CHAPTER 1

Life and works

LIFE AND THOUGHT

Clement was a traveller, always moving on. He invites Greeks to desert to God's side and to enjoy the danger of change (prot 10.93.2). In his quest for knowledge, he left home and travelled to teachers around the eastern Mediterranean, moving from Italy to Egypt.

> Of these [teachers], one, an Ionian, lived in Greece, two others who came from Coele-Syria and Egypt respectively were in Magna Graecia. Others were in the east – one was from Assyria, and the other a Hebrew from Palestine. I found the last of them where he was hiding in Egypt. Here I came to rest. He was a real Sicilian bee who drew from the flowers of the apostolic and prophetic meadow and who engendered a purity of knowledge in the soul of his hearers.
>
> (1.1.11)

He remained in Alexandria until in 202 persecution drove him to Palestine, where he died.[1] His early travels had been tied to intellectual exploration. While in Alexandria, his intellectual voyages did not cease. He explored the bible, philosophy and literature, often preserving fragments of philosophers who would otherwise be lost today, and quoting classical writers with affection and sensitivity. He was now driven by evangelical zeal: to explain the gospel, he became all things to all men.

In spiritual matters he called for exploration and movement: he exhorted Greeks to turn to Christ, to follow Christian morals in every detail of behaviour and finally to become wise in the mysteries of Christ. Practical problems drew attention and analysis from his inquiring mind. Despite his criticism of Gnostic[2] theosophy, he followed the flight of Theodotus, exploring new questions and problems. The Christian should

1 Two letters of Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem (Eusebius H.E. 6.11.6 and 6.14.9), point to his death between 211 and 215.
2 In this book heretical 'Gnostics' are distinguished from Clement's 'gnostic' by a capital letter.

never abandon his simple faith, but he should always be moving on in his journey towards wisdom and the likeness of God.

Clement has been seen variously by interpreters. One extolled him as a Christian liberal, while another explored his rich store of citations. Many have struggled with his literary form. One was drawn to the richness of his call to piety and perfection. Another discerned a logical pattern, which permeated his thought. More recently, one writer has shown the depth of his penetration of Plato and another his understanding of true philosophy.[3]

Clement, more than any other early Christian writer, knew and enjoyed Greek philosophy and literature. Saturated with study of this culture, he belonged to Alexandria, a city which was ruled by it. Clement displayed that heritage as clearly as Tertullian displayed the Roman heritage of Carthage.

Alexandria was a cosmopolitan city including Greeks, Jews, Egyptians, other native Africans and Romans. Its place in trade was dominant. It also had a long literary tradition and a special Platonic tradition which Eudorus represented. Its libraries were central in its learning. Clement quotes more than 300 different literary sources for more than a thousand references to other writers. Jewish-Hellenistic works were available to Clement. Philo was a major influence, and minor influences came from Demetrius, Aristobulus, the Sibylline oracles and others. The story of the Alexandrian origin of the Septuagint emerges in a second-century tradition which is found in Clement and Tertullian, Justin, Irenaeus and elsewhere.

Clement exhorted pagans to turn to Christ with kerygmatic fervour. His language was tied closely to the text of scripture which was ever in need of transposition from vision to metaphysic. Logic helped to elucidate scripture and to defend its truth.

His achievement began from a grasp of divine love as the core of the Christian gospel. God is not God unless he be both father and son, for the divine being is the love which joins father and son. God is love and the revealed mystery of this love is the gospel. Clement's faith in one God is expressed in both philosophical and biblical terms. God is one because he is one and nothing but one (a simple unity like a pinpoint), and

3 R. B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: a study in Christian Liberalism*, 2 vols. (London, 1914); S. R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: a study of Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1971); A. Méhat, *Etude sur les 'Stromates' de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1966); W. Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Clemens Alexandrinus* (Berlin, 1952); E. F. Osborn, *The philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, 1957); D. Wyrwa, *Die christliche Platonaneignung in den Stromateis des Clemens von Alexandrien* (Berlin, 1983); U. Schneider, *Theologie als christliche Philosophie* (Berlin, 1999).

because he is one and universal (a complex unity like a spider's web). From this scheme he explained the duality which he found in the Johannine account of God, who is father and son, God and word.

