

Copyright © 2017 Justin Lawrence Glenn

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF CLEMENT OF  
ALEXANDRIA IN THE *STROMATA*

---

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

---

by  
Justin Lawrence Glenn  
May 2017

**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF CLEMENT OF  
ALEXANDRIA IN THE *STROMATA*

Justin Lawrence Glenn

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Timothy Paul Jones (Chair)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Charles Jeffrey Robinson, Sr.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

To Jennifer, Lydia, Eli, and Tali.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	viii
Chapter	
1. RESEARCH CONCERN.....	1
Relevance of This Study: From Second-Century Alexandria to Twenty-First-Century America .....	2
Cultural Context in the Roman Empire.....	5
Introduction of Thesis .....	7
Gap in the Existing Literature .....	8
Delimitations .....	10
Research Methodology .....	11
Conclusion .....	12
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
Pertinent Biographical Details of Clement .....	14
Alexandria in the Second Century .....	16
Middle Platonism as the Dominant School in Greek Philosophy.....	17
Stoicism as both Competitor and Companion to Middle Platonism.....	19
Gnosticism: An Attempted Bridge Between Philosophy and Christianity .....	20
An Educational System that Shaped Clement and that He Rejected .....	23
Views on Clement’s Approach to Greek Philosophy .....	25
Clement as Christian Platonist: Gnosticism in Disguise .....	26
Clement as Syncretist: Philosophy and Scripture as Equal Authority.....	28

Chapter	Page
Clement as Biblical Integrationist: God’s Word Is Preeminent .....	29
Conclusion: Complex and Adamant Biblical Integrationist.....	31
The <i>Stromata</i> : Clement’s Primary Work .....	31
Clement’s Eclectic and Robust Philosophy.....	32
Clement’s <i>Gnostic</i> Figure: Personification of the Perfect Christian .....	35
Clement’s Philosophy of Education: Educational Discipleship .....	36
Conclusion .....	38
3. THE IDENTITY OF CLEMENT’S GNOSTIC FIGURE .....	40
The Usefulness of Gnostic in the Second Century .....	40
Occurances of Gnostic Language in Second- and Third-Century Literature....	43
γνώμη.....	44
γνωστικός.....	44
Conclusion .....	47
Clement’s Primary Uses of “Gnostic” .....	47
As a Modifier.....	48
Referencing His Gnostic Figure .....	53
Conclusion: Clement’s Redefining of the Word “Gnostic” .....	59
4. CLEMENT’S CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH IN THE <i>STROMATA</i> .....	61
Clement’s Concept of Knowledge in <i>The Stromata</i> .....	61
Knowledge Is a Gift from God .....	62
Knowledge Can Be Used for Good or Evil .....	62
Knowledge Is an Important Part of Christian Salvation.....	63
Knowledge Is Crucial to Christian Formation.....	64
Knowledge Is Necessary for Maximum Christian Progress.....	65
Conclusion .....	65

Chapter	Page
Clement’s Concept of Faith in the <i>Stromata</i> .....	66
Faith As the Ground of Salvation .....	67
Informed Faith Is Preferred Over Uninformed Faith.....	68
Faith Is the Foundation of True Knowledge.....	68
Conclusion .....	69
The Relationship between Knowledge and Faith .....	69
Faith and Knowledge Are Not Mutually Exclusive .....	69
Knowledge of God Comes Only through Faith.....	71
Faith and Knowledge Compared to the Son and the Father .....	71
Knowledge and Faith Cooperate for Understanding Scripture.....	72
Knowledge Guards Faith .....	73
Knowledge and Faith Advance Together .....	74
Conclusion .....	75
5. CONCLUSION .....	77
Elements of Clement’s Philosophy of Education Deduced From His <i>Stromata</i> .....	77
Education Is Good, but Not Necessary for Salvation.....	78
Clement’s Purpose is to Educate with a Christian Worldview.....	79
Education and Discipleship Are Partners in Christian Growth .....	80
A Liberal Education Best Equips Christians .....	81
Education Should Include Non-Christian Ideas .....	82
Education Helps Christians Live Godly Lives .....	83
Education is Necessary to Reach Full Christian Maturity.....	83
Contribution to Precedent Literature.....	84
Application Points for Educators .....	85
Educational Leaders in Local Churches .....	85

	Page
Educators and Administrators in Primary and Secondary Christian Schools.....	86
Educators and Administrators in Christian Higher Education .....	88
Further Research Needed .....	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	91



## PREFACE

This study began by researching the educational views of Tatian, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria. As my research progressed, two things became obvious. First, these three figures provided far too much material to analyze in a work of this length. Second, Clement's description of his Gnostic figure provided a glimpse into his educational philosophy, which appeared neglected in the literature base. Thus I narrowed my focus to Clement's educational philosophy as expressed in the *Stromata*. I hope that this study sheds needed light on Clement and his approach to education.

I would like to thank Dr. Timothy Paul Jones for guiding and supervising this project. Additionally, I would like to thank Chuck Mielke and the rest of my 2014 Ed.D. cohort for their encouragement and companionship over the course of this program. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my family for giving me time to research and write this thesis.

Justin Glenn

Birmingham, Alabama

May 2017

## CHAPTER 1

### RESEARCH CONCERN

“What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?”<sup>1</sup> These questions asked by Tertullian in the second century accurately frame the issues that Clement of Alexandria sought to address in much of his writing. As a Christian, Clement was concerned for the purity of the church and the right interpretation of Scripture. As an educator, he wanted to provide his students with the best information and training available. Therefore, as a Christian educator, he had to grapple with difficult questions like the ones Tertullian posed above. The present research examines Clement’s place in the second-century church, specifically in regard to his educational philosophy. The growing and developing church had to come to terms with the surrounding culture as the boundaries between biblical theology and Greek philosophy, as well as the priority of each to the education of Christian children, were debated.<sup>2</sup> In this study, I attempt to more fully understand the educational philosophy of one second-century Christian leader and

---

<sup>1</sup>Tertullian, *The Prescription for Heretics* 7, accessed October 5, 2015, [http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-24.htm#P3208\\_1148660](http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-24.htm#P3208_1148660).

<sup>2</sup>Karl Sandnes comments, “Neither did all Christians agree in defining the proper relationship to Hellenistic culture. The New Testament witnesses discussions and arguments on how the Christians should interact with the Roman authorities and the temples. . . . Differing views, therefore, emerged among the believers, as well as intense debate on how to deal with the ancient ‘παιδεία-system’.” Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 10. Sandnes adds, “The Christian sources [in antiquity] often treat school and education within discussions of how Greek philosophy and Christian faith were to be understood.” *Ibid.*, 12. These issues are central to understanding the educational philosophy of Clement of Alexandria.

educator, Clement of Alexandria, in the philosophical and cultural context mentioned above, and specifically as written in his *Stromata*.

### **Relevance of This Study: From Second-Century Alexandria to Twenty-First-Century America**

The challenges faced by the church in the second century were not unique to that time period. In every age, Christians must decide how they will engage and interact with the surrounding culture. More specifically, Christian educators must make crucial decisions about the content taught and methodology used in their classrooms. There can be no mistaking of the significance of the increase in both private Christian schooling and homeschooling in America over the last few decades.<sup>3</sup> Some Christian leaders have even called for an intentional exodus from the public educational system for a variety of reasons, worldview issues being central.<sup>4</sup> As this trend continues to grow, Christian parents and educators must think biblically and intelligently about how they will

---

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of Education, “Trends in the Use of School Choice: Statistical Analysis Report,” accessed January 26, 2015, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010004>. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, homeschooling rates increased from 850,000 in 1999 to 1,500,000 in 2007. According to a 2012 survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of homeschooled students rose to 1,770,000 in the 2011-12 school year, with 77 percent of homeschool parents citing religious or moral education as “Important” in their decision to homeschool (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013028/index.asp>). M. Planty et al., “The Condition of Education 2009,” National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009081.pdf>. According to this study, conservative Christian private schools increased their share of students among private schools from 13 percent in 1995 to 15 percent in 2007. Albert Mohler argues, “The Christian school and home school movements are among the most significant cultural developments of the last thirty years.” R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues with Timeless Truth* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008), 72.

<sup>4</sup>Albert Mohler explains the current situation as he observes it: “The crisis in public-school education has prompted some to reconsider the very idea of public education. Some now argue that Christian parents cannot send their children to public schools without committing the sin of handing their children over to a pagan and ungodly system.” Mohler, *Culture Shift*, 69. Later in the same chapter, he makes his own position clear: “So, what should Christian parents and churches do? I am convinced that the time has come for Christians to develop an exit strategy from the public schools. Some parents made this decision long ago” (72). Somewhat more extreme are groups like Exodus Mandate who describe themselves as “a Christian ministry to encourage and assist Christian families to leave Pharaoh’s school system (i.e. government schools) for the Promised Land of Christian schools or home schooling.” Exodus Mandate, “About Exodus Mandate,” accessed December 12, 2016, <http://exodusmandate.org>.

undertake the educational process and what content and methodologies should be included.

Today, the church finds itself in the midst of an increasingly non-Christian culture in America,<sup>5</sup> much like the church in the second century was located in a dominantly pagan culture. D. A. Carson explains, “In much of the western world, despite the fact that Christianity was one of the forces that shaped what the West became (along with the Enlightenment, and a host of less dominant powers), culture is not only moving away from Christianity, it is frequently openly hostile toward it.”<sup>6</sup> The situation the western church faces in the twenty-first century is not merely a shift from a traditionally Judeo-Christian culture to a purely secular culture, but the shift is toward an increasingly heterogeneous religious landscape that is changing the way the culture thinks about and understands reality, including education. Nancy Pearcey in her book, *Total Truth*, argues

---

<sup>5</sup>Researchers cite the growing Muslim population in Robert Wuthnow, “Responding to the New Religious Pluralism,” *Cross Currents* 58, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 43; the growing Buddhist population in Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge, “Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 3 (September 2004): 364-65; and the Barna Group published findings in December 2014 about the growing number of “churchless” Americans (those who have not attended a regular Christian worship service in the past six months) in “10 Facts about America’s Churchless,” accessed February 23, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/698-10-facts-about-america-s-churchless#.VOtUHUL4jk0>. The combination of growing non-Christian religions and shrinking Christian church involvement points toward a loss of what might have been considered a Judeo-Christian culture in the past. Released in May 2015, a Pew Research Center study found that between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of Americans self-identifying as Evangelical Protestant, Catholic, and Mainline Protestant all decreased, while the percentage of Americans claiming adherence to a non-Christian faith rose slightly and those self-identifying as unaffiliated rose by a significant 6.7 percent. The total Christian percentage of the population dropped, in those seven years, from 78.4 percent to 70.6 percent. “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” accessed May 23, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>. While 70.6 percent is certainly a majority of the population, a drop of that magnitude in only seven years could be predictive of an even more precipitous drop in the years to come. The study also revealed a generational decline in the percentage of Americans who self-identify as Christian, which strengthens the notion that this decline will continue: Silent Generation (born 1928-1945), 85 percent; Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), 78 percent; Generation X (born 1965-1980), 70 percent; Older Millennials (born 1981-1989), 57 percent; and Younger Millennials (born 1990-1996), 56 percent. It is important to note that these numbers do not accurately reflect the percentage of followers of Christ in America, but only the percentage of Americans who verbally self-identify with these religious traditions.

<sup>6</sup>D. A. Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 6.

against the compartmentalization of religion to merely matters of belief and out of matters of mind and reason. She argues for a comprehensive and all-encompassing Christian worldview: “‘Thinking Christianly’ means understanding that Christianity gives the truth about the whole of reality, a perspective for interpreting every subject matter.”<sup>7</sup> The implications for educational practice when considering matters of worldview formation are staggering, and Christians today are faced with these challenges.<sup>8</sup>

It is important, however, for Christians to understand that this is not a new debate. The problem of reconciling theology and culture did not simply appear in the twentieth century, but it has been fundamental to many debates and conflicts that have been present in the church for centuries.<sup>9</sup> Niebuhr describes the conflict this way:

The question of Christianity and civilization is by no means a new one; that Christian perplexity in this area has been perennial, and that the problem has been an enduring one through all the Christian centuries. It is helpful also to recall that the repeated struggles of Christians with this problem have yielded no single Christian answer, but only a series of typical answers which together, for faith, represent phases of the strategy of the militant church in the world.<sup>10</sup>

Carson, revisiting Niebuhr’s categories of Christ and culture, explained, “The problem is not new. Christians had to confront it during the days of the Roman

---

<sup>7</sup>Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 34. Pearcey focuses her arguments primarily on the modern time period, beginning with Darwinian thought in the mid-nineteenth century and how they impact the cultural thought patterns and practices today.

<sup>8</sup>Included are such challenges as mode of education (homeschool, private Christian school, or public school), what is included in a good education, how much a child’s education should be dictated by non-believers, etc. Timothy Paul Jones notes in regard to educational choices that parents have to make, “I do not pretend that the issues or the solutions today are precisely analogous to the ones in the second and third centuries. Yet it is helpful to know that ours is neither the first nor the only generation to struggle with these issues.” Timothy Paul Jones, introduction to *Perspectives on Your Child’s Education*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 6.

<sup>9</sup>For example, Mondin traces this debate through Roman Catholic thought from Clement of Alexandria to Vatican II in Battista Mondin, “Faith and Reason in Roman Catholic Thought from Clement of Alexandria to Vatican II,” *Dialogue & Alliance* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 18-26.

<sup>10</sup>Richard H. Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1951), 2.

Empire.”<sup>11</sup> This is an issue that has been, is now, and will continue to be critical for Christians to consider carefully.

Clement provides a helpful example for modern Christians grappling with these issues. While the specific elements of culture that he dealt with may differ from the current debates, the principles of evaluation and integration that he employed can help advise twenty-first century Christians as they seek to develop sound educational philosophies. This thesis will not attempt to construct a fully formed educational philosophy, in the mold of modern educational thinking, from the *Stromata*. Rather, broad principles will be sought from his writing. Likewise, this study will not attempt to apply Clement’s philosophy of education directly to the present day, but will take principles gleaned from the *Stromata* and consider how they could help modern educators engage in the process of developing a philosophy of education.

### **Cultural Context in the Roman Empire**

In the beginning centuries of the church, the context was rife with opportunities for Christians to engage a pagan culture, including educational practices. These opportunities were often, in actuality, necessities brought about by a dominant culture that was opposed (sometimes violently) to Christian ways of thinking.<sup>12</sup> If Christians were “to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3),<sup>13</sup> they would have to think deeply about what it means to educate their children in the midst of a pagan culture. The prevailing ideas about children and their education in the

---

<sup>11</sup>Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited*, 9.

<sup>12</sup>Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 592-609. Ferguson provides a helpful discussion of the development of pagan attitudes and Roman laws during the first two centuries of Christianity. Christians were often singled out for supposed crimes and sedition against the Roman Empire. Informally, Ferguson refers to the “popular ridicule of Christianity” as a common way that pagan society interacted with the early church.

<sup>13</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

Roman Empire centered traditionally on a view of children as weak, irrational, and incomplete.<sup>14</sup> This view of children as almost less than human contradicted the example Jesus provided in dealing with children. He welcomed them and warned that any adults who endangered the souls of children will be held to account for it before God (Matthew 18:5-6). The disparity of these understandings of children would have caused the early church to think deeply about their approach to education in a pagan world.

Although there was not a monolithic educational system equivalent to modern educational systems, “the general impression of education during the Hellenistic and imperial eras of the classical world is one of sameness rather than divergence.”<sup>15</sup> In the absence of an educational system with a centralized governing body, a similarity in educational practices had developed throughout the Roman world by the second century AD that afforded at least the children of privilege a typical education in the classical model. Townsend goes on to argue that Jewish education “was not overly different from Hellenistic reading schools except for the use of the Bible in place of Homer and the pagan classics.”<sup>16</sup> The difference, which Townsend seems to downplay, was actually

---

<sup>14</sup>O. M. Bakke observes, “In the philosophical tradition, children were portrayed, along with other weak groups, as the negative counterfoil to the free male urban citizen. Children lack reason, or at best, have a limited measure of reason. They also lack the physical strength and courage that are typical of men (or at least of the ideal man). This means that children are portrayed as negative symbols or paradigms for adult conduct. According to Aristotle, children are not complete human beings. If they are interesting and possess a positive value, this is because they have the potential to develop those valuable characteristics and qualities that were associated with free men.” O. M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 21-22.

<sup>15</sup>John T. Townsend, “Ancient Education in the Time of the Early Roman Empire,” in *The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity*, ed. Stephen Benko and John J. O’Rourke (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1971), 141. While Townsend appears to be mostly focused on Hellenized Jews throughout their discussion of this, he does explicitly argue that the similarities between Hellenistic education and Jewish education are seen both in the “relatively liberal Jewish communities in the Greco-Roman Diaspora like the community in Rome where synagogue teachers were called *grammatei*” as well as in the “orthodox, Rabbinic circles” (154). He notes that the most obvious similarity between Hellenistic education and education in the “orthodox, Rabbinic circles” in the threefold division of education in both, with the Hellenistic system being established earlier and presumably the source of the similar system in orthodox Jewish education.

<sup>16</sup>Townsend, “Ancient Education in the Time of the Early Roman Empire,” 155. Sandnes

significant. If, as he also argues, Hellenistic education was necessarily intertwined with pagan religion,<sup>17</sup> then this simple difference in reading texts would have made a tremendous difference in the worldview that was communicated through the education, even if methodology remained similar. The similarities in classical education throughout the Roman Empire not only provided students with tools for reading, writing, and occupying a profession, but they also promulgated a pagan worldview.

### **Introduction of Thesis**

In the second century, Christianity was in a critical stage of development in terms of organization, doctrine, and identity.<sup>18</sup> The writings of the early church were crucial to the solidification of orthodox Christianity in the midst of not only a pagan culture, but also the emergence of Christian heresies (such as Gnosticism) that had to be refuted with sound biblical theology and philosophical reasoning.<sup>19</sup> While significant attention has been paid to Clement's use of the word "Gnostic" in his *Stromata*, most interpretations have understood it primarily as either an idealized version of the mature

---

argues that despite the lack of uniform oversight and some regional diversity, there was a compelling similarity in educational practice throughout the Roman Empire. Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer*, 16-18, 38-39. Everett Ferguson also points to the "three-stage system—primary, secondary, and advanced" that brought unity to education across the empire. Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 109-13. See also Theresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), 24. Despite some variation, the emphasis appears to be on the significant degree of similarity in educational practice across the Roman Empire.

<sup>17</sup>"Hellenistic schools as the educational institutions of a pagan society were inseparably associated with pagan religion. Not only did the curriculum center around the pagan classics, which were taught in classrooms decorated with representations of pagan gods, but also the students were often expected, and even compelled, to take part in pagan religious festivals." Townsend, "Ancient Education in the Time of the Early Roman Empire," 149.

<sup>18</sup>Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 602-6. The second-century church stood in a time of transition and uncertainty. Ferguson notes that the first century saw a process of distinguishing Christianity from Judaism, especially in regard to the view of the Roman government; the third century brought about official condemnation of Christianity by the Roman authorities, making it illegal to be a Christian; and the second century fell between these two periods, witnessing local persecution and much ridicule with continued confusion about what, exactly, a Christian believed.

<sup>19</sup>Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 112-16.



Christian<sup>20</sup> or as a representation of himself and/or his teacher, Pantaenus.<sup>21</sup> This thesis will demonstrate that Clement's Gnostic figure in the *Stromata* is best understood as the ideal Christian who has been educated properly, as conceived by Clement, and therefore sheds light on Clement's educational philosophy. While Clement never systematically explains his philosophy of education in any of his extant works, the central elements of his philosophy can be deduced from the descriptions he provides of the Gnostic figure and from the relationship between faith and knowledge in the *Stromata*.

### Gap in the Existing Literature

A significant amount of helpful literature has examined the writings of Clement of Alexandria and the context surrounding him. Scholars have established that he was well educated in Greek philosophy and the classic disciplines.<sup>22</sup> They have documented and examined his heavy use of philosophy, as well as his particular admiration of Plato and his writings.<sup>23</sup> His use of the word "Gnostic" in a way that was very different from the surrounding culture has been acknowledged as a significant element of his *Stromata*.<sup>24</sup> Previous research into the views of Clement of Alexandria will

---

<sup>20</sup>John Ferguson, "The Achievement of Clement of Alexandria," *Religious Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 1976): 79.

<sup>21</sup>Judith L. Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher according to Clement of Alexandria," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 5. She cites André Méhat, *Étude sur les 'Stromates' de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966): 60-61.

<sup>22</sup>Anthony and Benson, *Exploring the History & Philosophy of Christian Education*, 113. Catherine Osborne, "Clement of Alexandria," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 270.

<sup>23</sup>Robert P. Casey, "Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Platonism," *Harvard Theological Review* 18 (1925): 45. A. R. Harkness and Haywards Heath, "They Speak to Us across the Centuries: Clement of Alexandria," *The Expository Times* 108, no. 10 (1997): 292. Osborne states, "Clement quotes Plato 600 times." Eric Osborn, "Arguments for Faith in Clement of Alexandria," *Vigiliae Christianae* 48, no. 1 (March 1994): 4.

