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Theology and the Philosophical Climate: Case-Studies from the Second Century AD (part 2)

Alan P.F. Sell

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In Part 1 the methodological approaches of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian were discussed in relation to the question, 'How far, and with what consequences, does the prevailing philosophical climate influence those who would communicate the Christian gospel?' With the same question in mind we turn finally to Clement of Alexandria, and then draw some conclusions. (The discerning will have understood ἀνακεφαλαίωσις in Part 1 p.47, line 2.)*

It is hardly surprising that in view of the shriller anti-philosophical remarks of such Christians as Tertullian, Celsus¹⁴⁷ should charge most Christians with being ignorant fools.¹⁴⁸ No such charge could, however, properly be laid at the door of Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215). A man of wide culture, conversant with the best thought and letters of his day, his entire upbringing and training precluded him from believing that as between Christian faith and noblest culture an absolute disjunction could or should be maintained. Since we have noted inadequacies in Tertullian's presentation of Christian truth—and he, for all his dependence upon the intellectual tradition, was much more critical of it than was Clement—it will be particularly interesting to see whether the philosophically sympathetic Clement departs more radically from the main stream of Christian doctrine than did Tertullian.

We may begin to get our bearings on Clement by observing that he interprets his brief more widely than did Justin. Whilst he had a truly missionary zeal, he was more than an apologist seeking to win the enemy by making sallies into his camp and utilizing his weapons. To say as little as this is to be plunged into scholarly debate, for as Dr. Lilla has pointed out, so eminent a Clement scholar as W. Völker takes the view that:

Clement is nothing if not a Christian, who likes to present himself under the guise of a Platonic or Stoic philosopher in order to speak the same philosophical language as the heathens and to convert them to Christianity by showing them that a Christian is not forbidden to express himself in terms of Greek philosophy. Accordingly, the borrowing of elements of Greek philosophy has only an instrumental importance: they are purely exterior terms, covering an orthodox and genuinely Christian thought, which, however, is not substantially influenced by them.¹⁴⁹

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Some older scholars such as H. R. Mackintosh concur:

The influence of Neo-Platonism on Church thinkers has been much exaggerated. Doubtless, like the writers of the New Testament, the Fathers may not have disdained to borrow this or that technical expression, without prejudice to its new Christian meaning, or

* http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol13/theology_sell.pdf

¹⁴⁷ for Celsus (2nd cent.) see Quasten, *Patrology* 2, 52-7.

¹⁴⁸ see Origen, *Contra Celsum* III xlv.

¹⁴⁹ S. R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: a Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (London 1971) 3, citing W. Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker...*, 8, 9, and 14 n.1.

to learn something of the art of formal ratiocination. But men like Tertullian and Origen were after all seeking to theologize upon a faith anchored to historical realities; the Neo-Platonisms, on the other hand, were bent on a metaphysical cosmology. Their trinity and the Trinity of Church writers have scarcely anything in common but the number three.¹⁵⁰

Harnack, however, took a broader view of Clement's purpose:

His superiority to Justin not only consists in the fact that he changed the apologetic task that the latter had in his mind into a systematic and positive one; but above all in the circumstance that he transformed the tradition of the Christian Church, which in his days was far more extensive and more firmly established than in Justin's time, into a real scientific dogma... By elevating the idea of the Logos who is Christ into the highest principle in the religious explanation of the world and in the exposition of Christianity, Clement gave to this idea a much more concrete and copious content than Justin did. Christianity is the doctrine of the creation, training, and redemption of mankind by the Logos, whose work culminates in the perfect Gnostics [sic].¹⁵¹

Again, to Quasten, 'The work of Clement of Alexandria is epoch making and it is no exaggeration to praise him as the founder of speculative theology.'¹⁵² Our own reflection upon the work of Clement leads us to the conclusion that he was not a quasi encapsulated Christian who stood over against the culture of his day, casting around amongst prevalent ideas with a view to discovering a suitable terminology by means of which to communicate (or straitjacket) the gospel. Rather, he sought to attend to the best his age had to offer, and to fulfil a creative, transforming role from within. As Daniélou says, 'He is the first Christian author to press the claims of the heritage of ancient culture...'.¹⁵³ But that is not all he did. He sought to show that that culture required Christ as its culminating point. Whatever the results in practice, it does not seem that such a policy need in principle cause the one who pursues it to overlook those differences to prevailing ideas which the Christian revelation makes, and to which H. R. Mackintosh rightly points.

