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Introduction to Clement

I will try to offer this not easy introduction to Clement in the perspective of the comparison with Gregory of Nyssa at the centre of our conference. Specific themes of comparison or referring specifically to Clement will be developed in the following papers. I will focus on some structural aspects within which the comparison can be placed; precisely in the perspective of the comparison with Gregory, the image that I will sketch is that of the "Greek" Clement, in particular relation to the Hellenistic intellectual world (philosophical and not), necessarily neglecting the other components, first of all the Judeo-Christian tradition, which contribute, even if less evidently, to the construction of his thought and to which some of the most recent scholarship has drawn attention. Similarly, I will take for granted the general knowledge of the historical-biographical framework and the cultural context in which Clement's work is placed. Given the limits of time and literary genre of an introduction, I will limit myself to stating, rather than fully developing, the themes I will address, referring for further study and bibliographical discussion to some of my own and others' works that you will find in the bibliographical note attached (as well as to the final draft of this contribution).

A further premise is necessary, concerning our knowledge of the whole of Clement's thought and the transmission of his work. With respect to the catalogue of Clement's writings offered by Eusebius in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, we can assume, apart from a few minor works, that we are deprived only of the seven or eight books of the so-called *Hypotyposeis*, which in reality are only than the books that follow the seven *Stromateis* that have come down to us, from which they had been separated in the passage format from the scroll format to the codex format, regrouped in different sequences and under a different title, as it happened for example in the case of Sextus Empiricus's *Adversus mathematicos*. If this were the case, we would be deprived of a significant part of Clement's most advanced speculative and exegetical reflections arranged, however, according to the polemical testimony of Photius in his *Bibliotheca*, according to the same modalities of the *Stromateis*, i.e. in a non-systematic form and in close dialectical engagement with the positions of interlocutors and adversaries that makes it difficult, as in the case of the so-called *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, to attribute to Clement what is his own thought and what instead he refers of that of others. It is therefore possible that some of Clement's theological positions are unknown to us, but they may have reached Gregory of Nyssa directly, before the disappearance of the so-called *Hypotyposeis*, or through the mediation of Origen, who, as well known, never mentions Clement, even though he makes ample use of his ideas or themes - one among all: *apokatastasis*.

I will organize my exposition under three major circumstances that separate Clement from Gregory of Nyssa and that explain at least in part the structural differences between the two, but at the same time allow us to better identify the elements of continuity. On a strictly theological and institutional level, Clement precedes orthodoxy and the establishment of a strong ecclesiastical hierarchy, that is, he is on this side of the process that takes place in Nicaea and Constantinople where a universally normative canon of the Christian faith is drawn up, of which the bishops and, to a lesser degree, the clergy proclaim themselves to be the guardians and authorized interpreters (I personally lean towards the hypothesis that Clement was never ordained a priest, or at least not before his departure from Alexandria, like Origen). On the exegetical level, Clement precedes Origen and his mighty effort of complete and systematic interpretation of the biblical *corpus*, book by book: in this case, however, perhaps the witness of the *Hypotyposeis* is missing, which, according to Eusebius, would have contained a sort of continuous commentary on the entire Bible, including some (numerous?) writings now considered extracanonical; from what we can understand from the *Adumbrationes*, probably a Latin translation of a part of them promoted by Cassiodorus, it was in any case more a collection of *scholia* to the text than a real exegesis (this aspect is also significant in relation to Origen's dependence on Clement in terms of literary genres). Finally, on the philosophical level, so important for Gregory of Nyssa, Clement precedes Plotinus and the redefinition of Platonism made by the latter, since Clement still operates in the eclectic and largely scholastic context of the so-called Middle Platonism,

although, as we shall see, already in his case we can perhaps detect hints of overcoming the schemes of this philosophical current.