<sup>24</sup>John Ferguson, "The Achievement of Clement of Alexandria," 79, describes the Gnostic in a similar way as many who have written about Clement: "the full-grown or perfect man." Catherine Osborne notes that Clement's use of "Gnostic" is different from the prevailing use. "Clement's Gnostic is not a

undergird the present study of his educational philosophy. Though his position regarding the relationship between pagan Greek philosophy and Christian theology has been well documented, there has not been adequate attention paid to a related aspect of his writing, his educational philosophy. Since the Greek philosophic tradition was a central component to education in the second-century Roman Empire, Clement's interaction with it is a major factor in his philosophy of education.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, previous studies that have undertaken an examination of his position regarding Greek philosophy will be important to the explication of his ideas on education.

Clement is widely regarded as one of the first Christian writers to seek to maintain biblical orthodoxy while using the methodologies and wisdom that were derived from Greek philosophy.<sup>26</sup> As an educator, he valued the Greek philosophy that he was trained in, largely for its helpfulness in interpreting Scripture skillfully<sup>27</sup> and interacting with the educated pagan world intelligently.<sup>28</sup> He hoped for an educated Christian church

---

gnostic in the sense in which that term is used of the sects such as Valentinians and the followers of Basileides. Such sects are characterized particularly by their class distinction between a spiritual elite who have secret knowledge and the riff-raff who are excluded from salvation. Clement endorses the idea that knowledge of spiritual truths is the pinnacle of perfection (hence his choice of the title 'Gnostic' for the Christian sage), but it is not the only route to salvation, since the *Logos* has many ways of training the souls even of simple believers; and the knowledge is not hidden but is made available to all by way of the innate reason with which we were all created, and the allegorical interpretation of Scripture." Osborne, "Clement of Alexandria," 272-73.

<sup>25</sup>Townsend, "Ancient Education in the Time of the Roman Empire," 144-49. Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer*, 17-22.

<sup>26</sup>Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 9.

<sup>27</sup>Clement begins his discussion of this in the *Stromata* in Book 1, chapter 5 ("Philosophy, the Handmaid of Theology") and continues in various places throughout the work. Perhaps with some degree of hyperbole, Catherine Osborne sums up Clement's principle regarding the helpfulness of Greek philosophy in the interpretation of Scripture: "For Clement, there is no true understanding of Scripture without philosophy." Osborne, "Clement of Alexandria," 273. Certainly, Clement believed that by using the methods and knowledge that come with philosophical training, one was better equipped to understand the fullness of Scripture.

<sup>28</sup>Harcus and Heath, "They Speak to Us across the Centuries," 294. Harcus and Heath discuss Clement's willingness and ability to engage with non-Christian philosophers.

that could debate the truth of Scripture with the best and most educated pagan philosophers, and he set out to help build that through his school.<sup>29</sup> It is the specifics of his educational philosophy that need more examination and explanation. It is the contention of this thesis that Clement's Gnostic figure represents the ideal product of sound Christian education, and that his philosophy of education can be deduced from his description of this figure in the *Stromata* as well as through his concepts of faith and knowledge. While scholars have written about Clement's Gnostic figure and his ties to Greek philosophy, and a few have tangentially touched on his educational philosophy, none have linked the Gnostic figure plus his concepts of faith and knowledge to his educational philosophy in this way.

### **Delimitations**

This study will not examine the entirety of Clement's work, but will focus specifically on the *Stromata*, and even more specifically on the instances where he mentions and describes his Gnostic figure and where he discusses faith and knowledge. While there is certainly truth about his educational philosophy that could be gleaned from other works such as *Christ the Educator*, the scope of this study will be limited to the *Stromata*. Undergirding this will be sound understandings of Gnosticism and the culture that surrounded and influenced Clement in his writing and teaching. Additionally, Clement's use of the concepts of knowledge and faith (examined through Greek word groups used by Clement to communicate these concepts) in his explanation of the Gnostic figure will be examined. Together, these elements will be used to extract principles of Clement's philosophy of education.

---

<sup>29</sup>This statement goes to the heart of the argument of this thesis, namely, that Clement's Gnostic, who is well equipped to faithfully engage with an educated pagan society, provides a window into Clement's educational philosophy.

## Research Methodology

This study utilizes a text-based methodology that is centered on a thick reading<sup>30</sup> of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*. The text will be examined in line with what Webster describes as theologies of retrieval.<sup>31</sup> Clement participated in significant theological and philosophical writing that engaged Roman education and culture in general and Greek philosophy in particular. Of specific interest is Clement's use of the word "γνωστικός" to describe his conception of the ideal Christian, as well as his discussions of faith and knowledge, and how these sections elucidate certain principles in his educational philosophy. Secondary sources will include those that examine Clement's philosophical and educational views in general as well as his particular writing concerning the Gnostic figure and his use of faith and knowledge.

As mentioned above, the particulars of Clement's educational philosophy have not been fully treated, and no one has approached it through the lens of the Gnostic figure as the picture of the ideally educated Christian. While an entire educational program may not emerge from this information, I seek to demonstrate Clement's primary principles of education by working backward from his educative goal. The primary question in this study is, "What is Clement of Alexandria's philosophy of education?" To arrive at an answer to that question, one must answer several secondary questions: Did Clement

---

<sup>30</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 63. By thick reading, I mean that the passages primarily dealt with in Clement's *Stromata* will be considered as parts of a coherent whole. While this research will focus on very specific passages within the *Stromata* that deal with Clement's Gnostic figure and his relationship to educational philosophy, those passages fit within a larger work, and that larger work exists within a corpus of work by Clement.

<sup>31</sup>John Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 583-99. Webster describes theologies of retrieval as "a *mode* of theology, an attitude of mind and a way of approaching theological tasks" (584). This approach to the writings of the early church seeks to understand them, not in a primarily historical-critical mode, but as theological writers who legitimately contributed to the development of modern theological categories, and it treats "pre-modern Christian theology as resource rather than problem" (585). This study will approach Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* in this manner, examining it in its context, but acknowledging that it rivals the work of modern thinkers on education and can inform our thinking in significant ways.

intend to embed his philosophy of education or principles of education within the *Stromata*? What is the identity of the Gnostic figure in the *Stromata*? What is the significance of Clement's use of knowledge and faith in the *Stromata*? Addressing these questions will lead to an answer for the primary research question.

### **Conclusion**

The second century was a period when Christianity was growing and increasing in influence, but also experiencing persecution and resistance in a pagan culture.<sup>32</sup> Education in the Roman Empire not only taught the skills needed to function in society and in a profession, but also conveyed a pagan worldview. Based on his understandings of Greek philosophy and its appropriate integration into a Christian worldview, Clement of Alexandria argued for and practiced a unique method of education among second-century Christians. In the *Stromata*, his frequent use of the Gnostic figure describes not only the ideal Christian but, more specifically, the Christian who has been taught and disciplined in an ideal way. Additionally, the relationship between his concepts of faith and knowledge provide further insight into his educational thought. It is in these two categories that this thesis will argue that the *Stromata* provides readers with enough information to accurately deduce elements of Clement's philosophy of education.

---

<sup>32</sup>See above, note 22. Ferguson demonstrates that the second century was a time of limbo for Christianity in the Roman Empire, seeing both positive and negative results.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Significant scholarly attention has been directed toward Clement of Alexandria, particularly in the last century and a half. That cannot be said of the work of the second-century teacher and Christian leader throughout much of church history. As Irena Backus points out, his work was largely untouched through the Middle Ages due to his faulty reputation as a heretic, and he was only rediscovered as an orthodox and beneficial church father in the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> She lists Clement's use of the word "Gnostic" as one of the major reasons for this negative view of him. The few who read him tended to be uncertain about how to understand this term since Clement wrote it in the midst of the heretical movement called Gnosticism in the early church.<sup>2</sup> Since the first Latin edition of Clement was published in 1551, more attention has been paid to him, and more scholars have sought to understand precisely what he intended to communicate. As this thesis contends, Clement's use of the word "Gnostic" was not, in fact, synonymous with the better-known usage of the word in Christianity in the second and third centuries. Instead, Clement's Gnostic figure was his own creation, and represents the epitome of true Christian education.

---

<sup>1</sup>Irena Backus, "Lay and Theological Reception of Clement of Alexandria in the Reformation: From Gentien Hervet to Fenelon," in *Between Lay Piety and Academic Theology: Studies Presented to Christoph Burger on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. Ulrike Hascher-Burger, August den Hollander, and Wim Janse (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 355.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

### Pertinent Biographical Details of Clement

Clement was born into a pagan family in the middle of the second century AD, likely in Athens.<sup>3</sup> Here he was provided a thorough education founded on Greek philosophy and the classic disciplines.<sup>4</sup> Eby and Arrowood said of Clement, “A man of profound knowledge, he was versed in all the sciences and philosophical systems of the day.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Kovacs describes him as “an exuberant and dynamic thinker” who “was a biblical exegete, platonic philosopher, polymath, and apologist for Christianity.”<sup>6</sup> Following his conversion, which is not recorded but appears to have occurred as a young man, he set out in search of the best Christian teaching in the Roman Empire.<sup>7</sup> He eventually landed in Alexandria under the tutelage of a teacher named Pantaenus, who was in charge of the catechetical school there.<sup>8</sup> In this setting, Clement’s notions of education and the interaction between secular and biblical knowledge took shape. After Pantaenus died, Clement succeeded him as head of the catechetical school in Alexandria. He served there until 202, when he fled Alexandria due to a new persecution against

---

<sup>3</sup>Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol.1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1984), 71.

<sup>4</sup>Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 113. Catherine Osborne, “Clement of Alexandria,” in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 270.

<sup>5</sup>Frederick Eby and Charles Flinn Arrowood, *The History and Philosophy of Education Ancient and Medieval* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), 612.

<sup>6</sup>Judith L. Kovacs, “Clement (Titus Flavius Clemens) of Alexandria,” *The Expository Times* 120, no. 6 (2009): 261.

<sup>7</sup>William Wilson, “Introductory Notice,” in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. 4, *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, trans. William Wilson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), 11.

<sup>8</sup>Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 1:71. Anthony and Benson, *Exploring the History & Philosophy of Christian Education*, 113. Likewise, van den Hoek explains that Clement “shopped around for the right beliefs before landing in Alexandria.” See also Annewies van den Hoek, “Etymologizing in a Christian Context: The Techniques of Clement and Origen,” *The Studia Philonica Annual* 16 (2004): 123.

Christians began under Emperor Septimius Severus. He lived out most of his last years in Asia Minor.<sup>9</sup>

There are three main extant works of Clement, typically understood to form a loose trilogy: *Protrepticus* (Exhortation to the Greeks), *Paedagogus* (Christ the Educator), and the *Stromata* (Miscellanies).<sup>10</sup> Many modern scholars understand these three works to have been written in intentional succession, leading a person from initial conversion to Christianity through maturity in the faith.<sup>11</sup> In his *Protrepticus*, Clement presents a defense of the Christian faith directed at the educated classes in Alexandria who practice the traditional polytheistic Roman religion.<sup>12</sup> He seems to have had a desire for others who shared his own pagan religious and educational background to discover the truth of Christianity as he did. His *Paedagogus* then built on the evangelistic intentions of *Protrepticus* by providing basic Christian instruction for new converts. Finally, the *Stromata* describes what Clement understands as being fully formed in Christ, with an eye toward both spiritual and intellectual development.<sup>13</sup> In this final work of Clement's trilogy one finds the Gnostic figure and frequent discussions about faith and knowledge, which this thesis contends provides a window into his educational philosophy.

---

<sup>9</sup>Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 1:71. Anthony and Benson, *Exploring the History & Philosophy of Christian Education*, 113.

<sup>10</sup>Other writings of Clement remain, such as homilies, prayers, and some documents of disputed authorship, but this trilogy comprises the bulk of his surviving work, and Eric Osborn refers to the *Stromata* as "Clement's main work." Eric Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (London: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1954), 7. This brief summary of Clement's writings will focus on only this primary trilogy.

<sup>11</sup>Marco Rizzi, "The Literary Problem in Clement of Alexandria: A Reconsideration," *Adamantius* 17 (2011): 154.

<sup>12</sup>Peter Ensor, "Clement of Alexandria and Penal Substitutionary Atonement," *Evangelical Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2013): 23.

<sup>13</sup>Rizzi, "The Literary Problem," 154.



## Alexandria in the Second Century

Though Clement was most likely not born there, Tollinton explains that he “belonged to Alexandria for the most important twenty years of his life” and that “no account of Clement would be even tolerably complete which did not attempt to portray the life of the great and complex community, in the midst of which he had found shelter and opportunity. The influence which Alexandria exerted upon his career and work must, in any case, have been considerable.”<sup>14</sup> The Egyptian city of Alexandria was a center of learning and philosophical wisdom in the second century.<sup>15</sup> Digeser notes, “Alexandria, despite being in Egypt, was still a predominantly Greek city.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, its educated residents would have been well acquainted with the range of Greek philosophy that had filtered down to the second century. In addition, Marcus and Heath explain the Alexandrian situation as tremendously complex and eclectic in a religious sense, where one could find everything from fortunetellers to local gods to religious philosophical teaching.<sup>17</sup> Sheridan writes of the Alexandrian context, “Christians did not exist in a vacuum; they lived, worked, and functioned in every way in a multi-cultural society. This multi-cultural society existed primarily of non-Christian cults, groups, religions that had been part of the Alexandrian milieu since the fourth century B.C.E. when Alexander conquered the area.”<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, even within this diversity, Haas is quick to note that

---

<sup>14</sup>R. B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), 1:32.

<sup>15</sup>Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 1:71.

<sup>16</sup>Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, “The Late Roman Empire from the Antonines to Constantine,” in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>17</sup>A. R. Marcus and Haywards Heath, “They Speak to Us across the Centuries: Clement of Alexandria,” *The Expository Times* 108, no. 10 (1997): 292-93.

<sup>18</sup>Mary C. Sheridan, “The Influence of Non-Christian Ideas in the Second Century CE on Clement of Alexandria,” *Philotheos: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 8 (2008): 160.

the clear majority of society at large was still some version of pagan or non-Christian,<sup>19</sup> and therefore would have been opposed to the teachings of Clement. Explaining the implications of this cultural and religious situation, Eby and Arrowood write,

In this cultured city with its Museum, libraries, and schools, with their numerous teachers and students, comprising atheists, oriental mystics, Greek philosophers, and Jewish eclectics, Christianity was obliged to meet the first philosophic attack from the learned world. Apparently the new school arose out of the catechumenal class of the Alexandrian Church. In this cosmopolitan environment there appeared inquiring catechumens who asked innumerable perplexing questions in regard to Christianity. To meet the needs of these young inquirers, secular studies of all kinds and Christian theology were taught together to a special group of students as well as to individuals.<sup>20</sup>

Particularly important for this work is the presence of Middle Platonism, Stocism, and Gnosticism in Alexandria, as well as the predominant methods of education.<sup>21</sup>

### **Middle Platonism as the Dominant School in Greek Philosophy**

Mary Sheridan describes a phenomenon that she calls a “syncretistic knot” of Middle Platonism and Stoicism as the major philosophical influences on Clement.<sup>22</sup>

Edward Moore explains the position that Middle Platonism held chronologically: “The period designated by historians of philosophy as the ‘Middle Platonic’ begins with *Antiochus of Ascalon* (ca. 130-68 B.C.E.) and ends with Plotinus (204-70 C.E.), who is considered the founder of Neoplatonism.”<sup>23</sup> Ferguson lists “Stoic ethics, Aristotelian

---

<sup>19</sup>Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997): 134-52.

<sup>20</sup>Eby and Arrowood, *The History and Philosophy of Education*, 610.

<sup>21</sup>Chadwick explains that Clement’s philosophical viewpoint “is largely derived from Middle Platonism which, as Clement explicitly remarks, had already fused Plato with much Stoic ethics and Aristotelian logic.” H. Chadwick, “Clement of Alexandria,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek & Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 170.

<sup>22</sup>Sheridan, “The Influence of Non-Christian Ideas,” 163.

<sup>23</sup>Edward Moore, “Middle Platonism,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/midplato/>.

logic, and Neopythagorean metaphysics, religion, and number symbolism” as major influencers of Platonic thought that resulted in what we now know as Middle Platonism.<sup>24</sup> This philosophical system had a significant impact on Alexandria, and particularly on the Judeo-Christian mindset in Alexandria from the time of Philo of Alexandria in the middle of the first century AD.<sup>25</sup>

John Dillon provides a helpful explanation of the major themes of Middle Platonism, breaking it down into three categories: ethics, physics, and logic.<sup>26</sup> A major concern of Middle Platonic ethics was the purpose of life, also described as that which produces happiness in life. The answer to this in Alexandrian Middle Platonism was the classic Platonic formulation of “likeness to God.”<sup>27</sup> Other ethical questions included the relation of virtue to happiness and the existence and implications of free will.<sup>28</sup> In regards to the second category, physics, the Middle Platonists included a significant amount of spiritual reality in their understanding of physical reality. Dillon discusses their belief in a supreme principle (or God), an “intermediate and mediating entity”<sup>29</sup> called the World Soul, and many “subordinate, intermediate beings, the race of daemons.”<sup>30</sup> The Platonic Forms, according to Dillon, are difficult to properly examine, but are probably “to be

---

<sup>24</sup>Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 387-88.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 388.

<sup>26</sup>John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism (80 B.C. to A.D. 220)* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 43-51.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 43-44.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 46. Dillon writes, “Whatever the differences in detail, however, it is common ground for all Platonists that between God and Man there must be a host of intermediaries, that God may not be contaminated or disturbed by a too close involvement with Matter” (47).

seen as thoughts in the mind of God.”<sup>31</sup> Understanding the physical world, for the Middle Platonist, meant understanding the metaphysical world first.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, Dillon argues that though the Middle Platonists did not contribute much to the science of logic, their main achievement was the integration of Aristotelian logic into Platonic thought.<sup>33</sup> The Middle Platonists carried Plato’s thought forward, synthesizing it to some extent with other philosophies, arriving at a philosophic tradition that would carry Platonism from its original expression to the beginning of Neoplatonism in the third century. Clement, as a Platonic philosopher and a great admirer of Plato, would have been influenced significantly by the current trends in Platonic thought in Alexandria, which was found in the Middle Platonists.

### **Stoicism as both Competitor and Companion to Middle Platonism**

Besides Middle Platonism, the other primary philosophical influence in second-century Alexandria was Stoicism.<sup>34</sup> Like Middle Platonism, Stoic philosophy can be easily divided into the same three categories (logic, physics, and ethics), though “Stoicism is essentially a system of ethics which, however, is guided by a logic as theory of method, and rests upon physics as foundation.”<sup>35</sup> In summary, “The stoic ethical teaching is based upon two principles already developed in their physics: first, that the

---

<sup>31</sup>Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 48.

<sup>32</sup>Hagg says, “It [Middle Platonism] is first of all characterized by a renewed interest in Plato, a return to a metaphysical and religious Plato, and questions such as the creation of the world, the construction of the Godhead and the purpose of life, were of special interest.” Henry Fiska Hagg, “Deification in Clement of Alexandria with a Special Reference to his Use of *Theaetetus* 176B,” *Studia Patristica* 46 (2010): 170.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 49-51.

<sup>34</sup>Sheridan, “The Influence of Non-Christian Ideas,” 167.

<sup>35</sup>Massimo Pigliucci, “Stoicism,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, ed. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/stoicism/>.

universe is governed by absolute law, which admits of no exceptions; and second, that the essential nature of humans is reason. Both are summed up in the famous Stoic maxim, ‘Live according to nature.’”<sup>36</sup> For the Stoic, reason and rationality were supreme.

A major feature that distinguished Stoicism from Middle Platonism was its rejection of a separate existence of the immaterial.<sup>37</sup> Despite this distinction, Inwood demonstrates that Stoicism emerged largely from the thought of Plato,<sup>38</sup> and Ferguson argues that it was subsumed into Neoplatonic thought when it emerged in the third century.<sup>39</sup> By the time of Clement’s writing, therefore, Stoicism was waning and merging with Middle Platonism as it developed into Neoplatonism in the writing of Plotinus in the third century.<sup>40</sup> Stoic thought, therefore, had what might be best considered an indirect influence on Clement’s own philosophical thinking.

### **Gnosticism: An Attempted Bridge Between Philosophy and Christianity**

Though Gnosticism, as modern scholars use the term, refers to a broad grouping of ideas and schools of thought, it is particularly important for this study because Clement made consistent use of the term “Gnostic” as a designation for the ideal Christian in the *Stromata*.<sup>41</sup> The Christian heresy known as Gnosticism was present and

---

<sup>36</sup>Pigliucci, “Stoicism.” Emphasizing this point, the author goes on to explain that Stoicism believed, “Virtue, then, is the life according to reason. Morality is simply rational action. It is the universal reason which is to govern our lives, not the caprice and self-will of the individual. The wise man consciously subordinates his life to the life of the whole universe, and recognizes himself as a cog in the great machine.”

