

YOUR LIFE IS A BOOK THAT ONLY YOU WRITE.  
WHAT THE STORY WILL BE ABOUT  
AND WHAT KIND OF ENDING IT WILL HAVE  
ISN'T UP TO ANYONE BUT YOU.

Anonymous graffiti, Olomouc (Czech Republic), near the theological faculty, March 2020

## The main features of Clement of Alexandria's soteriology

When I started thinking about how to write an article concerning Clement's soteriology, just before the outbreak of the pandemic, I noticed a scrawled inscription on a wall near our theological faculty in Olomouc, obviously written with the ardent passion of a teenage philosopher. This originally Czech inscription could be translated as follows: "Your life is a book that only you write. What the story will be about and what kind of ending it will have isn't up to anyone but you." The naive individualism of this philosophical reflection prompted me to wonder what Clement would say to the writer. In particular, I was intrigued by the question: for whom does it matter what the end or denouement of our life stories will be? I would like to share these my thoughts with you today.

Judith Kovacs' articles were a great inspiration for my paper.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, one memory is extremely dear to me: Judith, in the face of her imminent passing, wanted to hear something about eschatology and was grateful when I wrote her the point of this article. I would therefore like to dedicate this contribution to her memory, with thanks for her friendship to many of us here.

In my opinion, the main features of Clement's soteriology can be summarized in several seemingly contradictory pairs of statements:

- 1) Faith is the only way to salvation. / Salvation is open to all people.
- 2) Salvation is equal for all (like the denarius in the gospel story of the workers in the vineyard). / There are different degrees of salvation.
- 3) Salvation is a gift. / Each saved person collaborates on their own salvation by their choices and actions.
- 4) Salvation comes only through Christ. / Every saved person collaborates on the salvation of others.

In this paper, I would like to focus on these points, with the main emphasis on the last one. [Of course, salvation means, first of all, rescue from mortal danger. So we could also talk about what Clement says we are being saved from and what the Saviour himself had to face and undergo in order to achieve the salvation of mankind. For the moment, however, let us leave aside these, so to speak, negative aspects of our subject. Not only because the time available to us is not unlimited, but also because Clement himself does not like to say much about these matters. He treats the mystery of the cross with silent reverence: not that he does not speak of it at all,<sup>2</sup> but unlike perhaps all the other theological topics he deals with, he

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<sup>1</sup> Esp. her "Concealment and Gnostic Exegesis: Clement of Alexandria's Interpretation of the Tabernacle", *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997), 414–437.

<sup>2</sup> The passion and death of Jesus: *Protr.* 4,59,2; 10,106,5; *Paed.* I,5,23; I,6,42,2–3; 43,3; 46,1; 47,4; 49,4–50,1; 10,94,3–95,1; II,2,19,3–4; 3,36,2; 8,61,3; 62,3; 63,1–2; 73,3–74,4; *Strom.* I,18,88,4–8; II,15,64,4; 20,108,3; IV,7,43,2; 12,87,4; V,1,1,2; 14,108,2–3; VI,8,70,2; 15,127,1–2; (VII,2,8,1); *Quis div.* 33,6; 37,3–4; *Hypot. fr.* 24/III (*Adumbr.* ad 1 John 3:12.15–16).

The Cross, Jesus' sacrifice: *Protr.* 11,111,2–3; 114,4; *Paed.* I,5,23,1; II,8,73,6; III,3,25,3; 12,85,3; (I,5,15,3; II,2,19,3); *Strom.* II,4,19,1; II,20,104,3; 108,4; V,10,66,5; 11,72,2–3; (VI,15,128,1 - Kerygma Petri); *Quis div.* 37,4; *Hypot. fr.* 7 (ad Gal 5:24; zl. 24/I (*Adumbr.* ad 1 Pet 2:23).

The Sign (i.e. the Cross): (*Paed.* II,2,19,3); *Strom.* V,6,35,1; VI,11,84,3; 87,2; VII,12,79,5–7; *Quis div.* 8,2.

Redemption by the blood of Jesus: *Protr.* 11,116,2; *Paed.* I,5,23,2; I,6,42,2–3; 43,3; 49,4–50,1; II,2,19,4; III,12,85,1; *Strom.* IV,16,107,5–8; *Exc.* 11,3; *Hypot. fr.* 24/I (1 Pet 1:17–19).

never attempts to grasp Christ's redemptive sacrifice in philosophical terms. He is also aware of actions of God's enemy and demons and calls them "perishing" (φθίμενοι), i.e., having no part in salvation, and reckons with the violence and manipulation they try to exert to cut people off from salvation. He refuses, however, to admit that they have any power worth speaking of, i.e., power over human free will. He emphatically warns his readers of the possibility of not accepting salvation and frequently mentions God's educational punishments to save the obstinate. But nowhere does he speculate on how many people will be lost and what a definite non-acceptance of salvation would actually mean for a person.]<sup>3</sup>

Valentinian soteriology, which influenced Clement

Before discussing Clement's soteriology, it should be noted that Clement's theological thought, and above all his doctrine of salvation, is deeply influenced by heterodox Valentinian Gnosis – but not in the sense that Clement himself resigned to orthodoxy in any respect. Clement's work is characterized by inexhaustible intellectual playfulness. He borrows schemes of thought from various authors and schools and rebuilds them, adopts their terminology and alters its meaning, and puts the original doctrines on their heads. The Valentinians are Clement's best enemies: he strongly disagrees with the vast majority of their doctrines and warns his readers against them. His most frequent attitude, however, is the aforementioned "creative adaption"<sup>4</sup> of their teachings: Clement adopts a given idea or terminology, or distills a particular interesting feature and uses it to express his own views. The result is often not only different, but quite the opposite of the original Valentinian teaching. This enables Clement, on the one hand, to refute in a polite and elegant way the views he considers dangerous, and on the other hand, to attract the attention of readers fascinated by Gnostic mysticism and offer them an alternative, and last but not least, Clement himself enriches his own theological thinking by this intellectual play.

As far as we can judge from Clement's reports, the soteriology of some of the Valentinian Gnostics, whose teachings were known in Clement's Alexandria, seems to have been based on the following anthropological concept: in addition to a visible physical shell, man consists of three incorporeal elements: material (ὕλικός), psychic (ψυχικός) and spiritual (πνευματικός). The material element is transmitted by procreation, so that all humans share it. The psychic and spiritual elements are not transmitted in this way, but are given to some individuals from above. For this reason, most people lack psychic and spiritual elements, and the Valentinians were said to call them "material people". Then there are the so-called psychical people, who have the psychic element (the soul) in addition to the incorporeal material element, but the spiritual element is not present in them. Thirdly, there is a small group of spiritual people who have all three incorporeal elements in them (*Exc.* 55–56). The psychical element is for them a kind of psychical body, in which the spiritual element is enveloped. With the psychic people, then, the Valentinians were said to identify the believers of the catholic Church, and with the elected spiritual ones they identified themselves as those who possess knowledge that remains hidden to the simple believers.

