CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Clement of Alexandria (150–215) lived and taught in the most lively intellectual centre of his day. This book offers a comprehensive account of how he joined the ideas of the New Testament to those of Plato and other classical thinkers. Clement taught that God was active from the beginning to the end of human history and that a Christian life should move on from simple faith to knowledge and love. He argued that a sequence of three elliptical relations governed the universe: Father and Son, God and humanity, humans and their neighbours. Faith as a fixed conviction which is also a growing mustard seed was joined to Plato's unwavering search for the best reason. The open heaven of prophecy became intelligible through Plato's ascending dialectic. This book will be invaluable in making this outstanding thinker of the early church accessible to the students of today.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521837538

First published 2005

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-521-83753-8 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-83753-7 hardback

To
My Wife
Lorna Grace

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Preface

'The king, who is Christ, watches our laughter from above'. No one enjoyed theology more than Clement, yet his skilful synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem has furrowed many brows. It has often been my experience that thinkers who appear to be simple prove to be complex, while those who appear complex turn out to have clear concepts. Clement belongs to the second category.

From Irenaeus to Tertullian, early Christian theology has a common structure – that of the preaching or kerygma of the earliest churches – and a common source – the scriptures which became the Christian bible. Justin had a similar structure but a limited set of scriptures, drawing on the Sayings of Jesus and Old Testament writings as his source. Fortunately, Irenaeus has left us a statement of the kerygma, the logic of which dominates his own thought and that of Clement.

Clement has been approached in three ways which are found elsewhere in the history of ideas. The retrospective method starts from Nicaea and Chalcedon and asks what he contributed to their later solutions. The doxographical method collects verbal similarities and parallels between Clement and other ancient writers. The analytic or problematic method asks what problems Clement was trying to solve and what new moves he made towards this end, including how he used the doxographical material. The retrospective method has never found much in Clement for the development of doctrine. In contrast, the doxographical method has been unendingly fruitful. For example, parallels between Clement and contemporary Platonism provided a simple picture of Clement as a card-carrying Middle Platonist. This account has fallen apart, chiefly for two reasons. It is plain that Clement does not hold key Middle Platonist teachings (such as that concerning first principles). It is equally plain that his use of Plato differs from the various interpretations of those who preceded him. He goes to Plato himself. Consequently we are left with the analytic approach

which has been influential outside theology. We simply ask what problems forced Clement to write and where he found Christian teaching in need of elucidation.

In my youthful book I argued that the concept of unity made sense of much that he said and displayed him as a coherent thinker. Long years of reflection have now isolated three problems which permeate his entire work. How can the narrative of the kerygma (what God does) be translated into a metaphysic (who God is)? This problem is evident when one sees the *Protrepticus* as a rewriting for Greeks of Irenaeus' *Demonstration*. It governs the use of scripture in Irenaeus and Clement, for the joining of prophecy and Plato is the key to the joining of Jerusalem and Athens. The second problem is how two distinct beings, father and son, constitute one God. This problem is evident from the first verse of the Fourth Gospel, where the word is with and is God. Clement's account of God derives from this Gospel and this problem. The final problem is on the human, not the divine, side. The response to God is faith. It is easier to see where faith begins than to know where it ends. For Clement, an answer had to be found for those who divided faith and knowledge. Clement draws on Paul for epistemology and soteriology, arguing that faith and knowledge are inseparable.

As I see things now, these are the three problems which govern Clement's thinking and which hold his thought together. To understand him requires that we see that these are real problems. How does one move from the kerygma and scripture to propositions about God? How can one God be father and son? How can faith be the way to salvation, opening the way to richer knowledge but never losing its initial simplicity and dominant sufficiency? When these are seen as real problems, Clement's thought will open before us.

In 1942 I sailed as a teenaged soldier to war in New Guinea. In my pack were two books – a bible and Plato's *Republic*. Six years later I discovered Clement of Alexandria, who used Plato's logic to explain the bible. I returned to him for my Cambridge dissertation, 'The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria'. I stayed with him and Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian, although much of my teaching was in New Testament. Only in Ethics did I delve deep into later centuries.