<sup>37</sup>Brad Inwood, “Stoicism,” in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 126-31.

<sup>39</sup>Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 368.

<sup>40</sup>Sheridan, “The Influence of Non-Christian Ideas,” 163.

<sup>41</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 320. Charles Bigg referred to Gnosticism as “his [Clement’s] one trouble.” Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of*

active in the life of the church in Clement's time, since Irenaeus of Lyons mentioned it in reference to the writings of Valentinus in his work, *Against Heresies*, around AD 180.<sup>42</sup> Moore and Turner describe the overarching concept of Gnosticism this way: "the binding thread connecting the disparate texts so often called 'Gnostic' is the idea that, although this world is the product, not of the highest God or One, but of a lower entity of lesser power, it is possible for humans to transcend this world through the insight (*gnosis*) from which the divine human self originates, and can reassimilate itself to the highest God."<sup>43</sup> This emphasis on knowledge as primary would be a point that Clement staunchly opposes with his own formulation of the Gnostic.

Tollinton describes the allure that second-century Roman citizens might have seen in what he calls "the glamour and completeness of a cosmological theory."<sup>44</sup> He contrasts this with the limitations that had been placed on philosophy in recent times (mainly concerned with morality and ethics) and the lack of modern science. Gnosticism offered a grand scheme with which to understand the world. Laistner describes the heart of Gnostic thought this way: "The essential feature was the belief that truth about God, man, and the universe was attainable not by reason, but only through direct revelation to, or illumination of, the individual."<sup>45</sup> It is understandable that less-disciplined Christians

---

*Alexandria: Being the Bampton Lectures of the Year 1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 115. Tollinton describes Clement as one who was not fond of controversy: "Nevertheless, through his writings, and no doubt equally through his life, there ran one trail of contention, and that was his opposition to Gnosticism." R. B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), 2:35.

<sup>42</sup>Edward Moore and John D. Turner, "Gnosticism," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 174. Additionally, Tollinton advises, "Half a century before Clement taught in the Catechetical School, Gnosticism had reached its maturity in the reign of Hadrian." Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria*, 2:38. He then speculates that by the time Clement was in Alexandria, it would have been easy to procure Gnostic works there.

<sup>43</sup>Moore and Turner, "Gnosticism," 174.

<sup>44</sup>Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria*, 2:41.

<sup>45</sup>M. L. W. Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Ithaca, NY:

could be caught up in this idea, appearing to elevate God and humble mankind by downplaying man's ability to know God by himself and highlighting God's enlightenment of man. It appears both humble and exclusive at the same time. John Dillon, in his work on Middle Platonists, describes Gnosticism as an offshoot of Middle Platonism.<sup>46</sup> He writes, "What chiefly distinguishes the Gnostic attitude from main-line Platonism is a conviction that this world is not only imperfect (a view with which all sides would concur), but the creation of an evil entity, and that we are total aliens in it," and, "The other salient characteristic of Gnostic systems [is] the riotous proliferation of entities and levels of being."<sup>47</sup> Thus the Gnostic patterns of thought centered on mystical knowledge attained by individual divine revelation in the midst of an imperfect cosmos with very active spiritual beings operating in a hierarchical structure.

Though Clement made frequent use of the word in the *Stromata*, his definition was radically different than that described above. Tollinton surmises, "Clement, as we have seen, had himself some such idea of a great scheme of knowledge and hoped, it may be, to meet here the Gnostics on their own ground."<sup>48</sup> By using their word, he would have naturally drawn them into his conversation, a conversation in which he was attempting to define the terms. Harcus explains that the main difference between the heretical Christian Gnostics and Clement "centered on the relationship between knowledge and faith."<sup>49</sup> While the Gnostics held knowledge to be the only requirement for salvation, Clement argued that faith is a prerequisite to true knowledge about God.<sup>50</sup> Tollinton sums up

---

Cornell University Press, 1951), 5.

<sup>46</sup>Specifically, he calls Gnosticism (along with some other schools of thought) the "underworld of Platonism." Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 384.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 385.

<sup>48</sup>Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria*, 2:41.

<sup>49</sup>Harcus and Heath, "They Speak to Us across the Centuries," 294.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid. Additionally, Chadwick explains, "Faith and knowledge, Clement repeatedly affirms,

Clement's situation: "Thus, like Irenaeus in Lyons, Tertullian in Carthage, Hippolytus in Rome, Clement found himself confronted in Alexandria with a rival teaching so varied, so diffused, so subtle, that it was difficult to attack as it was dangerous to leave unchallenged and uncriticised."<sup>51</sup> Clement's own definition of Gnostic will be examined below.

### **An Educational System that Shaped Clement and that He Rejected**

As noted above, Alexandria was a thoroughly Greek city in the second century, even though it was in Egypt.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the Greek educational tradition that was foundational throughout the Roman Empire was also present in Alexandria.<sup>53</sup> Sandnes provides a picture of how Greco-Roman education was typically organized: "The upbringing of children proceeded in corresponding levels; small children up to age 7 (παιδεῖος); children (παῖς) from 7 to 14, and adolescent (μειράκιον) from 14 till age 20."<sup>54</sup> He goes on to describe the primary emphases of each stage of education. Primary education, beginning at age seven, was focused on the basic skills of reading and writing, and when this was mastered (typically around age fourteen), a student proceeded on to secondary schooling, which involved deeper work with the poets and philosophers that

---

are not incompatible but mutually necessary. Against the Gnostic disparagement of faith Clement upholds vigorously the sufficiency of faith for salvation. The baptismal confession is not to be despised. But educated and mature Christians will seek to achieve a higher understanding than that of the catechism, and this more advanced theology necessarily employs philosophy." Chadwick, "Clement of Alexandria," 169.

<sup>51</sup>Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria*, 2:47.

<sup>52</sup>Digester, "The Late Roman Empire from the Antonines to Constantine," 15.

<sup>53</sup>Arthur F. Holmes, *Building the Christian Academy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 8-9. Additionally, Teresa Morgan demonstrated that Roman education had so thoroughly adopted Greek education tradition that the two are nearly synonymous. Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), 24. Karl Sandnes further states the unity of Roman and Greek education, arguing that it is most beneficial to simply refer to "Graeco-Roman education" as a whole. Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 17-18.

<sup>54</sup>Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer*, 20.



depended on previously learned reading and writing skills.<sup>55</sup> Following the completion of secondary school, students had the option of choosing a profession by apprenticing himself to a teacher or practitioner for more focused study.<sup>56</sup>

In all these levels of education, Greek poetry and philosophy dominated the curriculum.<sup>57</sup> Townsend explains that at the younger levels, students learned to read using “selections from the very best writers, especially Homer and Euripides, writers whose style would be worthy of later imitation. These selections the children would learn first to read aloud and then to recite from memory.”<sup>58</sup> In secondary education, students studied the classics in greater depth, of which “Homer was preeminent. Next in importance came Euripides, Menander, and Demosthenes. The main Latin writers were Virgil first and then Terence, Cicero, and Horace. This concentration on certain classical works tended to mold a man’s thinking for the rest of his life.”<sup>59</sup> Far from a neutral source, Sandnes points out, “primary education was . . . intimately connected with values, identity and traditions in ancient society. The schools thus provided the means for passing down key notions of the Hellenistic culture.”<sup>60</sup> Clement, as noted above, was a product of this educational system, but his later conversion to Christianity had the potential to cause significant conflicts in his worldview. How he dealt with this conflict, living in the midst of a bastion of Greek philosophical tradition, will be examined in the next section.

---

<sup>55</sup>Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer*, 20-22.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>57</sup>John T. Townsend, “Ancient Education in the Time of the Roman Empire,” in *The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1971), 144-49.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>60</sup>Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer*, 7.

## Views on Clement's Approach to Greek Philosophy

Alexandria provided a perfect context for the early church to interact with the various influences in the Roman world, and Clement was an individual who clearly took up this challenge.<sup>61</sup> The church in Clement's time was, at best, wary of outside intellectual influence and, at worst, hostile toward it. Oulton and Chadwick argue,

Distrust of learning and argument was evidently characteristic of much of Christian feeling at this time. . . . Accordingly, in the eyes of many Christians it was doing the devil's work to pretend that anything more than simple faith was required. Such an attitude did nothing to commend Christianity to educated people. Clement conceives of his task as a vocation to see to it that the Church is made safe for a more positive evaluation of Greek philosophy.<sup>62</sup>

There is clear consensus that Clement used and interacted heavily with Greek philosophy,<sup>63</sup> as the following section will demonstrate. He broke new ground for Christian intellectualism and scholarly pursuit within the church. The question that is left to answer concerns the weight he gave to various sources of truth and the method of integration he appropriated, both of which this section seeks to address. The two ends of the spectrum that most scholars have placed Clement on are philosopher on one side and theologian on the other. Was he more of a philosopher, dealing primarily with the intellectual speculation of philosophical thought, or was he more of a theologian, seeking to understand God's revelation in the most accurate way? For the purposes of

---

<sup>61</sup>Lilla comments, "In a period in which most of the Christians showed an open hostility towards Greek culture, in so far as they regarded it as the direct product of the devil and as the mainspring of the heresies, particularly of Gnosticism, Clement was the first who boldly undertook the task of defending the achievements of Greek thought against the attacks of some members of the Christian community to which he belonged. The problem of the reconciliation and synthesis between Christianity and Hellenism was felt by no other Christian author of the second century A.D. so deeply as by Clement." Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 9.

<sup>62</sup>John Ernest Oulton and Henry Chadwick, "General Introduction," in *Alexandrian Christianity: Selected Translation of Clement and Origin*, The Library of Christian Classics 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 21.

<sup>63</sup>For example, Hagg observes, "It is common knowledge that Clement is the church father who most frequently cites from non-Christian authors. In addition to, of course, countless citations from the New and Old Testaments, Clement very often refers to Greek poets, dramatists, philosophers and historians." Hagg, "Deification in Clement of Alexandria," 170.

classification, three broad categories within the spectrum of views on Clement will be defined and used.<sup>64</sup> *Christian Platonist* refers to the view that Clement is characterized as primarily a Greek philosopher who was also a Christian, *syncretist* refers to the view that he appropriated Christian doctrine and Greek philosophy relatively equally, and *biblical integrationist* refers to the view that understands him to hold Christian doctrine as his foundation with Greek philosophy used as a helpful supplement and tool.

### **Clement as Christian Platonist: Gnosticism in Disguise**

Although few contemporary scholars would blatantly call Clement a heretic, there have been some who understand him as more of a Greek philosopher than Christian theologian.<sup>65</sup> Charles Bigg, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford in the nineteenth century, was a major proponent of Clement as a Christian Platonist. In fact, it was in his 1886 lectures that Bigg cemented the scholarly designation for Clement as a “Christian Platonist.”<sup>66</sup> In his characterization of Clement as more Greek philosopher than Christian theologian, Bigg argues that Clement held the position that “philosophy is necessary to

---

<sup>64</sup>These categories are my own attempt to describe the spectrum of views on Clement in the literature base. *Christian Platonist* is drawn from the work of Charles Bigg (described in detail below). *Syncretist* and *Biblical Integrationist* are my own designations for the views that other scholars have taken on Clement. While the scholarly views could be rightly described as a spectrum with many individual nuances, I have attempted to categorize them for purposes of understanding Clement and making my argument. Maier gives helpful insight into the variety of views on Clement among various scholars in Harry O. Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 719-45. I have attempted a slightly more systematic classification here.

<sup>65</sup>This view, that Clement held Greek philosophy to an unorthodox level of authority or truth and wrote more as a purveyor of Greek philosophy than Christian theology, was more common in past centuries, with most of the scholars who held this view publically writing more than seventy-five years ago. Photius, writing in the ninth century, argued that Clement was a heretic based on texts that are now lost. Photius’s work is addressed in Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial: The Evidence of ‘Heresy’ from Photius’ Bibliotheca* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010).

<sup>66</sup>Albert C. Outler, “The ‘Platonism’ of Clement of Alexandria,” *The Journal of Religion* 20, no. 3 (July 1940): 220. Wagner describes Bigg’s position on Clement as a Hellenistic philosophy as “specific and slashing,” and resulted in “virtual repudiation,” explaining that Bigg “started from the assumption that [Clement] was a philosopher.” Walter Wagner, “A Father’s Fate: Attitudes Toward and Interpretations of Clement of Alexandria,” *The Journal of Religious History* 6, no. 3 (June 1971): 220.

Exegesis,<sup>67</sup> and “reason [is] the judge of Revelation.”<sup>68</sup> In Bigg’s estimation, Clement’s early education in Greek philosophy never gave way to a complete acceptance of the Christian worldview. He understood Clement’s position to be a “compromise between the Church and the world.”<sup>69</sup> Clement’s philosophical, and largely Platonic, framework served as the foundation for his worldview, into which he incorporated Christian ideas. Bigg understands this to be typical among Alexandrian thinkers, and Clement was simply one of many who adopted this kind of philosophy.<sup>70</sup> Robert Casey, who was influenced by Bigg, took a similar approach by arguing that Clement’s “philosophy of religion [was] controlled by the ontological and epistemological premises of Platonism, but also inspired by the less formal mysticism of early Christians like Paul and John.”<sup>71</sup> Though most contemporary scholars do not hold these harsh views of Clement now (as will be demonstrated below), this understanding was characteristic of Clementine scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

---

<sup>67</sup>Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 79.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 119.

<sup>70</sup>This can be seen from Bigg’s including Clement in multiple references to the “Alexandrines” and their Greek way of thinking about both Judaism and Christianity throughout Lecture II in Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*.

<sup>71</sup>Robert P. Casey, “Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Platonism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 18 (1925): 95. While Casey gives credit for Clement’s thought to New Testament writers as well, he clearly places a higher emphasis on Platonic philosophy. R. E. Witt is another notable scholar who understands Clement primarily in terms of his Hellenism. In his article, “The Hellenism of Clement of Alexandria,” he positively compares Clement to Plotinus, the typically recognized founder of Neoplatonism. Witt seeks to demonstrate how Clement’s thought was very similar to Plotinus, even though Plotinus was most likely no more than 15 years old when Clement died, and much younger when Clement left Alexandria. This would seem to position Clement as possibly the true founder of Neoplatonic thought. In any case, Witt understands Clement as primarily Platonist. R. E. Witt, “The Hellenism of Clement of Alexandria,” *The Classical Quarterly* 25, nos. 3/4 (July-October 1931): 195-204.

### **Clement as Syncretist: Philosophy and Scripture as Equal Authority**

Other scholars have understood Clement in a more syncretistic and balanced way. They see Greek philosophy (usually Platonic philosophy in particular) and Christian doctrine to be more or less equal influences on Clement's thought. Outler, describing Clement as an eclectic philosopher, takes this second position when he writes, "Clement takes from Plato only that which he wishes to find, that which is in accord with a position derived in part from his hellenistic education and in part from his Christian convictions."<sup>72</sup> He explains Clement's thought as influenced equally between Hellenism and Christianity, and he credits Clement with being the most Hellenistic of the early church Fathers.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Backus describes Clement's work as "couching the ideal of Christian life in philosophical terms."<sup>74</sup> She presents Clement as a Christian thinker with a philosophical framework, blending the two together.

Anders Nygren has written significantly on Clement and argues that Clement was a prime example of the syncretism he sees throughout Alexandrian theology in the second-century church and beyond.<sup>75</sup> Nygren argues in *Agape and Eros* that Clement's syncretism is seen in his concurrent adoption of the ideals of Christian *agape* and Hellenistic *eros*. These two notions of love, according to Nygren, were equally present in Clement's thought, and they demonstrate his syncretistic method. This more balanced

---

<sup>72</sup>Outler, "The 'Platonism' of Clement of Alexandria," 227.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 217.

<sup>74</sup>Backus, "Lay and Theological Reception of Clement of Alexandria in the Reformation," 353. Backus argues that this interpretation of Clement understands his theology to be "best understood once it is borne in mind that it took shape in the context of the heretical Gnosis. It is partly in an attempt to neutralize and tame the Gnostic dualism that Clement adopted a platonic line of thought distinguishing two levels of reality" (353).

<sup>75</sup>Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982). "The syncretistic trend of Alexandrian theology is clearly present in Clement of Alexandria," (353) and "Behind the theology of Clement and Origen is that Hellenized Christianity which had long had its centre in syncretistic Alexandria" (351).

approach to Clement was chronologically subsequent to the previous understanding of him as primarily a Hellenistic philosopher. These scholars give more credence to Clement's use of Christian theology and the influence that Christian doctrine had on his thinking, but still argue that his Christian worldview did not supersede the one gained from his prior education in Greek philosophy.

### **Clement as Biblical Integrationist: God's Word Is Preeminent**

Standing in contrast to understanding Clement as primarily a Hellenistic or Platonic philosopher, and seeing more influence from Christian theology than the syncretist view, other scholars have concluded that Clement was primarily a Christian thinker whose Hellenistic education served as a significant influence on his thought. Mary Sheridan explains this concept clearly when she writes, "Clement takes the position that none of the philosophies, theologies and/or religions extant during his time or 'popular' in his time are sufficient to explain and elucidate the Christian position. Clement's position is that Christianity stands on its own and is the only place to find the truth and the purpose of life."<sup>76</sup> Clement's main allegiance, according to Sheridan, was the Christian tradition.<sup>77</sup> In a similar vein, Gibbons, writing about the relationship between Clement's understanding of Greek philosophy and the Jewish origins of Christianity, makes the case that Clement's belief that Greek philosophy was derivative of the Old Testament law is what allowed Clement to use Greek philosophy so heavily in

---

<sup>76</sup>Sheridan, "The Influence of Non-Christian Ideas," 171.

<sup>77</sup>I use the phrase "Christian tradition" here because in Clement's time, much of Christianity would have been passed down through word of mouth, or oral tradition. While the books of the NT had already been written and were being circulated, there was not a concrete sense of canon yet. Christian tradition, as used here, refers to the inspired writings (including the Old Testament as well as the NT books in circulation), the writings of the church fathers, and the teaching that had been passed down from the apostles.

his writings.<sup>78</sup> The underlying assumption in this argument is that it is the Christian tradition that holds the supreme position of authority over Greek philosophy.<sup>79</sup>

Eric Osborn has spent much of his career studying the writings of Clement, and he has published extensively in this area. Though Osborn's thought has developed over the course of more than fifty years of writing, the overarching concept of Clement that he presents is one of a Christian thinker who uses his understanding of Greek philosophy to better express his Christian beliefs. In his early work on Clement, Osborn presented him as "a man whose thought is scattered and eclectic but whose answers to philosophical questions are illuminating and to the point. The answer to the riddle is that Clement is at once breaking up old systems and creating a new synthesis."<sup>80</sup> Osborn casts Clement in a revolutionary light, as one who is approaching the task of Christian theology and philosophy in new, and perhaps better, ways. Osborn goes on to explain Clement's understanding of the source of truth:

There are two main tendencies in Clement's account of truth. The first is to call the essential elements of Christianity true and everything else false. This is the way Clement speaks when he is talking about heresy. The second tendency is to include within truth not only all valid Christian teaching, but also everything that is consistent with it. This is the way Clement speaks when he is talking about philosophy.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup>Kathleen Gibbons, "Moses, Statesman and Philosopher: The Philosophical Background of the Ideal of Assimilating to God and the Methodology of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* 1," *Vigiliae Christianae* 69 (2015): 157-85.

<sup>79</sup>"One might be tempted to ask whether he is really a Platonist philosopher dressing his ideas up with a veneer of Christian language, rather than a genuine Christian believer, but that is probably an anachronistic way of thinking since Clement is effectively forging an account of what it means to be a believer: what is required for salvation, what kind of being god is, how the second person of the Trinity relates to the first person, and what its role is *vis-à-vis* revelation, morality and speculative thought." Osborn, "Clement of Alexandria," 281.

<sup>80</sup>Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria*, 13.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.

In either of Osborn's conceptions of Clement's thought, it is Christian truth that supersedes all else, while providing the opportunity for Greek philosophy to be applied to that ultimate truth. Osborn rightly presents Clement as one who "always modified philosophical concepts on the basis of Scripture."<sup>82</sup>

### **Conclusion: Complex and Adamant Biblical Integrationist**

This last position on Clement's relationship to Greek philosophy is most convincing, and his writing in the *Stromata* is illustrative of it. While Clement certainly does make significant use of Greek philosophy in his works, he does so only in a supportive role to Christian theology. Understanding Clement's relationship to Greek philosophy plays an important role in understanding his educational philosophy and his use of the term "Gnostic" in the *Stromata* to describe the ideal Christian. His position that Greek philosophy was not evil, but was in fact an intellectual exercise that is helpful for right thinking and correct interpretation of Scripture would have a significant impact on the shape of his Gnostic figure, his understanding of the relationship between faith and knowledge, and his educational philosophy as a whole.

