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CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA
AND THE BEGINNINGS OF
CHRISTIAN APOPHATICISM

Henny Fiskå Hägg

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HENNY FISKÅ HÄGG

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For Tomas

Even the most unlearned of men knows that the truly important matters in life are those for which we have no words. Yet we must speak of them. We speak, as it were, around them, under them, through them, but not directly of them. Perhaps the Master of the Universe thought it best not to give us those words, for to possess them is to comprehend the awesome mysteries of creation and death, and such comprehension might well make life impossible for us. Hence in His infinite wisdom and compassion the Master of the Universe gave us the obscure riddle rather than the revealing word. Thus we should give thanks to Him and bless His name.

Chaim Potok: *The Gift of Asher Lev* (1990), 55–6

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Kristiansand, June 2005

Henny Fiskå Hägg

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Abbreviations

Works of ancient authors

<i>C. Cels.</i>	Origen, <i>Contra Celsum</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	Justin, <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>Did.</i>	Alcinous, <i>Didascalicus</i>
<i>Exc.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>excerpta ex Theodoto</i>
<i>HE</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>In rem. publ.</i>	Proclus, <i>In Platonis rem publicam commentarii</i>
<i>Or.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Orationes</i>
<i>Paed.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Paedagogus</i>
<i>Parm.</i>	Plato, <i>Parmenides</i>
<i>Protr.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>Ref.</i>	Hippolytus, <i>Refutatio omnium haeresium</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	Plato, <i>Republic</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	Philo, <i>De Somniis</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromateis</i>
<i>Tim.</i>	Plato, <i>Timaeus</i>
<i>V. Plot.</i>	Porphyry, <i>Vita Plotini</i>

Series

ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> (1972–)

FC	The Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
LCL	The Loeb Classical Library
SC	Sources Chrétiennes

1

Introduction

In the theology of the Greek Fathers and of Eastern Orthodoxy generally the question whether, or in what sense, man can know God is of primary importance. Christian apophaticism, or Christian apophatic theology, may be seen as a response to this question. In the Greek Orthodox tradition the primary way of approaching the divine is through negation (Gr. *apophasis*), not affirmation (Gr. *kataphasis*).¹ What is denied or negated, then, is the possibility both to know and to express the divine nature: God is both greater than, and different from, human knowledge and thought. It also follows that human language is incapable of expressing him.

In other words, confronted with the otherness of divine being, it is less misleading to say what God is not, than to say what he is. Of course, *apophasis* and *kataphasis* are not mutually exclusive alternatives. All theology must be to some extent affirmative, otherwise it would be mere intellectual nihilism. Apophatic theology in fact presupposes kataphatic theology, otherwise there would be nothing to negate.

¹ The Greek word *ἀπόφασις* means ‘denial’ or ‘negation’.

Apophatic theology then, has as its premise that God is transcendent, and that there is an absolute gulf between the transcendent one and the rest of the cosmos, including man. It is closely related to Christian mystical theology, or Christian mysticism, but it is not the same.² All types of mysticism will include apophatic approaches to God, or will use negative roads to achieve knowledge of him, i.e. a negative knowledge. Yet mystical theology (equivalent to spirituality or contemplative theology) focuses mainly on man's inner existential relationship to God, on his union with God. Correspondingly, though apophatic theology may well have mystical aspects, its primary concern is intellectual/dogmatic and epistemological.

An important aspect of apophatic discourse is the claim that the divine is beyond human language. When affirmative language fails, apophatic theology uses alternative ways of describing the indescribable, such as parables, contradictions, and symbolism. For example, in the Christian Orthodox tradition a passage from Exodus 19, describing how Moses met God in a thick darkness or cloud, is a favourite symbol for conveying the experience of the incomprehensibility of the divine nature. The divine darkness signifies that God is essentially inaccessible and unknown to man. It also signifies the impossibility of describing God or predicating anything of him. This realization of the limits of language

² In the West mystical theology and dogmatic theology have become separated: mystical theology is concerned with man's inner relationship to God, whereas dogmatic theology aims at the systematization of statements about God. In the Greek Eastern tradition and among the Greek Fathers, however, no such separation exists.

and thus also of the limits of man's rationality in relation to God is a fundamental aspect of the tradition. God cannot be named or described because all language is inadequate for expressing the divine. In addition, God's negative, or apophatic, nature also implies that dogmas or doctrines are seen rather as ways of safeguarding the divine mystery than as definitive expressions of the contents of faith.

Apophasis is not, however, a phenomenon peculiar to Christianity. It is found in many religions and religio-metaphysical systems. Wherever a religion or a philosophy operates with a transcendent god or a transcendent principle, it is faced with the dilemma of how to know and describe that god or that principle. Recent decades have witnessed a considerable increase in the number of studies on mystical traditions within Christianity and outside it. Works on separate so-called 'mystics' both in the Eastern and Western traditions from Plato onwards are manifold. We have also seen a renewed interest in 'dialogue' between different religions concerning this concept.³ In various ways negative theology is part of religions such as Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism, as well as all branches of Platonism. Recent studies that address the topic in a more general way include Michael A. Sells' *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (1994), which deals with the different types of negative theology, focusing on the Neoplatonic, Islamic, and Christian types.⁴

³ One recent example is J. P. Williams, *Denying Divinity. Apophasis in the Patristic Christian and Soto Zen Buddhist Tradition* (Oxford, 2000).

⁴ See also Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vols. i–ii (Bonn, 1986); Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (eds.), *Silence and the Word. Negative Theology and Incarnation* (Cambridge, 2002); and Jan Miernowski, *Le Dieu*

But also studies that go beyond the traditional religious traditions find the language of apophasis, negation, and negativity to be fruitful means of expressing a sentiment of our 'postmodern' time.⁵

Apophasic theology works with negations: God is not good, loving, or just—which does not, of course, mean that he is evil, hating, or unjust, but that it is beyond the limits of language and the ability of man to express what he is. Yet, this does not lead to any type of agnosticism in relation to God. For, as we have seen, Christian apophaticism presupposes kataphatic, or affirmative, theology: God has revealed himself both in the creation and in the coming of Christ; in this way God's immanence enables man to relate to and know God. Therefore, God is—paradoxically—both known and unknown, both immanent and transcendent.

A 'solution' to the dilemma of God's unknowability was expressed in Orthodox theology at an early time. Greek theologians distinguished between knowing God *as he is in himself*, his *essence*, and, on the other hand, knowing his powers or *energies*. By making a distinction between his unknowable, apophatic essence and his knowable, kataphatic energies, these theologians sought to safeguard the absolute transcendence and incomprehensibility of God. But since his energies too are uncreated and divine, flowing from

néant. Théologies négatives à l'aube de temps modernes (New York, 1998) (starting with Dionysius the Areopagite).

⁵ Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion. Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago, 1999) gives an insight into some of this vast area of research. See also Henny Fiskå Hägg (ed.), *Language and Negativity. Apophaticism in Theology and Literature* (Oslo, 2000).

the same nature, real knowledge of, as well as participation in, God were made possible.

The distinction between God's 'essence' and his 'energies' was not clearly formulated until the conciliar decisions in the middle of the fourteenth century. Its roots, however, can be sought at a much earlier stage, already in the early church. In the present work, my intention is to investigate this earliest stage of Christian apophaticism as well as the beginnings of the distinction between essence and energies, focusing on Clement of Alexandria in the late second century. Though he was certainly not the first Christian theologian to touch on these questions—both in the Apologists and in Irenaeus there are traces of negative theology—his discussion is the most articulate among the earliest Fathers and his insights the deepest.

Thus, this is not a general study of Clement's theology. It will focus on one particular aspect, but one that appears to run like a scarlet thread through much of his writings. There is a statement in Clement's main work, the *Stromateis*, which seems to express the essence of apophatic theology. After a detailed description of a process of thought which aims at the contemplation of God, Clement finally concludes—against the expectation of his readers—that 'we may somehow reach the idea of the Almighty, *knowing not what he is, but what he is not*' (*Strom.* 5.71.3). This epistemological statement concerning man's inability to know God also indicates, I would claim, a meaningful approach to understanding Clement's theology and philosophy in general.

My own study has, of course, benefited and received inspiration from many scholars and works, and it will be convenient

to mention a few of the more important titles already at this stage. The following survey is not, however, intended as a regular review of research and has no pretensions of being exhaustive. It is a brief presentation of the works to which my own study owes most; the more specific debts will be stated in my footnotes. Dispensing with a *Forschungsbericht* proper is warranted by the fact that there exist fairly recent and detailed surveys of Clementine scholarship.⁶

Eric Osborn's monograph *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* appeared in 1957. Though Clement's theological statements may seem scattered and unsystematic, Osborn regards his work as a new Christian synthesis which reconciles the transcendent and the immanent in the mystery of the unity of all things in the knowable Son. Osborn is one of the few patristic scholars to keep Clement in a more or less constant focus, up to (and beyond) his more recent book on *The Emergence of Christian Theology*,⁷ continuously striving to give him the more prominent place in the history of theology that he deserves.⁸ Among the modern writers on Clement that I have consulted, it is Eric Osborn's understanding of Clement's way of writing and of his achievement

⁶ For a general survey of the study of Clement in the period 1958–82, see Eric F. Osborn, 'Clement of Alexandria: A Review of Research, 1958–1982', *The Second Century*, 3 (1983), 219–44. Cf. also Walther Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Clemens Alexandrinus* (Berlin, 1952), p. viii. The most recent *Forschungsbericht* is that of Annewies van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and his Use of Philo in the Stromateis* (Leiden, 1988) which is not confined only to studies concerning the Philonic influence on Clement.

⁷ Eric F. Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge, 1993).

⁸ See my 'Concluding Remarks' for a discussion of the rather negative view of Clement that for long has dominated scholarly circles.

that I have found most congenial to my own reading of Clement.⁹

At an early stage, before I embarked on this study, I was much inspired by reading the unpublished thesis by David J. Gendle, 'The Apophatic Approach to God in the Early Greek Fathers, with special reference to the Alexandrian Tradition'.¹⁰ Though it does not appear in my footnotes since I have not had access to it in the meantime, I wish to express my general debt to it here.

Jean Daniélou's *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique aux II^e et III^e siècles*,¹¹ in addition to Clement, also deals with the Apologists and Origen, arranging the material systematically according to various topics. Daniélou's attempt to evaluate Clement's contribution and originality within the framework of his own—pre-Nicene—time, broke with a long-standing practice and yielded lasting results. In the section 'Theological Problems', he treats Clement's place in the development of Christian thought, including his Middle Platonist background, his negative theology, and the person of the Logos, all topics central to my study.

The most comprehensive study of the *Stromateis*—Clement's main work as well as the principal source for my own investigation—is André Méhat's *Étude sur les 'Stromates'*

⁹ Cf. also Eric F. Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1981), as well as several articles (see my Bibliography).

¹⁰ David J. Gendle, 'The Apophatic Approach to God in the Early Greek Fathers, with special reference to the Alexandrian Tradition' (unpublished thesis, Oxford, 1973).

¹¹ I have used it in the English translation: Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (London, 1973).

de Clément d'Alexandrie.¹² It covers not only the peculiar literary structure of the *Stromateis* and its attitude to pagan culture, topics long in the focus of classical scholars, but also its significance in its contemporary religious and philosophical setting. I have further benefited from the detailed commentary on Book 5 of the *Stromateis* by another French expert on Clement, Alain le Boulluec.¹³

Salvatore Lilla's *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*¹⁴ is the first and fundamental work among several recent investigations of Clement's theological thinking viewed against its background in non-Christian philosophy.¹⁵ Lilla sets out to demonstrate two things: that Clement is, to a great extent, an exponent of Middle Platonist religious philosophy and that his Christianity has a specifically Gnostic flavour. However, although his demonstration of Clement's Middle Platonism has met with general acceptance,¹⁶ when in the present study I focus on Clement as a Middle Platonist, I do not base myself primarily on Lilla's systematic exposition. The weakness of

¹² André Méhat, *Étude sur les 'Stromates' de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1966).

¹³ Alain le Boulluec, *Clément d'Alexandrie: Stromate 5* (Paris, 1981).

¹⁴ Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1971).

¹⁵ Other important studies are Dietmar Wyrwa, *Die christliche Platonaneignung in den Stromateis des Clemens von Alexandrien* (Berlin, 1983) on Clement's use of Plato, and Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria*, who investigates the Philonic influence on Clement.

¹⁶ Lilla's second argument, concerning Clement's Gnosticism, has been more criticized, e.g. the reviews of his *Clement of Alexandria*, by R. A. Norris, *Theological Studies*, 33 (1972), 761–2; P. O'Connell, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 38 (1972), 275–7; and R. McL. Wilson, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 24 (1973), 286–8. Cf. also below, Ch. 4.

his approach is a certain tendency to isolate phrases and propositions from their organic context.¹⁷ Here I have chosen to present the concept of God in three representative pagan Middle Platonists in its original (if necessarily fragmentary) context to serve as an independent background to my treatment of Clement's own view of these matters.

In his *Connaissance religieuse et herméneutique chez Clément d'Alexandrie*,¹⁸ Raoul Mortley discusses the problem of faith and knowledge in Clement. In addition to an investigation of Clement's cultural and philosophical background (the area of Lilla and others), he seeks to present Clement's contribution to epistemology, his 'théorie de la connaissance'. In that context he deals illuminatingly with Clement's views on language and silence in relation to God, a topic highly relevant to my study. Mortley has also written extensively on questions related to negative theology in general,¹⁹ in particular in his monumental two-volume work *From Word to Silence*.²⁰

Finally, a scholar not primarily concerned with Clement has been of special importance in my work with Clement's concept of God, particularly in relation to its philosophical background, namely John Whittaker. His many essays on different aspects of the Platonic tradition, some of which are included

¹⁷ Cf. the criticism in Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy*, 241–4. John Whittaker, '[Rev.] E. Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (1981)', *The Second Century*, 4 (1984), 60–2, however, regards this as an unfortunate attack on Lilla's book.

¹⁸ Raoul Mortley, *Connaissance religieuse et herméneutique chez Clément d'Alexandrie* (Leiden, 1973).

¹⁹ See my Bibliography.

²⁰ Mortley, *From Word to Silence*.

in his doctoral dissertation *God Time Being: Studies in the Transcendental Tradition in Greek Philosophy*,²¹ have been most instructive, also methodologically. In particular, I am indebted to his discussions of the tradition of negative theology in Platonism, in the pagan as well as the Christian (including Clement) and Gnostic traditions.²²

Turning now to my practice here: I have endeavoured to read and understand Clement himself before turning to the interpretation of others, and have searched his text with my own specific questions in mind. The book has thus to a large extent developed through the localization and interpretation of a number of key passages, primarily from the *Stromateis* but also from Clement's other extant writings (including the *Excerpta ex Theodoto* and the fragments).²³

²¹ John Whittaker, *God Time Being: Studies in the Transcendental Tradition in Greek Philosophy* (Bergen, 1970). Others are reprinted in John Whittaker, *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought* (London, 1984).

²² John Whittaker, 'Moses Atticizing', *Phoenix*, 21 (1967), 196–201; 'Ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 23 (1969), 91–104; 'Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology', *Symbolae Osloenses*, 44 (1969), 109–25; 'Neopythagoreanism and the Transcendent Absolute', *Symbolae Osloenses*, 48 (1973), 77–86; 'Numenius and Alcinous on the First Principle', *Phoenix*, 32 (1978), 144–54, as well as his critical edition of *Didascalicus*, Alcinous' Middle Platonic handbook, *Alcinoos: Enseignement des doctrines de Platon* (Paris, 1990). John Dillon's translation and commentary, in *Didascalicus: The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford, 1993), based on Whittaker's Budé text, as well as his handbook, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), have also been of great value for my work.

²³ For Clement's text, I have mostly used and quoted from Otto Stählin's critical edition (GCS), but I have also compared other later editions (most of which have appeared in SC). A few of the English translations are my own, but I generally use the available printed translations, sometimes in a slightly modified form (for conformity or to bring out a special point). This also applies to the other Greek and Latin texts I quote in translation. For details on editions and translations used, see below, Bibliography: Primary sources.

Clement is no system-builder, who in one place displays his whole theological construction; he is constantly rethinking and revising his viewpoints, and whoever wants to understand and explain his thought must be in constant contact with the texts in which it develops.

Before arriving at the discussion proper of the concept of God in Clement, contained in my central Chapters 4–8, I have found it essential to trace Clement's background in two respects, first his personal background as a Christian writer in second-century Alexandria (Chapter 2), then his philosophical context as a Christian Middle Platonist (Chapter 3).

The reason for first dwelling on Alexandria in the first centuries AD is best expressed by quoting from Walther Völker's 'Einleitung' to his monograph on Clement:

Mysterious, like a meteor, suddenly the figure of Clement of Alexandria emerges from the dark, shines for a short time in the brightness of light, and then disappears for ever in darkness.²⁴

The first part of this statement highlights both the challenge and the difficulties. When trying to penetrate the 'dark', one immediately meets with a desperate lack of reliable sources, especially concerning the history and origins of the Christian church in Alexandria. But Alexandria was Clement's home and working place for most of his productive years, and in order to understand him it is important, I think, to try to create a picture of the multifarious social, cultural, and religious worlds that surrounded him. Further, the

²⁴ Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker*, 1.

origins of Christianity in the city of Alexandria have to be discussed, in spite of the scarcity of sources; it is not until around AD 180 that a clearer picture emerges, partly through what may be gleaned from the writings of Clement himself. In the last part of Chapter 2, I also include a short introduction to each of these writings, discussing the purposes for which they were composed and the kinds of audience to which they may have been originally addressed.

When dealing specifically with his philosophy, an important concern must be not to view Clement in isolation from the intellectual world, or perhaps rather worlds, that surrounded him. Then we are, of course, no longer confined to the city of Alexandria; the whole *oikoumenē* is his intellectual milieu. Clement was a Christian and a Platonist, a theologian and a philosopher. His struggle to combine and create a synthesis of these different thought-worlds is manifest all through his writings. I have chosen in Chapter 3 to pay special attention to the philosophical school that seems to have influenced him most, Middle Platonism, as represented by three of its main exponents, Alcinous, Atticus, and Numenius, with a special focus on their concept of the divine.

The main part of the book, comprising Chapters 4–8, discusses the aspects of Clement's theology and philosophy that concern his so-called esotericism, the apophatic nature of God, the nature of the Son, and the question of the knowledge of the divine. When it seems appropriate, I attempt to relate Clement to the relevant passages in the works and fragments of the Middle Platonists.

More specifically, Chapter 4 considers certain aspects of Clement's writing methods and his views of the written

versus the spoken word; I also discuss the question whether Clement teaches an esoteric doctrine or not. Chapter 5 presents Clement's concept of God the Father, particularly focusing on his apophatic nature or essence.

Chapter 6 is devoted to Clement's Logos-theology: the function, status, and role of the Son in relation to the Father, emphasizing the Son's peculiar or paradoxical position as being, on the one hand, distinct from the One as the knowable One—Many and, on the other, united with the One. I further consider questions related to his pre-existence, generation, and divinity.

Against this background, the relationship between Clement's apophaticism and his epistemology is discussed in Chapter 7. I dwell, in particular, on the consequences of the negative way to God—as an expression of Clement's view of God's absolute incomprehensibility—as well as its relation to the positive, or cataphatic, way: the way of knowing the unknowable. In Chapter 8, the argument reaches its termination with the presentation of the Clementine model(s) for a distinction between God's essence and his power(s).

Finally, Chapter 9, by way of conclusion, addresses the question whether Clement really, in Völker's words, disappeared 'for ever in darkness', or if it is possible to argue that his legacy reaches far beyond his own time. Clement's solution to the problem of the relationship between the knowable and unknowable aspects of God is seen in a wider perspective, both in the immediate historical context and in relation to later orthodox theology—especially as expressed by the Cappadocians. Is Clement's philosophy to

be regarded merely as loose and unsystematic sketches, later to be systematized and surpassed, by 'his great pupil' Origen? Or are we entitled to see in him an important, as well as independent, background for subsequent orthodox theology, in his apophaticism and also in his attempts at defining a distinction in God?

2

Clement: Christian Writer in Second-Century Alexandria

ALEXANDRIA: THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS WORLD

Any account of Clement and his philosophy will be incomplete if it does not attempt to give some impression of the life of the great and complex community in which Clement settled about AD 180 and where he stayed for the twenty most important years of his working life. No doubt the influence that Alexandria exerted upon his career and work was considerable.

Founded in 331 BC by Alexander the Great, Alexandria had by 320 replaced Memphis and become the new capital of Egypt. Under the rule of the Ptolemies the population and commerce of Alexandria grew extensively. The descendants of Ptolemy ruled in Alexandria until 30 BC when Egypt came under the control of Rome.¹

¹ For Alexandria under the Ptolemies, see P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, vols. i–ii (Oxford, 1972).

The Egypt that Octavian annexed included three Greek cities, which enjoyed local autonomy and various other privileges. In addition to Alexandria there were Naukratis in the Nile Delta (founded already in the sixth century) and Ptolemais in Upper Egypt. In AD 130 the emperor Hadrian founded a fourth Greek city, Antinoopolis, in Middle Egypt. The most important among them was without comparison 'the queen city of the eastern Mediterranean'² and cultural capital of the Hellenistic world, Alexandria.

The Romans made Alexandria their seat of administration. The emperor became the heir of the Ptolemaic god-kings and exercised his authority through a prefect. The change that the Roman ruling power brought to the new province was probably not felt much by people in general, except that the burden of taxation was heavier. The efficiency of the Romans in the collection of taxes far exceeded that of the former rulers, the Ptolemies.³

The prefect of Egypt was the head of the thirty administrative districts, or 'nomes', that the country was divided into. Each of the nomes was governed by a *stratēgos*, a system preserved from the Ptolemies. When the Romans came, however, the *stratēgoi* were reduced to mere civil officials; the military power was in the hands of the Roman armed forces. The civil government, too, situated in each of the capitals of the nomes, was in the hands of the Romans, though its personnel were drawn from the native population. Their language was Greek, not Latin, except for some bilingual officers in Alexandria.⁴

² Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule* (Oxford, 1983), 25.

³ Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 15.

⁴ Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 241, 245.

Alexandria was for centuries the most important commercial city of the Mediterranean world. This position it owed mainly to its two excellent ports which accommodated an immense volume of maritime trade, but also to the river Nile which made Egypt's domestic produce, notably its grain supply, accessible to Alexandria. Egypt was also required to provide the city of Rome with one-third of its corn supply, which every spring was shipped from the quays of Alexandria.

Dio Chrysostom (c. AD 40–after 112), the Greek orator from Prusa in Bithynia who visited Alexandria as an informal representative of the emperor Trajan early in the second century, admonishes the Alexandrians to behave in the theatres and public places as befits inhabitants of a city which is 'ranked second among all cities beneath the sun' (Rome, of course, came first):

and furthermore, not only have you a monopoly of the shipping of the entire Mediterranean by reason of the beauty of your harbours, the magnitude of your fleet, and the abundance and the marketing of the products of every land, but also the outer waters that lie beyond are in your grasp, both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, whose name was rarely heard in former days. The result is that the trade, not merely of islands, ports, a few straits and isthmuses, but of practically the whole world is yours. For Alexandria is situated, as it were, at the crossroads of the whole world. (Or. 32.36)⁵

⁵ Trans. in J. W. Cohoon and H. Lamar Crosby (eds.), *Dio Chrysostom: Discourses 31–36* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961).

Alexandria exported many important goods, including papyrus, glass, and linen, and luxuries such as jewellery and perfume. Desert routes between Upper Egypt and ports in the Red Sea brought raw materials from India, Arabia, and East Africa, which were then manufactured in Alexandria and shipped around the Mediterranean world.

Prosperity and wealth, no doubt distributed according to social status, followed this extensive commerce and trade. From some of Clement's writings, especially *Paedagogus* and *Quis dives salvetur*, it is clear that he is addressing himself to Greek Christians of considerable wealth.

Although the original population was Greek, the prosperity of the growing city of Alexandria attracted Egyptians from the countryside as well as Jewish and other immigrants. According to Diodorus of Sicily, at the time of Augustus its free population totalled 300,000; the whole population would have been twice as great or more. Ethnic Greeks probably soon became a minority, but they continued to set the cultural tone, and the Egyptians and the various other immigrants gradually assimilated to the dominant Greek culture.⁶ The symbol of the dominance of the Greeks was above all the presence of the great Library and Museum in Alexandria.

In addition to the native Egyptians, the Jews, and the Greeks, the population of Alexandria included many other

⁶ Joseph Wilson Trigg, 'Receiving the Alpha: Negative Theology in Clement of Alexandria and its Possible Implications', *Studia Patristica*, 31 (1997), 540–5. In a recent article Andrew Erskine, 'Culture and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Museum and Library of Alexandria', *Greece & Rome*, 42:1 (1995), 38–48, at 42–3, claims that the domination of Greek culture in Alexandria gradually enforced the subjection and exclusion of the native Egyptians.

rates. Chrysostom addresses the people there in the following manner: 'For I behold among you, not only Greeks and Italians and people from neighbouring Syria, Libya, Cilicia, nor yet Ethiopians and Arabs from more distant regions, but even Bactrians and Scythians and Persians and a few Indians' (*Or.* 32.40).

He is also impressed by the process of integration between the different nationalities in the city: 'For Alexandria is situated, as it were, at the crossroads of the whole world, of even the most remote nations thereof, as if it were a market serving a single city, a market which brings together into one place all manner of men, displaying them to one another and, as far as possible, making them a kindred people' (*Or.* 32.36).

The socio-political structure of early Roman Egypt—as well as Alexandria—takes the form of a pyramid. The tip was constituted of the small number of Roman citizens residing in Alexandria and the provinces; below them was the larger segment of urban Greeks and Jews; and below them was the whole of the remaining population, addressed by the Roman government as the 'Egyptians'. Until AD 212 when the emperor granted Roman citizenship to almost everyone within the empire, advancement on the social ladder was extremely difficult. Only exceptionally was an Egyptian admitted to Alexandrian or Roman citizenship.⁷

The contempt Greeks could feel for the Egyptians is reflected in one of the major works of Clement, the *Protrepticus*. After having described the division of the Egyptians

⁷ Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 18–19.

regarding their religious cults, Clement adds rather ironically: 'But as for you, who are in every way better than Egyptians—I shrink from calling you worse—you who never let a day pass without laughing at the Egyptians, what is your attitude to the irrational animals?' (*Protr.* 39.6)⁸

From very early in the city's history (and until AD 115), Alexandria had a large and flourishing Jewish community and was the centre of the Hellenistic Jewish culture. The Jews occupied their own quarter of the city and had their own administration, their own council of elders.⁹ At the time of Philo (c.20 BC–c. AD 50) they had several synagogues, situated in different sections of the city. The main synagogue is described in the Talmud as a basilica with a double colonnade;¹⁰ it was, however, probably destroyed during the revolt of AD 115–17.

The privileges that the Jews had enjoyed under the Ptolemies were preserved by the Roman emperor. According to the Jewish historian Josephus (b. AD 37–8), they enjoyed equal rights with the Greeks, including Alexandrian citizenship.¹¹ Yet, while there is no doubt that individuals among

⁸ Trans. G. W. Butterworth (ed.), *Clement of Alexandria: The Exhortation to the Greeks, The Rich Man's Salvation and the Fragment of an Address entitled To the Newly Baptized* (Cambridge, 1982).

⁹ For a description of their political and religious arrangements, see e.g. Esther Starobinski-Safran, 'La Communauté juive d'Alexandrie à l'époque de Philon', in *ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΙΝΑ. Hellenisme, judaïsme et christianisme à Alexandrie: mélanges offerts au P. Claude Mondésert* (Paris, 1987), 45–75. See also the recent monograph on Alexandria by Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore, 1997), focusing on the three main ethno-religious communities, the pagans, the Jews, and the Christians and their contest for cultural hegemony.

¹⁰ Dorothy I. Sly, *Philo's Alexandria* (New York, 1996), 43–4.

¹¹ Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 2.18.7.

them acquired citizenship, it was probably not granted to them as a community.¹² In Alexandria the Hellenistic Jewish culture notably produced the *Septuagint* translation of the Old Testament, the *Book of Wisdom* and the works of the Jewish philosopher Philo. By the first century AD Alexandrian Judaism was one of the intellectual forces of the ancient world.

The privileges that the Jews undoubtedly enjoyed in Alexandria seem to have been one important reason for the hostility that is attested in early Roman times between the Alexandrian Greeks and the large Jewish population. In the first century AD we hear of recurrent fighting between Greek and Jewish residents. After a major pogrom in AD 38, rival delegations of Greeks and Jews were sent to Rome, as Philo recounts in his *Legatio ad Gaium*, and a few years later, after the accession of the new emperor, Claudius, a similar embassy was sent again. The famous letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians (preserved in a British Museum papyrus), was written shortly after this second visit:

As to the question which of you were responsible for the riot and feud (or rather, if the truth must be told, the war) against the Jews, I was unwilling to commit myself to a decided judgment . . . Wherefore I conjure yet once again, on the one side, the Alexandrines show themselves forbearing and kindly towards the Jews who for many years have dwelt in the same city, and offer no outrage to them in the exercise of their traditional worship but permit them to observe their customs as in the time of Divus Augustus . . . and on the

¹² See the discussion in H. Idris Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt: The Jewish Troubles in Alexandria and the Athanasian Controversy* (Oxford, 1924), 10–16. See also Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 28–31.

other side, I bid the Jews not to busy themselves about anything beyond what they have held hitherto... nor to strive in gymnasiarch or cosmetic games (κοσμητικοίς), but to profit from what they possess, and enjoy in a city not their own an abundance of all good things.¹³

However, the hostility, tensions, and clashes between the Greeks—presumably aided by the Egyptian mob—and the Jews continued. In AD 115–17 a new Jewish revolt against the Roman yoke was violently suppressed by the emperor Trajan through his Roman troops; though it was not completely annihilated, the suppression dealt a severe blow to the Alexandrian Jewish community, and it would take many years before it could again play an important role in the city's life.¹⁴ This is clear from the evidence of the documentary papyri; from the first 150 years of Roman rule there are almost 300 documents with allusions to Jews, while there are only 44 documents for the 220 years between 117 and 337.¹⁵

So, whatever remained is largely invisible in the documentation and there is—according to Roger Bagnall—nothing to suggest that the Jewish communities of Egypt ‘ever recovered their numbers, visibility, or Hellenic character by which they were marked before the great revolt’.¹⁶ At the

¹³ Papyrus BM, trans. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, 28–9.

¹⁴ See Roelof van den Broek, ‘The Christian “School” of Alexandria’, *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* (Leiden, 1996), 195–205; Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (Oxford, 1979); Birger A. Pearson, ‘Earliest Christianity in Egypt: Some Observations’, in Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1986), 132–59, and Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 99ff.

¹⁵ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 58.

¹⁶ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 278.

very least recovery took a long time; Christopher Haas suggests that the Alexandrian Jewry was, in the fourth and fifth centuries, again a thriving community.¹⁷ The defeat of 115–17 was long commemorated; its anniversary is mentioned in a papyrus letter of c.200.¹⁸

It was not only the Greek–Jewish tensions that led to regular outbreaks of violence, apparently giving the Alexandrians a bad reputation abroad. The city remained a place where the mobilization of mass violence was easy and effective, whatever group interest was at stake. The city was also well known for its interest in public entertainment and spectacles, especially the theatre and horse racing. To quote Dio again: ‘Is not that the reason why even to your own rulers you seem rather contemptible? Someone already, according to report, has expressed his opinion of you in these words: “But of the people of Alexandria what can one say, a folk to whom you need only throw plenty of bread and a ticket to the hippodrome, since they have no interest in anything else?”’ (*Or.* 32.31). And later: ‘But among you not a man keeps his seat at the games; on the contrary, you fly faster than the horses and their drivers’ (*Or.* 32.81).

Obviously the eloquent orator is exaggerating; nevertheless, it is indeed not a very flattering picture he draws of the population of Alexandria:

For on the whole it is better to face empty benches than to behold no more than fifteen substantial citizens in the midst of an innumerable horde of wretched, raving creatures, a sort of concentrated

¹⁷ Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 109 ff.

¹⁸ *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 705. Alan K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs* (London, 1986), 42–3.

dunghill piled high with the sweepings of every kind. Why, the word ‘city’ could not justly be applied to a community composed of men like that. (*Or.* 32.87)

This Alexandria, Clement’s residence for twenty years, was a city of enormous contradictions. It was a city with a history of several hundred years of learning and with an advanced intellectual culture. In the words of Alan Bowman, ‘There is virtually no area of intellectual activity to which she did not make a major contribution and in several spheres her role was paramount.’¹⁹ The Museum with its great Library, founded early in the Ptolemaic period (c.280) and built within the palace area, had attracted men of letters, scientists, and scholars from all over the Greek world. Euclid, the poets Theocritus, Callimachus, and his rival Apollonius of Rhodes (also head of the Library), Aristophanes of Byzantium, and the geographer Eratosthenes all had made their abode in the city; later Galen studied there.²⁰

These ‘tax-free museum pensioners’ (οἱ ἀτελεῖς σιτουμένοι ἐν τῷ Μουσείῳ)²¹ to whom Strabo (64/3 BC–AD 21) refers (17.793–4), had no taxes to pay or duties to perform. They lived in community and had their meals together in a vast dining-hall. Their working facilities—the Botanical and Zoological Gardens and the Library with its annexe, the Serapeum—were world-famous. The number

¹⁹ Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs*, 223–4.

²⁰ For the description of the Museum, see Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford, 1968), 87–104, esp. 96–8; Luciano Canfora, *The Vanished Library: A Wonder of the Ancient World* (London, 1991), and Henri-Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (London, 1956), 189–91.

²¹ Marrou, *A History of Education*, 260.

and quality of the Library's books were unique: the catalogue drawn up by the librarian Callimachus, between 260 and 240 BC, already contained 120,000 volumes.

The Museum was at the outset a centre for research, not for education. We know, however, that the scholars of the Museum did attract disciples, though very little is known as to what kind of teaching was offered or how many students there were. Henri-Irénée Marrou thinks that the 'university' side of the Museum may have grown gradually in the following centuries.²²

Whereas the earlier period of the Museum's activity was more concentrated on literature and the natural sciences, in later times its attention was turned to philosophy and theology; medicine, however, continued to be taught there. At the end of the third century AD, Alexandria had professorial chairs in all the main branches of philosophy, just as we know it from Athens.²³

What philosophical teaching or influences, then, may Clement have met or experienced in second-century Alexandria? First, we may presume, Platonism—in the stage of development we nowadays call 'Middle Platonism' (cf. Ch. 3, below).

Eudorus of Alexandria (130–67 BC), of whom we know rather little, has been looked upon as the first Middle Platonist.²⁴ Postulating a supreme, utterly transcendent first

²² Ibid., 190.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), 115 and Heinrich Dörrie, 'Der Platoniker Eudoros von Alexandria', *Hermes*, 79 (1944), 25–39. Also printed in Clemens Zintzen (ed.), *Der Mittelplatonismus* (Darmstadt, 1981).

principle which is also termed God, he started, says John Dillon, 'a most fruitful development for later Platonism'.²⁵ It is not unlikely that his thoughts were known to Clement—directly or perhaps indirectly through Philo, who was versed in the works of Eudorus.

The writings of Philo (20 BC–AD 50), also a citizen of Alexandria, undoubtedly exercised a great influence on the early Christian community of the city.²⁶ David Runia, in his monograph on *Philo in Early Christian Literature*,²⁷ states that Philo's writings would not have survived had it not been for the intervention of the Christian authors; his writings were ignored or neglected by Jews and pagans alike.²⁸ Clement is in fact our first witness to a direct knowledge and use of Philo. We know little, however, of how the Philonic writings were preserved in the intermediate years, between AD 50 and the arrival of Clement in Alexandria, in about 180; the books that Clement wrote in Alexandria show, however, that he had access to the majority of Philo's works.²⁹ The fact that they were preserved by the Christian community, points perhaps to the existence of a Christian library (see Ch. 3).

²⁵ Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 128.

²⁶ Philo's relation to Middle Platonism has been given a thorough discussion in *The Studia Philonica Annual* (1993), 95–155.

²⁷ David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature. A Survey* (Assen, 1993).

²⁸ Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 16–17. This was also the view of Cohn and Wendland who edited Philo's writings, cf. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 8.

²⁹ Annewies van den Hoek, 'The "Catechetical" School of Early Christian Alexandria and its Philonic Heritage', *Harvard Theological Review*, 90 (1997), 59–87, at 84.

The Jewish community, including the intellectual milieu in Alexandria, without doubt suffered great losses during the war of AD 115–17 and was by the time of Clement no political force of any weight.³⁰ Whether the remnant Jewry in Alexandria after AD 117 represented any living intellectual milieu of which Clement might have been a part is uncertain. There is in Clement's writings hardly any hint of a direct relationship with Jews or a Jewish community.³¹ The continued Jewish presence in Alexandria may, however, be inferred from several passages of the *Stromateis*, e.g.: 'Since it comes next to reply to the objections alleged against us by Greeks and Jews... To whom we say, that among you who are Jews, and among the most famous of the philosophers among the Greeks, very many sects (αἱρέσεις) have sprung up' (*Strom.* 7.89.1,3).

Other philosophers than Platonists were perhaps more prominent in the streets of Alexandria; notably, the Cynics. At least, Dio encountered them there around AD 100. They do not win any favour with him:

And as for the Cynics, as they are called, it is true that the city contains no small number of that sect... still these Cynics, posting themselves at street-corners, in alley-ways and at temple-gates, pass round the hat and play upon the credulity of lads and sailors and crowds of that sort, stringing together rough jokes and much

³⁰ See Robert M. Grant, 'Theological Education at Alexandria', in Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1986), 178–89, at 179.

³¹ See e.g. Broek, 'The Christian "School" of Alexandria', 192 and Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 120.

tittle-tattle and that low badinage that smacks of the market-place. Accordingly they achieve no good at all, but rather the worst possible harm, for they accustom thoughtless people to deride philosophers in general. (*Or.* 32.9)

Whether from personal acquaintance or from reading their books, one may discern in the writings of Clement a certain influence from Cynicism. Though he generally does not favour the excesses of the Cynics—as his comment in the *Paedagogus* shows (2.78): ‘it is Cynic vanity to make a practice of sleeping like Diomedes’ (who tried to discipline the body by exposing it to extremes, e.g., of heat or cold)—he promises, nevertheless, in a distinctly Cynic vein:

If any of you will completely avoid self-indulgence by the careful cultivation of frugality, he will be developing a habit of enduring involuntary hardships readily. If he makes a further practice of looking on voluntary sufferings as a training for persecution, then when he is confronted with labours and fears and pains he cannot evade, he will not be unpractised in steadfastness. (*Paed.* 3.41.1)³²

If, for a moment, we proceed beyond Clement’s own time, the fame that Alexandria enjoyed for its teaching of philosophy is attested by Porphyry, who in his *Life of Plotinus* tells us that in Plotinus’ twenty-eighth year (around AD 233) ‘he felt an impulse to study philosophy and was recommended to the teachers of Alexandria who then had the highest reputation’ (*V. Plot.* 2.7–9).

³² See F. Gerald Downing, *Cynics and Christian Origins* (Edinburgh, 1992), 241–8.

In the end Plotinus came to Ammonius, who is regarded as the founder of Neoplatonism, and remained in Alexandria as his student for eleven years. Origen, too, studied for some time with the same Ammonius, but unfortunately Ammonius' two great disciples never seem to have met.³³ It appears that Origen left Alexandria for good the year Plotinus began his studies with Ammonius.³⁴

A similarly direct connection with Ammonius is not attested for Clement. R. E. Witt, in his article 'The Hellenism of Clement of Alexandria', draws attention to the fact that at least for some years they must have lived in the same city and thinks that they most probably knew each other. He even suggests that 'perhaps the philosopher under whom Plotinus was to study for eleven years had even sat by the side of Clement at the feet of Pantaenus, the erstwhile Stoic and founder of the Catechetical school'.³⁵ This view is supported by Salvatore Lilla: 'I regard the existence of a close relationship between Clement and Ammonius as extremely likely.'³⁶ But it remains a likelihood; no ancient reference to such a close link survives.

Living in Alexandria at the end of the second century AD meant being in a melting pot not only of different languages, cultures, and philosophies, but also, and above all, of different

³³ Mark J. Edwards, 'Ammonius, Teacher of Origen', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (1993), 1–13, however, thinks that Origen's Ammonius and Plotinus' Ammonius are not the same.

³⁴ Grant, 'Theological Education at Alexandria', 182.

³⁵ R. E. Witt, 'The Hellenism of Clement of Alexandria', *The Classical Quarterly*, 25 (1931), 195.

³⁶ Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1971), 5.

religions;³⁷ the city in this respect probably surpassed any other place in the Roman world. Nowhere else was it possible to meet with and participate in so many different religious cults and ceremonies as here.

There was a widespread syncretism among the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman religions; the Romans adapted quickly to the Greek–Egyptian syncretism that they found when arriving in Egypt. ‘Multi-service’ temples were not unusual, especially in villages, as in the example Naphtali Lewis quotes, from a papyrus letter of the second or third century:³⁸

Marcus Aurelius Apollonios, hierophant, to the ritual basket-carrier of [the village of] Nesmeimis, greeting. Please go to [the village of] Sinkepha to the temple of Demeter, to perform the customary sacrifices for our lords and emperors and their victory, for the rise of the Nile and increase of crops, and for favourable conditions of climate. I pray that you fare well.

The mixture is manifold: the priest is a Roman citizen, the temple belongs to the Greek goddess Demeter, and the cults address the ruling emperors, the river Nile, and the gods of the weather.

The Egyptian gods were naturally dominant in Alexandrian worship, especially the goddess Isis, the giver of life, known to the Greeks as Demeter, but by many other names as well. The god Sarapis, created by the first Ptolemy as a political instrument to symbolize the unity and equality of

³⁷ Cf. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton, 1993), 14–22.

³⁸ Trans. Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 85.

the Greek and Egyptian cultures, was an instant success,³⁹ and temples of Sarapis spread all over Egypt. His importance to Greek-speakers was great and his cult particularly prominent in Alexandria and Memphis.⁴⁰

In the midst of these different thought-worlds and religions Clement had his abode. His knowledge of Greek religion, as well as Greek literature, is impressive. In his *Protrepticus*, a work intended to win Christian converts, Clement shows his disdain for all this worship of statues, animals, human beings, and material things and exhorts the Greeks to turn to worship the immaterial, uncreated God. On Sarapis he writes: 'But why do I linger over these [sculptures of Greek gods], when I can show you the origin of the arch-daemon himself, the one who, we are told, is preeminently worthy of veneration by all men, whom they have dared to say is made without hands, the Egyptian Sarapis?' (*Protr.* 48.1). Clement gives various versions of the origin of this god, arguing that he and his statue were like human creations, a fusion of Osiris and Apis (*Protr.* 48.2–6).

Finally, among the potential philosophical and religious influences on Clement in the Alexandrian milieu, Gnosticism must be mentioned. In the decades preceding Clement's arrival in Alexandria, we know of the probable presence there of the two famous Gnostic teachers, Basilides and Valentinus,⁴¹ who most likely attracted students among

³⁹ Lewis, *Life in Egypt*, 86.

⁴⁰ Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs*, 176.

⁴¹ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 31.2.2–3, does not constitute conclusive evidence that Valentinus himself lived in Alexandria; there is, however, no doubt that there were Valentinians there.

Christians and pagans alike. Pantaenus, Clement's teacher, must have been their contemporary.

Gnosticism was definitely a vital part of Clement's thought-world, and he must have had access to a whole range of Gnostic literature, by Valentinus, Basilides, Theodotus, and others.⁴² A considerable part of his writings is polemical against 'heretics'. In addition to the many polemical sections of the *Stromateis*, his work *Excerpta ex Theodoto* consists mainly of quotations from Valentinian works, to which some criticism and theological speculation have been added. Clement is generally opposed to the teachings of these Gnostics, especially their pessimistic view of the world and their denial of the role played by free will in the attainment of salvation. He thinks he himself represents the true gnosis over against their false gnosis; the mature Christian is the true Gnostic, γνωστικός.⁴³ In reality, the language of Gnosticism and gnosis is part of Clement's own language which he understood in Christian terms.⁴⁴

With regard to one topic, however, the affinity between Clement and his Gnostic opponents is particularly evident, namely his description of God in negative terms, especially the aspect of the ineffability of God. One example is Basilides, quoted in Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7, who even deprives God

⁴² John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York, 1974), 18.

⁴³ Cf. Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, 1996), 271: 'it is ironic that our best witness for the self-designation "gnostic" is someone who falls outside the typological construct of "Gnosticism".'

⁴⁴ For a more detailed account of Clement's views on gnosis, see Ch. 4, 'Esoteric Knowledge and Gnosis'.

of existence: '(But this Deity) the creature can neither express nor grasp by perception... so, in contrariety to the nature of the Holy Spirit, was that place simultaneously of non-existent Deity and Sonship—(a place) more ineffable than ineffable (entities), and higher up than all names'.⁴⁵

Now, as we shall see, this phenomenon is not at all uncommon in the religious writings of the period. As to the extent of the influence of Gnosticism on Clement's thought and theology, scholars disagree. Some have called his orthodoxy into question, asking whether he really was a Christian Platonist, or just a Platonist philosopher 'intellectually christianized'.⁴⁶ A lot of confusion can be caused by the tendency of much twentieth-century scholarship to use Gnosticism as a blanket term for a supposed second-century heretical movement. Clement's openness to and understanding of other systems of thought represent, as I see it, a genuine recognition on his part of the values and merits of pagan insights and Greek tradition,⁴⁷ while at the same time

⁴⁵ Trans. J. H. Macmahon, ANF 5.

⁴⁶ See esp. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*. This view was challenged by P. O'Connell, '[Rev.] S. R. C. Lilla: Clement of Alexandria', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 38 (1971), 275–7, at 276. See also L. G. Patterson, 'The Divine Became Human: Irenaean Themes in Clement of Alexandria', *Studia Patristica*, 31 (1997), 497–516.

⁴⁷ Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis, 1990), 212, remarks that 'Clement's attitude toward the teachings of Valentinus and Basilides is not altogether hostile'. See also James E. Davison, 'Structural Similarities and Dissimilarities in the Thought of Clement of Alexandria and the Valentinians', *The Second Century*, 3 (1983), 201–17 and Adolf Knauber, 'Die patrologische Schätzung des Clemens von Alexandrien bis zu seinem neuerlichen Bekanntwerden durch die ersten Druckeditionen des 16. Jahrhunderts', in P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann (eds.), *Kyriakon. FS Johannes Quasten* (Münster, 1973), i. 289–308.

he regards the Judaeo-Christian tradition as superior and even more ancient.⁴⁸ As Morton Enslin notes: 'It is the failure to observe this fundamental fairness and intellectual breadth in Clement which has led his readers from the days of Photius—and not unlikely earlier during his stay in Alexandria—to look at him with a certain reserve as not quite sound in the faith'.⁴⁹

While there is hardly any reliable information concerning the situation of the orthodox Christians in Alexandria at this time—their actual number, places of worship, doctrines, or even the names of individuals among them—the case is just slightly better with the Gnostics. We do know some of the Gnostic doctrines and the names of two of their prominent teachers, and there has been much speculation as to the influence they had on nascent Alexandrian Christianity. I will devote the following section to the question of the origins of Christianity in Alexandria.

THE ORIGINS OF ALEXANDRIAN CHRISTIANITY

The conspicuous lack of reliable sources concerning the beginnings of Alexandrian Christianity—as well as Egyptian Christianity in general—continues to be a puzzle to historians of early Christianity. The situation is all the more striking

⁴⁸ See e.g. *Strom.* 7.89 and 7.106–7.

⁴⁹ Morton S. Enslin, 'A Gentleman Among the Fathers', *Harvard Theological Review*, 47 (1954), 213–41, at 229.

seeing that during the first two centuries Alexandria was not only the greatest Greek city in the *oikoumenē* and a centre of learning and scholarship; as we have seen, it also had within its boundaries the largest Jewish community outside Palestine which should have been a primary target for Christian mission.⁵⁰ Except for the third/fourth-century historian Eusebius however, there are in our literary and documentary sources almost no references at all to Egyptian Christianity of the first two centuries.

When the Alexandrian church emerges or begins to attract attention around 180 (which is the approximate time of Clement's arrival in the city), it seems to be a complete institution with both a bishop and, according to Eusebius, a catechetical school. During the following centuries it reaches an importance, equal to Rome's both politically and theologically, which surpasses the other centres of ancient Christianity—Antioch and Jerusalem—and is finally only matched by Constantinople herself.

The testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea

The 'Father of Church history', Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–c.340), in many ways represents a dilemma for the historian of earliest Christianity. On the one hand he is of primary importance—with his indispensable *Historia ecclesiastica*,

⁵⁰ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 1. For a survey of various aspects of Egyptian Christianity, see also C. Wilfrid Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity: From its Origins to 451 C.E.* (Leiden, 1993), as well as the recent monograph of Attila Jakab, *Ecclesia alexandrina: évolution sociale et institutionnelle du christianisme alexandrin (II et III siècles)* (Bern, 2001).

as well as his *Demonstratio evangelica* and *Praeparatio evangelica*. It is largely thanks to his many quotations of other historians, philosophers of various kinds, bishops, and Church Fathers—most often verbatim quotations—that these texts have survived at all. His quotations from the works of the Middle Platonists Numenius and Atticus (see Ch. 3) are good examples of his crucial role.

On the other hand—and especially regarding the *Historia ecclesiastica*—specialists often disagree as to when he is trustworthy and when he is not. Seeing that he was personally involved in the theological and political discussions of his day, few scholars would argue that Eusebius presents an unbiased version of his material.⁵¹ Still, as he is practically our only source for the earliest period of Christianity in Alexandria, he has been examined and re-examined by scholars of the last hundred years in attempts to distinguish right from wrong. The main points of disagreement seem to be the origins and circumstances of Egyptian Christianity (hardly surprising, as this is one of Eusebius' main focuses

⁵¹ Grant claims in two articles, 'Early Alexandrian Christianity', *Church History*, 40 (1971), 133–44, at 133 and 'The Case against Eusebius or, Did the Father of Church History Write History?', *Studia Patristica*, 12 (1975), 413–21, that the basic difficulty with the *Historia ecclesiastica* is that the work which is classified as 'official history' contains 'a judicious mixture of authentic record with a good deal of suppression of fact and occasional outright lies'. See also Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 140–1, who considers Eusebius' picture of the church before 200 as 'fundamentally anachronistic'. This attitude to Eusebius' account as unreliable and distorted for a specific purpose is characteristic of an older line of scholarship. The recent tendency, especially concerning the question of a catechetical school in Alexandria, is to acknowledge his descriptions as trustworthy to a greater degree; see Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 132 ff. and Hoek, 'The "Catechetical" School', 60 ff.

and he is our only source) and in particular the questions concerning the catechetical school of Alexandria. I shall come back in more detail to this last question below.

Eusebius' sources were manifold. He seems never to have visited Alexandria, but he had access to the libraries in Caesarea and Jerusalem and the archives of Edessa and he draws on specific authors such as Josephus, Philo, the Libyan Julius Africanus (d. after 240), the author of a treatise on chronology, and Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis, as well as the Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists, various Gnostic writers and, of course, Clement and Origen themselves.

Where it is possible to test the historical accuracy of his narrative by comparison with other sources (as is often the case concerning the churches in Rome, Jerusalem, and Antioch) Eusebius' account largely corresponds with these other sources.⁵² With regard to the situation in Alexandria, however, we have no such possibility.

What is it, then, that Eusebius writes about the Alexandrian church before AD 180? In addition to his statements concerning the catechetical school, he is our earliest source for the tradition that the church was founded by Mark the Evangelist, who also, according to Eusebius, was the first bishop of Alexandria. This tradition is still alive in considerable parts of the Christian world. Eusebius writes: 'They say (*φασιν*)⁵³ that this Mark was the first to be sent to preach

⁵² See R. Trevijano, 'The Early Christian Church at Alexandria', *Studia Patristica*, 12 (1971), 471–7, at 473.

⁵³ G. M. Lee in his article 'Eusebius on St. Mark and the Beginnings of Christianity in Egypt', *Studia Patristica*, 12 (1975), 422–1, at 425, argues that 'they say' often introduces a statement derived from books.

in Egypt the Gospel which he had also put into writing, and was the first to establish (συστήσασθαι) churches in Alexandria itself' (HE 2.16). And further: 'In the eighth year of the reign of Nero Annianus was the first after Mark the Evangelist to receive charge of the diocese of Alexandria' (HE 2.24).

Even though Mark is mentioned several times in the New Testament, there is no trace there of the tradition that he was the founder of the Alexandrian church. The New Testament connects him with Jerusalem, Antioch, Cyprus, Asia Minor, and Rome, but never Alexandria.

Nor does Clement, Origen, or bishop Demetrius of Alexandria ever mention Mark as the founder of their church. G. M. Lee, however, asks the pertinent question why precisely Mark, the least popular of the evangelists, should have been chosen as the founder of one of the greatest and most important of all churches in the Roman empire unless it happens to be a historical fact. With Peter and Paul already out of the question, why not choose Matthew?⁵⁴

Now, if the document discovered by Morton Smith in the monastery of Mar Saba outside Jerusalem is trustworthy, it might support Eusebius' claim that Mark was the founder of the church of Alexandria.⁵⁵ In 1973 Smith published his monograph *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, based on a hitherto unknown letter ascribed to Clement. In the letter Clement describes Mark as the author of an esoteric gospel:

⁵⁴ Lee, 'Eusebius on St. Mark', 428.

⁵⁵ I shall discuss the question of the authenticity of the letter in Ch. 4.

As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord's doings, not, however, declaring all of them, nor yet hinting at the secret ones, but selecting what he thought was most useful for increasing the faith of those who were being instructed. But when Peter died a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former book the things suitable to whatever makes for progress toward knowledge.⁵⁶

As we see, the letter does not state that Mark actually planted the church of Alexandria but rather seems to imply an already existing community there. It is not inconceivable, though, on the basis of the wording of the letter, that Mark could already have visited the city earlier.

Another interesting piece of information in Eusebius' *Church History*—which is even more controversial than his claim that Mark was the founder of the church—is his list of names associated with the Alexandrian episcopal succession, scattered throughout his account. He names the ten bishops who succeeded Mark up to the reign of Commodus (180), each with his accurate years of office: Annianus, Abilius, Cerdo, Primus, Justus, Eumenes, Marcus, Celadion, Agrippinus, and Julian. Whereas the eleventh, bishop Demetrius (189–232), is well known from several other sources, the other ten are just names. In sharp contrast to Demetrius, there are no stories or comments of any sort attached to these ten bishops. Thus, neither the bishops on the list nor

⁵⁶ Morton Smith, 'Clement of Alexandria and Secret Mark: The Score at the End of the First Decade', *Harvard Theological Review*, 75:4 (1982), 449–61, at 446.

Mark as the founder of the Alexandrian church seem to find any early corroborative evidence outside Eusebius.⁵⁷

Around 180, in the alleged episcopate of Julian, in whose period of office Pantaenus is described by Eusebius as a learned teacher, a marked change occurs in the history of the Alexandrian church. The Eusebian narrative now becomes more than names and dates, and a rather detailed description of Pantaenus and his school emerges:

At that time a man very famous for his learning named Pantaenus had charge of the life of the faithful in Alexandria, for from ancient custom a school of sacred learning (διδασκαλείου τῶν ἱερῶν λόγων) existed among them. This school has lasted on to our time, and we have heard that it is managed by men powerful in their learning and zeal for divine things, but tradition says that at that time Pantaenus was especially eminent, and that he had been influenced by the philosophic system of those called Stoics. (HE 5.10)

Pantaenus, according to Eusebius, was appointed to preach in the East and travelled among the Indians where he found Christians who had been converted through the preaching of Bartholomew. When he came back to Alexandria, he served as head of the school until his death. Though Pantaenus probably never wrote anything, and certainly nothing from his hand has survived,⁵⁸ his historicity can hardly be doubted. Eusebius also quotes a letter to Origen from Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, where Alexander men-

⁵⁷ See Jakab, *Ecclesia alexandrina*, for a recent discussion of the 'Mark legend'.

⁵⁸ References to Pantaenus' writings made by Eusebius, and later Jerome (*De viris illustribus* 36), are usually regarded as due to Eusebius misunderstanding Clement; for Clement seems to indicate that such writings were not available to him. If they were, it is indeed curious that Clement never quotes from any. See Enslin, 'A Gentleman Among the Fathers', 219.

tions both Pantaenus and Clement as men known to him: ‘Pantaenus, truly blessed and my master, and the holy Clement, who was my master and profited me, and all others like them’ (*HE* 6.13).

There is also a reference in Eusebius to an otherwise lost work of Origen, in which Origen, when compelled to defend his Greek learning, writes: ‘we followed the example of Pantaenus, who, before us, was of assistance to many, and also Heraclas, who now has a seat in the presbytery of the Alexandrians’ (*HE* 6.19).

It remains, however, to ask concerning Pantaenus what were the contents of his teaching, whether he—and Clement—really taught at ‘a school of sacred learning’, as Eusebius (*HE* 5.10) puts it and lastly, whether they represented a school independent of or with close links to the church. I shall discuss this below.

Gnostic origins of Alexandrian Christianity?

There is no doubt that the Gnostic movement thrived in second-century Egypt. As a matter of fact—except for Eusebius’ assertion that Mark was the founder of the church, his listing of the ten bishops succeeding Mark and some evidence for a few individual Christians (see below)—the only known representatives of Alexandrian Christianity before the year 180 are the Gnostic teachers Basilides and Valentinus.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ According to Clement (*Strom.* 7.106.4), Basilides was active in Alexandria at the time of the emperors Hadrian (117–38) and Antoninus Pius (137–61). According to Epiphanius (*Panarion* 31.7.1–2), Valentinus received his education in Alexandria, and spread his doctrines in Egypt before he went to Rome, probably around 140.

This has led scholars to explain the lack of information on a Christian Church by asserting that the earliest Christianity in Egypt was heterodox—especially Gnostic—in character. This view is particularly represented by Walter Bauer in his famous *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (1934).⁶⁰ Walter Bauer's study has been regarded as 'epochal'⁶¹ and 'one of the most influential monographs on Christian origins to appear in this century'.⁶²

However, in order to support his view of the heretic (Gnostic) character of Christianity there, Bauer had to view the earliest Egyptian literature that is known to us in a way consistent with his theory. His method of extrapolating backwards from the time of Hadrian when the Gnostic teachers Basilides, Valentinus, and Carpocrates were active, is questionable. He characterizes both *The Gospel of the Hebrews* and *The Gospel of the Egyptians* as products of 'movements resting on syncretistic-gnostic foundations',⁶³ and regards even the *Letter of Barnabas*—a part of Codex Sinaiticus and a letter which Clement often cites—as Gnostic.⁶⁴

An important testimony for an early orthodox reaction against Gnosticism, as well as for the close relationship

⁶⁰ Eng. trans. Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971).

⁶¹ So characterized by James Robinson in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971), 16.

⁶² Gary T. Burke, 'Walter Bauer and Celsus: The Shape of Late Second-Century Christianity', *The Second Century*, 4 (1984), 1–7. Cf. Manfred Hornschuh, 'Das Leben des Origenes und die Entstehung der alexandrinischen Schule, 1–2', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 71 (1960).

⁶³ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 48.

between Alexandria and the Western church, is a fragment of Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses* which had reached Oxyrhynchus in Egypt shortly after it was written.⁶⁵

Without rejecting Gnostic influence on the early Alexandrian church, it is interesting to realize—from Clement's *Stromateis*—that around AD 180 there is a 'rule of the church' (κανόνα τῆς ἐκκλησίας) and that the Christian community has attained a considerable degree of self-confidence; it also looks upon itself as separated from heresies in the world around. This cannot have happened overnight; it must have been a gradual development. Clement writes:

For we must never adulterate the truth, nor steal the rule of the Church, as those who follow the heresies... Nay, they have not even got the keys of the door themselves, but only a false, or as it is commonly called, a skeleton key, which does not enable them to throw open the main door, and enter, as we do, through the tradition of the Lord; but they cut a side door and break secretly through the wall of the Church; and so overstepping the bounds of the truth, they initiate the soul of the impious into their mysteries. For it needs no long discourse to prove that the merely human assemblies which they have instituted were later in time than the Catholic church... But of the heresies some are called after Valentinus, and Marcion, and Basilides, though the last sect professes to cite the opinion of Matthias. (*Strom.* 7.105–8)

Speaking metaphorically, Clement here describes what he calls heretics who steal the truth and enter the church through secret doors, not through the tradition of the Lord

⁶⁵ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 53.

(τῆς τοῦ κυρίου παραδόσεως). These are also later in time, he claims, than the Catholic church.

An individual testimony to the existence of Christians in Alexandria before AD 180 is found in the Apologist Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165). In his *First Apology* (29)⁶⁶ he speaks of a young Alexandrian who in the year 151/2 made an appeal to the prefect of Egypt, L. Minucius Felix, asking for permission to castrate himself. He is described by Justin as ‘one of ours’ (τις τῶν ἡμετέρων), an expression which suggests the existence of an orthodox Christian group.

Bauer’s view of the essentially Gnostic character of Egyptian Christianity was for a long period accepted doctrine; the general view today, however, is that Bauer’s thesis is untenable and that the little evidence we have points instead to another conclusion: that the beginnings of Alexandrian Christianity must be sought in the Jewish milieu.

The Jewish character of Alexandrian Christianity

According to several modern scholars—prominent representatives for this view are Jean Daniélou,⁶⁷ Manfred Hornschuh,⁶⁸ and Colin Roberts⁶⁹—the earliest Christianity of

⁶⁶ Trans. ANF 1.

⁶⁷ Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London, 1964).

⁶⁸ Hornschuh, ‘Das Leben des Origenes’.

⁶⁹ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*. They are supported by a majority of scholars, such as Leslie W. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background* (Oxford, 1966); Broek, ‘The Christian “School” of Alexandria’; Pearson, ‘Earliest Christianity in Egypt’; A. F. J. Klijn, ‘Jewish Christianity in Egypt’, in B. A. Pearson and J. E. Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of*

Alexandria, and of Egypt in general, was of an essentially Jewish character, and there was a continuity with the Jewish community of Philo's time, at least up to the time of the Jewish revolt (115–17).

Colin Roberts has, through his study *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, shed important light on Christian origins in Egypt. The Greek papyri from Egypt cover a span of a thousand years, from the late fourth century BC to the Arab invasion in the seventh century AD, and include many kinds of literary and documentary texts. Challenged by 'the obscurity that veils the early history of the Church in Egypt',⁷⁰ Roberts turned to the papyri of the first three centuries AD for illumination. Finding that the documentary papyri yielded little of interest, he turned his attention to the Christian literary papyri, both Biblical and others, and made important discoveries.

Of the fourteen extant Christian manuscripts dating from the second century, ten were Biblical: seven Old Testament, three New Testament: John, Matthew, and Titus. The four non-Biblical were the Egerton Gospel, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Gospel of Thomas* (26–8), and Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses*.⁷¹ The only Gnostic text in this list is the *Gospel of Thomas*.

Egyptian Christianity (Philadelphia, 1986), 161–75; Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 194–213; Adolf Martin Ritter, 'De Polycarpe à Clément: aux origines d'Alexandrie chrétienne', in P. C. Mondésert (ed.), *ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΙΝΑ. Hellénisme, judaïsme et christianisme à Alexandrie. Mélanges offerts au P. Claude Mondésert* (Paris, 1987), 151–72; Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 32–4; Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, and Hoek, 'The "Catechetical" School'.

⁷⁰ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 1.

⁷¹ Ibid. 12–14.

Roberts also finds it striking that all Gnostic manuscripts found in Egypt—except for the fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas*—were written in the fourth and fifth centuries when orthodoxy was dominant. From first-century Egypt there are no Christian papyri, it is true—but neither are there any Gnostic ones. The question, for Roberts, is not which group or sect was most influential or most numerous, but rather why we seem to know so little about any of them.⁷²

Another important feature of Roberts' study is his discussion of *nomina sacra* in early Christian manuscripts and their importance for the interpretation of the earliest Egyptian (Alexandrian) Christianity. The *nomina sacra* are certain proper names and religious terms that are given special treatment in writing, usually by means of abbreviation and super-lineation. Roberts argues that the use of *nomina sacra* is a Christian, not a Jewish invention, although it may have been influenced by the Jewish reverence for the name of God. His conclusion is that this scribal practice started among Christians in Jerusalem during the first century and was carried from there to Alexandria. The earliest evidence for it is actually the *Letter of Barnabas*, which was probably written in Alexandria. The practice is also found in the fragment of the Egerton Gospel.⁷³

That the variety of Christianity that reached Egypt, probably from Jerusalem, had a strongly Jewish stamp, is also supported by the popularity in Egypt of Jewish and Jewish-Christian writings, such as the *Shepherd of Hermas*

⁷² Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 52.

⁷³ Ibid. 26–8.

and the *Gospel of Thomas*. One may also point to the special situation of the Jewish community in Alexandria: being the largest and most important of the Greek-speaking Diaspora, it is to be expected that it housed a considerable degree of religious and cultural diversity, including apocalyptic and Gnostic groups.⁷⁴ In addition, although it was not uncommon in the ancient world for the Jews to be on bad terms with their pagan neighbours, the situation in Alexandria was exceptional.⁷⁵ As we have seen, the hostilities between Jews and Greeks (and the Roman government) often resulted in violent outbreaks and clashes, even pogroms with an enormous loss of lives.

At this early stage, before the almost total depletion of the Alexandrian Jews in 115–17, the Christians may not have been distinguishable from the Jews. They probably lived in the same areas and may even have participated in the life of the synagogues. As highly Hellenized the Jews may also have been more sympathetic to the Christian mission than Jews tended to be in other places.⁷⁶ The Christians' break with the Jews must have come gradually and was not complete until after the war of 115–17.⁷⁷ The break is evident in a feature which Roberts has pointed to: the earliest Christian papyri, dating from the second century, had almost all been part of codexes, not rolls, as was still common practice among the Jews.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 148.

⁷⁵ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 55.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 57–8.

⁷⁷ Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 150.

⁷⁸ Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 20 f. It is possible, of course, to take the more radical position, that the Christian (Jewish) community in

The individual testimony of the Jew by the name of Apollos from Alexandria, mentioned in Acts 18.24–5, is worth quoting: ‘A certain Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian who was eloquent and well versed in the scriptures, arrived at Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord [in his home country ἐν τῇ πατρίδι]⁷⁹ and, burning with zeal, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, although he knew only the baptism of John.’ The text seems to imply the existence of a community in Alexandria at an early date even though the addition in Codex Bezae is not original. It states that Apollos ‘was teaching accurately concerning Jesus, although he knew only the baptism of John’, probably implying that he taught inadequately and with a Jewish emphasis.

There is another witness to Alexandrian Christianity, pointing both to a diversity of groups and to a Jewish origin. Around 170–80, just before Clement’s time in the city, the Middle Platonist philosopher Celsus wrote a polemical tractate against the Christians, called *The True Doctrine* Ἀληθὴς λόγος. The tractate is known to us through Origen’s refutation of it in his *Contra Celsum*. Celsus’ work is the most systematic judgement and the most extensive pagan critique of Christianity in the second century. Henry Chadwick, who has translated and commented on *Contra Celsum*,

Alexandria, immersed in the body of Alexandrian Jewry, was itself destroyed during the revolt of 115–17. For this view, see Joseph Mélèze-Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Ramses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Philadelphia, 1995), 228 and Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 52.

⁷⁹ Codex Bezae, representing the so-called ‘Western text’, includes the words ἐν τῇ πατρίδι, ‘in his home country’.

maintains that *The True Doctrine* was most probably written in Alexandria.⁸⁰

Celsus' observations concerning the Christians, presumably in Alexandria around 180, are thus worth quoting in our context: 'When they were beginning (he says), they were few and were of one mind; but since they have spread to become a multitude, they are divided and rent asunder, and each wants to have his own party. For they wanted this from the beginning' (*C. Cels.* 3.10).

Celsus not only explains the orthodox position and how the heresies started, he also tells us what moved the innovators. This corresponds well with the picture that Irenaeus provides of the reason for the division into many different groups, without specific reference to Alexandria: that they wanted to be teachers themselves and therefore left their old groups and started new ones.⁸¹

On the question of the ethnic and religious background of the Christians, Celsus writes: 'I will ask them where they have come from, or who is the author of their traditional laws. Nobody, they will say. In fact, they themselves originated from Judaism, and they cannot name any other source for their teacher and chorus-leader' (*C. Cels.* 5.33). Celsus then expands the argument, claiming that both Jews and Christians derive ultimately from the same God, the Creator God of Genesis. Not everybody accepts this, he says and goes on to point to the many different sects into which the

⁸⁰ Henry Chadwick (ed.), *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge, 1980), p. xxix.

⁸¹ *Adversus haereses* 3.28.1.

Christians were split up. It is interesting that Celsus, who lived in the East and probably in Alexandria where, according to Bauer, the beginnings of Christianity were above all Gnostic, is able to discern a common (Jewish) origin.⁸²

Conclusion

Although we may never be able to obtain a clear answer to the question of the origins and further development of Christianity in Egypt during the first two centuries, the general picture today is much more complex than the one drawn by Walter Bauer.

The following picture seems to emerge of the early history of the church of Alexandria. An original Christian mission to Egypt, addressed to the Jews, and especially to the Jews of Alexandria, came from the church in Jerusalem. It arrived at an early date, perhaps around AD 50, and the earliest Christian converts in Alexandria were Jews. The message that the Christians brought from Jerusalem was Jewish in emphasis rather than Pauline, which let the first Christian Alexandrians easily identify with their Jewish compatriots. The reason why the ‘apostle of the Gentiles’, Paul, never came to Alexandria, was simply that the needs were greater in other places; there already existed at this time Judaeo-Christian communities in Alexandria. For the rest of the century and

⁸² The evidence for the existence of church buildings in Alexandria before the 4 cent. is slim. The earliest documentable church, that of St Theonas (bishop 282–300), lay, interestingly, in one of the Jewish quarters of the city, implying a Jewish Christian presence in that part of the city before the building of the church. See Pearson, ‘Earliest Christianity in Egypt’, 152.

until after the war of 115–17, they probably did not really distinguish themselves from the orthodox Jews either by living apart or by giving up the life of the synagogues. The role of Mark, however, in such a scenario, seems problematic.

Though numerically reduced, Christianity persisted; and when the link with Judaism broke probably after 115–17, Alexandrian Christianity seems to have taken a variety of directions, one of which certainly was predominantly Gnostic in character—a Gnosticism which was initially not separated from the church. The lack of a strong central authority and a firm organization may have made the rise of sects and movements of various types rather easy, as we recall from Celsus' vivid description.

During the later part of the second century the influence of Christianity from Rome grew stronger; and through the efforts of theologians like Pantaenus, Clement, and Origen, with or without the help of the catechetical school, the dividing line between Gnostic and orthodox Christianity was gradually drawn.⁸³

CLEMENT IN ALEXANDRIA: LIFE, WORKS, AND AUDIENCE

Few facts concerning the life of Clement are known to us. There is very little biographical information in his own writings or in other ancient sources. Assertions about the

⁸³ Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians in Rome in the First Two Centuries* (London, 2003), gives a similar picture of the situation in Rome.

time and place of his birth, his parentage, and early training all rest on mere assumptions. The extant testimonies about him may, however, help us with a few data concerning his mature life: he was—according to Eusebius—ordained presbyter, presumably in Alexandria. Eusebius quotes a letter from Alexander, then bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (later bishop of Jerusalem) and former pupil of Clement, who wrote to the church of Antioch in AD 211: ‘I am sending you these lines, my dear brothers, by Clement the blessed presbyter, a man virtuous and approved, whom you have already heard of and will now get to know’ (*HE* 6.11).

Also a statement by Jerome refers to Clement as a presbyter of the church of Alexandria.⁸⁴ In another letter, written from Jerusalem to Origen in AD 215, Alexander speaks of Clement and Pantaenus as ‘true fathers’ and ‘those blessed ones who have trod the road before us and with whom we shall soon be reunited’.⁸⁵ On the basis of these letters it is also possible to fix the time of Clement’s death to somewhere between AD 211 and 215.

The words *presbuteros* and *episkopos* are both found in the New Testament (Tit. 1.5/1; Tim. 3.2) where they are synonymous, meaning one who is responsible for a local community. Early Jewish-Christian documents, such as the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Clement*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas* all present the same picture.⁸⁶ Gradually a distinction

⁸⁴ Quoted in Otto Stählin (ed.), *Clemens Alexandrinus*, vol. i: *Protrepticus und Paedagogus* (Leipzig, 1905), p. xii (*De viris illustribus* 38). Though it is a disputed question, there seems to me to be no reason to doubt the tradition that Clement was a priest as well as a teacher in the church of Alexandria.

⁸⁵ *HE* 6.14.

⁸⁶ Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 346–7.

between the *episkopos*, 'bishop', and the *presbuteros*, 'priest', was made. The surviving liturgical information and canonical legislation give the impression, however, that the titles were variously used; the two offices seem to have been interchangeable in some places but not in others.⁸⁷ From the second century onwards the title of bishop is normally confined to presidents of local councils of presbyters, and as such, bishops came to be distinguished from the presbyters, as superior both in honour and in privilege.⁸⁸

If Eusebius' list of bishops is to be trusted, Agrippinus may have been bishop when Clement arrived. He was soon succeeded by Julian, and it may have been Julian who ordained Clement to the office of presbyter.

Concerning Clement's place of origin, Epiphanius informs us that there were two conflicting traditions: some claimed that he was an Alexandrian, others that he came from Athens.⁸⁹ Starting from his own writings, which show a wide knowledge and love of everything Greek, including familiarity with Greek literature and customs, it has been common to regard Athens as his place of birth. He presumably arrived in Alexandria after a period of travelling. Whether he was raised as a pagan or as a Christian is also a matter which he has chosen not to disclose; again the evidence is inferential, and the common opinion is that he was born a pagan, received a classical education, and became

⁸⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago, 1971), 161.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth A. Livingstone (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 1977), 175–7.

⁸⁹ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 32.8.

a Christian during his travels. As his writings also reveal an intimate knowledge of the Eleusinian mysteries,⁹⁰ it has even been suggested that he was an initiate himself. On the other hand, his extensive knowledge of the Scriptures may also suggest a Christian background.⁹¹ One should not, however, overlook the fact that most hereditary Christians have little incentive to read Scripture, as they think they already know what is in it. It seems best to leave it at that; Clement simply will not yield answers to questions of that sort.

In a famous paragraph in his main work, the *Stromateis*, Clement gives a résumé of his spiritual journey, or rather a review of the men he encountered on this journey:

One of these, an Ionian, came from Greece, the remainder from the Greek dispersion; one from Coele-Syria, others from the East, one from among the Assyrians, one a Jew by birth, from Palestine. I fell in with a final one—supreme in mastery. I tracked him down to his hiding-place in Egypt and stayed with him. He was the true Sicilian bee, culling out of the flowers from the meadow of prophets and apostles a pure substance of true knowledge in the souls of his hearers. (*Strom.* 1.11)

Although there have been several suggestions as to the identity of these masters, there is no way of knowing for certain who they were, except, perhaps, the last one, who is commonly thought to be Pantaenus. In his extant writings, Clement only once mentions Pantaenus, in *Eclogae*

⁹⁰ e.g. *Protr.* 20–1.

⁹¹ This is the view of Claude Mondésert, *Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1944), 265, who raises doubts about the assumption that Clement was born a pagan. He points to Clement's evident familiarity with the Scriptures, which indicates an early acquaintance with Christianity.

propheticae,⁹² calling him ‘our Pantaenus’ and quoting words of his. According to Eusebius, Clement also referred to Pantaenus as his teacher in the lost *Hypotyposeis*.⁹³

When Clement arrived in Alexandria, Eusebius—who again is our main source—writes that Pantaenus was head of ‘the school of sacred learning’ διδασκαλείου τῶν ἱερῶν λόγων, later commonly referred to as the catechetical school. This school had, according to Eusebius, existed since ancient times, and the successor to the chair after Pantaenus was Clement, who was in his turn succeeded by Origen, and so on. Opinion differs, however, especially as to the correctness of the term ‘catechetical school’ as early as Pantaenus’ time; there is also considerable disagreement among scholars concerning the kind of school: was it a free and private enterprise or was it attached to the church?⁹⁴

⁹² *Eclogae propheticae* 56.2.

⁹³ *HE* 5.11; 6.13.

⁹⁴ Important studies include Johannes Munck, *Untersuchungen über Klemens von Alexandria* (Stuttgart, 1933), 185; Adolf Knauber, ‘Katechetenschule oder Schulkatechumenat? Um die rechte Deutung des “Unternehmens” der ersten grossen Alexandriner’, *Trierer theologische Zeitschrift*, 60 (1951), 243–66; Hornschuh, ‘Das Leben des Origenes’; Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria*, 15; Gustave Bardy, ‘Aux origines de l’école d’Alexandrie’, *Recherches de science religieuse*, 27 (1937), 65–90; Alain Le Boulluec, ‘L’École d’Alexandrie. De quelques aventures d’un concept historiographique’, in P. C. Mondésert (ed.), *ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΙΝΑ. Hellénisme, judaïsme et christianisme à Alexandrie. Mélanges offerts au P. Claude Mondésert* (Paris, 1987), 403–17; Ulrich Neymeyr, *Die christlichen Lehrer im zweiten Jahrhundert: ihre Lehrtätigkeit, ihr Selbstverständnis und ihre Geschichte* (Leiden, 1989); André Méhat, *Étude sur les ‘Stromates’ de Clément d’Alexandrie* (Paris, 1966), 62–3; André Tuilier, ‘Les Évangélistes et les docteurs de la primitive église et les origines de l’École (διδασκαλείον) d’Alexandrie’, *Studia Patristica*, 17:2 (1982), 738–49; Robert Lewis Wilken, ‘Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue’, in

It must have been about AD 180 that Clement came to Alexandria and joined Pantaenus. For a long time most historians, on the basis of Eusebius, have envisaged a catechetical school in Alexandria with a regular succession of qualified teachers, similar to the practice of the Greek philosophical sects. It was simply thought to be an institution of the church to prepare the catechumens for baptism.⁹⁵ This view was radically questioned by Gustave Bardy who claimed that the history of the catechetical school of Alexandria started only in AD 202 when Origen took charge of it.⁹⁶ According to Bardy, Eusebius' account was dictated by 'le plan général qu'il s'est proposé de suivre dans son histoire et que revient à envisager la vie de l'Église comme une série régulière de successions'.⁹⁷ The 'school' before Origen—that of Pantaenus and Clement—was, according to Bardy, Christian, but private and had nothing to do with the contemporary official institution of the church, which was handled by humble catechists who prepared the catechumens for baptism. The school of Pantaenus was rather a parallel to

Patrick Henry (ed.), *Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1984), 15–18; Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*; Annewies van den Hoek, 'How Alexandrian was Clement of Alexandria? Reflections on Clement and his Alexandrian Background', *The Heythrop Journal*, 31 (1990), 179–94; David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley, 1992), 219–22; Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 132–5; Clemens Scholten, 'Die alexandrinische Katechetenschule', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 38 (1995), 16–37, and Hoek, 'The "Catechetical" School'.

⁹⁵ See Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. ii: *The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus* (Utrecht, 1953), 2–4, for the standard account.

⁹⁶ Bardy, 'Aux origines de l'école d'Alexandrie'.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 78–9.

that of Justin in Rome and later that of Origen in Caesarea (which we know thanks to Gregory Thaumaturgus' description),⁹⁸ a private, independent school of higher learning. And when persecution broke out, Clement left, and the school disappeared with him.⁹⁹

Bardy's demonstration has been influential, but not uncontested. Thus, André Méhat first criticized Bardy and pointed out that catechesis is not simply a matter of baptismal instruction, but something more general and more demanding, indicating that the type of instruction that Clement practised, may well have taken place within the boundaries of a church. He was further of the opinion that at this time in Alexandria catechesis had a far from 'official' character.¹⁰⁰

This view of Clement and Pantaenus as 'independent, free-lance Christian intellectuals'¹⁰¹ who had a loose (but not antagonistic) relationship to the formally constituted church of Alexandria and whose teaching took place on the

⁹⁸ Greg. Thaum. *Oratio in Originem*; cf. Richard Valantasis, *Spiritual Guides of the Third Century: A Semiotic Study of the Guide-Disciple Relationship in Christianity, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and Gnosticism* (Minneapolis, 1991), ch. 2.

⁹⁹ Bardy, 'Aux origines de l'école d'Alexandrie', 83.

¹⁰⁰ Méhat, *Étude sur les 'Stromates'*, 62 ff. This view is shared by Munck, *Untersuchungen über Klemens von Alexandria*, 185; Knauber, 'Katechetenschule oder Schulkatechumenat?'; Hornschuh, 'Das Leben des Origenes'; Broek, 'The Christian "School" of Alexandria'; Scholten, 'Die alexandrinische Katechetenschule'; and Hoek, 'The "Catechetical" School'. Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria*, 15, does not find the two views incompatible. In his opinion Pantaenus may well have been in charge of some kind of instruction for catechumens; but the relationship between Pantaenus and Clement may then have brought into being something more akin to a philosophical 'school'.

¹⁰¹ Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 221.

margins of the Alexandrian church, has now convincingly been challenged by Annewies van den Hoek. In two articles 'How Alexandrian was Clement of Alexandria? Reflections on Clement and his Alexandrian Background' and 'The "Catechetical" School of Early Christian Alexandria and Its Philonic Heritage'¹⁰² she considers the existence of an institutionalized Christian establishment in Alexandria to be highly probable. Based on a consideration of the literary sources Clement employed in his writings, she argues that Clement must have had access to a Christian library, with much local material: 'it is hard otherwise to imagine the concentration of such varied Jewish and Christian sources'.¹⁰³ She finds support for her argument in the classical scholar Günther Zuntz¹⁰⁴ who from his work on the textual criticism of the Pauline corpus concluded that the Alexandrian type of Biblical text was far superior to most other texts available in the second century. He argued that already in the later half of the second century Alexandria must have possessed a Christian scriptorium that set the standard for this type of text. Van den Hoek concludes that 'it is only a small step from a scriptorium to a library', and likewise, from a library to a centre for instruction.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Hoek, 'How Alexandrian was Clement of Alexandria?' and 'The "Catechetical" School'.

¹⁰³ Hoek, 'How Alexandrian was Clement of Alexandria?', 190.

¹⁰⁴ In his Schweich lectures of 1946; see Hoek, 'How Alexandrian was Clement of Alexandria?', 191.

¹⁰⁵ Hoek, 'How Alexandrian was Clement of Alexandria?', 191. Cf. Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, 1995), 152: 'teachers like Justin and Clement must have depended at least partly on texts accumulated by the Roman and Alexandrian churches.'

In her article 'The "Catechetical" School of Early Christian Alexandria' van den Hoek shows more confidence in Eusebius' account of the catechetical school than has been common. Her other source of knowledge of the school is Clement's own writings. From them emerges, she argues, a picture of his activities that closely corresponds to Eusebius' characterization of what went on in the school, 'consisting of interpreting scripture and teaching catechism... The union of liturgical and didactic functions is, of course, best fulfilled by a priest, and this seems to have been the situation of both Clement and Pantaenus'.¹⁰⁶

About Clement's life in Alexandria, we know curiously little, even if we scrutinize his works for information. When Demetrius became bishop (AD 189), Clement was established in the city. It is clear from his general attitude and from specific references that he was a shepherd of souls as well as a formal teacher; as we have seen, he was probably an ordained presbyter. But the rest is silence; not even Origen mentions him. He may well have been married, since he writes with sympathetic insight of married life.¹⁰⁷

During the persecutions under Severus in AD 202–3 when, according to Eusebius, countless numbers lost their lives in Egypt, and especially in Alexandria,¹⁰⁸ Clement left the city, obviously never to return. We do not know where he went, perhaps to Cappadocia.¹⁰⁹ About AD 211, as we

¹⁰⁶ Hoek, 'The "Catechetical" School', 76–7. See also Jakab, *Ecclesia alexandrina*.

¹⁰⁷ e.g. *Strom.* 3.

¹⁰⁸ *HE* 6.1.

¹⁰⁹ Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria*, 16.

have already seen, he was in touch with Alexander, then bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, who wrote a letter to commend him to the church at Antioch.¹¹⁰

Although we know little of the hard facts of Clement's life, it is possible to get an impression of his personality from his writings. He seems to have lived a quiet life, teaching¹¹¹ and caring for the spiritual and intellectual welfare of his hearers, for those inside as well as those outside the church. To judge from his writings, he was a man of gentle persuasion, completely lacking in aggressiveness and fanaticism. His career apparently lay far from ecclesiastical politics, controversies, and struggle, which certainly helped him concentrate his energies upon his distinctive task, that of a Christian writer.¹¹²

To discover and impart truth seems to have been his permanent interest in life. His intent was to bring 'the wisdom of the world' into the service of Christianity. His own temperament and cultural background gave him the opportunity to reach the more prominent members of the church, as well as interested onlookers on the fringes. He had learned from Philo, of course, who in many an essay had tried to show that the Jewish religious view was also capable of being expressed in the language of Greek philosophy. Clement is one of our star witnesses to the first contacts between

¹¹⁰ *HE* 6.11.

¹¹¹ Cf. e.g. *Strom.* 1.12: 'As one teaches, one learns more and more.'

¹¹² For this characterization, cf. Simon P. Wood (ed.), *Clement of Alexandria: Christ the Educator* (Washington, DC, 1954) in the 'Introduction'. See also R. B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism* (London, 1914).

Greek philosophy and Christianity, a position bestowed on him by a happy coincidence of time, place, and his own education and personality.¹¹³ Werner Jaeger writes: 'Two universal systems, Greek culture and the Christian Church, were united under the mighty superstructure of Alexandrine theology.'¹¹⁴

We possess only a part of Clement's writings, as listed in Eusebius.¹¹⁵ Clement's chief extant writings are the three major works: (a) 'The Exhortation to the Greeks' (*Protrepticus*) in one book, (b) 'The Instructor' (*Paedagogus*) in three books, and (c) 'Miscellanies of Notes of Revealed Knowledge in Accordance with the True Philosophy' (known as the *Stromateis*) in seven books. Our single primary manuscript has eight books of the *Stromateis* (followed by *Excerpta ex Theodoto* and *Eclogae propheticae*), but the eighth was evidently not intended for publication. It consists of notes of a preparatory nature on which Clement draws in the first seven books and was probably appended to the work after Clement's death. We do not know how many books of the *Stromateis* he intended to write; at the end of Book 7 he speaks of continuing further.

There are two other minor works of a nature similar to the so-called eighth book of the *Stromateis*, one which throws important light on Gnosticism, entitled 'Epitomes

¹¹³ H. Robbers, 'Christian Philosophy in Clement of Alexandria', in *Philosophy and Christianity. Philosophical Essays dedicated to Professor Dr. Herman Dooyeweerd* (Kampen, 1965), 203–11, at 204.

¹¹⁴ Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), 37–8.

¹¹⁵ For an extended survey of Clement's works, see Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. ii, 6–20.

from the Writings of Theodotus and the so-called Eastern Teaching of the Time of Valentinus' (*Excerpta ex Theodoto*), and another, consisting of comments on portions of the Scriptures, 'Selections from the Prophetic Sayings' (*Eclogae propheticae*). Interesting as they are, it is very difficult to separate the excerpts from the Valentinian Theodotus from the words of Clement himself; they should therefore be used with caution.

There is still one complete work, a homily on the salvation of the rich, starting from Mark 10.17–31 on the rich young man, 'Who is the Rich Man that is Saved' (*Quis dives salvetur*). Of the lost works the most important seems to have been the 'Outlines' (*Hypotyposeis*), a commentary on the Scriptures, of which only scattered fragments remain. Numerous fragments of other works survive as quotations in later writers.

It is not possible to be certain of the exact date of any of Clement's writings. On the relative order of his main works there is, however, general agreement: *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus* (*Προτρεπτικὸς πρὸς Ἕλληνας*), and the *Stromateis*. With the possible exception of Books 5, 6, and 7 of the *Stromateis*, they are all thought to have been written before AD 202 when Clement left Alexandria.¹¹⁶

The earliest of his major writings, the *Protrepticus*, is an address to 'Greeks', i.e. non-Christians, aiming at their conversion, 'a provocative encouragement to embrace Christianity'.¹¹⁷ After having ridiculed the immorality, pettiness,

¹¹⁶ See e.g. Wood (ed.), *Clement of Alexandria*, p. xii.

¹¹⁷ Daniel Ridings, *The Attic Moses: The Dependency Theme in Some Early Christian Writers* (Gothenburg, 1995), 132.

and other shortcomings of the gods of Greek mythology and distinguished the good philosophers and poets from the bad, regarding the former as partial witnesses to the Truth, Clement in the end exhorts his readers to consider the Logos of God and urges them all to be saved: 'Wherefore it seems to me, that since the Logos himself came to us from heaven, we ought no longer go to human teaching, to Athens and the rest of Greece, or to Ionia, in our curiosity... What then is my exhortation? I urge thee to be saved' (*Protr.* 112.1; 117.3).

The book—regarded by many as the most literary and eloquent of Clement's extant works—belongs to a recognized literary genre, exhortatory discourse. Usually these were exhortations to the study of philosophy. Clement, by deliberately using this term, appears to be arguing that Christianity is the true heir to Greek philosophy.

The *Paedagogus* (*Παιδαγωγός*)—‘a major source for social history of the age’¹¹⁸—functions as an immediate continuation of the *Protrepticus*, addressing those who have let themselves be exhorted by the Logos and accepted the Christian faith. The Logos now comes forward as tutor or ‘educator’ in order to guide the converts in how to conduct their lives. The Logos as educator moulds the characters of those entrusted to his care. ‘Just as our body needs a physician when it is sick, so, too, when we are weak, our soul needs the Educator to cure its ills’ (*Paed.* 1.3).

¹¹⁸ Henry Chadwick, ‘The Early Christian Community’, in John McManners (ed.), *The Oxford History of Christianity* (Oxford, 1990), 21–69, at 58.

The *Stromateis* (Στρωματεῖς)—which is the most important of Clement's works for the present study—is not easily defined or understood with regard to literary genre, purpose, and intended audience. Eusebius gives us an account of it in his *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.13:

Now in the *Stromateis* he has composed a patchwork, not only of the divine Scripture, but of the writings of the Greeks as well, if he thought that they also had said something useful, and he mentions opinions from many sources, explaining Greek and barbarian alike, and moreover sifts the false opinions of the heresiarchs; and unfolding much history he gives us a work of great erudition. With all these he mingles also the opinions of the philosophers, and so he has suitably made the title of the *Stromateis* correspond to the work itself. And in them he has also made use of testimonies from the disputed writings, the book known as the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, and those of Barnabas, and Clement, and Jude; and he mentions Tatian's book *Against the Greeks*, and Cassian, since he also had composed a chronography, and moreover Philo and Aristobulus and Josephus and Demetrius, Jewish writers, in that they would show, all of them, in writing, that Moses and the Jewish race went back further in their origins than the Greeks. And the books of Clement, of which we are speaking, are full of much other useful learning.

The *Stromateis* has been regarded—by some, at least—as theologically important, but more difficult to grasp than Clement's earlier works. The reason lies primarily in its structure, or lack of such. It appears unsystematic both in style and in the thoughts it expresses; constantly moving from one subject to another, inserting digressions and diverting the

reader's attention, the author often obscures the connection between the different sections and chapters.¹¹⁹ But it should be noted that this unsystematic surface structure is something Clement imposed on his work quite deliberately. He states this a number of times, for example: 'Let these notes of ours, as we have often said, for the sake of those that consult them carelessly and unskilfully, be of varied character—and as the name itself indicates, patched together—passing constantly from one thing to another, and in the series of discussions hinting at one thing and demonstrating another' (*Strom.* 4.1). As Henry Chadwick notes, however, there is a premeditated structure in spite of the unsystematic style. In his words the *Stromateis* is 'a deliberately rambling work, constantly changing the subject, but from which the discerning reader can reconstruct a remarkable, carefully thought out system'.¹²⁰

But why did Clement deliberately disguise his thoughts? At least two reasons may be discerned: One was stated by Clement himself: 'for the sake of those who consult them [these notes] carelessly and unskilfully', with a bearing on the intended audience of the work, with which I will deal presently. The other concerns, I think, are his view of language and the character of the truth that he feels it his duty to impart. To Clement ordinary language is inadequate to express truth; it can only be expressed by paradox or symbolic language, or even—basically—by silence (*Strom.* 7.2.3). In

¹¹⁹ Eric F. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, 1957), 7–8.

¹²⁰ Chadwick, 'The Early Christian Community', 58.

Clement's view truth, which is God, is 'unutterable' (*ἄρρητος*) (see Ch. 5).

The prospective audience of Clement's works needs special attention in our context. The members of the Christian church in Alexandria were probably mixed in cultural background, education, nationality, economic, and social standing. It seems, however, that the majority were Greek in culture and language, not 'Egyptian' (i.e. anybody non-Greek) and that this not inconsiderable group of people was often both well educated and relatively wealthy.¹²¹

This much is clear from both the *Paedagogus* and the *Quis dives salvetur?*: Christianity in Alexandria had penetrated the upper classes. Clement's intended readers of these works belong to people of the community already Christian, and well off. Poor people would have required no advice on how to treat slaves or how to conduct themselves at a dinner-party. Nor would it be appropriate to advise them to eat food which is 'plain and ungarnished' (*Paed.* 2.2) and 'free of a too rich variety' (*Paed.* 2.7) when they had barely enough to survive. Clement also addresses the rich when he disapproves of the 'possession of too many slaves. Men resort to servants to escape work' (*Paed.* 3.26) or reproaches women who 'conceal natural beauty by overshadowing it with gold; they do not realise the serious mistake they make by hanging countless chains about themselves' (*Paed.* 2.122). His attitude is clear: 'God has given us the power to use our possessions, I admit, but only to the extent it is

¹²¹ Cf. Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World: From the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London, 1986), 302.

necessary: He wishes them to be in common. It is unbecoming that one man lives in luxury when there are so many that live in poverty. How much more honourable it is to serve many than to live in wealth. How much more reasonable it is to spend money on men than on stones and gold' (*Paed.* 2.120).

Also in his sermon on Mark 10, the *Quis dives salvetur?*, Clement is concerned with the rich members of the church, Christians who fear, if they take the Gospel seriously, that they will be cut off from the kingdom of heaven; Jesus, after all, told the rich young man that if he wished to be perfect, he had to give away all his goods. Clement, however, removes the stumbling-block by assuring the rich that the passage need not be taken literally (*Quis dives* 5). He thus breaks with the prophetic tradition of stressing in a literal way the perils of material wealth, and demonstrates that wealth does not need to be a problem for a believer.¹²²

That Clement directs his attention in these two works to the rich members of his church does not have to mean that these were the only members: on several occasions he advises the rich to give alms to the poor (e.g. *Paed.* 3.93), people who probably were part of the church, too. This means, however, that the wealthy were numerous enough to be the target of instruction and teaching; they were no doubt the dominant section of the community.¹²³

¹²² Cf. Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 38, who characterizes the work as 'a novel exercise in Christian literature'.

¹²³ Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, *The Social Structures of the Early Christian Communities* (London, 1987), 106.

They were rich, but were they also educated? That this does not always have to be the case is clear from a passage at the end of the *Paedagogus*. Clement writes:

But, someone may say, we are not all philosophers.

But do not all of us desire life?

What do you mean? Where is your faith? How do you love God and neighbour, if you do not love wisdom? How can you love yourself, if you do not love life?

I have not learned letters, he may answer.

But even if you have not learned to read, hearing is inexcusable, as if it, too, needed to be taught. Faith is not the possession of the wise according to this world, but of the wise according to God. (*Paed.* 3.78)

While it is clear that the readers Clement addresses in the *Paedagogus* and the *Quis dives salvetur?* were Christians, the intended readership of the *Protrepticus* was pagan ‘Hellenes’; in addition, they were probably also well educated. The author presupposes in his readers a certain knowledge of Greek mythology, philosophy, and poetry. The book is full of quotations from classical works, but also from the Christian Scriptures.

Concerning the intended audience of the *Stromateis*, opinions vary, and granted the special character as well as complexity of the work, one should be cautious about jumping to conclusions based on single passages. As mentioned above, Clement deliberately expresses himself enigmatically and unsystematically: ‘Some I am deliberately putting to one side, making my selection scientifically out of fear of writing what I have refrained from speaking—not

in a spirit of grudging (that would be wrong), but in fear that my companions might misunderstand them and go astray and that I might be found offering a dagger to a child' (*Strom.* 1.14.3).

The question is who are these 'companions' of Clement? Do they belong to the group of more simple-minded Christians who had not yet become 'true Gnostics'? Why did he want to compose his work not only from 'the divine Scripture, but from the writings of the Greeks as well'?

One of the central topics of the *Stromateis* is the role of philosophy and its relationship to Christian truth. Clement contends that philosophy is for the Greeks what the Law is for the Jews, a preparatory discipline (ἡ φιλοσοφία προοδοποιούσα) to Christian religion (*Strom.* 1.28.3).

Daniel Ridings has convincingly argued that in the *Stromateis* 'Clement is addressing himself to educated non-Christians and will do so on their own terms'.¹²⁴ Ridings' argument is based on Clement's view of the value of philosophy and secular learning: by his extensive use of secular literature Clement shows his wish to communicate with the 'Hellenes', rather than to emphasize the value of the literature in itself. The Hellenes need to be prepared, and this can best be achieved by using their own works. Before the coming of Christ, philosophy is necessary for the Hellenes because they do not have the prophets. After Christ, it is still useful as a preparation for those who need proof (*Strom.*

¹²⁴ Ridings, *The Attic Moses*, 137. Méhat, *Étude sur les 'Stromates'*, 292 f., is of the opinion that the *Stromateis* serves a mixed audience, while Witt, 'The Hellenism of Clement of Alexandria', 199, thinks that the *Stromateis* was addressed to Christians.