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<sup>3</sup> I. Ramelli ("*Stromateis* VII and Clement's Hints at the Theory of Apokatastasis", in: M. Havrda – V. Hušek – J. Plátová (eds.), *The Seventh Book of Stromateis*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2012, 239–260) is convinced that Clement believed in the universality of the final restoration. It would be easy to oppose her view by citing Clement's contradictory statements (e.g. *Strom.* VI,111,2; *Exc.* 9,2; *Ecl.* 17). It is known, however, that Clement professed the necessity of a certain pedagogical lie, if the revelation of the truth could be dangerous to the reader (*Strom.* VII,53; V,54). It is not improbable that our author, by his statements about the condemnation of some men, conceals his conviction (which, clearly recorded in writing, may function like a knife in the hand of a child) that all men will after all attain salvation. E.g. in *Paed.* III,44,3 we may see a hint of Clement's hope for the salvation of all at the end of time, the hope which is not cheap or naive. Clement is well aware of the price that has been paid for the salvation of humankind, and of the suffering of those who are passing through the punishing and purifying fire; he also understands what is experienced by intercessors who "lay down their lives" for their friends (John 15:13) and enemies (cf. Matt 5:44) in the hope of their salvation. It is not excluded, however, that Clement admits the real possibility of a fully conscious, voluntary, and definitive choice of evil, and therefore of eternal damnation, though he does not lose hope of the salvation of any particular individual.

<sup>4</sup> Judith L. Kovacs, "Concealment and Gnostic Exegesis", 418.

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According to the Valentinian doctrines, what is “material” cannot be saved: matter inevitably perishes. That which is spiritual, on the other hand, cannot perish. The spiritual element present in elected individuals is therefore guaranteed the fullness of salvation. The psychical element is called to salvation, but its salvation is conditional upon righteous works and repentance of sin, and it is a salvation of a lower degree than that of the spiritual element. Salvation, then, according to the Valentinians, is not achieved by the human person as a whole, but there is a certain lower salvation for the soul, and a higher salvation guaranteed to the spiritual element sown as a seed in the souls of the chosen individuals.

This spiritual seed is not, unlike the psychical element, created, but was born before the creation of the world from Sophia (Wisdom), after Sophia as one of the aeons of the divine Pleroma (Fullness) was forced to leave the Pleroma because of an offence she committed. That fatal offence was her attempt to attain knowledge of the Depth of the Pleroma, which weds with the Silence and is separated from the rest of the Pleroma by a Limit (ὄρος). Sophia was stopped by this inner Limit and thrown out of the Pleroma beyond its outer Limit.

The Saviour and His angels were sent to the fallen Sophia and she, looking at them, gave birth to the spiritual seed. After the creation of the world, this seed is gradually being placed in the elected human souls. The Saviour and his angels then bring redemption not only to Sophia herself, but also to her spiritual seed. This redemption is spiritual baptism.

Some Valentinians have taught that the Saviour, along with His angels, immersed himself in the waters of the Jordan, and therefore, in Valentinian spiritual baptism (called baptism in the Holy Spirit), the spiritual seed receives one of the Saviour's angels as a personal saviour (*Exc.* 22).

Then, after physical death, the souls who have the spiritual seed within them rest in the Eighth Heaven with their mother Sophia, and the other saved souls rest in the Seventh Heaven. As soon as all the spiritual seeds are gathered in the Eighth Heaven, the end of the world will come (*Exc.* 23–24; 34,2). Then the other souls from the Seventh Heaven will move to the spiritual ones in the Eighth Heaven and celebrate the wedding feast of Sophia and the Saviour together there. After the feast, when it is time for the bride and bridegroom to leave for the Bridal Chamber, the spiritual seeds strip off the souls that were previously their garments or psychical bodies. They leave them in the Eighth Heaven with the other souls, and enter naked with the bride and bridegroom through the Limit (also called the Cross by the Valentinians) into the Pleroma like paranymphs into the Bridal Chamber.<sup>5</sup> In the Bridal Chamber of the Saviour and Sophia, the spiritual seeds will also unite with their angels.

This entry into the Pleroma is sometimes understood as an eschatological event, while at other times it is spoken of as an already present reality into which the spirituals enter by the baptism in the Holy Spirit, by which the spiritual seeds become a kind of spiritual body of the Saviour.

So much for the basic features of the soteriology of some Valentinian groups, against whom Clement wrote in his works.

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<sup>5</sup> In *Exc.* 68 we find the phrase “children of a husband and a bridal chamber” (ἀνδρὸς καὶ νυμφῶνος τέκνα), which is probably i.a. an allusion to the phrase “the sons of the bridal chamber” (οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος) in Luke 5:34 (or Matt 9:15 or Mark 2:19; cf. *Gospel of Philip*, 67,4–5; 72,20–25; 76,5; 86,4–5). This term may have referred to the paranymphs who were close to the bride and groom at the wedding feast and then stood outside their bridal chamber or even entered the bridal chamber with them to witness the defloration (see M. Malul, *Susapinnu: The Mesopotamian Paranymph and His Role*, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 32/3, 1989, 241–278). In *Exc.* 65,1, in a different context, the “friend of the bridegroom” of John 3:29 is explicitly designated as a paranymph, so it seems probable that the Valentinians read also the phrase “sons of the bridal chamber” in this sense. The Evangelists themselves probably had in mind here not paranymphs but simply wedding guests in general (cf. the use of the word νυμφῶν in Matt 22:10 according to the Sinai Codex, etc., where the term does not denote the bridal chamber, but the place where the wedding feast takes place). However, the division of wedding guests into ordinary participants in the feast and, on the other hand, paranymphs in the exceptional role of those who are in an intimate relationship with the bride and have access to the newlyweds’ bedroom (*Exc.* 63–65) fits very well into the Valentinian doctrines.