This book returns to Clement for three reasons. First, the second century now looks very different. Middle Platonism has multiplied our knowledge of Clement's intellectual world. His contemporaries have been energetically explored, and his Gnostic opponents are better understood. Philo has been discovered and profitably investigated. The second reason

is that Clement's philosophical dialectic which is mixed with, but distinct from, his citation of philosophical dogmas (I explored the first, Lilla and Wyrwa the second) is directed to one source – the Christian bible. This was the 'true philosophy' from which pagans had torn a portion. Mondésert saw this clearly and called Clement a 'biblical theologian'; Völker repeated it with some vehemence against philosophy; and recently Schneider firmly established this fundamental point. The central question, for me now, becomes how Clement used philosophy, as dialectic and dogma, to explicate prophetic and apostolic scripture as the 'true philosophy' or the Christian gospel. We may call him a 'philosophical exegete' or 'biblical theologian'. (Ernst Käsemann commonly called himself a 'theologian' rather than an 'exegete'.) My third reason is less obvious. I think that Clement's fusion of Christian faith with Plato's search for the 'best reason' instils optimism at the centre of the European tradition. To prove this would take more books than I can write. I cite one instance. In a celebrated interview which explained why he 'gave the DDR away', Mikhail Gorbachev identified the culture which he wished to embrace as optimistic. Europe believed that a way through successive problems could be found, not quickly, but eventually. No culture is monolithic, and Clement's own thought has many strands. Yet Clement draws a final confidence from Paul, John and Plato. The exploration of that confidence is hard to resist. In our final conversation, Jean Daniélou singled out an optimism of grace as the first theme of the Greek fathers.

For the modern reader, Justin, Irenaeus, Clement and Tertullian offer different challenges. Justin has good ideas, which are not developed. Irenaeus' great work is a treasury of argument and imagery; its literary form has been likened to a jungle. Tertullian argues vividly but so conceals his rationalism that he was long classed as a fideist. Clement wins the prize for mystery, because his main work is deliberately obscure, designed to separate sophists from philosophers and turn boys into men.

They joined the discourses of the bible and philosophy, of Jerusalem and Athens; they all wrote with strong intent. Christians were being martyred and misunderstanding was rife. Their gospel was a plain formula, but its meaning was unclear. Sects could confuse and discredit. Beyond the diversity of apostolic scripture came the gulf between Athens and Jerusalem: here lay their chief challenge and resource. There was an urgency to elucidate the gospel and they drew on a wide range of argument. Inevitably they were original; originality brings diversity. Their few common characteristics were the inventive mind, an inordinate devotion to the person of Christ, an appreciation of the created world,

and a sense of humour and joy. Irenaeus satirises Gnostic aeons as varieties of pumpkins. Tertullian rejects the notion of a docetic Christ because a mindless human (like Marcion) is possible, but a bodiless human is not. Clement tells jokes but goes deeper. Play and laughter, with endurance, mark the Pauline freedom of the child of God:

> O wise sport, laughter aided by endurance, with the king as spectator. . . this is the sport of gods. 'Such a sport, his very own, Jove sports,' says Heraclitus. For what other work is fitting for him, who is wise and perfect than to sport and be glad in the enduring of good things and the disposing of what is good, celebrating with God? . . . And the witness of those who have endured to the end and the thanksgiving which they inspire, this is the mystic sport and the salvation which helps us with solemn gladness. The king, then, who is Christ watches our laughter from above. (paed 1.5.21f; Philo, plant. 169f)