### **The *Stromata*: Clement's Primary Work**

The *Stromata* is a work of seven volumes<sup>83</sup> that touches on a wide range of topics that were important to Clement. Tollinton, writing in the early twentieth century, explains the disagreement among scholars as to the time, place, and circumstances of writing. Tollinton eventually settles on the position that "no theory fits all the facts," and

---

<sup>82</sup>Eric Osborn, "Clement of Alexandria: A Review of Research, 1958-1982," *The Second Century* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 228.

<sup>83</sup>While Book VIII could be a work that was produced by a later editor from work that was left by Clement, the combination of its disputed authorship, its lack of continuation of the discussion of Clement's Gnostic figure, its lack of contribution to the topic of this thesis lead the present author to leave it out of this study and focus on Books I-VII.



can only suppose “that Clement wrote the *Stromateis* in Alexandria and was cut short by the persecution under Severus in his task.”<sup>84</sup> Recent scholarship tends to agree with this assessment but is more certain of a date, placing it generally between AD 193 and AD 202. It is generally understood to be the third book of his supposed trilogy (*Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus*, the *Stromata*).<sup>85</sup>

Osborn describes the *Stromata* as “a written confirmation of Clement’s oral instruction [that] reproduces its substance rather than its form. It serves a mixed audience of pagan and Christian, unlearned and learned, Jews and heretics, with special instruction for those who are on the way to gnostic perfection.”<sup>86</sup> It is that last phrase, “gnostic perfection,” that will be a large component of this study. This reference is not directed toward the heretical Gnosticism present in Clement’s time, but a specific concept named and defined by Clement in the *Stromata*. Clement’s Gnostic figure will be examined below, after a discussion of how Clement frames the notion and task of philosophy in this work.

### **Clement’s Eclectic and Robust Philosophy**

The topic of philosophy plays a significant role in both the *Stromata* and in Clement’s life and work in general. Philosophy was a controversial point of discussion in the second-century church.<sup>87</sup> As noted above, Clement was well educated in Greek

---

<sup>84</sup>Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria*, 1:205-6.

<sup>85</sup>It must be after 193 because he mentions the death of Commodus and before 202 because in that year he fled Alexandria amid persecution and would have lost access to the library. This reasoning, as well as placing it third in the trilogy, is followed by a number of scholars: Osborne, “Clement of Alexandria,” 271; Ensor, “Clement of Alexandria and Penal Substitutionary Atonement,” 27; Lois Eveleth, “Clement of Alexandria and the *Logos*,” *American Theological Inquiry* 6, no. 2 (July 2013): 39; Sheridan, “The Influence of Non-Christian Ideas,” 185-86; Osborn, “Clement of Alexandria,” 221.

<sup>86</sup>Osborn, “Clement of Alexandria,” 221-22.

<sup>87</sup>Mondin, “Faith and Reason in Roman Catholic Thought,” 18. Mondin mentions Tatian and Tertullian as two significant second-century Christian writers who held the common view that philosophy

philosophy and was particularly fond of Plato, even after his conversion. He took it upon himself to try to reconcile the church to outside knowledge, specifically the philosophical tradition passed down from the Greeks.<sup>88</sup> He sought to defend “the achievements of Greek thought against the attacks of some members of the Christian community to which he belonged.”<sup>89</sup> In fact, Battista explains the radical nature of Clement’s defense of philosophy: “Not only does he not consider reason (philosophy) an enemy of faith, but he considers it a natural and providential ally of the latter: there is no incompatibility between the two, but they are supposed to exist in harmony and mutual integration.”<sup>90</sup> Clement held on to his knowledge of and facility with Greek philosophy as a teacher in the Christian church for the purpose of furthering biblical truth.

Philosophy loomed large in Clement’s interpretation of Scripture. Catherine Osborne went so far as to write, “For Clement, there is no true understanding of Scripture without philosophy.”<sup>91</sup> It might be more accurate to temper that statement a bit, replacing “true” with “full” or “complete” (because of the emphasis he places on faith, rather than knowledge, as the requisite for salvation), but the point stands that Clement understood philosophy to be a tremendous aid in good biblical interpretation.<sup>92</sup> Mondin explains,

---

is an “enemy of the Christian faith, or at the very least something absolutely worthless.”

<sup>88</sup>Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 9.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Mondin, “Faith and Reason in Roman Catholic Thought,” 19.

<sup>91</sup>Osborne, “Clement of Alexandria,” 273. After explaining how the Gnostic is able to distinguish truth from error in philosophical writings, Clement described how he understood knowledge of philosophy to help one interpret Scripture: “And how necessary is it for him who desires to be a partaker of the power of God, to treat of intellectual subjects by philosophizing! And how serviceable is it to distinguish expressions which are ambiguous, and which in the Testaments are used synonymously! For the Lord, at the time of His temptation, skillfully matched the devil by an ambiguous expression.” *Stromata* 1.9. Clement believed that training in philosophy, logic, and reason aided the Christian in interpreting Scripture.

<sup>92</sup>Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria*, 123. Osborn highlights this when he discusses Clement’s view of philosophy as “preparatory education for the truth.” It is helpful for the deepest understandings of Scripture, but not necessary for salvation. Additionally, Timothy argues that in

“Philosophy, according to Clement, is a gymnastics of the mind, which makes the mind capable of comprehending intelligible notions. . . . Philosophy helps one to understand, as much as is possible for a creature, the Divine Word.”<sup>93</sup> Far from being a detriment to biblical Christianity, philosophy is something that should be celebrated and used to benefit the Church.<sup>94</sup> Osborn argues that Clement wants to help Christians get past their immature and unfounded fear of philosophy.<sup>95</sup>

Most fundamentally, Clement believed and argued that philosophy was a good gift from God. Though some Christians were afraid to approach philosophy for fear of being misled, Clement sought to demonstrate how it is helpful and why it is worthy of study: “Those who assert that philosophy does not derive from God are in danger of saying that he is ignorant of each thing in particular and is not the cause of everything that is good; but, declares Clement, nothing that exists would have had a beginning without the will of God, and philosophy, if God so willed it, owes its origins to Him.”<sup>96</sup> For Clement philosophy is derived from God, and therefore it should not be ignored. Because Greek philosophy played such a central role in education in the second century, as noted above, it is also important for Clement’s philosophy of education.

---

Clement’s mind, philosophy “co-operates in the search for and in the discovery of truth. It does not always observe accuracy in matters of detail and falls short in that it does not know and worship the true God.” H. B. Timothy, *The Early Christian Apologists and Greek Philosophy: Exemplified by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Company, 1972), 65.

<sup>93</sup>Mondin, “Faith and Reason in Roman Catholic Thought,” 19.

<sup>94</sup> Chadwick notes some benefits Clement saw in the use of philosophy: “One must be on one’s guard against the possible infiltration of pagan ideas incompatible with a true faith, but there is no escape from philosophical arguments, not only to refute heresy and to defend the faith against outside attack, but even to expound central matters of Christian doctrine.” Chadwick, “Clement of Alexandria,” 169.

<sup>95</sup>Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria*, 117.

<sup>96</sup>Timothy, *The Early Christian Apologists and Greek Philosophy*, 61.

### **Clement's Gnostic Figure: Personification of the Perfect Christian**

In his *Stromata*, Clement attempts to wrestle an important word away from those who would seek to use it for heretical purposes. Gnosticism was a tempting threat for second-century Christians, and that temptation would have likely been even stronger in an educated city like Alexandria where Greek philosophy was prominent. Frend explains the temptation as strong because following the Gnostic heresy “did not oblige the believer to put away pagan philosophy and to study only the Bible.”<sup>97</sup> Clement’s approach, using Greek philosophy liberally under the authority of Scripture,<sup>98</sup> should have been an attractive alternative to Gnosticism. In that context, Clement makes an effort to rebrand this term to refer to the “ideal sage” who is “selective, collecting what is true, discarding the dross, in search of union with the source of all truth, who is God.”<sup>99</sup> Osborne goes on to explain that Clement used the word very intentionally, recognizing that *gnosis* (knowledge) was necessary for continued spiritual growth, but it is not the central component in salvation.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup>W. H. C. Frend, “The Gnostic Sects and the Roman Empire,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 5 (1954): 30.

<sup>98</sup>For example, Clement gives some explanation to his understanding of the relationship between philosophy and Scripture: “Since, therefore, truth is one (for falsehood has ten thousand by-paths); just as the Bacchantes tore asunder the limbs of Pentheus, so the sects both of barbarian and Hellenic philosophy have done with truth, and each vaunts as the whole truth the portion which has fallen to its lot. But all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light. . . . So, then, the barbarian and Hellenic philosophy has torn off a fragment of eternal truth not from the mythology of Dionysus, but from the theology of the ever-living Word.” *Stromata* 1.13. Christ (the Light), and perhaps the writing of the New Testament as a result of Christ (the ever-living Word), stands as is the authority over all other truth claims for Clement. The one truth (revealed in Scripture) is for Clement the measuring rod for all other truth claims. Throughout the *Stromata*, Clement cites Greek philosophy liberally, both to support truth claims and also to demonstrate folly, while citing Scripture in a consistently authoritative way. He wrote, “I do not think that philosophy directly declares the Word, although in many instances philosophy attempts and persuasively teaches us probably arguments.” *Stromata* 1.19.

<sup>99</sup>Osborne, “Clement of Alexandria,” 272. Backus writes, “He refers to the true Christian as the Gnostic. Here, the resemblance with heretical Gnosticism stops, however.” Backus, “Lay and Theological Reception of Clement,” 353.

<sup>100</sup>Osborne, “Clement of Alexandria,” 272. In fact, Hagg also states, “For Clement also teaches that there is no knowledge (*gnosis*) without faith (*pistis*).” Hagg, “Deification in Clement of Alexandria,”

In Clement's construction, the true Gnostic is a picture of the goal of the Christian life.<sup>101</sup> Ferguson describes Clement's Gnostic in this way:

He abstains from wrongdoing, opens himself to the Gospel, cooperates with God's will, does good for love's sake, and pursues the knowledge of God for its own sake. He is altogether free from passion. He is at once gay and serious. He is the true king; he is God's high priest. He is gentle and charming, approachable, clubbable, patient, warm in response, easy in his conscience, austere. All knowledge is his province.<sup>102</sup>

Clement intends to combat heretical Gnosticism by presenting what he understands a true Christian Gnostic to be. He seeks to rescue this good word from those who would imbue it with ideas and doctrines that are alien to Scripture. Clement's usage of *γνωστικός* and *γνώσις* will be examined at length in chapters three and four.

### **Clement's Philosophy of Education: Educational Discipleship**

While Clement's positions on philosophy and his explanation of the Christian Gnostic have been studied and written about at length, little attention has been given to unpacking Clement's philosophy of education. Judith Kovacs has written a helpful article that examines Clement's philosophy of education primarily in two of his works:

*Paedagogus* and the *Stromata*. She notes at the beginning of her article that an aspect of Clement's writing that has been neglected is, in fact, his thinking on pedagogy. She follows André Méhat in understanding Clement's Gnostic as "an idealized picture of Clement's teacher, Pantainos, as well as a reflection of Clement's own life."<sup>103</sup> While this view is certainly plausible and has merit, I believe a better understanding of Clement's

---

173. Faith is the prerequisite to true knowledge.

<sup>101</sup>John Ferguson, "The Achievement of Clement of Alexandria," *Religious Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 1976): 79.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher," 5. She cites André Méhat, *Étude sur les 'Stromates' de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966): 60-61.

Gnostic figure is Clement's hoped for result in the life of his students after receiving an education at the catechetical school of Alexandria where he taught.<sup>104</sup>

Clement clearly held education in high esteem. Marcus explains Clement's desire to correct any anti-intellectualism within the church as the direct result of his theological understanding of the world and everything in it as a good and useful gift from God.<sup>105</sup> If God created everything, and if education is the exploration of God's creation, then pursuing education is glorifying to God. As an educator, Clement certainly had a philosophy of education, and his Gnostic figure in the *Stromata* provides a picture of that from the end result of the educational process.

Eby and Arrowood provide some insight into Clement's educational philosophy as well, gleaned from his writings as a whole as well as from the practice of the catechetical school he led. They argue, "Clement's writings were distinctly pedagogical in tone. . . . No other educator was so successful in integrating Christian truth with the products of the humanistic spirit."<sup>106</sup> Clement was the epitome of a teacher; he seemed to view everything he did through the lens of teaching. They describe the curriculum of the catechetical school as resembling the typical Roman education of the day, which

included logic, physics, geometry, astronomy, and possibly anatomy. After these sciences came philosophy, especially the principles of ethics and metaphysics. All systems of Greek philosophy were expounded except the Epicurian, which was naturally excluded as being too sensual. These subjects were considered as a preparatory course for the full understanding of Christianity not merely as a theological science, but as a new principle of ethical life. . . . The course naturally culminated in the study of Christian theology and of Biblical exegesis.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup>This argument is central to the thesis of this study and will be articulated and supported from Clement's *Stromata* in chap. 3.

<sup>105</sup>Harcus and Heath, "The Speak to Us across the Centuries," 295.

<sup>106</sup>Eby and Arrowood, *The History and Philosophy of Education*, 612.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 611.

Clement's interest in education was not merely professional, but it was also spiritual. His goal in education was not merely academic attainment, but also spiritual development. He saw the two as necessarily intertwined. Laistner aptly summarizes the ideas that have been expounded in the previous pages:

*Gnosis* is not in opposition to *Pistis*; rather it consists in a fuller comprehension of what is already implicit in faith. . . . Clement's purpose as a teacher and author was, broadly speaking, twofold: to convert the Gnostics of his day whose preoccupation with philosophy and sometimes with religious ideas of paganism had led them into heterodoxy or heresy; and, at the same time, to convince those of his Christian contemporaries who rejected everything in pagan thought as dangerous to belief, that it was possible for an orthodox Christian to acquire a knowledge of dialectic and the best philosophical thought—Stoicism and Platonism as understood in his day—and also a proper understanding of the physical universe. So far from harming the faith of a Christian, this knowledge would help to deepen his understanding of the truth of Christianity.<sup>108</sup>

Education, for Clement, was primarily an exercise in devotion that was meant to lead to deeper knowledge of and intimacy with God.

### **Conclusion**

Clement has been widely examined over the last two centuries. Most of the study of his writings has focused on his relationship with Greek philosophy and his efforts to engage the pagan culture with the truth of the Christian gospel. The setting of second-century Alexandria was the perfect stage for an educator like Clement to emerge and become an influencer. In that context Middle Platonism, Stoicism, and Gnosticism held tremendous sway over the more educated classes. Clement was influenced by all these factors, but he paved his own path of intellectual engagement and educational leadership. While a few scholars have pursued elements of Clement's educational philosophy, there is still much work to be done in that area. Specifically, Clement's Gnostic figure and his discussions of the relationship between faith and knowledge in the

---

<sup>108</sup>Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture*, 59.

*Stromata* can help to clarify some of the most central principles of his educational philosophy. From this picture, one may deduce elements of Clement's pedagogical views and piece together an educational philosophy that drove his work in Alexandria.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE IDENTITY OF CLEMENT'S GNOSTIC FIGURE

Clement's *Stromata* has been the subject of significant study over the last two centuries. As described in the review of literature above, much of that study has concentrated on Clement's unique interaction with and use of Greek philosophy as an orthodox Christian writer in the second-century church. Of tangential interest within that field of study has been Clement's use of Greek words that are commonly translated to "Gnostic" to describe what scholars such as Catherine Osborne have called Clement's "Christian sage."<sup>1</sup> While there have been a few different theories as to the particular meaning of Clement's Gnostic figure, I agree with the interpretation of Osborne and the majority, and I seek to draw out even more specifics regarding Clement's intentions when using this term. This chapter will begin by exploring the usage of "Gnostic" and "Gnosticism" in the second century, including a brief look into some Gnostic Christian literature. Then Clement's usage of the term will be described and compared to other uses. The details of his redefinition of the term will be explained, and the final identity of the Gnostic figure will be presented.

#### **The Usefulness of Gnostic in the Second Century**

When approaching the term "Gnostic" in second-century documents, the problem of the lack of usage of the term γνῶστικὸς in primary Gnostic sources must be dealt with. Michael Williams, in *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* argues that the category of

---

<sup>1</sup>Catherine Osborne, "Clement of Alexandria," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 272.

“Gnosticism” as discussed in modern times is a mischaracterization of the ancient phenomenon. He argues that the category is an unhelpful one, and he makes the case for a new category with a new name: “biblical demiurgical traditions.”<sup>2</sup> Specifically, he charges that there are two primary deficiencies of the category of “Gnostic”: (1) there is no evidence of any person in a so-called Gnostic group who refers to himself or his group as Gnostic, and (2) the typological definition often applied to Gnosticism is troublesome, especially in light of the Nag Hammadi discoveries in 1945.<sup>3</sup> These two factors have led to a confusion of what documents, individuals, and traditions should legitimately be included in this category. If Williams is correct, making comparisons between Clement’s use of the term and others’ use would be fruitless, but there are good reasons to continue using the term “Gnostic” as we consider this historical category.

Though Williams makes a good case for a revisiting of the category with careful attention paid to the content it is given, his charges seem to be somewhat exaggerated. First, as to his point that we have no extant evidence of self-designated Gnostics, this is understandable given the circumstances. The early church’s victory over heretics of all stripes would naturally result in a loss of many Gnostic works, as the orthodox leaders would have been wary of the remaining documents’ influence over others which could result in the raising up of more opponents.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, as demonstrated by Norris, Christians were not the only ones calling these groups Gnostic in the second and third centuries. Plotinus, the Platonic philosopher, addressed those identified as Gnostics, and they appear to be the same or similar groups as those that

---

<sup>2</sup>Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 51.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 37. The destruction of documents deemed heretical in the early church is to be expected.

Irenaeus opposes in his writings.<sup>5</sup> This fact, combined with Wilson's own documentation that Gnostics are well attested to, even by that name, in the writings of heresiologists in the early church<sup>6</sup> gives the modern reader reason to believe that the term and category of "Gnostic" was in use, and not uncommon, in and around the second century AD.<sup>7</sup>

As to Williams' second charge, the typological definition of Gnosticism often used can be said to be problematic. Perhaps, however, this is the nature of the phenomenon of Gnosticism through the centuries rather than a fatal problem to the category itself. Each new teacher seems to add and subtract from the specifics of Gnostic belief, so the continuity would be general rather than specific. For example, Williams cites common "clichés" that the current typological definition has led to. First, "we are told that the main principle of gnostic hermeneutics is 'inverse exegesis,' the constant and systematic reversal of accepted interpretations of Scripture," and second, "we are told that gnostics were 'anticosmic' pessimists and completely isolated from the society they opposed."<sup>8</sup> While some scholars may have made these claims, they hardly represent the

---

<sup>5</sup>Richard A. Norris, Jr., "Irenaeus and Plotinus Answer the Gnostics: A Note on the Relation between Christian Thought and Platonism," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 13-14. The fact that Christian writers were not alone in designating these groups as Gnostics lends credence to the notion that the term was commonly used, and would have been well understood by second and third century readers.

<sup>6</sup>Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 33-43. Wilson specifically addresses Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius in detail, with mentions of Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origin. Each of the first three, Wilson notes, describe some heretical groups as referring to themselves as Gnostics, and they all apply the term to even more groups. This evidence appears to work against his thesis. This is not unique to Wilson. Others, such as Hans Jonas, provide similar evidence: "The struggle against Gnosticism as a danger to the true faith occupied a large space in early Christian literature, and the writings devoted to its refutation are by their discussion, by the summaries they give of gnostic teachings, and frequently also by extensive verbatim quotation from gnostic writings the most important secondary source of our knowledge." Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 37. He goes on to list a number of Early Church Fathers who contributed significantly to this body of texts, including Clement of Alexandria.

<sup>7</sup>Multiple early church heresiologists even note that some of these categories referred to themselves as Gnostics. This category was not unknown to the second century, though the definition may have been different, or at least less refined, than it is in modern writing.

<sup>8</sup>Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 52.

primary understanding we have of Gnosticism. Rather, a more helpful generalized typological definition is one that Wilson, himself, cites earlier: “The emphasis on *knowledge* as the means for the attainment of salvation, or even as the form of salvation itself, and the claim to the possession of this knowledge in one’s own articulate doctrine, are common features of the numerous sects in which the gnostic movement historically expressed itself.”<sup>9</sup> This general concept, making specific reference to the term “Gnostic,” appears to be a workable typological categorization.

### **Occurrences of Gnostic Language in Second- and Third-Century Literature**

In order to understand Clement’s unique use of Gnostic language, it will be helpful to survey how those words were used by other writers around his time. Along with the attestation of the heresiologists as well as those outside the church offered below, which shows evidence of the use of the term in the early centuries AD, this provides sufficient reason to continue using the category and the term as we attempt to describe this phenomenon in antiquity. With the understanding, presented above via Williams, of the occurrence of γνῶμη and γνωστικός in the second century, this examination of these terms as commonly used will focus primarily on other church fathers and their use of them.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 32.