1. *Before Orthodoxy: the regula fidei*

Clement's literary production is therefore placed *before* the univocal and universal definition of orthodoxy and *during the* process that leads, in parallel, to its exact definition and to the establishment of episcopal authority in doctrinal terms and no longer only in liturgical and organizational terms (with the relative economic implications). Clement belongs to a line of the development of Christianity in the second and third centuries represented, for example, by Justin and Tatian, destined to culminate and come to an end with Origen, because it succumbed to the institutional-episcopal line of Ignatius and Polycarp or of Papias and Irenaeus with their successors. Clement's horizon is the direct teaching of a "Christian philosophy" - whatever the formula means - in a scholarly context - where "school" is to be understood in the ancient, rhetorical-philosophical sense of the term, implying sharing and community between the teacher and the disciples. This leads to consequences of considerable importance in your case, which will be attenuated already with Origen. First of all, such a context implies a different dynamic between orality and writing and between master and disciple with respect to what happens, for example, in the case of preaching or public catechesis, from which much of the later speculative production originates (think of Gregory's *Oratio catechetica*); Clement's interlocutor is called to play an active role even in front of the written text, according to a reading mode that presupposes the constant interaction of the teacher and that in the case of the *Stromateis* allows to reconnect the different threads that run through the individual *kephalaia* and to catch the "scattered sparks" of the most authentic teaching dispersed in the text. For the modern interpreter it becomes thus difficult to delineate the overall traits of Clement's thought, beyond the single issues, misrepresenting it as a whole and painting, for example, Clement as exclusively addressed to contemporary social and economic *elites* or as a passive receptor of Stoic ethical models (typical the case of *apatheia*, to which I will come back). Moreover, the scholastic context determines more blurred boundaries in the relationship between outside and inside, between Christians and non-Christians, between Christians and "heretics" if one wants to use this terminology for mere convenience, so that references, arguments and texts are intertwined in a way that is not always easy to untangle, as already mentioned in the case of the *Hypotyposeis* and Photius' misunderstanding of them. There is therefore in Clement's work a constant polemical-dialectical dimension that contributes to the very formation of his thought; it must therefore be carefully deconstructed before extracting - so to speak - its positive component and combining it with the other elements of his thought. It is the case, as we shall see, with the very concepts of gnosis and gnosticism that turn out to be so central and problematic in Clement's work.

In such a framework there is a decisive junction for the understanding of Clement's intellectual position, namely his peculiar definition of what in the Christian theological lexicon is usually called *regula fidei*. Unlike the more or less contemporary Tertullian, who referred to the symbols of faith current in the African church of his time, or the slightly later Origen, who in the proemium of the *De principiis* drew up an accurate list of the contents of the Christian doctrine that were absolutely certain and those that were subject to investigation and better definition, Clement frequently refers to a "secret tradition" that through a succession of *didaskaloi* went back to the apostles themselves. Far from constituting any form of esotericism or exclusivism, in my opinion such an expression indicates a careful selection of key passages of the New Testament (hence the reference to the apostles) that structure a *regula fidei* as an epistemological criterion for the construction of a Christian thought about the faith that saves and the way in which it saves, transmitted orally in Christian teaching and recurring in karstic form, but identifiable in the writings, especially the *Stromateis* that are most affected by scholastic practice, as mentioned above. It is a combination of aspects of the Johannine and Pauline traditions: for Clement, Paul is the prototype of the one who has attained knowledge of God and his world, while John testifies how Christ as Logos represents the

only possibility of access to the knowledge of the Father (Jn 1:8), on the one hand, and on the other offers the specifically Christian definition of God as love (1 Jn 4:8). The key text, however, is 1 Cor 13:12-13, which constitutes a whole in which the three so-called "theological virtues" (faith, hope, love) must not be separated from the epistemological statement according to which we now see "as in a mirror and in an enigma" or "according to a part", when instead, reunited with Christ, we will be able to see "face to face".

In the course of the *Stromateis* the combination and its individual elements appear repeatedly, scattered and concealed in the various contexts according to the scholastic procedure characteristic of the work. A passage in the fifth book is particularly clear of the conceptual scheme and method that oversees the relationship between religious knowledge and the *regula fidei* thus defined:

Becoming aware of ignorance is however the first lesson for those who want to proceed *kata logon*. If one realizes he is ignorant, he seeks; if he seeks, he finds the master. When he has found him, he has faith; and if he has faith, he hopes: hence he begins to love and assimilates himself to the object of his love, studying himself to be what he had already begun to love.