It would be impossible to list all who have helped my understanding of Clement over more than fifty years. The journey began with A. Boyce Gibson, William Telfer, Henry Chadwick and Claude Mondésert. In recent years, Alain Le Boulluec, Judith Kovaks, John Rist and David Runia have been in helpful contact. Ernst Käsemann took me into the New Testament. There are others in Cambridge, Tübingen, Strasbourg and Rome to whom I owe much. Here, my thanks go to colleagues at La Trobe University and the University of Melbourne. Through the generosity of the Australian Research Council I have received distinguished service from research assistants. Michael Champion produced the manuscript and the index of citations from Clement with intelligent skill and good humour, while Clive Bloomfield checked references in Clement. David O'Brien cleaned up footnotes and produced the bibliography. He and Andrew Itter helped greatly while completing their own fine dissertations on Clement. Joan Barclay Lloyd, art historian, has found the cover picture for my last three books. Over many years Mimi Lucas has been a friend and infinite help to my wife and to myself. Ian Breward and Genevieve Osborn helped with the proofs.

The book is dedicated, as was my first book on Clement, to my wife, Lorna.

In the production of the book, Kate Brett, Gillian Dadd, Joanna Breeze and Christopher Jackson, of Cambridge University Press, have displayed the greatest competence and depth of understanding. My thanks go to them all.

Abbreviations

Aug	*Augustinianum*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
BCNH	*Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Etudes*
ChH	*Church History*
CNRS	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
D.L.	Diogenes Laertius
DK	H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (7^{th} edn; Berlin, 1951–4)
ET	*Expository Times*
EThL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
EtThR	*Etudes théologiques et religieuses*
EthSt	Erfurter Theologische Studien
FS	*Festschrift*
GCS	*Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*
Greg	*Gregorianum*
H.E.	Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*
HeyJ	*Heythrop Journal*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
HTh	*History and Theory*
HThR	*Harvard Theological Review*
JAC	*Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JThS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KRS	G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The presocratic philosophers* (2^{nd} edn; Cambridge, 1983)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library

LS	A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1987)
Mn.	*Mnemosyne*
NAWG.PH	Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen – Philologisch-historische Klasse
ND	de natura deorum
NRTh	*Nouvelle revue théologique*
OrChrAn	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
PG	*Patrologia graeca* (Migne)
Phron	*Phronesis*
POC	*Proche-orient chrétien*
REAug	*Revue des études augustiniennes*
RevSR	*Revue des sciences religieuses*
RFIC	Revista de filologia e d'istruzione classica
RHPhR	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*
RSPhTh	*Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*
RSR	*Recherches de science religieuse*
RThAM	*Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*
RThPh	*Revue de théologie et de philosophie*
SC	Sources chrétiennes
Schol	*Scholastik*
SecCent	*The Second Century*
SJTh	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SO	*Symbolae Osloenses*
SO.S	*Symbolae Osloenses, Suppl.*
StMiss	*Studia missionalia*
StPhilo	*Studia Philonica*
StTh	*Studia theologica*
StudAns	*Studia Anselmiana*
StudPatr	*Studia patristica*
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*
SW	Sämtliche Werke
ThLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
ThPh	*Theologie und Philosophie*
ThStK	*Theologische Studien und Kritiken*
TS	*Theological Studies*
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TWNT	Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament
VetChr	*Vetera Christianorum*
VigChr	*Vigiliae Christianae*

ZAC	*Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum*
ZKG	*Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*
ZKTh	*Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*
ZThK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Other abbreviations follow the *Abkürzungsverzeichnis* of S. Schwertner (Berlin, New York, 1976)

REFERENCES TO CLEMENT

1.28.176.1	refers to *Stromateis* book 1, chapter 28, section 176, paragraph 1.
paed 1.8.62.1	refers to *Paedagogus* book 1, chapter 8, section 62, paragraph 1.
prot 1.7.1	refers to *Protrepticus* chapter 1, section 7, paragraph 1.
exc:	*Excerpta ex Theodoto*
ecl:	*Eclogae propheticae*
hypot.	*Hypotyposeis*
q.d.s.:	*Quis dives salvetur?*

Fragments follow the numbering of O. Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, III (Leipzig, 1909)