Having regard to the prevalence of anthologies of school-philosophy in Clement's day, we may agree with W. R. Inge as far as he goes:

Clement is most important as the author of a syncretistic philosophy

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of religion, fusing Platonism and Stoicism in a Christian mould. In Stoicism he found a natural religion, rationalism, moralism, and a predominant interest in psychology and apologetics, in Platonism a cosmology, doctrines of revelation, redemption and salvation, and contemplation as the highest state.¹⁵⁴

But there is more to be said, and at this point Lilla is most helpful in delineating Clement's developmental process *within*, and by the aid of, the Middle Platonism and Christian gnosticism of the times. Clement, though a self-confessed eclectic, is an *involved* eclectic in that he genuinely breathes the air of the schools upon which he draws, and does not simply regard them as repositories of illustrations and analogies. On the contrary, as we shall see, he

¹⁵⁰ Mackintosh, *Person of Jesus Christ*, 161.

¹⁵¹ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 2, 326.

¹⁵² Quasten, *Patrology* 2, 20.

¹⁵³ Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 305.

¹⁵⁴ J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh 1908) 1, 315.

maintains that the universal Logos, though its culminating expression is Christ, is diffused through all the traditional systems of Greek philosophy. It thus becomes more to the point than ever to ask whether this existential involvement inhibits Clement from fully presenting Christian truth (his own criticism of gnostic hellenizers notwithstanding), and whether or not the most the Christian thinker may do is precisely to use the thought around him judiciously and analogically, ever seeking to refine his analogies in the light of that in the Christian message which is distinctively new. In a word, Clement's peril is reductionism, whereas Tertullian's is failure to communicate.

Let us, then, spell out in some detail Clement's attitude towards, and his expectations of, philosophy. We may first state without fear of contradiction that although he was not uncritical of some of the philosophers of his own and of preceding generations, Clement was generous in his appreciation of philosophy as a whole, and in this he contrasts greatly with Tertullian. For Clement, 'philosophy—I do not mean the Stoic, or the Platonic, or the Epicurean, or the Aristotelian, but whatever has been well said by each of these sects... this eclectic whole I call philosophy'.¹⁵⁵ His account of the origin of this 'eclectic whole' is threefold. In the first place, Clement reproduces a Stoic argument made familiar to us by Justin to the effect that the Logos is all-pervading, and that human reason, itself a gift from God, necessarily, and by virtue of a φυσική ἔννοια (natural conception), partakes of the Logos to some degree: 'The Father, then, and Maker of all things is apprehended by all things, agreeably to all, by innate power and without teaching...'.¹⁵⁶ More specifically, 'all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light. Let all, therefore, both Greeks and barbarians... produce whatever they have of the word of truth'.¹⁵⁷ Again, 'into all men whatever, especially those who are occupied with intellectual pursuits, a certain divine effluence has been instilled; wherefore, though reluctantly, they confess that God is one...'.¹⁵⁸ Clement draws upon illustrations familiar to Justin, Philo and Jewish-Alexandrian philosophy to reinforce his point: 'The Greek preparatory culture, therefore, with philosophy itself, is shown to have come from God to men, not with a definite

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direction, but in the way in which showers fall down on the good land, and on the dunghill, and on the houses.'¹⁵⁹ But the knowledge possessed by the Greeks is dim compared with that which Christians have in Christ;¹⁶⁰ indeed, the true Christian gnosis is of a different order from the knowledge commonly shared by all.¹⁶¹ On this latter point Clement departs from Justin and, by proposing two planes of knowledge, makes his distinctively new contribution to Christian thought.¹⁶²

Secondly, Clement, in accounting for philosophy's origin, employs a loan theory similar to that used by Justin and by Philo before him. In a manner consistent with his view that the more ancient the thought the more reliable it is, Clement emphasizes the extent of Greek

¹⁵⁵ *Stromateis* I vii We are indebted to Lilla's extensive and able account of Clement's understanding of the threefold origin of Greek philosophy, *op. cit.* 12-31.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* V xiv.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.* I xiii Cf. e.g. *ibid.* I xix.

