation as Christian teacher. Interpreting the gospel in light of Greek ideas of education (*paideia*), he presents Christ as the consummate teacher who seeks to train all humanity up to perfection. The Christian teacher, Clement writes, is 'the image of the Lord,' who shares in the execution of the divine plan for salvation (*Misc.* 7.9.52.1-3). Education, which involves a one-to-one relationship of master and disciple, is moral and spiritual as well as intellectual. It aims to reform the attitudes and habits of the disciple and bring him to intellectual understanding of what was first accepted by faith.[11] The sequence of Clement's three main works —the *Exhortation*, the *Instructor*, and the *Miscellanies*— mirrors what Clement says about the pedagogy of the Logos, the divine plan of progressive education:

> Just as those who have a bodily illness need a doctor, in the same way those who are ill in their soul need an instructor (*paidagogos*) so that he might heal our passions, and then lead us to the house of a teacher (*didaskalos*), making the soul pure, ready for

[11] J. L. Kovacs, 'Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher according to Clement of Alexandria,' *JECS* 9 (2001), 3-25. For similar ideas of education as 'psychagogy' among Greek philosophers, see P. Rabbow, *Seelenführung. Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike* (Munich: Kösel, 1954), and P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, tr. M. Chase, ed. A. I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

> knowledge, and able to receive the revelation of the Word. The Logos, who is supremely benevolent, being eager to perfect us by the progressive stages of salvation, makes use of an excellent plan, well-suited for effective education: first he exhorts us [to convert], then he trains us, and, finally, he teaches. (*Instr*. 1.1. 3.3)

The correspondence between the educational programme outlined here and two of Clement's writings is clear. The *Exhortation*, which calls on the Greeks to abandon their vain idols for the one true Teacher, prepares for the *Instructor,* in which Clement provides elementary moral instruction for new Christians. Less clear is how the *Miscellanies* fits into this scheme. Some argue that it corresponds to the third level of teaching described in the passage just quoted; others suggest that Clement originally intended to write a more systematic work called the *Teacher* (*Didaskalos*) but then altered his plan and wrote the more diffuse and enigmatic *Miscellanies* instead. Still others hold that the summit of Clement's program of teaching — corresponding to the third stage of Christ's activity as teacher (*didaskalos*) — was written down in a series of exegetical works that included the *Sketches* (*Hypotypose*s), now sadly almost entirely lost.[12]

3. *Clement's Theology*

Eric Osborn captures well both the spirit of Clement's theological thinking and the difficulty it presents for interpreters who seek to summarize his most significant ideas: 'No one enjoyed theology more than Clement, yet his skilful synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem has furrowed many brows.'[13] The sense of joyful discovery of truth, evident in *Misc*. 1.1.11.1-2 (quoted above), permeates his works. Steeped in ancient learning and culture, Clement discovered Jesus Christ, the divine Logos, as a 'new song.' In his *Exhortation*, he contrasts Christ with the singers of ancient Greece:

> See what great power the new song has! It has made men out of stones, men out of wild beasts. Those who were as good as dead, who had no share in the true life, came to life again merely from hearing this song. . . . And he, the Wisdom from on high, the celestial Word, is also the perfectly-pitched, harmonious, and holy instrument of God. And what does this instrument — the Word of God, the Lord, the New Song — desire? To open the eyes of the blind, to unstop the ears of the deaf, to lead to righteousness those who are limping or going astray, to reveal God to the foolish, to put an end to decay, to conquer death, to reconcile disobedient children to their Father. This instrument of God loves mankind. The Lord pities, instructs, exhorts, admonishes, saves, protects, and — what is more — promises us the kingdom of heaven as a reward for learning, receiving only this as his benefit: that we are saved. (*Exhort*. 1.4.5-6.2)

Clement's *Instructor* ends with an exuberant hymn to Christ, the divine Teacher and Word (Logos), who oversees all things, which reads in part:

> Bridle of untrained colts, Wing of birds that fly on course,
> Steady rudder of ships, Shepherd of the royal flock, . . .
> All-conquering Word of the supreme Father,
> Lord of wisdom, Ever-joyful support in woe,
> Jesus, Savior of the mortal race,
> Shepherd, Husbandman, Rudder, Bridle . . .
> Fisher of men whom you rescue from the sea of wickedness,
> Drawing them out of the hostile waters,

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[12] Osborn. *Clement of Alexandria*, 77-78; Kovacs, 'Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher,' 23-25; P. Nautin, 'La fin des *Stromates* et les *Hypotyposes* de Clément d'Alexandrie,' *VC* 30 (1976), 268-302; B. Bucur, 'The Other Clement of Alexandria: cosmic hierarchy and interiorized apocalypticism,' *VC* 60 (2006), 252-54.

