

extract

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Clement on *Apokatastasis* Related to the “Feminine” Side of God¹

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Clement of Alexandria connects the doctrine of ἀποκατάστασις (the restoration of rational creatures to God) to what he depicts as the feminine side of God. The latter is a theological imagery that Clement uses in several of his works, but especially in *Paedagogus* (= *Paed.*) and *Quis dives salvetur*. From here, indeed, arises the connection between the feminine aspect of God and *apokatastasis*.

Clement’s representation of women, mothers, and babies in his *Paedagogus*, especially in Book I, is to be considered within his historico-theological context: significant parallels are to be found in Bardaisan

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of Edessa, the *Odes of Solomon*, the *Acts of Thomas*, and other texts. As it has been pointed out, Clement's treatment of women, maternity, and babies in his *Paedagogus* affects his theology prominently, being actually used in the service of his theological argument; even his long biological expositions in Book I of his *Paedagogus* arguably support his theology.² God is no less Mother than Father,³ although the Divinity, properly speaking, is beyond genders, being entirely spiritual (angels also are non-gendered); as a consequence, both men and women are in the image of God in the same way, as Gen 1:27 also makes clear. Origen would elaborate on this point. Clement deployed much Platonic and Stoic lore about genders, their common virtue, and philosophical education. Gregory of Nyssa shared with Clement the conviction of the exclusively biological and temporary differentiation between man and woman.

Clement attributes to God and Christ a great deal of feminine and maternal attributes. He claims that “the Lord gave birth” to the Christians “with carnal birth-pangs [ἐκύησεν ὁ Κύριος ὠδῖνι σαρκικῆ], and swaddled them up with his precious blood” shed on the Cross; “the Logos is all for the newborn, father and mother, pedagogue and nurse” (*Paed.* I,6,42,2). Christ provides “milk from his loving breasts” (φιλοστόργοις πηγάζουσα μαστοῖς, *Paed.* I,6,35,2-3) and his blood is like a mother's blood transformed into milk—according to the biology of Clement's time—for the nourishment of her baby (*Paed.* I,6,40,1). The Logos is the breast of God the Father, supplying God's children with milk; the babies, namely the Christians, suckle and are nourished by the milk of the Father; they rush to the Father's care-soothing breast,

2 Examined in Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *Babies and Women in Clement's Paedagogus: Biology, Anthropology, Theology, and their Interrelations*, in Veronika Černušková – Miklós Gyurkovics (eds.), *Colloquium Clementinum III: Clement's Paedagogus*, Brill, Leiden 2024, forthcoming.

3 Pope John Paul I in a famous audio-recorded message from St. Peter (Angelus, 10th September 1978) likewise claimed: God “is Father; even more, Mother [è Papà; più ancora, è Madre]”.

which Clement identifies with the Logos.⁴ Clement offers a Trinitarian exegesis of this imagery in this context: the flesh symbolizes the Holy Spirit, the blood the Logos; the union of both is “the Lord, the food of the babies” and

the nourishment is *the milk of the Father* [ἡ τροφή τὸ γάλα τοῦ Πατρὸς], by which alone we infants are fed [ὡ μόνῳ τιτθενόμεθα οἱ νήπιοι]. The Logos itself, indeed, the beloved One, our nourisher, shed Its blood for us, thereby saving humanity [σώζων τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα]; and thanks to It we, believing in God, flee to *the care-soothing breast of the Father, the Logos* [ἐπὶ τὸν λαθικηδέα μαζὸν τοῦ Πατρὸς, τὸν λόγον, καταφεύγομεν]. And the Logos alone, as is fitting, provides us, babies, with the milk of love [ἡμῖν τοῖς νηπίοις τὸ γάλα τῆς ἀγάπης χορηγεῖ], and truly blessed are only those who suck this breast [τοῦτον θηλάζουσιν τὸν μαστόν]. (*Paed.* I,6,43,4).

The Logos supplies the faithful with the milk of love, and only those who suckle this breast are really blessed (*Paed.* I,6,43,2-4). Clement attributes again (as in I,6,43,4) maternal breasts to the Father in *Paed.* I,46,1: the Father’s “nipples of love” provide milk to babies who seek the Logos. Such a maternal imagery related to God and Christ is emphasized in Book I of *Paedagogus*, and is supported by plenty of biological information, which works as a support for an important theological argument that Clement is setting out.⁵

Clement explicitly says that God is Mother as well as Father not only in Book I of his *Paedagogus*, but also in *Quis dives salvetur* 37,1-2, in very clear terms, and, crucially, he connects God’s female side with God’s love (charity-love, ἀγάπη), as Gregory of Nyssa will also do, probably in the footsteps of Clement, as we shall see later. This constitutes the link between God’s female side and *apokatastasis*, which is the supreme

4 See Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Care-Banishing Breast of the Father: Feminine Images of the Divine in Clement of Alexandria’s *Paedagogus* I”, in *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997), 401-405.