Clement used the relation between simple and complex unity, between father and son, claiming that in philosophy as in the bible they could not be held apart. The reciprocity, which joined them, is central to his thought. He speaks (paed 1.5.24.3) of the great God who is the perfect child, of the son in father who is father in son. He quotes Is. 9:5,6 where the holy spirit tells him of the great God who is perfect child in newness and perfection. Elsewhere, he speaks of the undefiled God, who has taken the form of man, who is the servant of the father's will, who is both word and God, who is in the father and at the right hand of the father and who has the form of God as he has the form of man (paed 1.2.4.1).

We shall see how Clement follows the Platonic logic of simple and complex unity (*Parmenides* 137c–142).[4] God is the first and oldest first principle and the cause of all things. Nothing can be predicated of him, for he is neither a whole nor a collection of parts. He has no limit, form or name, so all the names we give him are improper. We choose the best names to support our understanding and to indicate the power of God. He cannot be proved because there is nothing prior to him and he is known only by the grace and the word which proceed from him (5.12.81f). Yet the same God, as divine logos, is the creator and sustainer of all things.

QUESTIONS: MOBILITY, RECIPROCITY AND SALVATION BY FAITH

Mobility and reciprocity mark the Johannine God. The word is God and with God; he becomes flesh and as son reveals the unique glory of the father. From within the bosom of the father he declares the father. God in love to the world sends his son to die, an act of barbaric immorality unless father and son be in some way identical. Mobility is linked with work, which is constant for father and son. 'My father is still working and I must work' (Jn 5:17). The father sends the son to do the father's work (Jn 5:36f). The final prayer (Jn 17) declares the completion of God's work, which will now go on until all believers share God's life and glory.

Such a movement marks the universality and vitality of God for John and Clement. Clement echoes some words recorded by Plato, which identified the original gods of the Greeks and barbarians with the sun,

4 See C. Meinwald, 'Goodbye to the Third Man', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut (Cambridge, 1992), 365–96.

moon, earth, stars and sky. 'Seeing that they were always moving and running, from their running nature they were called gods or runners (*theous*, *theontas*) and when men became acquainted with other gods they proceeded to apply the same name to them' (Crat. 397d). Clement writes that God is unchangeably one, as he emits the perpetual flow of good things (4.23.151.3). Others had been deceived into deifying the stars and calling them gods because of their motion (prot 2.26.1).

Three problems faced Clement in the exposition of such a God:

1. The kerygma proclaimed a rational plan of divine movement declared in scripture and fulfilled in Christ. Can this plan present coherent answers to questions about God, humanity, right and wrong? How do we move from narrative and oracle to metaphysic?
2. The Gospels proclaimed one God. How can father and son be one God?
3. Paul offered salvation by faith. How can faith be the one way to truth, and what is the salvation which redeems and preserves mankind? How is faith related to knowledge?

Clement's response consists of three major concepts: divine plan/economy, reciprocity and salvation by faith.

Everything is ordered by '*the goodness of the only, one, true, almighty God, from age to age saving by the son*' (7.2.12). *Faith is the one universal salvation of mankind* (paed 1.6.30).

1. 'from age to age'. The divine plan/economy moves to fulfilment in Christ and to the offer of salvation by faith. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Clement adds to this divine plan of salvation the gift of philosophy to the Greeks to prepare them for Christ.
2. 'saving by the son'. The one God is marked by reciprocal love. Always, the word was with God and was God. No one comes to the father but by the son and no one comes to the son unless the father draws him. Reciprocity works on three levels: between father and son, between God and the human person, between human and human.
3. 'salvation by faith'. Salvation has turned the world into a sea of blessings. 'Faith like a grain of mustard seed bites beneficially into the soul so that it grows in it magnificently until the reasons concerning the highest realities rest upon it' (5.1.3.1).

The importance of these three concepts must be stressed if we are to find our way through Clement. Clement cites scripture 5,121 times and

348 different classical authors, including Plato 600 times, Philo 300 times and Homer 240 times. He believes with Philo that all great natures, freed from passion, can hit on the truth. Without attention to his chief problems his work will seem impenetrable. However, before we tackle the problems, we must look at his literary and historical puzzles; on both these questions, scholars have been energetically productive.

WRITINGS: THE LITERARY PUZZLE

Movement marks the plan of Clement's writing. He follows the logos who exhorts pagans to desert their falsehood for the truth of God, instructs them in the ethics of Christian practice, then goes on to teach the true knowledge of the mysteries of Christ. Following this plan, Clement's major works form a trilogy: *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus*, *Stromateis*. In addition, the surviving minor works compound the sense of movement. There is a sermon on the salvation of the rich man (*Quis dives salvetur?*) and a fragment on patience to the newly baptised. There is a careful examination of a Gnostic work: *Excerpts from Theodotus*. There are parts of exegetical works: *Hypotyposeis*[5] and *Prophetic Eclogues*. Eusebius cites works which are lost, except for fragments: *On the Passover, On Fasting, Against Judaisers, On Providence*.