1.28.5), implying that is not necessarily useful or necessary for those who already are Christians.¹²⁵

This seems to be a reasonable interpretation of Clement's attitude towards philosophy in the *Stromateis*. At the same time, however, it is difficult to believe that Clement did not also have in mind members of his own Christian community as readers of the *Stromateis*. The problems discussed there must have been constantly to the fore among educated Christians in the multicultural Alexandrian society of Clement's time.

¹²⁵ Ridings, *The Attic Moses*, 132 ff.

3

The Concept of God in Middle Platonism

Before dealing more fully with the theology of Clement, it will be useful to delineate some central aspects of the period in the history of Platonism, commonly called Middle Platonism, which probably influenced Clement more than any other. The philosophers who will be discussed here were more or less contemporary with Clement and were all to some degree occupied with related topics and problems. I will, therefore, in this chapter describe how they reflected on God and the divine and analyse their discussions, terminology, and ways of expression, so as to provide a background against which it will be easier to understand Clement himself.

In so doing, I do not, of course, pretend to give a complete survey of Middle Platonist philosophy; the choice of themes is based on their relevance for the study of Clement that follows. The chapter is therefore concerned primarily with the concept of God and the structure of the divine, on the basis of three individual Middle Platonists. Within this framework, however, I have tried to deal with the philosophers as much as possible on their own terms.¹

¹ Bibliographical references are deliberately reduced to a minimum.

The Middle Platonic period is normally defined as the period of the Platonic Academy, which starts with Antiochus of Ascalon (c.130–67 BC) and goes down to Ammonius Saccas (AD c.175–242), the precursor of Plotinus, i.e. from c.100 BC till c.AD 220.² These three hundred years were until recently rather neglected by scholars; the period was seen as ‘a middle period’ between the philosophical giants Plato and Plotinus. The philosophers themselves have often been called ‘eclectics’, in modern times only a negative characterization.³

This view is gradually changing towards a greater acknowledgement and appreciation of Middle Platonism and its philosophers. John Dillon may be seen as a representative of this new attitude.⁴ In his opinion, the view of the Middle Platonists as eclectics needs a drastic re-evaluation; they should be looked upon as philosophers in their own right and not ‘as dimly seen milestones on the way to Neoplatonism.’⁵ He describes Middle Platonism as ‘a curious but fascinating chapter of intellectual history’ and as ‘unusually rich in its cultural resources’.⁶

Dillon admits, however, that this is a period which is not easily defined, explaining that it ‘is important not for any

² Cf. John M. Dillon, ‘The Academy in the Middle Platonic Period’, *Dionysius*, 3 (1979), 63–77.

³ As in Eduard Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1856–68), a work which has had an enormous influence on the study of ancient philosophy.

⁴ His *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977) is the modern standard work on Middle Platonism.

⁵ Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, p. xiii.

⁶ John M. Dillon and A. A. Long, *The Question of “Eclecticism”: Studies in Later Greek Philosophy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1988), 13.

great thinkers that it produced, but rather as a period in which certain basic philosophical issues were formulated, and approaches to their solution developed, which would come to brilliant fruition in the speculations of Plotinus'.⁷ He also characterizes the achievement of these philosophers by way of a simile:

Like those humble sea-creatures whose concerted action slowly builds a coral-reef, the philosophers of this period each contributed some detail to the formation of what was to become perhaps the greatest philosophical edifice of all time, that Platonism which, gathering to itself much of Aristotelianism and Stoicism, was to dominate the Late Antique world and the Middle Ages, and continue as a vital force through the Renaissance to the present day.⁸

Scholars today are also quite unanimous in viewing the period as a return to a metaphysical and religious Plato:⁹ towards the end of the second century BC Hellenistic philosophy generally, including that of the Platonic Academy, takes on a new direction—there is a change in the philosophical atmosphere. This new direction may best be

⁷ Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 414. Cf. also J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London, 1958), 19: 'The Platonism of the period (Middle Platonism as it is called) presents a much less coherent aspect [than Stoicism]. Generalisation about it is not easy, for several diverse trends of thought were to be found in it.'

⁸ Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 415.

⁹ David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden, 1986), 46. The two things that remain constant in Middle Platonism are, according to Eric Osborn, "Negative Theology and Apologetic", in Raoul Mortley and David Dockrill (eds.), *The Via Negativa* (Auckland, N. Z., 1981), 54, the transcendence of the first principle and a dogmatic approach to philosophy.

characterized by a fresh interest in the thinkers of the past—especially Plato—and in questions of a metaphysical character: in first principles, in a transcendent supreme principle, and in the origin of being. This interest in metaphysics is represented not only in the philosophy of Middle Platonism, but also in the mystery cults, Hermetism, Gnosticism, and Neopythagoreanism. The latter, especially through Eudorus of Alexandria (fl. c.30 BC), was especially influential on the other philosophical and religious movements.

The Middle Platonists were, however, never an organized movement or sect. They did not look upon themselves as innovative or as creating anything new; what they wanted to do and thought they were doing was ‘passing on the torch of Platonism’.¹⁰ They viewed themselves simply as Platonists who followed earlier Platonists who followed Plato—*veteres sequi*. Their task was only to expound and comment on their Master’s writings—something, as we shall see, they did in their own (Middle Platonic) way.¹¹ It is posterity which in their fragmentary works has found a ‘Middle Platonic’ identity—works which included commentaries on Platonic works, surveys of the history of philosophy, introductions to Plato’s philosophy, and treatises on individual philosophical problems.¹²

¹⁰ Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 49.

¹¹ Heinrich Dörrie, ‘Die Frage nach dem Transzendenten im Mittelplatonismus’, in E. R. Dodds *et al.* (eds.), *Les Sources de Plotin* (Genève, 1957), 193–223, at 194, says that Middle Platonism ‘nimmt eine eigenartige Stellung ein in der Mitte zwischen Schulphilosophie und religiösem Bekenntnis’.

¹² Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 52.

THE MIDDLE PLATONISTS, WHO WERE THEY?

The Middle Platonic period in the history of Platonism in all likelihood has its origin in Alexandria, but by the second century AD Middle Platonists are spread throughout the Mediterranean world.¹³

There is today a general agreement on what constitutes a Middle Platonist; though the numbers on the various lists may differ depending on how far into the periphery one goes, there is a common core which is quite constant. This core would have to include (in chronological order) Plutarch of Chaeroneia (AD 45–125, an extensive literary corpus), Calvenus Taurus (fl. AD 145, a few fragments extant of commentaries on the *Timaeus* and *Gorgias*), Albinus (fl. AD 150, author of an extant short introduction to the dialogues of Plato), Alcinous (second century AD, author—or compiler—of the extant *Didascalicus*, a handbook on Platonism),¹⁴ Numenius of Apamea (fl. AD 150, fragments in Proclus and Eusebius, in addition to a long fragment on matter in Calcidius), Apuleius of Madaura (AD 123–c.180, several works, including the only other extant handbook on Platonism, *De Platone et eius dogmate*), and Atticus (fl. AD 175, long fragments in Eusebius and several short fragments in Proclus).¹⁵

¹³ Ibid. 49.

¹⁴ I follow the opinion of John Whittaker, who, in a series of articles beginning in 1974, and finally in his Budé edition of *Didascalicus*, argued that the author of *Didascalicus* is Alcinous, not Albinus.

¹⁵ We know that Plotinus read—among these—Gaius, Numenius, and Atticus (Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 14.10–13).

Another branch of Middle Platonism is represented by the Neopythagoreans Moderatus of Gades (fl. AD 60) and Nichomachus of Gerasa (fl. AD 120) who have much in common with the Platonists. Moreover, Numenius of Apamea, mentioned among the Middle Platonists above, is just as often defined as a Neopythagorean, sometimes simply as a Platonic–Pythagorean philosopher.¹⁶

The reason for this confusion regarding Numenius seems to lie in the fact that Numenius represents a blend of Pythagorean and Platonic elements in his teaching. Heinrich Dörrie has stressed the role of Eudorus of Alexandria in the revival of a fruitful exchange of ideas between Platonists and Pythagoreans in the first century BC. It was difficult to draw a dividing line between the two groups.¹⁷

In the case of Numenius we do not actually know whether he described himself as a Pythagorean or a Platonist. Though no small number of ancient authors refer to him as Pythagorean (*Πυθαγόρειος* or *Πυθαγορικός*), Porphyry in *Vita Plotini* (14.12) lists Numenius among the Platonist authors that were read in the school of Plotinus. Iamblichus, too, mentions him among Platonic authors, and Proclus (*In rem publ.* 2.96.11) puts him first on the list of the Platonic leaders (*τῶν Πλατωνικῶν οἱ κορυφαῖοι*). More-

¹⁶ Cf. Arthur Hilary Armstrong, 'Gnosis and Greek Philosophy', in *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London, 1979), 109: 'Numenius, for all his "Orientalism" remains a Platonic–Pythagorean who looks at Gnosticism, as he looks at other Oriental, non-Greek ways of thinking, from the outside, adopting and adapting any ideas from the Gnostics which he thinks will be helpful for his Platonic philosophical purposes.' So also Michael Frede, 'Numenius', in *ANRW* 2:36.2 (1987), W. Haase and H. Temporini (eds.), 1034–75, at 1046–7.

¹⁷ Heinrich Dörrie, 'Der Platoniker Eudoros von Alexandria', *Hermes*, 79 (1944), 25–39.

over, Eusebius and Theodoret, though they call him a Pythagorean, refer to him as a representative of Platonic teaching,¹⁸ and in both Clement (*Strom.* 5.29.3) and Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho* 5.6 and 6.1) Platonists and Pythagoreans are mentioned in the same breath.

Even if arguably the content of Numenius' surviving fragments is more Platonic than Pythagorean, this does not mean that the 'Pythagorean' element is negligible or insignificant. In particular, a Pythagorean could allow greater freedom to his speculative talent than was permissible for a professional Platonist. The primary task for a Platonist was to expound the Platonic dialogues and interpret the stock of teaching enshrined in them. Numenius, by contrast, seems to have picked up his δόγματα more freely and elaborated them according to his own mind.¹⁹

In addition to the pagan authors there are the Jewish and Christian representatives, namely Philo of Alexandria (c.25 BC–AD 45), Justin Martyr (c. AD 100–65), Clement, and Origen (c. AD 185–254).

The question of Philo's influence on Clement will not concern us here. If the purpose of this study had been to pose the genetic question from what sources Clement got his ideas, Philo would no doubt have been central. In addition, the question of the relationship between Philo and Clement has recently been extensively treated by Annewies van den Hoek in her book *Clement of Alexandria and his Use of Philo*

¹⁸ For references and discussion, see John Whittaker, 'Platonic Philosophy in the early centuries of the Empire', in *ANRW* 2:36.1 (1987), W. Haase and H. Temporini (eds.), 117–21.

¹⁹ See Whittaker, 'Platonic Philosophy', 120.

*in the Stromateis: An early Christian reshaping of a Jewish Model.*²⁰

Instead of a genetic approach mine will be comparative. I shall compare Clement with three more or less contemporary pagan Middle Platonists. It is not my intention, however, to show any direct influence on Clement from these philosophers. The similarities that we may detect are likely to be due to their common cultural milieu, which may be characterized as Middle Platonic.

Alcinous, Atticus, and Numenius may be described as typical exponents of pagan Middle Platonism in the second century, and they are central to the topic of the present investigation.

MAIN TOPICS OF MIDDLE PLATONIC PHILOSOPHY

The Middle Platonists looked upon themselves as followers of Plato and more or less affiliated with the Platonic *αἱρεσις* or school.²¹ Typically, their attitude to Plato was one of reverence and awe, almost making him divine. According

²⁰ Leiden, 1988. It is a strength of her book, I think, that the results she comes up with are not straightforward or presented as definitive; the question is a complex one.

²¹ The term *πλατωνικός* meaning a follower of Plato is first found in the 2nd cent. bc: Heinrich Dörrie, 'Logos-Religion? oder Nous-Theologie? Die hauptsächlichen Aspekte des kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus', in Jaap Mansfeld and L. M. de Rijk (eds.), *Kephalaion: studies in Greek philosophy and its continuation offered to Professor C. J. de Vogel* (Assen, 1975), 115–36, at 118 and John Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen, 1978), ch. 4.

to Atticus, Plato was sent down to us from heaven.²² They also believed that Plato concealed his message and consciously expressed himself in enigmas and riddles, *αἰνύματα*. According to Numenius, Plato concealed his own ideas midway between clarity and obscurity, keeping his real doctrine safe for himself, but causing doctrinal dissension among his followers: 'and so he [Plato] too wrapped up his subjects in a manner that was neither usual nor plain to understand; and after conducting them each in a way that he thought fit, and disguising them so as to be half seen and half unseen, he wrote in safety, but himself gave occasion to the subsequent dissension, and distraction of his doctrines'.²³

Timaeus 28c was in Middle Platonism widely used to stress the evasive character of the truth and also, as we shall see later, to affirm the ineffability of the first principle: 'Now to discover the Maker and Father of this Universe was a task indeed; and having discovered Him, to declare Him unto all men were a thing impossible.'

Alcinous understood this to mean that only the chosen few were given instruction on the Good. He first renders the above passage in his own words, then comments on it: 'Certainly he only imparted his views on the good to a very small, select group of his associates' (*Did.* 27.179.37–9).²⁴

²² Édouard des Places (ed.), *Atticus: Fragments* (Paris, 1977), fr. 1.

²³ Édouard des Places (ed.), *Les Fragments de Numénius d'Apamée* (Paris, 1973), fr. 24 and Edwin Hamilton Gifford (ed.), *Eusebius: Preparation for the Gospel*, Part 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1981), 784.

²⁴ Trans. Dillon in John Dillon (ed.), *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford, 1993). When referring to *Didascalicus*, I use the page and line numbers of Hermann's edn. (1853), which Whittaker takes over in his new edn. of the Platonic handbook, John Whittaker (ed.), *Alcinoos: Enseignement des doctrines de Platon* (Paris, 1990).

It was then their task as Platonists to interpret and take care of this secretive and enigmatic teaching for the following generations.

David Runia has described the methods that were used by the Middle Platonists in interpreting the writings of Plato, and I summarize his descriptions:²⁵

1. They were mainly concerned with the text itself, not with the esoteric conception of his philosophy. They also believed that their account of Plato's philosophy was the authentic one.
2. They were loyal to the texts; they did not question their authenticity and authority, and by exegesis and systematization they tried to present a true exposition of the teaching of their Master. Their hermeneutical principle was to interpret one Platonic text in the light of another Platonic text.²⁶
3. The framework for their interpretation of Plato was a certain view of the history of philosophy. The Middle Platonists of this period viewed Plato more and more as a disciple of Pythagoras. It was also their opinion that Aristotle and the Stoics had their philosophy from Plato and that they had only made a few 'modernizations'. In this way a great many Pythagorean, Stoic, and Peripatetic ideas and concepts were adopted by Middle Platonism.

²⁵ Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 486–8.

²⁶ See also John Whittaker, 'The Value of Indirect Tradition in the Establishment of Greek Philosophical Texts or the Art of Misquotation', in J. N. Grant (ed.), *Editing Greek and Latin Texts* (New York, 1989), 63–95, at 70–1.

John Whittaker, in the 'Introduction' to his new critical edition of Alcinous' *Didascalicus*,²⁷ gives many examples of how the author of that handbook, along with other writers of the period, treats the Platonic texts. It is important to stress, says Whittaker, that alterations to the Platonic text were most often made intentionally, and that one should not accuse these Middle Platonists of lack of memory in their quotation practice.

One typical feature is the inversion of the order of words, or, as Dillon calls it, 'mirror quotation'.²⁸ For example, when in his discussion on matter in *Timaeus* (30a 4–5), Plato writes *κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως* ('it moved in a discordant and disorderly way'), Alcinous 'quotes' with a deliberately reversed word order, *ἀτάκτως καὶ πλημμελῶς κινουμένην*.

Other features are the tendencies of the Middle Platonists to accommodate and replace Platonic words and expressions with Aristotle's terminology, to modernize or modify the Platonic vocabulary by, for instance, using a compound verb instead of a simple one (or vice versa), or to vary the terminology of Plato by replacing an adjective or a verb with the corresponding substantive.

What Whittaker thus demonstrates is a method used, not only by Alcinous, but by the whole Platonizing literature of the empire, as part of an established tradition of writing commentaries or in other forms commenting on the authoritative texts. This procedure was typical for many

²⁷ Whittaker, *Alcinoos*, pp. xvii–xxx.

²⁸ Dillon, *Alcinous*, p. xxx. Cf. also Whittaker, 'The Value of Indirect Tradition'.

writers of the period, including Philo, Atticus, Plutarch, Numenius, Apuleius, Clement, and even Plotinus.²⁹

Their systematic manipulation of Plato's text shows paradoxically how close the Middle Platonists were to the *ipsisima verba* of the Master. The liberty they exhibit resides in the emphasis they put on certain elements and in their tendentious combination of 'quotations' from various places in the Platonic corpus.

It was not, however, the whole Platonic corpus that was read by the Middle Platonists, their textual basis was rather narrow: they were almost exclusively concerned with the 'classical' dialogues: *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Parmenides*, and some of the *Letters*. Among these works the *Timaeus* had a special importance and exercised a considerable influence on the Middle Platonic exposition of the philosophy of Plato.

The influence of the *Timaeus* was not limited to the professional philosophers. As it was regarded as 'the Platonists' Bible',³⁰ it is probable too that people of letters and others with some education had read or at least knew the creation story in the *Timaeus*.³¹ The dialogue was in antiquity not only the most read but also the most widely disseminated and influential among philosophical works.³² It was also made available for a wider audience through commentaries on the whole or parts of it, through summar-

²⁹ Whittaker (ed.), *Alcinoos*, p. xvii.

³⁰ Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 57.

³¹ Dörrie, 'Logos-Religion? oder Nous-Theologie?', 198.

³² John Whittaker, 'Plutarch, Platonism and Christianity', in *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought* (London, 1984), 5.

ies and introductions of the teaching of Plato which were heavily influenced by the *Timaeus*, and through monographs on this dialogue.

Just as the *Timaeus* itself was the object of special attention, there were also certain passages that were in special focus, and were commented on and interpreted. The most important of these passages are the following:³³

1. 28a The two worlds, the sensible and the intelligible.
2. 28a and c, 31b and c The doctrine of three principles.
3. 28b Cosmogony: 'The double question,' the question of whether the *γένεσις* did or did not take place in time (i.e. whether *Timaeus* should be read literally or not). The division between the literalists (Atticus, Plutarch) and the non-literalists (the majority) was important in Middle Platonism.
4. 28c The unreachable and inexpressible Father and Creator.
5. 29a Praising of the goodness of the Demiurge and the Cosmos.
6. 30a The visible things are attended to by God and brought from disorder to order.
7. 30b *νοῦς* cannot exist apart from the soul.
8. 41a–b The indestructibility of the cosmos.
9. 47a–c The gift of philosophy.
10. 92c The doxology.

The main theme of the *Timaeus* is the genesis of the universe: how it came about, who the creator was, and for what purpose it was created. Naturally, given the importance

³³ The list is taken from Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 490. Greek text and translation: LCL.

of this dialogue among them, this theme is also central for Middle Platonists. The doctrine seemed to give them the answers to some of their most important questions concerning their view of reality.³⁴

Of primary importance was the question whether the genesis took place in time or not, which is equivalent to the question whether the *Timaeus* should be read in a literal or a non-literal, or mythic, way. Among 'our' Platonists, Atticus was very much concerned with this question, arguing for the literal meaning of the *Timaeus*, which Plutarch did too. They were, however, a minority; the majority supported the non-literal interpretation.³⁵

By none of these philosophers was this creation of cosmos seen as a creation *ex nihilo*, an understanding which developed gradually in Early Christianity and was by the third century an established fact;³⁶ but rather as what in German is termed *Weltbildung*, in contrast to *Weltschöpfung*.

This *Weltbildung* implies a formation of matter that is already there, albeit in a disorderly fashion.

³⁴ For a general survey cf. Willy Theiler, 'Gott und Seele im kaiserzeitlichen Denken', in *Forschungen zum Neuplatonismus* (Berlin, 1966), 104–23.

³⁵ The debate did not start with the Middle Platonists; this question was from the time of Plato and onwards the object of much debate. For a more detailed exposition, see Matthias Baltes, *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios nach den antiken Interpreten*, Part 1 (Leiden, 1976). Cf. also Leonardo Tarán, 'The Creation Myth in Plato's *Timaeus*', in J. P. Anton and G. L. Kustas (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (New York, 1971), 372–407 and Whittaker, 'Plutarch, Platonism and Christianity', 59 ff.

³⁶ Gerhard May, *Creatio ex nihilo: The Doctrine of "creation out of nothing" in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh, 1994), 179–80 claims that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* came into being in Early Christianity through confrontation with the Greek and gnostic *Weltbildungsmodell*.

The agent of creation is the Demiurge (in Alcinous also the World Soul). The First God is in Middle Platonism (as in Clement and Origen and, of course, in Gnosticism and Hermetism) thought to be so exalted above the cosmos of matter that he can have no direct relation to it at all. The Demiurge, sometimes called the Second God (Numenius, Origen), is for the Middle Platonists simply the creating arm of God, the instrument which God used in his scheme.

The doctrine of how the genesis and existence of the universe can be explained by three basic principles (*ἀρχαί*)—God, Ideas, Matter (*θεός*, *ιδέαι*, *ὕλη*)—is the cornerstone of this renewed Platonism.³⁷ It was, at an early date, deduced from the *Timaeus*.³⁸ By means of this doctrine it was possible to make conceivable the beginning of cosmos, to answer the questions of its *ὅθεν*, *ἐξ ὅθεν*, *πρὸς ὅ*.

28a, c	ὅτι αἰτίου τινός	by a cause	[God]
28a, c	πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα	after a model	[Ideas]
31b, 32c	ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ ἀέρος καὶ ὕδατος καὶ γῆς	of fire, air, water, and earth	[Matter]

³⁷ Heinrich Dörrie, 'Die Erneuerung des Platonismus im ersten Jahrhundert vor Christus [1971],' in *Platonica Minora* (Munich, 1976), 154–165, at 157. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 162 f., calls it 'the heart of the Middle Platonic system'.

³⁸ Dörrie, 'Die Frage nach dem Transzendenten im Mittelplatonismus', 206: 'In dieser Drei-Prinzipien-Lehre liegt eine erste Lese Frucht aus dem Timaios vor.' See also Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, vols. i–ii (Notre Dame, Ind., 1986), 249 and Jean Pépin, *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne* (Paris, 1964), 17–58.

There was always a cause or a first principle, though it was given many different names; the ones most employed were the first God, the One, the Good, the Demiurge, or *voûs*. I will elaborate on this topic later in this chapter by analysing the concept of God in Alcinoüs, Atticus, and Numenius.

As to the model according to which everything was made, an interesting development took place during the Middle Platonic period. The 'Platonic ideas' seem to have undergone a thorough transformation: along with the development of a hierarchy of three principles—God—Ideas—Matter³⁹—the ideas gradually lost their independent state. What happened was that the Platonic ideas were placed in the divine *voûs*, as God's thoughts. How this actually took place and the reasons or motives for it have been the source of much debate among scholars during the last decades. This is not the least interesting development from a theological point of view, since this doctrine provides us with a specific point of contact between Platonism and the Christian tradition; it will, however, lead too far to go into that particular discussion in this context.⁴⁰

³⁹ This happened gradually, according to Dörrie, 'Die Frage nach dem Transzendenten im Mittelplatonismus', 207, during the period.

⁴⁰ Cf. first of all the interesting article by Arthur Hilary Armstrong, 'The Background of the Doctrine "That the Intelligibles are not outside the Intellect"', in E. R. Dodds *et al.* (eds.), *Les Sources de Plotin: dix exposées et discussions* (Genève, 1957), 393–413; cf. also Roger Miller Jones, 'The Ideas as the Thoughts of God', *Classical Philology*, 21 (1921), 317–26; R. E. Witt, *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism* (Cambridge, 1937), 75; Harold Cherniss, '[Rev.] R. E. Witt: Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism (1937)', in *Selected Papers* (Leiden, 1937), 351–6, at 352 f.; Audrey N. M. Rich, 'The Platonic Ideas as the Thoughts of God', *Mnemosyne*, 7 (1954), 123–33, and Willy Theiler, *Die Vorbereitung des Neuplatonismus* (Berlin, 1964), 40–6.

THEOCENTRICITY AND THE PLATONIC
BACKGROUND

The doctrine of the three principles may well be looked upon as an attempt to systematize what first of all distinguishes the Middle Platonists, their preoccupation with the divine. The First Principle is the focal point of the doctrine, and everything that was written on other topics—on matter, the ideas, Demiurgic activity—was meaningful primarily in its relationship to the divine.⁴¹

Heinrich Dörrie has characterized the theocentricity of Middle Platonism by pointing at two different attitudes to the divine that we find among the philosophers of this period.⁴² In the first, which he terms *Logos-Religion*, with Plutarch as the typical representative, the stress is laid on the disclosure of the divine in the cosmos, as seen in the presence of the Logos and the goodness of the Demiurge. In the second, which Dörrie calls *Nous-Theologie*, stress is laid on the distance between God and the cosmos, and the fact that knowledge of the highest God can only be reached through theological reflection or mysticism. Representatives of this attitude are Alcinous and Plotinus.

This is also the attitude which has had the strongest influence on and is most compatible with Christian Middle Platonism. In the last section of the present chapter, I shall therefore analyse Alcinous, as well as Numenius and Atticus

⁴¹ See Dörrie, 'Die Frage nach dem Transzendenten im Mittelplatonismus', 200.

⁴² Dörrie, 'Logos-Religion? oder Nous-Theologie?.'

(whom Dörrie does not mention in this context), regarding their attitudes to the divine.

One of the most important aspects of Middle Platonist theology and its attitude to the divine was the concept of ineffability. These authors regarded the first and highest principle as unutterable, unspeakable (*ἄρρητος*). This inclination towards a negative theology was, as we shall see, particularly evident in Alcinous (who actually uses the term *ἄρρητος*, as did Philo, Clement, and Origen); and there is no doubt that both Numenius and Atticus—in their different ways—are closer to the *Nous-Theologie* of Alcinous and Plotinus than the *Logos-Religion* of Plutarch.

The fact that Alcinous, along with many other Middle Platonists, describes God as being ineffable or unsayable (*ἄρρητος*) while at the same time he is given attributes of many kinds, has caused problems for commentators. A common way of ‘solving’ this problem has been to assert that there is a lesser degree of consistency or coherence in Middle Platonism than in the philosophical systems of Plotinus and other Neoplatonists.⁴³ In the next section I shall discuss this at some length.

The theological concern and quest for God or the divine as such was not foreign to Plato. He was very much occupied with the subject of the divine, but, as David Runia puts it, the difference between Plato and the Middle Platonists lies in the fact that Plato retained a separation between abstract

⁴³ Cf. Philip Merlan, ‘Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus’, in Arthur Hilary Armstrong (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967), 114–32, at 103, and John Whittaker, ‘*Ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας*’, *Vigiliae Christianae*, 23 (1969), 91–104.

philosophical principles (the Ideas, the Good, the One) and theological entities (the Demiurge, the cosmic soul, the gods of myth), while the Middle Platonists disregard this separation: 'Abstract principles and theological conceptions are brought into relation with each other and fused into *θεολογία*, the highest form of knowledge.'⁴⁴

Plato himself used the expression of ineffability once (*ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς*),⁴⁵ not directly to describe the nature of God, but that of reality (*οὐσία*).⁴⁶ In the *Seventh Letter* (338–42) he denies the possibility of 'bringing the nature of reality to light for all to see', by any spoken or written account:

No treatise by me concerning it exists or will ever exist. It is not something that can be put into words (*ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς*) like other branches of learning; only after long partnership in a common life devoted to this very thing does truth flash upon the soul, like a flame kindled by a leaping spark, and once it is born there it nourishes itself thereafter.⁴⁷

In the speculation on the first principle taking place in Middle Platonic–Neopythagorean circles, in addition to the expression just mentioned, there were a few more passages in the Platonic corpus that exerted an especially great influence on the minds of the philosophers. Two are of paramount importance: the first is the famous expression *ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας* ('beyond being') of *Rep.* 509b; the

⁴⁴ Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 492.

⁴⁵ *Seventh Letter* 341c5.

⁴⁶ Alcinous is probably referring to this place in his discussion of the first God. *Did.* 10.164.8, 31; 165.5.

⁴⁷ Trans. LCL.

other is the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*. These texts are integral components in ‘the Platonic mosaic which were the inspiration and justification of the Middle Platonic negative theology’.⁴⁸

Let us take a closer look at these texts. The context of *Rep.* Book 6 is a discussion between Socrates and Glaucon on the nature of the Form of the Good. Socrates declines to answer questions on its essential nature because a satisfactory answer is beyond the scope of their inquiry. In the analogy of the Sun he says what there is to say: in the visible world the Sun—begotten in the likeness of the Good—is the cause both of sight and the visibility of objects, without itself being identical to them. In the intelligible world it is the Form of the Good which gives to the objects of knowledge truth and reality and to the mind the power of knowing, without itself being identical with truth and reality. The Good itself is in a different place: ‘though the good itself is not reality but even transcends reality in dignity and surpassing power’.⁴⁹

In the *Parmenides*, a dialogue concerning the nature of the One, the One is throughout the First Hypothesis (137c–142a) described in negative terms: It is unlimited (ἀπειρον), without beginning or end (μήτε ἀρχὴν μήτε τελευτὴν ἔχον), it is without form (ἄνευ σχήματος) and parts (οὐδὲ μέρος ἔχον), it is neither at rest nor in motion (οὔτε ἑστῆκεν οὔτε κινεῖται), it has no place (οὐδαμοῦ ἂν εἴη), no participation

⁴⁸ John Whittaker, ‘Ἄρρητος καὶ ἀκατονόμαστος’, in H.-D. Blume and F. Mann (eds.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie* (Münster, 1983), 303–6, at 306.

⁴⁹ οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος (*Rep.* 509b).

in time (μηδενὸς μετέχει χρόνου), and no share in being at all (οὐδαμῶς ἄρα ἔστι τὸ εἶν).

In the dialogue, at this stage conducted between Parmenides and Aristotle (later one of the Thirty Tyrants), the conclusion of the First Hypothesis runs in the following manner:

[P]: Then if the One has no participation in time whatsoever, it neither has become nor became nor was in the past, it has neither become nor is it becoming nor is it in the present, and it will neither become nor be made to become nor will it be in the future. Evidently not.

Then it has no being even as to be one, for if it were one, it would be and would partake of being; but apparently one neither is nor is one, if this argument is to be trusted.

That seems to be true.

But can that which does not exist have anything pertaining or belonging to it?

Of course not.

And it is neither named nor described nor thought of nor known, nor does any existing thing perceive it (οὐδ' ὀνομάζεται ἄρα οὐδὲ λέγεται οὐδὲ δοξάζεται οὐδὲ γινώσκεται, οὐδέ τι τῶν ὄντων αὐτοῦ αἰσθάνεται).

Apparently not. (Parm. 141e–142a)⁵⁰

Echoes of the statement of *Rep.* 509b—applied on the first principle—are abundant in the Platonic–Neopythagorean speculation of our period.⁵¹ At the same time a Neopythagorean–Platonic, i.e. a theologico-metaphysical interpretation of the *Parmenides* is also rather extensive—with

⁵⁰ Trans. LCL.

⁵¹ Ample evidence in Whittaker, 'Ἐπέκεια νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας'.

Clement and Alcinous as two of the most prominent examples.⁵²

It is also worth noticing that the two conceptions of the first principle, the Good of the *Republic* and the One of the *Parmenides*, are frequently found in combination, and sometimes even identified: the first principle is conceived as transcending not only being (*ousia*) but also mind (*nous*). These two conceptions are linked in the minds of writers of the Middle Platonic period with the passage of *Rep.* 509b quoted above.⁵³

The conclusion of the First Hypothesis in *Parmenides* is a paradox, and a logical consequence of the premises: if the One is one, it cannot participate in anything, not even existence. How can it be explained? Is it meaningful or just absurd? Can a paradox be meaningful?

Apparently, the Middle and Neoplatonists, in their interpretation of the dialogue, thought the paradox meaningful in the sense that the first and highest principle transcends all reasoning. If one tries to grasp the One rationally, one will end up in paradoxes. That does not, however, eliminate the notion of the One; it just shows that reason has its limits.

For their consideration of the nature and identity of the first principle, these texts played an important role among the philosophers and theologians of Clement's time. The vocabulary and thoughts of *Republic* Book 6, and the First Hypothesis of *Parmenides* have undoubtedly inspired a number of formulations in pagan and Christian Middle

⁵² Whittakes, 'Ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας', 96–8.

⁵³ Ibid. 101.

Platonic as well as in Gnostic and Hermetic literature. For contemporary reference to Clement we shall now look closer at three representatives of pagan Middle Platonism: Alcinous, Numenius, and Atticus.

ALCINOUS, NUMENIUS, AND ATTICUS AS SOURCES FOR THE MIDDLE PLATONIC DOCTRINE OF THE DIVINE

As stated above, a corner-stone of Middle Platonist philosophy and theology is the doctrine of three first principles, God, Ideas, and Matter. It is the doctrine of the genesis of the cosmos, of its 'from what, by what, and for what', on the basis of an interpretation of *Timaeus*.

There is little doubt that both Alcinous and Atticus took this three-principle doctrine for granted even though there are differences in their ways of expressing it. As for Numenius, he seems—on the basis of the extant material—to reckon with only two first principles: God and Matter. The Ideas as a first principle do not seem to play any role in the structure of his philosophy.

The extant material of Atticus shows us a philosopher of the Middle Platonist school in all areas except one: his preoccupation with and also his answer to the question of the genesis of the cosmos or world, of whether it took place in time or not, and whether it has a cause or not, makes him stand somewhat apart. He shares his position with Plutarch: the world has a beginning. It was created in time by the

Demiurge (of the *Timaeus*). He also shares his notion of the evil soul as dwelling in (disorderly) matter with Plutarch and with Numenius, although in a more moderate way than the latter.

Numenius is, as we have seen, often defined as a Pythagorean Platonist or a Neopythagorean. This is due first of all to his dualism of God and Matter, Monad and Dyad. According to Numenius there is an ontological dualism between God as the cause of good and matter as the cause of evil.⁵⁴ Matter as undetermined is without quality and form (*silvam igitur informem et carentem qualitate*), independent and uncreated (*ingenita*); this is the true matter (*nuda silva*). As determined it is generated and ornamented (*generatam et exornatam*) by the Demiurge and turned from chaos to order. The world (*mundus*) is a result of a co-operation between matter and God, a mixture of good and evil.

Alcinous, the 'main line' Platonist⁵⁵ and regarded as the most typical representative of Middle Platonism,⁵⁶ sees matter as passive and receiving, without quality and form, but in no way related to evil.

The three Middle Platonists' different views on matter and evil may serve as an example of another important

⁵⁴ des Places (ed.), *Les Fragments de Numénios d'Apamée*, fr. 52, from Numenius' commentary on *Timaeus*, extant in Calcidius *In Timaeum*; trans. in J. C. M. van Winden, *Calcidius on Matter: His Doctrine and Sources* (Leiden, 1959), 103–19.

⁵⁵ John M. Dillon, 'The Knowledge of God in Origen', in Roelof van den Broek *et al.* (eds.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden, 1988), 219–28, at 226.

⁵⁶ Pierluigi Donini, 'La Connaissance de dieu et la hiérarchie divine chez Albinos', in Broek *et al.*, *Knowledge of God*, 131.

aspect of our period: it is not the agreement of doctrine in all areas that makes a philosopher a Middle Platonist. What makes him a Middle Platonist is first of all the way he expresses and advocates his views on ultimate being or God, the first principle.⁵⁷ It is in this area that our three Middle Platonists find their common ground: they all define the first principle primarily in terms of Platonic philosophy: as the Good, the Truth (*Republic*), the One (*Parmenides*), or the Demiurge (*Timaeus*) although the diversity within this framework may be considerable. One might also add that a typical representative of Middle Platonism will have a strong inclination towards apophaticism in his view of God.

Among the writings of our three Platonists it is only Alcinous' *Didascalicus*, a manual of instruction in Platonism, that is handed down in its entirety. Of Atticus and Numenius only fragments—quotations in later writers—are extant.

The *Didascalicus* was, according to Whittaker, probably intended as a manual for teachers of Platonism; it was not a textbook for beginners nor an initiation into the reading of Plato, but rather a systematic and concise exposition of the Platonic doctrines, as Alcinous apprehended them. It also presupposes in the readers a great familiarity with Plato as well as a solid knowledge of the other domains of philosophy.⁵⁸ It consists of thirty-six chapters, comprising the three 'parts' of philosophy, the 'theoretical', 'practical', and

⁵⁷ The term 'first principle' is in *Didascalicus* as well as in much of secondary literature used ambiguously, both as denoting each of the three first principles—God, Ideas, Matter—and as referring exclusively to the first principle *par excellence*, God.

⁵⁸ Whittaker *Alcinoos*, p. xvii.

‘dialectical’, more commonly known as physics, ethics, and logic. The area of physics, where theology (θεολογία) is included, dominates the handbook completely, and one whole chapter (ch. 10) is devoted to the first principle, or God. There is in the handbook, however, a considerable degree of inconsistency, and it has been suggested that the work is a compilation from different sources (see below).⁵⁹ My exposition of Alcinous’ theology is based mainly on the theological chapter proper, chapter 10, so the question of whether the handbook is a compilation or not will not affect my argument.

Our principal source of knowledge of the philosophy of Atticus is what Eusebius quotes in his *Praeparatio evangelica* (books 11 and 15).⁶⁰ These quotations are all taken from a polemical tractate against the Aristotelians. In addition to these fragments, our other important source of information is Proclus’ comments on and rendering of Atticus’ philosophy in his commentary on *Timaeus*.⁶¹

As for Numenius, the fact that there exist no fewer than four editions of the fragments of his works is a testimony of the interest that he has aroused among scholars of modern times.⁶² Our main source of information is again the

⁵⁹ This view has been put forward by Tryggve Göransson, *Albinus, Alcinous, Arius Didymus* (Göteborg, 1995). See also Whittaker, ‘The Value of Indirect Tradition’.

⁶⁰ Trans. in Gifford, *Eusebius*.

⁶¹ des Places, *Atticus: Fragments* contains all the fragments.

⁶² The two most recent editions are Kenneth Guthrie (ed.), *The Neoplatonic Writings of Numenius* (Lawrence, Kan., 1987) (an abridged version of the original 1917 edition); and des Places, *Les Fragments de Numénius d’Apamée*.

Praeparatio evangelica of Eusebius (books 11 and 15), which appears to give a fairly accurate rendering of what Numenius wrote. In addition there is Proclus' commentary on the *Timaeus*, in which there are preserved a few remarks on Numenius as well.

HIERARCHY OR LEVELS OF BEING

Alcinous

The *Didascalicus*, constituting the only complete Middle Platonic presentation of the doctrine of Plato, has accordingly received much scholarly attention, especially during the last few decades. Attention has particularly centred on the nature of God and the subdivision of the divine, since this is reckoned as the most interesting and original part of the work,⁶³ including questions of the transcendence of God, the hierarchical structure of the divine, and how man is to have knowledge of God. It is beyond the scope of the present investigation to go into all areas discussed, but I shall focus on some of the most important issues.

Concerning the nature of the divine, the following questions are crucial:

1. Does Alcinous teach one or several divine beings?
2. What is the relationship in Alcinous between the active and the passive aspect of God—are the first God and the Demiurge to be identified or not?

⁶³ Dillon, *Alcinous*, 100.

3. How can man, according to Alcinous, have knowledge of God?
4. Is there in his doctrine even a God above the first God?

Alcinous starts out in chapter 10 by declaring that the first principle is 'more or less beyond description' (μικροῦ δεῖν καὶ ἄρρητον) (10.164.8).⁶⁴ Still we might arrive at some knowledge of it, not by sense-perception, but by intellection (νόησις).

He goes on to the presentation of the divine, and here we are introduced to a whole battery of entities:

Since intellect is superior to soul, and superior to potential intellect (νοῦ δὲ τοῦ ἐν δυνάμει) there is actualised intellect (ὁ κατ' ἐνέργειαν), which cognizes everything simultaneously and eternally, and finer than this again is the cause of this (ὁ αἴτιος τούτου) and whatever it is that has an existence still prior to these, this it is that would be the primal God (ὁ πρῶτος θεός), being the cause of the eternal activity of the intellect of the whole heaven (τῷ κῷ τοῦ σύμπαντος οὐρανοῦ).⁶⁵ He is Father through being the cause of all things and bestowing order on the heavenly Intellect (τὸν οὐράνιον νοῦν) and the soul of the world (τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ κόσμου) in accordance with himself and his own thoughts. By his own will he has filled all things with himself, rousing up the soul of the world and turning it towards himself, as

⁶⁴ Trans. from *Didascalicus* here and in the following are taken from Dillon, *Alcinous*. Greek text from Whittaker, *Alcinoos*.

⁶⁵ Ἐπεὶ δὲ ψυχῆς νοῦς ἀμείνων, νοῦ δὲ τοῦ ἐν δυνάμει ὁ κατ' ἐνέργειαν πάντα νοῶν καὶ ἅμα καὶ αἰεὶ, τούτου δὲ καλλίων ὁ αἴτιος τούτου καὶ ὅπερ ἂν ἔτι ἀνωτέρω τούτων ὑφέστηκεν, οὗτος ἂν εἴη ὁ πρῶτος θεός αἴτιος ὑπάρχων τοῦ αἰεὶ ἐνεργεῖν τῷ κῷ τοῦ σύμπαντος οὐρανοῦ (*Did.* 10.164.18–23).

being the cause of its intellect. It is this latter that, set in order by the Father, itself imposes order on all of nature in this world.⁶⁶

Alcinous thus argues for a highest being on the basis of an ascending sequence of dignity between soul and intellect (or ‘mind’) and even within intellect: There is—in the order of their appearance in the text—first, a potential *nous* (ὁ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν) and an actualized or activated *nous* (νοῦ· · · τοῦ ἐν δυνάμει), the latter being superior to the former. Second, there is the *cause* (ὁ αἷτιος) of the eternal activity of the *nous* of the whole heaven, which is the first God; there is, thirdly, the intellect of the whole heaven (τῷ νῷ τοῦ σύμπαντος οὐρανοῦ), the heavenly intellect (τὸν οὐράνιον νοῦν), and lastly, the world soul (τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ κόσμου).

The order ‘soul–potential *nous*–actualized *nous*–first God’ I take not as an ontological hierarchy but as a hierarchy of value, which does not imply that the two intellects are distinct ontologically.

The potential intellect⁶⁷ is potential until it becomes activated by God, who is said to be ‘the cause of the eternal activity of the intellect of the whole heaven’; a few lines below, God, who is ‘the primary intellect’ (ὁ πρῶτος νοῦς), ‘moves the intellect of the whole heaven’. God, then, brings the

⁶⁶ πατὴρ δέ ἐστι τῷ αἷτιος εἶναι πάντων καὶ κοσμεῖν τὸν οὐράνιον νοῦν καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ κόσμου πρὸς ἑαυτὸν καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἑαυτοῦ νοήσεις. κατὰ γὰρ τὴν αὐτοῦ βούλησιν ἐμπέπληκε πάντα ἑαυτοῦ, τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ κόσμου ἐπεγείρας καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐπιστρέψας, τοῦνοῦ αὐτῆς αἷτιος ὑπάρχων. ὃς κοσμηθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διακοσμεῖ σύμπασαν φύσιν ἐν τῷδε τῷ κόσμῳ (Did. 10.164.40–165.4).

⁶⁷ Dillon, *Alcinous*, 102, implausibly suggests that the potential intellect is the intellect of the human being.

potential intellect to actuality, or, expressed in another way, is the cause of its eternal activity. Hence, there can be no doubt that these intellects are one and the same. Furthermore, it is clear that it is this same *νοῦς* that is subsequently described as ‘the intellect of the whole heaven’, or, in the next paragraph, ‘the heavenly intellect’ (τὸν οὐράνιον νοῦν).

This actualized intellect/intellect of the whole heaven/heavenly intellect must be the intellect which the Father caused in the world soul: ‘By his own will he has filled all things with himself, rousing up the soul of the world and turning it towards himself, as being the cause of its intellect’ (10.164.42–165.2). Though there have been various interpretations earlier, it seems to be the view of most scholars today that these cosmic entities are to be understood as one and the same, and that the heavenly *nous* is a function of the world soul.⁶⁸ The world soul, once its *nous* has been actualized, is the one who ‘imposes order on all of nature in this world’.

The first God (ὁ πρῶτος θεός), himself a *nous*, is the cause of the *nous* of the world soul, and he is the cause (αἷτιος) of all things: in ch. 9 he is in one breath called both ‘God the father and cause of all things’: ὁ πατὴρ καὶ αἷτιος πάντων θεός.

So, to the question of the number of divine beings in Alcinous’ theology, as well as to the relationship between the

⁶⁸ J. H. Loenen, ‘Albinus’ Metaphysics. An Attempt at Rehabilitation’, *Mnemosyne*, 9 (1956), 296–319, at 305–7; Donini, ‘La Connaissance de dieu’, 119; Jaap Mansfeld, ‘Three Notes on Albinus,’ *Studies in Later Greek Philosophy and Gnosticism* (London, 1989), 64–5, and Dillon, *Alcinous*, 106.

active and passive aspect in his concept of the divine, it seems clear that—as far as ch. 10 of *Didascalicus* is concerned—there is mention of two distinct divine beings: the transcendent first God/first *nous* who only indirectly is the cause of the existence of the material world and the immanent world soul with its *nous*-function, the efficient cause. The first God entrusted the actual ordering of the cosmos to the world soul.

The distinction between a transcendent and an immanent deity is also expressed in a paragraph in ch. 28, employing different terms: ‘By which we mean, obviously, the god in the heavens (*θεῶ τῷ ἐπουρανίῳ*), not, of course, the god above the heavens’ (*τῷ ὑπερουρανίῳ*). The *θεὸς ἐπουράνιος* may well be identical with the immanent world soul, or more precisely, the *νοῦς* of the world soul.

The relationship between the two beings, the first God and the world soul, is one of complete dependency of the world soul upon the first God, both for its ordering and awakening and for its having a *νοῦς*; the causality of the first God exercises itself upon the world soul.

As we have seen, the transcendent God and Unmoved Mover of chapter 10 does not have any direct relationship with the material world. This account and the account of the creation story of the following chapters (12–23) have puzzled many interpreters of *Didascalicus*, as they seem to be mutually inconsistent. The section of *Didascalicus* treating the area of ‘physics’, chapters 12–23, is largely a paraphrase of the *Timaeus*. In this section the world is depicted as an entity that was created (*δημιουργεῖν*) by God at a certain point in time. How can the description in ch. 10 of the first

God as an ineffable, Unmoved Mover without any attributes be consistent with the active creator God of chs 12–23? The answer may be, as suggested above, that they derive from different sources, and that the compiler did not care to harmonize them.⁶⁹

In ch. 14, moreover, in a paragraph which stands apart from the rest of the text, Alcinoüs abruptly declares:

When he [Plato] says that the world is ‘generated’ (γενητόν) (*Tim.* 28b), one must not understand him to assert that there ever was a time when the world did not exist; but rather that the world is perpetually in a state of becoming (ἀεὶ ἐν γενέσει ἐστί) and reveals a more primordial cause of its own existence. Also, God does not create the soul of the world, since it exists eternally (ἀεὶ οὖσαν), but he brings it to order (κατακοσμεῖ), and to this extent he might be said to create it, by awakening and turning towards himself both its intellect and itself, as out of some deep coma or sleep, so that by looking towards the objects of intellection inherent in him it may receive the forms and shapes, through striving to attain to his thoughts. (14.169.32–41)

In this paragraph the idea of a temporal creation of the world is completely dismissed; the description of God and the world soul much resembles that of ch. 10. In both places the first God is said to be the final, not the efficient cause of the world, and the world soul is pre-existent and brought to order by God, ‘and to this extent he might be said to create it’.

⁶⁹ There have been several attempts at harmonizing the inconsistencies, see especially Donini, ‘La Connaissance de dieu’, who denies any causal relation between the first God and the world. The world was created by the Demiurge, which he identifies with the world soul, the second God.