<sup>10</sup>This will be sufficient to establish common usage patterns, for if the church fathers were using the term in a way that did not match the Gnostic groups, one would expect Clement to make that clear. Clement is clearly using the term over and against the better-known usage of it, and if there was some confusion about its usage, he would have needed to clarify. But Clement’s heavy usage of the word, in a distinctly and intentionally contradictory way to the way other church fathers typically used it, seems to indicate that the identity of the Gnostic groups was clear in the minds of, at least, the educated second-century church leaders. Hunt notes that most Gnostic groups were typically referred to by the names of their leaders, but they had certain common characteristics that set them apart from both orthodox Christianity and paganism, even if there were definite differences among the individual groups. Emily J. Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 17-18.

## γνώμη

Lampe begins his discussion of this word by noting that it has many meanings.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in surveying the references that he lists, it was used by writers in the early church in a number of ways, including referencing heretical doctrines in general, Gnostic doctrine in particular, and individuals who follow heresy in general or the Gnostic tradition in particular. For instance, Irenaeus uses this word in the preface to *Against Heresies*, as he seeks to refute Gnosticism, which he describes as, “craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than the truth itself.”<sup>12</sup> In the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter *ANF*), volume I, γνώμη is translated with the word, “doctrine,”<sup>13</sup> specifically the false doctrine of the Gnostics, who are his main opponents in this polemic. And again, in 1.11.1, Irenaeus uses γνώμη to refer to the “opinions of those heretics,” as translated in *ANF*. As Irenaeus sought to discuss and refute Gnosticism, γνώμη is the word he chose to use to refer to their beliefs. Similarly, Ignatius, in his Letter to the Philadelphians, uses γνώμη to refer to heresy. He warns his readers not to walk in the way of γνώμη, or they will be in disagreement with the gospel.<sup>14</sup> The prominent usage of this word in early Christian writings was to certain heretical ideas and doctrines, often those held by the people called Gnostics.

## γνωστικός

This is the primary word that is used to refer to individuals who follow the

---

<sup>11</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 317-18.

<sup>12</sup>Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Cox, vol. 1 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 1.Pref.2.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ignatius, *Letter to the Philadelphians*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Cox, vol. 1 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 3.

tradition known as Gnosticism throughout early Christian literature. It is also the word used by Clement in the *Stromata* to refer to his Gnostic figure. As such, this section will examine the uses of γνωστικός in texts other than Clement in order to compare with his use below. Lampe identifies two primary definitional categories for γνωστικός. In the first category it is used as an adjective, and in the second category it is used as a noun. Clement makes use of the word in both senses, so both will be examined in this section.

In the adjectival usage, there are two divisions. First, Lampe defines it as, “of or for knowing.”<sup>15</sup> It describes things as being cognitively knowable or capable of producing knowledge. For example, one way that *ANF* translates Clement’s use of the word in this way is “scientific knowledge.”<sup>16</sup> The second major adjectival category of γνωστικός, according to Lampe, is “applied to the spiritual life.”<sup>17</sup> Clement is the most referenced source in this category. Origen is also cited as using this word, and his usage is helpful for understanding its meaning and connotations in early Christian literature. Lampe refers to his usage as being opposed to another word that Origen uses in the same sentence: πρακτικός.<sup>18</sup> According to Liddell and Scott (hereafter LSJ), πρακτικός can be translated as “fit for” or “concerned with action, practical.”<sup>19</sup> Origen was commenting on John 8:19<sup>20</sup> and referencing Luke 21:1-4<sup>21</sup> to aid his explanation. It is in his reference to

---

<sup>15</sup>Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 320.

<sup>16</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Cox, vol. 2 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 6.11. English quotations from the *Stromata* will all come from *ANF*. Greek quotations will be taken from the Migne text.

<sup>17</sup>Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 320.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Sir Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), accessed June, 24 2016, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dpraktiko%2Fs>. Similarly, Lampe defines γνωστικός as “practical, active.” Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1127.

<sup>20</sup>John wrote, “They said to him therefore, ‘Where is your Father?’ Jesus answered, ‘You know

the story of the widow's offering at the Temple in Luke 21 that he uses *πρακτικός* and *γνωστικός*.<sup>22</sup> Both words describe the place into which the widow placed her coin. The offering box is called both *πρακτικός* and *γνωστικός*, or practical as well as the opposite of practical. Origen was describing the box and the act of the poor widow giving as not only a practical action, but a practical action with critical spiritual importance. While the rich gave more in quantity, it was a utilitarian function for them. It was merely a rote routine practiced in order to supposedly earn righteousness. But for the widow, the practical act of giving was a spiritual exercise in trusting God to provide for her. It is to describe this additional spiritual component that Origen used *γνωστικός*.

More importantly for the present research, *γνωστικός* was also used as a noun. Irenaeus used *γνωστικός* in this way in *Against Heresies*. Two instances of Irenaeus's usage will be examined here, as they are slightly different and demonstrate the range of meaning that was common. He wrote, “Ο μὲν γὰρ πρῶτος, ἀπὸ τῆς λεγομένης γνωστικῆς αἰρέσεως εἰς ἴδιον χαρακτηῖρα διδασκαλείου μεθαρμόσας Οὐαλεντίνος.”<sup>23</sup> Irenaeus addressed the “so-called Gnostic heresy” in this sentence, using *γνωστικός* to refer broadly to the beliefs of this heresy called Gnosticism. Individual people are not in view here, but instead, the worldview of the people called Gnostics. Later in the same section, Irenaeus used the same word in a different way. In this second instance, he refers to individuals who are falsely called Gnostics (“*ψευδωνύμως Γνωστικοῖς*”).<sup>24</sup> No longer is

---

neither me nor my Father. If you new me, you would know my Father also.”

<sup>21</sup>Luke wrote, “Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, ‘Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.’”

<sup>22</sup>Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Books 13-32*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 101.

<sup>23</sup>Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, in *Libros quinque adversus haereses* (Cambridge: Typic Academicis, 1857), 5.1. Italics are the most pertinent words, translated in the next sentence.

<sup>24</sup>Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 5.1.

the Gnostic worldview being referenced, but the people who hold (or in this case, who are falsely thought to hold) the Gnostic worldview. Irenaeus, in fact, recognized that the heretical Gnostic groups were using the term in a way that he did not approve, as he referred to them as falsely called Gnostics. He both acknowledges that these groups are indeed called Gnostic, but then expresses his disapproval of the use of γνωστικός in this way. It is clearly, then, not Irenaeus who has given them this name, but it is right to presume that he is using this term because others have used it already.

### **Conclusion**

In the early centuries of the church, it was known, at least among educated Christian leaders, who the Gnostics were. While there were certainly different sects of Gnostics, they were understood to be heretical groups who were related to Christianity in some way. Clement mentioned both Valentinus and Basilides, prominent second-century Gnostic leaders, in the *Stromata* as opponents.<sup>25</sup> Clement used γνωστικός not in isolation, but knowing very well what others meant by it and with the intentional goal of creating a new category.

### **Clement's Primary Uses of "Gnostic"**

While γνωστικός is used frequently throughout Clement's *Stromata*, this section will attempt to extract only those instances where the author intends to use the word in relation to its philosophical meaning. In total, words built on the root γνωσ occur 805 times in the *Stromata*. The instances where Clement clearly intends to use the word in simpler way (e.g., I know grass is green) are most prominent, and will not be examined as they are not in the purview of this study. Narrowing the uses of γνωσ-related words in

---

<sup>25</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 2.8 and 3.1, for example.



this way leaves two main uses: as a modifier and as a reference to his Gnostic figure. The vast majority of these occurrences are in books four through seven.

### **As a Modifier**

Clement used γνωστικός as a modifier of other words about seventy times in the *Stromata*. Though these uses are not centrally what this study is interested in, this prominent use of the term is helpful in understanding Clement's internal definition of his Gnostic figure. Often used alongside, or sometimes in place of, references to the Gnostic figure, these uses help demonstrate the fullness of what Clement envisions his Gnostic Christian to be.

**Adjective.** One way that Clement used γνωστικός was as an adjective. He modified a wide range of nouns with this word, such as life, love, training, and perfection. Examining his use of γνωστικός in this way sheds some light on his unique usage of the word, which in turn helps to explain his Gnostic figure and his educational philosophy.

The first instance of Clement's use of γνωστικός to be examined is a modification of "life." Clement wrote, "Does He not plainly then exhort us to follow the gnostic life, and enjoin us to seek the truth in word and deed?"<sup>26</sup> Immediately preceding this sentence, Clement quoted Matthew 16:26 ("For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?") and Matthew 6:31-33 ("Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.")

---

<sup>26</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 4.6; Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, defines this particular use in the realm of perfect, as applied to spiritual life (320).

Clement then describes this lifestyle of seeking not the things of this world but seeking after kingdom of God as following the Gnostic life. For Clement, the adjective γνωστικός had a decidedly Godward meaning.

Another noun that Clement modified with γνωστικός was “perfection.” He wrote, “Now the apostle, in contradistinction to gnostic perfection, calls the common faith *the foundation*, and sometimes *milk*. . . .”<sup>27</sup> Clement then quoted 1 Corinthians 3:1-3<sup>28</sup> to further explain what he meant. For Clement, Gnostic perfection is complete spiritual maturity in Christ, with the contrasting Christian state being “infants in Christ,” as Paul described in 1 Corinthians 3:1. So then Gnostic perfection, for Clement, should be the goal for a Christian. It is synonymous with perfect Christlikeness.

He goes on a few sentences later to assert that Paul’s description of Christian growth in 1 Corinthians 3:10<sup>29</sup> is the “gnostic superstructure on the foundation of faith in Christ Jesus.”<sup>30</sup> The result of discipleship and Christian maturity, for Clement, is a Gnostic superstructure that is built upon the foundation of the gospel and grown with “gnostic food.”<sup>31</sup> This string of uses of γνωστικός by Clement serves to provide a picture of his understanding of the word to carry connotations of full and Christlike perfection, or Christian maturity in its completeness.

A fourth noun that Clement modified with γνωστικός was “power.” In a

---

<sup>27</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 5.4; “αὐτίκα ὁ ἀπόστολος πρὸς ἀντιδιαστολήν γνωστικῆς τελειότητος τὴν κοινήν πίστιν πῆ μὲν θεμέλιον λέγει, πῆ δὲ γάλα. . . .”

<sup>28</sup>Paul wrote, “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?”

<sup>29</sup>Paul wrote, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it.”

<sup>30</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 5.4. “. . . . γνωστωτικά ἐποικοδομήματα τῆ κρηπίδι τῆς πίστεως τῆς εἰς Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν.”

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.4. “βρώματος γνωστικοῦ.”

section in which he attempted to describe his Gnostic figure's holiness and combat charges of atheism from non-Christians, Clement wrote, "Thus also it appears to me that there are three effects of gnostic power (γνωστικῆς δυνάμεως): the knowledge of things; second, the performance of whatever the Word suggests; and the third, the capability of delivering, in a way suitable to God, the secrets veiled in the truth."<sup>32</sup> Clement makes an interesting progression in describing the effects of Gnostic power. He begins with knowledge. His Gnostic figure possesses a knowledge that is somehow unique, which is not unlike the common usage of γνωστικός described in earlier sections above. His second effect, however, makes Clement's Gnostic stand apart from the common understanding and qualifies it as unique. In saying that Gnostic power results in "the performance of whatever the Word suggests," Clement is specifying that his concept of a Gnostic is one whose knowledge is of the God of the Bible, the knowledge is gained through the Bible, and that knowledge leads to a more holy life. And not only can Clement's Gnostic figure live in a more Christlike manner, but he is also able to help others know and follow the God of the Bible.

Finally, Clement repeatedly describes this whole work, commonly referred to as the *Stromata*, in this way: "ἡμῖν τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἀληθῆ φιλοσοφίαν γνωστικῶν ὑπομνημάτων Στρωματεύς."<sup>33</sup> Clement intended this work to be mainly about his unique understanding of true γνῶσις and his γνωστικός figure. It is certainly a collection of miscellanies, notes about a wide range of subjects, but the collective whole is about Clement's understanding of the true knowledge of God and what kind of person should be produced when that true knowledge is sought intensely for a lifetime.

---

<sup>32</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 7.1.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 6.1; translated in *ANF* as "Miscellany of gnostic notes, in accordance with the true philosophy." Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies*, 6.1.

**Adverb.** In addition to using γνωστικός as an adjective, Clement also used it as an adverb. While this usage is less frequent, it still provides insight into Clement's concept of γνωστικός. The way Clement used this word as an adverb demonstrates his notion of acting in full and true knowledge. As will be shown below, his ideal is that a Christian should live and act in a way that is always informed by a knowledge of God and of His ways and desires.

First, Clement made use of γνωστικός as an adverb in a section about purity. He wrote, "When, therefore, he who partakes gnostically of this holy quality [purity] devotes himself to contemplation, communing in purity with the divine, he enters more nearly into the state of impassible identity. . . ." <sup>34</sup> According to Lampe, this use signals that "which leads to heaven." <sup>35</sup> For Clement, living a pure life necessitated a prior knowledge of purity. One is to partake in purity Gnostically, having been taught the concept and having learned what a pure life is. A person does not stumble into living a pure life, but the Christian, having learned and been taught the purity of God, consciously chooses to pursue purity with his life.

Similarly, Clement later uses γνωστικός as an adverb to describe the apostles' mastering of negative emotions through the teachings of Jesus:

While the apostles, having most gnostically mastered [γνωστικώτερον κρατήσαντες], through the Lord's teaching, anger, and fear, and lust, were not liable even to such of the movements of feeling, as seem good, courage, zeal, joy, desire, through a steady condition of mind, not changing a whit; but ever continuing unvarying in a state of training after the resurrection of the Lord. <sup>36</sup>

It seems that, in Clement's view, the ideal for a Christian is mastery of the emotions through knowledge and training (perhaps revealing the influence that Stoicism had on his

---

<sup>34</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 4.6.

<sup>35</sup>Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 320.

<sup>36</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 6.9.

thinking). Again, as has been demonstrated above, it is knowledge and learning that must precede Christian growth, or knowledge and learning that causes or contributes significantly to Christian growth.

Lastly, Clement pairs γνωστικός with “sinlessly” to describe people who have the special favor of God: “To those, then, who have repented and not firmly believed, God grants their requests through their supplications. But to those who live sinlessly and gnostically, He gives, when they have but merely entertained the thought.”<sup>37</sup> These two ways of living, sinlessly and Gnostically, seem to hold a particularly important place in Clement’s understanding of the Christian life. Yes, one must live outwardly in such a way as to honor God and his commands, but one must also live a certain inward life. Holy living is tied necessarily to a knowledge of God, and the deeper that knowledge of God is, the more holy one is able to live.

Clement uses γνωστικός as a modifier throughout the *Stromata* in ways that shed light on his idea of the Gnostic figure. His use of the word is so unique and different from the common usage before or during his time that it is particularly helpful in trying to describe his educational philosophy. This concept denotes a Godward and Christlike life. It describes perfect Christian maturity, as well as the ability to help other Christians grow in their faith and life. It carries meanings for both one’s knowledge and understanding of God as well as implications for living a pure and holy life. Clement’s concept of γνωστικός is, in fact, quite broad in scope while still specific in intention. It can be applied to a wide range of other concepts, modifying them in the ways noted above. Below, Clement’s specific use of γνωστικός as a noun to refer directly to the Gnostic figure will be examined, but these modifying uses set the stage for a full picture of who

---

<sup>37</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 6.12. “Τοῖς μὲν οὖν ἐξ ἁμαρτιῶν μετανενοηκόσι καὶ μὴ στερεῶς πεπιστευκόσι διὰ τῶν δεήσεων παρέχει ὁ θεὸς τὰ αἰτήματα, τοῖς δ' ἀναμαρτήτως καὶ γνωστικῶς βιοῦσιν ἐννοησαμένοις μόνον δίδωσιν.”

Clement envisions this Gnostic figure to be.

### **Referencing His Gnostic Figure**

The most prominent use of the word γνωστικός in Clement's *Stromata* is to reference his Gnostic figure.<sup>38</sup> This occurs more than two hundred times throughout the work, and is heavily concentrated in Books 6 and 7 (with more than one hundred occurrences in Book 7 alone). With the understanding of Clement's uses as a modifier listed above, the following direct references to his Gnostic figure will solidify this figure's identity as not only the ideal Christian, but also as the ideally educated Christian, providing a basis for the extraction of some core elements of Clement's educational philosophy.

As shown above in chapter 2, Clement does in fact, as many scholars who have written about him attest, present his Gnostic figure as the ideal Christian. First and above all else, one must have faith in Christ in order to be a Gnostic.<sup>39</sup> For Clement, a nonbeliever cannot be a true Gnostic. For example, he writes, "The Gnostic, consequently, in virtue of being a lover of the one true God, is the really perfect man and friend of God, and is placed in the rank of son."<sup>40</sup> And also, "For the Gnostic alone will do holily, in accordance with reason all that has to be done, as he hath learned through the Lord's teaching, received through men."<sup>41</sup> In addition to describing the Gnostic in these ways, he also makes a clear distinction between the "common believer" and the Gnostic believer. The common believer may be able to abstain from evil things, Clement explains,

---

<sup>38</sup>In every instance cited in this section, "Gnostic," as used by Clement in each passage noted, is a transliteration of γνωστικός.

<sup>39</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 6.16. Clement writes, "The Gnostic recognises the Son of the Omnipotent, not by His flesh conceived in the womb, but by the Father's own power."

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.11.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.11.

but the Gnostic lives such that “his righteousness advances to activity in well-doing,” and “in his case perfection abides in the fixed habit of well-doing after the likeness of God.”<sup>42</sup>

Clement’s Gnostic figure is one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God and who has progressed to a unique state of maturity in Christ, beyond the common believer.

A basic element in this progression beyond common belief is education.

Clement’s Gnostic “must be erudite.”<sup>43</sup> He must be well educated, and he also must be broadly educated: “For to him [the Gnostic] knowledge (*gnosis*) is the principal thing.

Consequently, therefore, he applies to the subjects that are a training for knowledge, taking from each branch of study its contributions to the truth.”<sup>44</sup> He follows this

statement with a list of many subjects in which the true Gnostic is knowledgeable and conversant, with the purpose being the discovery of truth wherever it may be found.

Included in this discussion is Greek philosophy. He mentions that many Christians are afraid of it, but gives assurance that when studied in light of God’s truth, one may distinguish truth from falsehood wherever it may be, including pagan philosophy.

Elsewhere Clement wrote, “He who is conversant with all kinds of wisdom, will be pre-eminently a gnostic,” citing Proverbs 8:9-11 as his evidence from Scripture.<sup>45</sup> A broad and sound education is a hallmark of Clement’s Gnostic figure.

While a broad education is necessary for a Gnostic, specific knowledge of God is also mandatory: “Well, then, if the Lord is the truth, and wisdom, and power of God, as in truth He is, it is shown that the real Gnostic is he that knows Him, and His Father by Him.”<sup>46</sup> Beyond simple knowledge, citing Hosea 14:9, Clement explained, “the

---

<sup>42</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 6.7.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 6.8.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 6.9; also a similar list in 6.10.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 1.13.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 2.11.

Gnostic alone is able to understand and explain the things spoken by the Spirit obscurely.” There are levels of understanding concerning the knowledge of God, and the Gnostic has reached the highest possible level. Yet, the secret knowledge that is the hallmark of the commonly referred to Gnostic is, for Clement’s Gnostic, the revealed truth about God found in Scripture.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, not only does he possess a knowledge of God gained from God’s own revelation, but a true Gnostic values the knowledge of God above all else: “. . . to desire knowledge about God for any practical purpose, that this may be done, or that may not be done, is not proper for the Gnostic; but the knowledge itself suffices as the reason for contemplation.”<sup>48</sup> In fact, to make this point even more strongly, Clement posed a hypothetical dilemma in which his Gnostic figure is given a choice between salvation and knowledge of God. Though he gave the disclaimer that these two things are “entirely identical,” if his Gnostic had to choose, “he would without the least hesitation choose the knowledge of God.”<sup>49</sup> While knowledge in general is important for the Gnostic, a deep knowledge of God is both necessary and desirable above all else.

Along with knowledge of God, Clement asserted that discernment is also a marker of a true Gnostic. He wrote,

And he who brings everything to bear on a right life, procuring examples from the Greeks and barbarians, this man is an experienced searcher after truth, and in reality a man of much counsel, like the touch-stone (that is, the Lydian), which is believed to possess the power of distinguishing the spurious from the genuine gold. And our much-knowing gnostic can distinguish sophistry from philosophy, the art of decoration from gymnastics, cookery from physic, and rhetoric from dialectics, and

---

<sup>47</sup>Clement writes, “Our Gnostic then alone, having grown old in the Scriptures, and maintaining apostolic and ecclesiastic orthodoxy in doctrines, lives most correctly in accordance with the Gospel, and discovers the proofs, for which he may have made search (sent forth as he is by the Lord), from the law and the prophets. For the life of the Gnostic, in my view, is nothing but deeds and words corresponding to the tradition of the Lord.” Clement, *Stromata* 7.16.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 4.22.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



the other sects which are according to the barbarian philosophy, from the truth itself.<sup>50</sup>

Describing the difference in the use of pagan philosophy, Clement wrote, “For what those labouring in heresies use wickedly, the Gnostic will use rightly.”<sup>51</sup> The true Gnostic is able to distinguish truth from falsehood when assessing ideas presented by others. But not only is his discernment intellectual, it is also practical:

For he [the Gnostic] well knows what is and what is not to be done; being perfectly aware what things are really to be dreaded, and what not. Whence he bears intelligently what the Word intimates to him to be requisite and necessary; intelligently discriminating what is really safe (that is, good), from what appears so; and things to be dreaded from what seems so, such as death, disease, and poverty; which are rather so in opinion than in truth.<sup>52</sup>

Clement’s Gnostic figure is able to comprehend beyond merely simplistic observation, and he has a deep understanding of the ideas and circumstances around him.