The Christian perceives in this sequence first of all the amphibology of the reference to the investigation *kata logon*, which alludes both to rationality and therefore to philosophy, as well as to the identification of the Logos-Christ as the only possible master of the investigation itself; then the progress in faith marked by the three Pauline virtues that acquire a gnoseological and ethical value at the same time, because the path culminates finally in the assimilation to God who is precisely love. It is worth noting how Clement inserts the Platonic theme of vision and assimilation to God into an exquisitely Christian matrix: from being the driving force of the ascent towards the full *theoria* of the being, as it was in Plato and in the tradition that began with him, love is transformed into the very object of contemplation according to Johannine indications. The lexical change, from Platonic *eros* to Johannine *agape*, is explicitly thematized by Clement, who characterizes the latter as "philosophical" love, as if to correct Plato himself. In this way, even the principle current in Middle-Platonism according to which only the like can know the like is bent in a Christian sense, given that knowledge of the Father can only be attained through the Son, as John teaches, and since God is love, our knowledge of the Father must also necessarily pass through assimilation in love with the Son.

The epistemology consequent on the *regula fidei* built on Paul and John thus takes on a precise Christological focus, as emerges from a passage, among others, in Book Seven:

Christ is the beginning and the end. The two extremes, the beginning and the end, are not taught and are faith and love: but gnosis, transmitted by tradition, is entrusted as a deposit, by the grace of God, to those who make themselves worthy of its teaching. For it is said: "To the one who has, more will be given" (Mt 25:29): to faith the gnosis, to gnosis the love, to love the inheritance. And this happens when one becomes dependent on the Lord through faith, through gnosis, through love, and ascends with Him to where He is the God and guardian of our faith and love.

One observes in this passage the substitution of gnosis for hope; in this case also the substitution is made possible by the reference to the letter to the Hebrews that Clement attributes without hesitation to Paul: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for" (Heb 11,1). In the scheme recalled many times, hope is placed between faith and love on the path of knowledge and virtue that leads to God. If faith is the starting point and love the condition and outcome of the final assimilation into God through the Son-Logos, hope covers the intermediate space that leads from one to the other, thus revealing itself to be the area in which, for Clement, knowledge of the content of faith develops and in parallel the mature Christian is built up. To indicate it, Clement uses the term "Gnostic", or "true Gnostic" whose polemical function is well evident, but he could have used that of "philosopher" or "true philosopher", if he had found himself operating for example in a context analogous to that of Justin or Meliton of Sardis, as it is easy to deduce from the very title of the work ("Gnostic notes according to true philosophy") used several times in the *Stromateis*. In this sense, once the polemical intention has been deconstructed and contextualized, the "Gnostic" turns out to be nothing

other than the Christian *progrediens* of the later and well-known Origenian tripartition (*incipientes, progredientes, perfecti*), even if Clement prefers to stress the final outcome of the path, rather than emphasizing the difficulties or the more general condition of inadequacy of the faithful. Again, Clement's difference with Origen and Gregory is in relation to the potentially open and less rigidly hierarchical didactic context of the former, as opposed to the progressively more institutionalized preaching and teaching of the other two.

For Clement, the "Gnostic" Christian thus redefined is capable of living (in) Christian hope in such a way as to reduce the space, chronological and ontological, that separates him from the fulfilment in the love and contemplation of God. Gnosis consists in a movement of ethical and intellectual ascent of which Clement illustrates in the *Stromateis* (but also in the *Paedagogus*) all the behavioural and cognitive aspects that allow one to operate a similar mystical and gnoseological contraction, thanks to the *sequela Christi*, the one and only true *didaskalos*. It is clear that the one we are talking about constitutes a very particular *regula fidei*, if compared to the contemporary professions of faith in use in the churches; it is configured as an epistemological and methodological rule, rather than immediately content-related: it constitutes the hermeneutical key of access to the effective understanding of the Scriptures and thanks to this it allows the validation of the doctrinal statements and the various canons of faith, as Clement clarifies in a passage of the seventh book, thus recovering and justifying the adherence of the believer to the "rule of the church" at the moment of baptism:

For this reason, we need greater diligence and shrewdness in examining how to lead a perfect life and what is the true religion. (...) It is necessary to consent to the search and through the Scriptures themselves to become aware, as if by demonstration, how the heresies have fallen into error and how instead in the unique truth of the ancient church the most perfect gnosis is placed and the best school in reality.