Clement's 'trilogy' of major works raises questions which drew close attention during the first half of the twentieth century. The crucial passage in the first chapter of the *Paedagogus* distinguishes between the divine logos who invites men to salvation (*protreptikos*), then guides them to right action and the healing of their passions (*paidagôgos*) and finally teaches, explains and reveals first principles, clarifying symbolic and ultimate statements (*didaskalikos*). No one has questioned the first two elements of Clement's threefold economy. The *Protrepticus* and *Paedagogus* bear the names which denote their functions. Traditionally, the *Stromateis* were taken to be the *Didascalus*. De Faye[6] in 1898 claimed that

5 The whole of which was seen 200 years ago. See my article, 'Clement of Alexandria's *Hypotyposeis*: a French eighteenth-century sighting', *JThS* 36 (1985), 67–83. In 1983, a colleague, Colin Duckworth, drew my attention to a private letter of the Comte d'Antraigues which he found in the municipal archives of Dijon. In it the writer described with much detail a copy of Clement's *Hypotyposeis* which he had seen in the library of the monastery of St Macarius, in the Wadi Natrun. After three visits to the monastery I have found no trace of the manuscript. For reasons given elsewhere, the question must remain open. See my article, 'Clement's *Hypotyposeis*. Macarius revisited', *SecCent* 10 (1990), 233–5.

6 E. de Faye, *Clément d'Alexandrie, étude sur les rapports du christianisme et de la philosophie grecque au IIe siècle* (Paris, 1898), 104.

the *Stromateis* were too unsystematic to be the final work of Clement, who had intended to write a systematic treatment of Christian knowledge but was forced by his complex environment to write a preliminary work which justified the use of Greek philosophy. The stimulus for the *Stromateis* lay in the caution of many Christians towards Greek philosophy which heretics had used (it was thought) to the detriment of the faith. De Faye was dominated by a belief in 'systems' which was characteristic of his day.

The views of De Faye were soon attacked by Heussi, who put forward a modification of the traditional view.[7] In 1925, Prat proposed a different version to reestablish in part the traditional claim for the *Stromateis*.[8] Munck went into greater detail and provided grounds for believing in two trilogies: *Protreptikos*, *Paidagogos*, *Didaskalos*; and *Stromateis* I–III, *Stromateis* IV–VII, and the *Physiologia*. Munck claimed that Clement did not produce the final work of either trilogy.[9] This attractive solution appeared too systematic for Lazzati, who differently divided the works of Clement into those intended for private instruction, and those directed to the general public.[10] The seven books of the *Stromateis* and the three commentary works were esoteric. The *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus* and *Quis dives salvetur?* were for the general public. Yet another interpretation was proposed by Quatember, who argued impressively that Clement's trilogy referred to three stages of instruction, not to three written works.[11]

A case for the traditional view can be made from the first chapter of the *Stromateis*.[12] Here Clement insists that the purpose of this work is to teach, and the argument only makes sense if the *Stromateis* are the projected *Didascalus*.[13] Clement argues as follows:

1. Written notes are appropriate for the communication of Christian truth since they teach, instruct and proclaim. The relation between writer and reader is that of teacher to pupil. The explicit use of *didaskalos* and *didaskalia* shows that the argument is concerned to

7 C. Heussi, 'Die Stromateis des Clemens Alexandrinus und ihr Verhältnis zum Protreptikos und Paidagogos', *ZNW* 45 (1902), 465f.
8 F. Prat, 'Projets littéraires de Clément d'Alexandrie', *RSR* 15 (1925), 234.
9 J. Munck, *Untersuchungen über Klemens von Alexandria* (Stuttgart, 1933), 111.
10 G. Lazzati, *Introduzione allo studio di Clemente Alessandrino* (Milan, 1939), 1–35.
11 F. Quatember, *Die christliche Lebenshaltung des Klemens von Alexandreia nach seinem Pädagogus* (Vienna, 1946), 29–32.
12 E. F. Osborn, 'Teaching and writing in the first chapter of the *Stromateis* of Clement of Alexandria', *JThS* 10 (1959), 335–43.
13 *Ibid.*, 342f.

justify teaching through writing. There would be no need of intricate argument in favour of written teaching if the *Stromateis* were not going to teach.