5 As argued in I. L. Ramelli, “Babies”. Veronika Černušková, “Proliferation of Divine Reciprocity. Clement of Alexandria’s Trinitology as a Reaction to Valentinian Pleromatology”, in *ETJ* (2023), 165-180, suggests with reason that Clement’s statements about the femininity and maternity of the Father and the Son represent an “orthodox” alternative to the “Valentinian” notion of feminine beings in the divine Pleroma.

expression of God's love, and is related according to Clement with the feminine aspect of God. In this passage from *Quis dives salvetur*, Clement remarks that the ineffable part of God is Father, but the part that has sympathy for God's creatures is Mother. It is precisely by loving that the Father "became female" (ἐθελύνηθη), and the evidence of this feminine aspect of God is the Child whom God brought forth:

Contemplate the mysteries of charity-love, and then you will have the revelation of *the maternal womb of the Father*, which the only-begotten God alone demonstrated. Now, God *is* charity-love and it is on account of love that he was captured by us. What is ineffable in God has become Father, *what has sympathy for us, Mother*. Having begun to love us, the Father *became Female*, and the great proof of such a feminization is the One whom *God brought forth from Godself*. And the fruit to which it was given birth out of love is love.

Θεῶ τὰ τῆς ἀγάπης μυστήρια καὶ τότε ἐποπτεύσεις τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς, ὃν ὁ μονογενὴς θεὸς μόνος ἐξηγήσατο. "Ἔστι δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη καὶ δι' ἀγάπην ἡμῖν ἐθελύνηθη. Καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄρρητον αὐτοῦ πατὴρ, τὸ δὲ εἰς ἡμᾶς συμπαθεὶς γέγονε μήτηρ. Ἀγαπήσας ὁ πατὴρ ἐθελύνηθη, καὶ τούτου μέγα σημεῖον ὃν αὐτὸς ἐγέννησεν ἐξ αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ὁ τεχθεὶς ἐξ ἀγάπης καρπὸς ἀγάπης.⁶

God is ἀγάπη or charity-love, and Christ, to whom God gave birth as a Mother out of love, is also love. Charity-love is typical of Christ and of a mother.⁷ It is through ἀγάπη that God became female and could then give birth from her womb in a maternal way, as Scripture states in Psalm 109:3 in the Septuagint, which functioned as a Scriptural basis for God's maternal parturition of the Son: "From the womb, before Morning-star, I [God] brought you forth" (ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐγέννησά σε, Ps 109:3 LXX). If God gave birth to the Son from the womb, God is obviously Mother. The connection between God's *Maternity* and God's *love*, established by Clement, appears again manifestly in

6 *Quis div.* 37,1-2, in Otto Stählin – Ludwig Früchtel (eds.), *Clément d'Alexandrie, Quel riche sera sauvé?*, Introduction, notes et index par Carlo Nardi – Partick Descourtieux, Cerf, Paris 2011, 194.

7 As I show in "Love", in Angelo Di Berardino (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, InterVarsity, Downers Grove, IL 2014, and in "Life in Christ", in Mark Edwards – Giulio Maspero (eds.), *The New Brill History of Doctrines*, 1, Brill, Leiden, forthcoming.

Gregory of Nyssa, who was impacted by Clement in a variety of ways⁸ and, I suspect, in this respect as well. The link is evident in Gregory's Homily 7 on the Song of Songs: "If we call God «Mother» or «Love», we shall not err: for God is Love, as John stated".