The procedure is in some ways reversed with respect to Irenaeus or Tertullian: the interpretation of Scripture carried out in the light of the hermeneutical and methodological principle preserved by the didascalical (oral) tradition allows the "rule of the church" to be validated, and not vice versa, using the canon of faith to verify *ex post* the doctrinal or exegetical construct. In this way, Clement unifies rational investigation, biblical exegesis and ecclesiastical tradition: faith (testified by baptism) constitutes the necessary starting point for understanding the Bible, but in turn the investigation conducted on the text supports and confirms the faith of the Church and this is reflected in the progress of the believer on the path of hope, progress that is both gnoseological and ethical, without the possibility of separating the two aspects, as stated at the beginning of the quotation. Like Origen (and Gregory of Nyssa), for Clement the Bible is the decisive component of the life of the Christian around which all the other dimensions revolve, from individual prayer (examined in the *Paedagogus* and the *Stromateis* in relation to the different position of the believer on the path of contemplation) to liturgical and sacramental prayer (only hinted at in both works), to the ethical life. But, as already mentioned, Clement's approach to the text is profoundly divergent from that of his successors.

2. Before Origen: biblical exegesis

As is known, Clement resorts to allegorical - or rather "spiritual" - hermeneutics of the sacred text, following in the footsteps of Philo and in a line that would later be considered exquisitely Alexandrian. This adherence is not, however, total or exclusive: in fact, it is easy to see how in the *Protrepticus* and the *Paedagogus*, the works addressed to the audience of non-Christians or *incipientes* Christians, the exegesis of the proposed passages has an exclusively literal dimension, and the allegorical insights are only hinted at and immediately removed. These are instead, once again, reserved for the practice of scholastic reading conducted under the guidance of the teacher. In Clement's vision, the human teacher must act in the same way that divine pedagogy has acted in human history through the Logos, as recorded in biblical history and in its indirect

influence on Greek philosophy (a characteristically Clementine theme, which I will not dwell on here), and finally in its incarnation which constitutes the fullness of revelation. This implies that the human teacher must develop biblical exegesis in different ways just as Scripture contains different truths; on the one hand, the immediate, historical and literal meanings of the Bible, with a primary focus on ethics; on the other hand, he will be able to lead the *proficientes* towards the deeper teachings of the Logos scattered in the biblical text beneath the surface of the *littera*, by means of a conceptual instrumentation that Clement summarizes in the term "philosophy", encompassing in it the totality of the Greek *paideia*, in the footsteps of Philo:

Philosophy grasps the spark of divine Scripture, and here and there manifests it (...). But when one then grasps a spark of the real and revives it within the soul with the desire for doctrine, afterwards he sets everything in motion for the purpose of perfect knowledge. In fact, what one does not grasp with knowledge, one does not even desire, nor does one look with liking at the utility of it. The Gnostic therefore, at the limit of his perfect action, imitates the Lord as far as is given to a man: he has contracted as it were a quality of the Lord in order to assimilate himself to God. But those who do not know Gnosis cannot even judge of truth according to the standard.

The idea returns that it is Gnostic exegesis that validates the norm of faith and the central role in this process of the Christian teacher. Unlike Origen and his systematic approach to the Bible, Clement places Christian exegesis in a much broader context. We need to return again to 1 Cor. 13, to vision "in aenigmatate" and knowledge "according to a part" (*ek merous*). For Clement, philosophizing by enigma is typical of both Greek and Biblical wisdom; both pass on "truths by means of representations and symbols, allegories and metaphors, and other similar procedures". The interpretation of this symbolic language constitutes the nucleus of "Gnostic" exegesis, once the level of the *littera* and its ethical implications have been resolved. Its value, however, does not appear limited to the interpretation of the Scriptures alone, but extends to the whole cosmic reality, in virtue of the fact that both creation and Biblical revelation are the work of the same Logos. Just as the reader under the guidance of the teacher can recompose in unity the contents of the sacred text thanks to the symbolic interpretation (*in aenigmatate*), in the same way the Christian must be attentive to the knowledge of each part (*ek merous*) of the creation, in order to lead it back to its original unity and goodness, because "everything is of one God and there is no one whose nature is foreign to the world, because one is the substance and one is God". In parallel, "he who will recompose the divided parts and reunite them, will contemplate without risk the Logos in his perfection, that is, the truth".