2. The *Stromateis* are records of teaching, notes which Clement took from the words of his teachers. They record his memory of the powerful teachers whom he heard.
3. Clement claims that the teaching which he records and preserves is part of a great tradition, 'the true tradition of the blessed teaching' (1.1.11.3). This teaching comes from God through scripture and tradition. Clement is concerned to revive the memory of it and to preserve it for his readers.
4. There is extended argument on whether this great tradition should be written down and indeed whether one should write at all. It is remarkable that after having written the *Protrepticus* and *Paedagogus*, Clement sees the necessity to justify writing before he can begin the *Stromateis*. Clearly, this new work represents a different kind of discourse, and the only other kind of discourse which Clement planned is that of the logos who is Didaskalos.
5. The *Stromateis* fulfil what Clement had predicted concerning the *Didascalus*. He begins with the announcement that the work will show the opinions of philosophers and heretics and also declare true philosophy and knowledge. The first concern is true gnosis, as the title and contents of the work indicate. This concern Clement had allotted to his projected *Didascalus*.
6. The method of the *Stromateis* points to the more appropriate way of teaching philosophy. The writing does not set out a handbook but aims to kindle a spark, to sow a seed or to be the bait to catch a fish.
7. Finally, the very disorder of the *Stromateis* confirms the ultimacy of their teaching. Clement wishes to conceal, from the lazy and unworthy, certain aspects of Christian truth. There is no point in this concealment if he is not handing on the mysteries of Christian knowledge.

The chief objection to the teaching status of the *Stromateis* has been their deliberate incoherence.

> For I am silent on the point that the *Stromateis*, being the embodiment of much learning, wish to hide skilfully the seeds of knowledge. As he who loves the chase, after seeking, searching, tracking and hunting with dogs, takes the quarry, so truth when sought and gained through hard work seems a sweet thing. How then did it seem good that this arrangement should be adopted in your notes? Because

great is the danger in betraying the truly ineffable word of the real philosophy to those who wish to speak recklessly and unjustly against everything, and who hurl forth quite inappropriately all sorts of names and words, deceiving themselves and bewitching their followers.

(1.2.20–1)

Indeed, the *Stromateis* stand in marked contrast to the *Didaskalikos* of Alcinous, which is a tidy Platonic handbook and which epitomises the kind of philosophy which Plato and much later Wittgenstein rejected. Wittgenstein said of something which he had written that it could not be philosophy because it suggested that philosophy could be learnt from reading a book. Plato's dialogues imply a similar view.

The controversy surrounding the *Stromateis* has continued. From a useful summary of the hypotheses put forward by de Faye, Bousset, Munck and Lazzati concerning the *Stromateis*, Méhat shows that they all agree wrongly on the fortuitous ordering of the material in the work. He rejects de Faye's assertion that Clement was incapable of producing a well-ordered piece of philosophical writing;[14] the works of the *Protrepticus*, the *Paedagogus* and *Quis dives salvetur?* clearly demonstrate Clement's capabilities. Moreover, says Méhat, Clement freely announces his intentions for the composition of the *Stromateis*; they aim at concealment and pay no attention to arrangement or diction.[15] Clement fulfils what he proposes in this regard.

Méhat insists that, while the arrangement of the *Stromateis* is haphazard, this does not preclude the possibility of an order of teaching that is conducive to discovering the truth. Méhat cites thirty-three occasions where Clement refuses to digress from a sequence (*akolouthia)* of teaching, an order that is apparent to Clement himself, yet difficult for us to discern. Moreover, Clement is concerned with treating certain issues at the appropriate time (*kairos*) within that sequence, indicating that he has a plan for teaching and discovering the truth. However disorderly the arrangement of the *Stromateis* is, it is clear that Clement himself was teaching with a purpose.

In the same year as Méhat's compendious book appeared, an article by E. L. Fortin offered a different approach to the controversy.[16] Without delving into the various hypotheses put forward by scholars, Fortin sets out two extreme points of view. There are those who claim that Clement's conviction that he is transmitting a secret and oral tradition is an 'affectation' and that such a view supports the Gnostic tendencies of the author.

14 Méhat, *Etude*, 23–35. 15 7.18.111.1–3.
16 E. L. Fortin, 'Clement and the esoteric tradition', *StudPatr* 9 (1966), 41–56.