Being aware that the Divinity properly transcends genders, Clement describes the ineffable side of God as Father but the side of God which has sympathy for humans as Female and Mother. God is both Father and Mother, just as both justice and goodness belong to one and the same God (*Paed.* I,8,73,3); the latter point targeted both Marcionite and "Gnostic" theories of the separation of divine justice and goodness.⁹ Now, the female aspect of God is related to the doctrine of restoration or *apokatastasis*. Clement, indeed, can be regarded as a precursor of Origen's, Gregory of Nyssa's, and Evagrius' doctrine of *apokatastasis*, although he was not an explicit or systematic theorizer of the doctrine of universal restoration.¹⁰

Clement deployed the lexicon of *apokatastasis* profusely (ἀποκατάστασις, ἀποκαθίστημι), and his use of the vocabulary expressing time and eternity is revealing.¹¹ He often describes salvation as absolutely eternal, frequently also depicting it as the health of the soul, in Philonic and Pauline terms, which will be taken over by Origen.¹² Instead, he never describes damnation as absolutely eternal. Clement explicitly refers αἰδιος, "absolutely eternal", to the eventual *apokatastasis*: in *Stromateis* (= *Strom.*) VII,10,56,2-7, he identifies

8 A Colloquium in Rome, Santa Croce University, has cast light on this relation (*From Alexandria to Nyssa. Clement and Gregory in Conversation*, 28-30 October 2021, forthcoming).

9 Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* 120, Brill, Leiden 2013, 119-136.

10 Argument in Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *Stromateis VII and Clement's Hints of the Theory of Apokatastasis*, in Matyas Havrda – Vit Hušek – Jana Plátová (eds.), *The Seventh Book of the Stromateis: Colloquium Clementinum I, Olomouc 2010*, *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements*, Brill, Leiden 2012, 239-257.

11 Detailed treatment in Ilaria L. E. Ramelli – David Konstan, *Terms for Eternity: Αἰώνιος and αἰδιος in Classical and Christian Authors*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway 2007; new, electronic edition, De Gruyter, Berlin 2022, 102-116.

12 *Strom.* VIII,7,48; *Paed.* I,8,65,2; I,11,96,3.

the final *apokatastasis* or restoration with perfection of knowledge (γνώσις) and charity–love (ἀγάπη). This is attained after a period of “salvific [σωτήριον] education”: then, “restoration [ἀποκατάστασις] awaits them in absolutely eternal contemplation [τῇ θεωρίᾳ τῆ ἀϊδίῳ]”. Clement here, like Origen and Gregory later, characterizes the eventual restoration as absolutely eternal (ἀίδιος), not simply as αἰώνιος, which can mean a variety of things, including “pertaining to the other aeon”, “long-lasting”, or even “mundane”, and the like.¹³

The perfection of the soul that has attained perfect knowledge (γνώσις) and abides in what is divine and saint is described by Clement as “*apokatastasis* to the highest place of rest” (εἰς τὸν κορυφαῖον ἀποκαταστήσῃ τῆς ἀναπαύσεως τόπον).¹⁴ Those who know God “become eternal thanks to their knowledge”, which Clement identifies as the perfection of *apokatastasis* (ἐν τῇ ἄκρᾳ ἀποκαταστάσει, *Eclogae Propheticae* 57,2). Note that Evagrius, who was also acquainted with Clement and derived from him some important doctrines, repeatedly described God the Trinity as “essential knowledge”;¹⁵ this is why the knowledge of God is perfection and makes people eternal, as God is. Evagrius’ idea of knowledge (γνώσις) is the direct descendant of Clement’s notion of γνώσις, which in its highest degree is inseparable from that of deification (θέωσις). As is clear from *Kephalaia Gnostica* I,89, the opposite of knowledge for Evagrius is not only ignorance but also evil(ness).

In a very powerful description, Clement remarks that life in the world to come is the “aim” or “end” (τέλος) of the present life: “Paul teaches that the end is the hoped–for *apokatastasis*” (τέλος διδάσκει τὴν

13 See Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *Time and Eternity*, in Mark Edwards (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook to Early Christian Philosophy*, Routledge, Oxford 2021, 41–54.

14 *Strom.* VII,10,57,1–4.

15 See Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *Evagrius’ Kephalaia Gnostika: Propositions on Knowledge*, WGRW 38, Brill–SBL, Leiden – Atlanta 2015, XLVII–XLIX, LXVI–LXIX; 79–80, 95, 118–119, 136–137; 142, 146–148; 167–168; 239–243; 296–299; 310; 325–326; 332; 335–336; 357–362; Fabien Muller, “What Is Evagrian γνώσις?” *The Heythrop Journal* 64/5 (2023), 1–16: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/heyj.14239>.