Simple believers and “gnostics”

As we have seen, the Valentinian Gnostics in question distinguished two degrees of salvation: the lower degree of salvation is, according to them, available to psychical people, who are called not to perish, are baptized in water for the remission of sins, and will be saved if they are worthy. The higher degree of salvation, according to them, is then guaranteed to the elected spiritual element implanted in their righteous souls, that is, to the spiritual seed who receives the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In his *Paedagogus*, Clement clearly opposes this Valentinian distinction of two degrees of salvation and a double baptism: the lower baptism of catholic believers, who are as ignorant as infants (νήπιοι), and, on the other hand, the spiritual baptism of mature and perfect spirituals. Clement here explicitly states that all Christians are spiritual and by a single baptism were given the same Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:13), all know the one God, and thus all can be said to be “gnostics” (*Paed.* I,31,2). He accepts the derisive designation of believers as νήπιοι (“infants” or “the little ones”) and quotes the Gospel accounts that it was to these babes that God showed what remained hidden to the phoney “clever experts” (σοφοὶ καὶ συνετοί, Luke 10:21 in: *Paed.* 32). The community of such little believers, these true gnostics, to whom the Spirit Himself gives knowledge in baptism and in Eucharistic contemplation<sup>6</sup> – this whole community is the mature bride of the Saviour. The Gnostic secret doctrines are utterly childish compared to the knowledge of these “little ones”. Faith means knowledge of God and is the only and equal salvation for all.

In *Stromateis*, however, Clement plays with the Valentinian doctrine of the two degrees of salvation even more creatively, adopting and reinterpreting it. He introduces his famous term “gnostic” to distinguish the person who knows God from the simple believer and he even claims that the “gnostic” comes to the fullness of salvation in contrast to the simple believer (or “the mere believer”, ὁ ἀπλῶς πιστός, ὁ ἀπλῶς πεπιστευκώς), who will be saved, but only in some lesser way (cf. *Strom.* VI,111,3; IV,114,1).<sup>7</sup>

But the difference between the “simple believer” and the “gnostic” is not due to ontological difference or initiation into secret doctrines. Nor does it lie in the degree of education or mental abilities: gnostics in Clement’s conception are not the intellectual elite of the Church, superior to uninformed simpletons.<sup>8</sup> Clement’s “gnostic” is a Christian believer, as it should be. Clement finds it highly appropriate for Christians to study philosophy, but he also emphasizes that even a small child, a woman, or a slave who has received no formal education can be a philosopher. On the other hand, a “mere believer” may be well educated, and may even have many pieces of information about God – but the motivation for acquiring it is for his own (spiritual) benefit (*Strom.* IV,136,2). The gnostic desires knowledge of God just to know God – for no other reason. And this knowledge is not merely a human feat of study (though even that is very useful), and it

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g. *Paed.* I,28,1; *Strom.* V,66,1–3.

<sup>7</sup> Clement’s famous term “gnostic” in the sense of “Christian knowing God” is a term peculiar to *Stromata*, while it does not occur in Clement’s other works, except in *Ecl.* 27–37 and *Hyp.* fr. 24/III 2,3 (this is the only sentence of this large fragment, the so-called *Adumbrationes*, which is preserved in the original Greek in addition to the Latin translation: ὁ μὲν γνωστικός πάντως καὶ ἔργα ἐπιτελεῖ καθήκοντα, ὁ δὲ τὰ ἔργα ἐπιτελῶν οὐ πάντως καὶ γνωστικός ἐστίν; the Latin version uses the term *intellector*). In this article, I capitalize the word “Gnostic” in the sense of a member of a Gnostic sect, and I lowercase the word “gnostic” in the sense of Clement’s designation of a mature Christian. I always refer to a gnostic in the masculine, universal sense, just as Clement never uses the term ἡ γνωστικός.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that an (unconscious) tendency to elitism is, however, a certain weak point of Clement’s theology. The Alexandrian teacher seems to have lived in modesty, but provided for everything he needed, as a respected member of the ecclesiastical community in an exceedingly wealthy city. He had received an excellent education, and he seems to have had no personal experience of material or moral poverty. Although in his writings he ardently advocated solidarity and generosity of the rich toward the poor (*Paed.* III,30.34-41), he apparently could not imagine life in want of means (*Paed.* II,15,2; II,103,2). This is probably why he applies the beatitude of poverty neither to material want (Luke 6:20; *Quis div.* 11:3) nor to the situation in which a person is inwardly poor because of some weakness and so entirely dependent on the Spirit (Matt 5:3), but only to the renunciation of possessions for righteousness’ sake (*Strom.* IV,26,4). He also objects, for example, to the purchase of disabled slaves as curiosities, but does not speak of their human dignity (*Paed.* III,30,1). He extols Job’s bravery (*Strom.* IV,106,2), but never writes of his lamentations.

does not happen only with the help of ecclesiastical teachers, but is given first of all by the Spirit, to whom the believer exposes himself by his grateful (eucharistic) contemplation. For Clement, knowledge of God and salvation are exactly the same thing. But hypothetically speaking, if the gnostic had to choose between the knowledge of God and his own salvation, he would choose the knowledge of God without hesitation (*Strom.* IV,136,3–5). Through knowledge of God and of His mercy, the gnostic understands what love and mercy is, and thus understands God’s will and is able to act in accordance with it.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover *Stromateis* are not (like *Paedagogus* or *Quis dives salvetur?*) intended exclusively for the ecclesiastical community, but they also try to reach out to members of the Jewish community, followers of sects and Greek philosophers. For this reason Clement uses here some terms in a wider sense. Thus, for example, the term “believer” or “faith” in the *Stromateis* sometimes express a relationship to Christ, but at other times they also indicates belonging to contemporary Judaism, and at still other times they also mean fidelity to the “voice of the Logos” speaking to every person at all times (*Strom.* VI,60,2; 107,2).

For Clement is firmly convinced that everyone is called to salvation.<sup>10</sup> The title “called” belongs to all those who have accepted God’s offer of salvation – by their faithfulness to the Logos, i.e. by avoiding evil actions because they wisely fear their dangerous consequences, and making an effort to act rightfully because they believe that good actions will one day be rewarded. This faith and faithfulness implies a certain basic knowledge of God, and for Clement, knowledge of God is the same as salvation: hence the faith of either Christians or Jews or Gentiles is “power in order to salvation, and strength to eternal life”.<sup>11</sup> But the fullness of knowledge (and hence the fullness of salvation and the title of “elect”, cf. Matt 22:14) is only given by the relationship with Jesus, by accepting his Gospel: by selling all property (to use the Gospel parable) and buying the pearl of great price (Matt 13:46; cf. *Paed.* II,118,5). On the basis of this step, which Clement calls “second repentance”, one enters into a process of knowledge and becoming like God, which means first of all a gradual acquisition of knowledge of God’s mercy and imitation of it.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the acceptance of the fullness of salvation produces in believers an increasing desire for the salvation of others.