Clement, however, does not merely describe his Gnostic figure in intellectual and cognitive terms. He also delves into the character of this ideal Christian. Clement calls his Gnostic “decorous in character” and explains that he holds “the many patriarchs who have lived rightly” as his models for life.<sup>53</sup> Clement also joins the Gnostic’s intellect to his character: “Therefore volition takes precedence of all; for the intellectual powers are ministers of the Will. . . . And in the Gnostic, Will, Judgment, and Exertion are identical. For if the determinations are the same, the opinions and judgments will be the same too; so that both his words, and life, and conduct, are comfortable to rule.”<sup>54</sup> For Clement, a well-trained intellect, taught in the truth, would shape the character of his

---

<sup>50</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 1.9.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.11.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.11.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.17.

Gnostic figure. Going further, Clement argued that motivation for holy living was important as well. He explained, “But only doing good out of love, and for the sake of its own excellence, is to be the Gnostic’s choice.”<sup>55</sup> In the Gnostic, through sound and broad education in the truth, a sense of responsibility to live morally will be developed that will motivate him to live a holy life. Righteousness is an important marker of Clement’s Gnostic figure.

In a number of places in the *Stromata*, Clement claimed perfection for the Gnostic.<sup>56</sup> Lest he be misunderstood to think that Gnostics rise above their humanity, he tempered this language several times. He wrote, “He is the Gnostic, who is after the image and likeness of God, who imitates God as far as possible, deficient in none of the things which contribute to the likeness as far as compatible, practicing self-restraint and endurance, living righteously, reigning over passions, bestowing of what he has as far as possible, and doing good both by word and deed.”<sup>57</sup> He is an imitator of God, as much as he could be. Clement understood that his Gnostic was still a fallen human being. He would still sin. In fact, in discussing the daily habits of his Gnostic, Clement mentioned that he would pray and “ask forgiveness of sins; and after, that he may sin no more.”<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 4.22. Clement went further in 7.11: “For some suffer from the love of glory, and others from fear of some other sharper punishment, and others for the sake of pleasures and delights after death, being children in faith; blessed indeed, but not yet become men in love to God, as the Gnostic is. For there are, as in the gymnastic contests, so also in the Church, crowns for men and for children. But love is to be chosen for itself, and for nothing else. Therefore in the Gnostic, along with knowledge, the perfection of fortitude is developed from the discipline of life, he having always studied to acquire mastery over the passions.”

<sup>56</sup>For example in 7.11 he wrote, “Certainly, then, the gnostic soul, adorned with perfect virtue, is the earthly image of the divine power,” and the titles of 4.21 and 6.12 are (respectively) “Description of the Perfect Man, or Gnostic” and “Human Nature Possesses an Adaptation For Perfection; The Gnostic Alone Attains It.”

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.19.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.12.

The Gnostic's perfection in Christian maturity was not an unrealistic hope of complete sinlessness, but a state of maturity that can be attained as fallen and sinful creatures.

Throughout the *Stromata*, Clement mentioned several other personal traits of his Gnostic figure having to do with such things as temperament and character. For example, he notes that the Gnostic is supremely patient, and he compares him to Job experiencing devastation with the permission of God, Jonah having a change of heart inside the whale, and Daniel being lowered into the lions' den.<sup>59</sup> Additionally he wrote, "The Gnostic, then, is very closely allied to God, being at once grave and cheerful in all things, – grave on account of the bent of his soul towards the Divinity, and cheerful on account of his consideration of the blessings of humanity which God hath given us."<sup>60</sup> Clement also described the Gnostic's prayer life as robust and going beyond even the typical devout Christian: "Now, if some assign definite hours for prayer – as, for example, the third, and sixth, and ninth – yet the Gnostic prays throughout his whole life, endeavoring by prayer to have fellowship with God."<sup>61</sup> Clement's description of his Gnostic figure went far beyond intellect and knowledge, and it covered a significant portion of what would make up the whole person.

Finally, Clement detailed the content of the Gnostic's hope. He wrote, "The Gnostic will never then have the chief end placed in life, but in being always happy and blessed, and a kingly friend of God."<sup>62</sup> It is not in this life that he hopes, but it is in God and His eternal promises. The Gnostic, though thoroughly educated in every subject and conversant in Greek philosophy, is preeminently a man of faith. Nevertheless, Clement did bring education to bear even in regard to the Gnostic's hope: "So then he [the

---

<sup>59</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 2.20.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 7.7.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 7.7.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 4.8.

Gnostic] undergoes toils, and trials, and afflictions, not as those among the philosophers who are endowed with manliness, in the hope of present troubles ceasing, and of sharing again in what is pleasant; but knowledge has inspired him with the firmest persuasion of receiving the hopes of the future.”<sup>63</sup> Clement’s Gnostic is one in whom true knowledge creates piety and Christian hope.

### **Conclusion: Clement’s Redefining of the Word “Gnostic”**

Clement’s use of Gnostic is both related to its better-known usage by others in the second century and, at the same time, unique in itself. While the idea of Gnosticism or a Gnostic was often understood to be less concerned with the particular content of knowledge and more concerned with the belief that there is some secret knowledge to be gained, Clement’s notion specifically included orthodox Christian doctrine as the content of the knowledge to be gained. In contrast to heretical Gnosticism’s vagueness, Clement’s Christian Gnostic is focused on knowing the things of God that come not through secret revelations, but from written Scripture. Being influenced by Middle Platonism as well as by Christians who practiced an allegorical reading of Scripture, Clement saw the written revelation as something that could be read and understood at a basic level by anyone, thus making salvation possible, but also as a document that had deeper meanings that could only be unlocked by those who took time to train their minds using the best that this world has to offer. This involved a thorough education in all disciplines, including the hotly contested subject of Greek philosophy.

It is clear throughout his *Stromata* that Clement believed his Gnostic ideal to be very important in the church. A person such as he described would be a role model, a leader, a teacher, and a credible witness to the wider world, including the educated classes

---

<sup>63</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 7.11.

in the Roman Empire. In taking so much time and effort to describe this ideal Christian, Clement demonstrated that it was his desire that Christian Gnostics be raised up in the church. Being fluent in Greek philosophy himself, he saw a need for the church, living in a world dominated by pagan ideas and lifestyles, to become all things to all people. He understood a contextual missiology that would take the gospel to the ears of people who might otherwise never listen. In all of this, Clement was writing as an educator. He was a teacher, and he was passionate about education. Clement's Gnostic figure stands as the ideal Christian who has been educated in an ideal way, including instruction in a wide range of subjects, in biblical truth, and in morality and holy living.

As this chapter has shown, the Gnostic figure is central to Clement's purposes in the *Stromata*. His repeated use of γνῶστικός to refer to the ideal Christian and to modify other nouns and verbs when discussing his ideal Christian demonstrates this truth. The term and the idea was a known concept in Clement's time, but he intentionally sought to redefine it. The result was a new category of Christian, a new ideal that declared to the church that Christianity did not require abstention from outside thought. In fact, Clement argued that a Christian would be a better follower of Christ if he did study pagan philosophy and all the other subjects, maintaining a distinctly biblical worldview in the process.

## CHAPTER 4

### CLEMENT'S CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH IN THE *STROMATA*

As can be deduced from chapter 3 and his purposeful redefining of γνωστικός, Clement chose his words carefully and intentionally in the *Stromata*. Two other concepts that help to detail Clement's philosophy of education are knowledge and faith. In addition to the way Clement uses these words in relation to his Gnostic figure, the way that he uses these words in relation to each other is also an important clue to his educational philosophy. This chapter will focus on how Clement uses these two words and how his usage helps explain his views concerning education.

#### **Clement's Concept of Knowledge in *The Stromata***

For Clement, knowledge was a significant part of his Christian faith. It seems that he was not pleased with the fact that knowledge (in particular, γνώσις) had come to mean something in contradiction to orthodox Christianity, and perhaps his repeated use of the concept in several different ways throughout the *Stromata* was an attempt to rescue it from the heretical abyss and reestablish it as a part of biblical Christianity.

In doing this, Clement used three primary words for the concept of knowledge: γνώσις, ἐπιστήμη, and μάθησις. The most used word was γνώσις, followed by ἐπιστήμη and then μάθησις. Lampe defines γνώσις simply as knowledge, followed by a lengthy discussion of the particulars of usage in the Patristics.<sup>1</sup> He defines ἐπιστήμη as

---

<sup>1</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 318.

“knowledge” or “discipline,”<sup>2</sup> and μάθησις as “act of learning, acquisition of knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> Following are five significant ways that Clement used the concept of knowledge in the *Stromata*.

### **Knowledge Is a Gift from God**

Clement understood knowledge as a gift from God, and he expressed this in several places in the *Stromata*. In one place he wrote, “For they who seek Him after the true search, praising the Lord, shall be filled with the gift that comes from God, that is, knowledge [γνῶσις].”<sup>4</sup> Knowledge is a gift that God bestows upon those who seek Him. As such, knowledge, in and of itself, is good: “Knowledge [γνῶσις], then, desirable as it is for its own sake, is the most perfect good; and consequently the things which follow by means of it are good.”<sup>5</sup> Clement’s most basic understanding of knowledge was that it is a good gift from a loving God to His people.

### **Knowledge Can Be Used for Good or Evil**

While he deemed knowledge to be a gift from God, he also acknowledged that, like many of God’s gifts, it could be used for good or for evil. Just as stones can be used

---

<sup>2</sup>Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* 534-35. The examples of ἐπιστήμη used as “knowledge” in Lampe is far more extensive than the examples of “discipline.” While Lampe includes no examples of Clement using ἐπιστήμη to mean discipline, he listed more than ten examples of him using it in the sense of “knowledge.” *ANF* follows suit and typically translates it as “knowledge.” Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Cox, vol. 2 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 820. While slightly different from the other two words, this word still clearly communicates knowledge, and it is evident in the way that Clement uses it. This word is used far less than either γνῶσις or ἐπιστήμη, and the present study only includes one usage (referenced twice). Nonetheless, it is an important component to understanding Clement’s concept of knowledge.

<sup>4</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Cox, vol. 2 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 5.1.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.12.

to build helpful structures or to injure and kill, knowledge has the potential for good use or evil use by fallen humans. As an example, Clement explained, “But the knowledge [γνῶσις] of those who think themselves wise, whether the barbarian sects or the philosophers among the Greeks, according to the apostle, ‘puffeth up.’”<sup>6</sup> Such a use of knowledge leads to pride and arrogance, which can then lead to many other outward sins. Continuing, Clement explained a better use of knowledge: “But that knowledge [γνῶσις], which is the scientific demonstration of what is delivered according to the true philosophy, is founded on faith.”<sup>7</sup> Clement went on in this section to describe the good done by his Gnostic figure whose knowledge comes from, and is founded upon, faith. Elsewhere, he described the “unholy knowledge (*gnosis*) of those falsely called [Gnostics].”<sup>8</sup> Knowledge, while originating as a good gift from God, is not inherently good in a fallen world. So he understood God’s gift of knowledge as able to be used for either good or evil by humanity.

### **Knowledge Is an Important Part of Christian Salvation**

Clement clearly parted ways with the heretical Gnostic understanding of salvation by holding up biblical faith as the central means of salvation. His concept of knowledge was not a secret, salvific knowledge, but he was clear that biblical faith did have a definite object, and this object must be known. Clement explained that salvation must begin with instruction [διδασκαλία], and it continues with love being perfected through knowledge [γνωστικῶς].<sup>9</sup> There is a certain knowledge that must precede faith.

---

<sup>6</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 2.11.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 2.11.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 7.7. “Gnosis” in parentheses was provided by the translator, while “Gnostics” in brackets simply fills in the context of Clement’s antecedent in this statement. This phrasing, “those falsely called,” is strikingly similar to Irenaeus’s phrasing noted above in chapter three.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 4.7. Clement writes, “The first step to salvation is the instruction [διδασκαλία]



As noted above, Clement believed that knowledge of God and salvation are “entirely identical.”<sup>10</sup> For him, to truly know God is to be saved. He wrote, “To know God is, then, the first step of faith.”<sup>11</sup> Understanding his position requires more nuance, however, and that will be provided below when his concept of faith is examined. Therefore, in this way, knowledge was an important part of salvation for Clement, but not the only, or even most central, facet. One is not saved by knowledge alone, as other Gnostics may claim.

### **Knowledge Is Crucial to Christian Formation**

Clement’s emphasis on knowledge focused heavily on the discipleship growth of Christians rather than the process of initial salvation. Though one could be saved without any significant level of education, he understood right education (the accumulation of knowledge and the development of thinking skills) as the best path to Christian formation. For example, he explained that, “in the Gnostic, along with knowledge [γνῶσις], the perfection of fortitude is developed from the discipline of life, he having always studied to acquire mastery over the passions.”<sup>12</sup> Studying and the pursuit of knowledge, for the Christian, leads to a more disciplined, self-controlled life. Shortly after that, Clement went on to explain that “self-control . . . perfected through knowledge [γνῶσις]”<sup>13</sup> is a key component of the mature Christian Gnostic. Christian formation, or progress in one’s maturity in Christ, is aided by the pursuit of knowledge.

---

accompanied with fear, in consequence of which we abstain from what is wrong; and the second is hope, by reason of which we desire the best things; but love, as is fitting, perfects, by training now according to knowledge [γνώστικῶς].”

<sup>10</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 4.22.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 7.2. “To know” in this sentence is translated from οἶδα. The sentence continues, “then, through confidence in the teaching of the Saviour, to consider the doing of wrong in any way as not suitable to the knowledge [ἐπίγνωσις] of God.”

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 7.11.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

He summarized his position well when he wrote, “knowledge [γνῶσις] is the purification of the leading faculty of the soul, and is a good activity.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Knowledge Is Necessary for Maximum Christian Progress**

Finally, Clement’s Gnostic figure gives the reader a glimpse into Clement’s conception of Christian maturity. In order to truly become a mature Christian, Clement believed that dedicated study is necessary and that this study must be applied consistently to one’s understanding of God, the Scriptures, and God’s creation. This view is evidenced throughout the *Stromata* as Clement describes his Gnostic figure. One place where he succinctly expresses this idea is when, discussing the truth revealed by God in Scripture, he wrote, “...in which knowledge [ἐπιστήμη; knowledge of the voice of God, specifically in Scripture] those who have merely tasted the Scriptures are believers; while those who, having advanced further, and become correct expounders of the truth, are Gnostics [γνωστικός].”<sup>15</sup> According to Clement, there is a simple knowledge of God that he equates with salvation. These are believers, but believers who have not progressed to what he believes is a more mature Christianity. There is a deeper knowledge that leads to maturity, and this is characteristic of his Gnostic figure.

### **Conclusion**

Clement repeatedly returned to the topic of knowledge throughout his *Stromata*. Knowledge played a significant part in his understanding of life, and particularly of the Christian life. Knowledge and learning were key components in his concept of Christian growth and maturity, and they were necessary for one to achieve the status of his Gnostic figure. Next, this study will turn to his concept of faith in the

---

<sup>14</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 4.6.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 7.16.

*Stromata*. Both concepts are indispensable for understanding Clement’s philosophy of education, and examining how they interact with one another provides a glimpse into Clement’s thinking.

### **Clement’s Concept of Faith in the *Stromata***

As described in chapter 3, Clement repeatedly described his Gnostic figure as a man of deep faith in God and in the gospel. In fact, faith forms the foundation for the development of his Gnostic. Like his concept of knowledge, faith was also a necessary component of a mature Christian; in fact, it was a necessary component of a Christian at any stage. Clement defined faith as the “voluntary assent of the soul,”<sup>16</sup> understanding it to be of divine origin but exercised in the human will. Lampe defined πίστις as, “trust, belief, faith.”<sup>17</sup> This section will examine how Clement further defines faith, and three words will be included based on his usage. In addition to πίστις (faith), Clement often uses two other words alongside, and in complementary conjunction with, πίστις. These words are δικαιοσύνη (righteousness) and θεοσέβεια (godliness or piety).<sup>18</sup> Lampe defines δικαιοσύνη as justice or righteousness,<sup>19</sup> with *ANF* typically translating it as

---

<sup>16</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 5.8: “Ἡδὴ δὲ ἡ πίστις εἰ καὶ ἐκούσιος τῆς ψυχῆς συγκατάθεσις.” Elsewhere he described it similarly as, “a voluntary preconception, the assent of piety.” “πρόληψις ἐκούσιός ἐστι, θεοσεβείας συγκατάθεσις” (2.2). And further, in a similar but slightly different way, “Faith is the voluntary supposition and anticipation of pre-comprehension” (“καὶ ἡ μὲν πίστις ὑπόληψις ἐκούσιος καὶ πρόληψις εὐγνώμονος πρὸ καταλήψεως, προσδοκία δὲ δόξα μέλλοντος”) (2.6).

<sup>17</sup>Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* 1083. Lampe provides a lengthy discussion of πίστις that stretches for about five pages. Clement’s use of πίστις in the *Stromata* was almost entirely in reference to saving faith in the God of the Bible.

<sup>18</sup>“Accordingly, before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness [δικαιοσύνη]. And now it becomes conducive to piety [θεοσέβεια]; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith [πίστις] through demonstration.” Clement, *Stromata* 1.5. Clement held these three words close together in concept, and interrelated in regard to knowledge (philosophy standing in for knowledge in this passage). Further, Clement describes faith [πίστις] as, “a voluntary preconception, the assent of piety [θεοσέβεια]” (2.2). And lastly, “These things show that that wisdom can be acquired through instruction, to which Abraham attained, passing from the contemplation of heavenly things to the faith [πίστις] and righteousness [δικαιοσύνη] which are according to God” (1.5).

<sup>19</sup>Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 369.

righteousness.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Lampe defines θεοσέβεια as having connotations of goodness or living in a way that accords with God’s will. He includes “worship of God,” “religion, consisting of doctrine and practice,” and “of practical piety and right conduct.”<sup>21</sup> The *ANF* text<sup>22</sup> most frequently translates this word as piety, and the two (δικαιοσύνη and θεοσέβεια) are often used in close and complementary relation to πίστις by Clement in the *Stromata*, helping to illuminate his particular usage of πίστις.

### **Faith As the Ground of Salvation**

While the typical understanding of Gnosticism was that salvation came through a secret knowledge, Clement argued that his Gnostic figure was formed on the basis of salvation by faith. In fact, in discussing philosophy and learning, he explained that philosophy could not be given the status of a necessary antecedent to salvation, “Since almost all of us, without training in arts and sciences, and the Hellenic philosophy, and some even without learning at all, through the influence of a philosophy divine and barbarous and by power, have through faith [πίστις] received the word concerning God.”<sup>23</sup> Education is not, in Clement’s mind, necessary for salvation since it is by faith alone.<sup>24</sup> This is the first and most important aspect of Clement’s understanding of faith. Since it is the foundation of salvation, it is the beginning of the path toward Clement’s Gnostic. While simple faith will not enable one to achieve Gnostic status, it is a necessary first condition of his Gnostic figure.

---

<sup>20</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies*.

<sup>21</sup>Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 635-36.

<sup>22</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies*.

<sup>23</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 1.20.

<sup>24</sup>Again, Clement states it clearly toward the end of the *Stromata*: “since the just obtain access to the Father and to the Son by faith” (7.28). His adherence to salvation by faith alone was not deterred by his great respect for education and philosophy.

## **Informed Faith Is Preferred Over Uninformed Faith**

While faith is all that is needed for salvation, Clement wrote strongly in favor of education for Christians. While faith in Christ, or simple knowledge of God, provides one salvation and forgiveness of sins, Clement's ideal was that Christians pursue knowledge in order to build their faith. His Gnostic figure, the ideal Christian, is well-versed in a broad range of disciplines.<sup>25</sup> And he argues that this broad education aids the Gnostic Christian in distinguishing truth from error. Faith is necessary, as was shown above, but a better faith results when it becomes informed faith.