τῆς ἐλπίδος ἀποκατάστασιν).¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa echoed this definition, as we shall see, I suspect intentionally. Clement had also in mind 1Cor 15:24-28, which is Origen's favourite Biblical authority in support of his doctrine of *apokatastasis*, and in which Paul describes the τέλος, explicitly mentioned, as the submission of all enemies to Christ, the elimination of evil and death, and the final presence of God "all in all" (ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι).¹⁷ In this passage, as in Rom 6:22, Paul can indeed be taken to teach that the *telos* is the hoped-for *apokatastasis*.

God's Wisdom is, in Clement's view, the cause of both the creation and of "the *apokatastasis* of the elect" (*Strom.* II,8,37,5), who are those who have reached knowledge and have subjugated all passions: they "will be restored to the most loving adoration".¹⁸ Note that the *apokatastasis* of rational creatures is *voluntary*, as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa would also insist,¹⁹ and as Clement already maintained against the perceived determinism of "Gnostic" trends (supposed to pre-determine the salvation of the "spiritual" or "pneumatics" and part of the "psychics" alone, but the condemnation of the "hylics", all conceived as fixed natures).

Thus, the restoration is *voluntary*, but Clement stresses God's mercy even towards sins or voluntary faults, because God wants the sinner's repentance and conversion, not his death.²⁰ Repentance and conversion take place thanks to God, but without detriment to human freewill, because "God wants us to save ourselves by ourselves".²¹ This coexistence of providence and human freewill would be a tenet of Origen's theology.

16 *Strom.* II,22,134,4, with a reference to Rom 6:22.

17 See I. L. E. Ramelli, "Paul on Apokatastasis", 212-232.

18 *Strom.* IV,6,40,2. The lexicon is that of ἀποκατάστασις and ἀποκαθίστημι, as in *Strom.* III,9,63,4.

19 Christian Hengstermann, *Origenes und der Ursprung der Freiheitsmetaphysik*, Aschendorff, Münster 2015; Alfons Fürst, *Origen of Alexandria: Christian Philosophy of Freedom*, in Wiebke Denecke – Ilaria L. E. Ramelli (eds.), *A Companion to World Literature*, I, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2020, 255-266; Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, "The Legacy of Origen in Gregory of Nyssa's Theology of Freedom", in *Modern Theology* 38/2 (2022), 363-388.

20 *Strom.* II,15,66.

21 *Strom.* VI,12,96,1-3.

Each one's salvation or punishment must rest on one's voluntary choices.²² A punishment for mistakes due to deception, obnubilation, and ignorance is still right, according to Clement, but God's justice is "salvific". This is why Clement highlights the therapeutic and pedagogical value of suffering inflicted by God:²³

everything, both in general and in the single cases, is ordered by the Lord of the universe *for the purpose of universal salvation* ... God is good and from eternity and eternally *saves* through his Son ... the task of salvific Justice is to lead each being to what is better.²⁴

God's punishments are instructions (παιδεύσεις), decided out of goodness (ἀγαθότητι), even at the final judgment, in order to "compel those who have hardened too much to repent [ἐκβιάζονται μετανοεῖν] and convert" to God. The terminology of compelling emerges again: the Logos "almost compels people to salvation for a superabundance of goodness" (*Strom.* VII,14,86,6). The idea of compelling seems to contradict the voluntary nature of one's conversion and restoration, and this is why Clement uses the modifier "almost", but it is clear that in Clement's view this kind of compulsion is salvific and worthwhile.

According to Clement, it is either through good deeds or through punishment that God's providence works, but the goal of both is the same, namely salvation, which takes place through conversion to virtue (*Strom.* I,17,173). Clement, unlike later Patristic theologians, was convinced that salvific repentance and conversion is always possible, "both here on earth and on the other side", because God's goodness operates everywhere:²⁵

The Saviour is active, because *his work is to save*. ... All those who have believed will be saved, even if they come from paganism, because they have professed their faith *down there* (in hell): *God's punishments save and educate!* ... Even those who were out of the Law but had lived in a righteous way, thanks to the

22 E.g. in *Strom.* I,6,35,1; II,3,11,2; V,27,4; IV,26,170,4; V,17,1-2; 13,83,1; VI,12,96,2; VII,2,6,3, etc.

23 E.g., in *Strom.* II,15,69-71, etc.

24 *Strom.* VII,2,12; I,17,86,1-2.

