

Da Alassandria a Nissa : Clemente e Gregorio in conversazione
Roma, 28-30 ottobre

**Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa :
from the 'gnostic' to numerous and ordinary believers,
from psyche to Church**
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I. Clement and Gregory: two moments in Early Christianity

• Clement and the Post-Apostolic Times

Stromata, VI, 5, 39, quoting the *Preaching of Peter* (fr. 2): And that men of highest repute among the Greeks knew God, not by positive knowledge, but by indirect expression, Peter says in the *Preaching* : “Know then that there is one God, who made the beginning of all things ; incapable of being contained, who contains all things; needing nothing, whom all things need, and by whom they are; incomprehensible, everlasting, unmade, who made all things by the ‘Word of His power’, that is, according to the gnostic scripture, His Son.”

Stromata, VI, 5, 41, quoting the *Preaching of Peter* (fr. 5): For we find in the Scriptures, as the Lord says: ‘Behold, I make with you a new covenant, not as I made with your Fathers in Mount Horeb” (Jr 31,31) He made a new covenant with us; for what belonged to the Greek and Jews is old. But we, who worship Him in a new way, in the third form, are Christians. For clearly, as I think, he showed that the one and only God was known by the Greeks in a Gentile way, by the Jews Judaically, and in a new and spiritual way by us.

Stromata, VI, 6, 48, 6, quoting the *Preaching of Peter* (fr. 8): But to all rational souls it was said from above, ‘Whatever one of you has done in ignorance, without clearly knowing God, if, on becoming conscious, he repent, all his sins will be forgiven him’ (“Όσα ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ τις ὑμῶν ἐποίησεν μὴ εἰδῶς σαφῶς τὸν θεόν, ἐὰν ἐπιγνοῦς μετανοήσῃ, πάντα αὐτῷ ἀφεθήσεται τὰ ἁμαρτήματα.

• Gregory of Nyssa, Christian people and the councils

Letter 6, 9-11 (A. Silvas tr., p.141): ... But as soon as we entered the portico the carriage struck against the dry pavement. At that, as if by some signalling device, the people suddenly appeared I know not from where or how. They thronged around us so closely that it was not easy to disembark from the carriage ... We were pressed on every side by the crowd all around us, so much so that their excessive

affection all but made us faint.

When we had come within the portico, we saw a stream of fire coursing into the church, for the choir of virgins was processing in line into the entrance of the church carrying tapers of wax in their hands, kindling the whole to a splendour with their blaze. And when I had entered and had both rejoiced and wept with the people ... as soon as I had finished the prayers, I wrote out this letter to your holiness as quickly as possible

De deitate Spiritus Sancti et in Abraham (383), GNO X, 2, Rhein ed., p. 117-144

Οὐκοῦν ἀφείς τὸ πρ'ς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἀντιπάλους διαπληκτίζεσθαι πατρικῶς ὑμῖν περὶ τῶν προκειμένων διαλεχθήσομαι Οὐκοῦν δότε μοι κατ' ἐξουσίαν ὑπανιέναι τοῦ λόγου τὸ σύντομον μνήμη τινὸς τῶν κατὰ τὴν παλαιὰν ἱστορίαν. Ἔσται δὲ ἡμῖν ἴσως οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ τὸ διήγημα (p.126,24s. and 130,16s.) (French Translation by M. Cassin in: *Conférence* n° 29, 2009, p. 581-611 [online].



II. A common heritage: care for soul and spiritual progress

1. Γνώθι σεαυτόν

• Clement of Alexandria:

Stromata, VI, 18, 166: Then he who is incapable of speaking what is true respecting himself, is he no much less reliable in what concerns God?

Stromata, VII, 3, 20, 7: So also we have received mind, that we may know what to do. And the maxim “Know thyself” means here to know for what we are born. And we are born to obey the commandments, if we choose to be willing to be saved? Such is the Nemesis, through which there is no escaping from God. Man’s duty, then, is obedience to God, who has proclaimed salvation, manifold by the commandments.

• Gregory of Nyssa:

Homilies on the Song of Songs II (Ct 1, 8^{LXX}), GNO VI, 69, tr. Norris, p.77: If, then, you know yourself, *O beautiful one among women*, you will look down on the whole cosmos, and fixing your gaze in all circumstances on the immaterial good, you will be watchful concerning the error of the ways of this life. So always take heed to yourself, and you will not be led astray regarding the flock of goats or be shown up as a goat rather than a sheep at the time of judgment or be exiled from the station at the right hand.

2. Spiritual progress

• Clement of Alexandria:

Stromata VII, 3, 20, 2-3: Now the Greek philosophy, as it were, purges the soul, and prepares it beforehand for the reception of faith, on which the Truth builds up the edifice of knowledge.

This is the true athlete – he who in the great stadium, the fair world, is crowned for the true victory over all the passions.

• Gregory of Nyssa:

De virginitate, V, GNO VIII, 1, J.-P. Cavarnos ed., p. 277-278.

Homilies on the Our Father III, GNO VII, 2, 38-39, M. Delcogliano and A. Radde-Gallwitz tr., p. 133: In the same way, if the kingdom of God comes to us, all that now dominates will end up vanishing. For darkness cannot abide the presence of light; nor can sickness stand when health appears; nor can the passions act when impassibility is present. Death is gone, corruption disappears whenever life reigns in us and incorruptibility has mastery.