It may well be that the author-compiler inserted these lines into a section which otherwise is a paraphrase of the *Timaeus*, speaking of a temporal creation of the world. They probably also, directly or indirectly, refer to a controversy that existed in antiquity as to whether the account in the *Timaeus* of the creation of the cosmos was to be taken literally or not: what did Plato mean when he wrote that the world was generated (γένεσθαι)? By the first half of the second century AD there were several possible senses of the verb in use. In Calvenus Taurus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* four possible meanings of γενετός are listed,⁷⁰ and Alcinous in ch. 14 adheres to and combines two of these meanings: first, there was never a time when the world did not exist, i.e. the world does not have a beginning in time; second, the world has a cause for its existence. Being a paraphrase of the *Timaeus* the creation account in *Didascalicus* may well have been meant to be interpreted in a non-literal, mythological sense. This was in fact the most common way of interpreting the *Timaeus* in antiquity.⁷¹

Thinking in terms of the temporality of the Jewish-Christian creation of Genesis, however, may not help us understand the account of the *Didascalicus*, ch. 10 and the paragraph of ch. 14. Rather, the cosmos is here to be thought of as ever emanating from the eternal and immovable being of God who by some kind of constant 'overflowing' causes

⁷⁰ Preserved by John Philoponus, see Dillon, *Alcinous*, 124.

⁷¹ Xenocrates maintained that the account of creation in the *Timaeus* is not to be understood literally but rather as a pedagogical aid to the comprehension of the structure of the universe, see John Whittaker, 'Timaeus 27 d 5 ff.', *Phoenix*, 23 (1969), 181–5, at 182. Alcinous (in ch. 10), in seeing the world as an eternal being, follows the view of the Old Academy.

the world to be 'perpetually in a state of becoming' (*ἀεὶ ἐν γενέσει ἔστί*). God is the primary and underlying cause of its existence and it is in this context that he may also be termed its Demiurge. According to 14.169.32–41, quoted above, because they are pre-existent, neither the world nor the world soul are created. The world soul is set in order by the Father and in its turn imposes order on the world. In its condition of ever-becoming the world reveals its dependence upon a cause: it cannot exist by itself. If God is taken away, the world will disappear.⁷²

The role of the world soul in the everlasting process of generation is, then, of rather minor importance. Its dependency upon the first God is complete and essentially the same as that of the world itself. If interpreted in a non-literal sense, meaning that there never was a time when the world did not exist, but that it is always in a state of becoming, the creation story of chs. 12–23 may perhaps not be in conflict with the view of the world and the Demiurge as described in 10.164.40–165.4 and in 14.169.32–41 above.⁷³

⁷² C. J. de Vogel, 'On the Neoplatonic Character of Platonism, and the Platonic Character of Neoplatonism', in *Philosophia*, vol. i: *Studies in Greek Philosophy* (Assen, 1970), 355–77, at 364, maintains that Alcinoüs, in his identification of the Demiurge and God, must be an exception in contemporary theology where 'the Demiurge or Builder of the sensible world was placed inferior to the intelligible World of Ideas', and that 'even the Alexandrian Jew Philo did not accept the theory that the supreme God created sensible things directly'.

⁷³ As Loenen, 'Albinus' Metaphysics', 302, puts it: 'Albinus explains Plato's transcendent God as a *νοῦς ἀκίνητος* and therefore as a final cause exclusively, but in his paraphrase of the *Timaeus* he follows Plato's mythic mode of exposition.' Loenen, who argued against Witt and his rejection of the compatibility of *ἀεὶ ἐν γενέσει ἔστί* with the *πρὸ τῆς οὐρανοῦ γενέσεως* of 12.167.17, is opposed by Whittaker, 'Timaeus 27 d 5 ff.', 183: 'the two

In conclusion, there is little doubt that there exist in the *Didascalicus* two conflicting views on the nature of the first God, most probably due to a compilation from different sources. According to the theology of the tenth chapter, however, the divine is composed of an unutterable first God and cause of all things; this first God brought the world to order through an agent, the world soul, who in all things is dependent upon the first God.

Numenius

Turning to Numenius and the question of a hierarchy of the divine, we are presented with a theological system that has many parallels to the *Didascalicus*, but also with some notable differences. Many of the quotations from Numenius in Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica* are taken from the *On the Good* (*Περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ*), which was his main work⁷⁴ and consisted of at least six books; the following exposition of Numenius will be mainly based on this homogenous group of fragments. It is, however, important to keep in mind that unlike Alcinoüs, Numenius is represented by fragments only, even though some are of a considerable length.

statements conflict, and there seems no choice but to admit this fact.' See also Donini, 'La Connaissance de dieu', who denies any causal relation at all between the first God and the world.

⁷⁴ Thus Hans Joachim Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik* (Amsterdam, 1967), 64.

Numenius starts out by asking about the nature of ‘being’ (τὸ ὄν),⁷⁵ whether being could be any of the four elements or matter. He denies this, for the elements are created and transitory and need something to hold them together, some principle of coherence. This principle can be nothing but the incorporeal (τὸ ἀσώματον): ‘For of all the natures this alone is stable, and compact, and not at all corporeal. At all events it is neither created, nor increased, nor subject to any other kind of motion’ (fr. 4a),⁷⁶ and it can be perceived by the mind only (εἶναι τὸ νοητόν) (fr. 7).

In the second book he asks about the name of the incorporeal, and affirms that the name is ‘essence’ and ‘being’ (οὐσίαν καὶ ὄν). He goes on: ‘And the cause of the name “being” is that it has not been generated nor will be destroyed, nor is it subject to any kind of motion at all, nor any change for better or for worse; but it is simple and unchangeable’ (ἀπλοῦν καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον) (fr. 6).⁷⁷

So far the incorporeal, the unchangeable, which is also ‘essence’, ‘being’, and ‘intelligible’ (νοητόν), is ‘the highest

⁷⁵ In Kenneth Guthrie (ed.), *The Neoplatonic Writings of Numenius*, the fragments are grouped according to the books (of *On the Good*) to which they belong (the order is almost the same as that of Eusebius which des Places follows in his edition). Cf. A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. iv: *Le Dieu inconnu et la Gnose* (Paris, 1954), 125 and H. D. Saffrey, ‘Les Extraits du Περὶ τὰ γαθού de Numénios dans le livre XI de la Préparation évangélique d’Eusèbe de Césarée’, *Studia Patristica*, 13 (1975), 46–51.

⁷⁶ Unless otherwise stated, the translation is quoted from Gifford, *Eusebius*. Greek text in des Places, *Les Fragments de Numénios d’Apamée*. I refer to the fragments using des Places’ numbers.

⁷⁷ Ἡ δὲ αἰτία τοῦ “ὄντος” ὀνόματός ἐστι τὸ μὴ γεγονέναι μηδὲ φθαρῆσθαι μηδ’ ἄλλην μήτε κίνησιν μηδεμίαν ἐνδέχεσθαι μήτε μεταβολὴν κρείττω ἢ φαύλην, εἶναι δὲ ἀπλοῦν καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον.

rank' in Numenius' system. But in Book 5 he has developed his thoughts further:

Now if essence and the idea is discerned by the mind, and if it was agreed that the mind (*νοῦς*) is earlier than this and the cause of it, then mind itself is alone found to be the good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*). For if God the Creator is the beginning of generation, the good is the beginning of essence. And God the Creator is related to the good, of which He is an imitator, as generation is to essence, of which it is a likeness and an imitation. For if the Creator who is the author of generation (*δημιουργὸς ὁ τῆς γενέσεως*) is good (*ἀγαθός*), the Creator also of essence (*ὁ τῆς οὐσίας δημιουργός*) will doubtless be absolute good (*αὐτοάγαθον*), innate in essence. (fr. 16)⁷⁸

We are here presented with a higher entity, something even above the level of essence, being its cause and creator, and also more basic than 'the incorporeal' of Book 2, namely the mind (or 'intellect') (*ὁ νοῦς*). It is the good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*), even 'the good-in-itself' (*αὐτοάγαθον*), as compared to the one who forms material substance and who is only 'good' (*ἀγαθός*). Numenius thus distinguishes between the creator of generation (*ὁ δημιουργὸς ὁ τῆς γενέσεως*) who is good (*ἀγαθός*) and the creator of essence (*ὁ τῆς οὐσίας δημιουργός*) who is the Good (*τὸ ἀγαθόν*), or even Absolute Good (*αὐτοάγαθον*).

⁷⁸ *Εἰ δ' ἔστι μὲν νοητὸν ἢ οὐσία καὶ ἡ ἰδέα, ταύτης δ' ὡμολογήθη πρεσβύτερον καὶ αἴτιον εἶναι ὁ νοῦς, αὐτὸς οὗτος μόνος εὔρηται ὦν τὸ ἀγαθόν. Καὶ γὰρ εἰ ὁ μὲν δημιουργὸς θεὸς ἐστι γενέσεως, ἀρκεῖ τὸ ἀγαθὸν οὐσίας εἶναι ἀρχή. Ἀνάλογον δὲ τούτῳ μὲν ὁ δημιουργὸς θεός, ὦν αὐτοῦ μιμητής, τῇ δὲ οὐσίᾳ ἢ γένεσις, (ἢ) εἰκὼν αὐτῆς ἐστι καὶ μίμημα. Εἴπερ δὲ ὁ δημιουργὸς ὁ τῆς γενέσεως ἐστὶν ἀγαθός, ἢ που ἔσται καὶ ὁ τῆς οὐσίας δημιουργὸς αὐτοάγαθον, σύμφυτον τῇ οὐσίᾳ.*

This use of adjectives consciously parallels Plato's description of, on the one hand, the Demiurge of *Timaeus* (29e) who is said to be good (ἀγαθός) and on the other, the first principle of *Republic* (509b) who is the Good (τὸ ἀγαθόν). The secondary God, the Demiurge, is only good by participation and imitation of the 'Good-in-itself', and (according to fr. 12) the first God is also the father of the Demiurge.

The fact that the term 'Demiurge' belongs to both of them—even the Good itself is called a Demiurge—must imply that the term in itself should not be reduced and associated with evil as has often been the case.⁷⁹ The relationship between, on the one hand, the first God and, on the other, the Demiurge, between generation and essence, is based on 'imitation';⁸⁰ the Demiurge is the imitator (μιμητής) of the Good, the world a copy (μίμημα) of the essence (οὐσία) of the second God. There is no direct relation between the first God and the cosmos; this is in all ways mediated through the second God.⁸¹

The distinction between the 'Good-in-itself' and the one who is only 'good', between a first and a second God, is a distinctive and central feature of Numenius' theology or metaphysics; it is also a feature which he shares with other Neopythagoreans and—with some modification—with contemporary Christian theology.⁸²

⁷⁹ Cf. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 69.

⁸⁰ Cf. Plutarch, *De animae procreatione in Timaeo* 1023c.

⁸¹ Cf. Matthias Baltes, 'Numenios von Apamea und der platonische Timaios', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 29 (1975), 241–70, at 260.

⁸² For the Neopythagoreans, see Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 367. As for Alcinous, John Dillon seems to have changed his mind between Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 367, where he distinguishes between the first God and the Demiurge, and Dillon, *Alcinous*, 106, where he identifies them.

In Plato's *Timaeus* the Father and Demiurge are one and the same. Though Numenius may apply the name 'Demiurge' to both the first and the second God, there is no doubt that he also consciously separates them. The distinction is made in a number of passages in his *On the Good*, e.g.: 'Now the modes of life of the First God and of the Second are these: evidently the First God will be at rest (ὁ μὲν πρῶτος θεὸς ἔσται ἐστῶς), while the Second on the contrary is in motion (ὁ δὲ δεύτερος ἔμπαλιν ἐστι κινούμενος). So then the First is engaged with intelligibles, and the Second with both intelligibles and sensibles' (fr. 15).⁸³

The movement of the second god, the Demiurge, is related to the ordering of the sensible world, for it is out of the question that the first God could create or have anything to do with a material world: 'For it is not at all becoming that the First God should be the Creator; also the First God must be regarded as the father of the God who is creator of the World . . . the First God is free from all kinds of work and reigns as king, but the Creative God governs, and travels through the heaven' (fr. 12).⁸⁴

The Demiurge of the material world is doing his creative task in close dependence on the first God; he employs the

⁸³ Εἰσι δ' οὗτοι βίοι ὁ μὲν πρῶτον, ὁ δὲ δευτέρου θεοῦ. Δηλονότι ὁ μὲν πρῶτος θεὸς ἔσται ἐστῶς, ὁ δὲ δεύτερος ἔμπαλιν ἐστι κινούμενος· ὁ μὲν οὖν πρῶτος περὶ τὰ νοητά, ὁ δὲ δεύτερος περὶ τὰ νοητὰ καὶ αἰσθητά.

⁸⁴ Καὶ γὰρ οὔτε δημιουργεῖν ἐστι χρεὼν τὸν πρῶτον καὶ δημιουργοῦντος δὲ θεοῦ χρὴ εἶναι νομίζεσθαι πατέρα τὸν πρῶτον θεόν . . . τὸν μὲν πρῶτον θεὸν ἀργὸν εἶναι ἔργων συμπάντων καὶ βασιλέα, τὸν δημιουργικὸν δὲ θεὸν ἡγεμονεῖν δι' οὐρανοῦ ἰόντα.

ideas⁸⁵ as a paradigm while keeping his mind fixed upon the first God. He is 'himself seated above matter', and 'steers by the ideas' and 'looks to the High God who attracts His eyes, and takes His judgment from that contemplation, and his energy from that impulse' (fr. 18).

The act of ordering of matter which the Demiurge accomplishes in dependence on the first God, results, however, in a division of the Demiurge: by his contact with matter which is evil and *duitas* ('duality', from Calcidius' commentary on *Timaeus*, fr. 52) he is in some way touched by it and is split in two, into a second and a third God.⁸⁶ Numenius declares, however, that the second and third are one: 'The First God, being in himself, is simple (ὁ μὲν πρῶτος ἐν ἑαυτοῦ ὧν ἐστιν ἀπλοῦς), because, being united throughout with himself, he can never be divided. God however the Second and Third is one: but by being associated with matter which is duality (δυσάδι οὔση), he makes it one, but is himself divided by it' (fr. 11).⁸⁷

The question of whether Numenius teaches a hierarchy of two or three gods has caused some disagreement among scholars. I will only touch upon it briefly. As reported by Eusebius, Numenius, as we have seen above, repeatedly

⁸⁵ In *Did.* these are the thoughts of God. This is also the view of Atticus (fr. 9). Numenius never directly states this, but in one place he identifies the first God and the idea: 'the first Mind would be an idea, as being absolute good' (fr. 20).

⁸⁶ Cf. Einar Thomassen and L. Painchaud, *Le Traité Tripartite* (Quebec, 1989), 340.

⁸⁷ Ὁ θεὸς ὁ μὲν πρῶτος ἐν ἑαυτοῦ ὧν ἐστιν ἀπλοῦς, διὰ τὸ ἑαυτῷ συγγιγνώμενος διόλου μὴ ποτε εἶναι διαίρετος. ὁ θεὸς μέντοι ὁ δεύτερος καὶ τρίτος ἐστὶν εἰς· συμφερόμενος δὲ τῇ ὕλῃ δυσάδι οὔση ἐνοὶ μὲν αὐτήν, σχίζεται δὲ ὑπ' αὐτῆς (fr. 11).

states that there are two Gods, termed the first and second, the Father and the Demiurge.

There are, however, two extant fragments in the Neoplatonist Proclus (fr. 21 and 22) which seem to indicate a doctrine of three gods. At first sight the fragments appear to be mutually inconsistent. In fragment 21 Proclus states: 'Numenius, who teaches three Gods, calls the First Father; the Second Creator, and the Third Creature; for, according to his opinion, the world is the Third God. According to him, therefore, the Creator is double, (consisting) out of the First and Second God; but the Third is created' (fr. 21).⁸⁸

In fragment 22, however, the names of the three Gods are different: 'Numenius relates the First (God) to 'the Absolute Living Creature' (ὁ ἐστι ζῶον) (*Tim.* 31a); and says, that it thinks by availing itself of the Second (God). The Second God he relates to the Mind, and asserts that it becomes creative by availing itself of the third; and the Third he relates to discursive thought.'⁸⁹

In this last fragment the first God utilizes or avails himself of the second God for its thinking, and the second utilizes the third for its creation. The third God in this fragment, however, is not a creature, but an intellect 'who is thought'

⁸⁸ Νουμίνιος μὲν γὰρ τρεῖς ἀνυμνήσας θεοὺς πατέρα μὲν καλεῖ τὸν πρῶτον, ποιητὴν δὲ τὸν δεύτερον, ποιήμα δὲ τὸν τρίτον (fr. 21).

⁸⁹ Νουμίνιος δὲ τὸν μὲν πρῶτον κατὰ "ὁ ἐστι ζῶον" τάττει καὶ φησιν ἐν προσχρήσει τοῦ δευτέρου νοεῖν, τὸν δὲ δεύτερον κατὰ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τοῦτον αὖ ἐν προσχρήσει τοῦ τρίτου δημιουργεῖν, τὸν δὲ τρίτον κατὰ τὸν διανοούμενον (fr. 22). My translation, based on Thomassen and Painchaud, *Le Traité Tripartite*, 395, who commenting on προσχρήσθαι write that the word is used 'pour décrire comment une hypostase supérieure agit par l'intermédiaire d'une hypostase inférieure qu'elle utilise comme un instrument'.

(τὸν δὲ τρίτον κατὰ τὸν διανοούμενον).⁹⁰ How is it possible to combine this with the third God of fr. 21 who is a *ποίημα* or *κόσμος*? One possible solution may be that the third God as creature does not mean the actual physical world, but the world as it exists in the thought of the Demiurge.⁹¹

We know (fr. 24) that Numenius was of the opinion that Socrates taught three gods, but because his hearers did not understand, they later spread his doctrine in different ways. Only Plato, himself a Pythagorean, understood and realized that the originator of this doctrine was Pythagoras himself.⁹² Numenius may have this doctrine of three Gods from Plato's *Second Letter*, 312e.⁹³ We know that Plotinus interpreted the text in the same way.⁹⁴ The question is, however, whether Numenius really takes over this doctrine for himself, or just reports it as part of Socrates' teaching.

The fact that Numenius states that 'the Second and Third is one' (in fr. 11 above) may indicate that he opposes the view of a hierarchy of three Gods which he thought was a

⁹⁰ H. A. S. Tarrant, 'Numenius fr. 13 and Plato's *Timaeus*', *Antichthon*, 13 (1979), 19–29, at 26–7.

⁹¹ Suggested by Festugière, *Le Dieu inconnu et la Gnose*, 124. This is also the opinion of Rudolph Beutler, 'Numenios', *Realenzyklopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Suppl. 7 (1940), 663–78.

⁹² Fragments 24–8.

⁹³ In 312e Plato seems to speak of three Gods: 'The matter stands thus: Related to the King of All are all things, and for his sake they are, and of all things fair He is the cause. And related to the Second are the second things; and related to the Third the third', trans. LCL (and the logic is that where there are a second and third, there must be a first). In 314e Plato attributes the doctrine to Socrates.

⁹⁴ Philip Merlan, 'Drei Anmerkungen zu Numenius', *Philologus*, 106 (1962), 137–45, at 138–9.

Socratic/Platonic doctrine.⁹⁵ On the basis of the extant fragments it is clear, I think, that the issue for Numenius is primarily centred on the question of the Good and the distinction between the Good and the Demiurge, not between God and cosmos.⁹⁶

Thus, the best way to understand the division of the Demiurge (in fr. 11 above), may be to view the second and third Gods as two different aspects of the same Demiurge: as second God 'he turns away to the contemplation of himself' (fr. 12), as third God he 'governs, and travels through the heaven' (fr. 12).⁹⁷ This interpretation is supported by fr. 15, which states that the first God is concerned with the intelligible, the second with the intelligible *and* the sensible (ὁ δὲ δεύτερος περὶ τὰ νοητὰ καὶ αἰσθητά), as well as fr. 16 which states that the second God is double (ὁ γὰρ δεύτερος διττός ὢν).

Regarding the two fragments in Proclus, the only reasonable solution seems to be that Proclus somehow misunderstood Numenius.⁹⁸ When Proclus says in fr. 21 that the

⁹⁵ Cf. Michael Frede, 'Numenius', *ANRW* 2:36.2 (1987), 1034–75, at 1055. So also Festugière, *Le Dieu inconnu et la Gnose*, 124.

⁹⁶ See also Frede, 'Numenius', 1055 ff., who thinks that it cannot be excluded that Numenius himself too held this view, but that it was of little importance to him.

⁹⁷ Cf. Baltes, 'Numenios von Apamea', 260.

⁹⁸ This view is shared by the majority of scholars: Beutler, 'Numenios', 671; Merlan, 'Drei Anmerkungen zu Numenius'; J. H. Waszink, 'Porphyrios und Numenios,' in *Porphyre* (Genève, 1966), 35–78, at 40–1; Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, 72–5; Baltes, 'Numenios von Apamea', 260, and Robert M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen* (Chico, Calif., 1984), 111. E. R. Dodds, 'Numenius and Ammonius', in E. R. Dodds *et al.* (eds.), *Les Sources de Plotin* (Genève, 1957), 14 f., however, is of the opinion that Numenius accepted a doctrine of three Gods.

Demiurge is double, consisting of the first and the second God, this clearly contradicts the fragments in Eusebius which are so unanimous and clear in stating that the first God has nothing to do with creation or movement at all. The first God 'rests in himself' (ἐν ἑαυτοῦ ὤν) (fr. 11) or is at peace (ὁ μὲν πρῶτος θεὸς ἔσται ἐστῶς) (fr. 15), while the second God is moving (ὁ δὲ δεύτερος ἔμπαλιν ἐστι κινούμενος) (fr. 15).

To conclude, then, the evidence for Numenius teaching a doctrine of two, not three Gods, is relatively clear. At least, it is as clear as we may demand or expect, for scholars (modern as well as ancient) agree that Numenius generally did not express himself with the highest degree of logic and clarity.⁹⁹

In Alcinous as well, the first God is termed the Demiurge; the role of the world soul (or the second God as some scholars have named him)¹⁰⁰ is, however, no more than a simple ordering of cosmos in total dependence upon the first God. In Numenius, on the other hand, the divine is divided in a resting first God and a moving and creative second God. Notwithstanding, there are significant similarities between the first Gods in Alcinous and Numenius, especially as to their transcendence, their function as the cause (*αἴτιος/αἴτιον*), the Good and *nous*.

⁹⁹ See e.g. Waszink, 'Porphyrios und Numenius,' 63; Dodds, 'Numenius and Ammonius', 16, and Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 20.74 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Donini, 'La Connaissance de dieu', 118, Jaap Mansfeld, 'Compatible Alternatives: Middle Platonist Theology and the Xenophanes Reception,' in van den Broek *et al.* (eds.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, 92–117, at 107.

We must note, however, an important difference between them, namely the different concepts of generation that they seem to have had. Whereas the *Didascalicus* teaches that the cosmos 'is perpetually in a state of becoming' (14.169.34), Numenius seems to presuppose a temporal creation:¹⁰¹ 'For if the Creator who is the author of generation is good, the Creator also of essence will doubtless be absolute good, innate in essence. For the second God, being twofold, is the self-maker of the idea of Himself, and makes the world as its Creator: afterwards (ἐπειτα) He is wholly given to contemplation' (fr. 16).

Also the fragments transmitted by Calcidius in his commentary on the *Timaeus*, relating the views of 'Numenius the Pythagorean', suggest a temporal creation, not of matter, but of cosmos:¹⁰²

in as far as this dyad is indeterminated it did not originate but in so far as it is determined it has an origin. In other words: before it was adorned with form and order, it was without beginning and origin, but its generation was the adornment and embellishment by the Godhead who regulated it (*exornatam vero atque illustratam a digestore deo esse generatam*). Since, therefore, this generation is a later event, the unadorned and unborn substance should be held to be as old as God by whom it was regulated . . . Now this world was made out of God and matter (*Porro ex deo et silva factus est iste mundus*). (fr. 52)

It is true that the picture concerning a temporal creation of cosmos is not as clear in Numenius as it is in Atticus, as we

¹⁰¹ So Baltes, *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios*, 68 f.

¹⁰² Trans. in J. C. M. van Winden, *Calcidius on Matter: His Doctrine and Sources* (Leiden, 1959).

will see in the next section. But the extent to which Eusebius quotes Numenius (together with Atticus) and the influence that he is said to have had on Eusebius' own theology,¹⁰³ are indications that the views Numenius expresses in these matters are, to a certain extent, compatible with Jewish-Christian thinking.¹⁰⁴ They are thus an important background also in dealing with Clement's views of the nature of God and his relationship to cosmos.

Atticus

Atticus, together with Alcinous, accepted the Middle Platonic doctrine of three principles, God—Ideas—Matter, and, as will be clear from the following, the two philosophers share the same views on many topics.

In some areas, however, the difference between them is rather striking. Whereas Alcinous represents some kind of synthesis between Plato and Aristotle, Atticus is very much an anti-Aristotelian.¹⁰⁵ In Atticus we also meet with a religious sentiment;¹⁰⁶ he is a polemicist and a pro-Platonist,

¹⁰³ See e. g. des Places ed., *Les Fragments de Numénios d'Apamée*, 31–2.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Mark J. Edwards, 'Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 44 (1990), 64–75.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. e.g. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 252: 'He is only concerned with making the greatest possible contrast between Plato and Aristotle.' On Atticus and his relationship to Aristotelianism in general, see Paul Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen*, vols. i–ii (Berlin, 1984), 564–82.

¹⁰⁶ e.g. M. K. Mras, 'Zu Attikos, Porphyrios und Eusebios', *Glotta*, 25 (1936), 183–8, at 186: 'Er ist ein gläubiger Platoniker'. Cf. Baltes, *Die*

at least to judge from the surviving fragments. He sees Plato as a divine master and ridicules Aristotle, especially for not believing that the cosmos was created in time. This seems to be a question of importance: a considerable part of the fragments preserved by Atticus are concerned with the question of the generation of cosmos, which is of course also the question of whether to interpret the *Timaeus* in a literal or a mythological sense. In this area their views differ. I shall return to that.

There took place in antiquity a debate about what was the highest theological principle according to Plato. In the *Timaeus* it is the Demiurge, in the *Republic* it is the Good, while in the *Parmenides* the One is above anything else.¹⁰⁷ The tradition following Plato came up with a number of different answers.

In contrast to Numenius but in conformity with Alcinous, Atticus does not distinguish between the Good and the Creator, the Demiurge. In this and especially in his teaching of the temporal creation of cosmos, he comes close to the Jewish–Christian concept of God as the Creator at a certain point in history. He still reveals himself as a Greek and a Middle Platonist, however, by calling his first principle both the Good and *nous*: ‘Atticus who was his (Harpocration’s) teacher, immediately identified the Demiurge as the Good,

Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios, 62 f. and Édouard des Places, *Études platoniciennes 1929–1979* (Leiden, 1981), 279.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Matthias Baltes, ‘Zur Philosophie des Platonikers Attikos,’ in H. Dörrie et al. (eds.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift H. Dörrie* (Münster, 1988), 37–57, at 40.

even though he is called good in Plato, not the Good, and is given the name *nous*’ (my trans.).¹⁰⁸

The Demiurge in Atticus is a *nous* with a soul. For, according to Plato, says Atticus, ‘*nous* cannot exist without a soul (*ψυχή*), while Aristotle separates *nous* from soul’ (fr. 7). While according to Numenius the generation of cosmos takes place through the second God, not the first, Atticus’ first God creates—or orders—the world directly. As all creation is movement (*κίνησις*), and all movement (*κίνησις*) presupposes a soul, Atticus has to endow the Demiurge with a soul: *πόθεν γὰρ ἡ κίνησις ἦν ἢ ἀπὸ ψυχῆς*; ‘for from where was movement if not from the soul?’ (fr. 23).

The soul of the Demiurge is also the seat of ideas. Ideas do not exist in *nous* (fr. 28), as is the view of Alcinoüs, but they exist eternally in ‘the essence of the soul’ (*ἐν οὐσίᾳ τῇ ψυχικῇ*) (fr. 40).

The Demiurge is the first God (*ὁ πρῶτος θεός*) (fr. 28); he is intelligible and the oldest God (*θεοῦ τοῦ πρεσβυτάτου καὶ νοητοῦ*) (fr. 37), and he is the Father of all, Demiurge, Lord, and Guardian: *τῶν ἀπάντων πατέρα καὶ δημιουργὸν καὶ δεσπότην καὶ κηδεμόνα* (fr. 9).

Above all, however, the first God is the Creator God and the best of artisans: ‘and all the other artificers, who pursue the constructive arts, have this power to bring some non-existent thing into existence (*τι τῶν οὐκ ὄντων ἄγειν εἰς*

¹⁰⁸ Ἀττικὸς δέ, ὁ τούτου διδάσκαλος, αὐτόθεν τὸν δημιουργὸν εἰς ταῦτον ἄγει τὰγαθῶ, καίτοι ἀγαθὸς μὲν καλεῖται παρὰ τῷ Πλάτῳ, τὰγαθὸν δὲ οὐ, καὶ νοῦς προσαγορεύεται (fr. 12). Greek text in des Places, *Atticus: Fragments*. When not otherwise stated, the translation is quoted from Gifford, *Eusebius: Preparation for the Gospel*. I refer to the fragments using des Places’ numbers.

οὐσ'αυ);¹⁰⁹ and shall the universal King and chief Artificer not even share the power of a human artificer, but be left by us without any share in creation?' (fr. 4, my trans.)

Closely related to the view of God as Creator, is Atticus' repeated insistence in the fragments preserved on the creation of cosmos as a temporal event.¹¹⁰ The following is just one example of the several fragments concerned with the temporal creation of the cosmos (fr. 20, from Proclus): 'Let us still follow the fantastic hypotheses of Atticus. He says that "what is moving in a discordant and disorderly way" is uncreated (ἀγένητον), while the cosmos is created (γενητόν) at a point in time (ἀπὸ χρόνου).'

¹¹¹

On this matter Atticus (together with Plutarch and probably Numenius) was out of line with other Platonists, including Neoplatonists such as Porphyry and Proclus. The much more widely accepted view of the *Timaeus* was that the whole creation story was meant to be understood in a mythological sense, so it is no wonder that Atticus—in the pagan world, that is—is primarily remembered for this eccentric—and unpopular—viewpoint. For Christian writers, however, he was much more useful.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ The bringing of some non-existent thing into existence does not for Atticus imply the acceptance of the Jewish-Christian creation out of nothing, but rather the movement from chaos to cosmos of pre-existent matter.

¹¹⁰ For a short exposition of Atticus' view, cf. E. P. Meijering, 'HN ΠΟΤΕ ΟΤΕ ΟΥΚ ΗΝ Ο ΥΙΟΣ. A Discussion on Time and Eternity', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 28 (1974), 161–8.

¹¹¹ Cf. also fragments 19, 21, 22, 23, 29, 31, 35, 37, and 38b.

¹¹² Eusebius (who quotes from his work *On Providence*) was one, of course, cf. W. C. van Unnik, 'Two Notes on Irenaeus', *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976), 201–13, at 206.

INEFFABILITY, DIVINE ATTRIBUTES, AND
THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Alcinous

Though the apparent inconsistency between God as a final cause in *Didascalicus* ch. 10 and an efficient cause in chs. 12–23 may be reconciled and the unity of God be preserved through either assuming a mythological interpretation of the *Timaeus* paraphrase, or by asserting different authors of the sections, we are still faced with rather conflicting statements in the theological chapter proper, ch. 10. How is it possible to harmonize the view of God as ineffable and immovable with a description of him by means of a series of positive attributes?

Alcinous expresses his negative theology in particular through the word ‘ineffable’. That the first God is ‘ineffable (ἄρρητος) and graspable only by the intellect’ (ch. 10.165.5), is a doctrine of great importance for his theology; it is repeated three times. Plato himself never uses the term ‘ineffable’ (ἄρρητος: the closest being ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς in his *Seventh Letter*),¹¹³ but the corresponding meaning is conveyed in several places.¹¹⁴ The concept of the ineffability of God became widespread in later Platonism (as well as in the Christian theology of the time, as we shall see in Clement of Alexandria). Philo of Alexandria is the first surviving

¹¹³ *Seventh Letter* 341c.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Timaeus* 28c, *Parmenides* 137e–142a, and *Republic* 509b, as well as in the *Seventh Letter*. See above, Ch. 3.

author actually to describe God as 'ineffable' (ἄρρητος, e.g. *Somn.* 1.67).¹¹⁵

Together with Alcinous' assertion that God is ineffable we find, paradoxically, a sequence of attributes and epithets of the supreme God, attributes which seem to define or at least describe him. This is a problem that perhaps more than any other has troubled modern interpreters and specialists of Middle Platonism: how can God be termed ineffable, indescribable, and at the same time be given positive attributes?¹¹⁶ Further, how can he be known negatively—according to the *via negationis*—and positively—according to the *via analogiae* and the *via eminentiae*—at the same time? Let us have a look at the paragraphs in question. *Did.* 10.164.31–42 states:

The primary god, then, is eternal (ἀίδιος), ineffable (ἄρρητος), 'self-perfect' (αὐτοτελής) (that is, deficient in no respect), 'ever-perfect' (ἀειτελής) (that is, always perfect), and 'all-perfect' (παντελής) (that is, perfect in all respects); divinity (θειότης), essentiality (οὐσιότης), truth (ἀλήθεια), commensurability (συμμετρία), <beauty>, good (ἀγαθόν). I am not listing these terms as being distinct from one another, but on the assumption that one single thing is being denoted by all of them. He is the Good (ἀγαθόν), because he benefits all things according to their capacities, being the cause of all good. He is the Beautiful (καλόν), because he himself by his own nature is perfect and

¹¹⁵ Dillon, *Alcinous*, 101.

¹¹⁶ Cf. the important study of Festugière, *Le Dieu inconnu et la Gnose*. Tryggve Göransson, *Albinus, Alcinous, Arius Didymus* (Gothenburg, 1995), 121, does not regard the contradictions within this chapter as a result of a conflation of different sources, but as inherent in the theology.

commensurable; Truth, because he is the origin of all truth, as the sun is of all light; he is Father through being the cause of all things and bestowing order on the heavenly intellect and the soul of the world in accordance with himself and his own thought.

In the next paragraph (10.165.5–16), however, the description of God is made by denying him all attributes and by the use of negative polar pairs:

God is ineffable and graspable only by the intellect (*Ἀρρητος δ' ἔστι καὶ νῶ μόνῳ ληπτός*), as we have said, since he is neither genus, nor species, nor differentia, nor does he possess any attributes, neither bad (for it is improper to utter such a thought), nor good (for he would be thus by participation in something, to wit, goodness), nor indifferent (for neither is this in accordance with the concept we have of him), nor yet qualified (for he is not endowed with quality, nor is his peculiar perfection due to qualification) nor unqualified (for he is not deprived of any quality which might accrue to him). Further, he is not a part of anything, nor is he in the position of being a whole which has parts, nor is he the same as anything; for no attribute is proper to him, in virtue of which he could be distinguished from other things. Also, he neither moves anything, nor is he himself moved (*οὔτε κινεῖ οὔτε κινεῖται*).

Now, the three ways leading to knowledge of God which immediately follow may well be seen as a response to, or in some way corresponding to, the different views of God that are expressed above: in the first paragraph (*Did.* 10.164.31–42) he is given positive attributes, while in the next he is deprived of all attributes (*Did.* 10.165.5–16).

The first way is the method of abstraction of all attributes (ἡ κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν τούτων) or what was later to be called the *via negationis*.¹¹⁷ The second is the *via analogiae*, and the third the *via eminentiae*.

The first way of conceiving God is by abstraction of these attributes (ἡ κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν τούτων), just as we form the conception of a point by abstraction from sensible phenomena, conceiving first a surface, then a line, and finally a point. The second way of conceiving him is that of analogy (ἡ κατὰ ἀναλογίαν), as follows: the sun is to vision and to visible objects (it is not itself sight, but provides vision to sight and visibility to its objects) as the primal intellect is to the power of intellection in the soul and to its objects; for it is not the power of intellection itself, but provides intellection to it and intelligibility to its objects, illuminating the truth contained in them.

The third way of conceiving him is the following: one contemplates first beauty in bodies, then after that turns to the beauty in souls, then to that in customs and laws, and then to the 'great sea of Beauty', after which one gains an intuition of the good itself and the final object of love and striving, like a light appearing, and, as it were, shining out to the soul which ascends in this way; and along with this one also intuites God, in virtue of his pre-eminence in honour. (*Did.* 10.165.16–34)

So, are we here faced with incompatible systems for representing the divine, or should we rather look upon the three ways as *alternative ways* of contemplating the same reality? As suggested above, it seems that the three different ways or

¹¹⁷ The *via negationis* occurs also in Clement (*Strom.* 5. 71.2), in Celsus (Origen, *C. Cels.* 7.42), and in Maximus of Tyre (17.11), indicating that this was a familiar doctrine.

alternatives, although of unequal value, correspond to the different ways of expressing God. If so, the confusion scholars have tended to see in *Didascalicus* ch. 10 is merely apparent, and it may well be that Alcinous uses the three ways as an integral part of his systematic theology. By structuring the chapter according to (1) correct theology (10.164.18–165.16); (2) justification of the correct theology by referring to the three ways or modes of cognition (10.165.16–34); and (3) refutation of false theology (10.165.34–166.14), the apparent incoherence seems to disappear.¹¹⁸

According to the first, or highest explanation, as Jaap Mansfeld calls it, the first God is ineffable and above the negative polar pairs of 10.165.5–16, as well as deprived of all attributes, corresponding to ‘the first way of conceiving God’, the way of abstraction. The second way is illustrated by the example of the sun in relation to both sight and the objects seen, which is compared with the relation between the first God and ‘the power of intellection in the (world) soul and to its objects’. This corresponds with 10.164.18–23 where the relation between the first and the second intellect (the intellect of the world soul) is described, as well as with the description of God in 10.164.38–40: God is ‘Truth, because he is the origin of all truth, as the sun is of all light’.

The third way helps us to arrive at a conception of God as the Good-and-Beautiful (*ἀγαθόν* and *καλόν*) which occurs in the first paragraph (10.164.32–165.4), and also in 10.164.27–28 where the first *nous* is the most beautiful (*ὁ κάλλιστος*)

¹¹⁸ Thus Mansfeld, ‘Compatible Alternatives’. See also Harry Austryn Wolfson, ‘Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 57 (1947), 115–30.

by contemplating beauty in bodies, soul, customs and laws; in the end one attains to the ‘great sea of Beauty’, and lastly ‘one gains an intuition of the Good itself and the final object of love and striving’ (τὸ πρῶτον ἐραστὸν καὶ ἐφετόν). Mansfeld thinks that the notions conceived by each of the three ways outlined in 10.165.16–34 and which seem to be ‘jumbled together’ in 10.164.27–165.4, are consciously done. For Alcinous declares: ‘I am not listing these terms as being distinct from one another, but on the assumption that one single thing is being denoted by all of them’ (10.164.34–6).¹¹⁹ Mansfeld also argues that the description of the three ways as ‘first’, ‘second’, and ‘third’ is not just a way of enumeration, but rather a judgement of value, that the first (πρώτη) means ‘most important’, second (δευτέρα) ‘second best’, and third (τρίτη) ‘third best’.

Developing the arguments of Mansfeld somewhat further, I shall claim that the theological chapter of Alcinous’ *Didascalicus* represents one model to come to grips with the relationship between the transcendent and immanent aspects of God, which was a constant dilemma for Christians as well as pagans in the period of Middle Platonism. In Philo, the view that God is ineffable, unnamable, and incomprehensible leads to the conclusion that while the existence of God can be known from the things created by him, his essence cannot be known.¹²⁰ Philo therefore raises the question of how one can speak of God, or how one is to

¹¹⁹ Göransson, *Albinus, Alcinous, Arius Didymus*, 121, supports this view of the structure of the chapter.

¹²⁰ e.g. *On Rewards and Punishments* 40.

interpret the predicates by which God is described in Scripture.¹²¹ In Numenius we saw a separation of the transcendent and immanent aspects of God, thereby creating a first and a second God—a solution to which Origen of Alexandria, the Christian, was attracted.¹²² Plotinus works along the same lines when he says: ‘For we say what it is not, but we do not say what it is: so that we speak about it from what comes after it’ (ὥστε ἐκ τῶν ὑστερον περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγομεν).¹²³

Returning to Alcinous’ text, the first paragraph (10.164.31–42) describes God by his attributes, the second (10.165.5–16) declares that God is ineffable and wholly negative; no attribute is proper to him. The first God in Alcinous is on the one hand the unmoved cause who through his eternal emanation is responsible for everything there is, and who can be indirectly perceived through his work. In the latter respect he is also described as the Good, the Beautiful, the Truth, and the Father, as well as the cause of the ordering of the world soul.

As he is in himself, or in his nature or essence, on the other hand, God has no attributes. Although Alcinous never calls him the One, it is a speculation on the relationship of the One and the Many that underlies his reasoning: ‘he is not part of anything, nor is he in the position of being a whole that has parts’ (10.165.13–14). When God is given an

¹²¹ e.g. *On the Unchangeableness of God* 60–2.

¹²² e.g. *C. Cels.* 5.39.

¹²³ *Enneads* 5.3.14. Donini, ‘La Connaissance de dieu’, 120 f., while rejecting the presence of this distinction in Alcinous, still recognizes its existence: ‘de toute façon il s’agit, c’est bien connu, d’une distinction diffusée dans les textes philosophiques et non philosophiques de l’époque du moyen platonisme.’

attribute, he is not one and simple any more, but belongs to the Many. The simplicity or oneness of God cannot admit any attribute and is therefore ineffable; he can only be reached by stripping off and taking away all words or attributes—*κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν*, by a method of negation. And though Alcinous does not describe God by either the word, essence, or nature (*οὐσία*), it is the same meaning that is expressed.

This distinction between the positive and negative aspects of God, between his unknowable nature and his knowable attributes, was an integral part of the thought of many philosophers at this time, Christian as well as pagan.¹²⁴ The differences among them are more due to differences in the words or expressions employed than in substance. The distinction was developed and refined as time went on, and in Christian Orthodox theology from the Cappadocians onwards, it became an established doctrine. Its beginnings, however, are to be sought at a much earlier stage, in the Middle Platonists, including Philo, in the Christian Apologists, and—as we shall see below—in Clement of Alexandria.

Numenius

There are fragments of Numenius which suggest his concern for man's potential to gain knowledge of God: 'Since Plato knew that the Creator alone was known among men, but that the First Mind, which is called Absolute Being, is altogether unknown among them, therefore he spoke in this

¹²⁴ Cf. Festugière, *Le Dieu inconnu et la Gnose*.

way, just as if one were to say: The First Mind, my good sirs, is not that which you imagine, but another mind before it, more ancient and more divine' (fr. 17). Numenius seems to hold the view that only the second God, the Demiurge, can be the object of knowledge, whereas the first God cannot even be imagined by man.

The same unknowability and inaccessibility of the first God is suggested in the first book of *On the Good* (fr. 2), reminiscent of Plotinus:

Bodies, therefore, we may conceive by inferences drawn from observing similar bodies, and from the tokens existing in the bodies before us: but there is no possibility of conceiving the good from anything that lies before us, not yet from anything similar that can be perceived by the senses. For example, a man sitting in a watch-tower, having caught a quick glimpse of a small fishing-boat, one of those solitary skiffs, left alone by itself, and caught in the troughs of the waves, sees the vessel at one glance. Just so, then, must a man withdraw far from the things of sense, and commune in solitude with the good alone, where there is neither man nor any other living thing, nor body great or small, but a certain immense, indescribable, and absolutely divine solitude, where the occupations, and splendours of the good exist, and the good itself, in peace and benevolence, that gentle, gracious, guiding power, sits high above all being.

So Numenius admits, in spite of everything, that man may, by removing all material obstacles, in some way be able to reach the Good and have company with it. While Alcinous in chapter 10 has much to say about God's ineffability as well as the possible ways to reach him, there are in Numenius only traces of such teaching. Atticus, however, does not seem to be occupied by these questions at all.

THE QUESTION OF TRANSCENDENCE

An important question among main line Middle Platonists was the status of the first principle, whether he was above being or essence (*οὐσία*) or identified with it, sometimes even whether he was above the level of *nous*.¹²⁵ In the *Didascalicus* ch. 10, the first God is also the Good and the first *nous*, but nowhere is there any sign of the famous ‘beyond being’ (*ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*) statement (*Rep.* 509b) that Alcinous most probably was acquainted with.¹²⁶ There is, however, an ambiguous statement about the first God which has to some degree engaged commentators¹²⁷ and which might indicate that he was conscious of the problem. In 10.164.20–2 (quoted above), after having presented the potential and actualized intellect, he goes on: ‘and finer than this again is the cause of this and *whatever it is that has an existence still prior to these* (*καὶ ὅπερ ἂν ἔτι ἄνωτέρω τούτων ὑφέστηκεν*), this it is that would be the primal God.’ The question is whether Alcinous is here referring to two distinct entities, in other words, does he admit the possibility of a principle even higher than the Cause of the intellect of the universe, a being above *nous*?

¹²⁵ For a survey and acute discussion of the important texts, see Whittaker, ‘*Επέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας*’.

¹²⁶ ‘Ibid. 99–101’

¹²⁷ Cf. Merlan, ‘Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus’, 114–32; Loenen, ‘Albinus’ Metaphysics’; Dörrie, ‘Die Frage nach dem Transzendenten im Mittelplatonismus’; Donini, ‘La Connaissance de dieu’; and Mansfeld, ‘Three Notes on Albinus’.

The question is also related to the concept of ineffability ascribed to God in ch. 10.

In this chapter God is described as ‘ineffable’ (10.164.31; 165.5); he is also, however, said to be ‘almost ineffable’ (10.164.8). As we have seen, a typical feature of Middle Platonist theology is an inclination towards apophatic expressions in relation to the divine; it is, however, also typical that these authors to some extent lack the type of doctrinal precision or coherence that is more common in later (Christian) authors. Could it not be that in the phrase quoted above that ‘and whatever it is that has an existence still prior to these’ is only to be taken as parallel to ‘the cause of this’?¹²⁸ Judging from the whole of his work, it seems clear that Alcinous does operate with two, not three divine beings. Nowhere else in *Didascalicus* is there any mention of a being above being or above the level of *nous*. Though never stated, it seems probable that Alcinous instead identified *nous* with being, as we shall also find in Numenius and Clement.

Owing to our fragmentary knowledge of the writings of Numenius, we have to be even more cautious than in the case of Alcinous. Unlike Alcinous, though, Numenius actually states in several places that the first God is identical with Being.¹²⁹ In fr. 17 (quoted above) he is called ‘Absolute Being’ (*ἀπτοόν*) and—unlike the Demiurge—unknown

¹²⁸ See Mansfeld, ‘Three Notes on Albinus’, 66.

¹²⁹ e.g. fragments 5, 6, 11. Discussion in John Whittaker, ‘Moses Atticizing’, *Phoenix*, 21 (1967), 196–201, which concludes that Numenius was undecided on the issue.

among men: 'Since Plato knew that the Creator alone was known among men, but that the First Mind, which is called Absolute Being, is altogether unknown among them.'¹³⁰

In addition to being identified with being, he is also, according to fr. 16, the cause of being, which might indicate a dissociation from actual being: 'For if God the Creator is the beginning of generation (*γενέσεως*), the good is the beginning of essence' (*οὐσίας εἶναι ἀρχή*). However, later in the same fragment, he is still associated with being: 'the Creator also of essence will doubtless be absolute good, innate in essence' (*σύμφυτον τῇ οὐσίᾳ*). And also at the end of fr. 16: 'The first, God, absolute good; his imitator, a good Creator: then essence, one kind of the First God (*ἡ δ' οὐσία μία μὲν ἡ τοῦ πρώτου*), another of the second.'

Numenius probably was undecided on the issue, for in a fragment allegedly from the first book of *On the Good* (though it would fit better in a later book), fr. 2, he states: 'and the good itself, in peace and benevolence, that gentle, guiding power, sits high above all being' (*ἐπὶ τῇ οὐσίᾳ*).

There is nothing in the remaining fragments of the writings of Atticus which indicates that he teaches a God above being. On the contrary, Proclus at least in two places (frs. 12 and 28) criticizes Atticus exactly for this. In the sequel of fr. 12 (above, this chapter), Proclus, after referring to Atticus as identifying the Good with the Demiurge, states: 'whereas the Good is the cause of all essence and beyond being (*τὰγα-θὸν δὲ αἷτιον ἀπάσης οὐσίας καὶ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ ὄντος ἐστίν*), as we have have been taught in the *Republic*' (my trans.).

¹³⁰ See also fr. 13.