## **Faith Is the Foundation of True Knowledge**

Not only is faith primary in salvation, but it is also primary in chronology. While Clement believes that one may learn and gain a significant amount of knowledge as a nonbeliever, there is a quality or depth of knowledge that only comes after, and as a result of, faith. He wrote, "so it is the natural prerogative of him who has received faith to apprehend knowledge, if he desires, on 'the foundation' laid, to work, and build up 'gold, silver, precious stones.'"<sup>26</sup> Faith begins the ability to comprehend new things and to have insights not previously possible. Elsewhere in the *Stromata* he wrote, "And, in truth, faith is discovered, by us, to be the first movement towards salvation; after which fear, and hope, and repentance, advancing in company with temperance and patience, lead us to

---

<sup>25</sup>Clement writes, "For to him knowledge (*gnosis*) is the principle thing. Consequently, therefore, he applies to the subjects that are a training for knowledge, taking from each branch of study its contribution to the truth. Prosecuting, then, the proportion of harmonies in music; and in arithmetic noting the increasing and decreasing of numbers, and their relations to one another, and how the most of things fall under some proportion of numbers; studying geometry, which is abstract essence, he perceives a continuous distance, and an immutable essence which is different from these bodies. And by astronomy, again, raised from the earth in his mind, he is elevated along with heaven, and will revolve with its revolution; studying ever divine things, and their harmony with each other; from which Abraham starting, ascended to the knowledge of Him who created them. Further, the Gnostic will avail himself of dialectics, fixing on the distinction of genera into species, and will master the distinction of existences, till he come to what are primary and simple." Clement, *Stromata* 6.10.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.27.

love and knowledge.”<sup>27</sup> In Clement’s understanding, faith is the foundation of true knowledge and knowledge is the natural outcome of practiced faith.

## **Conclusion**

The most important consideration in Clement’s understanding of faith in the *Stromata* is that he holds strongly to salvation by faith, with only the basic knowledge of God and the gospel necessary as the object of that faith. Beyond that, he values Christian faith that is informed by a broad and thorough education, but he is clear that education is not necessary for salvation. Clement very frequently discusses faith (πίστις), piety (θεοσέβεια), and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) in conjunction with knowledge (γνώσις, ἐπιστήμη, or μάθησις). In the next section, these two concepts will be examined as they appear together in the text, and their relationship will be defined.

### **The Relationship between Knowledge and Faith**

While each of these word groups are important when examined in isolation, it is even more enlightening to see the relationship between these concepts in Clement’s writing. Individually, these concepts are both central to his description of his Gnostic figure. Together, they shed far more light on Clement’s understanding of Christianity, education, and discipleship. This section will introduce seven statements that can be deduced from the *Stromata* regarding Clement’s understanding of the relationship between knowledge and faith.

### **Faith and Knowledge Are Not Mutually Exclusive**

To open his *Stromata*, Clement began in Book 1, Chapter 1 by making it clear that faith and knowledge are not mutually exclusive. His aim in this chapter was to

---

<sup>27</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 2.6.

defend the usefulness of the written word versus only speaking when it comes to education. An important note to make here for the larger purposes of this study is that Clement started this grand work with a section about what is best for education, and also included in that argument the necessity of faith. He wrote the *Stromata* as an educator, and specifically as a Christian educator, with an eye toward the best educational practices. Within that argument, he included both faith and knowledge (or philosophy, φιλοσοφία, as he also uses to refer to learning in general) as elements that do not war against each other, but that have a complementary relationship, which will be examined in this section. This, Clement noted, is in contradiction to the ideas of Basilides and Valentinus, well known figures in the heretical Gnostic tradition.<sup>28</sup> They describe faith as distinct from knowledge, with little overlap or complement, and knowledge as primary in salvation.

A few chapters later, Clement wrote, “But as we say that a man can be a believer without learning, so also we assert that it is impossible for a man without learning to comprehend the things which are declared in the faith. But to adopt what is well said, and not to adopt the reverse, is caused not simply by faith, but by faith [πίστις] combined with knowledge [μάθησις].”<sup>29</sup> Later in the *Stromata*, Clement referenced those Christians who are afraid of philosophy and learning, as if it will damage their faith. Against this fear, he argued that knowledge would actually complement their faith.<sup>30</sup> He did not argue against either faith or knowledge, but championed both, and the relationship between the two is both simple and complex.

---

<sup>28</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 2.3.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 1.6. He also wrote, “Now neither is knowledge without faith, not faith without knowledge” (5.1).

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 6.10; He used an analogy, which will be further expounded below, comparing educated Christians to money-changers, arguing that education enables the Christian to rightly identify falsehood.

## **Knowledge of God Comes Only through Faith**

For Clement, knowledge of God is the most important knowledge one can gain. In fact, as noted above, he equated knowledge of God and salvation.<sup>31</sup> He also wrote, “He who believeth then the divine Scriptures with sure judgment, receives in the voice of God, who bestowed the Scripture, a demonstration that cannot be impugned. Faith [πίστις], then, is not established by demonstration.” Knowledge of God is by faith rather than by demonstration, or scientific knowledge. In fact, Clement later wrote, “And if any one of the Greeks, passing over the preliminary training of the Hellenic philosophy, proceeds directly to the true teaching, he distances others, though an unlettered man, by choosing the compendious process of salvation by faith [πίστις] to perfection.”<sup>32</sup> One born into paganism would do well, in Clement’s estimation, to begin not with learning philosophy and other academic disciplines, but to move straight to the “true teaching,” or “τὴν ἀληθῆ διδασκαλίαν,”<sup>33</sup> that leads to salvation, also called knowledge of God, by faith. That most important knowledge, the knowledge that leads to salvation, comes through faith. In a similar way, Clement described the majority of the Jewish people as those “who have indeed the oracles of God, but have not faith [πίστις], and the step which, resting on the truth, conveys to the Father by the Son.”<sup>34</sup> It is not the possession of the source of knowledge that leads to knowledge of God, but faith.

## **Faith and Knowledge Compared to the Son and the Father**

At the beginning of Book 5, Clement expounded upon faith and knowledge by

---

<sup>31</sup>When Clement discusses the knowledge of God, he seems to be echoing passages like John 14:7 (Jesus speaking), “If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>32</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 7.2.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 7.18.



comparing them to the Son and the Father. He begins by writing, “Now neither is knowledge [γνῶσις] without faith [πίστις], nor faith without knowledge. Nor is the Father without the Son; for the Son is with the Father.”<sup>35</sup> Drawing upon an orthodox understanding of the Trinity, Clement expressed the relationship between faith and knowledge by analogy.<sup>36</sup> Faith and knowledge are united to each other in the salvation and life of a Christian as the Son is united to the Father. He went on to explain the relationship further: “And the Son is the true teacher respecting the Father; and that we may believe [πιστεύω] in the Son, we must know [προγιγνώσκω] the Father, with whom also is the Son.” Clement appears to be echoing 1 John 5:20, “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” The Christian has faith in the Son, who teaches about the Father that He may be known. In this way, one’s faith is inextricably linked to one’s knowledge of God as the Father is to the Son.

### **Knowledge and Faith Cooperate for Understanding Scripture**

Not only are faith and knowledge likened to the Son and the Father, but this faith and knowledge work together to rightly comprehend the Old Testament. Explaining that Paul’s writing depended on what he knew of the Old Testament, Clement argues, “For faith [πίστις] in Christ and the knowledge [γνῶσις] of the Gospel are the explanation and fulfillment of the law.”<sup>37</sup> The faith and knowledge of the Christian work together to enable a full and complete understanding of the Old Testament. This is important for

---

<sup>35</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 5.1.

<sup>36</sup>Though he does not quote any biblical passages here, this description sound very much like John 14:11 (Jesus speaking), “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

<sup>37</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 4.21.

understanding Clement because it grounds his notion of faith and the knowledge of God specifically in Jesus. His faith has a definite object, and there is no other object of faith that is acceptable for the Gnostic.

Additionally, Clement discusses the “many reasons . . . the Scriptures hid the sense”<sup>38</sup> in certain types of passages, such as parables. He reasons, “Wherefore the whole mysteries of the prophecies are veiled in the parables—preserved for chosen men, selected to knowledge [γνῶσις] in consequence of their faith [πίστις]; for the style of the Scriptures is parabolic.”<sup>39</sup> For Clement, salvific faith led to God-enabled knowledge to understand the Scriptures correctly.<sup>40</sup> Just as believers are elected to salvation through the gift of faith, they are also elected to the knowledge of God that is the result of faith. Faith and knowledge are partners in the comprehension of God’s eternal truths.

### **Knowledge Guards Faith**

One important aid that knowledge is to faith, in Clement’s mind, is that of a guard against outside assaults. He wrote about some believers who think education is not helpful to their Christian life, but, “They demand bare faith alone, as if they wished, without bestowing any care on the vine, straightway to gather clusters from the first.”<sup>41</sup> For Clement, knowledge is the food that helps faith grow. But continuing in this passage, Clement described what knowledge helps faith grow into: “I call him truly learned who brings everything to bear on the truth; so that, from geometry, and music, and grammar,

---

<sup>38</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 5.15.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. Clement is speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit, as he referenced “the things declared for salvation by the Holy Spirit” immediately preceding that quote. His understanding seems to be that faith and regeneration spark a new and Holy Spirit-inspired ability to see God’s truth more fully in His Word. Not only are believers chosen to salvation, but they are also chosen to knowledge of the truth, which comes by God’s divine revelation.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 1.9.

and philosophy itself, culling what is useful, he guards the faith against assault.”<sup>42</sup> He argues that to add knowledge to faith is to add protection for faith. Knowledge built on the sure foundation of faith enables the believer to “distinguish . . . the other sects which are according to the barbarian philosophy, from the truth itself.”<sup>43</sup> Clement wanted believers to develop a discerning mind that would not be deceived by the world, and he reasoned that this is accomplished by adding sound knowledge to biblical faith.

In two places in the *Stromata*, Clement used the analogy of the money-changers.<sup>44</sup> He likened the educated Christian, or his Gnostic figure, to professional money-changers who are able to distinguish between real and counterfeit coins. The man who brings the coin to the money-changer cannot determine the authenticity, but the money-changer can because he has studied to be able to distinguish between what is true and what is false. So too, the Gnostic Christian will be able to guard against deceptive falsehoods that may draw the weak away from the faith, and thereby remain steadfast. Clement believed that this was the ideal for believers.

### **Knowledge and Faith Advance Together**

Finally, knowledge and faith grow and are sustained together. In describing the Gnostic’s life, Clement wrote, “Through the power of impulse thence derived he devotes his energies in every way to learning, doing all those things by means of which he shall be able to acquire the knowledge of what he desires. And desire blended with inquiry

---

<sup>42</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 1.9.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Clement writes, “With a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, whatever can be seen and heard is to be apprehended, by the faith and understanding of the disciples of the Lord, who speak, hear, and act spiritually. For there is genuine coin, and other that is spurious; which no less deceives unprofessionals that it does not the money-changers; who know through having learned how to separate and distinguish what has a false stamp from what is genuine. So the money-changer only says to the unprofessional man that the coin is counterfeit. But the reason why, only the banker’s apprentice, and he that is trained to this department, learns.” Ibid., 2.4. See also 6.10.

arises as faith advances.”<sup>45</sup> Knowledge and faith have a relationship within a believer’s life that propel each other forward. As knowledge is increased, faith also grows, and as faith grows, knowledge also is added to.

Further, Clement argues that true knowledge produces intelligent faith and faith produces the best knowledge:

The demonstration [Clement’s often-used word for scientific observation and/or proof resulting in general knowledge], however, which rests on opinion is human, and is the result of rhetorical arguments or dialectic syllogisms. For the highest demonstration, to which we have alluded, produces intelligent faith [πίστις] by the adducing and opening up of the Scriptures to the souls of those who desire to learn; the result of which is knowledge [γνῶσις].<sup>46</sup>

Clement understands Christian growth to be an interchange of faith and knowledge: faith leading to a new kind of divine knowledge of God and knowledge leading to a surer and more intelligent faith.

### **Conclusion**

Clement’s understanding of faith and knowledge began with the simple concept of the basic knowledge of God leading to faith in Christ. This knowledge is accessible to all, regardless of educational level or philosophical savvy. But there is a deeper and more complex relationship between faith and knowledge that comes with time, effort, and learning. Faith and knowledge were not, for Clement, different paths to salvation, and neither were they competing elements in the Christian life. He counted them both good and necessary, complementing each other in scope and purpose. As a Christian educator, Clement believed that education was needed for the church. He mentioned those in the church who tended to be afraid to approach education, and especially pagan philosophy, for fear that it would lead them astray from their faith.

---

<sup>45</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 7.11.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.11.

Clement, however, argued just the opposite. When, after receiving the gospel by faith, one pursues knowledge and erudition built on the foundation of that faith and in light of the truth now known, the believer is able to grow in both knowledge and faith, equipped to explain the faith to others and defend it from attacks.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### **Elements of Clement's Philosophy of Education Deduced From His *Stromata***

The goal of this study is to take the information gleaned from chapters 3 and 4 and draw out principles that help to define the educational philosophy of Clement of Alexandria. First, building upon the theory in precedent literature (and specifically prominent in Eric Osborn's work on Clement) that Clement's Gnostic figure was his ideal Christian, this study demonstrated that Clement's Gnostic figure is not only the ideal Christian in a general sense, but more specifically, he is Clement's notion of what an ideally educated Christian should be. Clement wrote as a Christian educator, with the purpose of making a case for Christian education.<sup>1</sup> Clement had high expectations for this ideally educated Christian, and he wanted Gnostic Christians to become more plentiful in the church.

In addition to the Gnostic figure, Clement also wrote about faith and knowledge in ways that shed light on his educational philosophy. Very often, when he would use γνῶσις, ἐπιστήμη, or μάθησις (referring to knowledge), he would also use πίστις (faith) and/or δικαιοσύνη (righteousness) and θεοσέβεια (piety or godliness). These concepts can best be understood when the relationship between them is examined, and that relationship is central to Clement's thinking about education and how the

---

<sup>1</sup>Some, perhaps, may argue that he was making a case for the education of Christians and not necessarily for Christian education as modern Christians understand it. The following sections will make the argument that Clement was, in fact, writing to explain Christian education, as in a school that teaches all of the academic disciplines from a Christian worldview perspective.

education of Christians should take place. The following subsections present principles of education that have been deduced from the evidence compiled in chapters 3 and 4. The statements themselves are not necessarily Clement's direct statements, but they are summations from the totality of Clement's *Stromata*.

### **Education Is Good, but Not Necessary for Salvation**

Clement is clear throughout the *Stromata* that education does not lead to salvation. They are not equal, and education is not necessary for a person to be saved. Clement argued that education was a good gift from God.<sup>2</sup> It was to be appreciated and used wisely, but it was not the cause of salvation. What he does say is necessary for salvation is the knowledge of God and faith in the Son. He equated salvation with the knowledge of God, so that to know God truly is to be saved.<sup>3</sup> He adamantly held to the doctrine of salvation by faith alone.<sup>4</sup> He explained that simple knowledge of God and faith in the gospel resulted in salvation, while acknowledging more advanced levels of understanding and Christian growth, leading to his concept of the true Christian Gnostic.<sup>5</sup> His analogy of faith and knowledge likened to the relationship between the Son and the Father demonstrated that faith and the knowledge of God work together for salvation, and that the knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God is the object of Clement's saving faith.<sup>6</sup> Clement championed education as a good gift from God and something that should be

---

<sup>2</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Cox, vol. 2 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 5.1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 4.22 and 7.2.

<sup>4</sup>Faith is not according to knowledge. Ibid., 7.2 and 7.18. "The just obtain access to the Father and to the Son by faith." 7.18.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 4.18.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 5.1.

engaged in broadly, but it was not the means to salvation as others who were called Gnostics claimed.

### **Clement's Purpose is to Educate with a Christian Worldview**

Clement was inarguably an advocate for education and believed that it was worth gaining. He wrote, “But, as seems, ignorance is the starvation of the soul, and knowledge its sustenance.”<sup>7</sup> He urged his readers to pursue knowledge as a good thing in this life.<sup>8</sup> But beyond that, he made a case for a distinctly Christian education in the *Stromata*. In the first chapter, Clement set forth a case for what he believed was best for education,<sup>9</sup> and part of that was a saving faith in Christ.<sup>10</sup> His notion that faith and salvation enabled true learning meant that faith and salvation had to be critical components of education. If one was to achieve the status of his Gnostic figure, the student would need “faith [πίστις] combined with knowledge [μάθησις].”<sup>11</sup> This is

---

<sup>7</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 7.12.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 6.12. Clement writes, “Knowledge, then, desirable as it is for its own sake, is the most perfect good; and consequently the things which follow by means of it are good.” And likening learned Christians to the laborers mentioned in Matthew 9:37-38, “If, then, ‘the harvest is plenteous, but the labourers few,’ it is incumbent on us ‘to pray’ that there may be as great abundance of labourers as possible” (1.1).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 1.1.

<sup>10</sup>Clement writes, “On him who by Divine Providence meets in with it, it confers the very highest advantages, – the beginning of faith, readiness for adopting a right mode of life, the impulse towards the truth, a movement of inquiry, a trace of knowledge; in a word, it gives the means of salvation. And those who have been rightly reared in the words of truth, and received provision for eternal life, wing their way to heaven.” Ibid., 1.1.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 1.6. It is noteworthy in this quote that Clement used a cognate, μάθησις, rather than γνῶσις. Perhaps this is to express a sense of active pursuit of knowledge rather than simply knowledge itself. The full quote in context from *ANF* is, “But as we say that a man can be a believer without learning, so also we assert that it is impossible for a man without learning to comprehend the things which are declared in the faith. But to adopt what is well said, and not to adopt the reverse, is caused not simply by faith, but by faith combined with knowledge [μάθησις].” Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Cox, vol. 2 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 1.6. Clement seems to making a case for active discipleship and education, one’s faith leading to the



because he viewed a comprehensive education as that which is built upon the foundation of faith.<sup>12</sup> For Clement, the ideal seemed to be that one professes faith in Christ at an early age, when gospel comprehension is possible, and then engage in a rigorous education that is consciously built on Christian faith.

Though Clement believed that education was good in itself, and knowledge a gift from God to humanity (believers and nonbelievers alike), he also held that knowledge could be used for good or for evil. There is a knowledge that puffs up, and that knowledge is not grounded in faith. He described the groups typically referred to as Gnostics as having “unholy knowledge [γνῶσις]” and argued that they were only “*falsely* called” Gnostics.<sup>13</sup> There is a way of knowing and learning that honors God, and there is a way that dishonors God. That which is grounded in and built upon Christian faith, or what modern Christians may call a Christian or biblical worldview, is most honoring to God and most beneficial to the Christian student. Clement believed that the life of a Christian should be moving in a Godward direction. He pushed his readers toward a “gnostic life”<sup>14</sup> that was in pursuit of God’s truth, wherever it may be found.

### **Education and Discipleship Are Partners in Christian Growth**

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have often erred on one side or the other of the education and discipleship spectrum.<sup>15</sup> Some would seek to focus only

---

pursuit of true knowledge.

<sup>12</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 6.27.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.7.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.6.

<sup>15</sup>One might, perhaps, compare the revivalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with its emphasis on Sunday school and strict Bible teaching, and its counter movement, the liberal progressivism of the early to mid twentieth century, with its de-emphasis on Bible indoctrination and focus on the social Gospel. This is all explained well in Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 345-52.

on Bible teaching to the exclusion of any other learning, and others may neglect the teaching of the gospel in order to teach other ideas and disciplines. In Clement's time, he saw the danger of those Christians who were afraid to approach pagan philosophy and knowledge for fear that it would damage their faith.<sup>16</sup> He was also keenly aware of the Greeks who were thoroughly educated, but who did not know and believe in Christ.<sup>17</sup> His position understood there to be a middle road that was more beneficial. This middle road allowed knowledge and faith to cooperate and advance together.<sup>18</sup> Rather than being enemies, Clement understood them to be partners in the growth and development of Christians. Thus, they should be blended together in educational practice. Not merely taught side by side, but taught as a comprehensive truth that allows a student to understand both the academic disciplines better as well as the revelations of Scripture. He believed that God was the author of all truth, therefore wherever truth is found, God is found.

### **A Liberal Education Best Equips Christians**

Clement was a strong proponent, not only of a Christian education, but also of a broad liberal arts Christian education. Erudition was a highly praised quality for Clement.<sup>19</sup> In several places throughout the *Stromata*, he provides lists of various disciplines and skills that an educated person should be conversant in or able to perform.<sup>20</sup> He argues that this broad education is best because God's truth can be found

---

<sup>16</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 1.9.

<sup>17</sup>He, himself, was among these earlier in his life (see the brief biographical section at the beginning of chap. 2).

<sup>18</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 7.11.

<sup>19</sup>Clement explains, "Now the Gnostic must be erudite." Ibid., 6.8.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 6.9 and 6.10, for example.

everywhere and in every subject. The ability to speak knowledgeably in a wide range of topics is seen as an advantage to Clement, and he favors this kind of education for Christian students. It is a broad education that best equips a Christian to defend against arguments that attack Christianity.<sup>21</sup> His ideal is not merely faith, but a faith that is informed and that is able to distinguish falsehood and find truth in every endeavor.