¹⁵⁸ *Protreptikos* vi.

¹⁵⁹ *Strom.* I vii.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.* I xix.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.* I xii, and see further below.

¹⁶² see Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 52.

borrowings from the Old Testament.¹⁶³ The point is constantly reiterated in the *Stromateis*. For example, at the beginning of V xiv Clement sets out to show 'the plagiarism of the Greeks from the Barbarian [i.e. older and therefore more trustworthy] philosophy'. The barbarians, in turn, borrow from the Jews. Among the many specific claims in the chapter cited is the following: 'And in general, Pythagoras, and Socrates, and Plato say that they hear God's voice while closely contemplating the fabric of the universe, made and preserved unceasingly by God. For they heard Moses say, "He said, and it was done", describing the word of God as an act'. Again, Plato is said to have been aided in legislation by Moses, and so on.¹⁶⁴ It was against this kind of approach that Celsus protested. To him it represented Christian plundering of the basest kind: *Christians* were the borrowers, not pagans. Clement was prepared for such an attack:

As Scripture has called the Greeks pilferers of the Barbarian philosophy, it will next have to be considered how this may be briefly demonstrated. For we shall not only show that they have imitated and copied the marvels recorded in our books; but we shall prove, besides, that they have plagiarized and falsified (our writings being, as we have shown, older) the chief dogmas they hold....¹⁶⁵

In fact, Clement is so ready in defence that Lilla feels that 'it is difficult to resist the hypothesis that Clement had already read Celsus' Ἀληθῆς λόγος and bore in mind his charges against Judaism and Christianity when he wrote the *Stromateis*'.¹⁶⁶

Thirdly, Clement advances the view, fairly well-known in his time, that philosophy was not bestowed on men directly by God, but that powers or angels conveyed it to men. God is said to have allowed this to happen because of the benefit that philosophy would bring to men: 'But philosophy, it is said, was not sent by the Lord, but came stolen, or given by a thief. It was then some power or angel that had learned something of the truth, but abode not in it, that inspired and taught these things, not without the Lord's knowledge... but Providence directed the issue of the audacious deed to utility'.¹⁶⁷ Tertullian, by contrast, had included philosophy's demonic origin in his list of the pursuit's disadvantages.

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If we were asked which of the above accounts of the origin of Greek philosophy appealed most to Clement himself, we should have to confess that the question is unanswerable because Clement did not stop to harmonize his several accounts. His primary concern was to use his accounts to demonstrate the antiquity of the biblical faith and philosophy's dependence upon it, and hence to show the divine origin of the entire corpus of human thought. In the process, he advances his view that philosophy was to the Greeks as the Law was to the Hebrews: 'we shall not err in alleging that all things necessary and profitable for life come to us from God, and that philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks, as a covenant peculiar to them—being, as it is, a stepping-stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ'.¹⁶⁸ Even more explicitly, he supposes that 'philosophy was given to the Greeks, directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. For this was a

¹⁶³ *Strom.* VII i.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.* I xxv.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.* II i; cf. VI vii.

¹⁶⁶ Lilla, Clement 37 Lilla further shows the *agreement* between Celsus and Clement on the point that the Greeks inherited their culture from older races, *op. cit.* 39-41.