And in fr. 28 he objects to Atticus' doctrine that the Demiurge should be the first God: 'And the Demiurge is not the first God; for that one is superior to all noetic essence' (*κρείττων γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ἀπάσης τῆς νοηρᾶς οὐσίας*) (my trans.). God, for Atticus, is primarily the benevolent Creator, whose providence embraces the whole universe. The influence of Atticus on later times was great, not least on the Christian philosophers.¹³¹

It is evident, then, that the whole topic of the status of the first principle was something that was much discussed in this period, and, in the words of John Whittaker: 'in the case of both *οὐσία* and *νοῦς* the final outcome of the conflict spelled victory for the negative theological tendency which dominates the speculation of the whole period.'¹³²

While this is generally true, there are also distinctive nuances in the picture. For all their similarities, even our three pagan Middle Platonists differ in important respects, as we have seen in some detail in this chapter. It is true that in their description of God they all employ terminology taken from the Platonic writings: God is (variously) named the Good, the One, Father, and the Demiurge. Also important, but only for Alcinous and Numenius, is the question of the relationship between immanence and transcendence, or between a resting and an active God. Atticus, in his turn, primarily focuses on God as the Creator, without dwelling on his apophatic and transcendent aspects.

¹³¹ So Baltes, 'Zur Philosophie des Platonikers Attikos', 57.

¹³² Whittaker, 'Ἐπέκεια νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας', 104.

Clement the Christian Middle Platonist shares with Alcinous, Atticus, and Numenius many of the questions and concerns in relation to the divine. But does he also provide answers similar to theirs? The following chapters will let Clement's specific solutions and ways of expressions come to the fore.

4

Clement's Method of Concealment

It is now time to move on to Clement of Alexandria, the main Christian exponent of the tendency to negative theology that permeated our period. My exposition in the following will on the whole be guided by the pattern used in the previous chapter, concentrating on God and the divine beings. However, in order to grasp the rather complex views of the divine that we find in Clement, it is essential that we first consider questions concerning esotericism, concealment, orality, and gnosis related to his writings, taking into account his reflections on the relationship between the oral and the written word and his theory of symbolism. Understanding Clement's reflections on these matters is a necessary precondition for a correct appreciation of his philosophy in general. At the same time it will illuminate Clement's purpose in composing the *Stromateis* in such an 'obscure' way.

ESOTERICISM AND THE 'SECRET GOSPEL OF MARK'

The question of esoteric doctrines in early Christianity has often been played down, among both Catholic and Protestant theologians. Esoteric doctrines are normally taken to mean an oral or written tradition of doctrine independent of Scripture, a 'hidden wisdom' which it is necessary for 'gnostic' Christians to know. The reasons for the modern negative attitude are obvious. First of all, such an assumption challenges or opposes the openness and public nature of the tradition of the church, the idea that salvation is offered to all humankind. Second, it is associated with 'heresy', above all with Gnosticism.

Yet, there is no doubt that there existed esoteric traditions within early Christianity (widely defined) and that a theologian like Clement must have known about them.¹ Such traditions were transmitted during the first centuries in oral form or recorded in what we call 'apocryphal' works. It is a wholly different question whether these doctrines were acknowledged and used by the church itself in the period we are dealing with, and in Alexandria in particular. In

¹ See e. g. *Strom.* 5.20.1; 5.61.1; 6.61.3. Cf. the articles by Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom. Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden, 1996). It is Stroumsa's opinion that this esotericism developed first in Judaeo-Christian milieus, and was primarily of Jewish origin. It was, however, all part of a greater context of esotericism, both religious and philosophical, which also includes the teachings of Plato, Pythagoreanism, and the Greek mystery religions.

Clement's case, the matter is to some extent connected with the question of the authenticity of the letter from Clement containing extracts from a 'secret Gospel of Mark', which was discovered by Morton Smith in the monastery of Mar Saba outside of Jerusalem.

The manuscript, written in the eighteenth century, was discovered in 1958 and published in 1973.² It contains a fragment of a previously unknown letter from Clement to an otherwise unknown Theodore. The letter exhibits two brief excerpts from a text Clement calls 'the mystical gospel' (τὸ μυστικὸν εὐαγγέλιον) of Mark.

In the letter Clement asserts that Mark wrote two gospels; his original gospel, intended for beginners, was written in Rome, while the second gospel, an expanded version of the original, was written in Alexandria. It is this second gospel Clement calls 'secret'³ and describes as a 'more spiritual gospel' (πνευματικώτερον εὐαγγέλιον). It is also asserted in the letter that Mark knew of additional, arcane traditions—which he did not write down—that would lead initiates 'into the innermost sanctuary' of the truth:

But when Peter died a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former book the things suitable to whatever

² In 1973–4 Morton Smith published his find in two separate volumes, a critical edition containing an extensive analysis of the text: *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973) and a popular volume describing the discovery: *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* (London, 1974).

³ Whether the epithet *μυστικόν* should be interpreted as secret, kept from the knowledge of others, or is merely an attempt to describe the 'supernatural' message of Christ, is uncertain. Cf. Paul's use of the word in Col. 1.27.

makes for progress toward knowledge. Thus he composed a more spiritual Gospel (συνέταξε πνευματικώτερον εὐαγγέλιον) for the use of those who were being perfected. Nevertheless, he did not divulge the things not to be uttered, nor did he write down the hierophantic teaching of the Lord, but to the stories already written he added yet others and, moreover, brought in certain sayings of which he knew the interpretation would, as a mystagogue, lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven veils.⁴

Of primary interest in the present context is whether the letter itself is genuine, and what this would mean for our understanding of Clement's thought. It is not my concern to address the question of different stages in the compositional history of the Gospel of Mark, or to discuss how to interpret the contents of the alleged quotations of a lost Mark, as has been the focus of most scholars that have studied the letter.

Most, but by no means all, scholars seem to agree that this is a genuine letter by Clement of Alexandria, in which case the only one extant. It is, however, interesting to note that several scholars who are specialists in Clement's theology belong to those who doubt its authenticity.⁵

Even if the letter were genuine, there is no evidence in Clement's extant works that he accepted the Secret Gospel as Scripture. In the third book of the *Stromateis*, he

⁴ Trans. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*.

⁵ The authenticity is doubted by E. L. Fortin, 'Clement of Alexandria and the Esoteric Tradition', *Studia Patristica*, 9:3 (1966), 41–56; Raoul Mortley, *Connaissance religieuse et herméneutique chez Clément d'Alexandrie* (Leiden, 1973), as well as *From Word to Silence*, vol. ii: *The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* (Bonn, 1986), 38; Herbert Musurillo, 'Morton Smith's Secret Gospel', *Thought*, 48 (1973), 327–31; Quentin Quesnell, 'The Mar Saba

acknowledges 'the four Gospels which have been handed down to us' (*Strom.* 3.93.1). He knew, however, other gospels than these four: there are references to the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and the *Protevangelium of James*. Except for the letter, there is no mention or quotation of a 'secret' Gospel of Mark nor is there in any other early Christian literature.⁶ The fact that Clement never quotes from it in his main works makes it doubtful that he could have put much stock in it. He did not seem to have a high opinion of apocryphal gospels in general. This may be seen from the fact that Stählin's index has only nineteen references to them compared to 1,579 from the canonical gospels.⁷ At the most he saw it as one among a large number of writings—Christian, Jewish, and pagan—in which he might find something of value.⁸

Clementine: A Question of Evidence', *Classical Biblical Quarterly*, 37 (1975), 48–67; Eric F. Osborn, 'Clement of Alexandria: A Review of Research, 1958–1982', *The Second Century*, 3 (1983), 219–44; Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, 1981); and A. H. Criddle, 'On the Mar Saba Letter Attributed to Clement of Alexandria', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 3 (1995), 215–220. In Eric F. Osborn, 'Teaching and Writing in the First Chapter of the *Stromateis* of Clement of Alexandria', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 10 (1959), 335–43, at 341, the author discusses the question of esotericism in Clement in general. Also Bart D. Ehrman, in Charles W. Hedrich, 'The Secret Gospel of Mark: Stalemate in the Academy', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 11:2 (2003), 131–63 at 155–63, has serious doubts as to its authenticity.

⁶ Cf. James A. Brooks, 'Clement of Alexandria as a Witness to the Development of the New Testament Canon', *Second Century*, 9:1 (1992), 41–55.

⁷ Brooks, 'Clement of Alexandria', 45–6.

⁸ Cf. R. P. C. Hanson, '[Rev.] Morton Smith, Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 25 (1974), 513–21.

Further, provided the letter is authentic, is it possible to harmonize the theological contents of it with what Clement, in his undisputed works, writes on the topic of secrecy and esoteric tradition? In order to answer the question, two things must be taken into account. First, in Clement's view, as I interpret it, the 'gnostic' Christian differs from the simple believer not by having access to written texts forbidden to the latter,⁹ but by an increased insight into the hidden meanings of texts; meanings which are available in principle to simple and advanced believers alike. Or, as Eric Osborn puts it: 'for Clement true gnosis is not attained by acquaintance with hidden documents, but by faith and love as learned through interpretation of public apostolic writings.'¹⁰ Second, it is important to interpret the meaning of the mystery language of the letter in the light of his use of the same language in his extant works. In these works Clement often uses language drawn from the mystery religions, not the least in the *Protrepticus*. There is, however, no sign that reference is to a secret tradition. In fact Clement often borrows terms from these religions and Christianizes them, giving them a different meaning. One example may suffice: 'O truly sacred mysteries! O pure light! In the blaze

⁹ This is, however, the view of R. P. C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London, 1962), 26, supported by Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1971), 145 ff., who strongly argues for the existence of such a doctrine in Clement: in his view, Clement regarded Christian teaching as imparted by the Son of God to a select few who handed it down as a secret tradition to those who might benefit from the secret writings.

¹⁰ Osborn, 'Clement of Alexandria', 224.

of the torches I have a vision (ἐποπτεύσαι)¹¹ of heaven and of God. I become holy by initiation. The Lord reveals the mysteries; he marks the worshipper with his seal ... If thou wilt, be thyself also initiated, and thou shalt dance with angels around the unbegotten and imperishable and only true God' (*Protr.* 120.1–2).¹²

For Clement there is nothing in the pagan mystery cults that is worth comparing with the knowledge of the true God; the greatest mystery of all was the truth, the Logos, the coming of Christ, who came for the salvation of all people, as e.g. in *Protr.* 111.3: 'O amazing mystery! The Lord has sunk down, but man rose up.'

The outcome of these considerations is that there are some superficial similarities between the letter and Clement's undisputed works. On a deeper level, however, it seems difficult to reconcile his general views on gnosis and 'mysteries' with the casual remarks in the letter fragment. This will be more evident as we move on to a closer analysis of Clement's own method of concealment and his motives for it.

ESOTERICISM AND CONCEALMENT

To avoid misunderstanding Clement, it is important to distinguish between esotericism and *concealment*. Esoteric or secret doctrines are held to belong to an elite, to an

¹¹ This is the term used in the Eleusinian mysteries. In the Platonic tradition the common term is *θεωρία*. Cf. also *Protr.* 118.4 and *Quis dives* 37.1.

¹² See also *Protr.* 118. 4, 119.1, and *Strom.* 4.3.1. Clement follows the apostle Paul.

initiated, select group of people, an inner circle, and are never meant to be disclosed to all and sundry. The idea of concealment is something different. For Clement, the primary focus of his practice of concealment is determined by his view of himself as the Gnostic teacher, an image of the Logos, who teaches according to a divine plan. Clement thinks that he cannot teach in the same way or teach the same things to everybody; the teacher must adapt his message to the different categories of recipients. Secondly, it is related to his view of language as inadequate for expressing divine truth which creates a need for alternative, symbolic ways of writing. Thirdly, it is part of his understanding of how the Scriptures are composed—that the authors of the New Testament as well as the Logos himself employ a method of concealment. We shall look at these issues in turn below. But first, a few words must be said on how he saw the relationship between the oral and the written word.¹³

Orality and esotericism

The introductory part of the first book of the *Stromateis* is a lengthy justification of Clement's decision to write his book. Though he prefers the oral to the written word, he has decided to write because the written word is necessary for preserving the Apostolic tradition: 'many things have passed away from us into oblivion in a long lapse of time through

¹³ Cf. Osborn, 'Teaching and Writing'.

not being written down' (*Strom.* 1.14.2). His own exposition has its value because of this; it is a 'collection of memoranda', reflections and sketches from the blessed men from whom he has heard them (*Strom.* 1.11.1). He is also of the opinion that the content of the oral teaching should find its way into the written text in such a way that it will pass unnoticed by the unprepared reader and be understood by anyone who is prepared (*Strom.* 1.15.2). At the same time, he says, there is need for great caution. Once the books are published they are liable to fall into anybody's hands. They cannot answer all the questions that are put to them and they cannot defend themselves. They are constantly in need of their author or someone else qualified to interpret these teachings to others (*Strom.* 1.14.4). The caution is motivated, however, by a sincere desire to protect both the hearer and the truth. So, instead of being a tendency to secrecy or esotericism, it is part of Clement's view that once a thing is written down, something is lost.¹⁴

Another reason why the oral word or teaching is superior to the written is the fact that the teacher who addresses an audience is in a position to judge the effect of his words on the hearer. Thanks to his direct contact with his audience he can measure their intellectual ability, moral character and attitudes, and he can 'distinguish the one who is capable of hearing from the rest' (*Strom.* 1.9.1).

¹⁴ This view, of course, was not uncommon in Antiquity, the most well-known exponent being Plato. Cf. Fortin, 'Clement of Alexandria', 49–54. An early Christian example is Hegesippus.

Pedagogical concerns

Yet, the most important aspect of the question of concealment in Clement, to some degree related to the question of orality versus 'the writing down of things', is that of pedagogy. It is Clement's opinion that the divine Logos, the great teacher, trains according to a plan (*οἰκονομία*), only gradually disclosing to his disciples the divine truths: 'The Logos, who is entirely benevolent, being eager to perfect by the progressive stages of salvation, makes use of an excellent plan (*οἰκονομία*), well suited for effective education: first he exhorts [to converts] (*προτρέπων ἄνωθεν*), then he trains us (*ἐπειτα παιδαγωγῶν*), and, finally he teaches'¹⁵ (*ἐπὶ πάντων ἐκδιδάσκων*) (*Paed.* 1.3.3).

There is no doubt that Clement applies these same ideas to his own teaching. He sees himself as the image of the great teacher, the Logos. So, it is first of all due to pedagogical concerns that he deliberately conceals truth in his writings: 'Let these notes of ours, as we have often said for the sake of those that consult them carelessly and unskilfully, be of varied character—and as the name itself indicates, patched together—passing constantly from one thing to another, and in the series of discussions hinting at one thing and demonstrating another' (*Strom.* 4.4.1).

Clement does not want that truth, which he sometimes calls 'the secret traditions of revealed knowledge' (*ἀποκρύ-*

¹⁵ Cf. the three main works of Clement: The *Protrepticus*, the *Paedagogus*, and the *Stromateis*. Did Clement change his mind about writing a *Didaskalikos*, and write the *Stromateis* instead?

φους τῆς ἀληθοῦς γνώσεως παραδόσεις) should be obtained easily; we should 'not offer them to all without reserve' (*Strom.* 1.56.2). It is also possible, he writes, that things may be misunderstood and that people may 'go astray and I might be found offering a dagger to a child' (*Strom.* 1.14.3). So, because of man's ignorance and unbelief, truth must be concealed from him, in order to protect both him and the truth. Truth is for Clement too precious to be allowed to fall into the wrong hands. He therefore consciously selects the things fit for writing, and leaves out the rest; he will write in an obscure way, he says, to hide the meaning from those unprepared and without education and reveal it to those who are prepared (*Strom.* 1.55.4). There are also those who are indifferent and who contradict everything without justification. They will only deceive themselves as well as those who listen to them (*Strom.* 1.21.2).

Clement therefore sees the need of writing a treatise endowed with a double character:¹⁶ 'Sometimes my manuscript will make allusive references. It will insist on some things, it will make a simple statement of others. Sometimes it will try to say something unobtrusively (λανθάνουσα εἰπεῖν), to reveal something without uncovering it (ἐπι-κρυπτομένη ἐκφῆναι) or to demonstrate it without saying anything' (δείξαι σιωπῶσα, *Strom.* 1.15.1).

It is also, paradoxically, these pedagogical concerns that best explain why the *Stromateis* is known to the modern reader as a difficult book. Clement expresses himself

¹⁶ Raoul Mortley, 'The Theme of Silence in Clement of Alexandria', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 24 (1973), 197–202, at 200.

unclearly, uses numerous digressive references to other writers, and tends to jump from one topic to another. In his monograph, *The Conception of the Gospel in the Alexandrian Theology*, Einar Molland characterized Clement's 'chief work', the *Stromateis*, as 'a heap of theological essays' with no system in it, because 'Clement is no systematician and no scholastic and no thinker capable of penetrating analyses'.¹⁷ This attitude to the *Stromateis* and to Clement in general is not uncommon,¹⁸ especially when Clement is compared with the other great Alexandrian theologian, Origen, system-builder *par excellence*. However, seeing that Clement's two other main works, the *Protrepticus* and the *Paedagogus*, both have a developed and clear argumentation as well as structure, it is evident that Clement's specific way of writing in the *Stromateis* is not simply due to inability.¹⁹

Scriptural concealment

Moreover, it is possible to detect what might have been an additional reason behind Clement's symbolic writing method, a reason that is often overlooked. In *Strom.* 1.13.2 Clement writes: 'The Lord ... did not reveal to the people

¹⁷ Einar Molland, *The Conception of the Gospel in the Alexandrian Theology* (Oslo, 1938), 12.

¹⁸ Eugène de Faye, *Clément d'Alexandrie. Étude sur les rapports du christianisme et de la philosophie grecque au IIe siècle* (Paris, 1906), 78–111, 126–48 and John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York, 1974), 106, share the view of Molland.

¹⁹ Cf. Eric F. Osborn, 'Clément, Plotin et l'Un', in Claude Mondésert (ed.), *ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΙΝΑ. Hellénisme, judaïsme et christianisme à Alexandrie. Mélanges offerts au P. Claude Mondésert* (Paris, 1987), 173–89, at 174.

in the street what was not for them; only to a few, to whom he knew it to be apposite, those who could accept the mysteries and be conformed to them.' So what did the Lord do? He talked to the people in *parables*: 'for neither prophecy nor the Saviour Himself announced the divine mysteries simply as to be apprehended by all and sundry, but expressed them in parables' (παραβολαῖς) (*Strom.* 6.124.3).²⁰

Clement defines a parable as a kind of metaphorical description: 'a narration based on some subject which is not the principal subject, but similar to the principal subject, and leading him who understands to what is the true and principal thing' (*Strom.* 6.126.4). Because it was not suitable for all to understand, both the Scriptures and the teaching of the Lord are veiled in parables—the Scriptures have a 'parabolic style'.²¹ Clement goes on to describe the actual coming of the Lord, the incarnation, as the parable *par excellence*. The Lord himself came in the likeness of something he was not: 'Wherefore also the Lord, who was not of the world, came as one who was of the world to men' (*Strom.* 6.126.3).²² For those who do not know the truth, Clement writes, the whole 'economy which prophesied of

²⁰ Cf. also *Strom.* 1.56.2: τὰς ἀποκρύφους τῆς ἀληθοῦς γνώσεως παραδόσεις ὑψηλῶς ἐρμηνευομένας ἐκδέχεσθαι κελεύων... οὐχὶ δὲ πᾶσιν ἀνέδην ἐκδιδόναι τὰ ἐν παραβολαῖς εἰρημένα πρὸς αὐτοὺς παραγγέλλων ('He is telling us to receive the secret traditions of true knowledge, interpreted with outstanding loftiness ... not to offer them to all without reserve, when he only pronounced thoughts in parables to them').

²¹ παραβολικὸς γὰρ ὁ χαρακτήρ ὑπάρχει τῶν γραφῶν, *Strom.* 6.126.3.

²² Cf. the distinction between δόξα and ἐπιστήμη in Plato, *Rep.*, and δόξα–σοφία as a traditional theme from Plato on.

the Lord appears indeed a parable' (*Strom.* 6.127.1). In this way the Scriptures hide the meaning, he writes, for reasons which remind us of the arguments of the first book: that 'we may become inquisitive, and be ever on the watch for the discovery of the words of salvation'; or that those who do not understand 'might not receive harm in consequence of taking in another sense the things declared for salvation by the Holy Spirit' (*Strom.* 6.126.1).

THEORY OF SYMBOLISM: THE INADEQUACY OF LANGUAGE

In Book 5 of the *Stromateis*, which also contains some of the most extensive sections on the concept of God, Clement expands his views on the inadequacy of language to communicate truth: in this book he gives his theory of symbolism,²³ or 'the mode of symbolic interpretation' (*τὸ τῆς συμβολικῆς ἐρμηνείας εἶδος*, *Strom.* 5.46.1)—of the importance of wrapping divine things up in enigmas, allegories, or figures. I shall return to this aspect in the next chapter, then related more specifically to the ineffability of God. It is, however, relevant in the present context as well. Speaking in symbolic, indirect terms has many benefits: 'Very useful, then, is the mode of symbolic interpretation

²³ Eric F. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, 1957), 10, writes: 'Clement is the first person to give a theory of symbolism and to attempt to justify it rationally'.

(τὸ τῆς συμβολικῆς ἐρμηνείας εἶδος) for many purposes; and it is helpful to the right theology, and to piety, and to the display of intelligence, and the practice of brevity, and the exhibition of wisdom' (*Strom.* 5.46.1).

Clement's persistence in using this indirect, symbolic expression as a prerequisite for transmitting the Christian truth is evident all through the *Stromateis*. It is the only way of conveying the message of the Scriptures and the 'barbarian philosophy' which is consistent with the message as well as with its recipients, or audience. Mystery (μυστήριον) or *gnosis*, is both the form in which truth is imparted and truth itself: 'The mysteries are transmitted mysteriously' (τὰ μυστήρια μυστικῶς παραδίδονται, *Strom.* 1.13.4).

Therefore, in the absence of oral teaching, the only way left is to set forth the sacred truths in a veiled manner and camouflage one's thoughts in ways that may be summed up in what Clement calls his 'method of concealment' (τῆς ἐπικρύψεως τὸν τρόπον, *Strom.* 5.19.3; 5.45.1).

Thus, for instance, the limitation that resides in mere words in which truth cannot be contained, makes it necessary for Clement to resort to the use of paradox: 'to reveal something without uncovering it (ἐπικρυπτομένη ἐκφῆναι) or to demonstrate it without saying anything' (δείξαι σιωπῶσα). This same point is made in *Strom.* 1.10.1: 'Anyone . . . should walk towards the truth which shows through Scripture things which are not written in Scripture' (βαδιζέτω ἐπὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν τὴν ἐγγράφως τὰ ἄγραφα δηλοῦσαν).

So, the crucial point that Clement makes in the *Stromateis* (and especially in the first book) is precisely that the unwritten teaching is revealed through writing and not in a

purely oral manner. The mysterious truths in question are unwritten teachings inscribed into the text itself (*Strom.* 1.10.1).²⁴ These truths have been 'purposefully scattered' like seeds throughout the book. In this way truth appears like a riddle, an *αἴνιγμα*, to be deciphered by the careful reader: 'My *Stromateis* will embrace the truth which is mixed in with the dogmas of philosophy—or rather which is covered in or hidden within them, as the edible part of the nut is covered by the shell' (*Strom.* 1.18.1).

On the last page of the last (seventh) book of the *Stromateis* he sums it all up as follows: 'Having completed this introduction, and given a summary outline of ethical philosophy, wherein we have scattered (ἐγκατασπείραντες) the sparks of the doctrines of the true knowledge dispersedly here and there, as we promised, so that it should not be easy for the uninitiated who came across them to discover the holy traditions' (*Strom.* 7.110.4).²⁵

It is, then, hardly anywhere in his writings, a question of a secret unwritten doctrine that would remain inaccessible to the reader whose only source of information is the author's written work. It is rather a question of adapting the message to the needs and capacities of different categories of readers and not to speak in the same manner to everyone. Clement's work was obviously not directed to beginners, but rather to the more advanced student who had already received some instruction. This also means that the book may be read and understood in more than one way, a purpose he achieved by deliberately setting forth the truth in a veiled, indirect

²⁴ So also *Strom.* 6.61 and 131.

²⁵ Trans. Chadwick.

manner. In this way he can hide the meaning from the arrogant or impure and reveal new things to those who believe: 'For only to those that often approach them, and have given them a trial by faith and in their whole life, will they supply the real philosophy and the true theology' (*Strom.* 5.56.3).

Lastly, in addition to these pedagogical and moral reasons, the obscurity should also be seen in relation to the literary genre that Clement chose when writing this work. 'Stromateis' may be interpreted as 'notes' or 'memoranda', and the work belongs to a type of writing not uncommon in Antiquity, characterized by a loose and digressive structure.²⁶ It stands in contrast to more strictly composed pieces of writing, and is no doubt well suited to Clement's contemplative type of theology.

ESOTERIC KNOWLEDGE AND GNOSIS

It is not uncommon to suppose that Clement's so-called esoteric knowledge is synonymous with his concept of *gnōsis* (γνῶσις), a teaching that is reserved only for the few, the more advanced and spiritual Christians. This is hardly

²⁶ See Annewies van den Hoek, 'Techniques of Quotation in Clement of Alexandria: A View of Ancient Literary Working Methods', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 50 (1996), 223–43 and Jaap Mansfeld, *Prolegomena. Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden, 1994) who points out that speaking and writing in unclear and hidden ways has a long tradition in Antiquity.

correct, as is evident if we look into what Clement understands by the word *gnosis*, a concept which undoubtedly plays an important role in his philosophy.²⁷ It will suffice here, however, to mention the aspects that are most relevant in the present context.

Gnosis, as mentioned above, may be seen as a twofold thing: it is, on the one hand, a subject matter and, on the other, a way or a process. As to the first aspect, *gnosis* is often used as an equivalent of God's message in Scripture, also called a mystery, or even mysteries. The mysteries of God that are veiled in the prophecies have, according to Clement, been revealed in our time: it is the paradox of the coming of the Lord (*Protr.* 111.2). *Gnosis* is thus essentially the Logos himself, or Christ, the mystery of God.

Man's object is to know God, to have knowledge of God (*γνώσις τοῦ θεοῦ*); it is a knowledge that man was intended to have: 'We call upon man, who was made for the contemplation of heaven, and is in truth a heavenly plant, to come to the knowledge of God' (*Protr.* 100.3).

The foundation of *gnosis* is faith (*πίστις*) and the two cannot be separated: 'Now neither is knowledge without faith, nor faith without knowledge' (*ἡδὴ δὲ οὐτε ἡ γνώσις ἄνευ πίστεως οὐθ' ἡ πίστις ἄνευ γνώσεως*) (*Strom.* 5.1.3). To have knowledge of God is to be part of a process, leading from faith via *gnosis* to the love of God. Faith and love represent the beginning and the end of this process:

²⁷ In Stählin's index the word figures 240 times (not included *γνωστικός* and *γνωστικῶς*). Cf. Walther Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Clemens Alexandrinus* (Berlin, 1952).

‘Knowledge added to faith and love to knowledge, and to love, the heavenly inheritance’ (*Strom.* 7.55.7). Moreover, Clement describes a gnostic as a person whose gnosis is demonstrated through his activities: ‘The gnostic ... being on the one hand not without a knowledge of God (or rather being known by him), and on the other hand showing the effects thereof ... For works (*τὰ ἔργα*) follow knowledge, as the shadow the body’ (*Strom.* 7.82).

It is rather obvious, then, that Clement, instead of emphasizing that gnosis or knowledge is for the select few, repeatedly insists that it is reserved for anyone who approaches it in faith; and, as we have seen, faith and knowledge are inseparable. The reason why knowledge is not in everyone is simply that not all men have faith (*Strom.* 5.1); but those who seek Him ‘after a true search (*κατὰ τὴν ζήτησιν τὴν ἀληθῆ*) ... shall be filled with the gift that comes from God, that is, true knowledge (*τῆς γνώσεως*)’ (*Strom.* 5.12.2). So, as I stated above (Ch. 2), the language of Gnosticism and gnosis is part of Clement’s own language. His understanding and use of it was different indeed from many of his contemporary Gnostics.

Clement's Concept of God (I): The Apophatic Essence of the Father

In the present chapter I shall focus on the way Clement expresses his views of God, the first principle. In the next chapter I shall move on to Clement's description of the Son, the Logos of God.

Though Clement received influences from a variety of philosophical and religious movements of his time, it may be argued that Middle Platonism is the philosophical school with which he shared the most. With the outline of the philosophy of three leading representatives of pagan Middle Platonism in Chapter 3 as a background, Clement's own thoughts will appear in a larger perspective and less isolated than if viewed mainly within a theological context.

Though it is not my intention to compare the thought of Clement in all areas with Middle Platonism or to trace in detail the verbal parallels,¹ I shall, whenever it is useful, refer

¹ This is the approach of Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1971). He also includes the Apologists, Gnostic writers, and Philo.

to our three Platonists' views of the divine beings or first principles in order to perceive more clearly both the Platonists and Clement himself.

I shall begin this chapter on the concept of God by pointing to the problem that is felt in all religious systems where the first or ultimate is said to be transcendent, as is the case also in Clement's theology: how to describe what is beyond description?

In the second part I shall focus on the concept of being (*οὐσία*) with derivatives that Clement employs in his attempt to describe nonetheless the being of God.

THE DILEMMA OF TRANSCENDENCE: THE INEFFABILITY OF GOD

It is stated in many ways and in different contexts in Clement's writings that the ultimate principle is indeed ineffable, or inexpressible: 'For the God of the universe who is above all speech, conception and thought, can never be the object of writing, as he is inexpressible (*ἄρρητος*) in his own *dynamis*' (*Strom.* 5.65.2). We have already seen that Clement preferred to express orally—and only reluctantly conceded to write down—the opinions of men concerning the divine, the sacred truths of Scripture, and his own thoughts on theology and other subjects; this preference becomes even more pronounced when it comes to the question of God himself. For central to Clement's concept of God is that he cannot be expressed by man since he is above both human

speech and human thought; his being cannot be expressed within the realm of senses—as something written down and therefore physical. Clement finds this theme in earlier writers as well; both Plato and Moses are used to demonstrate this aspect of his view of God. In the following passage he is quoting *Tim.* 28c as well as alluding to Moses' meeting with God on the mountain of Sinai:

For both is it a difficult task to discover the Father and Maker of this universe; and having found Him, it is impossible to declare Him to all. For this is by no means capable of expression, like the other subjects of instruction', says the truth-loving Plato. For he that had heard right well that the all-wise Moses, ascending the mount for holy contemplation, ... commands that the whole people do not accompany him. And when the Scripture says, 'Moses entered into the thick darkness where God was', this shows to those capable of understanding that God is invisible and beyond expression by words. (*Strom.* 5.78.1–3, trans. ANF)

The way Clement writes off religious language, claiming that words cannot convey God who is beyond language, naturally represents a problem. It is true, as Eric Osborn writes, that 'every thinker who has called God ineffable, has nevertheless continued to speak of him'.² Clement is no exception. Though God cannot be expressed, Clement all the same describes him, in many ways and with many names—as the All, the Father of the universe, the One and so on. This dilemma of transcendence is obvious in Clement's writings as well as in other writings of the so-called

² Eric F. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, 1957), 31.

mystical tradition, East and West. The transcendent must be beyond names, ineffable. In order to claim that he is beyond names, however, I must give him a name, 'the transcendent'. The denial that the transcendent can be named must in some sense be valid, and insofar as it is valid, the formal statement of ineffability turns back on itself, and we are caught in a linguistic regress.³

However, when Clement speaks of God, he is conscious of the limitation, or even paradox, inherent in the use of words. This may be seen in a passage on the problem of naming God:

And if we give him a name, either we call him the One or the Good or Mind or Being or Father or God or the Demiurge or Lord, we do not do it in a correct way, and we do not talk as if conferring a name on him. But because of our helplessness, we use nice names so that our mind may have these things to lean upon and not wander at random. For one by one they do not contain information about God, but all together they are indicative of the power of the Almighty. (*Strom.* 5.82.1–2, my trans.)⁴

It seems, then, that Clement knows this practice of naming God to be logically incorrect, but it must be tolerated for the sake of our helplessness, our humanity. This problem of the incommensurability between man and God—the dilemma

³ Cf. Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago, 1994), 2.

⁴ καὶν ὀνομάζωμεν αὐτό ποτε, οὐ κυρίως καλοῦντες ἥτοι ἐν ἡ τὰγαθὸν ἡ νοῦν ἡ αὐτὸ τὸ ὄν ἡ πατέρα ἡ θεὸν ἡ δημιουργὸν ἡ κύριον, οὐχ ὡς ὄνομα αὐτοῦ προφερόμενοι λέγομεν, ὑπὸ δὲ ἀπορίας ὀνόμασι καλοῖς προσχρώμεθα, ἵν' ἔχῃ ἡ διάνοια, μὴ περὶ ἄλλα πλανωμένη, ἐπερείδεσθαι τούτοις. οὐ γὰρ τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον μηνυτικὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ ἀθρόως ἅπαντα ἐνδεικτικὰ τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δυνάμεως (*Strom.* 5.82.1–2). Cf. also Justin, 2. *Apology* 6.1.

of God's transcendence and otherness—'how ever could a creature subject to birth draw near to the unborn and the uncreated?' (*Strom.* 2.5.4)—is something that Clement grapples with in many areas of his theology. He offers, as we shall see, different solutions to it.

Describing the indescribable: alpha privatives

One of the devices is an extensive use of alpha privatives. In his article 'The Fundamentals of the Via Negativa' Raoul Mortley alerts us to the fact that negative adjectives can have a wide range of meanings—or employ various degrees of hyperbole. He also maintains that the mere use of the alpha privative does not constitute negative theology: 'A fully-fledged apophatic theology requires a systematic use of the negative, "not" (οὐκ), thus producing privations that are unambiguous.'⁵

The theological language of the first centuries of the Christian era abounds in alpha privatives. We find them in Gnostic literature and the Hermetic corpus, as well as in Middle Platonism, Christian and pagan. The preponderance of this type of adjective is, it seems, a sign of the religious sensibility, the sense of the transcendent, and the belief in deity that was typical of the time.⁶ Using the negative adjective was primarily an honorific gesture, a way of showing one's respect for the transcendent, more than an act of

⁵ Raoul Mortley, 'The Fundamentals of the Via Negativa', *American Journal of Philology*, 103 (1982), 429–39, at 432.

⁶ Thus Mortley, 'The Fundamentals', 433.

describing God: 'To say that God is invisible or unknowable may simply mean that he is seen only with difficulty, and it is clear that the rather airy use of the alpha privatives in this period suggests little more than a new awe of the transcendent.'⁷ Nevertheless, it is here that the *via negativa* to the knowledge of God takes its beginnings. Clement is the first Christian writer who systematically employs the method of abstraction in relation to God (in Ch. 7 this will be developed in more detail).

In *Stromateis* Book 6 Clement claims that the Greeks too worshipped the same God as the Christians, but because they did not know the Son, their knowledge was not complete. In this one section, by citing the apocryphal work *Kerygma Petrou* (the *Teaching of Peter*, c. AD 125), Clement brings together a considerable part of his alpha privatives:

And that the most approved men among the Greeks did not have direct knowledge about God but only indirect, Peter says in his *Preaching*: 'Know then, that God is one; he who made the beginning of everything and has the authority over the end.' And he is 'the Invisible (ὁ ἀόρατος) who sees everything, the Uncontained (ἀχώρητος) who contains everything, needing nothing (ἀνεπιδεής) whom all things need and through whom they are; incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτος), everlasting (ἀέναος), incorruptible (ἀφθαρτος), uncreated (ἀποίητος) who created everything by the Logos of his *dynamis*', that is his Son (*Strom.* 6.39.1–3).

This is only one example of many. In order to give a clear overview of this terminology, I provide the following list of the most-used alpha privatives in the works of Clement as

⁷ Mortley, 'The Fundamentals', 433.

far as they refer to God. Though the preponderance of the negative adjectives are found in *Stromateis*, there are also examples in his other works:

ἀόρατος	invisible
ἀέनाος	eternal
ἀδιαίρετος	indivisible
ἀκατάληπτος	incomprehensible
ἄπειρος	infinite or without limit
ἄγνωστος	unknown
ἀγέννητος	unbegotten
ἄωνόμαστος	without name
ἄρρητος	inexpressable, unspeakable
ἄφθεγκτος	unutterable, unspeakable
ἀποίητος	unmade, uncreated
ἄναρχος	without beginning
ἄσχημάτιστος	without form
ἀπερίγραφτος	incapable of being circumscribed
ἄχώρητος	uncontained
ἄπαθής	without passion
ἀνεπιδεής/ἀενδεής	without need
ἄφθαρτος	incorruptible

The alpha privative most widely used by Clement in relation to God is ἄρρητος ('ineffable/inexpressible'). We have already explored in some detail Clement's view that the divine cannot be expressed in words; the term ἄρρητος (once he uses ἄφθεγκτος) seems in Clement's eyes to be the appropriate way of conveying this uncompromising attitude to man's inability to express the divine: 'What is divine is unutterable (ἄφθεγκτος) by human power' (*Strom.* 5.79.1).

This term is also the most radical: God may be uncontained, unbegotten, without form, without need, and without limit, but to declare him unutterable or ineffable is somehow to place him completely out of reach for the human mind.

This is certainly an aspect of God which Clement uses a great amount of energy and space to impart; considerable parts of three chapters of Book 5 of the *Stromateis* are dedicated to the mystery and ineffability of God. The climax of the section, or Clement's 'most pungent paragraph',⁸ deserves to be quoted *in extenso*:

And John the Apostle says: 'Nobody has ever seen God. The only-begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, has explained him', giving the bosom of God the names invisibility (τὸ ἀόρατον) and ineffability (ἄρρητον). Therefore some have called it the Abyss as it includes and embraces everything which is inaccessible and infinite.

The discourse about God is most difficult to handle. For since the beginning of everything is difficult to discover, it follows that the first and oldest principle of everything is difficult to exhibit—the principle which is also the cause both of the beginning of all things and their continued existence.

For how can one find words for that which is neither genus nor differentia nor species nor individual nor number, not even accident or subject of accident? One could not rightly describe him as 'the whole', as the whole comes under the category of magnitude—and he is the Father of all. Nor can one speak of him as having parts. For the One is indivisible (ἀδιαίρετον) and therefore also infinite (ἄπειρον), not in the sense of being inexhaustible to thought, but in the sense of being without extension (ἀδιάστατον) or limit

⁸ Eric F. Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge, 1993), 54.

(μὴ ἔχον πέρας), and thus without form (ἀσχημάτιστον) and name (ἄνωνόμαστον). (*Strom.* 5.81.3–6, my trans.)

The story of Moses who met God in darkness on mount Sinai is a metaphor of God's inexpressibility that Clement employs several times: 'And when the Scripture says "Moses entered the darkness where God was", this is clear for those capable of understanding, that God is invisible (ἀόρατος) and inexpressible' (ἄρρητος) (*Strom.* 5.78.3, my trans.). The same idea is expressed in the Book 2 of the *Stromateis*:

Therefore, Moses—as he was convinced that God is not to be known by human wisdom, says: 'Show thyself to me' and is forced to enter 'into the darkness' where the voice of God was, that is—into the inaccessible and invisible concepts of being (εἰς τὰς ἀδύτους καὶ ἀειδεῖς περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἐννοίας). For God is neither in darkness nor in space, but above both space, time and created things. Similarly he is not found in any section, nor does he contain anything or is contained by anything. Neither is he subject to limit or division. (*Strom.* 2.6.1–2, my trans.)

Alpha privatives in Middle Platonism

If we turn to our three Middle Platonists to check their use of precisely the privatives mentioned above as applied to the first principle, the coincidence in use appears to be rather limited. In the fragments of Atticus and Numenius very few of them are in use at all, and when they are, they are always applied to 'essence', 'soul', the 'elements', or 'cosmos', not to God or the first principle.

Such too is the case in Alcinous' *Didascalicus*. Even though he employs more of the alpha privatives listed above, most of them are not used of God specifically. In the theological chapter proper, only ἄρρητος is employed, but is then used three times and in all instances attributed to God.

This does not mean, however, that these writers are devoid of alpha privatives in relation to God; to a certain extent they use different ones from those used by Clement—besides, of course, their literary remnants are of a very different (i.e. smaller) size.⁹

Silence

Another response to the dilemma of the absolute difference between man and God, is that of silence. Clement's view of language—and not only in its written form—as limiting and limited, and his use of enigmas and symbols when concerned with ultimate transcendence, both suggest this step, that of *silence*. Silence has for Clement two aspects, one being the ethical, the other the epistemological aspect. Looked upon from the ethical point of view, it is a virtue recommended for women and young people (*Paed.* 2.58). What interests us here, however, is the use of silence as an epistemological and even devotional device:

Among intelligible beings must be honoured that which is eldest in origin, the timeless unoriginated principle, the first-fruit of all

⁹ Alcinous, for instance, also employs ἀκίνητος (unmoved, *Did.* 10.164.23) and ἀπροσδεής (without want of more, *Did.* 10.164.32) in relation to God.

existing things, the Son. From him we may learn about the cause which is beyond (τὸ ἐπέκεινα αἵτιον), the Father of the universe, the most ancient and beneficent of all, no longer transmitted by word of mouth but only revered in adoring silence and holy fear (σεβάσματι δὲ καὶ σιγῇ μετὰ ἐκπλήξεως ἁγίας σεβαστόν); declared by the Lord so far as it was possible for the learners to understand, but apprehended by those whom the Lord has chosen for knowledge, who have had their senses exercised. (*Strom.* 7.2.2–3)

Whereas language is seen as a commitment to the senses, the mind is the medium through which man may worship God in ‘silence and holy fear’ (*Strom.* 7.2.3), in some kind of speechless contemplation. So when enigmas, metaphors, and allegories have imperfectly pointed at the truth, what is left is nothing but silence. The cause which is beyond (τὸ ἐπέκεινα αἵτιον) lies beyond the realm of language and cannot be transmitted by words, but is to be worshipped in silence (σιγῇ).

It is clear that the theme of silence is related to the *via negativa*, the way of negation and abstraction (see below, Ch. 7), since the transcendence of the Father is held to imply that he is beyond description or predication.¹⁰ God can only be grasped by negation, in our knowing ‘not what he is, but what he is not’ (*Strom.* 5.71.3), and the most appropriate response is silence. Silence is for Clement a symbol of a higher form of knowledge, a symbol of pure thought. Words, belonging to the realm of senses, are naturally of a

¹⁰ Cf. Raoul Mortley, ‘The Theme of Silence in Clement of Alexandria’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 24 (1973), 197–202, at 200.

lower quality. Besides being the most appropriate homage paid to God, silence is also that in which the right apprehension of God is realized. The search for God, for which a description in mystical language is alone appropriate, culminates in the adoration of God in silence.

This state of silence is, however, in Clement's mind never a last and abiding place. For by the paradox which lies at the heart of Christianity, the incarnation, the Son became part of the world of senses and of language and became the revealer of hidden truths; so he broke the long-standing silence that existed prior to his coming (*Protr.* 10.1). Clement's insistence on the Son's function as mediator between God and man as his Logos, or Word, is evident in all his writings, and is the topic of the next chapter.

THE ESSENCE OF GOD

Clement's pessimism about the efficacy of language as a medium for representing the truth, is, as we have seen, closely related to his interest in negative theology. His view that words and language can only indirectly convey the nature and character of God, seems to run like a scarlet thread through much of his writings. This view of language also provides Clement with the context for his use of the *via negativa* to the knowledge of God. Chapter 7 will study in more detail the apophatic way, or the 'method of abstraction', as well as the positive, or kataphatic way to knowledge of God.

Clement attempts, as we have seen, many ways of expressing God's transcendence and remoteness, of expressing that which cannot be expressed, including the ways of metaphor and allegory as well as an extensive use of alpha privatives. The most important aspect of what might be called his negative theology is, however, his application of the term *οὐσία*, and also *τὸ ὄν* and *ὁ ὢν*, to denote the being of God. The rest of the present chapter will illustrate these ontological aspects of God.

The concept of *οὐσία*, *τὸ ὄν*, and *ὁ ὢν*

In fourth-century trinitarian debate it was a central problem how to express at one and the same time divine unity and the diversity of the Godhead, the coincidence in God of the monad and the triad. The Christian Fathers had by then chosen the word *οὐσία* to express the reality or nature common to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The term is not found in the Bible, but belongs to the language of pre-Christian philosophy; it was, however, from an early stage used by Christian philosophers and writers in a sense which was also specifically theological, among others by Clement.

Though the history of the word goes back well beyond the time of Plato, Plato is the first writer to use the term *οὐσία* in a philosophical sense, as distinct from that of 'wealth' or 'possessions'. Its meaning in Plato was manifold, but its philosophical meaning emerging in the fourth century BC may be circumscribed by words like 'substance', 'existence',

‘reality’, ‘essence’, ‘nature’, but also extending to ‘material’ or ‘stuff’.¹¹

In Patristic Greek the term *οὐσία* likewise covers a whole range of meanings; most of them are, however, either concerned with *οὐσία* related to ‘being’ and ‘substance’ in a general sense, or *οὐσία* in a theological sense, related to the being or nature of God.¹²

Clement, in agreement with his own age, employs the term *οὐσία* in a variety of meanings, most of which do not interest us here. With the classifications of Lampe and Stead combined as my basis, I shall discuss Clement’s use of *οὐσία* both in a general sense (sense (1) below), and when it appears in a theological context (as in (2) below).

In an etymological perspective, the word *οὐσία* means ‘being’; it is the abstract noun connected with the verb ‘to be’. Both in Greek philosophical language and also in the writings of Clement it is closely related to another abstract, *τὸ ὄν*, ‘that which is’, and also to the substantivized masculine present participle of ‘to be’, *ὁ ὢν*, ‘he who is’. Though the term *οὐσία* is by far the one most commonly employed by Clement to name or symbolize God’s essence or nature,

¹¹ For the historical background of the concept of *οὐσία* I am primarily indebted to Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (New York and Oxford, 1977), 131–56. Cf. also George L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London, 1952) and T. B. Strong, ‘The History of the Theological Term “Substance”, Parts 1–3,’ *Journal of Theological Studies*, 2: 224–35; 3: 22–40; 4: 28–45 (1901–3).

¹² Geoffrey H. W. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961). Stead, *Divine Substance*, observes seven different senses of the word in Late Antiquity. It is important to note, however, as Stead does (158), that ‘although the term *οὐσία* was used in various senses, for the most part the variations were not detected (by the ancients themselves)’.

as well as the one most relevant to my present topic, I shall also include examples of his use of the Septuagint designation $\delta \ \acute{\omega}\nu$ as well as the philosophical term $\tau\acute{o} \ \acute{\omicron}\nu$.

With regard to Clement's use of $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ in connection with the being of God, it all seems to boil down to two, more or less distinguishable, senses: (1) $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ as a general definition of being, for instance fr. 37 (from a lost work *On Providence*, quoted in Maximus Confessor): $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha \ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\nu \ \tau\acute{o} \ \delta\iota' \ \acute{\omicron}\lambda\omicron\upsilon \ \acute{\upsilon}\phi\epsilon\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ ('being is that which exists in everything'). This sense is also found in the Middle Platonist Atticus, fr. 4: 'and all the other artificers, who pursue the constructive arts, have this power to bring some non-existent thing into existence ($\tau\iota \ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu \ \omicron\upsilon\kappa \ \acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\omega\upsilon\alpha\iota \ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\epsilon\iota\nu \ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma \ \omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$)'. It should be noted, however, that the context of fr. 37 is not philosophical, but theological: 'Being is God in God. Divine being is eternal and without beginning, incorporeal and uncircumscribed, and the cause of what exists. Being is that which exists in everything.'¹³ Whereas the last sentence may be said to be a general characterization of being,¹⁴ the context tells us that $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ is also identical with God's nature, thus indicating that God and being in the general sense of reality may be hard to separate.

¹³ $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha \ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\nu \ \acute{\epsilon}\pi\acute{\iota} \ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon \ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$. $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha \ \theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha \ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\nu \ \acute{\alpha}\acute{\iota}\delta\acute{\iota}\omicron\acute{\nu} \ \tau\iota \ \kappa\alpha\acute{\iota} \ \acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\rho\chi\omicron\nu \ \acute{\alpha}\sigma\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu \ \tau\epsilon \ \kappa\alpha\acute{\iota} \ \acute{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\gamma\rho\alpha\pi\tau\omicron\nu \ \kappa\alpha\acute{\iota} \ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu \ \acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\omega\upsilon\alpha\iota \ \acute{\alpha}\acute{\iota}\tau\iota\omicron\nu$. $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha \ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\nu \ \tau\acute{o} \ \delta\iota' \ \acute{\omicron}\lambda\omicron\upsilon \ \acute{\upsilon}\phi\epsilon\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ (fr. 37).

¹⁴ This is the interpretation of Stead, *Divine Substance*, 135. Cf. also Christoph Marksches, 'Was bedeutet $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$? Zwei Antworten bei Origenes und Ambrosius und deren Bedeutung für ihre Bibelerklärung und Theologie', in W. Geerlings and H. König (eds.), *Origenes. Vir ecclesiasticus* (Bonn, 1995), 59–82.