Thus, for Clement, not only the Bible, but also the whole of creation (visible and invisible) constitutes a potential *continuum* that human beings are called to navigate with knowledge, in order to grasp its deepest essence, which coincides precisely with the Logos-truth. The elements at play in this scheme are, on the one hand, the Logos as the manifestation of unity and truth, the recognizable expression of God insofar as it is his image, and, on the other, its articulations in time and space (*mere*, "parts"), which are proper to the cosmos. To reunite the series of elements so that they coincide is the joint work of revelation (the operation of the Logos from above) and of Gnostic progress (the work of human beings from below). The reading of the Bible under the guidance of the "gnostic" teacher provides the map that allows human beings to reach such a goal. The full possession of the symbolic method of reading or, as expressed in other terms, of the "enigmatic procedure" or of the "modes of expression in veiled terms" does not concern thus only the biblical exegesis, but represents the instrument of knowledge that allows the unification of the different aspects of reality and its gnoseological crossing, in order to reach the final unitary contemplation of the Logos. In fact, if the reality of the cosmos in its deepest nature constitutes a unitary *continuum*, inasmuch as it is the product of the creative act of God through the Logos, in this life the human being can grasp this structural characteristic of the created world only in symbolic terms, that is, passing from the differentiated external manifestations to the progressive perception of its intimate unity. Such a way of reading nature and the world is in perfect analogy with the mechanism of scriptural interpretation, which makes it possible to transcend

the literal word in order to grasp the diverse and inexhaustible degrees of spiritual meaning, which coincides with the very infinitude of the Logos-Word of God.

Of course, the starting point remains the symbolic hermeneutics of Christian revelation contained in the Bible, but precisely because the content coincides with the Revelator and the instrument of creation, the Logos, such a hermeneutics extends to the entire created cosmos; as shown by the famous case of the exegesis of the architecture of the Temple and the priest's robe in the fifth book of the *Stromateis*, Christian revelation becomes a sort of map of cosmic reality, thanks to which it is possible to grasp its underlying unity through an uninterrupted process of intellectual investigation. Creation and Scripture stand in very close relation to each other, and the "Gnostic" Christian is the one who progressively acquires the truth of good, of evil, of the origin of everything, from the beginning of the world to its end; in short, the truth revealed by the Logos. The "Gnostic teacher" designed by Clement thus summarizes in himself the characteristics of the High Priest, of the accomplished Christian and of the wise philosopher: "Our philosopher is attached to these three things, therefore: first, speculation; second, the fulfilment of the commandments; third, the training of good men; these elements, joined together, form the Gnostic. Whichever of them is lacking, Gnosticism remains incomplete". Because of Clement's insistence on the need for teaching by a human teacher, a sort of stand-in for the one true master, in his hands the Bible is neither a superior juridical code to be admired and respected, as it was for Philo, nor the pure noetic world, substituting the Platonic one, to be explored within the ecclesial confines, as it would be for Origen and Gregory; instead, it acts as a roadmap, to be shared with all mankind so that it can be led to salvation, passing through the sensible and intelligible worlds.

3. *Before the institution: the place of mysticism*

The peculiar characteristics of Clement's hermeneutic theory and its cosmic dimension draw attention to the figure of the Gnostic as model of the accomplished Christian who lives faith not simply on an inchoative level, but as "substance of things hoped for". Against every form of ethical indifferentism, Clement affirms that Gnosis is at the same time the application of the faithful to contemplation and the concrete manifestation of the virtues in the earthly space of hope that transcends to love, in a sort of dual purpose of Gnostic life, contemplative and active. The journey along the path of Gnosis already allows to some extent to anticipate on this earth the outcome of hope, which consists in the communion of love with God that frees human beings from every earthly conditioning, in the unity of faith and love. Precisely the setting in the created world of the cognitive progress of the Gnostic determines the decisive character of Clement's mysticism. In his vision gnosis is at the same time and in the same place, the world, application to contemplation and concrete manifestation of the virtues that make the hope of the gnostic transcend into love, in the double character of his activity, contemplative and at the same time active. Now, it is well known that the relationship between contemplation and action, or if one prefers between knowledge and love, constitutes a central node of Christian reflection. In Clement's case, it takes on a character quite different from what will happen later. It is not simply a matter of the love for the contemplated God that *naturaliter* overflows into love for His creatures on the part of the Gnostic, as will happen later (but I believe that it is on this point that Gregory may have been most influenced by Clement). In reality the latter turns out in some measure to be a co-operator to the same redemptive action of God in the very act of his own mystical progression:

Therefore, this is the activity of the perfect Gnostic: to converse with God through the high priest, assimilating himself as much as possible to the Lord, through all the worship dedicated to God: the purpose of this worship is the salvation of people, through a solicitous benevolence towards us, through the liturgy, the teaching of the doctrine and the practice of good. In addition to edifying and building himself, by assimilating himself to God, the Gnostic also forms his listeners.