Only the “gnostic”, therefore, receives the fullness of salvation, because he is – according to that famous Gospel saying – like a little child who alone can enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3). That is to say: he is innocent like a child (as he is purified by the action of the Spirit in contemplation), he is sensitive like a child (as he has understood what mercy is) and he is inquisitive like a child (he asks questions and does not reject any instrument of the search for truth). In contrast, the people who are “simple believers” are those faithful servants of God who make do with mere observance of the Law and are not willing to accept God’s invitation to a friendship - whether they are Jews or Gentiles or count themselves in the Church.<sup>13</sup>

The famous distinction between simple believers and “gnostics”, which Clement repeatedly presents in the *Stromateis*, is thus not merely a product of the frustration that legalism, lukewarmness, and intellectual laziness of some members of his community aroused in him,<sup>14</sup> and it is not merely an allusion to the figure of the Stoic sage. First of all, it is a playful and provocative paraphrase of Valentinian soteriology with the

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<sup>9</sup> A good example is *Strom.* VII,84,7: the “simple believer” is here a person who asks God to punish those who have wronged him. He does not avenge himself; he leaves vengeance to the Lord. In contrast, the Gnostic, because he has accepted the Gospel requirement to forgive wrongs and pray for enemies, asks God that those who have wronged him not be punished either here on earth or in eternity. He prays for their conversion and salvation.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. *Exc.* 9,3; *Hyp. fr.* 24/III 1,5: *nullum perdens, sed cunctis salutem tribuens.*

<sup>11</sup> *Strom.* II,53,5, transl. W. Wilson.

<sup>12</sup> See V. Černušková, „Divine and Human Mercy in *Stromateis*“, in: M. Havrda – V. Hušek – J. Plátová (eds.), *The Seventh Book of the Stromateis. Proceedings of the Colloquium on Clement of Alexandria (Olomouc, October 21–23, 2010)*, Leiden – Boston 2012, 167–184.

<sup>13</sup> In some places of his work Clement even speaks of three groups of the saved: the called, the elect, and those who are “the more elect among the elect”, the first group evidently meaning the faithful Greeks (and other Gentiles), the second the Jews, and the third the Christians, or “gnostics” (*Strom.* VI,107,2; *Quis div.* 36), and he connects (apparently alluding to the Valentinians) this triad with the Pauline (1 Thess 5:23) trichotomy of body-soul-spirit (*Strom.* III,68,5-69,1; 70,2-3).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. *Strom.* I,43,1, or *Hyp. fr.* 24/III 2,12: *nam multi solo credunt nomine.*

meaning: do you want to be true gnostics (knowers of God) and attain the fullness of salvation? Then avoid the Gnostic sects and become humble members of the catholic Church.

#### Hierarchy of salvation

From what has been said, it is clear that Clement places great emphasis on the universality of salvation and at the same time on the freedom of each individual to choose or reject salvation: no one is predestined to destruction, all are called to life. Furthermore, although he repeatedly emphasizes the importance of good deeds, by which man expresses and realizes his choice of salvation, Clement is firmly convinced that salvation is a gift: that there is a Saviour, God incarnate, who has made salvation possible for men by the sacrifice of Himself. In particular, Clement often recalls the statement in 1 Pet 1:18-19, "... you were ransomed ... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish" (NRS). And also, as we shall see, he holds very dear the concept of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, where Christ is represented as the High Priest who, instead of the blood of cattle offered annually in the Temple for the sin of the people, brings his own blood once for all to the Holy of Holies on the heavenly Yom Kippur.

Clement then presents Christ's work of salvation as an exercise of God's power and rule in which creatures participate. This government is strictly hierarchical. In the *Stromata* it is said:

But, as I think, characteristic of the highest power is the accurate scrutiny of all the parts, reaching even to the minutest, terminating in the first Administrator of the universe, who by the will of the Father directs the salvation of all; some overlooking, who are set under others, who are set over them, till you come to the great High Priest. ... Then at the highest extremity of the visible world is the blessed band of angels (ἡ μακαρία ἀγγελοθεσία);<sup>15</sup> and down to ourselves there are ranged, some under others, those who, from One and by One, both are saved and save. As, then, the minutest particle of steel is moved by the spirit of the Heracleon stone, when diffused over many steel rings; so also, attracted by the Holy Spirit, the virtuous are added by affinity to the first abode, and the others in succession down to the last. But those who are bad from infirmity, having fallen from vicious insatiableness into a depraved state, neither controlling nor controlled, rush round and round, whirled about by the passions, and fall down to the ground. For this was the law from the first, that virtue should be the object of voluntary choice.<sup>16</sup>

At the top of the salvific hierarchy stands the Saviour: the High Priest – the Son, enjoying immediately the power of the Father (*Exc.* 10:3; *Strom.* VII:5,3), acting in accordance with the will of the Father (*Strom.* VII,5,4; 9,3), the face of the Father (*Exc.* 10,6; 12,1; 23,5; *Strom.* V,34,1),<sup>17</sup> who is also called "the beginning" (Col 1:18; *Exc.* 12,1; *Strom.* VII,9,3). He is followed by angels and after angels by men. No one is the cause of his own salvation, but at the same time, he is always a co-agent of his own salvation, and is also a co-agent of the salvation of others. Salvation proceeds from the only High Priest (Heb. 12:21; 4:14) and is mediated by those who stand nearest (προσεχῶς) to him,<sup>18</sup> that is, by the angels to the people, and is then communicated among the people to each other. The power that draws the saved and within the whole

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<sup>15</sup> Literally, "the blessed angelic state". Cf. *Ecl.* 57,5: "the angelic state which belongs to the body [of Christ]", sc. to the Church (οἰκεία τοῦ σώματος ἀγγελοθεσία).

<sup>16</sup> *Strom.* VII,9,2–3, transl. W. Wilson. Cf. e.g. *Strom.* VI,161,6; *Ecl.* 16; 57,4–5.

<sup>17</sup> The Christological title of the Face of the Father, inspired by the Jewish intertestamental tradition, has been extended in the Church, *Strom.* VII,58,3 a *Paed.* I,22,3; 57,2; 71,3; *srv. Quis div.* 23,2 a Tertulián, *Adv. Prax.* 14; see B. G. Bucur, *Angelomorphic pneumatology. Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses*, Leiden – Boston 2009, 36–39. Ad Valentinian usage of the term see A. D. DeConick, *Heavenly Temple Traditions and valentinian Worship*, in: C. C. Newman – J. R. Davila – G. S. Lewis (eds.), *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, Leiden – Boston – Köln, 1999, 308–341, here 325–330.

<sup>18</sup> For Clement's expression προσεχῶς see M. Cambe, *Avenir solaire et angélique des justes. Le Psaume 19 (18) commenté par Clément d'Alexandrie*, Strasbourg 2009, 56–64.

hierarchy is not theirs – it is the Holy Spirit. It is He who provides the continuity of salvation throughout the chain: Christ, the High Priest, is like a magnet and the Spirit the magnetic energy (*Strom.* VII,9,4). Angels and men thus participate in the priesthood of Christ by passing on the salvation obtained by the power of the Holy Spirit (*Strom.* VI,161,6).