(2) *Οὐσία* is more typically used to denote the most permanent form of being, as ‘substance’, as an unchangeable, irreducible fact,¹⁵ or as ‘ultimate reality’.¹⁶ I shall in the following concentrate on this latter application of the term, of which there are many examples in Clement’s writings, as well as in two of our three Middle Platonists.

There is a typical example in Book 4 of the *Stromateis*, where the identification of God with *οὐσία* is evident. God is here also given two other epithets: he is ‘the good’ (*τἀγαθόν*) and he is ‘mind’ (*νοῦς*): ‘Now God, who is without beginning, is the perfect beginning of the universe, and the producer of the beginning. As, then, He is being (*ἡ μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν οὐσία*), He is the first principle of nature, as he is good, of morals; as He is mind, on the other hand, He is the first principle of reasoning and of judgment’ (*Strom.* 4.162.5).¹⁷

In *Protr.* 117.1 he is called ‘the highest essence of all beings’ (*τῆς ἀρίστης τῶν ὄντων οὐσίας*), and in *Protr.* 88.2 we are exhorted to ‘hasten to be gathered together into one love corresponding to the union of the One Being’ (*κατὰ τὴν τῆς μοναδικῆς οὐσίας ἔνωσιν*). He is also called the ‘immutable essence’ (*οὐσίαν ἀμετάβλητον*, *Strom.* 6.80.2) and the ‘intellectual essence’ (*τὴν νοητὴν οὐσίαν*, *Strom.* 7.40.1).

¹⁵ Cf. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 138–42.

¹⁶ Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 982.

¹⁷ ὁ θεὸς δὲ ἀναρχος, ἀρχὴ τῶν ὄλων παντελής, ἀρχῆς ποιητικός. ἡ μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν οὐσία, ἀρχὴ τοῦ φυσικοῦ τόπου· καθ’ ὅσον ἐστὶν τἀγαθόν, τοῦ ἠθικοῦ· ἡ δ’ αὖ ἐστὶ νοῦς, τοῦ λογικοῦ καὶ κριτικοῦ τόπου’ (*Strom.* 4.162.5).

In *Strom.* 2 Clement distinguishes between a disciple and his master, which is paralleled in the distinction between man and God, and writes: 'No disciple is above his master; it is enough if he is like his master. Not in essence (*οὐ κατ' οὐσίαν*); for it is impossible for that which is by adoption to be equal in substance to that which is by nature' (*Strom.* 2.77.4). The nature or *οὐσία* of God, then, is seen by Clement as essentially different from that of man. The same idea is reflected in Clement's rejection of man's ability to participate in God's nature (below, Ch. 8).

In addition to the rather widespread use of *οὐσία* in Clement's writings to characterize the inner nature of God, his essence or substance, let us briefly consider the two other concepts of being in Clement, *τὸ ὄν* and *ὁ ὢν*. Whereas the first is taken from the philosophical vocabulary, the second is the well known Septuagint designation of God.

The LXX designation of God, 'He that is' (*ὁ ὢν*) of Exodus 3.14 'God spoke to Moses, saying: "I am He that is"' (*εἶπεν ὁ Θεὸς πρὸς Μωυσῆς λέγων· Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν*), which was taken over by Christian writers as an epithet of God, is sometimes used by Clement. Once, for instance, when commenting on the second commandment of the Decalogue, Clement claims that this commandment means that men ought not to transfer God's name to things which human artificers have made, 'among which "He that is" (*ὁ ὢν*) is not ranked'. He then goes on: 'For in his uncreated identity, "he that is", is absolutely alone' (*ἐν ταυτότητι γὰρ ἀγενήτῳ ὁ ὢν αὐτὸς μόνος*) (*Strom.* 6.137.3).

In *Paed.* 1.71 Clement directs his argument against those who think that the just one is not also good. He quotes from

John 17 where Jesus claims his unity with the Father, and Clement uses this as an argument against the Marcionites when they teach two Gods. In this connection he further characterizes God, both by the abstract ‘the One’ (τὸ ἓν) as well as the Exodus 3.14 designation:¹⁸ ‘God is one, and he is even beyond the One and above unity itself (ἐν δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ ἐνὸς καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτὴν μονάδα). The point is that the pronoun “Thou”, with its vocative force, refers to God, he who alone is (τὸν ὄντως μόνον ὄντα), that is who was and who is and who shall be (ὃς ἦν καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται), according to the three different time values that the one phrase “he who is” (ὁ ὢν) connotes’ (*Paed.* 1.71.1–2).

In *Strom.* 7.29.1 God is also termed ‘the self-existent’ (αὐτὸ τὸ ὄν) that cannot be confined in temples made by human hands or be localized in a shrine as the heathen gods are, and *Protr.* 7.3 says about the Son: ‘Not long ago the pre-existent Saviour appeared on earth; He who exists in God (ὁ ἐν τῷ ὄντι ὢν, lit. “he who exists in the existent”) appeared as our teacher.’

Οὐσία, τὸ ὄν, and ὁ ὢν in the Middle Platonists

In Alcinous’ *Didascalicus* there is at least one example of the term οὐσία used in a general, philosophical sense, as opposed to ‘accidents’ (*Did.* 5.156.24–7). It is also used to define the idea, or form, as well as the soul: ‘Form

¹⁸ Cf. also *Strom.* 5.34.5 and 6.166.4.

is considered ... in relation to itself, essence (οὐσία)’ (*Did.* 9.163.14–17), and ‘for it (soul) is an incorporeal essence (οὐσία), unchanging in its substance (κατὰ τὴν ὑπόστασιν) and intelligible, and invisible, and uniform’ (*Did.* 25.177.22–3).

There are also some instances, however, where οὐσία is used, as in Clement, to denote the highest being or first principle: in *Did.* 7.161.13–18 the function of mathematics is said to sharpen the intellect, and ‘that part of mathematics which concerns number instills no slight degree of readiness for the ascent to Being (τὸ ὄν)’, as it is ‘assisting us towards the knowledge of true being’ (συνεργοῦν πρὸς τὴν τῆς οὐσίας γνῶσιν).

In the theological chapter proper (ch. 10) of *Didascalicus* by Alcinous, God is given a whole series of positive attributes or epithets, and among them the term οὐσιότης (‘essentiality’) figures (cf. above, Ch. 3).

Numenius too describes God by the terms οὐσία and τὸ ὄν, in one instance also ὁ ὢν. In fr. 6 he says: ‘But let no man laugh, if I affirm that the name of the incorporeal is “essence” and “being” (οὐσίαν καὶ ὄν).’¹⁹ And he goes on: ‘And the cause of the name “being” is that it has not been generated nor will be destroyed, nor is it subject to any other motion at all, nor any change for better or for worse; but is simple and unchangeable’ (fr. 6).

When in fr. 13 Numenius identifies the first God and Ὁ μὲν γε ὢν, this is—as convincingly argued by John

¹⁹ Ἀλλὰ μὴ γελασάτω τις, εἰὰν φῶ τοῦ ἀσωμάτου εἶναι ὄνομα οὐσίαν καὶ ὄν (fr. 6).

Whittaker—a reminiscence of the Septuagint title of God,²⁰ a title apparently also appealing to circles other than the specifically Jewish and Christian ones.

Atticus, however, does not seem to use either of the terms directly in connection with God or the Demiurge. *Οὐσία* is used several times in a general sense. He also employs it, as Alcinous does (*Did.* 1.152.8–11), when describing the nature of the ideas, which Atticus (like Alcinous) defines as God's thoughts: 'Rather is the supreme and final speculation of Plato's philosophy that which treats of this intelligible and eternal being of the ideas' (τὴν νοητὴν ταύτην καὶ αἰδίον οὐσίαν τὴν τῶν ἰδεῶν, fr. 9.17–20).

It is evident, then, that not only Clement but also Alcinous and Numenius employ the term *οὐσία*, as well as *τὸ ὄν/ὁ ὢν* in relation to God or the first principle; they all seem to identify God and *οὐσία*. Within this theological context *οὐσία* is closely connected with stability, rest, and eternity, whether it concerns *οὐσία* in relation to God or to the ideas.

Thus, the usefulness of stating that God is an *οὐσία*, seems to lie in the connotations of the word; it suggests something that exists in its own right, independent of human experience, something that never changes, and that has no other

²⁰ John Whittaker, 'Moses Atticizing,' *Phoenix*, 21 (1967), 196–201, at 197. Cf. also A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. iii: *Les Doctrines de l'Âme* (Paris, 1953), 44 n. 2 and John Whittaker, 'Numenius and Alcinous on the First Principle,' *Phoenix*, 32 (1978), 144–54. Cf. Mark Edwards, 'Numenius, Fr. 13 (des Places): A Note on Interpretation,' *Mnemosyne*, 42 (1989) who has contested Whittaker's interpretation.

cause for its being. It is also, as Stead writes, a statement that is 'general enough; it leaves a number of options open'.²¹

However, both in Clement and—as we saw in Ch. 3—in Alcinous and Numenius there exist alternative definitions or expressions about God or the first principle. This may indicate that the case is not so clear after all; it has been maintained that Clement also, along with other Middle Platonists, both Christian and pagan, places God beyond essence, thus being undecided or at least inconsistent with regard to this issue. I shall examine the validity of this allegation in the next section.

Is God beyond being?

The notion that God's transcendence implies that he is beyond being, or even beyond *nous*, is, as we have seen, not uncommon in Middle Platonism, Christian or pagan. It was a problem subject to active discussion, and the influence of the famous Platonic 'beyond essence' (*ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*) expression of *Rep.* 509b and of the First Hypothesis of *Parmenides* concerning this question is considerable among philosophers of Middle Platonism.²² In *Rep.* 509b Plato writes about the Good that it 'is itself not essence but still transcends essence (*ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*) in dignity and surpassing power'; and in the First Hypothesis of

²¹ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 273.

²² See John Whittaker, 'Ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 23 (1969), 91–104.

Parmenides the One is denied all attributes, even existence (above, Ch. 3).²³

So, in the first centuries after Christ philosophically minded Christians gradually came to see the One and the Good in Plato as applicable to the Christian God. God was actually given the name the One (τὸ ἓν) by several authors, as well as attributes and descriptions that belonged to the ultimate principle of the *Republic* and the *Parmenides*.

The 'beyond essence' (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) expression of the *Republic* was, in Middle Platonism, widely applied to God and other first principles (the One, the Good, the first Cause, etc.). Greek Christian writers from Justin onward often employed this radical expression which placed God beyond the realm of existence. In Plotinus and Neoplatonism in general, the One is definitely beyond being; but in the Middle Platonic period there is a general lack of internal agreement on this issue, and it has been claimed that the typical attitude is one of undecidedness or inconsistency.²⁴

In my exposition of the concept of God among our three Middle Platonists (above, Ch. 3) I briefly treated the question of whether God is beyond being or not. There I concluded that, whereas Atticus has not left enough material for us to form an opinion, Alcinous seems to identify the first

²³ The meaning of being or οὐσία in this context must in some way be differentiated from the meaning of οὐσία as identical with the nature of God. Though it is not always easy to separate the two senses, we shall interpret 'being' in the context of the ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας expression as 'being' in a general sense, οὐσία as a general definition of reality, as in sense (1) above.

²⁴ Cf. Whittaker, 'Ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας', 92–4. For Justin God is both τὸ ὄν and ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας.

principle with οὐσία and τὸ ὄν, though this judgement has not been unchallenged. Numenius seems to be inconsistent or unclear on the issue.

Let us now turn our attention to Clement. We have already seen that Clement clearly identifies God with οὐσία, ὁ ὢν, and τὸ ὄν. The question is, then, whether he also places God beyond οὐσία.²⁵

Clement never uses the expression of *Rep.* 509b, but there is at least one instance where he seems to agree with Plato: 'Among intelligible beings must be honoured that which is eldest in origin, the timeless unoriginated principle (τὴν ἄχρονον ἀναρχον ἀρχήν), the first-fruit of all existing things (ἀπαρχὴν τῶν ὄντων), the Son. From him we may learn about the cause which is beyond (τὸ ἐπέκεινα αἴτιον), the Father of the universe, the most ancient and beneficent of all' (*Strom.* 7.2.2). The Son, here called 'the timeless, unoriginated principle', is the source of our knowing about 'the cause which is beyond, the Father of the universe'. The Son is also 'the first-fruit of all existing things' or the origin of being and one may infer that the Father is beyond being because he is beyond the Son who is the origin of being—that τὸ ἐπέκεινα αἴτιον is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας.²⁶

There is another paragraph in Book 1 of the *Stromateis* which may imply the same. Here Clement writes about the true dialectic, which is accessible to the person of self-discipline, as an instrument for being able to speak or act

²⁵ Cf. Whittaker, 'Ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας', 93 and Raoul Mortley, *Connaissance religieuse et herméneutique chez Clément d'Alexandrie* (Leiden, 1973), 69.

²⁶ Whittaker, 'Ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας', 93.

in ways approved by God. And true dialectic promises knowledge, not of perishable objects, but of things of God and of heaven: 'True dialectic is mixed with true philosophy ... It rises up to the supreme essence of all (τὴν πάντων κρατίστην οὐσίαν). It dares to go beyond to the God of the universe (ἐπέκεινα ἐπὶ τὸν τῶν ὅλων θεόν)' (*Strom.* 1.177.1).

As to the identification of 'the supreme essence', it is clearly not God,²⁷ since God himself is beyond this essence. More probably it is the Son. We shall see in the next chapter that the level of the Monad is, in Clement, equivalent to that of the Son, or Logos. In *Paed.* 1.71.1 God is above the Monad, and it is reasonable to assume that the Father is above the Monad which is the Son in the same way as he is above the 'the most excellent essence' which undoubtedly is the essence of the Son. The essence of the Father is called the immutable essence (οὐσίαν ἀμετάβλητον, *Strom.* 6.80.2).

God's transcendence is in Clement expressed in a variety of ways and with a variety of terms. In addition to a widespread use of ἐπέκεινα in connection with intelligible being, the prepositions ὑπεράνω and μετά are both applied to God, as well as the description of God as a ὑπεροχή ('eminence'). He is placed above time, place, and material things: 'For God is neither in darkness nor in space, but above both space, time and created things (ἀλλ' ὑπεράνω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου καὶ τῆς τῶν γεγονότων ιδιότητος). Similarly he is not found in any section, nor does he contain anything or is contained by anything. Neither is he subject to limit or division' (*Strom.* 2.6.1–2, my trans.). He is also above name and

²⁷ This is, however, the view of Mortley, *Connaissance religieuse*, 68.

thought: 'The first Cause is not in space at all, but above (ὑπεράνω) space, time, name and thought (ὀνόματος καὶ νοήσεως)' (*Strom.* 5.71.5). The divine eminence (τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπεροχῆς, *Strom.* 7.28.2) is naturally above creation, and beyond the physical universe (μετὰ τὴν κτίσιν, *Strom.* 2.51.1).

However, Clement apparently wants to have it both ways: a famous paragraph of the *Paedagogus* (quoted above) identifies God as the One while at the same time situating him above the One and the Monad; God is, as a matter of fact, said to be the One and above the One at the same time: 'God is One, and he is beyond the One and above unity itself' (ἐν δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτὴν μονάδα, *Paed.* 1.71.1).

The same is true in the case of νοῦς: God is both a νοῦς and above the level of νοῦς. In *Strom.* 4. 162.5 Clement says: 'as he is mind, on the other hand (ἡ δ' αὖ ἐστὶ νοῦς), he is the first principle of reasoning and of judgment'.²⁸ In *Strom.* 5.38.6, however, he claims: 'And as the Lord is above the whole world, yea, beyond the world of thought (μᾶλλον δὲ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοητοῦ)'.

Is Clement, then, inconsistent in his way of expressing God? Rather than affirming or denying this, there is another solution which I think is more compatible with Clement's intentions. We have already seen how Clement again and again asserts that the God of the universe cannot be stated in words or expressed by speech, only by symbols and metaphors, or even silence.

²⁸ Cf. *Strom.* 4.155.2.

While in all other areas Clement uses arguments and rational discourse in presenting his views, this procedure loses its meaning when it comes to expressing the nature of the ultimate being. As Christopher Stead states in his article, 'The Concept of Divine Substance', when trying to answer the question whether it is possible to talk without contradiction about the being of God:

I allow, indeed I declare, that the mystery of the Godhead surpasses rational apprehension; and it may be that in the end it will all have to be presented by a contradiction. But it is essential that this should happen only when all our rational resources are at an end. It is ludicrous if we represent divine mysteries by *avoidable* contradictions, by muddles, which more disciplined thinking would enable us to dispel. And it is idolatrous if we cultivate paradox for the sake of paradox, when we could speak clearly.²⁹

The so-called inconsistencies in Clement are, no doubt, intended. His reflections on language and its inadequacy and his use of symbols and enigmas as alternative ways to represent ultimate reality are the result of a conscious choice. Far from cultivating paradox 'for the sake of paradox', Clement turned to the use of paradox as a last resort.³⁰

However, while I regard the inconsistencies in Clement as intended and the result of a conscious choice on his part,

²⁹ Christopher Stead, 'The Concept of Divine Substance', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 29 (1975), 1–14, at 5–6.

³⁰ Similarly Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology*, 52: 'For Clement, God is both mind and beyond mind, one and powerful ... All the subtleties of the *Geistmetaphysik* are found in his theology, especially the insistence that God is both *νοῦς* and beyond *νοῦς*, simple and complex unity, devoid of attributes, yet infinitely powerful, one and yet beyond the monad.'

I am more inclined to view the same type of inconsistency or undecidedness that exists in Alcinous and Numenius as real, or unintended. There is nowhere in their rather limited corpus any sign that they problematize the function of language, or consider the use of indirect language—of signs, symbols, and metaphors—for the description of God. Clement's deep insight is not shared by them.

6

Clement's Concept of God (II): The Son as Logos

Before turning my attention in Chapter 7 to the aspects of the Son that are specifically related to his epistemological function as the Father's face (*πρόσωπον*) and image (*εἰκὼν*) and as the revealer (*μηνυτής*) of his character and power (*δύναμις*), I shall in the present chapter concentrate on the Son's nature in itself.

The Son of God is endowed with many titles, names, and roles; in addition to the ones mentioned above that are linked to his role of bringing knowledge of God, there is not least his generally mediating role as the Logos, Saviour, Educator (*παιδαγωγός*), and Teacher (*διδάσκαλος*).

Though one should not distinguish too sharply between the roles and aspects or catalogue them too strictly,¹ they nevertheless deserve separate treatment. I shall primarily concentrate my exposition on the nature of the Logos with regard to divinity, pre-existence, and generation as well as to

¹ Cf. André Méhat, *Étude sur les 'Stromates' de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1966), 389.

the relation between the Logos and the Father in terms of unity/diversity of substance and personhood.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE LOGOS

To a great extent, the central problem that Clement seeks to come to terms with is the same as that of Middle Platonism, namely of relating God to the created cosmos, the unmoved to the moving, the One to the Many.² Yet, whereas the pagan Middle Platonists are primarily concerned with the problem of rest and motion in relation to the divine, Clement, as we shall see, is more interested in the epistemological aspects of the relationship. In that context the concepts of *dynamis* and Logos have important functions.

The favourite term for the Son of God in Clement's writings is Logos. The Logos, of course, first appears in Christian theology in the prologue to John's gospel, and 'became from then on the basis of Christian cosmology and the foundation of Christian psychology and epistemology'.³ In Clement, the Logos is made into the principle for the religious explanation of the world, since He is the medium by which God created the universe.⁴ He is also the one who manifested God in the Law and the Prophets of the Old

² The relationship between God and the world understood as a relationship between the One and the Many is a prominent feature of Eric Osborn's interpretation of Clement's metaphysics.

³ R. P. Casey, 'Clement and the Two Divine Logoi', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 25 (1924), 43–56, at 48.

⁴ Cf. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. ii: *The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus* (Utrecht, 1953), 22–3.

Testament, in the philosophy of the Greeks, and finally in his incarnation.⁵

The prominent status of the Logos in Clement is due to the combined influence of the New Testament, especially the prologue to John's gospel, and of other sources, such as Philo and the writings of the Christian Platonist Justin Martyr.⁶ I shall review very briefly the nature of each of these influences in turn.

In the prologue to John, the Logos is declared to be eternally pre-existent in God, to be his self-revelation, and to be himself God. Though the author of John's gospel himself probably used the Logos concept primarily as an introductory device to establish contact with an extended audience at the beginning of his gospel, without mentioning it again in the rest of his work,⁷ the prologue had an enormous influence on all subsequent Christological thinking.

Philo combined elements of Jewish speculation about the divine Word or wisdom with the concept of logos in Stoicism. Logos was a term used by Stoic philosophers to refer to a divine, physical energy that permeated reality in the form of a fiery ether. Rejecting the materialistic features of the Stoic idea, Philo adopted it into a Platonist system in which he used logos to designate both God's immanent reason, the world of ideas, and the world-soul of the cosmos.

⁵ Cf. *Protr.* 8.3; *Strom.* 6.58.1 ff; *Paed.* 1.60.

⁶ On the question of whether Clement may have read the works of Justin, Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (London, 1988), 180, states that, though there is no direct evidence, it is not impossible that he did so.

⁷ T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge, 1970), 12–13.

In the time of Justin and Clement, Middle Platonism flourished, as we have seen, with its transcendent and unmovable God who had no direct contact with the material universe. Justin accordingly argued that the God who appeared to the patriarchs of the Old Testament theophanies could not be the supreme Father himself since the Father was too far removed from this inferior realm: 'he who has but the smallest intelligence will not venture to assert that the Maker and Father of all things, having left all super-celestial matters, was visible on a little portion of the earth' (*Dialogue with Trypho* 60).⁸ Instead, Justin points to the fact that 'God begat before all creatures a Beginning, a certain rational power from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos' (*Dialogue with Trypho* 61).

The Apologists, in their attempts to elucidate the emergence, or the generation of the Logos, had argued consistently on the level of cosmology: God first generated the Logos in order to create and order all things through the Logos.⁹

Though neither Justin nor Clement after him denied the divinity of the Logos and his unity with the Father, the notion of a mediator between the supreme God and the material and inferior world is often seen as an early step in the development of doctrine which led to the denial of the

⁸ Trans. by Dods and Reith in ANF 1.

⁹ Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church* (Edinburgh, 1993), 51.

divinity of the Son in the teaching of the Arians in the fourth century.¹⁰

None of our three chosen pagan Middle Platonists uses the term *Logos* as such to designate a mediating figure.¹¹ However, the thesis and scheme advanced by Justin has many parallels with their philosophy, especially as we have seen it in Alcinoüs and Numenius: the doctrine of a transcendent God creates a need for a mediator, a world soul, or a second God.

Thus, for Numenius the distinction between the first and the second God is a constitutive part of his philosophy, and it takes the form primarily of a distinction between a resting and remote God and an active and creating Demiurge (above, Ch. 3) who orders pre-existent matter into harmony. He performs his creative task, however, in total dependence on the first God: 'he looks to the High God who attracts his eyes, and takes his judgment from that contemplation, and his energy from that impulse' (fr. 18).

In Alcinoüs too the contrast between a first and a second God is discernible (the latter is called world soul, not 'the second God'), and the relationship between them is again one of dependence. The first God, being 'the Father and cause of all things' has caused both the ordering and the awakening of the world soul. As he does not himself, however, have any

¹⁰ Cf. Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford, 1966), 16. Origen termed Father and Son the first and second God (just as his contemporary Numenius did, above, Ch. 3).

¹¹ David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), 186–8, however, by not distinguishing between Christian and pagan Middle Platonists, gives the impression that the term *Logos* was actually used by them all.

direct relationship with the material world, the actual ordering of the universe (according to chs 10 and 14 it was not created, since it exists eternally) is due to the activity of the world soul: 'It is the latter that, set in order by the Father, itself imposes order on all of nature in this world' (*Did.* 10.165.4).

So, parallels between Clement and Alcinous/Numenius with respect to their ways of expressing the first God and of distinguishing between a transcendent first and an immanent second God are not difficult to find. I have already described in some detail the pagan Middle Platonist concept of God, and it is now time to present Clement's idea of the mediating principle, as well as the relationship between the two beings, the Father and the Son.

Though the Logos, as expounded by Clement, has several different roles and functions, such as transmitter of salvation (especially described in the *Protrepticus*), education (in the *Paedagogus*), and knowledge (in the *Stromateis*, see below), I shall in the present chapter focus my exposition on aspects relating more directly to his relationship to the Father, aspects such as generation and incarnation, identity of essence, pre-existence, and divinity.

THE GENERATION AND INCARNATION OF THE LOGOS

Generation: one or two stages?

The existence of the Logos and his relation to God before the creation were already regarded as problems early in the

second century. It is not, however, a problem that occupies our pagan Middle Platonists. The Logos of John's prologue 'was in the beginning, and the Logos was with God' and 'all things were made by him'. Important as the prologue was for the subsequent speculation on the nature of the Son, it also raised questions: When was 'in the beginning'? Did it coincide with the creation of the world, with the beginning of time, or did it express an eternal generation figuratively? And if the Logos acted as God's agent in the creation, what was he before the creation, or before the beginning of time? The central problem is, it seems, to sort out the relation of the Logos in the godhead and the Logos as an agent in himself, as immanent in the universe. The Apologists were much concerned with these questions, and they answered the dilemma by distinguishing, more or less clearly, between the Logos in the godhead, as constitutive of its nature, and the Logos as issuing forth to do God's will.¹² The problem with this approach is that the Logos' emergence as a distinct person for the purpose of creation seems to tie his personhood to a moment in time, and thus also to temporality.¹³ In addition, it introduces a doctrine of distinct stages in the Logos' existence. This seems to be the case

¹² Theophilus of Antioch applied the Stoic terms *λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* and *λόγος προφορικός* in order to express the distinction, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.10. Casey, in his influential article 'Clement and the two divine logoi' (48), stated: 'They were the *termini technici* of Stoic logic for a distinction already indicated by Plato and Aristotle, between the spoken word and the thought of which it was the expression.' Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 21 and *Adversus Praxean* 5, uses *ratio* and *sermo* to make the same distinction.

¹³ Cf. Jean Daniélou, *The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*, vol. ii: *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (London and Philadelphia, 1973), 366.

in the Apologetical literature in general, that the generation of the Logos, pre-existent as the immanent thought of God, is closely associated with the creation of the cosmos.

The doctrine of the Logos in Clement shares certain aspects with that of the Apologists. A passage, relevant in this context, in which he seems to agree with the teaching of the Apologists concerning the two stages in the existence of the Logos, as well as the association of the generation of the Logos with temporal creation, is found in the *Stromateis*: 'Now the Logos proceeds as cause of the creation (προελθὼν δὲ ὁ λόγος δημιουργίας αἴτιος); then he begets himself (ἐαυτὸν γεννᾷ), when the Logos becomes flesh, in order that he may be visible' (*Strom.* 5.16.5). The 'proceeding' or 'procession' (προελθών)¹⁴ of the Logos from the Father has been interpreted as describing an act of generation by which the Logos emerges from its first stage of existence (when he was 'with God') and then enters a second stage in which he 'begets himself' and becomes a separate hypostasis, a distinct personal being, an interpretation similar to that of the Apologists. This aspect of Clement's thinking is, I think, worth discussing at some length, since it touches upon important aspects of his theology, such as the reality of the

¹⁴ προελθών is the technical term used by the Apologists to describe the generative process, Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers: Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 208, cited by Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1971), 204 n. 1. (Wolfson's chapter 'The Case of Clement of Alexandria' (204–17) is a reprint with revisions of Wolfson, 'Clement of Alexandria on the Generation of the Logos', *Church History*, 20 (1951), 72–80.) The term is also found in Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians* 8.3.

incarnation, the divinity of the Logos, as well as the unity between Father and Son.

In the scholarly literature on this topic opinions differ and several theories have been put forward. The interpretation shared by most scholars is the so-called *twofold stage theory*, which recognizes the two stages but denies that the Logos that became incarnate is different from the Logos that is in God which is, no doubt, the main question and thus maintains the divinity of the Logos in both stages.¹⁵ Consequently, though it is thought that Clement ties the generation of the Logos to the creation of the cosmos, the unity of the Logos in God and the Logos in Christ, and thus also its divinity, is maintained. This was also the position of the Apologists.

The other main position which is called the twofold stage theory *in its radical form* differs considerably from the first. According to this theory the Logos in its first stage of existence is identical with the mind of God, containing his thoughts. In the second stage it 'issues forth' from the divine mind and becomes a distinct being, a second hypostasis, which is also the author of the creation of the world. This theory is seen as a doctrine of *two distinct logoi*, the Logos in the Father and a Logos who came into existence—and is thus a created being—at some point, though it may well have happened before or outside time.¹⁶

¹⁵ Thus e.g. Casey, 'Clement and the Two Divine Logoi', 47.

¹⁶ Thus, for instance, Harry Wolfson in *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 211, distinguishes sharply between Clement's eternal Logos in God and the Logos that, prior to the creation of the world, was generated, or created, as a distinct personal being. It is this Logos, in its second stage of

I shall myself argue for a third position, one which brings the speculation on the nature of the divine beings one step further. It is an interpretation of Clement's views that has been called the *single stage* theory and one that perhaps should be identified as a doctrine of an eternal generation.¹⁷

First, however, we have to discuss the seemingly strongest evidence for a doctrine of two distinct logoi in Clement. It is a brief passage found in a fragment of a lost work, the *Hypotyposesis*, preserved by Photius in his *Bibliotheca* (cod. 109), that has played a considerable role in the interpretation of

existence, and not the Logos in God, that became incarnate in Christ. Salvatore Lilla, another strong advocate for this view, actually claims that this distinction 'has escaped the notice of the majority of modern scholars', Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 200. Lilla, in fact, identifies a third stage of existence as well: the Logos as immanent in the universe, as the world soul, 'the law and harmony of the universe, the power which holds it together', 209. Eric F. Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1981), 241–2, rejects Lilla's method of arguing on the basis of isolated phrases and not of a wider context. He finds that Lilla works like a doxographer and 'breaks the writer up in single propositions or phrases and looks for verbal coincidences'. With such 'verbal atomism', he maintains, 'it is not difficult to construe the three stages in the account of Logos. Philosophy needs to look for arguments, not for isolated words and phrases'. He also argues (220) that Wolfson 'succumbs to the simplistic error of counting logoi like billiard balls instead of like drops of water ($1 + 1 = 1$), or like the continuous sections of a beam of light'. Osborn's attitude to the 'doxographical approach' is criticized by John Whittaker, '[Rev.] E. Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (1981)', *The Second Century*, 4 (1984), 60–2. Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 408, in his comments on Clement's terminology, is close to Osborn's view: 'He is in no sense systematic in his use of language, and to reconstruct his thought on the basis of the words and phrases which he employs is to run the risk of misunderstanding it'.

¹⁷ Osborn, 'The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria', 38–44, and Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 341, are advocates of this view. Arguing on somewhat different lines, Mark J. Edwards, 'Clement of Alexandria and his Doctrine of the Logos', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 54:2 (2000), 159–77, arrives at the same conclusion.

Clement's doctrine of the Logos. I cite it only in Greek at the present stage; what I think Clement meant will emerge through the discussion below:

Λέγεται μὲν καὶ ὁ υἱὸς λόγος, ὁμωνύμως τῷ πατρικῷ λόγῳ, ἀλλ' οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ σὰρξ γενόμενος· οὐδὲ μὴν ὁ πατρῷος λόγος, ἀλλὰ δυνάμις τις τοῦ θεοῦ, οἷον ἀπόρροια τοῦ λόγου αὐτοῦ νοῦς γενόμενος τὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων καρδίας διαπεφοίτηκε.¹⁸

This passage is believed to be a direct quotation from Clement. Photius himself interpreted it as implying that Clement taught heretically that the Logos did not assume flesh—it was not the Father's Logos, nor was it a subordinate Logos that became incarnate, but a certain power of God, implying a doctrine of two distinct Logoi. Photius writes: 'He is proved to entertain the monstrous doctrine of two Logoi of the Father (λόγους... τοῦ πατρὸς δύο), of which the lesser (τὸν ἥττονα) was revealed to men but strictly speaking that was not either; for he says...',¹⁹ and then the passage above is cited.

Though Photius' radical interpretation and accusations of heresy have been rejected by the majority of modern scholars, the quotation from the *Hypotyposeis* has nevertheless been seen as supporting the view that Clement believed

¹⁸ Text according to Stählin in GCS 3, fr. 23, 202. A preliminary translation would run as follows: 'The son is also called logos, equivocally with the paternal logos, but it is not the former which became flesh. Nor indeed is it the paternal logos, but a certain power of God, a kind of emanation of his logos that became nous and inhabited the hearts of men', thus Colin Duckworth and Eric F. Osborn, 'Clement of Alexandria's *Hypotyposeis*: A French Eighteenth-Century Sighting', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 36 (1985), 67–83, at 78.

¹⁹ Trans. N. G. Wilson (ed.), *Photius: The Bibliotheca* (London, 1994), 124.

in the existence of two distinct logoi, of which only one was divine.²⁰ The accusations may also be the reason why the *Hypotyposeis* were neglected and that only a few fragments of it have survived.

Photius' misinterpretation is, it seems, best explained by ascribing it to a confusion stemming from the ambiguity of the word *logos*.²¹ Photius distinguishes between two logoi and an emanation of the Father's logos:

ὁ υἱὸς λόγος—the Logos of the Father, the Son, the Son-Logos
ὁ πατρικὸς λόγος—the paternal logos, the rationality, the mind of the Father

δύναμις τις τοῦ θεοῦ, οἶον ἀπόρροια τοῦ λόγου αὐτοῦ —the rationality of man

The word logos, as we know, can have several meanings, the most prominent being 'word' and 'reason', or 'rationality', and Clement often seems to play upon this double meaning of the word.²² In the Photian passage Clement does not mean what Photius thought he meant: he does not say that there are two separate logoi, but that the 'logos' may have a

²⁰ While Casey, though recognizing in Clement a doctrine of two logoi, maintains the unity between the two, Harry Wolfson on the other hand (and later Salvatore Lilla) takes the passage as further evidence of Clement's belief in an eternal 'paternal Logos' and a temporal 'Son-Logos'. Supporting Photius' interpretation, they both regard the Son (in Lilla also named 'the second hypostasis', identified with the divine wisdom) as a created being.

²¹ Cf. Duckworth and Osborn, 'Clement of Alexandria's *Hypotyposeis*', 77–83 and Adolf Knauber, 'Die patrologische Schätzung des Clemens von Alexandrien bis zu seinem neuerlichen Bekanntwerden durch die ersten Druckeditionen des 16. Jahrhunderts', in Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (eds.), *Kyriakon. FS Johannes Quasten*, vol. i (Münster, 1973), 289–308.

²² e.g. *Strom.* 5.6.

diversity of meanings, and that one should not confuse them. In other words: instead of seeing it as two (or three) distinct logoi, it is the *same logos present in three ways*, in the mind of the Father, in the incarnate Son, and in the hearts of men, as an ἀπόρροια of the Father's logos.

The first phrase of the quotation, then, does not express a doctrine of two logoi, nor does it deny the incarnation of the Logos: Clement simply wants to make clear that the rationality (logos) of the Father must be distinguished from the Logos (that became flesh): 'The Son is called logos, with the same word as (ὁμωνύμως) the logos (rationality) of the Father, but it is not he (the latter) who became flesh.'

In the second phrase, Clement objects to the thought that when God gives logos (rationality) to men, he becomes himself without logos (rationality). It is not the πατρικὸς λόγος that we receive, he writes, but an ἀπόρροια of this logos which becomes *nous* in our hearts. The logos of God is not weakened in the process. Though Clement elsewhere identifies the logos of the Father and the Son-Logos, he is probably here refuting someone's allegations, and wishes to show that rationality rather than irrationality is a quality of the Father and that God does not lose his logos when he gives man logos:²³ 'nor is it the logos (rationality) of the Father, but a certain power of God, as it were an emanation from his logos, that became *nous* and has entered into the hearts of men.'

²³ I owe this interpretation to Duckworth and Osborn, 'Clement of Alexandria's *Hypotyposeis*', 79–80.

So, by regarding these phrases as answers to allegations rooted in an ambiguity in the word *logos* which Clement strives to refute, we are perhaps closer to a correct understanding of what he really meant. It is perhaps unfair to blame Clement for expressing himself so obscurely if this is what he wanted to say;²⁴ after all, what we have is just a quotation torn from its context and embedded in Photius' hostile interpretation.

If this interpretation is correct, Clement is in fact teaching a 'single stage theory'—that the Logos' generation from the Father is a process without beginning and the Logos is united with God from eternity. This is normally called the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation, in today's theological debate most often credited to Origen and 'regarded as his greatest contribution to the development of trinitarian theology'.²⁵

There also survives a Latin fragment deriving from Book 7 of Clement's lost *Hypotyposeis*²⁶ commenting on the First Epistle of John which may support our conclusion: 'The word *erat* (was), then, denotes eternity without a beginning, like the Word itself (that is the Son), which according to its equality of substance is one with the Father, is everlasting and uncreated' (my trans.).²⁷

²⁴ Duckworth and Osborn, *ibid.* 80, comment on the paragraph: 'It is another instance of a common phenomenon in Clement. Apparent incoherence frequently conceals important points and subtle arguments.'

²⁵ Maurice Wiles, 'Eternal Generation', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 12 (1961), 284–91, at 286.

²⁶ It is important to bear in mind that much of Clement's work is lost. The *Stromateis* may not have been his chief work in his own estimation.

²⁷ GCS 3, 210.3–6, fr. 24 (*Adumbrationes Clementis Alexandrini in Epistolas Canonicas*, 3): "Erat" ergo verbum aeternitatis significativum est non

It is important to bear in mind, moreover, when trying to understand a writer like Clement, that one cannot argue on the basis of isolated phrases, but only by taking into account the wider context.²⁸ If Clement taught a doctrine of two distinct logoi, many statements throughout his works are inexplicable, e.g. his concern for the unity of God, 'for the One is indivisible' (*Strom.* 5.81.6), as well as for the unity in the Godhead, the unity of Father and Son (*Paed.* 1.24.3). I shall come back to the question of the divinity of the Logos in the last section of this chapter.

Incarnation

Closely tied to the questions concerning the generative process or stages in the existence of the Logos, there is the problem of the incarnation of the Son of God. Did he actually assume flesh, real physical flesh, *σάρξ*?

As we have seen, the Logos' generative act has no beginning in time; the incarnation, on the other hand, is the act by which the Logos goes forth and becomes flesh at a certain point in time. These two aspects of the Logos' life are closely

habentis initium, sicut etiam verbum ipsum (hoc est filius), quod secundum aequalitatem substantiae unum cum patre consistit, sempiternum est et infectum.' It is, of course, possible that the Latin translator (working on behalf of Cassiodorus) has adapted the Greek text to make it conform to contemporary (6th-cent.) orthodoxy; but Georg Kretschmar, *Studien zur frühchristlichen Trinitätstheologie* (Tübingen, 1956), 17, regards this as unlikely, since other potentially offensive passages have not been changed.

²⁸ This is the approach of Lilla, the doxographer. Cf. Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy*, 241–4. In this, as in many other areas, Lilla's influence tends to dominate the interpretation of Clement's views.

knit together—the incarnation is tied to his pre-existence, and is thus also correlated to divinity: ‘Not long ago the pre-existent Saviour (ὁ προὖν σωτήρ) appeared on earth; he who exists in God (because “the Logos was with God”) appeared as our teacher; the Logos appeared by whom all things have been created’ (*Protr.* 7.3).²⁹ The Logos is thus both God and man and Clement is here for the first time explicitly stating a dogma that was later to split the church: ‘This Logos, who alone is both God and man (θεός τε καὶ ἄνθρωπος), the cause of all our good, appeared but lately in his own person to men’ (*Protr.* 7.1).

The docetism or dehumanizing of the flesh of Christ that Clement has sometimes been charged with, has its basis primarily in his view of the impassible nature of Christ: ‘He is without sin, without blame, without passion of soul’ (*Paed.* 1.4). Clement admits, however, that Christ ate and drank—not that he had to, but to prevent the spread of heretical notions:

But in the case of the Saviour, it was ludicrous [to suppose] that the body, as a body, demanded the necessary aids in order [for] its duration. For he ate, not for the sake of the body, which was kept together by a holy energy, but in order that it might not enter into the minds of those who were with him to entertain a different opinion of him; in like manner as certainly some afterwards supposed that he appeared in a phantasmal shape (δοκῆσει). But he was entirely impassible (ἀπαθής); inaccessible to any movement of feeling—either pleasure or pain. (*Strom.* 6.71.2)³⁰

²⁹ Trans. G. W. Butterworth (LCL).

³⁰ Cf. John 19.28, where Jesus says ‘I thirst’ only ‘that all may be accomplished’.

One may infer from this that to Clement the earthly life of Jesus is a play-acting on the part of the Logos, and that his flesh is not real as ours. Yet, in the passage quoted above, Clement seems to insist on the reality of Christ's body and at the same time on its impassibility. This inconsistency may perhaps be found unacceptable; it is, however, easy to explain. There is no doubt that for Clement the reality of the body was important for the truth of the incarnation.³¹ On the other hand, to Clement the Platonist the idea of attributing to the creator and sustainer of the universe a lack or a need for anything external to sustain his own body, would seem ludicrous. In addition, the idea that God would have to eat would, in Clement's eyes, reduce him to equal status with the gods of the heathen.

In assessing Clement's view of the incarnation, it is important indeed to consider the Platonist milieu to which he belonged and the influence it had on his thought.³² To a Platonist philosopher, to claim that the transcendent One and the highest God had taken on flesh for the sake of mortal man was as repulsive as it was inherently paradoxical. Clement nevertheless insisted on the reality and concreteness—as well as significance—of the advent, life, and death of Christ. That his depiction of the event is not completely devoid of docetic tendencies is less surprising than his consistent adherence to what was a 'stumbling-block to Jews

³¹ Cf. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 51, who states that the incarnation, to Clement, was no play-acting, but a genuine taking of flesh.

³² Cf. Joseph C. McLelland, *God the Anonymous: A Study in Alexandrian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 82.

and folly to Gentiles', that the Logos actually took on real flesh: 'Hence the Son is said to be the Father's face, being the revealer of the Father's character to the five senses by clothing himself with flesh (σαρκοφόρος γενόμενος)' (*Strom.* 5.34.1). For Clement the Son is first of all 'the revealer of the Father's character', the one who gives knowledge of the Father, or, rather, by whom man may know God, still the revealing of knowledge is often seen in close relation to the incarnation, the two even amounting to the same thing, as in the passage just quoted.

UNITY AND DISTINCTION

Unity in divinity

A guiding principle in Clement's account of the divine is, as we have seen, the dialectic between unity and diversity, between the One and the Many.³³ Following the Neopythagorean conception of the One and the Many, the Father is seen as an ultimate, transcendent first principle, a unity or the One, a simple, undivided being, the Son as a second principle, a complex unity, the Monad: 'And the Son is neither simply one thing as one thing, nor many things as parts, but one thing as all things (ἀλλ' ὥς πάντα εἶν); whence also he is all things: for he is the circle of all the powers rolled

³³ Eric F. Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge, 1993), 52–4.

and united into one unity. Wherefore the Logos is called the Alpha and the Omega' (*Strom.* 4.156.2). As a complex unity, 'one thing as all things', he is also the intermediary between the One and the Many, the One-Many, the unity of God and man in the Logos.³⁴

According to Stählin's index Clement uses the expression 'the divine Logos' (ὁ θεῖος λόγος) sixteen times in his extant writings. In all instances it is used as a name for the Son, often also called 'the image of God'. In a passage in the *Protrepticus* Clement writes that the divine Logos is a 'most manifest God' and is even 'made equal' to God himself: 'the Lord, ... who is the real Purifier, Saviour and Gracious One, the divine Logos, the truly most manifest God (ὁ φανερώτατος ὄντως θεός), who is made equal to the Master of the universe (ὁ τῷ δεσπότῃ τῶν ὅλων ἐξισωθείς), because he was his Son, "and the Word was in God" ' (*Protr.* 110.2). It is not explicitly stated here that the equality is one of substance (ὁμοούσιος), but in the *Excerpta ex Theodoto* there are passages that seem to say just that. We now turn to the evidence of that work.

The *Excerpta* is usually regarded as a 'private notebook',³⁵ or, together with Book 8 of the *Stromateis* and the *Eclogae propheticae*, as 'raw material collected for future use'.³⁶ In it, Clement has collected fragments from Valentinian works, among them the works of a certain Theodotus which he

³⁴ Cf. *Protr.* 7.1, cited above.

³⁵ R. P. Casey (ed.), *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (London, 1934), 25 and Claude Mondésert, *Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1944), 253.

³⁶ John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York, 1974), 154.

quotes and comments upon. The book is an indispensable source for our knowledge of Clement's concept of the divine, and especially, I think, it is important with regard to his doctrine of the Logos. It is interesting to witness the formative stages in the Christian tradition. In addition to passages that would affirm the Son's divinity as well as his consubstantiality with the Father, the book also contains arguments for the idea of a distinction in God between different persons (see below).³⁷

Clement maintains, then, the unity of the Saviour that became flesh and the Son who is with the Father, or the identity of the one who descended and the one who remained: 'But he is the same, being to each place such as can be contained (in it). And he who descended is never divided from him who remained. For the Apostle says, "For he who ascended is the same as he who descended" ' (*Exc.* 7.3–4).³⁸

In *Exc.* 8 and 19 Clement substitutes for *ὁ θεῖος λόγος* a new expression for the Son of God, *ὁ ἐν ταυτότητι λόγος*. The translation differs somewhat among scholars: 'the *essential* Logos' (Casey), 'Logos, *dans sa constante identité*' (Sagnard), 'the Logos *in his constant identity*', sc. with the

³⁷ Its value as a source has been differently viewed by different scholars. Mondésert, *Clément d'Alexandrie*, 254: 'Il s'agit d'un texte important pour la connaissance de la pensée de Clément et particulièrement de sa façon de travailler.' Einar Molland, *The Conception of the Gospel in the Alexandrian Theology* (Oslo, 1938), however, has one sole reference to the work. Most scholars, though, tend to treat the *Excerpta* on a par with Clement's other writings.

³⁸ Trans. R. P. Casey.

Father (Daniélou). Festugière, conscious of the ambiguity of the term, adds a cautious question: ‘Le Logos *dans l’identité* (= “identique à lui-même” ou “à Dieu?”)’.³⁹

Clement uses the word *ταυτότης* as well as the expression *ἐν ταυτότητι* sixteen times, ten times in the *Stromateis*, six times in the *Excerpta*. In the *Stromateis* it is used several times about man who, for instance, ‘enters more nearly into the estate of impassible identity’ when he no longer *possesses* knowledge, but *is* knowledge (*Strom.* 4.40.1), or about the Gnostic who ‘remains honoured with the identity of all excellence’ (*Strom.* 7.13.1). In four instances it is related to God—once the will of God is described as being ‘in one identity’ (*Strom.* 6.142.3), three times it is used for the being of God, ‘who exists in his own (uncreated) identity’ (*Strom.* 6.137.3), or ‘continues immutably in the self-same goodness’ (*Strom.* 6.104.3).

In the *Excerpta* it is employed overall in relation to the Logos (once to the Only-Begotten). Clement seems not, however, to distinguish between ‘the essential Logos’ as the Son-Logos and as the Paternal Logos. The Logos of God and the Logos of Christ seem to be *substantially* the same, differing, however, in *activity* (see below). In *Exc.* 8.1 the divinity of the essential Logos is made clear: ‘We [as opposed to the Valentinians] maintain that the essential Logos is God in God (τὸν ἐν ταυτότητι λόγον θεὸν ἐν θεῷ), who is also said to be “in the bosom of the Father”, without

³⁹ A.-J. Festugière, ‘Notes sur les Extraits de Théodote de Clément d’Alexandrie et sur les Fragments de Valentin’, *Vigiliae Christianae*, 3 (1949), 193–207, at 199.

separation or division, one God.' In *Exc.* 19 he suggests that the essential Logos is also God the Father: 'For he [Paul] calls the Logos of the essential Logos "an image of the invisible God"' (*Exc.* 19.4).

Furthermore, it is in *Exc.* 17 suggested that when the Logos became flesh it did not affect his substance. The literary context is Clement criticizing the Valentinians who claim that Jesus, the church, and wisdom are a 'complete mixture of the bodies' (δι' ὅλων κρᾶσις τῶν σωμάτων, *Exc.* 17.1). Clement rejects this notion and claims that the commingling (i.e. incarnation) 'happens by conjunction and not by admixture' (κατὰ παράθεσιν τοῦτο γενέσθαι, ἀλλ' οὐ κατὰ κρᾶσιν). He then goes on: 'For (the immanence of) the divine power does not affect substance, but power and force' (ἡ γὰρ δύναμις οὐ κατ' οὐσίαν διήκει, ἀλλὰ κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ ἰσχύν, *Exc.* 17.4). For Clement, then, immanence and incarnation did not mean severing the Son from the Father; their unity of substance and thus also their unity in divinity is upheld.