25 *Strom.* IV,6,37,7.

particular quality of their soul, quickly converted and believed, even if they happened to be imprisoned *in hell* ... Therefore, it is demonstrated for sure that God is good, and the Lord can save with impartial justice those who convert, *here or on the other side*; for God's active power arrives not only here on earth, but everywhere, and it operates *everywhere*.²⁶

God's salvific power is active everywhere, even in the otherworld, even in hell. The "otherworldly fire" (πῦρ αἰώνιον) has a purifying and educative function; therefore, it is wise and endowed with discernment, φρόνιμον.²⁷ Thus, Clement hopes that "the heretics" can be converted by God, even after death, thanks to God's parental care (*Strom.* VII,16,102,1-3). Should they undergo "the final and general judgment", even then "God does not *punish* [τιμωρεῖται]—since punishment is the retribution of evil with further evil—but *corrects* [κολλάζει] *for the sake of those who are corrected*, both in general and singularly".²⁸ Punishment looks backwards, to the evil done, while correction looks forward, to the sinner's improvement.

The punishment of Sodom is "the image of the well calculated salvation for the human beings [τῆς εὐλογίστου τοῖς ἀνθρώποις σωτηρίας]". It does not represent damnation, but salvation, which is "well calculated" because purifying punishment must be applied in proportion to human sins for the sake of their salvation. Threats and punishments are also wanted by God to inspire a salutary fear, which keeps humans from sinning. The Logos waits for unbelievers to believe, even after death, because it is the Lord of all and the Saviour of all.²⁹ As Clement states in Book I of his *Protrepticus*, Christ, who "has saved us while we were already close to our ruin",³⁰ will produce the harmony and concord of all creatures.³¹ This is primarily a unity

26 *Strom.* VI,6,45-47.

27 *Strom.* VII,6,34,4.

28 *Strom.* VII,16,102,4-5.

29 *Strom.* VI,6,46-50; VII,2,7,6.

30 *Protrepticus* 1,7,4.

31 *Protrepticus* 1,5,2-4.

of will, and not of substance, either among rational creatures or God: Origen would stress this point.

Gregory of Nyssa was surely aware of Clement's hints of the theory of apokatastasis (besides being thoroughly familiar with Origen's theory), as seems to me to emerge from his clear allusion to Clement in his own description of apokatastasis as the highest hope.³² What is more, Gregory connected apokatastasis with God's Maternity and God's love, as I have pointed out that Clement already did. Gregory absorbed, both from his elder sister Macrina and from direct reading, a form of Christianity that was clearly Origenian and included apokatastasis. In his dialogue *De anima et resurrectione*, Macrina, one of the two protagonists along with Gregory himself, argues for apokatastasis. Note that this doctrine is again linked to a woman, who in her biography written by Gregory of Nyssa is also depicted as a (spiritual) mother of both of her younger brothers Gregory of Nyssa and Peter of Sebaste and of girls taken in and raised in her monastery, and was called so by them. But apokatastasis can be found in virtually all of Gregory's works, including in his short commentary on 1Cor 15:28, where Gregory explicitly states even the salvation of the Devil, as he also does in his *Oratio catechetica*.³³

Now, Gregory describes the eventual restoration as τὸ πέρασ τῶν ἐλπιζομένων, "the culmination of (our) hopes" (*Tunc et Ipse* GNO III/II,13,15), very much as Clement had done, as pointed out. I suspect that Gregory is indeed echoing Clement. Furthermore, precisely like

32 For *apokatastasis* in Gregory: see Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 372-440; eadem, "Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism. Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis," in *Vigiliae Christianae* 61/3 (2007), 313-356; eadem, *Apokatastasis and Epektasis in Hom. in Cant.: The Relation between Two Core Doctrines in Gregory and Roots in Origen*, in Giulio Maspero – Miguel Brugarolas – Ilaria Vigorelli (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa: In Canticum Cantorum. Commentary and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the 13th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Rome, 17-20 September 2014)*, *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* 150, Brill, Leiden 2018, 312-339; eadem, *Gregory of Nyssa on the Soul (and the Restoration): From Plato to Origen*, in Anna Marmodoro and Neil McLynn (eds.), *Exploring Gregory of Nyssa: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, 110-141.