For Clement's Gnostic, noetic contemplation and the practice of love are co-present in the same space and time, as stated in an often misunderstood passage: "Love is no longer the appetite of the one who loves, but

affective familiarity, that restores the Gnostic, no longer in need of time or place, to the "unity of faith". Thus, even the specifically Christian cultic, liturgical and sacramental forms, that at that height of time already substantiated the life of the churches, are radically supplanted - with the sole exception of baptism, as necessary beginning of the Christian path generated by adherence to the faith - by the whole complex of the life of the Christian, in which not only the liturgy and the exemplariness of life are included, but also the function of teaching and of caring for the spiritual progress of one's neighbour. The same idea of assimilation to God sees as a reference the incarnation of the Logos, in the previous line of the apologists, rather than his passion, as instead happens in martyrological spirituality, in the long run destined to assert itself. In this regard a marked reciprocity is given: "The Logos of God is endowed with intellect, and for this reason the image of the intellect is given only in man; so that in the soul the good man has divine aspect and form and in turn God has human form, because the essence of each is the intellect, by which we are characterized. »

Such a conception of worship brings about a profound change in the relationship of the Christian Gnostic with the world. Every boundary between spheres, places and distinct functions in the relationship with the divine - hence also in what we normally define as "mysticism" - proper to every traditional religious system is cancelled and all created reality is brought back to the human being, image of God. The Gnostic Christian knows neither special places nor times for prayer, convinced as he is of the omnipresence of God, in terms of time and space (even if precise indications on the times and modes of prayer are not lacking, especially in the *Paedagogus*). The sacrificial dimension of the ancient religion is annulled by the true sacrifice whose object is the Logos himself, which determines the perfect affinity between the recipient of worship, God, and the object of sacrifice, the Logos. The profound intentionality of the sacrifice is thus brought to light: "The sacrifice of the church is in fact the Logos that exhales from the holy souls, revealing to God together with the sacrifice the whole intention". It is not necessary to recall what instead is the role of the celebration of ecclesiastical worship in Gregory (but to some extent already in Origen, or at least in the "preacher" Origen)

Clement also makes explicit the last, decisive passage that separates not only the cultic, but the theological and mystical conception of Christianity from the ancient horizon, where he identifies in the human being, as said, in so far as created in the image of God, the place where the greatness of the latter is fully manifested. From this point of view, for Clement the Gnostic does not represent an elitist exception in the mass of Christians, but a stage of advancement on the unitary and uninterrupted path that leads to assimilation to God, destined not to conclude even in heavenly contemplation, but that can and must begin in this life, in a dimension that, given the bond of the flesh, takes on a marked symbolic connotation, as said. Thus, the Gnostic is "of this world and superior to this world". In this perspective it is necessary to reject the denotatively symbolic interpretation of the cult materially rendered, as still in Philo: there is not given a double level for the interpretation of the liturgical or sacrificial gesture, the material one of mere sign and the spiritual or symbolic one of true meaning, but rather the unity of creation in all its dimensions is reflected in the unity of the life and gestures of the believer, who already at the inchoative level of those on the verge of believing carries within himself the potential fullness of the image of God, destined to ever greater completion in progressive and eternal assimilation to Him. If true worship coincides with the totality of the Christian's life, the essence of the Eucharist rendered by the faithful consists in the progress in love, in which the offeror comes ever more to coincide with the offering, the Logos the image of God, and God himself, understood as love according to the often recalled dictation of 1 Jn 4:8. In this framework the doctrine of the *apatheia* of the Gnostic is also to be understood, that Clement certainly derives from the Stoic tradition, but bends it to an authentically Christian meaning. It is nothing other than the subjective dimension of the restitution of the soul to the unitary contemplation of the God who is love; in his earthly journey, the Gnostic, though not yet distancing himself from mortal life, succeeds progressively in wrenching the soul from the dominion of the passions - understood in the broad sense proper to ancient philosophy - and in entertaining a substantially instrumental relationship with the body, not remaining conditioned by desires or affections. This path takes the form of "rational death", which is the separation of the soul from the passion, just as natural death is the separation of the soul from the body. As has been said, physical death constitutes only a

partial break in the uninterrupted path of purification and progress which leads to the never-completed assimilation to God.