Homilies on the Song of Songs, VI (Ct 3,7-8), GNO VI, 198-199, Norris tr., p. 211: Hence it is one and the same thing to know that there are armed men around the bed and that there are children at rest in the

bed. For in both cases the invulnerability (ἀπαθεία) is the same: it is that of people who have not taken passion into their lives but have cast it out. For there are some who have not yet come to their senses, but there are others who have brought themselves to just such a condition of life, because they have turned and become children through invulnerability to passion, so that in them there is found the child, or warrior, or true Israelite who has come to blessedness...



III. The 'gnostic' and the bishop as *didaskaloi*

1. The Gnostic 'Statue' vs Gregory referring to 1 Co 12, 12s.

• **Clement of Alexandria:** Having then moulded, as it were, a statue of the Gnostic (καθάπερ οὖν ἀνδριάντα ἀποπλασάμενοι τοῦ γνωστικῶ), we have now shown who he is (*Stromata* VI, 168, 4)

Quis dives salvetur ? I, 4: For it appears to me to be far kinder, than basely to flatter the rich and praise them for what is bad, to aid them in working out their salvation in every possible way ; asking this of God, who surely and sweetly bestows such things on His own children ; and thus by the grace of the Saviour healing their souls, enlightening them and leading them to the attainment of the truth ; and whosoever obtains this and distinguished himself in good works shall gain the prize of everlasting life.

Stromata, VI, 14, 111, 3: As, then, to be simply saved is the result of medium actions, but to be saved rightly and becomingly is right action, so also all action of the Gnostic may be called right action: that of a simple believer, intermediate action, not yet made right according to knowledge; but that of every heathen is sinful. For it is not simply doing well, but doing actions with a certain aim, and acting according to reason, that the Scriptures exhibit as requisite.

Stromata, VI, 15, 161: The Gnostic, accordingly, having received from God the power to be in service, benefits some by disciplining them, by bestowing attention on them; others, by exhorting them, by assimilation; and others, by training and teaching them, by command. And certainly, he himself is equally benefited by the Lord.

Stromata, VII, 9, 53-54

• **Gregory of Nyssa:** "heaven accessible to human beings through virtue"

De anima et resurrectione, GNO III, III, ed. A. Spira, p. 1-7.

Homilies on the Our Father, II (GNO VII/2, 20; M. Delcogliano and A. Radde-Gallwitz tr. M. Delcogliano and A. Radde-Gallwitz tr., 121): But when our lawgiver, our Lord Jesus Christ, was about to lead us to the divine grace, [...] he does not leave the whole assembly below at the mountain's foot, allowing only one person to ascend to a mountain's peak covered in the darkness that hides the glory of God. Instead, he first leads them up to heaven itself rather than a mountain, having made it accessible to human beings through virtue.

Homilies on the Song of Songs VII (Ct 3, 11), GNO VI, 214, tr. Norris, p. 225: So the Bride says to the young women: 'Come out, and become daughters of Zion, so that you will be able to see, from an exalted height (for so 'Zion' is translated), the marvelous sight of the Bridegroom wearing his crown'. Now the church becomes his crown because of the 'living stones' with which she encircles his head, and the One who plaits a crown of this sort is Love, whom one may call either 'mother' or 'love' without risk of error, for according to John's word God is love.

2. *Gnôsis* vs *pistis*

• Clement of Alexandria: *gnôsis* as the *highest commandment*

Stromata, IV, 22, 136: Could we, then, suppose anyone proposing to the Gnostic whether he would choose the knowledge of God or everlasting salvation; and if these, which are entirely identical, were separable, he would, without the least hesitation choose the knowledge of God, deeming that property of faith, which from love ascends to knowledge, desirable, for its own sake.

Stromata, VI, 9-10, 79-80: For him, knowledge is the principal thing. Consequently, therefore, he applies to the subjects that are training for knowledge, taking from each branch of study its contribution to the truth.

Stromata, VI, 14, 109: Now to know is more than to believe, as to be dignified with the highest honour after being saved is a greater thing than being saved.

Stromata, VII, X, 55: For knowledge, to speak generally, a perfecting of man as man (ἡ γνῶσις τελειώσις τις ἀνθρώπου ὡς ἀνθρώπου), is consummated by acquaintance with divine things, in character, life, and word, accordant and conformable to itself and to the divine Word. For by it faith is perfected, inasmuch as it is solely by it that the believer becomes perfect. Faith is an internal good, and without searching for God, confesses His existence, and glorifies Him as existent. Whence by starting from this faith, and being developed by it, through the grace of God, the knowledge respecting Him is to be acquired as far as possible.

[...] But it is not doubting in reference to God, but believing, that is the foundation of knowledge.

Gregory of Nyssa: limits of knowledge and spiritual senses

Contra Eunomium II, 92-93: (Abraham) gave up scientific investigation, and '[he] believed in God', it says, 'and it was credited to him as righteousness'. Yet it was not for his sake that it was written, the Apostle tells us, but for ours, because it is faith, not knowledge, which God credits to men as righteousness. Knowledge adopts a sort of experiential approach (Ἡ μὲν γὰρ γνῶσις ὡς περ ἐμπειρικὴν τινα τὴν διάθεσιν ἔχει, assenting only to what is learnt, whereas Christian faith is different: its assurance is not of things learnt, but of things hoped for. (tr. St. Hall, *CollEun* II, p. 80)

Homilies on the Song of Songs, XIII (Ct 5, 9), GNO VI, 386, tr. Norris, p. 407: Hence when the virgin souls request the soul that is ascending to perfection to make the One they desire known to them, she describes for the virgins the marks of the One they seek by appealing to the things that have been revealed to us for the sake of our salvation. She treats of the church as the one body of the Bridegroom, and by referring to each individual member, she indicates, in her account of his beauty, some one of his attributes and in this way, starting from the particular characteristics she has examined, sums up the beauty of the body as a whole.