On the other hand, there were those scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth century who appealed to a *disciplina arcani* which, where evidence was difficult to achieve, included ideas that could not readily be placed within the development of doctrine. Fortin argues that as accounts of Clement's writings, these views suffer because they 'both attempt to dispose of an admittedly delicate problem by slicing the knot instead of unravelling it'.[17] Fortin therefore claims that, in order to take reasonably what Clement tells us about his writing and not to accuse him of withholding a secret oral teaching, we must find some middle ground. This is supplied by Clement himself when he acknowledges that his task is to write down this teaching, but that it must be put down with the utmost care; he wants to transmit, through writing, essential Christian teachings with some degree of concealment.

To this end, Fortin cites the many occasions where Clement employs literary techniques to disguise what he is attempting to communicate.[18] Such techniques put the *Stromateis* into a 'special category of books' which evade general understanding. Fortin draws on the controversial Seventh Epistle of Plato to illustrate that Clement believed that his method of writing would be sufficient for the genuine seeker. This is 'accomplished precisely by means of "slight indications" of which Plato speaks and which are both necessary and sufficient for students such as these'.[19] Viewed in this way, the *Stromateis* reveal themselves as an esoteric method of teaching.

The next literary comment on Clement was that of S. R. C. Lilla,[20] who devotes a footnote to the puzzle of the *Stromateis*.[21] Lilla inclines to the view of de Faye and disagrees with Méhat: 'The *Stromateis*, though dealing in many sections with gnosis, never examine in detail such arguments as cosmology or theology, which represent the content of the higher gnosis and which would fit in very well with the *logos didaskalikos*, but rather touch them *en passant*.' Such a view, however, plays into the hands of Fortin, for whom Clement's brevity is exactly the means by which the 'higher gnosis' is communicated. Lilla concludes that Clement's reference to a subsequent work, dealing with cosmology and theology, points to the proposed *Didascalus*.[22]

Another negative view of the *Stromateis* was put forward by J. Ferguson, who claimed that they are what the title suggests, a scrapbook of notes in

17 *Ibid.*, 42.
18 *Ibid.*, 46. He cites examples of brachyology, symbols and enigmas, deliberate untruths, exclusions.
19 *Ibid.*, 52. Citing Plato *Ep.* 7.341e.
20 *Clement of Alexandria.* 21 *Ibid.*, 189 n4. 22 4.1.3.1–3.

which Clement stored his material.[23] Clement bit off more than he could chew, and the *Stromateis* constitute a collection of ideas which never cohere as instruction for Christians seeking higher knowledge. Ferguson claims that on occasions Clement mentions his intentions for the *Didascalus*: for instance, he will give some account of first causes,[24] some account of the Greek mysteries[25] and will write more on the true gnostic.[26] However, according to Ferguson these things are postponed and never written. In the *Stromateis*, Clement is only concerned with scraps, he is merely 'composing a piece of exhibition oratory. . .a kind of sketch of words and people, lacking sharpness and vitality'.[27]

Roberts approached the controversy from the perspective of formal criticism.[28] Like Fortin, he acknowledges that the *Stromateis* constitute a literary form that is difficult to categorise. Critics, he suggests, too often assume that literature prior to the eighteenth century was 'primarily mimetic. . .characteristically object-oriented and outward-going'. Such works do not require an inward transformation of the reader in order to be understood. Works like the *Stromateis*, however, 'require a specific effort on the part of the reader'. According to Clement, this literary genre was known to the Greeks, who 'in this kind of composition. . .sow their doctrines secretly and not in a plain, unmistakable manner, seeking to exercise the care and inventiveness of the readers'.[29] These are the 'kindling sparks' that ignite the soul to investigate and acquire knowledge.

Roberts compares Clement's literary categories, namely recollection (*anamnêsis*) and expression (*emphasis*) of the truth, with those found in the *topoi* or *loci* which were first used as aids for the memory by Aristotle. Roberts traces these categories into Latin, showing how a literary form such as the *Stromateis* builds a system of images (*significatio*), which are gathered together by the reader to form a 'network of reciprocal relations'. These are called by Clement *capitula*, under which the images unite to recall the *loci* whence those images originally derived. Roberts believes that for Clement, the meadows of the *Stromateis* constitute the *loci*, while the plants, trees and seeds constitute the images that emphasise and recall the mind to the truth.

23 J. Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York, 1974), 106.
24 2.8.37.1.
25 6.2.42–3.
26 6.18.168.4
27 Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria*, 109.
28 L. Roberts, 'The literary form of the *Stromateis*', *SecCent* 1 (1981), 211–22.
29 *Ibid.*, 213. Cf. 7.18.111.3.