[13] Osborn. *Clement of Alexandria*, xii.

With the sweet bait of Life. . . .
Eternal Word, Boundless time, Light everlasting,
Fount of mercy, Fashioner of goodness,
Adored Life of those who praise God, Jesus Christ!
Milk from heaven, Expressed from the tender breasts
Of the Bride[14] who from your wisdom bestows gracious gifts. . . .
With simple praises, And well-tuned hymns,
Let us celebrate Christ the King,
As holy payment for his life-giving teaching. (*Inst*r. 3.12; Stählin 1:291.17-292.57)

As for the 'furrowed brows' of which Osborn speaks, there are several reasons why interpreters have found Clement's theology difficult to summarize. One is the diffuse and enigmatic character of his *Miscellanies.* Clement says that he is deliberately concealing part of the truth, because he considers it dangerous to entrust the most advanced teachings to a written work (*Misc*. 1.1.14.4). Secondly, the *Miscellanies* is an incomplete work. At the end of book 7 Clement promises a continuation but apparently never accomplished it, nor did he fulfill an earlier promise to discuss advanced topics such as cosmogony after he has initiated his readers into the 'lesser mysteries' (*Misc*. 4.1.1.1-3.3). A more fundamental reason is that Clement is an explorer of uncharted territory, who lays the foundation for a new Christian literature intended for the wider world and is one of the first to address questions that have engaged Christian thinkers through the centuries: what is the relation of faith and reason, of divine revelation and human thinking, of scripture and philosophy? Affirming the 'rule of the church' (*Misc.* 6.15.124.4-125.3) — that is an early creed that celebrates the acts of salvation described in the Bible — he goes on to ask how the biblical narrative of what God *does* can be translated into metaphysical terms. His theology has the character of a dynamic exploration rather than a well worked-out theological system.

Despite these difficulties, some characteristic ideas are clear. The following sketch of Clement's theology will focus on his answers to the following questions:

i. What is the purpose of human life?
ii. Who is God and how can he be known?
iii. How is the revelation in scripture to be understood?
iv. What is God's plan for human salvation?
v. How are believers to become perfect 'as the Father is perfect' (Matt. 5:48)?

i. What is the purpose of human life?

In book 2 of the *Miscellanies* Clement surveys the answers of Greek philosophers — including Epicureans, Aristotelians, Stoics, pre-Socratics and Platonists — to the question 'What is the purpose of human life, the most perfect good?' (2.21.127.1-22.136.5). The best answer, Clement asserts, was given by Plato, who said that human happiness comes from achieving 'likeness to God, so that as far as possible a man becomes righteous and holy with wisdom' (*Theat.* 176b). For Clement this is a prime example of the concurrence of the best of Greek philosophy with the revelation given in scripture, since according to Gen 1:26 God creates man 'in his own image and likeness.' Clement suggests that the 'image' and 'likeness' in this text point to two different things: while the 'image' of God is bestowed on human beings at their creation, the term 'likeness' points to what they can become through a long process of purification and perfection, guided by a teacher who forms their actions and habits as

[14] I.e., 'the Church'.

well as their understanding. This is what Paul has in mind when he writes: 'be imitators of me, as I am of Christ and Christ is of God' (1 Cor 11:1).

Clement goes on to set these reflections on achieving 'likeness to God' in the context of eschatological promises from the New Testament: 'eternal life' (John 3:16), 'rest' (Heb 4:9) and 'adoption' as God's children (Rom 8:15). He understands all these promises to refer to close communion with the perfect God. Clement speaks of this final end as vision or 'contemplation' and describes it through the biblical language of love.[15] Faith, Clement says, leads to knowledge which finds its end in love, 'giving the loving to the loved' (*Misc*. 7.10.57.4).