In another paragraph of the *Excerpta ex Theodoto* Clement even claims co-substantiality for the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. In ch. 24 Clement argues against the Valentinians who identify the Paraclete with Jesus. Clement argues that the Paraclete is the Spirit, sharing the very substance and power of God: 'But they do not know that the Paraclete, who now works continuously in the Church, is of the same substance and power as he who worked continuously according to the Old Testament (τῆς αὐτῆς οὐσίας ἐστὶ καὶ δυνάμεως τῷ προσεχῶς ἐνεργήσαντι κατὰ τὴν παλαιὰν διαθήκην)' (*Exc.* 24.2).

Distinction: delimitation and personhood

We have seen that the emergence of the Logos from the Father, though associated with the creation of the world, should not be interpreted as dividing or separating the logos in God from the logos who proceeded ‘as cause of the creation’ (*Strom.* 5.16.5).

In the *Excerpta ex Theodoto* Clement further discusses the nature of the Son’s relationship with the Father. In addition to repeating the new term ὁ ἐν ταυτότητι λόγος, he introduces another theme still, one that has been regarded as an important contribution to theology.⁴⁰ In *Exc.* 19.1–2 he states: ‘“And the Logos became flesh” not only by becoming man at his Advent [on earth], but also “in the beginning” the essential Logos became a son, by delimitation and not in essence (κατὰ περιγραφὴν οὐ κατ’ οὐσίαν γενόμενος [ὁ] υἱός). And again he became flesh when he acted through the prophets’ (*Exc.* 19.1–2).

While Clement, as we have seen above, in the manner of the Apologists distinguishes between the logos of God and the Logos active in the creation, though maintaining their unity, in this text he seems to develop a distinction within the godhead itself. The Logos was not only distinguished from the Father and became a son at his coming to earth, but also ‘in the beginning’, or from eternity. This distinction did not, however, affect the essence or the co-substantiality of the two. As it happened κατὰ περιγραφὴν, ‘by delimitation’, ‘in individuality’ (Daniélou), ‘by circumscription’

⁴⁰ Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 372–5.

(Casey) or ‘dans sa délimitation’ (Sagnard), neither the first (protological) nor the second (incarnational) generation affected his unity in essence with the Father.

Clement here seems to stress both the continuity of the Logos with God, that the Son’s coming to earth did not affect his identity with God (οὐ κατ’ οὐσίαν γενόμενος [ὁ] υἱός), and the fact that his Sonship is not only linked to his advent, but also to ‘the beginning’.

The incarnate Christ is ‘with the Father, even when here, for he was the Father’s power’ (παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ κἀνταῦθα· δύναμις γὰρ τοῦ πατρός, *Exc.* 4.2); but in order for us to conceive the Logos, he must have form and determination. It is God who conforms to material reality for our sake so that man as determined and delimited can conceive the divine Logos. ‘God can meet what is determinate only by appearing in determinate form’;⁴¹ ‘Now shape is perceived by shape (σχῆμα), and face by face and recognition is made effectual by shapes and substances’ (*Exc.* 15.3).⁴²

The idea of personhood is further developed in *Exc.* 19.5:⁴³ ‘Wherefore it is also said that he “received the form of a servant” (Phil. 2.7), which refers not only to his flesh at the advent, but also to his (becoming) substance, from (being) the underlying principle (for all that is); for substance is a servant, inasmuch as it is passive and subordinate

⁴¹ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London, 1987), 129.

⁴² Cf. also John Egan, ‘Logos and Emanation in the Writings of Clement of Alexandria,’ in T. A. Dunne and J.-M. Laporte (eds.), *Trinification of the World. Festschrift F. E. Crowe* (Toronto, 1978), 176–209, at 185.

⁴³ ὁθεν καὶ “μορφὴν δούλου λαβεῖν” εἴρηται, οὐ μόνον τὴν σάρκα κατὰ τὴν παρουσίαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ἐκ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου, δούλη δὲ ἡ οὐσία, ὡς ἂν παθητὴ καὶ ὑποκειμένη τῇ δραστηρίῳ κυριωτάτῃ αἰτίᾳ.

to the active and dominating cause' (*Exc.* 19.5).⁴⁴ In this cosmogonical passage Clement seems to argue that when the Son receives his substance from the Father, this makes him a 'subject', a servant, distinguished from the Father. Clement thus correlates incarnation and protology—the description of Christ's incarnation (when he 'received the form of a servant') also becomes a key to describing his protological generation. The Son, who is the principle of generation, became substance in order to be a receptacle for form and pattern. By becoming passive substance, he also became the principle of individuation as well as the first individual.

The Son's distinction from the Father also includes his having a face. In *Exc.* 11 Clement claims that it is determining an entity by shape and form that makes it possible to give it a face and thus also a name. Clement writes of the angels: 'And how could there be a face of a shapeless being? Indeed the Apostle knows heavenly, beautiful, and intellectual bodies. How could different names be given to them, if they were not determined by their shapes, form, and body? (εἰ μὴ σχήμασιν ἦν περιγεγραμμένα, μορφῇ καὶ σώματι;)' (*Exc.* 11.2).

God, as a shapeless being, does not have any face; so Clement continues a few lines further on: 'But the Son is the beginning of the vision of the Father, being called the "face" (πρόσωπον) of the Father' (*Exc.* 12.1).⁴⁵ And it is

⁴⁴ This translation was suggested to me by Einar Thomassen (personal communication).

⁴⁵ Cf. also *Paed.* 1.57 and *Strom.* 5.34.1.

only logical, then, that the Father is without name (*ἄνωνόμαστος*) and that the Son is the name of the Father. Though Clement never expressly says this, it lies close at hand. The *Gospel of Truth* (1.39), for instance, says that 'the name of the Father is the Son'.

The face, then, denotes existence as a person. This was also the sense it was going to have in the controversies of the fourth century.⁴⁶ However, to the thinkers of the second century the concept of individuality connoted in a sense a degradation. It implied a limitation (*περιγραφή*), and a body (*σῶμα*), while God essentially is without limitation, without a body (*ἄπερίγραφος, ἄσώματος*).⁴⁷ Such a concept made personhood, individuation, incompatible with the infinite and nameless being, as it also implied a differentiation from the absolute unity of God.⁴⁸ Nor could it be attributed to the Logos in its eternal existence.

So Daniélou is probably right in his comment on Clement's attempts to express the reality of personhood in the Logos and the double aspect of distinction and unity between the two logoi: 'It is hard to avoid the feeling that Clement's thought is going round and round something which he feels intuitively to be true but which he can never manage to pin down. What fails him is language; the words at his disposal are defective, coloured by connotations which make them inadequate for his purpose.'⁴⁹

⁴⁶ e.g. Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 372.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 374.

⁴⁸ Casey, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto*, 114.

⁴⁹ Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 373–4.

It was one of Clement's strongest convictions, and one that is stressed not only in the *Stromateis*, but in many places, that 'the essential Logos is God in God (τὸν ἐν ταυτότητι λόγον θεὸν ἐν θεῷ)' (*Exc.* 8.1). The divinity of the Logos and its unity with the Father, of which there are numerous examples in his writings, certainly exclude the twofold stage theory in its most radical form. Clement envisaged, I would assert, only one single stage in the life of the Logos: when the Logos became flesh, he did not therefore become twofold (or more); he is one and the same who is begotten of the Father in eternity and who becomes flesh.

The Knowledge of God

The separation introduced by Platonic philosophy between the intelligible world—the *κόσμος νοητός*—and the sensible world—the *κόσμος αἰσθητός*—was deeply rooted in the philosophy and theology of imperial Alexandria. The distinction was closely connected with the problem of the relationship between the One and the Many. These models of thought undoubtedly influenced many aspects of Clement's theology. Though they also caused problems for him, as for instance in his account of the impassibility of Christ, they nevertheless assisted him in realizing that, in spite of the mediating role of the Son, the distinction in God between his 'essence' and 'power(s)' is an absolute one.

This, of course, has implications for his view of man's ability to know God. Before turning to this more specific question, however, I shall make a few comments of a more general character concerning Clement's view of knowledge.

THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE

Clement's epistemology, or his account of knowledge, forms an important part of his philosophy. Much of Books 2 and 5 of the *Stromateis* is devoted to this topic. It is not without problems to try to sort out and interpret his thoughts in a consistent manner. Yet a number of scholars have over the years made such attempts, and I shall restrict myself to a brief survey.¹

In *Stromateis* Book 6 Clement presents three definitions of knowledge, accepting two of them and rejecting one: The first, which we may call 'spiritual knowledge',² identifies knowledge as Christ himself and is thus specifically Christian: 'The Lord, then, . . . is the Light and the true knowledge' (*φῶς οὖν ὁ κύριος καὶ γνῶσις ἡ ἀληθής*, *Strom.* 6.2.4). The second is rejected since it is knowledge based on sense-perception, which in Clement's eyes could never discover truth: 'I will never call that knowledge (*γνῶσις*) which comes from sense-perception' (*Strom.* 6.3.1). The third, which may be called 'logical knowledge' (*ἡ γνῶσις ἡ λογική*, *Strom.* 4.54.1), and which is further described and discussed in Book 8 of the *Stromateis*, is the common Platonic definition:

¹ Karl Prümm, 'Glaube und Erkenntnis im zweiten Buch der Stromata des Klemens von Alexandrien,' *Scholastik*, 12 (1937), 17–57; P. Th. Camelot, *Foi et Gnose. Introduction à l'étude de la connaissance mystique chez Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1945); Eric F. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, 1957); and Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh, 1995), 130–78.

² For this paragraph, see Osborn, *The Philosophy*, 146–7.

‘But that which is called knowledge (γνώσις) in a special sense is characterized by judgement (τῆς γνώμης) and reason (τοῦ λόγου)’ (*Strom.* 6.3.2). The two types of knowledge, the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘logical’, which both have the same foundation, namely faith, are, according to Clement, equally important in attaining knowledge of God.

A few words about Clement’s terminology: gnosis (generally synonymous with σοφία) is true or real knowledge; rational or scientific knowledge or understanding (ἐπιστήμη) comes close to apprehension (κατάληψις), and is often equivalent to demonstration (ἀπόδειξις). Demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) is also defined as ‘to draw a conclusion from what is true’: τὸ δέ γε ἐξ ἀληθῶν τι περαίνειν ἀποδεικνύειν ἐστίν (*Strom.* 8.6.2). About rational knowledge Clement also claims: ‘For ἐπιστήμη, which we affirm the gnostic alone possesses, is a sure comprehension (κατάληψις), leading up through true and sure reason to the knowledge (γνώσις) of the cause’ (*Strom.* 6.162.4). Θεωρία and ἐποπτεία are used to describe the vision of the Gnostic.³

In Clement’s view, the basis of all knowledge is faith (πίστις). This point is made in relation to both ‘logical’ and ‘spiritual’ knowledge. Logical knowledge and spiritual knowledge are inseparable to Clement, as Eric Osborn stresses: ‘These two kinds of knowledge start, continue, and finish together. They begin with faith and end in the vision

³ For a more detailed terminological exposition, see Walther Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Clemens Alexandrinus* (Berlin, 1952), 301–21.

of God. Their practices—logical inquiry and Christian piety—are interdependent ways of doing the same thing.’⁴

Book 2 of the *Stromateis* specifically considers the question of the relationship between faith (πίστις) and knowledge. Clement repeatedly states that faith, which is an act of the will (not a natural part of man), is presupposed in all knowledge; there is no knowledge without faith: ‘Ἐὰν μὴ πιστεύσητε, οὐδὲ μὴ συνῆτε (‘If you do not have faith, you cannot understand’, Is. 7.9, *Strom.* 1.8.2).⁵ Faith is superior to rational knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and is its criterion (*Strom.* 2.15.5). Its identity with gnosis is asserted: ‘Knowledge is one with faith, and faith one with knowledge, through a mutual implication derived from God’ (Πιστὴ τοίνυν ἡ γνῶσις, γνωστὴ δὲ ἡ πίστις θεία τινὶ ἀκολουθίᾳ τε καὶ ἀντακολουθίᾳ γίνεται, *Strom.* 2.16.2).

The so-called ‘eighth book’ of the *Stromateis*, which is not an organic part of the work, but a note-book of extracts made by Clement for his own use,⁶ contains evidence of the logic that Clement practised. The presupposition of faith, also in relation to the first principles of things (τὰς τῶν ὅλων ἀρχάς), is stated here: ‘In point of fact, the philosophers admit that the first principles of all things are indemonstrable (ἀναποδείκτους). So if there is a demonstration at all, there is an absolute necessity that there be something that is self-evident (πιστόν), which is called primary and indemonstrable. Consequently all demonstration

⁴ Osborn, *The Philosophy*, 146. Cf. also Eric F. Osborn, ‘Arguments for Faith in Clement of Alexandria,’ *Vigiliae Christianae*, 48 (1994), 1–24.

⁵ Cf. also *Strom.* 2.8.3; 2.12.1; 7.95.5.

⁶ For the contents of the work, see Osborn, *The Philosophy*, 148–53.

is traced up to indemonstrable faith (ἀναπόδεικτον πίστιν)' (*Strom.* 8.7.1–2). Faith, then, being the basis for both spiritual and logical knowledge, is an integral part of the true Christian. For Clement the Gnostic (ὁ γνωστικός), who is the true Christian (ὁ τῷ ὄντι Χριστιανός, *Strom.* 7.1.1), is characterized by possessing both spiritual and logical knowledge. This gnosis, which is a perfection of the faith (*Strom.* 6.165.1) and 'the perfection of man as man' (ἡ γνώσις τελείωσις τις ἀνθρώπου ὡς ἀνθρώπου, *Strom.* 7.55.1), leads to the everlasting vision or contemplation of God (θεωρία αἰδίου, *Strom.* 7.56.5).

Yet, Clement's consistent adherence to the unknowability and ineffability of God is never far from the surface. We may take an example from Book 2 of the *Stromateis* in which, as we have seen, Clement's primary concern is to expound his views of knowledge and faith, wisdom and understanding. After a short introduction, where he also lists the different areas of 'the Barbarian philosophy', he gives a distinct warning, as if to remind his readers that, although they may grow in knowledge and wisdom, they must not think that they can ever know God himself (cf. above, Ch. 5): 'The process of learning about these things, when practised with right conduct, leads upwards through wisdom which has made everything, to the Ruler of all, a being hard to track down, who always withdraws and always retreats from him who pursues him' (*Strom.* 2.5.3) (my trans.).⁷ And then he adds

⁷ Ἀνάγει δὲ ἡ τούτων μάθησις, μετὰ ὀρθῆς πολιτείας ἀσκηθεῖσα, διὰ τῆς πάντων τεχνίτιδος σοφίας ἐπὶ τὸν ἡγεμόνα τοῦ παντός, δυσάλωτόν τι χρῆμα καὶ δυσήρατον, ἐξαναχωροῦν αἰεὶ καὶ πόρρω ἀφιστάμενον τοῦ διώκοντος.

that God can only be known through the mediation of the Son: 'This selfsame Ruler, who is so distant, has—a wonder unutterable—come very close. "I am a God who draws near", says the Lord. He is far off in his *ousia* (for how can that which is begotten ever come close to that which is unbegotten?) but very close by his *dynamis*, in which he has embraced all things' (*Strom.* 2.5.4) (my trans.).⁸

Under no circumstance, then, can Clement accept the notion that the essence (*οὐσία*) of the unbegotten God could be known to man. But it is equally evident that by the immanence and mediation of the One-Many, the Son, 'in which he has embraced all things', he has been made available to the world. I shall come back to this at the end of the chapter.

THE ONE AND THE ONE-MANY

The strong apophatic tendency in Clement's thought is, as we have seen, closely related to his view of the limits of language in relation to the transcendent. Apophaticism is presupposed in his use of paradox, metaphors, parables, and symbols. It is also presupposed in his recourse to the *via negativa*, the negative or apophatic way to the knowledge of God. The mystery of God cannot after all be expressed within

⁸ 'Ο δὲ αὐτὸς μακρὰν ὦν ἐγγυτάτῳ βέβηκεν, θαῦμα ἄρρητον· "θεὸς ἐγγίζων ἐγώ," φησὶ κύριος. πόρρω μὲν κατ' οὐσίαν (πῶς γὰρ ἂν συνεγγίσει ποτὲ τὸ γεννητὸν ἀγεννήτῳ;) ἐγγυτάτῳ δὲ δυνάμει, ἥ τὰ πάντα ἐγκεκόλπισται. Cf. also *Strom.* 6.165.3–166.2.

the realm of senses where language operates. The knowledge based on sense perception was, as we saw, rejected by Clement. It is only by way of a deconstruction of all (positive) knowledge, in the acknowledgment of ‘not knowing what he is, but what he is not’ (οὐχ ὃ ἐστίν, ὃ δὲ μὴ ἐστὶ γνωρίσαντες, *Strom.* 5.71.3), that true knowledge of God is achieved.

For Clement man is not in a position to know truth, or God. This is the only view compatible with his acknowledgment of the absolute gulf between the Creator and the creation—or between the One and the Many. Clement therefore esteems the concept of ignorance (ἄγνοια)—realizing that the only possible attitude for man to adopt concerning God is to admit his unknowability—as well as that of silence (above, ch. 5). This concept he finds both in the Old Testament, in that ‘which the Scripture signified by “night” ’ (*Strom.* 5.17.3), and in Plato. Clement also combines Plato with Paul’s ‘faith, hope and love’ of 1 Cor. 13.13, which he understands as stages in the process of learning to live a true life:

To stop and give attention to his own ignorance (ἡ τῆς ἀγνοίας ἐπίστασις) is, then, the first lesson in walking according to the Logos. An ignorant man has sought, and having sought, he finds the teacher; and finding has believed, and believing has hoped; and henceforward having loved, is assimilated to what was loved—endeavouring to be what he first loved. Such is the method Socrates shows Alcibiades, who thus questions: ‘Do you not think that I shall know about what is right otherwise?’ ‘Yes, if you have found out.’ ‘But you don’t think I have found out?’ ‘Certainly, if you have sought.’ ‘Then you don’t think that I have sought?’

‘Yes, if you think you do not know (’Εγωγωγε, εἰ οἰηθείης γε μὴ εἰδέναι).’ (*Strom.* 5.17.1–2)

It is thus by acknowledging one’s ignorance concerning the truth that one may walk the right road towards love and even be assimilated to it. It is the same concept of ‘unknowledge’ that Clement exhibits when he describes the way of abstraction to the knowledge of God (below). When the seeker has attained his goal, and (thinks he) knows God, Clement assures us that the knowledge gained is a negative knowledge.

The realization which seems to lie at the heart of Clement’s view of language, and which in turn affects his view of how man can obtain knowledge of God, is based on his understanding of the incarnation. He sees this historical event as a breaking of the ‘mystic silence’ through his interpretation of the dumbness of Zacharias (*Protr.* 10.1). Christ’s coming as Logos ends the pre-incarnational silence and sanctions material reality, including language. Clement sees the paradox central to Christian Platonism to a great extent, but not wholly, in terms of a distinction between the Son as the revealer of God and God himself who is unknowable. Language operates only as far as the level of the Son, beyond which there is silence.⁹

Clement distinguishes between God as τὸ ἔν, a simple unity, and the Son as πάντα ἔν, the unity of all things (*Strom.* 4.156.2). This distinction is counterbalanced by his equally strong insistence on the unity of the two. As we have

⁹ Cf. Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. ii: *The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* (Bonn, 1986), 36–8.

seen, the influence of certain Platonic texts alluding to the transcendent is much in evidence in the Middle Platonic writers, including Clement. Just as the interpretation of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* was applied to the Christian God, so the second hypothesis was interpreted in relation to the Son of God.

In the *Parmenides*, Plato made the distinction between the one as a simple unity (the first hypothesis), and the one as a complex whole of many parts (the second hypothesis). According to the first hypothesis, the one is 'neither named nor described nor thought of nor known' (*Parm.* 142a), and can thus only be described in negative terms. The one as unity of all things, on the other hand, can be perceived and described: 'And there would be knowledge and opinion and perception of it, ... and it has a name and definition, is named and defined, and all the similar attributes which pertain to other things pertain also to the one' (*Parm.* 155d–e).

In the Middle Platonic period this dialogue was read in a theologico-metaphysical way, meaning that the concepts of the one, the one-many, the many etc., were interpreted as entities in a divine sphere, not solely as philosophical concepts (cf. Ch. 3). In Clement, the one of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* corresponds to the transcendent God, also called τὸ ἔν, while the one of the second hypothesis corresponds to his immanent Logos, 'the circle of all the powers rolled and united into one unity', the πάντα ἔν (*Strom.* 4.156.2) or μονάς (*Strom.* 5.71.2). While the one of the first hypothesis has no name, nor can be the object of any kind of knowledge (*Parm.* 142a)—thus Clement's God is

ἀωνονόμαστος (*Strom.* 5.81.6)¹⁰—the πάντα εἶν, or the Logos, can be named and perceived (*Strom.* 4.156.1).

The distinction between the Monad and a still purer unity, described as the ‘truth itself’, is also clear from a passage in the *Protrepticus*, where, however, the context is an appeal for salvation:

Let us hasten to salvation, to the new birth. Let us, who are many, hasten to be gathered together into one love corresponding to the union of the One Being (εἰς μίαν ἀγάπην συναχθῆναι οἱ πολλοὶ κατὰ τὴν τῆς μοναδικῆς οὐσίας ἔνωσιν σπεύσωμεν). Similarly, let us follow after unity by the practice of good works, seeking the good Monad (τὴν ἀγαθὴν . . . μονάδα). And the union of many into one, bringing a divine harmony out of many scattered sounds, becomes one symphony, following one leader and teacher, the Logos, and never ceasing till it reaches the truth itself, with the cry, ‘Abba Father’. (*Protr.* 88.2–3)

Here the Monad, which can be none other than the Logos of God, the Christ, is the unity of many parts, bringing harmony to scattered elements. Beyond this composite unity, however, there is the pure unity, recognized in the cry ‘Abba Father’.¹¹

For the Middle Platonist generation, with its emphasis on the One and the Many, thought and language necessarily

¹⁰ Cf. also *Paed.* 1.57.2. John Whittaker, ‘Ἀρρητος καὶ ἀκατονόμαστος’, in H.-D. Blume and F. Mann (eds.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie* (Münster/Westf., 1983), 303–6, has shown that Clement, in his theologico-metaphysical adaptation of the first hypothesis, condenses *Parm.* 142a (οὐδ’ ἄρα ὄνομα ἐστὶν αὐτῷ οὐδέ λόγος) into the single word ἀωνονόμαστος.

¹¹ Cf. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, 43. See also Raoul Mortley, *Connaissance religieuse et herméneutique chez Clément d’Alexandrie* (Leiden, 1973), 92.

operated under the condition of multiplicity. In describing realities, language involves predication, and predication implies separation between subject and predicate and between words and things. The simple, bare unity of the transcendent first principle, could therefore never be expressed in words or be given predicates, because predicates imply plurality and thus belong to the many. Distinctions imply plurality, and plurality implies distinction. The One, however, is identical with itself. All reality from the lowest matter to the unity of all things is, therefore, characterized by difference, in which there is predication and description.¹² God, however, the simple $\epsilon\nu$, is 'above all speech, all conception, all thought' (*Strom.* 5.65.2).

How, then, is God to be known? In the Christian Greek tradition, including Clement, the answer is twofold: God may be known negatively, by the apophatic or negative way, and he may be known positively by the 'kataphatic' way, which has been made possible by the Son of God.

THE *VIA NEGATIVA*

How should the *via negativa* be defined? For Raoul Mortley who has written extensively on these matters,¹³ the expression belongs to 'that branch of epistemology which speculates

¹² Raoul Mortley and David Dockrill (eds.), *The Via Negativa* (Auckland, NZ, 1981), 10–11.

¹³ See Bibliography.

on the value of negating the given as a means of grasping transcendent or hidden entities',¹⁴ or—put differently, but still in general terms—it 'denotes a method of knowing the transcendent essence of things, called the Good by Plato, the One by the Neoplatonists, and Father by Christians'.¹⁵ The negative way also constitutes a special use of language; it denies that any positive statements about the nature of God may be given, while, on the other hand, it presupposes the positive statements of God—which are negated.

As A.-J. Festugière showed in his monumental work, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*,¹⁶ the explanation for this new awe of the transcendent, so typical of the Middle Platonic period, should not be sought in oriental influences.¹⁷ Using numerous examples he demonstrates that there is a continuity of this transcendentalism within the Greek tradition and that it is an established doctrine in Middle Platonism. Though Plato never developed a theory of negation in an epistemological context, as later Platonists did (see below), he nevertheless laid an important basis for subsequent speculation concerning the knowledge of the first principle.

It was Aristotle who coined the technical terms of negative theology.¹⁸ Its main elements were from then on considered

¹⁴ Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, 13.

¹⁵ In Mortley and Dockrill (eds.), *The Via Negativa*, 12.

¹⁶ Esp. vol. iv: *Le Dieu inconnu et la Gnose* (Paris, 1954), ch. 4.

¹⁷ This was the view of Eduard Norden, *Agnostos theos. Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte Religiöser Rede* (Darmstadt, 1974), 83–5.

¹⁸ Esp. *Metaphysics* 1016–65. For the following exposition I am especially indebted to Raoul Mortley, 'The Fundamentals of the Via Negativa', *American Journal of Philology*, 103 (1982), 429–39 and John Whittaker, 'Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology', *Symbolae Osloenses*, 44 (1969), 109–25.

to be *στέρησις* (privation), *ἀφαίρεσις* (abstraction), and *ἀπόφασις* (negation). The first two have to do with the removal of attributes: the alpha *στερητικόν* (privative) denotes the absence of a given quality, whereas the method of *ἀφαίρεσις* consists of a removal, step by step, of the attributes of a thing until its essential character is revealed. *Ἀπόφασις* is Aristotle's general term for negation. Now the use of alpha-privative words and the method of abstraction were closely related in Aristotle's definitions, as they are in the usage of Middle Platonism, so the difference between negation and abstraction/privation tends to dissolve. They all involve removal: 'Removing an attribute must be considered a type of negation under almost any formulation of it.'¹⁹

Neither abstraction nor privation, however, are reckoned as being negation in its proper sense. As is the case with the Middle Platonists whom we will consider in the following, Clement is more concerned with a method by which we can form a conception of God, than with the way in which we can speak about God. It is not until Plotinus and onwards that one may speak of a full-fledged negative theology. This theology requires a systematic use of the negative *οὐκ* (not).

As Mortley points out, the negative adjective may have a wide range of meanings, and is often ambiguous: 'saying God is "unknowable", for example, might simply be to affirm that knowledge of God is difficult to come by, or that it is dissimilar to any other form of knowledge'.²⁰ It is

¹⁹ Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, 19.

²⁰ Mortley, 'The Fundamentals', 432.

also looser to say that God is *ἀόρατος* (invisible) than saying that he is *οὐκ ὄρατός* (not-visible). The latter expression, then, is characteristic of a more developed, but also, one might say, of a more systematic philosophical theology. There is actually an important shift from *ἀφαίρεσις* to *ἀπόφασις* in the *via negativa* of the later Platonists. The later Platonists (from Plotinus on) turned to the latter in their attempts to express a negative theology, whereas the earlier generation had used the former.²¹

The method of abstraction

The negative theology in its first stage, represented by the generation of the Middle Platonists, requires the way of abstraction. In their version of the *via negativa* the verbs *ἀφαιρέω* (take away) and *περὶαίρῃω* (take away, take off) are commonly in use. The Pythagorean view of reality which lies behind the method was that reality grew out of numbers, starting from a single unit or monad. From there it grows from points to lines, plane figures, solid figures, sensible bodies, and so on. This incremental view of reality was also shared by Plato and Aristotle. Reality is an accumulated structure arising from invisible beginnings or essence (*οὐσία*). This accumulation is regarded as a 'descent' into material reality. To find the essence of a thing, or the continuous, has become a difficult task; the knowledge of the One or the ultimate essence requires a removal of the

²¹ Mortley, 'The Fundamentals', 435.

attributes and characteristics of sensible reality. The method designed to do just that is the method of abstraction.

Among the Middle and Neo-Platonists, the method of abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις) is found in Celsus, Alcinous, Plutarch,²² Plotinus,²³ Maximus of Tyre,²⁴ as well as in Clement of Alexandria. Whereas in this context Clement, for his part, only mentions one way, the way of abstraction, the Platonists Celsus and Alcinous both recommend three ways to the knowledge of God.

Celsus (c. AD 185), known through the quotations from his treatise *On the True Doctrine* which Origen discusses and criticizes in his *Contra Celsum*, advocates the ways of synthesis, analysis, and analogy:

You see how the way of truth is sought by seers and philosophers, and how Plato knew that it is impossible for all men to travel it. Since this is the reason why wise men have discovered it, that we might get some conception of the nameless First Being which manifests him either by synthesis with other things, or by analytical distinction from them, or by analogy (ἢ τῇ συνθέσει τῇ ἐπὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἢ ἀναλύσει ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἢ ἀναλογίᾳ), I would like to teach about that which is otherwise indescribable. (C. Cels. 7.42)²⁵

In Alcinous the three ways to the conception of God are the way of abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις), that of analogy (the *via*

²² *Quaestiones Platonicae* 1001e–1002a.

²³ *Enneads* 6.7.36.

²⁴ 17.11.

²⁵ Trans. Henry Chadwick (ed.), *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge, 1980), 429–30. Cf. also R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Celsus: On the True Doctrine. A Discourse Against the Christians* (Oxford, 1987), 111.

analogiae as it is commonly called) and a third to which he does not give a name, but which he characterizes as having to do with pre-eminence (ὑπεροχή), customarily called the *via eminentiae*:

The first way of conceiving God is by abstraction of these attributes (ἡ κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν), just as we form the conception of a point by abstraction from sensible phenomena, conceiving first a surface, then a line, and finally a point. The second way of conceiving him is that of analogy (ἡ κατὰ ἀναλογίαν) . . . The third way of conceiving him is the following: one contemplates first beauty in bodies, then after that turns to the beauty in souls . . . after which one gains an intuition of the Good itself . . . and along with this one also intuites God, in virtue of his pre-eminence in honour (τούτῳ δὲ καὶ θεὸν συνεπινοεῖ διὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ τιμίῳ ὑπεροχὴν). (*Did.* 10.165)

Festugière has convincingly argued that the three ways found in Celsus and in Alcinoüs are identical:²⁶ the way of synthesis in Celsus corresponds to the *via eminentiae* in Alcinoüs and the way of analysis to the method of ἀφαίρεσις; the third, that of analogy, is the same in both authors.

Clement, however, whose method of abstraction has its parallels in Celsus and Alcinoüs, does not include the two kataphatic or positive ways to the knowledge of God in connection with his exposition of the method of abstraction. It may, however, be demonstrated that the *via analogiae* and the *via eminentiae* are also included as indirect ways to the knowledge of God in Clement.²⁷

²⁶ Festugière, *Le Dieu inconnu et la Gnose*, 116–18.

²⁷ Cf. Raoul Mortley, “ΑΝΑΛΟΓΙΑ chez Clément d’Alexandrie,” *Revue des Études Grecques*, 84 (1971), 80–93.

In the *Stromateis*, as in Alcinous' *Didascalicus*, the negative way—the gradual abstraction from material things to arrive at a contemplation of God by the mind alone—is associated with mathematical theory. This is how Clement describes the method:

We shall understand the mode of purification by confession (ὁμολογία), and that of contemplation by analysis (ἀνάλυσις), advancing by analysis to the first notion, beginning with the properties underlying it; abstracting from the body its physical properties, taking away the dimension of depth, then that of breadth, and then that of length. For the point which remains is a unit, so to speak, having position (τὸ γὰρ ὑπολειφθὲν σημειῶν ἐστι μονὰς ὡς εἰπεῖν θέσιν ἔχουσα); from which if we abstract position, there is the conception of unity (ἥς ἐὰν περιέλωμεν τὴν θέσιν, νοεῖται μονάς). (*Strom.* 5.71.2)

When comparing the two mathematical illustrations of the *via negativa* in the Middle Platonists Alcinous and Clement, certain comments spring to mind. The least significant, perhaps, is the different names they apply to the method. The fact that Clement uses the term ἀνάλυσις in accord with Celsus, instead of ἀφαίρεσις as does Alcinous (as well as Plutarch) when referring to the method of abstraction, no doubt shows that ἀνάλυσις was a current Middle Platonic term for the procedure in question.²⁸

Clement seems to give a more detailed exposition than Alcinous of the method of abstraction. As John Whittaker points out, Clement includes a final stage in the negative process which has no counterpart in Alcinous: 'For the point

²⁸ Thus Whittaker, 'Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology', 113.

which remains is a unit, so to speak, having position; from which if we abstract position, there is the conception of unity.' Besides pointing to Neopythagorean influence (which I will not elaborate), it also, as Whittaker sees it, indicates that Clement's account is independent of that of Alcinous (Wolfson regarded Clement's account as a paraphrase from Alcinous)²⁹ and that they both were recounting a familiar doctrine.³⁰

In addition to the different names they apply to the method and Clement's more detailed exposition of it, another difference between the two accounts is the rather conspicuous combination of the two approaches 'abstraction' (ἀφαίρεσις) and 'confession' (ὁμολογία) that is found in Clement's account: 'We shall understand the mode of purification by confession, and that of contemplation by analysis.' The use of the term 'confession' in this context probably alludes to the sequence of baptismal initiation.³¹ It tells us anyway that the road leading to the contemplation of God in Clement's eyes also involves a spiritual and ethical striving, whereas in Alcinous' version the spiritual aspect is much less developed than the mental one.

The greatest difference, however, between the two accounts consists in the fact that Clement does not stop with the 'final stage', the μονάς, as Alcinous does, but goes on to describe an act which in reality is a new stage: 'If, then,

²⁹ Harry Austryn Wolfson, 'Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides', *Harvard Theological Review*, 50 (1957), 145–56, at 147.

³⁰ Whittaker, 'Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology', 113.

³¹ Cf. the comments in Alain Le Boulluec (ed.), *Clément d'Alexandrie: Stromate 5*, vol. ii (Paris, 1981), 244–5.

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, not knowing what he is, but what he is not' (*Strom.* 5.71.3).³² Clement here distinguishes himself from the more philosophical approaches and practices of the *via negativa*, not only by such formulas as 'casting himself into the greatness of Christ', but also by again pointing to the spiritual/ethical side of the process, that the road must be tread 'by holiness'.

It is difficult, I think, to express the basic nature of apophatic theology in more adequate terms than Clement does in this last phrase: arriving at the point, we abstract its position and are left with unity itself. After the method of abstraction has been exhausted, however, one advances, by an extra-rational step, into the 'immensity of Christ'. But not even Christ can mediate knowledge of God; if there is knowledge to be gained, it is a negative one. The consistency as well as perseverance in Clement's thought regarding the inaccessibility of God is remarkable.

Turning finally to Numenius, there is a fragment from his treatise *On the Good* which indicates that he probably knew and used the negative way to the knowledge of the Good (above, Ch. 3). Here Numenius (fr. 2) argues that we may

³² *Εἰ τοίνυν, ἀφέλονται πάντα ὅσα πρόσεστι τοῖς σώμασιν καὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις ἀσωμάτοις, ἐπιρρίψαιμεν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ κείθεν εἰς τὸ ἀχανὲς ἀγιότητι προίοιμεν, τῇ νοήσει τοῦ παντοκράτορος ἀμῇ γένηται προσάγοιμεν (ἄν), οὐχ ὅ ἐστιν, ὁ δὲ μή ἐστι γνωρίσαντες.*

know sensible objects by comparing them with similar objects. The Good, however, does not have anything that it can be likened to. If man wants to know God, Numenius writes, he must withdraw from the things of sense

and commune in solitude with the good alone (ὁμιλῆσαι τῷ ἀγαθῷ μόνῳ μόνον),³³ where there is neither man nor any other living thing, nor body great or small, but a certain immense, indescribable and absolute divine solitude (ἀλλὰ τις ἄφατος καὶ ἀδιήγητος ἀτεχνῶς ἐρημία θεοπέσιος), where already the occupations, and splendours of the good exist, and the good itself, in peace and benevolence, the solitary (τὸ ἔρημον), the sovereign, sits high above all being (ἐπὶ τῇ οὐσίᾳ). (fr. 2)

The similarity between the views of Alcinous and Numenius concerning the knowledge of God is emphasized by Festugière. While Alcinous employs the method of ἀφαίρεσις (as Clement does), Festugière claims that in Numenius' concept of solitude (ἐρημία) the same method is implied. God is τὸ ἔρημον (the solitary) and can never be determined or approached by any concept. Therefore he escapes all rational knowledge. But above the λόγος—the rational faculty in man—is the νοῦς which, as a super-rational faculty, permits the vision and mystical contemplation of the divine.³⁴

³³ Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.7: Ἀναβατέον οὖν πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν, ... ἕως ἄν τις παρελθὼν ἐν τῇ ἀναβάσει πᾶν ὅσον ἀλλότριον τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτῷ μόνῳ αὐτὸ μόνον ἴδῃ εἰλικρινές, ἀπλοῦν, καθαρὸν, ἀφ' οὗ πάντα ἐξήρτηται καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπει καὶ ἔστι καὶ ζῇ καὶ νοεῖ. ('So we must ascend again to the good, ... passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God, one sees with one's self That alone, simple, single and pure, from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think', trans. A. H. Armstrong, LCL).

³⁴ In Alcinous too God is known by the mind alone: Ἀρρητος δ' ἔστι καὶ νῶ μόνῳ ληπτός, *Did.* 10.165.5.

But if anyone, obstinately clinging to the things of sense, fancies that he sees the good hovering over them, and then in luxurious living should suppose that he has found the good; he is altogether mistaken. For in fact no easy pursuit is needed for it, but a godlike effort (*θείας . . . μεθόδου*); and the best plan is to neglect the things of sense, and with vigorous devotion to mathematical learning to study the properties of numbers (*νεανιευσαμένῳ πρὸς τὰ μαθήματα, τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς θεασαμένῳ*), and so to meditate carefully on the question: what is being? (fr. 2)

Numenius thinks one may reach the good by 'a godlike effort' and by the mathematical method. When Clement reached the *μονάς*, however, the pursuit of the One was not at an end. It has no end, at least not in this life. The knowledge that was gained was a negative one.

While it is correct to say that Clement's theology is strongly apophatic, it is essential not to forget the other pole in his thought, namely the mediating role of the Son as the conveyor of true knowledge of the Father. This will be the topic of the last section of this chapter.

THE SON AS THE REVEALER OF THE FATHER: THE KATAPHATIC WAY

The transcendent God has, through an act of grace, disclosed himself in the Son. Unlike the transcendent God, then, the Son is circumscribed and limited and his Unity-in-Multiplicity (as the One-Many) is nameable. Hence the Son is the comprehensible aspect of God, the concrete expression of the

abstract: ‘God, then, who is indemonstrable, is not the object of knowledge. But the Son is wisdom, knowledge, truth and all such things related to these, and in that way he can be demonstrated and described’ (*Strom.* 4.156.1).

The Son of God has, as we saw in Chapter 6, been endowed with many names and attributes, some of which are associated primarily with his role as the revealer of the Father. The most important among these is undoubtedly the concept of *dynamis* (‘power’). Therefore before looking more closely at this concept, I shall present a key text of the New Testament concerning the Son’s mediation as well as the image of ‘the Father’s face’ that Clement applies to the Son.

Matthew 11.27 (and its parallel text Luke 10.22) appears rather frequently in Clement’s writings. It is cited, in more or less complete form, at least a dozen times, and is found in all his main works:³⁵ ‘and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’ (Matt. 11.27).³⁶

The text is placed in rather different contexts. In one of them Clement states that the knowledge of God may also help man to know himself:³⁷ ‘It is he who has shown us in reality how we are to know ourselves (ὅπως [τε] γνωστέον ἐαυτούς), he who reveals the Father of the universe to the person he wills (ὃ ἂν βούληται), and so far as human nature

³⁵ For the references, see Otto Stählin (ed.), *Clemens Alexandrinus*, vol. iv: *Register* (Leipzig, 1936), 12.

³⁶ οὐδεὶς ἐπιγινώσκει τὸν υἱὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ, οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα τις ἐπιγινώσκει εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ ὃ ἂν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι.

³⁷ Cf. also *Paed.* 1.88.2–3.

can conceive him. "For no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any person to whom the Son reveals him" ' (*Strom.* 1.178.2, my trans.).

The knowledge of God that is the goal for the Christian Gnostic is a knowledge by the mind alone, and is only made possible through the divine Teacher coming to aid us because we have 'become too enfeebled for the apprehension of realities' (*Strom.* 5.7.8). This vision and knowledge of God the gnostic soul receives when it has become quite pure, 'worthy to behold forever the Almighty, face to face' (*πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον*)³⁸ (*Strom.* 7.68.4). The vision 'face to face' will not, however, take place in this life, where the vision of God is mediated through the Son: 'The knowledge of God (*ἡ νόησις τοῦ θεοῦ*) is inaccessible to the ears and other related organs. Therefore the Son is said to be the Father's face (*πρόσωπον εἴρηται τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ υἱός*) by becoming a bearer of flesh through the five senses, the Logos who reveals the Father's character (*ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ πατρὸς μνηστὴς ιδιώματος*)' (*Strom.* 5.33.6–34.1, my trans.).

Just as the face is connected with the appearance to the senses, so also the name. Before the Son's advent, Clement writes, 'the Lord God was still nameless, since he had not become man... Logos is the face of God, through whom God is brought to light and made known' (*Paed.* 1.57.2). By being the Father's face and name, the Son makes the inaccessible nature of God accessible to man. The knowledge

³⁸ 1 Cor. 13.12.

that the Son conveys is, so to speak, accommodated to man's limited and finite nature.

THE SON AS THE *DYNAMIS* OF GOD

The Son who is the face and the name of God, 'the revealer of his character' and 'an image of the invisible God' (εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, *Exc.* 19.4),³⁹ is in sum the knowable aspect of the Father. There is, however, another concept that is also used in forming the contrast between the unknowable God and the knowability of the Son: the *dynamis*.

While the concept of Logos has a wide range of applications as a designation of the mediating principle between the transcendent God and the world, that of *dynamis* is in some instances used specifically in the mediation of knowledge. However, given the unsystematic character of Clement's writings as well as the early stage of theological thinking, overlapping and parallels in roles between the two aspects of the Son are not uncommon. The distinction between the Logos and the *dynamis* is not always clear, as, for instance, in a paragraph where Clement describes the nature of the Son, his status and his operations: 'For the Son is the power of God, being the Father's most ancient Logos, prior to all created things, and his wisdom' (*Strom.* 7.7.4, my trans.).⁴⁰

³⁹ Col. 1.15.

⁴⁰ δύναμις γὰρ τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ υἱός, ἅτε πρὸ πάντων τῶν γενομένων ἀρχικώτατος λόγος τοῦ πατρός, καὶ σοφία αὐτοῦ κυρίως ἄν.

The Logos and the *dynamis* seem to share several aspects: pre-existence, 'proceeding' from the Father, and descent into the world, as well as the unity between them and the Father.

As we shall see below, Clement often identified the word *dynamis* with the Son of God. The word is, of course, also used as a general term with a variety of meanings. In his *Greek Patristic Lexicon*, Lampe divides the term into ten main categories, of which only two are found in Clement: *dynamis* as 'divine power', with many subdivisions; and as 'concrete power', and particularly, in the plural, as 'cosmic spiritual powers', e.g. angels and evil spirits. These subdivisions of 'divine power' and the use of *dynamis* to denote the power of angels and demons correspond roughly to Stählin's entries in his 'Wort- und Sachregister'.⁴¹

It is *dynamis* as 'divine power' that will be the focus of the following exposition.⁴² It forms the main category in Lampe. As 'divine power' the word is used also in the plural (*δυνάμεις*). Osborn traces this doctrine of 'powers' back to the philosopher Posidonius (c.135–c.50 BC) who taught that the cosmos was ordered by a system of 'powers' equivalent to Plato's forms and the immanent reason of the Stoics. They were originally conceived in terms of natural explanations of physical phenomena, but gradually became supernatural beings who also ruled the world as intermediaries between the transcendent God and the world. This idea of a mediator having a unifying character and function has,

⁴¹ Stählin (ed.), *Clemens Alexandrinus*, vol. iv, 353–6.

⁴² For a survey of literature on *δύναμις*, see Hermann Josef Sieben, *Voces. Eine Bibliographie zu Wörtern und Begriffen aus der Patristik (1918–1978)* (Berlin, 1980), 68.

according to Osborn, determined the structure of the second hypostasis in Middle and Neo-Platonism.⁴³

Power in the plural is not uncommon in Clement, and one may ask, then, what does he mean by 'powers'? 'For the Son of God never moves from his watchtower... He is all reason, all eye, all light from the Father, seeing all things, hearing all things, knowing all things, with power searching the powers' (*δυνάμει τὰς δυνάμεις ἐρευνῶν*, *Strom.* 7.5.5). The 'powers' are here the thoughts and actions of God. *Protr.* 112.1 lists some of them: 'If our teacher is he who has filled the universe with holy powers (*τὰ πάντα δυνάμεισιν ἁγίαις*), creation (*δημιουργία*), salvation (*σωτηρία*), beneficence (*εὐεργεσία*), lawgiving (*νομοθεσία*), prophecy (*προφητεία*), teaching (*διδασκαλία*), this teacher now instructs in all things, and the whole world has by this time become an Athens and a Greece through the Logos.'

The powers of God, salvation, prophecy, and even creation are collectively one thing; they come together in the Son who is the prime instrument of divine action: 'All the powers of the Spirit are brought to fulfilment together, becoming one thing and the same, the Son. But he is not completely expressed by our conception of each of his powers; he is not merely One as Unity, nor Many as having parts, but One as All. For he is the circle of all powers which in him are rounded and united' (*Strom.* 4.156.1–2).⁴⁴

⁴³ Osborn, *The Philosophy*, 41–2.

⁴⁴ *πάσαι δὲ αἱ δυνάμεις τοῦ πνεύματος συλλήβδην μὲν ἓν τι πρᾶγμα γενόμεναι συντελοῦσιν εἰς τὸ αὐτό, τὸν υἱόν, ἀπαρέμφατος δὲ ἐστὶ τῆς περὶ ἐκάστης αὐτοῦ τῶν δυνάμεων ἐννοίας. καὶ δὴ οὐ γίνεταί ἀτεχνῶς ἓν ὡς ἓν, οὐδὲ πολλὰ ὡς μέρη ὁ υἱός, ἀλλ' ὡς πάντα ἓν. ἔνθεν καὶ πάντα. κύκλος γὰρ [ὁ] αὐτὸς πασῶν τῶν δυνάμεων εἰς ἓν εἰλουμένων καὶ ἐνουμένων.*

The identity of Christ as the power of God with the powers themselves is evident; he is his powers and the products of the powers: 'The Son is wisdom and knowledge and truth and all else that has affinity thereto' (*Strom.* 4.156.1). He is, however, as the *μονάς* or unity, more than just the totality of all the parts.

The Son in whom the powers are united as in a circle is God's power. Clement mostly uses the term in the singular. The scriptural basis for the identification of the Son with the *dynamis* is 1 Corinthians 1.24: 'but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God'.

This phrase occurs in various forms about ten times in Clement, all of them in the *Stromateis*.⁴⁵ In most instances it is Christ, the Lord or the Logos, who is 'the power and wisdom'. Once, however, it is 'the saviour's teaching' (*ἡ κατὰ τὸν σωτῆρα διδασκαλία*, *Strom.* 1.100.1) and in another passage still it is stated that 'power and wisdom' are the suffering of the Lord: 'they (the Scriptures) proclaim the very suffering endured by the flesh, which the Lord assumed, to be 'the power and wisdom of God' (*Strom.* 6.127.2). In some of the texts, moreover, 'wisdom' is left out and only 'power' is retained, as in *Strom.* 6.47.3: 'For we remember that the Lord is the power of God', and in another still, *δύναμις* ('power') is replaced by *ἐνέργεια* ('energy'): *εἰ τοίνυν αὐτόν τε τὸν Χριστὸν σοφίαν φαμέν καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ* ('if now we say that Christ himself is his wisdom and energy', *Strom.* 6.61.1).

⁴⁵ Stählin (ed.), *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 19.

The prevalence of *dynamis* in Clement may be explained by its scriptural basis. That the concepts of ‘power’ (δύναμις) and ‘energy’ (ἐνέργεια) have the same meaning in his writings may be seen in several texts, as for instance: ‘But all the *energy* of the Lord goes back to the Almighty, and the Son is—so to speak—an *energy* of the Father’ (*Strom.* 7.7.7).⁴⁶

The power of God permeates the whole universe and is omnipresent: ‘For that which is called the descent on the mount of God is the advent of divine power (θείας δυνάμεως), pervading the whole world, and proclaiming “the light inaccessible” ’ (*Strom.* 6.32.4).