This sort of vertical shift from the literal to the spiritual, from the *psyle pistis* (the "simple faith" that coincides with the acceptance of baptism) to gnosis makes eschatology lose its projection toward a more or less near future, as it still was in many Christians contemporary with Clement such as Tertullian or Hippolytus: in Clement's argument, the decisive passage is not represented by death, but by the passage from the material world in all its aspects to the intelligible realm, which occurs in different ways and at different times depending on each believer's progress in assimilating to God (again, it is impossible to know whether Clement's lost writings dealt with topics such as bodily resurrection and so on). Thus, it remains an open question whether the goal of human life can be achieved already in this life or only in the next, whether it coincides with the *eudaimonia* of the philosophical tradition or with *the face-to-face theoria* according to 1 Corinthians 13, although it is not difficult to imagine what Clement's inclination was. However, against a misunderstanding persistent in modern scholarship, such a view does not come from a disembodied intellectualism, but has precise implications on the anthropological and social level, precisely because in Clement's vision gnoseological progress and ethical progress proceed hand in hand along a continuum that moves from the material world toward contemplation of the divine, thus embracing all aspects of human life. Against the anti-cosmic perspective characteristic of some Gnostic schools, Clement proposes a universal model of ethics and behaviour that the philosophical tradition and elitism of ancient society limited instead to the ruling classes.

In this way, the condition of the simple believer, steadfast in faith, constant in the hope that is certainty in the expectation of the fulfilment that is love, is progressively transformed into the mystical figure of the Gnostic, to the extent to which, remaining in this world and working in it, through intellectual and behavioural asceticism he goes back towards the unity that substantiates all of creation and time, transcending them both and anticipating already on this earth the paradisiacal condition in which all is love. It is a strongly intellectualistic mysticism, of undoubtedly Platonic ancestry. However, the anthropological optimism that underlies it, derived from the creation *kata logon* of human beings and the redemptive action of Christ-Logos that extends into the present of each of them, and the biblically based identification of the world as the place of its realization give to the mysticism of Clement a specifically Christian imprint and a breadth of vision that, in my opinion, will not be reached later even by Origen and Gregory.

4. Before Plotinus: the doctrine of the Logos and the emergence of "theology"

Finally, Clement places himself chronologically before the turning point in ancient philosophy generally ascribed to Plotinus, particularly with regard to the doctrine of the Logos, even if the Logos takes on a more precise physiognomy in Clement in respect to the more indefinite reflection of the Apologists. From another point of view, however, Clement initiates the process of emancipation of theology from the discourse on the *archai* that will lead it to assume a distinct and superordinate position within the structure of late antique philosophical knowledge.

In the wake of the Apologists of the previous century, Clement attributes to the Logos a primary function as revelator, to which the Christian adheres as the necessary *arche* of every form of knowledge, to which, as seen, is also linked the path of progress in faith that leads to salvation and assimilation to God. The Logos constitutes the gnoseological foundation in that it connects God, absolutely transcendent and therefore unknowable for human beings, and the created world and human beings. Thus, Clement defines the Logos as *prosopon* (in the sense of "image") through which the Father makes himself visible and manifest; unlike the latter, one and indivisible and therefore not circumscribable and not liable to theoretical knowledge, the Logos is the one in multiplicity, therefore liable to *perigraphé*, which makes him accessible both historically through incarnation and theoretically through contemplation, in the ways mentioned above. In the absence