ii. Who is God? The transcendent Father and Christ, the divine Logos

The knowledge and love of God is the *raison d'etre* of human life, the primary source of human happiness. The God of whom Clement speaks is of course the God of the scriptures. He affirms a triune God and insists again and again, in arguments against Marcion and gnostic groups, that the same God is proclaimed in the Old Testament and the New. Despite his emphasis on 'seeing' God, Clement is keenly aware of the gulf that exists between human beings and God. He is an early exponent of apophatic or negative theology, which emphasizes the inadequacy of all human concepts and images for knowledge of God the Father.[16] This is a central theme of book 5 of the *Miscellanies*, where Clement quotes from Plato, 'For it is a difficult task to discover the Father and Maker of this universe; and having found him, it is impossible to declare him to all' (5.12.78.2, Plato, *Timaeus* 78c). Clement associates this text with the biblical account of Moses' ascent on Mount Sinai, quoting Exod 20:1: 'Moses entered into the thick darkness where God was.' The phrase 'thick darkness,' Clement explains, teaches that God is invisible and incapable of being expressed in words. Paul conveys the same truth when he says that, when he was 'caught up into the third heaven,' he heard 'unutterable words' (2 Cor 12:6-7). Thinking about God requires rigorous purification of the mind, an analysis in which the seeker abstracts not only from material, anthropomorphic images, but also from all human concepts in order to come to know 'not what God is, but what he is not' (*Misc.* 5.11.71.3).

Knowing God is not impossible, however, and this is the gracious good news of the 'new song.' Knowledge of God comes through divine grace, through the revelation of Jesus Christ the divine Logos (Word). As the texts from the *Exhortation* and the *Instructor* quoted above illustrate, Clement uses many titles to describe Jesus Christ. He is shepherd, king, creator, and saviour, who took on human flesh and died in order to rescue human beings from the power of sin. Above all, however, Clement understands him as the Logos (Word) of John 1:1, the divine revealer and teacher who makes God known and teaches the path to communion with him.

iii. How is the revelation in scripture to be understood?

Clement's extensive use of Greek philosophy has led some of his readers to think he is more a Platonist than a Christian, but Clement insists that the primary source of his philosophy is scripture (*Misc*. 7.1.1.4). He knows the Bible well and quotes from it frequently. His quotations and allusions range over most of the books of the Old and New Testaments, most especially from the letters of Paul, the Gospel of John, and the wisdom books (Proverbs, Ben Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon).

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[15] Osborn. *Clement of Alexandria*, 132-49; 254-68.
[16] H. Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, 153-268.

Along with fellow Alexandrians Philo and Origen, Clement used allegory to interpret the Old Testament. Although he did not compose commentaries on whole books of scripture, as Origen did, his *Miscellanies* contain many examples of allegorical exegesis, some of which are adapted from Philo's works. In each of the last four books of this work, Clement includes one chapter that he specifically identifies as a model exegesis. Of these, the chapters in books 5 and 6 treat passages from the Old Testament (the high priest's entry into the holy of holies and the decalogue), while those in books 4 and 7 provide early examples of the allegorical or spiritual exegesis of New Testament texts, one each from the gospels (the beatitudes) and the letters of Paul (1 Cor 6).[17] His exegetical discussions exemplify features that will become characteristic of patristic exegesis – careful attention to scriptural images and symbols, understanding specific passages in the context of the whole canon, and concern for how the study of scripture can foster the spiritual life of the interpreter.

In Book 5 of the *Miscellanies* Clement provides a theoretical justification for his view that scripture has a meaning that transcends the literal sense, making two main arguments. The first is a historical one: he surveys passages from Old and New Testaments, Greek poets and philosophers, and Egyptian writings to demonstrate how 'all who have spoken of divine things, barbarians as well as Greeks, have hidden the first principles and conveyed the truth through symbols, allegories, and metaphors (*Misc.* 5.4.21.4).' Secondly, Clement's view of scripture and its interpretation is closely related to his *apophatic* theology, the second main theme of *Miscellanies* 5. The immaterial God cannot be contained within sensible reality, even in the letters of scripture; thus allegorical exegesis is required in order to glimpse the transcendent realities of which the biblical words are symbols.

iv. What is God's plan for human salvation? – the pedagogy of the Logos

Salvation comes through revelation from God, most especially in the giving of the scriptures and the incarnation of the divine Logos. The Word who became incarnate was pre-existent before the ages (John 1:1); he is the source of the order of the cosmos and of all wisdom. As the supreme teacher, he has a comprehensive plan for the education and salvation of all humanity; throughout the ages he has deposited seeds of truth in various cultures. The most complete revelation of truth, however, is in the Bible, which speaks of God's perfection and the extravagant love by which God seeks to draw all people to himself (John 6:40).