33 As argued in I. L. E. Ramelli, *Apokatastasis*, 372-440.

Clement, Gregory states that the *apokatastasis* we hope for is the *telos*, which, like Origen and Plotinus, he connects with the origin (ἀρχή):

“Scripture teaches us that the Good [ἀγαθόν] to which we adhere out of our solicitude is nothing other than what is reserved for human nature from the origin (τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐναποτεθὲν τῇ φύσει).”³⁴

Paul’s eschatological prophecy in 1Cor 15:28 was Origen’s favourite Biblical buttress in support of *apokatastasis*. Like Origen, Gregory interprets the final submission of all to Christ announced in this Biblical verse as the salvation of all, in *De anima et resurrectione* (= *An.*), in *In Illud: tunc et ipse Filius*, and elsewhere.³⁵ Christ’s submission to God is understood by Gregory, just as by Origen,³⁶ as the submission, and consequent salvation, of all humans and rational creatures. Once all rational creatures reject evil, they will be saved.³⁷ The rejection and eviction of evil is enabled by Christ, in whom humanity is made connatural with the Good (God), which will reach even “the extreme limit of evil”, so “nothing will remain opposed to the Good”. All will be one body and united to God; “no being will remain outside the number of the saved” (*In illud* GNO III/II,21,2-3); “no creature of God will fall out of the Kingdom of God” (*ibid.* 14,2-3). Gregory insists that “Every being that had its origin from God will return such as it was from the beginning, when it had *not yet received evil*” (*ibid.* 14,5-7). If God must eventually be “all in all” (1Cor 15:28), then evil will no longer exist in any being, because God, the Good, could never be found in evil. In this argument, Gregory is drawing on Origen’s argument to the same effect (*De principiis* III,6,2-3).

34 Gregory of Nyssa, *Cant.* GNO VI 198, 8-10.

35 I demonstrated this in “Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology in *In Illud: Tunc et ipse Filius*: His Polemic against “Arian” Subordinationism and Apokatastasis”, in Volker Henning Drecoll – Margitta Berghaus (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism. Proceedings of the 11th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Tübingen, 17-20 September 2008)*, *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements*, 106, Brill, Leiden 2011, 445-478.

36 Argument for the derivation from Origen in Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, “Origen’s Anti-Subordinationism and Its Heritage in the Nicene and Cappadocian Line”, in *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011), 21-49.

37 See I. L. E. Ramelli, “Christian Soteriology.”

Macrina, in the role of Socrates in the Christian remake of Plato's *Phaedo*, *De anima et resurrectione*, argues for the resurrection and the restoration of all through the vanishing of sin and evil. She foresees

the *universal* harmony of all rational nature that one day will obtain in the Good . . . When finally, after long cycles of aeons, evil(ness) has disappeared, only the Good will remain, and even those creatures (demons) will concordantly and unanimously admit the sovereignty of Christ.³⁸

Fallen angels themselves will submit to Christ and be saved. Gregory, like Clement and Origen, regards otherworldly sufferings not as retributive but as healing, such as to purify rational creatures from passions and sins. God attracts the soul to himself, not to punish it, but to have it back in a divine work of *οικείωσις* (a Christianisation and theologisation of the Stoic doctrine of *οικείωσις*),³⁹ as Clement already stressed; suffering is but a side effect of God's re-appropriation of rational creatures (*An.* 97b-100c GNO III/III,71-73). The amount of sin in each one determines the duration of the purifying suffering, the flame of the "otherworldly fire" (*αἰώνιον*, *An.* 100cd-101a GNO III/III,73,5-75,2). God's aim with all this is the total annihilation of evil (*An.* 100-105a GNO III/III,73-78; with reference to Matt 18:23-25; Luke 7:41). The very notion of amount, quantity, and measure rules out a doctrine of an eternal duration of otherworldly suffering. Its purging nature, also stressed by Clement oftentimes, also excludes its eternity.

Out of pastoral concerns, which also worried Origen in relation to the theory of *apokatastasis*, Gregory warns through Macrina's words that the purifying process will be very hard—thus, it is much better not to sin than sinning and being purged very harshly.⁴⁰ But he never states that purifying suffering will be eternal. Purification will rather achieve its aim: restoration (*An.* 81a-84d GNO III/III 59,6-62,5; cf. *An.*

38 Gregory of Nyssa, *An.* 72b GNO III/III,51,12-14.

39 Argument in Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, "The Stoic Doctrine of Oikeiosis and its Transformation in Christian Platonism", in *Apeiron* 47 (2014), 116-140.

40 *An.* 157b-d, *Beat.* 5, etc.

85b-88c GNO III/III,62,16-65,8). Phil 2:10 foresees the final “universal harmony with the Good” (*An.* 136a *ibid.* 103,1-8), and the Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the eventual universal salvation: all rational creatures will be in harmony and unity, after the vanishing of evil (*An.* 132c-136a GNO III/III,100,6-103,1).