### **Education Should Include Non-Christian Ideas**

Although Clement championed an education that is grounded in and built on faith, he also advocated for the use of non-Christian ideas in this Christian education. He goes so far as to argue that philosophy was given to the Greeks by God in order to prepare them for the coming of Christ and the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>22</sup> And he goes on to say that now, since the gospel has come and we believe it, Greek philosophy has not lost its usefulness. Now it is useful in a different way, specifically for piety.<sup>23</sup> Beyond that, when one studies a philosophy that is simply not true, he argues, “even if philosophy were useless, if the demonstration of its uselessness does good, it is yet valid.”<sup>24</sup> Even studying, and refuting, false philosophy is a useful exercise according to Clement. Not only did he argue for the usefulness of non-Christian ideas, but he modeled it in the *Stromata*.<sup>25</sup> Clement quotes from a multitude of pagan philosophers and heretical

---

<sup>21</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 6.10.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 1.5.

<sup>23</sup>The new usefulness he describes as, “And now it becomes conducive to piety [θεοσέβεια].” Ibid., 1.5.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 1.2.

<sup>25</sup>Hagg writes, “It is common knowledge that Clement is the church father who most frequently cites from non-Christian authors. In addition to, of course, countless citations from the New and Old Testaments, Clement very often refers to Greek poets, dramatists, philosophers and historians.” Henry Fiska Hagg, “Deification in Clement of Alexandria with a Special Reference to his Use of *Theaetetus* 176B,” *Studia Patristica* 46 (2010): 170.

Gnostics, both in agreement and disagreement, throughout the *Stromata*. He models this notion of learning from every source and discerning truth and falsehood by measuring everything against God's revealed truth.

### **Education Helps Christians Live Godly Lives**

Not only is a broad Christian education helpful academically, but it's also helpful practically. For Clement, a sharpening of the intellect includes growth in character. In fact, education in the manner that Clement sought would necessarily lead to the growth of the character of the student.<sup>26</sup> This is also seen in instances noted above when Clement, speaking of knowledge, uses θεοσέβεια (righteousness) alongside and in conjunction with πίστις (faith). It is also evident when he speaks of the effects of Gnostic power. Along with knowledge, he also includes “the performance of whatever the Word suggests” as an effect of gnostic power.<sup>27</sup> For Clement, a true education included character education, and it would result in living a pure life.<sup>28</sup>

### **Education is Necessary to Reach Full Christian Maturity**

Even more than living a pure life, Clement wanted students to reach their full potential in Christlikeness. Clement believed that a proper education would naturally lead a student to full Christian maturity, which he would classify as a true Gnostic.<sup>29</sup> He references “gnostic perfection,” which he juxtaposes against the “common faith” or “milk.”<sup>30</sup> The milk is, of course, a reference to Paul's description of immature Christians

---

<sup>26</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 2.17.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 7.1.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 4.6.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 7.16.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 5.4.

in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, and Clement believes a broad Christian education should lead away from immaturity and toward maturity in Christ. Similarly, he speaks of a “gnostic superstructure,” referring to Christian growth that is built on faith as a foundation.<sup>31</sup> He envisioned education and discipleship as a complex partnership whereby each element supports, and is supported by, the others. Clement understood education to be a coherent whole rather than a collection of unrelated topics that must each be mastered individually. And when the student successfully progressed through this course of study, he hoped for a person who had reached their full potential in Christ, ready to engage the world with the gospel. And this maturity would carry them through their lives, always hoping in God and His promises.<sup>32</sup>

### **Contribution to Precedent Literature**

Prior to this study, there has been significant research on Clement of Alexandria. The facts and timeline of his life, insofar as they can be known, have received attention in scholarly works. His extant written works (including his *Stromata*, *The Instructor*, *The Exhortation to the Greeks*, and *Who Is the Rich Man that Shall Be Saved?*) have been studied, with the *Stromata* standing as his largest and most extensive work that remains. His interaction with, fluency in, and respect for Greek philosophy has been well researched and documented. Much has been written about his Gnostic figure, with a number of theories about what Clement intended it to represent. These elements of Clementine scholarship have provided a good picture of Clement and his thought.

The present study sought to clarify a few things that had yet to be stated. First, that Clement’s Gnostic figure is not simply his ideal Christian, but more specifically, his ideally *educated* Christian. Clement wrote as an educator, as a man who devoted his life

---

<sup>31</sup>Clement, *Stromata* 5.4.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.11.

to learning and teaching. His Gnostic figure represents the kind of person that he believed would be the result of a proper education. Second, Clement had a very particular understanding of the relationship between faith and knowledge. They should not be two warring or competing ideas, but each one was able to grow to its full potential within a person when understood as complementary. This relationship was critical to how he understood education and discipleship to take place. Flowing from the Gnostic figure and the relationship between faith and knowledge is, third, principle elements of Clement's philosophy of education. The present study extracted seven points of educational philosophy deduced from Clement's *Stromata*.

### **Application Points for Educators**

Making application of abstract and theoretical concepts to concrete, real-world settings can be difficult to do well. Clement, in his *Stromata* and specifically in regard to educational philosophy, was largely a big picture, theoretical thinker, and he didn't include many minute details in regards to classroom instruction or particular methods. Instead, this work was intended to provide broad, but precise, principles about Christian education. Nonetheless, application can be made to modern educational practice, and perhaps more acutely, to the development of an overall philosophy of education among modern Christian educators and educational leaders. Following are possible application points for educators in three different educational settings.

#### **Educational Leaders in Local Churches**

Out of the three treated here, this is perhaps the most difficult setting to apply Clement's principals of educational philosophy. Clement focused heavily on a comprehensive education, what modern educators would call a liberal arts education. This, however, is not the aim of most educational leaders in local churches. Their aim generally is, as it should be, to teach the Bible and to increase theological and doctrinal

understanding in the congregation. One possible application of Clement's thought regarding faith and knowledge could be to include special teaching sessions that are focused not simply on the typical Sunday school curriculum or Christian living, but that incorporate an academic discipline for the purpose of discipleship. Clement argued that being more broadly educated aided in one's comprehension of Scripture and, thus, grew one's faith.

For example, a class on church history would help church members not simply learn a 2,000-year timeline of the church but also to be exposed to other individuals who shared the same faith but lived it out in very different times and places. They would experience expressions of faith and theological concepts that may sound quite different than they typically hear, but that could help them understand more deeply. Another example may be an apologetics class. Apologetics is a philosophical discipline that has direct application to every Christian, and can help to strengthen both their faith and their ability to explain their faith to others. This is not learning simply for learning's sake (though Clement was certainly in favor of that), but this is learning more broadly in order to strengthen faith. It is knowledge and faith working in tandem in the life of the church.

### **Educators and Administrators in Primary and Secondary Christian Schools**

This category and the next more closely resemble Clement's setting and his vision for Christian education. In the typical school day of a student in an American Christian school, the roughly seven hours are divided into segments. Each segment, then, would focus on a single subject, one of those subjects being Bible. While not perfectly clear, it does seem that Clement may have planned the educational day differently. He held strongly to the principle that knowledge in any discipline can aid in one's understanding of Scripture and knowledge of God. A teacher in a Christian school may

decide to be more intentional about exploring the theological or moral implications regarding a scientific discovery or a historical event. A literature teacher may assign secular works for students to read, and discuss how the text reveals biblical themes such as redemption or how the author portrays God or whatever higher power he or she may believe in. Teaching in this way might achieve Clement's vision of finding God in every academic subject.

For administrators in Christian schools, perhaps Clement's bigger picture thinking is more clearly applied. Creating an environment where broad and integrative inquiry are encouraged and where Scripture is brought to bear in legitimate ways (not simply as an afterthought) could enable teachers to begin thinking more broadly about their own curriculum. Additionally, putting measures and safeguards into place to ensure that the school is not simply concerned with standardized test scores and college placement, but also about the character that is being produced in its students, could go a long way toward a more holistic educational environment. Ensuring that every student hears the gospel proclaimed from varied sources and in varied circumstances would highlight Clement's notion that education is good and needed, but faith is the means of salvation. Certainly, teachers and administrators have done and are doing some of these things, but as with any organization, a school can become complacent or can drift and morph from where it began.<sup>33</sup> Enacting new measures to achieve these overarching goals, and then measuring success rates empirically, can be beneficial to the operation of the school and can help create the kind of young men and women administrators would like to see as graduates.

---

<sup>33</sup>Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 2.



## **Educators and Administrators in Christian Higher Education**

Professors in Christian higher education have the opportunity to shape the minds of young men and women in the final stage of their education before they enter into adult life. One caveat that should be mentioned here is that the maturity and intellectual level at which college professors see incoming students is surely wide ranging and depends heavily on each student's previous academic experience. This makes specific application difficult, but again, Clement's high-level principles of education can be applied in a more general way. College professors may have freedom to encourage interdisciplinary work in their classes, whether that be in research assignments or in classroom discussions or other elements of the course. Teaching students to view one's particular discipline with a Christian worldview, and then encouraging them to think in similar ways on assignments could aid in the students not only knowing they are at a Christian school because there is weekly chapel, but also because they are learning to view mathematics and science and literature through the lens of the gospel. Clement would be proud of college students who were able to think critically about the how the truth of the Bible relates to each discipline they are studying. Finally, though a professor cannot realistically have a personal relationship with every student, he or she can certainly have a personal impact on the discipleship of a few.

Speaking more broadly, Christian higher education administrators could apply Clement's principles, first, by implementing professional development exercises that help faculty build interdisciplinary skills as well as think critically about the integration of faith and learning. While each student cannot have a personal relationship with each professor, the administration can establish a more efficient means of mentorship between faculty and students. Perhaps each professor is expected to formally mentor 1, 2 or 3 students each semester. Or maybe small groups are established with a professor leading each one that meet a few times per semester for the purpose of guidance, fellowship, and

discipleship. Intentional measures taken to ensure that a Christian school is not Christian in name only would establish Clement's ideal of educating from a Christian worldview, viewing education and discipleship as partners and understanding right education to be not merely academic but also about living a godly life.

### **Further Research Needed**

The present study only examined Clement's *Stromata*. Another work of his, *The Instructor*, contains more of his thinking about education. Further research into what *The Instructor* might add to the understanding of Clement's philosophy of education would be beneficial. Additionally, Clement's third extant work, *Who Is the Rich Man that Shall Be Saved?*, while not an educational text, could also shed light on elements of Clement's educational thought, such as more on the relationship between faith and knowledge. These were important concepts for Clement, and there may be corollary explanations in his other works.

Beyond Clement, it is helpful for modern Christian educators to go outside of their time and culture and be exposed to educational thought that may not be normative to them. Research into the educational philosophy of Christian educators in centuries past, who may not have left their philosophy of education neatly explained in a document, would be beneficial for Christian educators today. While it would not be wise to simply adopt the educational philosophy of an educator without critically examining it, getting to know the thought process behind their educational principles helps modern educators do the same critical thinking that leads to sound philosophies of education.

Finally, the relationship between faith and knowledge in Clement's *Stromata* was enlightening and beneficial to modern thinkers as an example of how one Christian educational leader in the second century worked through this crucial topic. Further research into other Christian thinkers and writers of the second and third century could prove beneficial as well. Perhaps Tertullian, Tatian, or Origen would provide a different

perspective on faith and knowledge and how they interact in education and discipleship.

The ability to concisely compare and contrast the way several thinkers in a similar culture understood the relationship between faith and knowledge could benefit the current discussion, helping modern Christians see outside of their culture boundaries.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anthony, Michael J., and Warren S. Benson. *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003.
- Ashwin-Siejkowski, Piotr. *Clement of Alexandria on Trial: The Evidence of 'Heresy' from Photius' Bibliotheca*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010.
- Backus, Irena. "Lay and Theological Reception of Clement of Alexandria in the Reformation: From Gentien Hervet to Fenelon." In *Between Lay Piety and Academic Theology: Studies Presented to Christoph Burger on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, edited by Ulrike Hascher-Burger, August den Hollander, and Wim Janse, 353-72. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010.
- Bakke, O. M. *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Barna Group. "10 Facts about America's Churchless." Accessed February 23, 2015. <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/698-10-facts-about-america-s-churchless#.VOtUHUL4jk0>.
- Bigg, Charles. *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria: Being the Bampton Lectures of the Year 1886*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913.
- Cadge, Wendy. "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 3 (September 2004): 363-80.
- Carson, D. A. *Christ & Culture Revisited*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Casey, Robert P. "Clement of Alexandria and the Beginning of Christian Platonism." *Harvard Theological Review* 18, no. 1 (January 1925): 39-101.
- Chadwick, H. "Clement of Alexandria." In *The Cambridge History of Later Greek & Early Medieval Philosophy*, edited by A. H. Armstrong, 168-81. Cambridge: University Press, 1970.
- Clement of Alexandria. *Stromata, or Miscellanies*. In *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. Translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. American ed. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.
- Digester, Elizabeth DePalma. "The Late Roman Empire from the Antonines to Constantine." In *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson, 1:13-24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

- Dillon, John. *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism (80 B.C. to A.D. 220)*. London: Duckworth, 1977.
- Eby, Frederick, and Charles Flinn Arrowood. *The History and Philosophy of Education Ancient and Medieval*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940.
- Ensor, Peter. "Clement of Alexandria and Penal Substitutionary Atonement." *Evangelical Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2013): 19-35.
- Eveleth, Lois. "Clement of Alexandria and the *Logos*." *American Theological Inquiry* 6, no. 2 (July 2013): 37-44.
- Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Ferguson, John. "The Achievement of Clement of Alexandria." *Religious Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 1976): 59-80.
- Massimo Pigliucci. "Stoicism." In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, edited by James Fieser and Bradley Dowden. Accessed September 22, 2015. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/stoicism/>.
- Frend, W. H. C. "The Gnostic Sects and the Roman Empire." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 5 (1954): 25-37.
- Gibbons, Kathleen. "Moses, Statesman and Philosopher: The Philosophical Background of the Ideal of Assimilating to God and the Methodology of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* 1." *Vigiliae Christianae* 69 (2015): 157-85.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity*. Vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. San Francisco: Harper, 1984.
- Haas, Christopher. *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Hagg, Henry Fiska. "Deification in Clement of Alexandria with a Special Reference to his Use of Theaetetus 176B." *Studia Patristica* 46 (2010): 169-73.
- Harcus, A. R., and Haywards Heath. "They Speak to Us across the Centuries: Clement of Alexandria." *The Expository Times* 108, no. 10 (1997): 292-96.
- Holmes, Arthur F. *Building the Christian Academy*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Hunt, Emily J. *Christianity in the Second Century: The Case of Tatian*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Inwood, Brad. "Stoicism." In *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson, 1:126-39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Jones, Timothy Paul, ed. *Perspectives on Your Child's Education*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009.

- Kovacs, Judith L. "Clement (Titus Flavius Clemens) of Alexandria." *The Expository Times* 120, no. 6 (2009): 261-71.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher according to Clement of Alexandria." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 3-25.
- Laistner, M. L. W. *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1951.
- Liddell, Henry George, and Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Edited by Sir Henry Stuart Jones. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940. Accessed June 24, 2016.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.04.0057>.
- Lilla, Salvatore R. C. *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Maier, Harry O. "Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 719-45.
- Méhat, André. *Étude sur les 'Stromates' de Clément d'Alexandrie*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966.
- Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. *Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues with Timeless Truth*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008.
- Mondin, Battista. "Faith and Reason in Roman Catholic Thought from Clement of Alexandria to Vatican II." *Dialogue & Alliance* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 18-26.
- Moore, Edward. "Middle Platonism." In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Accessed September 22, 2015.  
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/midplato/>.
- Moore, Edward, and John D. Turner. "Gnosticism." In *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson, 1:174-96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Morgan, Theresa. *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*. Cambridge: University Press, 1998.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ & Culture*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1951.
- Norris, Richard A., Jr. "Irenaeus and Plotinus Answer the Gnostics: A Note on the Relation Between Christian Thought and Platonism." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 13-24.
- Nygren, Anders. *Agape and Eros*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Osborn, Eric. "Arguments for Faith in Clement of Alexandria." *Vigiliae Christianae* 48, no. 1 (March 1994): 1-24.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Clement of Alexandria: A Review of Research, 1958-1982." *The Second Century* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 219-44.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria*. London: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1954.
- Osborne, Catherine. "Clement of Alexandria." In *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson, 1:270-82. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Oulton, John Ernest, and Henry Chadwick. General introduction to *Alexandrian Christianity: Selected Translation of Clement and Origin*. The Library of Christian Classics, 5:15-39. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954.
- Outler, Albert C. "The 'Platonism' of Clement of Alexandria." *The Journal of Religion* 20, no. 3 (July 1940): 217-40.
- Pearcy, Nancy. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.
- Planty, M., W. Hussar, T. Snyder, G. Kena, A. KewalRamani, J. Kemp, K. Bianco, and R. Dinkes. "The Condition of Education 2009." National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Accessed January 26, 2015. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009081.pdf>.
- Rizzi, Marco. "The Literary Problem in Clement of Alexandria: A Reconsideration." *Adamantius* 17 (2011): 154-63.
- Sandnes, Karl Olav. *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets, and Early Christianity*. New York: T&T Clark, 2009.
- Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- Sheridan, Mary C. "The Influence of Non-Christian Ideas in the Second Century CE on Clement of Alexandria." *Philotheos: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 8 (2008): 160-99.
- Tertullian, *The Prescription for Heretics*. Accessed October 5, 2015. [http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-24.htm#P3208\\_1148660](http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-24.htm#P3208_1148660).
- Timothy, H. B. *The Early Christian Apologists and Greek Philosophy: Exemplified by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria*. Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Company, 1972.
- Tollinton, R. B. *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism*. 2 vols. London: Williams and Norgate, 1914.
- Townsend, John T. "Ancient Education in the Time of the Roman Empire." In *The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity*, edited by Stephen Benko and John J. O'Rourke, 139-63. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1971.
- U.S. Department of Education. "Trends in the Use of School Choice: Statistical Analysis Report." Accessed January 26, 2015. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010004>.

- van den Hoek, Annewies. "Etymologizing in a Christian Context: The Techniques of Clement and Origen." *The Studia Philonica Annual* 16 (2004): 122-68.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. "Exegesis and Hermeneutics." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, 52-64. Leicester: IVP, 2000.
- Wagner, Walter. "A Father's Fate: Attitudes Toward and Interpretations of Clement of Alexandria." *The Journal of Religious History* 6, no. 3 (June 1971): 209-31.
- Webster, John. "Theologies of Retrieval." In *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, edited by John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, 583-99. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Williams, Michael Allen. *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Wilson, William. Introductory notice to *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*. Ante-Nicene Christian Library, 4:3-10. Translated by William Wilson. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867.
- Witt, R. E. "The Hellenism of Clement of Alexandria." *The Classical Quarterly* 25, nos. 3/4 (July-October 1931): 195-204.
- Wuthnow, Robert. "Responding to the New Religious Pluralism." *Cross Currents* 58, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 43-50.



## ABSTRACT

### THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA IN THE *STROMATA*

Justin Lawrence Glenn, Ed.D.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy Paul Jones

Clement of Alexandria played an important role in the development of Christian educational philosophy in a non-Christian culture in the second-century Roman Empire. Born into a pagan society and educated in Greek philosophy prior to his conversion, Clement sought to explain the orthodox Christian relationship between philosophy and theology and that the two are not enemies. His longest and perhaps most significant work, the *Stromata*, is a collection of the material that he taught to his students. As an educational record, it also provides two primary mechanisms for understanding some principles of his educational philosophy. First, his use of the term “Gnostic” (primarily γνωστικός, but also γνώμη) is unique and shows that he understands education to be crucial to, and even necessary for, Christian growth and development. Clement’s Gnostic figure is not just his ideal Christian, but of his understanding of what an ideally educated Christian would look like. Second, his use of γνῶσις and πίστις, and their relationship to each other throughout the *Stromata* provide further clues about his understanding of the relationship between education and discipleship. Clement argued for a complementary relationship between the two whereby faith is the ground of true knowledge and knowledge is the protector and aid to faith. Deduced from these elements in the *Stromata*, seven overarching principles of Clement’s philosophy of education are presented.

## VITA

Justin Lawrence Glenn

### EDUCATION

B.A., University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2004  
M.Div., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007  
Th.M., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2013

### ORGANIZATIONS

The Evangelical Theological Society  
The Society of Professors in Christian Education

### PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

“The Educational Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria in the *Stromata*.”  
Presentation at the Society for Professors in Christian Education Conference  
Orlando, Florida, October 2016.

“Toward a Contextual Theological Reading of John Amos Comenius.”  
*International Journal of Christianity and Education* 20, no.3 (2016): 186-198.

### ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Adjunct Faculty, Birmingham Theological Seminary, 2015-

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastor, Crosspoint Baptist Church, Souderton, Pennsylvania, 2008-2010  
Youth Minister, First Baptist Church, Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, 2010-2013  
Minister of Discipleship & Families, Red Lane Baptist Church, Powhatan,  
Virginia, 2013-2015