Clement adapts ancient ideas about education (*paideia*) to describe the pedagogy of the Logos. The divine Word is both Instructor (*paidagogos*) and Teacher (*didsakalos*) who carefully arranges his curriculum, knowing that certain things must be learned before others, just as in secular education the liberal arts (geometry, music, etc.) need to be mastered before the student is ready for rhetoric and philosophy. The word *paidagogos*—used as the title for the second volume of Clement's trilogy – is found in Gal 3:24, where Paul says, 'The law was our *paidagogos* until Christ came.' For Paul the word means 'disciplinarian' (so NRSV), and it characterizes the law's keeping people under guard until the messiah came. Early Christian theologians, however, understood *paidagogos* in a more positive sense as 'instructor' and took the verse to mean that the Old Testament was a preliminary teaching that prepared the way for receiving the good news of Jesus Christ. This idea is important for Clement, and to it he adds something new: just as the law was God's preliminary covenant with

[17] *Misc.* 4.6.25-40; 5.6.32-40; 6.17.133-148; 7.14.84-88.

the Jews, so philosophy was a divine covenant with the Greeks, to prepare them for the more complete revelation in the gospel: 'Before the coming of the Lord philosophy was necessary for the Greeks, for righteousness, and now it is still useful for the devout life, as preliminary instruction for those who use demonstration to enrich faith (*Misc*. 1.5.28.1-3).' After the incarnation, philosophy 'is still useful.' Clement's works are full of examples of what he means by this, for example. his use of Plato's phrase 'likeness to God' to help express the ultimate goal of the Christian life.

v. The pursuit of perfection: from faith to knowledge

Clement gives much attention to the subject of spiritual progress. He views the Christian life as an exacting but joyful discipline, a pursuit of perfection. Plato wrote 'like is dear to like' (*Gorgias* 510d, quoted in *Instr*. 1.6.28.2) and Jesus said, 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matt 5:48 quoted in *Misc*. 6.12.104.2). Clement takes very seriously biblical references to becoming 'perfect' (or 'mature'),[18] and he urges his readers to a life in which moral discipline, intellectual training, and imitation of the works of divine love go hand in hand.

The complex pedagogy of the Logos, evident on a large scale in the arrangement of the universe and the periods of salvation history, is also at work in the life of the individual Christian. The divine Logos has various means of training:

> All people belong to Him – some through knowledge, while others not yet in this way, some as 'friends' (John 15:14-15), others as 'faithful servants' (Heb 3:5), and others as merely 'servants.' The Logos is the teacher who educates the Gnostic by mysteries, the believer by good hopes and the hard of heart by corrective discipline that works through the senses. He is the source of providence, operating for the individual, the community, and the whole universe. (*Misc*. 7. 2.5.6-6.1)

Some are taught: through 'mysteries,' others are led on by hope of heavenly reward, while others – those at the beginning of their spiritual journey – are motivated by fear of punishment. The divine pedagogue uses many methods of care, including persuasive words, threats, and punishments (*Misc.* 7.61.1-3). In the Old Testament, for example, he uses punishment and reproof to cure the passions of the soul (*Instr.* 1.8.64.4).

This divine pedagogy leads the individual Christian through two distinct stages, as the simple believer moves to a more complete apprehension and application of the truth. Clement refers to these stages as 'faith' (*pistis*) and 'knowledge' (*gnosis*):

> Through knowledge 'faith is made perfect' (James 2.22)…Now faith is an inward good, which, without searching for God, confesses that he exists and glorifies him for existing. Hence beginning with faith and increased in it by the grace of God, we must attain knowledge of God, insofar as this is possible… Faith we could say is the concise knowledge of those in a hurry, but knowledge is a firm and sure demonstration of the things received through faith, built upon the 'foundation of faith' (1 Cor 3:10) …And it seems to me that the first saving transformation is the movement from paganism to faith...and the second one is the movement from faith to knowledge. And when knowledge has terminated in love, at that point it presents what is 'dear' to what is 'dear' (*Gorgias 510d*) – that which knows to what is known. (*Misc*. 7.10.55.2-3; 57.3-4)

[18] The Greek word *teleios* can have either meaning. Other biblical texts that use this word in reference to human beings are: Matt 19:21; 1 Cor 2:6; 14:10; Eph 4:13; Philip 3:15; Col 1:28; 4:12; Heb 5:14; James 1:4; 3:2.