of the developments that will lead to the dogma of the two natures of Chalcedon, a strong tension runs through all Clement's writings between the possibility of the Logos being an object of knowledge (and therefore ontologically subordinate to the Father) and his equality with the Father. More in detail, the relationship between them appears to be defined still in the light of the dual conception of the divine *nous* proper to medioplatonism, which interpreted Plato's "One" in terms of absolute unity (*Hen* understood as the Father), beyond the possibility of understanding and knowability, but also of unity as totality (*Hen panta*, the Son) or, to use an image of Xenocrates, as identity between the one who thinks and his infinite thoughts, or again as *nous* and *noeton*, "mind" and "thought" (but the two terms are corradical in Greek). In this sense, the Son-Logos is also the seat of ideas, on which the created world is exemplified; to this mid-Platonic scheme Clement gives an exquisitely Christian colouring (once again traceable to his specific *regula fidei*) determined by the affirmation according to which the Two are bound by mutual love that, even if it does not put them on a plane of strict ontological parity, underlines their intrinsic and necessary reciprocity. Instead, in subsequent Christian Neo-Platonism the emanationist logic of Plotinian matrix will prevail, with all the tensions that will arise. Though not fully defined in the pages of the *Stromateis*, it is evident how a similar conception of divine unity admits the insertion of the third Person of the Trinity, in this case also expressly Christianizing the Platonic triad in the light of Jn 1:3.

My final remark concerns Clement's role in the birth and development of the late antique philosophical system. In the construction of his conceptual edifice, Clement seems to reshape the articulation of the parts and of the teaching of philosophy, at that time marked by the succession of logic, physics and ethics, as found for example in the *Didaskalikos* or in the Platonic handbook of Apuleius, where physics was understood as the investigation of the whole cosmic reality, sensible and intelligible, starting from the *archai* that today we would say metaphysical, the One, the ideas, the matter, to end with man and nature. The first three books of the *Stromateis*, possibly integrated with the initial section of the so-called eighth book, may well represent the way to build a "Christian" logic. They focus on the theme of *pistis* ("faith"), on the rational conditions for accessing it, and on the evidence, including chronological evidence, concerning the relationship between Greek wisdom and Old Testament revelation. In these books Clement builds his argumentation on the double meaning that the term *pistis* can assume. On the one hand, in the wake of a tradition that goes from Aristotle to Middle-platonism, *pistis* is what allows one to find a starting point for demonstration, which in turn must not be the object of further demonstration, in order to avoid an endless backward process. It is primarily about universals, as well as the evidences of sensations and intellect, once the rational assent to perceived truths has been achieved, according to an indication proper to Stoic logic, summarized in the concept of (*koine*) *prolepsis*. In this sense, *pistis* also constitutes the outcome of the demonstration thus argued. On this logical-gnoseological substratum, Clement grafts the Christian meaning of *pistis*, that is of "faith" as acceptance of the revelation brought by the Logos-Christ, contained in the Bible, and in itself sufficient to guarantee salvation, but from which the hope and the search *kata logon* of the "Gnostic" Christian develops.

Compared to the scholastic scheme then in vogue, in the second part of the *Stromateis* (books four to seven) Clement repeatedly claims to deal with ethics, illustrating in substance the customs of the "Gnostic" Christian. The apparent fracture between the two parts of the work has often been pointed out, whereby the figure of the Gnostic sketched in the last books would decline in a more elitist sense compared to the previous ones. But if one applies Clement's *regula fidei* and his reference to the virtues of 1Cor. 13, the passage from logic to ethics, or from the *pistis* to the *elpis*, which constitutes the space proper to the Gnostic, implies the process of progress of the Christian that must and can only develop simultaneously on the ethical and intellectual plane, so as to lead him and make possible contemplation and assimilation to God. At the conclusion of the seventh book Clement promises: "And after this seventh *Stromate* of ours we shall make an exposition of what remains, starting from another beginning". What remains is the "*physike*" or, as Clement characterizes it, the *gnostike physiology*, which at this point - if we are to heed Eusebius and Photius - coincides with biblical exegesis and the boldest theological speculation. In any case the inversion of position between physics and ethics with respect to the mid-Platonic manuals, on the one hand, and the concentration on biblical exegesis

or in any case the most advanced Christian doctrine, on the other, is evident. If this were the case - and it is not unreasonable to think so -, Clement (and with him and after him Origen) would mark a step that anticipates the turning point of Plotinus and the primacy he assigned to theological issues, even if not the placement of the One above being in which many see the fundamental character of Neoplatonism (in turn taken from Dionysian mysticism); in this way, the last great philosopher of paganism would wear more Christian clothes than those normally believed to be attributed to him. A vision, perhaps, that would also well explain the philosophical choices of Gregory of Nyssa.

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