¹⁶⁷ *Strom.* I xvii; cf. *ibid.* VII ii.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.* VII viii.

schoolmaster to bring "the Hellenic mind", as the law, the Hebrews, "to Christ". Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ'.¹⁶⁹ Christ far surpasses the best that has been given to men in philosophy—the more so because although philosophy, a gift of God, was good in itself, the devil tampered with it to the disadvantage of both Jews and Greeks.¹⁷⁰ It follows that certain things are within philosophy's competence, whereas concerning others it is impotent. Indeed, philosophy is unavoidable, since without it one could not determine whether or not to philosophize. Again, philosophy is a defence against idolatry and superstition; it is a conveyor of truth; it is an apologetic tool.¹⁷¹ But it is limited; apart from Christ it is incomplete, and for all its worth it does not render faith superfluous, as some have thought. On the contrary, there is no pleasing God without faith,¹⁷² and there is ample evidence that those who have philosophy but no faith are powerless to break with idolatry.¹⁷³ 'That which the chiefs of philosophy only guessed at, the disciples of Christ have both apprehended and proclaimed'.¹⁷⁴ To reiterate, Clement makes his pro-philosophy claims as one committed to the best in human culture, and not as a despiser of it. Although Christ is for him the sum and the surpasser of philosophy's noblest aspirations, there is definite continuity between philosophy and the Christian revelation.¹⁷⁵ How is such a position worked out in relation to those doctrines which take us to Christianity's heart?

Let us first consider some aspects of Clement's doctrine of God. In his approach to the question of God's transcendence we see both Clement's debt to Philo, Middle Platonism and gnosticism, and his opposition to Stoicism. God is the absolute and the unknowable. Hence, we cannot say what he is, we can only, *κατ' ἀφίρεσιν*, say what he is not: 'If, then, abstracting all that belongs to bodies and things called incorporeal, we cast ourselves into the greatness of Christ, and thence advance into immensity by holiness, we may reach somehow to the conception of the Almighty, knowing not what He is, but what He is not... We speak not as supplying His name; but for want, we use good names, in order that the mind may

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have these as points of support, so as not to err in other respects'.¹⁷⁶ By thus emphasizing God's transcendence Clement directly opposes Stoic materialism, pagan idolatry, and pantheism. But he pays a high price for his victory, both in principle and in detail.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.* I v To those Christians who rested upon Paul's injunction to the Colossians that they should 'beware of philosophy and vain deceit', Clement replied that the apostle was quite properly warning Christians against such bad philosophers as the Sceptics and Epicureans, and that elsewhere Paul quoted pagans with approval, *Strom.* I xi, xix.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.* VI xvii.

¹⁷¹ see *ibid.* I ii, I xx, VI xviii.

¹⁷² *ibid.* II ii.

¹⁷³ *ibid.* VI xii.

¹⁷⁴ *Protr.* xi.

¹⁷⁵ Lilla has provided ample evidence for the view that there is a large measure of agreement between Clement, Justin and Middle Platonism. This emerges especially in respect of the esteem in which Plato and Pythagoras are held; and in the condemnation of Epicurean 'atheism', Peripatetic restrictions of the sphere of divine providence, and Stoic materialism and determinism, *Clement* 41-51. The moral is that Clement is a selective eclectic, but always from within the tradition in which he had been reared.

¹⁷⁶ *Strom.* V xi; xii Lilla notes the correspondence between Clement and Philo at this point. He further points out that Clement is not entirely at one with Plotinus, however, since to Clement the highest divinity is *νοῦς*, whereas the Plotinian 'one' is the source of *νοῦς*; and, by the same token, Clement's God has, and the Plotinian 'one' lacks, poetical activity, *Clement* 213, 223. For all that, McGiffert ruefully reflects that through Clement, the philosophical absolute entered Christian theology and has remained to plague theologians from that day to this', *History of Christian Thought* 1, 205.