'Faith' refers to accepting the basic teachings of the creed and the literal sense of scripture, while *gnosis* designates a deeper, more integrated theology. Clement defends the church's 'faith' against its critics but insists that the divine Teacher wants Christians to move on to 'knowledge.' He cites 1 Cor 3:10-12 to support both of these points (*Misc*. 5.4.26.1-5). The movement from faith to *gnosis* involves mastering the kind of philosophical investigation that accords with piety (*Misc*. 5.1.5.2) and also discovering the deeper meaning of scripture (*Misc.* 5.10.60-61). Clement emphasizes that the student must undergo rigorous moral purification before being entrusted with *gnosis*. Growth in wisdom presupposes control of the passions and progress in righteousness and holiness. While the believer strives to *moderate* the passions, imperturbability (*apatheia*) is the goal of the Gnostic (*Misc.*6.9.74.1-2).

Clement's use of the word 'Gnostic' to describe the perfected Christian reflects his high evaluation of learning as well as the centrality of the knowledge of God in his theology. It is also polemical: Clement offers his vision of Gnostic perfection as an alterative to the systems of gnostic theologians such as Valentinus and his followers.[19] The 'true Gnostic,' he claims, is the 'ecclesiastical' gnostic – the one whose home is in the majority church (*Misc.* 7.16.97.4).

Spiritual progress is not limited to the present life. After death the Gnostic soul ascends through the angelic ranks, becoming ever purer and closer to the godlike perfection commanded in Matt 5:48. As promised in Matt 5:8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' and 1 Cor 13:12, 'Now we see in a mirror dimly but then we will see face to face,' the summit of the Christian life is the direct vision of God:

> Gnostic souls...counted as holy among the holy...continue to ascend to higher and higher spheres until they no longer greet the promised vision of God in or through mirrors (1 Cor 13:12) but feast on a vision [of God] that is never cloying for these intensely loving souls, a vision as clear as can be and utterly pure. Throughout eternity they enjoy perpetual gladness. (*Misc.* 7.3.13.1)

5. *Clement's Legacy*[20]

In the first centuries after his death, Clement was held in high esteem by those who took up the task of Christian theological exploration. The letters of Alexander cited above typify his reputation among the Greek fathers. Eusebius calls him 'a celebrated guardian of the orthodoxy of the church' (*H.E*. 3.32.2), and Cyril of Alexandria describes him as 'an eloquent and learned man, who has studied deeply the writings of the Greeks as perhaps few before him did' (*Against Julian* 6-7). Although Clement was less known in the Latin-speaking West, Jerome gives his opinion that Clement was 'the most learned of all. What is there in his books that lacks learning? No, rather, what is there that does not reflect the very heart of philosophy?' (*Epistle* 70.4).

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[19] Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria*, 109-44; Kovacs, 'Echoes of Valentinian Exegesis in Clement of Alexandria and Origen, 328; *eadem*, 'Concealment and Gnostic Exegesis: Clement of Alexandria's Interpretation of the Tabernacle,' *Studia Patristica* 31, Elizabeth A. Livingstone, ed. (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 415-18.

[20] In this sketch of Clement's legacy I draw on the fuller treatments in W. H. Wagner, 'A Father's Fate: Attitudes Toward and Interpretations of Clement of Alexandria,' *Journal of Religious History* 6 (1971) 209-231, and A. Knauber, 'Die patrologische Schätzung des Clemens von Alexandrien bis zu seinem neuerlichen Bekanntwerden durch den ersten Druckeditionen des Sechzehnten Jahrhunderts,' in P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann,eds., *Kuriakon*. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1973) 289-308.

Whatever one thinks about Clement's official role in an Alexandrian catechetical school, his writings are the earliest that survive from an Alexandrian 'school' in the more general sense of a particular way of thinking about the Bible and Christian theology. His approach to exegesis and several of his characteristic emphases are carried on and developed further by numerous Greek fathers, especially by Origen in the third century and Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Evagrius, and Didymus the Blind in the fourth. These theologians echo many of the ideas discussed in this article, including the belief that God has an ordered plan for salvation (the divine 'economy'), evident not only in the different periods of salvation history but also in the life of the individual Christian.[21] They also continue Clement's understanding of the Christian life as a pursuit of perfection, with various stages of training and discipline, and his emphasis on the gradual ascent of the soul to to the beatific vision.