Like Clement, who connected Moses to the doctrine of the Logos and *apokatastasis* through the episode of manna, assimilated to the Logos’ milk, and water, which gushed out from Christ the Rock in the desert, Gregory also links Moses with the Logos and *apokatastasis*. He interprets Moses’ outstretched hands in battle as a type of the salvific effect of Christ’s cross (*De Vita Moysis* GNO VII/1,57,8-58,3); the plague of darkness in Egypt, from which Moses led away the Hebrews, indicates that Christ’s cross can dissipate even the “outer darkness” of hell. Given that “after three days of suffering in darkness even the Egyptians participated in light”, Exod 10:21 indicates

the restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) that we expect will come to pass in the end, in the Kingdom of Heavens: the restoration of those who had been condemned to Gehenna . . . the “outer darkness”. Now, both this (Egyptian darkness) and the “outer darkness” are dispelled when Moses outstretched his arms for the salvation of those who lay in darkness.

God’s will entails apokatastasis, as Clement insisted: God’s work is to save. And, as Gregory stresses, God’s will shall eventually be fulfilled. The last of his *Homilies on the Song of Songs* describes the restoration of all, after the purification of all from evilness: “no evilness will any longer remain in anyone. Then God will really be «*all in all*»”.⁴¹ The accomplishment (τέλος) of all is

that love may always increase and develop, until the One who “wants all to be saved and reach the knowledge of truth” has achieved his will . . . until the good will of the Bridegroom is *accomplished*. And this good will is that *all human beings be saved* and reach the knowledge of truth.⁴²

41 Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum Cantiorum* 15 GNO VI,469,5-6.

42 Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum Cantiorum* 4 GNO VI,131,12-13, with reference to 1Tim 2:4-6.

What is paramount for the present investigation, *apokatastasis* according to Gregory reveals the feminine side of God, as it emerges already in Clement. It is the side of God that “has sympathy toward us” humans in Clement’s words, although God is *per se* beyond genders.⁴³ Clement, as seen, notes that “The ineffable part of God is Father; the part that has sympathy towards us is Mother. By loving, the Father became female, and the great proof thereof is the Child She brought forth”.⁴⁴ Clement, as I suggested, probably had in mind Ps 109:3 LXX. Now, Gregory similarly links God’s saving will to God’s female, motherly aspect: human heart, *καρδία*,

becomes capable of the divine indwelling in it (*τῆς θείας αὐτοῦ ἐνοικήσεως*), when it returns up (*ἐπανέλθῃ*) to that condition (*κατάστασιν*) in which it was from the beginning (*τὸ κατ’ ἀρχάς*), when it was moulded by Her who conceived it (*ὑπὸ τῆς συλλαβούσης*). For if one conceives the first Cause of our constitution (*τὴν πρώτην τῆς συστάσεως ἡμῶν αἰτίαν*) as a Mother (*Μητέρα*), one will not err (*οὐχ ἀμαρτήσεται*).⁴⁵

Nyssen overtly calls God “Mother” in at least another significant passage of his last work: also in Homily 7 on Canticles, he declares that God is neither male nor female: how could one think of anything of this kind concerning the divine nature, while not even for us humans this characteristic endures forever (but we shall transcend gender in the other world)... If we call God “Mother” or “Love”, we shall not err: for God is Love (*ἀγάπη*), as John stated. (1]John 4:8; 4:16)⁴⁶

Clement, as pointed out above, in Book I of his *Paedagogus* represented Christ’s blood, shed for the salvation of humanity, as a mother’s blood shed in childbirth (*Paed.* I,42,2; 35,23) or as a mother’s blood transformed into milk for the nourishment of her baby (*Paed.*

43 See Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, “Christian Platonists in Support of Gender Equality: Bardaisan, Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Eriugena”, in Jessica Elbert Decker – Danielle Layne – Monica Vilhauer (eds.), *Otherwise than the Binary: New Feminist Readings of Ancient Philosophy and Culture*, SUNY, New York 2022, 313-350.

44 *Quis dives salvetur* 37,2.

45 Gregory of Nyssa, *Cant.* 6 GNO VI,183,10-15.

46 Gregory of Nyssa, *Cant.* 7 GNO VI.

I,40,1). The Logos is closely linked with milk in Clement's discourse, being the breast of God, which supply God's children with milk: "The food is the milk of the Father, from whom alone we babies suckle ... we rush to the care-soothing breast of the Father, the Logos. He alone, as is fitting, provides us babies with the milk of love. Only those who suckle this breast are really blessed" (*Paed.* I,43,2-4). The attribution of maternal breasts to the Father is hammered home in *Paed.* I,46,1, cited above: "The Father's nipples of love supply milk to babies who seek the Logos".