As to the principle, it is clear that undue emphasis upon transcendence hurts not only Stoicism and Clement's other foes, but the Christian incarnational claim as well. Clement is in a cleft stick, for at one and the same time he needs transcendence (and his cultural heritage at this point strongly ushers him in the direction of things Greek), and yet he also wishes to make the Christian affirmation that God is known in Christ. There is thus an ambivalence in his thinking which results from his insufficiently radical reappraisal of the notion that God is a metaphysical principle. Further, to take one detail—and the most important one—Clement's *via negativa* leads him to posit quasi-Neo-Platonic ἀπαφεία as being among God's highest attributes, and as the true gnostic's highest aspiration. Thus, Christ 'was entirely impassable; inaccessible to any movement of feeling—either pleasure or pain. While the apostles, having most gnostically mastered, through the Lord's teaching, anger, and fear, and lust, were not liable even to such of the movements of feeling, as seem good... but ever continuing unvarying in a state of training after the resurrection of the Lord'.¹⁷⁷ But this is to stop at ἔρωϛ, aspiration, and to leave us at some distance from that positive, gracious yet holy ἀγάπη which is at the heart of the Christian gospel. Further, Clement's inadequacy from the manward side is expressed by Dr. Bigg as follows: 'Love is not of Jesus, but of the Logos, the Ideal. Clement could not bear to think that the rose of Sharon could blossom on common soil.'¹⁷⁸

These difficulties are in no way diminished by the recollection that Clement grants the inadequacy of Christ-less philosophy, and turns against Neo-Platonism in asserting the existence of a mediator between the 'one' and man; for everything turns upon the nature of the mediator. The difficulties will be thrown into still clearer relief as we turn to Clement's account of the Logos of God. His transcendence and impassibility notwithstanding, God desires the salvation of men. Indeed, 'He is Saviour; not [the Saviour] of some, and of others not',¹⁷⁹ and he has taken steps to secure his objective: 'it has been God's fixed and constant purpose to save the flock of men: for this end the good God sent the good Shepherd'.¹⁸⁰ Lest it should be thought, in view of what we are about to say concerning Clement's gnosticism, that he makes no room for faith, we would draw attention to his famous chapter, *Stromateis* II iv, in which he argues that faith is the foundation of all knowledge. Clement here calls Hebrews 11 to his aid, and argues that 'Should one say that Knowledge is founded on demonstration by a process of reasoning, let him hear that first principles are incapable of demonstration; for they are known neither by art nor sagacity ... the first cause of the universe can be apprehended by faith alone... knowledge is characterized by faith; and faith, by a kind of

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divine mutual and reciprocal correspondence, becomes characterized by knowledge'. No doubt any Christians who were opposed on dogmatic grounds to Greek philosophy felt reassured by this assertion of the primacy of faith. But Clement has even more to say on the other side, and any apparent inconsistency in his overall approach is due to his attempt to fight on more than one front at once. He wishes to capitulate neither to those Greeks who charged Christians with irrationality, nor to those Valentinians whose γνῶσιϛ was for ever out of the reach of all except the πνευματικοι. The result is that the balance in Clement's work is

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.* VI ix.

¹⁷⁸ Franks, *History of Doctrine of Work of Christ* 1, 51 On ἔρωϛ as aspiration see A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London 1938) 2, 143-152.

¹⁷⁹ *Strom.* VII ii.

¹⁸⁰ *Protr.* xi.

very much in favour of knowledge, and we shall have to see whether he successfully avoids that gnostic aristocratic exclusivism which is the antithesis of Christ's universality.

Clement's view appears to be that, whereas faith in Christ suffices for salvation, there are various degrees of understanding what is given in faith. The Christian is not like the pagan philosopher, for the latter is still seeking the truth. The Christian already has the truth in Christ, and his quest is of an ever clearer grasp of it: 'that investigation, which accords with faith, which builds, on the foundation of faith, the august knowledge of the truth, we know to be the best'.¹⁸¹ Or again, 'as we say that a man can be a believer without learning, so also we assert that it is impossible for a man without learning to comprehend the things which are declared in the faith'.¹⁸² The imparting of understanding to the Christian is the primary function of the Logos.