To a large extent Clement's theological and exegetical legacy has been mediated through Origen, the most gifted theologian among the Greek-speaking Fathers. Origen never mentions Clement but it is very likely that he knew his writings. One of his lost works had the same unusual title as Clement's most important writing, the *Miscellanies*. Origen's exegesis of specific biblical texts often follows that of Clement,[22] and he takes up many of Clement's ideas and develops them in greater depth. Ironically, this has contributed to the neglect of Clement, for two quite different reasons. On the one hand Origen's sheer brilliance puts Clement's dynamic, ground-breaking explorations in the shade. On the other hand, criticisms of Origen, whose theology was condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, has caused his Alexandrinian forerunner to come under suspicion.

Doubts about Clement's orthodoxy reached a high point with Photius, a scholar of Constantinople in the mid-ninth century. Photius said that Clement's work of biblical interpretation, the *Outlines* (*Hypotyposes*), contained many 'godless and fantastic ideas,' including the eternity of matter, a doctrine of transmigration, and a heretical view that there were two divine *Logoi* (*Myriobiblion* 109-111). Although we have only a few fragments of Clement's *Outlines* against which to test these assertions, it appears that Photius has misunderstood what Clement wrote. In any case, he judges Clement's theology anachronistically, by the standards of later orthodoxy.

Evidence of the influence of Clement's works during the middle ages is scant. Since then Clement has found his champions, especially in Renaissance Florence, where there was a revival of interest in the Greek Fathers, and in England, as well as some critics. Among Clement's English admirers were John Potter, bishop of Oxford and later archbishop of Canterbury, who published an edition of Clement's works in Greek and Latin in 1715, and the early John Wesley.[23] Wesley was initially attracted to Clement's theology, especially his portrait of the perfect Christian and his emphasis on divine love, but in his later years he judged that Clement's theology was insufficiently scriptural. In the early twentieth century an influential scholarly book described Clement as a 'Christian liberal' and claimed him as a forerunner of the

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[21] On this point see the articles by J. L. Kovacs, J. W. Trigg, and R. D. Young, published together under the general title 'Human Participation in God's Plan: The Legacy of Clement of Alexandria,' *JECS* 9 (2001) 1-71.

[22] See, e.g., Kovacs, 'Echoes of Valentinian Exegesis in Clement of Alexandria and Origen, 325-329.

[23] W.H. Wagner, 'A Father's Fate: Attitudes Toward and Interpretations of Clement of Alexandria,' 225-226.

modern English: "in his distrust of extremes, in his love of peace, in his reverent, and sober piety, he anticipates some of the best characteristics of our race.'[24] An echo of English interest in Clement is preserved in the hymnal of the American Episcopal church, which contains two hymns whose text is based on words of Clement, 'Sunset to sunrise changes now' (Hymn 163) and 'Jesus, our mighty Lord, our strength in sadness, the Father's conquering Word' (Hymn 478), a loose paraphrase of the hymn at the end of Clement's *Instructor* quoted above.[25]

Although not widely acknowledged, Clement's legacy endures. He stands at the beginning of long tradition of Christian philosophical reflection. He was the first to focus attention on central problems of Christian theology, such as how to reconcile faith and knowledge and how to use secular learning to elucidate the revelation given in scripture. His exuberant and optimistic spirit stands as encouragement to theologians through the ages, along with a gospel text that was one of his favorites: 'Seek and you shall find' (Matt 7:7).[26]

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[24] R. B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria. A Study in Christian Liberalism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), 2:283.

[25]*The Hymnal 1982, according to the use of The Episcopal Church* [USA] (New York: Church Publisher, 1982).

[26]Clement cites or alludes to Matt 7:7 (or the parallel in Luke 11:9) in *Instr.* 1.10.91.3; 3.7.40.2; *Misc.* 1.10.51.4; 2.20.117.2; 3.7.57.2; 4.2.5.3; 5.1.11.1; 5.3.16.6; 6.9.78.1; 6.12.101.4; 7.12.73.1; 8.1.1.2; *Rich Man* 10.2.

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