In the background of the above text, besides the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, there is evidently also the idea of the ascending scale of the heavenly spheres, which Clement knew, among other sources, again from the Valentinian Gnostics. They were, of course, far from being its original authors. The idea is based on Greek cosmological concepts, according to which the heavens consist of seven spheres of “wandering” heavenly bodies (i.e. the Moon, the Sun, the Morning Star or Venus, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, individually moving around the Earth), and above them a sphere of the fixed stars (i.e. stars forming constellations and moving synchronously).<sup>19</sup> The concept of eight heavens was also familiar to the Valentinians from intertestamental literature and probably, other orally transmitted Jewish traditions.<sup>20</sup> Following Ezekiel’s vision of the fiery chariot throne, the idea of a heavenly temple in which the liturgy takes place, celebrated by angels as priests, was developed in the Jewish milieu.<sup>21</sup> Some of these texts then speak of seven or eight chambers of this heavenly temple, the highest heaven being understood as the “Holy of holies”, where the angels of the divine Face, by their intercession, propitiate the guilt of men before the Lord.<sup>22</sup> Some apocalyptic writings also describe the ascent of the visionary to the highest heaven and his transformation into an angel.

[In the Valentinian doctrines, however, the traditional idea of the seven or eight heavens is reinterpreted. In the Seventh heaven, according to them, the Creator sits on a fiery throne (*Exc.* 38), but he is a lower deity, unlike the God of Israel, above whom, in the Eighth heaven, the fallen Sophia resides, and only the Pleroma, which is above the Eighth heaven, is understood as the highest sphere. The seven heavenly spheres, then, according to the Valentinians, are not inhabited by angels subordinate to God and giving praise to him, but are ruled by evil powers (*Exc.* 38; 70-72).]

Clement does not question the Platonic concept of the celestial spheres, as well as he respects the Judeo-Christian tradition of the heavenly temple with angels as priests offering propitiatory sacrifices before the throne of God.<sup>23</sup> This important element of Jewish apocalypticism, interiorized, even becomes central point of his soteriology.<sup>24</sup>

#### Protocists and their little ones

The hierarchy of angels subordinate to the Son, the mighty High Priest, is presented in more detail by Clement in his *Excerpts from Theodotos* (*Exc.* 10-12) and *Eclogae propheticae* (*Ecl.* 56-57): the highest angelic class consists of the seven protocists (the First-Created), to whom perfection has been given at the

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<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Plato, *Tim.* 38–40; Alkinoos, *Didasc.* XIV,170–171; Philo, *De opif.* 112; *De spec. leg.* III,189. Irenaeus, *Demonstratio*, 9, says: “The earth is surrounded by seven heavens, in which dwell the powers, angels and archangels, giving honour to God, the Sovereign and Creator of all.” (The Greek original of this work of Irenaeus is not extant. I translate from the German translation, taken from the Armenian version of the text: A. Harnack et al. [ed.], *Des heiligen Ireaëus Schrift zum Erweise der apostolischer Verkündigung*, Leipzig 19082.) As J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 176, n. 9, points out, Irenaeus is not here speaking of the throne of God: it is probably, according to his rendering, even higher, above the seven heavens.

<sup>20</sup> See G. G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, ???, 65 ff.; M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, New York – Oxford, 1993, ???.

<sup>21</sup> R. Elior, *From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayer and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and Its Relation to the Temple Traditions*, in: *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 4/3, 1997, 217–267.

<sup>22</sup> *TPatr* III,2,6–3,10; cf. e.g. *Mlz* 8–10; *2Hen* 3–20 (anglické zkratky doplním ???)

<sup>23</sup> Origen (*Contra Cels.* VI, 21), however, insists that “the Scriptures recognized in the Churches of God say nothing about the seven heavens,” and the catholic Church therefore does not regard any such doctrine as authoritative, “whether the words ‘seven heavens’ are intended to testify to the seven spheres of wandering stars spoken of by the Greeks, or to some more forbidden doctrine”; cf. *ibid.* V,6-13.

<sup>24</sup> See esp. B. G. Bucur, “The Other Clement: Cosmic Hierarchy and Interiorized Apocalypticism,” *Vigiliae christianae* 60 (2006): 251–68.

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beginning.<sup>25</sup> They are the high priests of the archangels subject to them, and the archangels in turn are the high priests of the angels (*Exc.* 27:3; cf. 10:1).

Since the protostists stand closest to God and constantly behold the Father's face – Christ (*Exc.* 10:6), the title of gods also belongs to them.<sup>26</sup> They are the throne on which God rests (*Ecl.* 57,1, Col. 1:16) and the intellectual fire (*Exc.* 12:2). They are also, according to Clement, the angels of "the little ones" spoken of in Matt 18:10 (NRS): "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven" (cf. *Exc.* 10:6; 11:1; 23:4). These little ones, who are under the direct protection of the highest angels (*Exc.* 10-11 and 23:4-5), are those whom Clement calls "gnostics" in *Stromata*:<sup>27</sup> those who have acquired innocence through baptism for the remission of sins and have become children of God.

[The Son] is said to be "inapproachable Light" (1 Tim 6:16) as "Only-Begotten" (John 1:18) and First-Born" (Col 1:15), "the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man," – and such a one shall not be found either among the First-Created or among men, – but they "always behold the face of the Father" (Matt 18:10) and the face of the Father is the Son, through whom the Father is known. ... When, therefore, the Lord said, "Despise not one of these little ones. Verily, I say unto you, their angels do always behold the face of the Father," as is the pattern, such will be the elect, when they have received the perfect advance. But "blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matt 5:8).<sup>28</sup>

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" (Matt 18:10). 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 (cf. Matt 11:27 par.). But the rest of the Father is unknown.<sup>29</sup>

Those who believe on Him He calls children (*Mark* 10:24) and young children (*John* 21:5) and babes (*Matt* 11:25) and friends (*John* 15:14); also little ones (*Matt* 10:42; 18,10) here, in comparison with their future greatness above. "Despise not," He says, "one of these little ones, for their angels always behold the face of My Father who is in heaven" (*Matt* 18:10). And elsewhere: "Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" of heaven. After the same manner He says that is, His own disciple is greater than the greatest among them that are born of women, namely John (*Matt* 11:11 par.).<sup>30</sup>

The little ones, the Christians (or, in the diction of the *Stromata*, the "gnostics"), therefore, according to Clement, have their place together with the protostists - the gods - at the top of the salvific hierarchy, and together with them they are the throne of God: "God himself rests in them" (*Strom.* VII,82,4). They are immediately (προσῆχῶς) subordinate to Christ, the High Priest - in other words, deification belongs to them.