To Clement, as to Philo and to Platonism generally, the Logos is in the first place the mind of God. He then becomes an immanent principle—somewhat as in Stoic thought.¹⁸³ (It will here be recalled that Photius charged Clement with teaching the 'fabulous notion' of the existence of two logoi, of whom the subordinate one appeared to man.¹⁸⁴) As immanent principle the Logos is the power of God, the creative principle, and the source of such wisdom as the ancients possessed. Finally, the Logos was begotten, and became incarnate in Christ, the Son. He is the illuminator of those who have been initiated into the Christian way. He is the Tutor, the Instructor, the Educator,¹⁸⁵ and he is not concerned with intellectual matters only. Clement is well aware of Christianity's relevance to the whole of life, and he specifies the areas of the gnostic's proper concern thus: 'These three things, therefore, our philosopher attaches himself to: first, speculation; second, the performance of the precepts; third, the forming of good men;—which, concurring, form the Gnostic. Whichever of these is wanting, the elements of knowledge limp'.¹⁸⁶ The role of the Logos as educator is summed up thus: 'Eagerly desiring, then, to perfect us by a gradation conducive to salvation, suited for efficacious discipline, a beautiful arrangement is observed by the all-benignant Word, who first exhorts, then trains, and finally teaches'.¹⁸⁷ But this is not all, for the Logos is also seen as being involved in the deification of man. The Logos has 'bestowed on us the truly great, divine, and inalienable inherit-

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ance of the Father, deifying man by heavenly teaching, putting his laws into our minds, and writing them on our hearts'.¹⁸⁸ When to all of this we add our earlier remarks concerning ἄπαθεια, it is not surprising that some, on reading Clement, have been prompted to ask, this salvation? Is this the Saviour?' Clement made an heroic effort to unite the historic Jesus with

¹⁸¹ *Strom.* V i.

¹⁸² *ibid.* I vi.

¹⁸³ see Lilla, *Clement* ch. III.

¹⁸⁴ *cf.* Quasten, *Patrology* 2, 17.

¹⁸⁵ These descriptions are employed by Clement in *Paedagogus* I i. It will be clear that many of the functions which Clement allots to the Logos have traditionally been thought of as being aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit. Certainly it is not clear that Clement successfully related the two. This was, however, a task for a later age, and indeed it was not satisfactorily accomplished until the Logos was 'bowed out of the creeds'.

¹⁸⁶ *Strom.* II x.

¹⁸⁷ *Paed.* I i.

¹⁸⁸ *Protr.* xi A. C. McGiffert properly reminds us that unlike Irenaeus, Clement did not hold that the Christian becomes divine in essence or substance; he has in mind the Christian's moral likeness to God, *History of Christian Thought* 1, 186.

the Philonic Logos, but the latter all too often appears to take precedence over the former. This comes out clearly, for example, when Clement informs us that the *human* Jesus did not eat because he needed to, but only in order to demonstrate his humanity to his followers.¹⁸⁹ H. R. Mackintosh's verdict is just: 'Theories which start, not from the historical Christ, but from the pre-existent Word, and proceed by way of deduction, will always be in grave hazard on the side of docetism, and Clement is no exception'.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, God's holy demands and man's deepest need have ever seemed to those who have reckoned with the Pauline gospel, for example, to require an understanding of salvation which is more radically disjunctive than that which emphasizes education and deification. All of which leads us to observe that when he turns to the concept of sin and to Christ's redemptive work, Clement, though here self-consistent, is unable to bring out fully the distinctively Christian understanding of either.