Protr. 110.1 expresses the mission of the ‘divine power’ as that of salvation. The power is identified as ‘the Lord’, and is made possible by the ‘divine care’: ‘With a swiftness beyond parallel and a goodwill that is easy of approach, the divine power (ἡ δύναμις ἡ θεϊκή) has shone forth upon the earth and filled the whole world with the seed of salvation. For not without divine care (θείας κομιδῆς) could so great a work have been accomplished, as it has been in so short a time by the Lord, who to outward seeming is despised, but in very deed is adored.’⁴⁷

As the power of God, the Son’s main function is to reveal the Father, to bring the gift of knowledge to man. This knowledge is himself, the Son. The Son is both the power (δύναμις) and the ‘will’ (θέλημα), of the Father: ‘And I freely

⁴⁶ Cf. *Exc.* 8.3.

⁴⁷ The power of God is also identified with the ‘Omnipresent’: ‘But he was the Omnipresent, and is with the Father, for he was the Father’s power’ (*Exc.* 4.2).

give you divine reason, the knowledge of God; I give you myself in perfection. For this is myself, this is God's desire, this is the concord, the harmony of the Father: this is the Son, this is Christ, this is the Word of God, the arm of the Lord, the power of the universe, the Father's will' (*Protr.* 120.3–4).⁴⁸

The relationship between the will (*βούλησις/θέλημα*) of God and his *dynamis* is one of mutual dependence, and sometimes they even seem to be identified (as in the text quoted above):⁴⁹ the Son is the will of the Father. It is by the Father's will that the Son acts as his *dynamis*, for 'nothing is without the will of the Lord of the universe' (*Strom.* 4.86.3), or: 'for swifter than the sun he (the Son) rose from the very will of the Father—he readily lighted up God for us' (*Protr.* 110.3).

Atticus the Middle Platonist, who repeatedly argues—against 'the doctrines of Aristotle'—that the universe was created by a creator at a point in time, strongly emphasizes the role of the will and purpose of God in relation to the creation and preservation of things. In Atticus, too, the power and the will of God are identified: 'without the will and the power of God (*θεοῦ βουλήσεως καὶ δυνάμεως*), neither the created is imperishable nor the imperishable

⁴⁸ Καὶ λόγον χαρίζομαι ὑμῖν, τὴν γνῶσιν τοῦ θεοῦ τέλειον ἐμαντὸν χαρίζομαι. τοῦτό εἰμι ἐγώ, τοῦτο βούλεται ὁ θεός, τοῦτο συμφωνία ἐστί, τοῦτο ἁρμονία πατρός, τοῦτο υἱός, τοῦτο Χριστός, τοῦτο λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, βραχίων κυρίου, δύναμις τῶν ὄλων, τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός.

⁴⁹ Cf. Einar Thomassen and L. Painchaud, *Le Traité Tripartite* (Quebec, 1989), 277–9, with a short survey of this concept in Middle Platonism, pointing to the relationship between *βούλησις* and *δύναμις*.

created' (fr. 4.62).⁵⁰ Yet, while Atticus primarily connects the power (and the will) of God to his providence as a benevolent creator, Clement emphasizes the revelatory aspects.

A main aspect of the *dynamis* in Clement, then, is that of being an instrument of the knowledge of the Father:

The first principle is not in space at all, but above both space, time, name and thought. Therefore says Moses: 'Show thyself to me', indicating most clearly that God cannot be taught or expressed by men, but is known only by the *dynamis* that proceeds from him (ἀλλ' ἡ μόνῃ τῇ παρ' αὐτοῦ δυνάμει γνωστόν). For to seek him is to seek the formless and invisible; the grace of knowledge is from God through his Son. (*Strom.* 5.71.5)

Thus the first principle, which in himself is inexpressible, can only be known by the *dynamis* that proceeds from him, by the grace of God through his Son. The contrast that Clement so strongly emphasizes—between the unknowable and knowable aspects of God—is, as we have seen, essentially a contrast between God and his Son. Clement has often, however, more than one way of expressing his theological beliefs. The above-mentioned distinction is also expressed as a distinction between 'God himself' and 'the works of God' (*Protr.* 67.2) or between 'seeking God and seeking things about God' (διαφέρει δὲ τὸν θεὸν ζητεῖν ἢ τὰ περὶ θεοῦ, *Strom.* 6.150.7). In a few texts, moreover, as in *Strom.* 2.5.4 (above), the distinction is expressed as being between the essence (οὐσία) and the power (δύναμις) of God. In the next chapter we shall see how Clement's

⁵⁰ Cf. *Did.* 10.165.1.

model for the distinction in God deals with the problem of relating the One and the Many without reducing the One or compromising its inaccessibility. The implications of this model, and its role in the continuing process of theological thought will be the topic for the final chapter.

Apophaticism and the Distinction between Essence and Power

One of the things that Clement struggled with the most, as we have seen, was the problem of relating the One to the Many, the transcendent and unknowable God to the immanent and created world of things and objects. On the basis of his uncompromising apophatic attitude in relation to God, the problem was first of all an epistemological one. How was it possible for finite, immanent man to gain knowledge of the infinite and transcendent God? Clement's attempts at answering this question constitute his most important contribution to the development of theology. His speculations in this area also led to important innovative thinking on the concept of the Logos (see Ch. 6).

Clement's answer, then, to the epistemological dilemma may best be described as a distinction between God who is unknowable and his Son, or *dynamis*, who is knowable. In order for the knowledge of God to be real, Clement had to claim divinity also for the mediator, the Logos of God. This distinction, structurally equivalent to a distinction between God's essence and his energies, was later to become a dogma

in the Eastern church. It is then a distinction *in God* between his unknowable essence and his knowable energies, while in Clement it is primarily a distinction between God-in-himself and God-as-revealed-in-his-Son. I shall, however, in the last section of this chapter, also give examples from Clement's writings of a distinction which comes very close to the later Orthodox one.

Before describing in more detail the nature of this basic distinction, I shall put Clement's achievement into perspective by briefly considering whether and in what way this distinction may be traced in even earlier writers.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The epistemological position that God is not manifest in himself or in his essence (*οὐσία*) but only in his powers is already present in Philo's writings (above, Ch. 3). In Philo, however, it is bound up with a hierarchical structure and a subordinationist theology, as is common among the non-Christian Middle Platonists, and which—to a certain degree—is also found in the Christian Apologists. To Philo God is Being (*τὸ ὄν*), he is transcendent and remote from the world. Philo makes a distinction between knowing God's existence (*ὑπαρξίς*), which is possible for man, and knowing his essence (*οὐσία*), which is impossible. The existence of God can be known from his powers (*δυνάμεις*), but his essence cannot. It is through his powers or effects that he is accessible to the world; they reveal not his essence, only his

existence. The powers include the Logos, the nearest principle to the remote God. It will suffice to cite but one example. In *De confusione linguarum* (135–8) Philo rejects—as often—the notion that the transcendent God can ever be described in human terms. As the creator of space, he is both everywhere and nowhere, and is not contained in anything that he has made. Through the powers which he has made, he is everywhere, but himself transcends them:

That aspect of him which transcends his powers (τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὑπεράνω τῶν δυνάμεων ὄν) cannot be conceived of at all in terms of place, but only as pure being (κατὰ τὸ εἶναι μόνον), but that power of his (τούτου δύναμις) by which he made and ordered all things, while it is called God in accordance with the derivation of that name, holds the whole in its embrace and has interfused itself through the parts of the universe. But this divine nature which presents itself to us, as visible and comprehensible and everywhere, is in reality invisible, incomprehensible and nowhere (τὸ δὲ θεῖον καὶ ἀόρατον καὶ ἀκατάληπτον καὶ πανταχοῦ ὄν ὁρατόν τε καὶ καταληπτόν οὐδαμοῦ πρὸς ἀλήθειάν ἐστιν) (137–8).¹

In the hierarchical scheme of Middle Platonist theology—in Alcinous and Numenius, in particular—a distinction is made between a transcendent inactive God and a creative, immanent and lesser Demiurge or second God (while Atticus, on the other hand, identifies the first God and the Demiurge: above, Ch. 3). Compared to Clement, these writers lay less stress on the epistemological function of the second God or Demiurge; the distinction in Alcinous

¹ Trans. LCL. Cf. also *On the Posterity and Exile of Cain* 14–15; 168–9; *On the Decalogue* 59–61; *On the Migration of Abraham* 182–3.

and Numenius between the first and second God is mostly concerned with the question of whether the first God can be a creator or not, which boils down to the question whether the first God can be involved with matter and movement. With regard to terminology, the concepts of essence (*οὐσία*) and power (*δύναμις*) are employed only to a limited degree, and never with reference to God's visibility or knowability. One example from Numenius will serve to illustrate these points: 'For it is not at all becoming that the First God should be the Creator; also the First God must be regarded as the father of the God who is creator of the World... the First God is free from all kinds of work and reigns as king, but the Creative God governs, and travels through the heaven' (fr. 12).²

In the Christian Apologists, the contrast between a transcendent God and a mediating figure, here termed the Logos, has parallels to that between the first and second God in Middle Platonism. There is, as later in Clement, a contrast between the unknowable God and those aspects of the divine, including the Son, that mediate between God and man. The Son is termed *δύναμις* (sometimes also *ἐνέργεια*)³ as in Clement; in addition, the concept of powers (in the plural) plays some role. I shall quote two of the Apologists. Theophilus of Antioch says in his *Ad Autolycum*

² Καὶ γὰρ οὕτε δημιουργεῖν ἐστὶ χρεὼν τὸν πρῶτον καὶ δημιουργοῦντος δὲ θεοῦ χρὴ εἶναι νομίζεσθαι πατέρα τὸν πρῶτον θεόν... τὸν μὲν πρῶτον θεὸν ἄργον εἶναι ἔργων συμπάντων καὶ βασιλέα, τὸν δημιουργικὸν δὲ θεὸν ἡγεμονεῖν δι' οὐρανοῦ ἰόντα.

³ e.g. Athenagoras, *Legatio* 6.2. Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 2.22, employs 'power': 'But his Logos, through whom he made all things, who is his power (*δύναμις*) and wisdom'.

(1.5): 'Just as the soul in a man is not seen, since it is invisible to men, but is apprehended (*νοεῖται*) through the movement of the body, so it may be that God cannot be seen by human eyes but is seen and apprehended through his providence and his works (*διὰ δὲ τῆς προνοίας καὶ τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ*)...Are you unwilling to apprehend God through his works and powers (*διὰ ἔργων καὶ δυνάμεων*)'?

God cannot be seen or known except through his providence (including the advent of his Son) and his works. In Athenagoras, too, God is known through the Logos and his other works: 'Now if Plato is no atheist when he understands the Creator of all things to be the one uncreated God, neither are we atheists when we acknowledge him by whose Word all things were created and upheld by his spirit and assert that he is God' (*Legatio* 6.2).⁴

In the Apologists, then, it is possible to find a distinction similar to that found in Clement. This distinction has, however, a somewhat different background. Instead of being an epistemological one, it is primarily an answer to the question of how the transcendent God can be seen and how he could have created the world. In the writings of Theophilus of Antioch, there is, however, another distinction which appears to come closer to the Clementine one, namely that between expression (*λόγος προφορικός*) and conception (*λόγος ἐνδιάθετος*). Though rejected by Clement (*Strom.* 5.6.3), it nevertheless seems to express the same

⁴ William R. Schoedel (ed.), *Athenagoras: Legatio and De Resurrectione* (Oxford, 1972). Cf. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 2.4.2: 'We know him through his creation and what is invisible in his power we comprehend through what he has made.'

idea as his contrast between the Logos in the Father (ὁ πατρῶος λόγος) and the Logos in the Son.

In an article P. L. Reynolds traces the background of the position that God is not known or seen in his essence (οὐσία) but only in his powers, works or energies, in some ancient sources less well known than the Apologists and Philo. He points out two passages, both of which appear to presuppose the epistemological distinction between essence and power, one in a ps.-Aristotelian treatise, the other in a neo-Pythagorean fragment ascribed to Onatas.⁵

The thesis appears explicitly in the ps.-Aristotelian *De mundo*, a treatise probably composed around the beginning of the Christian era. The theology and cosmology of the treatise is in general Peripatetic,⁶ but the author is an eclectic who borrows from many schools, the main influence coming from Hellenistic Pythagoreanism.⁷

In chapter 6 the author turns from a general description of the cosmos and its elements to the question of the cause that holds it all together. It is an ancient idea, he notes, that all things are full of gods. It is found in both Plato and Aristotle, and the latter attributes it to Thales. In the author's opinion, it is true as regards the power (δύναμις) of God; but he rejects it concerning his essence (οὐσία): 'So

⁵ P. L. Reynolds, 'The Essence, Power and Presence of God: Fragments of the History of an Idea, from Neopythagoreanism to Peter Abelard,' in H. J. Westra (ed.), *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeuneau* (Leiden, 1992), 351–80, at 351–3.

⁶ Cf. D. J. Furley in E. S. Forster and D. J. Furley (eds.), *Aristotle: On Sophistical Refutations, On Coming-to-Be and Passing-Away, On the Cosmos* (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 335.

⁷ Reynolds, 'The Essence, Power and Presence of God', 352.

some of the ancients were led to say that all the things of this world are full of gods, all that are presented to us through our eyes and hearing and all the senses; but in saying this they used terms suitable to the power of God but not to his essence' (*De mundo* 397b17–20).⁸

The author rejects, then, the idea that the essence of God is present in the world so as to be perceptible through the senses. It is only the power of God that may be perceived. His power, the author continues, is experienced most by the body that is closest to him, less by the next one, and so on down to our own regions. The power of God is the cause of everything and so reaches even the remotest places (397b–398a); but it is not fitting for the Great King to be present himself or be the actual executor of things (398b4–7). For since the soul is invisible, it is perceived through its deeds. Then he goes on: 'This is also what we must believe about God, who is mightiest in power, outstanding in beauty, immortal in life, and supreme in excellence, because though he is invisible to every mortal thing he is seen through his deeds (διότι πάσῃ θνητῇ φύσει γενόμενος ἀθεώρητος ἀπ' αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων θεωρεῖται)' (399b19–23). Though God is distinguished as essence (οὐσία) and power (δύναμις) the emphasis is less on the contrast between knowability and unknowability than on that between visibility and invisibility, thus perhaps challenging anthropomorphic notions about God.

⁸ Trans. LCL. διὸ καὶ τῶν παλαιῶν εἰπεῖν τινες προήχθησαν ὅτι πάντα ταῦτά ἐστι θεῶν πλέα τὰ καὶ δι' ὀφθαλμῶν ἰνδαλλόμενα ἡμῖν καὶ δι' ἀκοῆς καὶ πάσης αἰσθήσεως, τῇ μὲν θείᾳ δυνάμει πρέποντα καταβαλλόμενοι, οὐ μὲν τῇ γε οὐσίᾳ.

The other text to which Reynolds calls attention is a fragment belonging to a corpus of texts in Doric Greek pseudepigraphically ascribed to various ancient Pythagoreans. Most of them were composed in Italy in the late second century BC.⁹ The text is ascribed to Onatas and distinguishes between the supreme God or Deity and lesser gods, as well as between the Deity himself and his powers:

For God himself is the intellect, soul and ruler of the whole world. His powers, whose distributor he is, are perceptible, and so are those (powers) which go to and fro across the whole world. God himself, on the other hand, is neither visible nor perceptible, but may be contemplated by the mind and intellect alone, while his works and his deeds are manifest and perceptible for all men. It seems to me that God is not one, but the greatest and highest and ruler of all is one, while the numerous other (gods) are different with regard to power; the one who is superior in power and greatness and virtue rules over them all.¹⁰

The safest way to the knowledge of God, it seems, is through his works and deeds, which are manifest to all men. God himself may, however, be contemplated intellectually. As in the second passage from *De mundo*, the emphasis here, too,

⁹ Reynolds, 'The Essence, Power and Presence of God', 353.

¹⁰ Text in H. Thesleff (ed.), *The Pythagorean Texts of the Hellenistic Period* (Åbo, 1965), 138–40; my trans. αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἐστὶν νόος καὶ ψυχὰ καὶ τὸ ἀγεμονικὸν τῷ σύμπαντος κόσμῳ· ταὶ δὲ δυνάμεις αὐτῷ αἰσθηταί, ὧν ἐντὶ νομεύς, [τά τ' ἔργα καὶ ταὶ πράξεις] καὶ ταὶ κατὰ τὸν σύμπαντα κόσμον ἐπιστρωφώσεις. ὁ μὲν ὧν θεὸς αὐτὸς οὔτε ὁρατὸς οὔτε αἰσθητός, ἀλλὰ λόγῳ μόνον καὶ νόῳ θεωρατός· τὰ δ' ἔργα αὐτῷ καὶ ταὶ πράξεις ἐναργέες τε καὶ αἰσθητὰ ἐντὶ πάντεσσιν ἀνθρώποις. δοκέει δέ μοι καὶ μὴ εἶναι ὁ θεός, ἀλλ' εἰς μὲν ὁ μέγιστος καὶ καθυπέρτερος καὶ ὁ κρατέων τῷ πάντός, τοὶ δ' ἄλλοι πολλοὶ διαφέροντες κατὰ δύναμιν· βασιλεύει δὲ πάντων αὐτῶν ὁ καὶ κράτει καὶ μεγέθει καὶ ἀρετῇ μέζων.

is on the contrast between God as invisible *in himself*, and his being visible through *his works*.

Though far from being exhaustive, this retrospect suffices to demonstrate that the distinction between God's inner or essential being which is invisible, and his powers which are visible, has a long tradition, both in Christian and in pre- or non-Christian texts. There is, however, still some way to go from the quoted texts stressing the visibility versus the invisibility of God, to the absolute apophaticism and denial of any knowledge of God that we meet in Clement and the later tradition. Clement claims that God is essentially unknowable and beyond the reach of the human mind; therefore he may only be apprehended through his *dynamis* and his works, through faith. Structurally, though, it is the same distinction that is presented in all these texts. Their emphasis on the transcendence of the deity creates the need for a mediating principle or principles, either personified as the Logos or described as powers, works, or deeds of God.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ESSENCE AND *DYNAMIS*

It is a central contention in my exposition of Clement's theology that the distinction between God as seen in his works and God as he is in himself that we have discerned in the earlier writers undergoes a further—and crucial—development in

Clement's writings. His model constitutes, to my mind, a decisive Vorstadium to the dogma of the distinction between God's essence and his divine energies that became so important to Orthodox theology.

It is, no doubt, a model in the making. So far, we have seen the Clementine model as a distinction primarily between God and his *dynamis*, the Son or Logos. But there are also examples in his writings of formulations that come closer to the later Orthodox distinction. In these passages Clement employs the concept of essence (*οὐσία*) together with that of *dynamis*. This specific use of the two concepts together deserves our attention.

In the beginning of Book 2 of the *Stromateis* Clement argues that the different ways of wisdom all lead to the way of truth, and that way is faith. Truth has been lost 'among many persuasive arguments from the Greeks', and Clement is concerned with finding the roses among the thorns. The first step on the ladder to the knowledge of 'true reality' is a study of the natural world, 'extending to everything born into the world of our senses':

The process of learning about these, if practised under good government, leads upwards via Wisdom, who formed the whole universe, to the ruler of the universe, a being hard to catch, hard to hunt down, who always distances himself in retreat from his pursuer. But this same ruler, distant as he is, has, marvellous to relate, drawn near. 'I am God at hand', says the Lord. In his essential being he is distant (*πόρρω μὲν κατ' οὐσίαν*)—however could a creature subject to birth draw near to the unborn and uncreated?—but very close by the exercise of that power (*ἐγγυ-τάτω δὲ δυνάμει*) which has enfolded all things in its embrace. (*Strom.* 2.5.3–4, my trans.)

Here Clement contrasts God's inaccessibility and remoteness on the one hand, and his closeness on the other by the use of the terms *οὐσία* and *δύναμις*: God as 'essence' is remote, while God as 'power' has come near.

The same distinction is found in Book 6 where the context is the question of the origin of the knowledge of truth. Clement claims that human teachers are not reliable in this area. In this example the 'power' and 'the works of God' are put together and contrasted to 'his essence':

For just as far as man is inferior to God in power, so much feebler is man's speech than Him; although he does not declare God, but only speaks about God and the divine word. For human speech is by nature feeble, and incapable of uttering God. I do not say His name. For to name it is common, not to philosophers only, but also to poets. Nor [do I say] His essence; for this is impossible, but the power and the works of God (*οὐδὲ τὴν οὐσίαν (ἀδύνατον γάρ), ἀλλὰ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ*). (*Strom.* 6. 166.1–2, my trans.)

In Clement's view the names of God are many, but they are all irrelevant when it comes to telling us who God really is, his essential nature. They all belong on the level of man, where God's power and his works are meaningful. His essence, however, can never be expressed on this level.

It is the same idea that is asserted earlier in the same book, where Clement states that the philosophers of the Greeks, while they name God, do not know him. They attribute their own affections to God and 'spend life in seeking the probable (*τὸ πιθανόν*), not the true (*τὸ ἀληθές*)'. Rather we should seek to know the 'truth itself', 'not seeking to learn

names'. The distinction between 'God' and 'the things about God' is here made parallel with that between the 'essence' and the 'accidents' (τὰ συμβεβηκότα): 'For what is to be investigated respecting God is not one thing, but ten thousand. There is a difference between declaring God, and declaring things about God. And to speak generally, in everything the accidents are to be distinguished from the essence' (*Strom.* 6.150.7, my trans.).¹¹

In another text it is the question of man's possibility to participate in God's nature (or οὐσία), which prompts Clement to distinguish between essence (οὐσία) and power (δύναμις): 'Wherefore Solomon also says, that before heaven, and earth, and all existences, Wisdom had arisen in the Almighty; the participation of which—that which is by power, I mean, not that by essence (ἡ κατὰ δύναμιν, οὐ κατ' οὐσίαν λέγω)—teaches a man to know by apprehension things divine and human' (*Strom.* 6.138.4).

An interesting section of the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, without using the actual terms, seems to indicate a similar distinction. Here Clement writes about an unknowable and knowable 'part' of the Father, the last being represented by the Son himself. Writing of the knowledge of the Father, Clement says that there are different ways of knowing him, and that each knows him 'after his own fashion', according to his own capacity. Then he makes a distinction:

¹¹ τὸ γὰρ περὶ θεοῦ πρᾶγμα οὐκ ἔστιν ἓν, ἀλλὰ μυρία, διαφέρει δὲ τὸν θεὸν ζητεῖν ἢ τὰ περὶ θεοῦ. καθόλου δὲ εἰπεῖν περὶ ἐκάστου πράγματος τῆς οὐσίας τὰ συμβεβηκότα διακρίτεον.

For each one knows the Lord after his own fashion, and not all in the same way. 'The Angels of the little ones' that is, of the elect who will be in the same inheritance and perfection, 'behold the face of the Father.' And perhaps the Face is now the Son, and now as much of that comprehension of the Father as they perceive who have been instructed by the Son. But the rest of the Father is unknown (τάχα δὲ τὸ πρόσωπον ἔστι μὲν καὶ ὁ υἱός, ἔστι δὲ καὶ ὅσον καταληπτὸν τοῦ πατρὸς δι' υἱοῦ δεδιδασκόμενοι θεωροῦσι, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν ἄγνωστόν ἐστι τοῦ πατρός). (Exc. 23.4–5)

In *Quis dives salvetur* Clement seems to bring the rather philosophical and abstract distinction between God's unspeakable essence and his speakable power down to a level where it takes on concrete meaning: 'What else is necessary? Behold the mysteries of love, and then you will have a vision of the bosom of the Father, whom the only-begotten God alone declared. God in his very self is love, and for love's sake He became visible to us. And while the unspeakable (ἄρρητον) part of him is Father, the part that has sympathy with us is Mother' (*Quis dives* 37). Here Clement employs yet another way and another metaphor to declare the 'θαῦμα ἄρρητον' (*Strom.* 2.5.3); God who is far off in his essence (οὐσία), has come near to us—in the form of a loving Mother.

If we return for a moment to the Middle Platonists concerning the question of a distinction in God or the first principle, there are certainly similarities between them and Clement. Both Alcinous and Numenius distinguish between a first and a second God; in Alcinous the contrast is between a transcendent first God or first *nous* and an immanent world soul. The world soul is in all matters dependent on the first God; it has its place in the hierarchy below its cause,

the first God. The role as creator and orderer of the cosmos is, however, bestowed on the world soul. Alcinous also emphasizes the ineffability of the first God who, as he is in himself, is devoid of all attributes and is distinguished from the immanent world soul.

The distinction between a first and a second God in Numenius' metaphysics is even more elaborated than in Alcinous. Numenius contrasts a first God, the Good-in-itself (*τὸ ἀνταγαθόν*) which is said to be unknowable, and the good, the Demiurge. The relationship between them is based on 'imitation', as well as a relationship between Father and Son. The first God 'rests in himself,' while the second God is the Demiurge who creates the cosmos.

Atticus, however, does not distinguish between a first and a second God, between the God and the Creator. Neither does he seem to place God above essence or endow him with negative attributes; the emphasis is primarily on God as the benevolent Creator, a characteristic which made him attractive to Christian writers.

Whereas in Clement the emphasis is on unknowability versus knowability, the distinction in Alcinous and Numenius is primarily, but not exclusively, between a non-demiurgic first God and a demiurgic second God. They both, to some extent, also emphasize the unknowability of the first God.

In the Concluding Remarks (Ch. 9), I shall attempt to view the 'Clementine distinction' between essence (*οὐσία*) and power (*δύναμις*) in the context of later theology, especially that of the fourth-century Cappadocian fathers.

9

Concluding Remarks

THE RECEPTION OF CLEMENT

Before summing up what I consider Clement's greatest contribution to apophatic theology, one question which has puzzled me in my work on Clement over the years needs to be addressed. For various reasons, posterity's attitude to Clement's theological thinking has been predominantly negative and lacking in understanding.¹ Though there are exceptions,² the tendency in general histories of Christian doctrine has been to ignore Clement, or to view him as doctrinally suspect or wanting, and worthy of censure.

¹ 'Orthodox theologians tend to avoid him, Roman Catholics approach him warily, Lutherans shrink from him, while with few exceptions Englishmen are far more sympathetic', says Walter Wagner, 'A Father's Fate: Attitudes Toward and Interpretations of Clement of Alexandria', *Journal of Religious History*, 6 (1971), 209–31, at 209, in his effort to sort out the historical reasons for all this negativity.

² Gerald Bray, for instance, writes on Clement in Philip F. Esler (ed.), *The Early Christian World* (London and New York, 2000), 559: 'he was the first Christian who took the need to reconcile faith and knowledge seriously. In that respect his writings have a curiously modern relevance'.

Even worse is the habit of judging his thinking from the perspective of later, Nicene orthodoxy.³ In more specialized studies, however, patristic scholars have in the last four or five decades begun to take Clement seriously as a thinker and to appreciate his contribution to more than the ethical part of theology. Still, the general picture is that he is ignored or not viewed as doctrinally sound. What are the reasons for this?

In the first centuries after his death, Clement was highly regarded among both theologians and historians. His friend and disciple Alexander of Jerusalem called him 'a blessed presbyter and a virtuous and approved man' (μακάριος πρεσβύτερος, ἀνὴρ ἐνάρετος καὶ δόκιμος, HE 6.11.6). Also Eusebius, Epiphanius, Cyril of Alexandria, and Jerome appreciated his doctrine as sound. However, by the ninth century the situation and climate had changed fundamentally.⁴

One reason for Clement's reputation as doctrinally suspect, may be found in Photius, the ninth-century Patriarch of Constantinople, who read Clement's now lost *Hypotyposes* and was put off by his 'heretical views' (discussed above, Ch. 6). Though accepting his ethics, he accused Clement of doctrinal error in his theology. This understanding of the more speculative part of Clement's theology was much debated in the modern period, especially during the

³ On such tendencies regarding pre-Nicene theology in general, see J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Oxford, 1993), 6–8.

⁴ Cf. Adolf Knauber, 'Die patrologische Schätzung des Clemens von Alexandrien bis zu seinem neuerlichen Bekanntwerden durch die ersten Druckeditionen des 16. Jahrhunderts', in P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann (eds.), *Kyriakon. FS Johannes Quasten*, vol. i (Münster, 1973), 289–308.

nineteenth century, with the result that Clement's way of thinking became better understood. Yet, an accusation of heterodoxy is difficult to erase. Only recently has there been a successful attempt to explain in a different way the passage of the *Hypotyposeis* that was Photius' main stumbling block.⁵

Most important, however, is the fact that Clement has tended to be put in the shade of Origen. I do not, of course, in any way question Origen's achievement or importance for subsequent theology or dispute his influence on the Cappadocian Fathers and the later history of Christian dogma. But for Clement, the association with Origen has no doubt been something of a mixed blessing.

Eusebius' biographical sketch of Clement in his *Church History* (5.11) has exerted a great influence on modern scholars in the field of early Christian studies. According to Eusebius, Clement succeeded Pantaenus as leader of the so-called catechetical school in Alexandria and was in turn succeeded by Origen (c.185–c.254), his former pupil and the Christian thinker who was to dominate the period (for discussion, see above, Ch. 2). Since Clement and Origen have been regarded as united in a teacher–pupil relationship, the younger man is assumed to have promoted and developed his teacher's ideas. But since Origen is the more systematic of the two and, though controversial, has attracted most attention, the tendency has been to interpret Clement in the light of Origen.

⁵ See Colin Duckworth and Eric Osborn, 'Clement of Alexandria's *Hypotyposeis*: A French Eighteenth-Century Sighting', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 36 (1985), 67–83 and above, Ch. 6.

In one area of theology it is especially obvious that Origen's views have influenced the way Clement has been judged, in particular, perhaps, among Orthodox theologians. A majority of modern Orthodox scholars are, in fact, sceptical towards Origen for his (allegedly) positive view of the knowability of God.⁶ The general tendency among these scholars is to regard Origen as an exponent of the Greek philosophical view—which, they think, must be rejected—that the human *nous* is capable of knowing God.⁷ And since Clement is mostly seen as Origen's teacher and even more 'Greek' than his disciple, this misconception has become rooted. Western scholars, on the other hand, largely see Origen as representing a gradually developing orthodoxy, with Clement as a rather insignificant, but still interesting, background, tainted with Hellenism.⁸

⁶ It is not difficult to find in Origen quite opposite statements concerning the knowledge of God, for instance these two from *De principiis*: In 1.1.5 he says that 'we assert that in truth he is incomprehensible and immeasurable' and 2.9.1: 'For we must maintain that even the power of God is finite, and we must not, under pretext of praising him, lose sight of his limitations. For if the divine power were infinite, it could not even understand itself, since the infinite is by its nature incomprehensible' (trans. G. W. Butterworth). For the common view that Origen believes in the possibility of man's knowing God, cf. e.g. Trigg, 'Receiving the Alpha: Negative Theology in Clement of Alexandria and its Possible Implications', *Studia Patristica*, 31 (1997), 540–5: 'While Origen shares with Clement an insistence on the necessity of divine grace, he is much less confident of the value of negative theology and more confident of the possibility of actually knowing God' (545).

⁷ e.g. John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York, 1993), 90; John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York, 1974), 12.

⁸ Cf. e.g. John M. Dillon, 'The knowledge of God in Origen', in Roelof van den Broek *et al.* (eds.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden, 1988), 219–28.

An example from the history of Bible interpretation may illustrate the scepticism that Clement is still being met with in Orthodox theological circles.⁹ The passage in Exodus 19 that describes how Moses met God in the darkness (*γνόφος*),¹⁰ has been interpreted, in turn, by Clement, Origen, and the Cappadocian Gregory of Nazianzus, as well as previously by Philo of Alexandria. They all interpret it as relating to the question of God's knowability, but with important differences.

Philo, whose exegetical works were highly influential in the early church, explains the darkness as the place of the thoughts of God, an inapproachable region where there are no material forms. True being itself—God—is invisible and above place and time. He can be neither seen nor known, except through his powers (*δυνάμεις*) which he has caused to extend themselves throughout the universe; his essence (*οὐσία*), however, remains unknowable.

Clement, the first Christian Father to use Philo's exegeses,¹¹ also interprets the 'darkness' of God as meaning that God is inaccessible and unknowable and cannot be expressed by words. While God in his nature or essence is beyond knowledge, he is known through his Son who is his power (*Strom.* 5.71.5; cf. above, Ch. 7).

⁹ See the discussion in Brooks Otis, 'Nicene Orthodoxy and Fourth Century Mysticism', in *Actes du XIIe Congrès International des Études Byzantines*, vol. ii (Belgrade, 1964), 475–84.

¹⁰ Philo, *On the Posterity and Exile of Cain* 14–15 and *On the Change of Names* 7.

¹¹ *Strom.* 2.6.1–2; 5.71.5; 5.78.3. Cf. Otis, 'Nicene Orthodoxy', 476.

Origen's exegesis of the Exodus passage develops, however, along different lines.¹² He interprets the 'darkness of God' not as the divine mystery, meaning that God is beyond human comprehension; rather he sees it as something man must overcome. The secrets that were spoken in darkness will become known to the saints, the enlightened. He quotes Proverbs 1.6 that the wise man will understand proverbs and riddles, and the saying of Jesus to his disciples in Luke 12.3: 'Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light.' To Origen darkness, instead of representing God's unknowability as it does to Philo and Clement, stands for man's ignorance, which needs to be replaced by light and understanding.¹³ God is not ontologically inaccessible. It seems that Origen's approach to God (at least here) is basically kataphatic (or positive) and Platonic: salvation consists in the return of *nous* to its original pure state.

In one of his theological orations Gregory of Nazianzus interprets the passage about Moses and the darkness along the same lines as Philo and Clement, differing from Origen: 'No—to tell of God is not possible, so my argument runs, but to know him is even less possible' (*Oration* 28.4).¹⁴ No matter how far man may reach, says Gregory, God remains hidden (in the cloud or darkness), and he is even farther from angelic beings than they are from man (*Or.* 28.4).

¹² *Commentarii in Joan.* 2.22–3, in Cécile Blanc (ed.), *Origène: Commentaire sur Saint Jean* (Paris, 1970).

¹³ *Commentarii in Joan.* 2.23. See also *De principiis* 2.9.1.

¹⁴ Trans. Lionel Wickham and Frederick Williams in Frederick W. Norris (ed.), *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* (Leiden, 1991), 226.

Thus, Philo's exegesis of the passage has been received differently by Clement, Origen, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Both Clement and Gregory interpret 'the darkness of God' apophatically, as an allegory of God's incomprehensibility or unknowability, whereas Origen's exegesis radically diverges from this notion and thus breaks with the Philonic—and Clementine—interpretation.¹⁵

This understanding—that Origen affirms that God is finite and that he may be apprehended by man—has apparently turned many Orthodox scholars away from Origen. This is no surprise since God's apophatic and incomprehensible nature is a major concern in Eastern Orthodox theology. At the same time, paradoxically, it has influenced their view of Clement, Origen's predecessor and teacher, in spite of the fact that he, on this question, is perfectly in agreement with Gregory the Theologian.¹⁶

The common expectancy, in almost all areas of our culture, that there is development from simpler and more primitive notions to more advanced views, may further explain the neglect of Clement. It has been all too easy to regard Clement as a *Vorstadium* to Origen and not as a thinker to be considered in his own right; all the more so since Clement's more unsystematic and discursive way of expressing himself may have caused him to be taken less seriously as a theological thinker than Origen.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, too, applies his exegetical skills to the same passage, cf. Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London, 1999), 102–6, 156–7, who does not, however, discuss Clement's potential influence on the Cappadocians.

¹⁶ Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 12, for instance, regards both Clement and Origen as holding the Platonic view that God is comprehensible.

It is also tempting to ask whether there may have been a direct line of influence between Clement and Gregory of Nazianzus. Could it be that Gregory actually had access to some of Clement's writings?¹⁷ Clement seems to have spent the last 12–15 years of his life in Cappadocia, probably in Caesarea. According to Eusebius, when persecution broke out in Alexandria in 202/3, Clement left the city and took refuge with his friend Bishop Alexander, who at that time presided over a Christian community in Cappadocia. Here Clement appears to have stayed until his death around 215. But, of course, such geographic proximity is not a prerequisite for influence.¹⁸

Though there is no firm evidence that the Cappadocians were directly influenced by Clement (such as the quotation of him by name), Brooks Otis, an exception among scholars writing about Cappadocian theology,¹⁹ claims that Gregory of Nazianzus (as well as Basil and Gregory of Nyssa) must have known Clement: 'Gregory's knowledge of Clement is clear both from his exegesis of Moses in the cloud and from

¹⁷ Evagrius Ponticus (345–99), who was part of the Cappadocian circles in his early years, may be a key figure in the transmission of Clement to the Cappadocians. Trigg, 'Receiving the Alpha', 544, finds him 'at least as Clementine as he is Origenist'.

¹⁸ For instance, Gregory may well have read Clement during his early studies at Caesarea Maritima, cf. John A. McGuckin, *St Gregory of Nazianzus. An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY, 2001), 41, on the Christian library there (though he does not mention Clement). There will have been many other occasions; we simply do not know enough about the circulation of Clement's writings in this period.

¹⁹ Brooks Otis, 'Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 12 (1958), 97–124, at 108. Another exception is Myrrha Lot-Borodine, *La Déification de l'homme* (Paris, 1970), 26 ff.

his reproduction of Clement's quotation of Plato.²⁰ In another context he says: 'So far as I can tell, no Father before Gregory of Nazianzus had seen the importance of Clement's theology in this respect, or the radical difference between his and Origen's doctrine of God. Clement, in fact, was the first to point out clearly that man can never hope to understand or fully reach God and that his mystical search for Him is in effect an infinite quest'.²¹ In the following section, there will be occasion to return to Clement's theological views in relation to the Cappadocians.

CLEMENT'S CONTRIBUTION TO APOPHATIC THEOLOGY

In my reading of Clement's works I have naturally focused on some aspects more than others. My primary concern has been to examine the question whether and on what terms, according to Clement, knowledge of God is possible. In so doing I have attempted to elucidate Clement's concept of the divine, both the Father and the Son separately and the relationship between the two. I have in particular sought to demonstrate the centrality of certain concepts that Clement uses to articulate that relationship, such as essence

²⁰ Otis, 'Nicene Orthodoxy', 481.

²¹ Otis, 'Cappadocian Thought', 108. Trigg, 'Receiving the Alpha', 545, thinks that Clement's reflection on the use of language in religious discourse may have influenced the Cappadocians: 'his [Clement's] sophistication about the uses and limitations of religious language anticipates the Cappadocians'.

(οὐσία) and power (δύναμις). I have attempted to stay close to the texts, trying to understand Clement's thought on its own premises and to juxtapose his various—and varying—utterances on the same topics, rather than trying to reduce them to one abstract formula, or 'dogma'.

The importance of Clement in the development of theology has been viewed differently in modern scholarship, as noted above. In my opinion, Clement's innovation and main contribution lies in his coupling apophaticism with the distinction between God's essence and his power(s). Thus he anticipates a later dogma of the Orthodox church. I shall try to substantiate this below.

First, however, I shall summarize thematically some of the more specific findings of my study. With regard to the Son, the Logos of God, several aspects of Clement's thinking are worthy of attention in the present context. Clement asserts the divinity of the Son, and his unity with the Father. The word *ὁμοούσιος*, 'of the same being', was later applied by the Nicene Fathers to express the key concept of Christology, the unity of substance between the Son and the Father. The term does occur in the extant writings of Clement, though only in the context of Gnostic usage. He uses it once to deny the (Gnostic) notion that man was an emanation from the divine nature and therefore of the same substance (*ὁμοούσιος*) as God (*Strom.* 2.74.1).

If Clement never coined any formal expression for the unity of Father and Son, he seems to have been groping for an adequate way of expressing that relationship. This may be assumed, for instance, from the way he explains how the Logos became flesh and how he became distinct from the

Father, which happened ‘by delimitation’ (κατὰ περιγραφήν), ‘not by essence’ (οὐ κατ’ οὐσίαν) (Exc. 19.1–2 (above, Ch. 6). Yet, Clement does not draw the same conclusion as the Cappadocians later did, that the apophatic nature of the Father, his unknowability according to essence, belongs equally to the Son.

This is, of course, a fundamental problem in Clement’s theology: though the unity between Father and Son is expressed as possibly including a unity of essence, the relationship is at the same time one of extreme contrast. While God is unspeakable, unutterable, unnameable, the Son can be spoken of, named, and described. The distinction is maintained through all Clement’s works and is a consequence of his epistemological apophaticism. The inaccessible Father needs a mediator, a Logos or a *dynamis*, that is accessible and comprehensible. Thus, the Son’s role as a mediator between the infinite and the finite is an aspect of vital importance for Clement’s theology.

Yet, this model of the unknowable Father and the knowable Son is not primarily one of hierarchy, between a transcendent Father and a subordinate mediator-Son. As we have seen, there is in Clement a manifest effort to express the essential identity and unity of the Son with the transcendent Father, thus excluding from his thought any subordinationism. Clement holds the Son to be just as divine, eternal, and uncreated as the Father himself. In epistemological terms, however, the opposition between the knowability of the Son and the unknowability of the Father always remains. Clement maintains two aspects of the Son: because he is man, he can mediate the Father to man—by becoming

man God adjusted himself to the level of man, but he who descended was never divided from him who remained (*Exc.* 7.4). The unity of the divine is a constant concern for Clement.

Now, the knowledge of the Father that the Son mediates is not a full, complete vision of him. As we have seen, Clement avails himself of various ways to ensure that we are not misled into thinking that we can ever know God: In *Exc.* 23.5 it is the 'rest of the Father' which remains unknown (τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν ἄγνωστόν ἐστι τοῦ πατρὸς), most often it is his essence (οὐσία) that is above all vision or comprehension.

Clement's apophaticism, then, depends on his view of the absolute 'unknowledge' of the divine essence. It is not an irrational knowledge, but a knowledge which is conscious of its ignorance (ἄγνοια) of the transcendent, as Clement says in the well-known passage (*Strom.* 5.71.5): 'not knowing what He is, but what He is not.' The paradox is that the negative process does not allow man to know God as he is in himself, except as the Unknowable and Incomprehensible.

Yet, this view does not imply agnosticism, for the kataphatic, or positive, aspect of Clement's thinking is equally prominent. The distinction between God's essence and his power(s) is Clement's way of affirming that both ways of approaching God, the negative and the positive, are equally true. The two ways to God are complementary, like a dialectical interrelationship of darkness and light, of God's absence and his presence. How, then, does Clement's model for the distinction between essence and power(s) relate to the later Cappadocian model?

It was the need to establish a dogmatic basis for the union with God and for mystical experience in general that moved the Eastern church to formulate its teaching on the distinction between God's 'essence' and his 'energies'.²² The traditional view is that the origins of the distinction in God between essence and energies are to be found in the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great (c.330–79), his brother Gregory of Nyssa (c.330–c.395) and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus (329–90/1).²³ The distinction was developed in their writings in opposition to the views propounded by Eunomius. Rejecting the Eunomian view that the human mind can know the essence of God,

²² 'Energies' (ἐνέργειαι) became the technical term *par préférence* after the time of the Cappadocians. The Cappadocians themselves alternated between 'powers' and 'energies'.

²³ Cf. Leonidas C. Contos, 'The Essence–Energies Structure of Saint Gregory Palamas with a brief Examination of its Patristic Foundation', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 12 (1967), 283–94 and Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 91 n. 75: 'The roots of this distinction are to be found in Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oration* 38.7). Its development leads to the theology of St Gregory Palamas.' Even apophatic theology is seen by some as first developed by the Cappadocians: George Maloney, *Uncreated Energy: A Journey into the Authentic Sources of Christian Faith* (Amity, NY, 1987), 43. But cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge and London, 1957), 71 who writes: 'the same distinction is found, though with less doctrinal precision, in most of the Greek Fathers—even amongst those of the first centuries of the Church'. See also L. H. Grondijs, 'The Patristic Origins of Gregory Palamas' Doctrine of God', *Studia Patristica*, 11 (1972), 323–8; Basil Krivocheine, 'Simplicity of the Divine Nature and the Distinctions in God, According to St. Gregory of Nyssa', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 21 (1977), 76–104, and Elie D. Moutsoulas, '“Essence” et “Énergies” de Dieu selon St. Grégoire de Nysse', *Studia Patristica*, 18 (1989), 517–28. None of these, however, points to Clement as a direct source.

the Cappadocians affirm the absolute transcendence and incomprehensibility of God.²⁴ A well-known passage from Basil may serve as a representative expression of their view: 'But we say that from his energies we know our God, but his substance (οὐσία) itself we do not profess to approach. For his energies descend to us, but his essence remains inaccessible' (αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐνέργειαι αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς καταβαίνουσιν, ἡ δὲ οὐσία αὐτοῦ μένει ἀπρόσιτος, *Epistles* 234).²⁵

It was the paradox of the accessibility of the inaccessible nature of God that prompted the Cappadocians to formulate the distinction between his activities and his inner being. By taking this step they sought to safeguard the inner and essential being of God from being accessible to man or to be the object of man's knowledge, while at the same time envisaging a way that enables man to participate in God and to have knowledge of him. For if man were able to participate in the nature of God, he would be God by nature, and God would not be Trinity, but a myriad of persons.²⁶ On the other hand, the divine call to become, in the words of 2 Peter 1.4, 'partakers of the divine nature' that plays such a great role in Eastern Christendom, cannot be an illusion. The solution, then, to the antinomy is to posit an absolute distinction between God's unknowable and inaccessible nature and his energies, or divine operations, described as 'forces proper to and inseparable from God's essence, in which He goes forth from Himself, manifests,

²⁴ Cf. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 11.

²⁵ Trans. Roy J. Deferrari, LCL.

²⁶ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 69.

communicates, and gives Himself'.²⁷ So, man may participate in God, not in his essence, but through his energies; for the energies are themselves God, uncreated, flowing eternally from the one essence of God.

A comparison of these ideas with the Clementine model for the distinction in God reveals, as we might expect, similarities as well as differences. The differences, I would claim, are due more to the 150 years of general doctrinal refinement that lie between Clement and the Cappadocians and condition the theological language of the latter, than to any substantial and structural difference between their basic concepts. The concept 'of the same substance' (ὁμοούσιος) has by the time of the Cappadocians developed into a technical term for the unity of the three persons in the Trinity. Therefore they are in a position to take for granted that the unknowability that is claimed for the essence (οὐσία) of God applies to the Son and the Spirit as well. The development of Trinitarian thinking has thus resulted in a much more precisely formulated notion of God as three persons, united in a common substance.

One point of difference between Clement and these later theologians is that he, when distinguishing between the unknowable essence of God and his knowable power, often regards the Son as the knowable aspect, as God's power (δύναμις) *par excellence*. The Cappadocians, on the other hand, hold that the unknowability of God is shared by the Son (and the Spirit as well) but that they (the Son and the

²⁷ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, 70.

Spirit) let themselves be known through their accessible 'energies'. Yet, Clement too recognizes in the Son a plurality of powers, as the fulfilment of all the powers; 'for he is the circle of all the powers rolled and united into one unity' (*Strom.* 4.156.2). There are, then, certain hints in Clement of a different pattern, resembling that of the Cappadocians, with the powers seen as God's activities *ad extra*.²⁸

It should also be observed that Clement sometimes makes a distinction between 'God's essence' and 'the power and the works of God' (*Strom.* 6.166.2), or between 'God' and 'the things about God', or between God's 'essence' and his 'accidents' (τὰ συμβεβηκότα) (*Strom.* 6.150.7). This is a type of distinction that does not base itself on the primary contrast between Father/essence and Son/power, but which resembles the later Cappadocian distinction.

In the philosophy of the day, above all in speculations about the nature of the One or the First Principle, Clement found a language of negation that suited his own way of thinking about the divine. And through the Cappadocians he reached further into the Eastern Orthodox tradition and into our own time. Apophaticism is not, I believe, just an expression of a peculiarly Eastern religious mentality. As I hope has become clear in this study, it is first of all a fundamentally existential attitude to the divine, a sense of

²⁸ In *Protr.* 112.1 Clement states: 'If our teacher is he who has filled the universe with holy powers (τὰ πάντα δυνάμεσιν ἁγίαις), creation (δημιουργία), salvation (σωτηρία), beneficence (ἐνεργεσία), lawgiving (νομοθεσία), prophecy (προφητεία), teaching (διδασκαλία), this teacher now instructs in all things, and the whole world has by this time become an Athens and a Greece through the Logos' (cf. above, Ch. 7).

the inherent inadequacy of all attempts to comprehend and express God.

In his apophaticism Clement thus differs radically from Origen, but shows clear affinity with the Cappadocians. It is remarkable that—apart from a few scholars and a few cautious hints here and there—this potential link has been overlooked in the history of Christian dogma. Moreover, if Clement's thoughts in the area of negative theology have—through the Cappadocians—influenced the subsequent history of the Eastern church, the same may also be true in other areas. Clearly, the early reception of Clement, especially by the Cappadocians, deserves to be investigated in depth, and with an unbiased mind.

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