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<sup>25</sup> As J. Daniélou points out (see his *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. J. A. Baker, London, 1964, 184), the reflections of the protostists have their origin in Jewish mysticism and apocalyptic literature.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. e.g. *Hyp.* fr. 24/II 24: "Ego sum et videbitis filium hominis a dextris sedentem virtutis." "Virtutes" autem significat sanctos angelos. Proinde enim cum dicit "a dextris dei" eosdem ipsos dicit propter aequalitatem et similitudinem angelicarum sanctarumque virtutum, quae uno nominantur nomine dei.

<sup>27</sup> Ad Matt 18:10 in Clement cf. B. G. Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 61–66; idem, "Matt 18:10 in Early Christology and Pneumatology: Contribution to the Study of Matthean 'Wirkungsgeschichte'", in: *Novum Testamentum* 49/3, 2007, 209–231.

<sup>28</sup> *Exc.* 10,5–6; 11,1 (Clement's own note), transl. R. P. Casey.

<sup>29</sup> *Exc.* 23,4–5 (Clement's own note), transl. R. P. Casey.

<sup>30</sup> *Quis div.* 31,1–3, transl. G. W. Butterworth. Cf. also *Strom.* V,90,5–91,3.



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[It is clear that here Clement is again alluding to Valentinian soteriology, as if to say: yes, the Valentinians are actually right when they say that salvation is somehow mediated by angels (*Exc.* 22; 64 ff.) and that the fullness of salvation is somehow related to the fact that an angel is assigned to the saved.]

### Steps to the Throne

Whoever, then, by his decision to know God has become a true “gnostic”, to him belongs the highest heaven. At the same time, however, such a person, before he reaches the Supreme Heaven, must (in his inner self) gradually pass through all the lower heavenly spheres (cf. e.g. *Strom.* IV,138,4). In other words, a person becomes an innocent “little one” at the moment of baptism (*Paed.* I,6,4–5; 28,3–30,1), and yet there is a lengthy process of acquiring virtues and purification ahead (*Paed.* I,6,4). The more a person approaches the radiance and flaming heat of the throne of God by seeking to know God, the more clearly he also comes to know himself and is confronted with the urgent need for forgiveness, mercy and purification.<sup>31</sup>

And the more of a “gnostic” a man becomes by doing right, the nearer (προσεχέστερον) is the illuminating Spirit to him. Thus the Lord draws near to the righteous, and “none of the thoughts and reasonings of which we are the authors escape Him — I mean the Lord Jesus” (Clement of Rome, *1 Cor.* 21,3,6), the scrutinizer by His omnipotent will of our heart, “whose blood was consecrated for us” (1Pet 1:19 in: Clement of Rome, *1 Cor.* 21,6).<sup>32</sup>

According to Clement, every faithful soul ascends to heaven and can proceed upward through the heavens to the Seventh heaven: the good angels, who guard the way upward through the heavenly spheres, let the soul ascend.

[The „gnostic“ is] very well persuaded that all things are managed consummately well, and that progress to what is better goes on in the case of souls that have chosen virtue, till they come to the Good itself, to the Father's vestibule (cf. Platón, *Philb.* 64c), so to speak, close to (προσεχής) the great High Priest.<sup>33</sup>

And they purify themselves seven days, the period in which Creation was consummated. For on the seventh day the rest is celebrated; and on the eighth he brings a propitiation, as is written in Ezekiel, according to which propitiation the promise is to be received (Ezek 44:27). And the perfect propitiation, I take it, is that propitious faith in the Gospel which is by the law and the prophets, and the purity which shows itself in universal obedience, with the abandonment of the things of the world; in order to that grateful surrender of the tabernacle, which results from the enjoyment of the soul. Whether, then, the time be that which through the seven periods enumerated (Lev 25:8) returns to the chiefest rest, or the seven heavens, which some reckon one above the other; or whether also the fixed sphere which borders on the intellectual world be called the eighth, the expression denotes that the “gnostic” ought to rise out of the sphere of creation and of sin. After these seven days, sacrifices are offered for sins. For there is still fear of change, and it touches the seventh circle. The righteous Job says: “Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there” (Job 1:21); not naked of possessions, for that were a trivial and common thing; but, as a just man, he departs naked of evil and sin, and of the unsightly shape which follows those who have led bad lives. For this was what was said, Unless you be converted, and become as children (Matt 18:3), pure in

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<sup>31</sup> Physical death is not a limit to this purification process: the purification of the believer can continue even after death, cf. e.g. the *Strom.* IV,37,7; VI,14,109,1-6.

<sup>32</sup> *Strom.* IV,107,6–8, transl. W. Wilson, the term “gnostic” lowercased and put in quotation marks.

<sup>33</sup> *Strom.* VII,45,3–4, transl. W. Wilson.

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flesh, holy in soul by abstinence from evil deeds; showing that He would have us to be such as also He generated us from our mother — the water.<sup>34</sup>

The seven days of Jewish purification after contact with the dead (Ezek 44:27), the seven spheres of the wandering heavenly bodies, the seven chambers of the heavenly temple, through which the soul passes, symbolize faith and faithfulness. On the eighth day, the purity thus attained is offered to God as a sacrifice for the propitiation of sins.

### The double washing of the high priest and the baptism in the Holy Spirit

According to the instructions in *Leviticus*, the high priest is to undress and wash twice before entering the Holy of Holies (Lev 16:4, 23-24). The first time before entering the first veil, where he puts aside his profane garments and, after washing, puts on another, holy garment, which includes a mitre on which is situated a gold plate (πέταλον) bearing the name of the Lord. He undresses and washes for a second time before entering the second veil, into the Holy of holies. In a like manner, a person entering the veil of faith undresses himself of his lust for the worldly things, and washes himself from the consequences of his sins which have rested upon him as “unsightly shape” or “formless phantom” (ἀειδές εἴδωλον, *Strom.* IV,160,1). Washed by faith and works of faithfulness, he then puts on the holy garment. Before entering the second veil, however, he must be washed again, this time not by mere faith, but by knowledge. The throne of God, to which he approaches, is a place of fire, as the Jewish tradition of interpreting Scripture teaches, as Heraclitus, who writes about “the wise fire” (fr. 51 Marcovich; *Strom.* VII,34,4),<sup>35</sup> suspects according to Clement, and as the Valentinians know (*Exc.* 38:1). The soul of the “gnostic”, having washed himself by faith for the remission of sins and passed through the first veil, now proceeds to the next washing: the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire.