Clement's God is not the author of sin. On the contrary, sin is the irrational abuse by man of the freedom in which he was created: 'in no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originates sins, and a mistaken judgement sometimes prevails, from which, since it is ignorance and stupidity, we do not take pains to recede, punishments are rightly inflicted'.¹⁹¹ Again, 'Everything that is contrary to right reason is sin'.¹⁹² But the very definition of sin also defines sin's remedy which is, as we have seen, education and the restoration of immortality. At the fall, says Clement, man did not lose all capacity for the divine; his logos, though not his moral capacity, diminished.¹⁹³ Hence, both the grace of God and the work of man are necessary 'that the friend of Christ may be rendered worthy of the kingdom'.¹⁹⁴ Not, indeed, that Clement favours asceticism, for this all too readily leads to undue concentration upon the externals of religion.¹⁹⁵ But that man has the ability to make right choices is clear from a number of passages, and especially from *Stromateis* IV xxiv: 'Now that it is in our power, of which equally with its opposite we are masters,—as, say, to philosophize or not, to believe or disbelieve. In consequence, then, of our being equally masters of each of these opposites, what depends on us is found possible'.¹⁹⁶ Not surprisingly Dr. Bartlet concluded that 'the *Freedom of the Will* is the key to moral evil, and that in so emphatic a form that he has, like much Greek theology, but a feeble sense of the part played by Divine grace in setting the will truly free'.¹⁹⁷ Lilla has not over-emphasized matters in saying that

For Clement Christ is, first of all, a gnostic teacher who has come down to the earth in order to lead a few selected persons to the higher

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gnosis of his father, by educating them to the perfect ἀπάθεια and by teaching them secret doctrines based on the allegorical interpretations of Scripture. This is what Clement means

¹⁸⁹ *Strom.* VI ix.

¹⁹⁰ Mackintosh, *Person of Jesus Christ* 163. As A. C. McGiffert says, 'It was the eternal Logos he chiefly thought of; the incarnation was only an incident. On earth the Logos simply continued the work he had always been doing, the work of a teacher or revealer.' *Op. cit.* 201.

¹⁹¹ *Strom.* I xvii; cf. *ibid.* II xv and VII xvi.

¹⁹² *Paed.* I xiii.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*; cf. Daniélou, *Gospel Message* 414.

¹⁹⁴ *Protr.* xi.

¹⁹⁵ von Campenhausen, *Fathers of Greek Church* 29-30.

¹⁹⁶ Cunningham quotes *Sculteti Medulla* to show that Clement 'on one occasion... goes so far as to say, that Christ assumed human nature, and came into the world, in order to show men that their own powers were sufficient to obey the will of God...' *Historical Theology* 1, 151.

¹⁹⁷ Bartlet, *Early Church History* 150.

by salvation. The idea of Christ as a redeemer of the whole of mankind by means of his sacrifice is replaced, in Clement's philosophical system, by the esoteric idea of *gnosis*.¹⁹⁸

What does puzzle us, however, is why Lilla should feel that 'Clement gives a "Christian" solution to Neo-platonic problems' concerning the relation of the 'one' to man.¹⁹⁹ (Unless, of course we are to understand by the inverted commas within which *Christian* is enclosed, that Lilla concedes the point we are about to make). For as Wiles has said, 'the Church has come... to feel that it cannot give satisfactory answers to other people's questions; it has demanded to be allowed to modify the agenda in the process of giving its answers'.²⁰⁰ That is, Clement's answers are, for all their sensitivity to the culture to which and from within which he spoke, inadequate and incomplete as *Christian* answers.

It is doubly important that in view of such a serious reservation we should underline our conviction of the genuineness of Clement's Christian profession. He is ardently committed to Christ, and none of the Fathers can surpass the urgency and winsomeness of Clement's evangelical appeals: 'Receive Christ, receive sight, receive thy light, "In order that you may know well both God and man"... I urge you to be saved. This Christ desires. In one word, He freely bestows life on you'.²⁰¹ In selecting the points on which we have commented we do not overlook the fact that 'The chief problem confronting Clement was a pastoral one'.²⁰² We applaud his generous appreciation of the best his culture had to offer, and his rounded view of the Christian life. Further, his attempt to combine the concepts of transcendence and immanence is praiseworthy, and his grasp of man's real responsibility under God is sound. Harnack's appreciation of Clement's efforts is the more telling because of the writer's general distrust of theologico-metaphysical conjunctions: 'His great work, which has rightly been called the boldest literary undertaking in the history of the Church, is consequently the first attempt to use Holy Scripture and the Church tradition together with the assumption that Christ as the Reason of the world is the source of all truth, as the basis of a presentation of Christianity which at once addresses itself to the cultured by satisfying the scientific demand for a philosophical ethic and theory of the world, and at the same time reveals to the believer the rich content of his faith'.²⁰³ Glover speaks a true last word: 'Clement's theology is composite rather than organic—a structure of materials old and new, hardly fit for the open air, the wind and the rain. But his faith is another thing—it rests upon the living personality of the Saviour, the love of God and the significance of the individual soul, and it has the stamp of such faith in all ages—joy and peace in believing. It has lasted because it lived'.²⁰⁴