This striking image, repeatedly employed by Clement, surfaces again in Gregory: "The divine breasts", τῶν θείων μαστῶν, produce "milk" for us; "from God's breasts milk is supplied, and milk is the nourishment of infants", but the most simple teaching from God is loftier than the highest human teachings; thus, "God's breasts", again, οἱ θεῖοι μαστοί, produce milk that is better than human adult food. Gregory adds that this thought (νόημα) is very important ("not at all secondary or negligible").⁴⁷ I suspect that Clement, with his imaginative bio-theology, impacted Gregory profoundly.

The insistence on the θεῖοι μαστοί, "divine breasts", which are obviously female since they produce milk, and which Clement sometimes identifies with the Logos, might also have the following Biblical foundation. Jesus in Rev 1:13-16 is dressed as a high priest and is explicitly said to have μαστοί, "female breasts". Note that this term is exclusively applied to women in the Bible (e.g. Isa 32:12), Philo, and Josephus. The angels in Rev 15:6 are said to have στῆθη ("chest"), not μαστοί. Christ's μαστοί can point to inclusiveness, in reference to the creation of the human being, the ἄνθρωπος, obviously not one gender alone, "in God's image and likeness" (Gen 1:26-27). To save the entire humanity, Jesus, ἄνθρωπος corresponding to the first ἄνθρωπος (Rom 5:6-11), assumed the whole of humanity, not only one gender (or one

47 Gregory of Nyssa, *Cant.* 1 GNO VI,35,4-10.

race). In the transcendent Christ gender is no longer relevant, like all other differentiations such as ethnic or social ones (Gal 3:28), and only the human nature remains, together with the divine one (Phil 2:6-8). It is likely that the Biblical image of Christ's *μαστοί* influenced Clement in Book I of his *Paedagogus*, and, after him, Gregory. Clement, as I have pointed out above, was also acutely aware of God's *maternal* generation of the Child "from the womb" in Ps 109:3 LXX.

This article has argued that Clement of Alexandria connects the doctrine of *ἀποκατάστασις* (the restoration of rational creatures to God) to what he depicts as the feminine side of God. After examining how Clement describes God, properly speaking, as transcending genders, but with a great deal of imagery that represents God as both Father and Mother (with a theological use of female attributes and arguably some Biblical foundations thereof), I have considered the connection that Clement establishes between the "female side" of God, divine love (charity-love: *ἀγάπη*), and *apokatastasis*. I have examined the concept of restoration in Clement, and have pointed out that the connection between God as Mother, divine love, and *apokatastasis* established by him and taken over by Origen was absorbed and developed by Gregory of Nyssa in a conscious and deliberate way.

Clement, although he was not an outspoken or systematic supporter of universal restoration, situates himself in a prominent position in the history of *apokatastasis*, as his own oeuvre makes clear, and as the major exponents of this theory contribute to show with their deliberate development of Clement's hints.

Abstract

L'articolo intende dimostrare che Clemente connette la dottrina dell'*ἀποκατάστασις* a ciò che egli descrive come "l'aspetto femminile" di Dio. Dopo avere esaminato in breve (con rinvio a studi approfonditi)

il modo in cui egli rappresenta Dio, che propriamente è al di sopra dei generi, con descrizioni della Divinità sia come Padre che come Madre (con un impiego teologico delle caratteristiche femminili, in base a fondazioni scritturistiche), l'articolo prende in esame la stretta relazione stabilita da Clemente tra l'aspetto femminile di Dio, l'amore divino (*ἀγάπη*, attribuito a Dio da Giovanni), e l'apocatastasi. L'articolo esamina la teoria della restaurazione in Clemente e dimostra che il nesso tra Dio come Madre, l'amore-carità di Dio, e l'apocatastasi, istituito da Clemente e ripreso da Origene, fu assorbito e sviluppato dal Nisseno consapevolmente. Clemente, pur non sostenendo sistematicamente la restaurazione universale, si situa in una posizione preminente nella storia della dottrina dell'apocatastasi, come dimostra la sua opera e come contribuiscono a suggerire i maggiori esponenti di questa teoria (da Origene al Nisseno ad Evagrio) grazie allo sviluppo che offersero degli spunti clementini.



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