I have mentioned that Clement in his *Paedagogus* rejects the Valentinian doctrine of twofold baptism: the water baptism of simple believers for the remission of sins, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which signifies knowledge. Clement here insists that there is only one baptism, in which the sight of the human soul is freed from the veil of sin and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and thus enabled to know God. In *Eclogae*, however, Clement goes even further, and borrows and paraphrases the Valentinian doctrine of twofold baptism. He interprets the Gospel account of the baptism in the Spirit and fire, likened to the cleansing of the grain and the burning of the chaff (Matt 3:11-12 par.): the wind of the Spirit “strips” the seed from the chaff and the chaff ends up in the fire. Clement, in alluding to the Valentinians, speaks of the grain of wheat as the incorporeal seed that comes to salvation, and of the chaff as its material covering from which the seed is stripped before entering salvation.

That which is saved is like wheat; what is grown around the soul is like chaff (Matt 3:12 par.). The former is incorporeal; that which is separated is material. Into that which is incorporeal God breathed the Spirit, subtle and pure perhaps beyond the intellect itself, and on that which is material He has put fire. This fire is neither evil nor bad, but powerful and purifying. ... When God is called “consuming fire” (Heb 12:29), it must be understood that this is a figurative designation, not of evil, but of power.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, after the “gnostic”, by his choice of knowledge, exposes himself to the flames of God’s nearness, and thus undergoes the process of the second conversion (or washing in knowledge, or baptism in the Holy Spirit), he also finally undresses himself of that new and holy garment (*Exc.* 27). Here Clement evidently has in mind the physical death of the “gnostic”, after which only comes his full perfection: that is, the fullness of

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<sup>34</sup> *Strom.* IV,158,4–160,2, transl. W. Wilson.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. W. C. van Unnik, “The ‘Wise Fire’ in a Gnostic Eschatological Vision”, P. Granfield – J. J. Jungmann (eds.), *Kyriakon. Festschrift J. Quasten*, I, Münster 1970, 277–288.

<sup>36</sup> *Ecl.* 25,4; 26,1.

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knowledge, i.e., the fullness of salvation. Then he finally enters the second veil, the Eighth Heaven or the Eighth Day, i.e. the resurrection, to behold the face of God and to rest there with friends who share the same love (*Exc.* 27:4; 86). This entrance into the heavenly Holy of holies may be anticipated by the true “gnostic” already on earth, but it can only be definitely attained after death.

Like a bride entering the bridal chamber, the “gnostic’s” soul undresses herself of the beautiful garment, which veiled her, when she knew her Beloved only as a betrothed (*Exc.* 27:6). She becomes so immediately close to the God Himself (not to any of His angel or other intermediary) that she becomes almost His body and He becomes her soul (*Exc.* 27:3, 6; cf. Eph. 5:29-32). She so unites with him that she comes to be the Logos herself (*Exc.* 27:5; Strom. VII:13,1).

When the priest entered the second veil, he put off the plate at the altar of incense, and entered in silence with the Name engraved in his heart. This indicates the putting off of that which has become pure and light through purification, like a gold plate, viz. of that which is as it were the soul’s body, in which the brilliance of piety is engraved, the brilliance through which he has known to be wearing the Name by the principalities and powers (cf. Eph 3:10). He puts off this body, the gold plate which has become light, “within the second veil”, that is, in the noetic world, which is the second complete veil of the universe, “next to the altar of incense”, i.e. beside the angels that minister to prayers that are borne upward (cf. Rev 8:3–4). The soul in its nakedness passes by the power of that which is conscious into the pneumatic realm, becoming as it were the body of the Power. It becomes truly rational and high-priestly, since it is directly (προσεχῶς) animated, so to speak, by the Logos, just as the archangels are the high priests to the angels and the πρωτόκτιστοι in turn to them. Where is there still the place for correction through Scripture and teaching for the soul that has become pure at a point when it is deemed worthy to see God “face to face” (1 Cor 13:12)? But having transcended the angelic teaching and the Name that is taught in Scripture, it comes to the knowledge and comprehension of realities. It is no longer a bride but has now become Logos and resides with bridegroom together with the πρωτοκλήτοι and the πρωτόκτιστοι, who are “friends” (John 15:15) because of love, “sons” (Gal 4:21–31) because of instruction and obedience, and “brothers” (Heb 2:11) by community of birth. Thus it belonged to the [divine] οἰκονομία that the high priest should wear the gold plate and be instructed in γνῶσις. But it belongs to the Power that man became a bearer of divinity, moved directly (προσεχῶς) by to Lord and becoming as it were his body.<sup>37</sup>

So yes, the Valentinians are actually correct that the spiritual seed becomes the body of Christ through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. And they are also actually right that those who are spiritual in a certain sense put off the spiritual body (*Exc.* 64) when they come to the very Limit and are to enter the Fullness (*Exc.* 26,2-3) through the reception of the Name (*Exc.* 22,4) and as the precious, spiritual seed and body of Christ (*Exc.* 26:1). But it is not, as they claim, that they are putting off the soul as the body of the spiritual element. On the contrary, it is the soul of the elect who in death strips off everything that surrounded her here on earth, that belonged to her but was not herself. She is left only with that which is imprinted no longer in the holy garment she wore, but in herself: the name of God. Thus stripped bare, she enters into eternal rest, where she will behold the face of God, in her resurrected flesh having the face of an angel (*Paed.* I,38,6).

### The High Priest enters in silence

In *Exc.* 27:1 we read an ambiguous formulation, according to which the priest entering the second veil comes “in silence” (ἐν σιγῇ), which may be understood either as “comes silently” or “comes into silence”. Then in *Exc.* 29-30,1, which follows *Exc.* 27 almost immediately afterwards, there is also talk of silence, but

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<sup>37</sup> *Exc.* 27, transl. J. L. Kovacs (except for the translation of the first sentence, which is mine).

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in the sense of the Valentinian second aeon: the Silence, the syzygy of the Depth. As we have already mentioned, some Valentinians assumed not only a Limit (called the Cross), bounding the Pleroma (the Fullness) externally, but also a second Limit, running within the Pleroma and separating the Depth (or the Ineffable), and his Silence from the rest of the Pleroma.<sup>38</sup> It is to this second Limit that Clement seems to allude when he interprets the High Priest's entry behind the second veil, into the heavenly Holy of Holies.

Clement seems to say: yes, we also teach that the elect enter through the Cross into the fullness of God, but not only so: they enter even before the very face of the Ineffable, into his silence, where all words cease. Clement thus turns on its head the Valentinian idea that the believers of the catholic Church have no entrance into the Pleroma, and that their salvation takes place beyond its outer Limit. According to Clement, on the contrary, the "gnostic" soul is not held back by any limit at all: by love, which knows no boundary (ἀόριστος), she unites herself (Strom. VII,44,5) with the Logos to such an extent that she becomes the Logos himself (Exc. 27,5). The ambition of the catholic Church, then, far exceeds all the ideas of the Valentinians, according to whom the depths of the Divine silence are not accessible even to Sophia and the other aeons.