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This article has taken the form of an extended illustration. We have attempted to show what happens when Christian thought seeks to make its way in a multi-faceted intellectual environment. (It is, incidentally, one of the glories of the second century that Christians, surrounded as they were by heresies of various kinds, and living as many of them did under the threat of persecution, did not develop a ghetto mentality more frequently than they did). Our account has been selective in at least two ways. Firstly, we have not treated every theme—notably omitting the ecclesiological and the sacramental—on which our chosen

¹⁹⁸ Lilla, *Clement* 159.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.* 202.

²⁰⁰ M. F. Wiles, review of Dr. Lilla's book in *Religious Studies* 11 (1973) 379.

²⁰¹ *Prom* xi,

²⁰² Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought* 33.

²⁰³ Harnack, *History of Dogma* 2, 324.

²⁰⁴ Glover, *Conflict of Religions* 303.

thinkers wrote. Secondly, we have been especially concerned with the philosophical elements of secondcentury culture rather than with, for example, the poetic—in which Clement, in particular, took so much delight—or the popularly religious, in which all our writers were greatly interested.²⁰⁵

We have encountered four thinkers, each of whom represents a perennial attitude to the question of the relations between Christian thought and the prevailing philosophical climate. We met Justin, who sought to use philosophy's tools for apologetic purposes, whilst maintaining that in the last resort all the philosophers are debtors to Christ; Irenaeus, who was cool towards, though not uninfluenced by, the thought-forms of his day; Tertullian who, despite his overt hostility towards philosophy was influenced by it perhaps more than he knew; and Clement who, more positively than Justin, sought to elaborate a Christian view of the world from within his cultural environment. To different degrees Justin, Irenaeus and Clement failed to give adequate place to distinctively Christian claims, and this was primarily because they were insufficiently critical of their intellectual inheritance: they did not subject it to entirely adequate biblical scrutiny. And Tertullian, for all his apparent aversion to theology, was not prevented from distorting the Christian position at various points.

Our most significant finding is that, for all their various and sometimes fluctuating attitudes towards the intellectual climate of their day, the four men are united by a common weakness on the question of what man needs, and what God has done to supply his need. The contemporary apologist would perhaps do well to ponder whether such weakness usually, or even necessarily, accompanies an insufficiently critical response to the world's thought-forms and conceptual apparatus.²⁰⁶ Certainly, the second century has provided us with more than a little evidence to suggest that the more the alleged continuities between Christian and other thought are emphasised, the greater the threat to the Christian message. Conversely, we have been reminded, again and again, that 'Salvation in the New Testament may never be read as enlightenment, moral reformation or spiritual growth. All these accompany it, but in essence it is none of these, but "salvage"—being plucked as a brand from the burning by the sheer good favour of God.'²⁰⁷ It is not without significance that when he came to

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write an article on 'Gratitude', Professor James Whyte had to say that 'the note of gratitude is not prominent in many of the early Christian writings, for neither is the note of grace.'²⁰⁸

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²⁰⁵ see H. J. Carpenter, 'Popular Christianity and the Theologians in the Early Centuries', *Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 14 (1963) 294-310.

²⁰⁶ For further reflections on this point see my article, 'The Peril of Reductionism in Christian Thought', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1974) 48-64.

²⁰⁷ H. F. Lovell Cocks, *By Faith Alone* (London 1943) 188.

²⁰⁸ J. A. Whyte, 'Gratitude' in *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. J. Macquarrie (London 1967) 141.