### The sacrifice of thanks

As I have already mentioned several times, the ascent of the soul through the heavenly spheres in which the angels dwell is at the same time a likening to the angels as the priests of the heavenly temple.<sup>39</sup> The task of these priests of the Most High, and especially of the "angels of the Face" or protoctists inhabiting the highest heaven, is primarily intercessory prayer and propitiation.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the believer who passes through the seven heavenly spheres as the seven-day purification enters the high-priesthood on the eighth day to offer a sacrifice for sin (Strom. IV,158,4–159,3).

Entering the Seventh heaven, the day when the Creator ceases from His work, signifies a kind of rest: the believer reaches the state of doing no evil (Strom. IV,8,6; 109,2; VI,108,1; Paed. I,4,3). But he who does not wish to remain a simple believer, and desires to know God, ascends still higher, and passes through the Seventh Heaven to the Eight, which signifies the doing of good joined with the full knowledge of God, in other words, doing in accordance with the will of God. This is the true rest and feast of the "gnostic" (cf. John 4:34).

The rest of the elect, then, is not idle; on the contrary, it means identifying with the one, mighty High Priest and uniting with him in the service of intercession and petition for forgiveness for others. The elect offer a proprietary sacrifice, which of course cannot be anything other than the Logos (Strom. VII,31,8; 32,4) - for this High Priest has already offered Himself as a sacrifice once for all. However, according to Exc. 27, the soul ascending into the Holy of holies becomes the Logos: he therefore offers the Logos as the sacrifice, and thus himself.

Not in vain is the righteous in the Strom. IV,117,4 is compared to an unfading tree covered with fruit:

For those [sc. the angels], who demand toll, detain those who bring in any worldly things, who are burdened with their own passions. But him that is free of all things which are subject to duty, and is full of knowledge, and of the righteousness of works, they pass on with their good wishes, blessing the man with his work. And his life shall not fall away— the leaf of the living tree that is nourished by the water-courses. Now the righteous is likened to fruit-bearing trees,

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<sup>38</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I,1–2 ; cf. *A Valentinian Exposition* 27,35–38.

<sup>39</sup> Clement, in my opinion, is not speaking here of the ontological transformation of man into an angel, but of the assumption of the priestly and intercessory role which angels have.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Testament of Levi* III,3,5; *1 Enoch* 15,2.

and not only to such as are of the nature of tall-growing ones.<sup>41</sup> And in the sacrificial oblations, according to the law, there were those who looked for blemishes in the sacrifices.<sup>42</sup>

Clement here seems to have in mind the tree of the Cross, the fruit of which is the propitiation made on the heavenly Yom Kippur when the Crucified One entered the heavenly Holy of holies. The believer, who assimilates to this High Priest and enters before the face of God, is therefore also called to the service of intercession and atonement. This is evidently the reason why the quoted text (*Strom.* IV,117) is followed by an account of the three intercessors: Moses, Judith, and Esther (*Strom.* IV,118,1-119,2). The latter was not afraid to step before the king's throne and defend her people, even though the act was presumptuous and extremely risky: the throne room was a terrible and forbidden place. The king's wife, however, was granted an exception, and she was not punished by death. She was heard. Her pure beauty thus became "a ransom for the people who were to be slaughtered" (*Paed.* III,12,5).

The only "mighty High Priest" (Heb 4:14; 10:21, etc.), of whom Melchizedek and Aaron are the types, is therefore Christ (*Strom.* VII,45,3), as Clement repeatedly points out.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, man, who through Christ's incarnation has become in baptism an "adopted son" of the Father and a "brother and fellow-heir of Christ" (Rom 8:15-17), is called to assimilate to the High Priest (*Strom.* II,134,2): to give thanks to God (εὐχαριστία) and to plead for others (*Strom.* VII,41,6). Christ, the King of Peace and Priest of the Most High,<sup>44</sup> is then at the same time Himself the propitiatory sacrifice, for He "gave Himself as a sacrifice (ἱερεῖον) for us" (*Paed.* I,97,3; cf. *Paed.* I,23,1; *Strom.* II,20,2): He brought His own blood once for all into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:12).

Gratitude (εὐχαριστία) for Christ's sacrifice then means both an understanding acceptance of it and an imitation of it. The "gnostic", who finally passes through the heat of the Seventh Heaven, and in death - stripped naked of all that is not himself - finally opens the veil separating the world from the fullness of God, to meet his Beloved face to face, and "offers his own blood as a sacrifice of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστεῖν) in His image, and sends his spirit" to God (*Strom.* IV,130,3).<sup>45</sup>

Returning to the inscription scrawled on the wall in Olomouc, I think that if Clement could speak to the writer, he would say to them: yes, it is up to you how the story of your life turns out. Your choice is absolutely decisive. But equally, you are not alone in the world. We belong together and are responsible for each other. You do not even know who you owe what to. If you choose to let yourself be helped and to act for the sake of others yourself, the way is open for you to move on. And then it is up to you how far you go and what adventures you venture into. You are invited.

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<sup>41</sup> Text *Strom.* IV,117,4 is corrupted in the manuscript, and its meaning is therefore not quite clear: οὐ μόνον τοῖς κατὰ τὴν τῶν μεταρσίων \*\* θυσίαν. A. van den Hoek, SC 436, translates: "Le juste est comparé aux arbres fruitiers et pas seulement à ceux qui s'élèvent dans les airs...". Referring to Philo (*De plant.* 24-27 and 127), A. van den Hoek points out that the expression μεταρσίος, originally used of growth, here seems to speak metaphorically of that which is raised above this world. The sacrifice could thus refer to the exaltation of Jesus to the wood of the cross and then to the glory of heaven (Jn 3:14; 12:32, 34 and Acts 2:33) and, consequently, to those who follow Jesus and resemble him.

<sup>42</sup> *Strom.* IV,117,2-4, transl. W. Wilson, the parenthesis is mine.

<sup>43</sup> *Protr.* 120,2; *Paed.* II,67,1; *Strom.* II,21,4; 45,7; 134,2; IV,151,3; VI,153,4; VII,9,2; 13,2.

<sup>44</sup> Christ is called Melchizedek, among other things, because of the meaning of this Old Testament figure's name: "king-priest"; cf. A. Pasquier, *Temple et prêtrise chez Clément d'Alexandrie. Questions sur les traditions apocalyptiques en Égypte*, in: Simon C. Mimouni – Louis Painchaud (eds.), *La question de la "sacerdotalisation" dans le Judaïsme Synagogaal, le Christianisme et le Rabbinisme*, Turnhout 2018, 349–370, here 364.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Strom.* IV,15,3; *Paed.* II,73,3. See also R. J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, Philadelphia 1978, 104–126.