

Testamentum Imperium
An International Theological Journal

www.PreciousHeart.net/ti

Volume 1 – 2005-2007

**Rising from the Ashes: Rediscovering the
St. Clement of Rome's Doctrine of Perseverance**

Brandon G. Withrow

In his book *Orthodoxy*, G.K. Chesterton tells of a story he had once considered writing about an English yachtsman who, due to a slight miscalculation, believes he has found an undiscovered island in the South Seas, but in reality it is England. The man, armed for a fight, is ready to plant the British flag "on that barbaric temple which turned out to be the Pavilion at Brighton."¹ While many would take this man as a fool for such an error, Chesterton points out that this is not so: "What could be more glorious than to brace one's self up to discover New South Wales and then realize, with a gush of happy tears, that it was really old South Wales?"²

Within the last two centuries a number of scholars have come to the conclusion that the early church epistle, 1 Clement, is New South Wales. They believe that Clement presents something other than orthodox Christianity, something new, something different from, or contrary to, the true gospel. And while cultural terminology and imagery abound in the epistle, it is the contention of this article that Clement is teaching something far closer to South Wales than previously supposed.

According to the predominate view, Clement has succumbed to Jewish moralism and to Stoic concepts of God and the world. Jewish moralism, it is argued, finds its roots in the system of the law and

¹ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City: Image Books, 1959), 9.

² Chesterton, 10.

salvation resulting in a persevering obedience to God. By emphasizing eternity as a reward of a moral life, one would be forsaking the gospel of grace.

Stoicism (from *poa*, or porch where Zeno of Citium taught in Athens around 300 B.C.) conflates nature, rationality, and God together. The universe is one and the same with God, and its order is evidence of his existence. Unrighteousness is a form of disorder. So Clement appeals to the order of the universe as a model for spiritual order and righteousness. Clement's emphasis on living a moral life and his terminology reflecting order in creation have left many historians to believe that Clement's teaching was corrupted by these religions.

Clement, like anyone, expresses his religion in the context of his culture. He uses phrases that are part of his personality, society, and religion, but the mere use of these phrases do not constitute "movement away from the Pauline faith to a type of Christianity in which ethical interests and concern for law and order predominate."³ Rather, Clement is writing a letter to a church on a moral decline, and though he truly understands justification by faith alone, he also believes that *sola fides justificat, sed fides non est sola* (faith alone justifies, but faith is not alone). Understandably, he expresses this thought to the Corinthian church with not only an abstract Pauline concept of justification, but also the practical theology of James that teaches "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24), an early Christian emphasis on the works of a persevering Christian. As will be seen, this perseverance is the reason for Clement's moralistic tone, resembling a doctrine of salvation by works.

Who is Clement?

No one knows for certain who wrote the book of 1 Clement. It is assumed that the author holds some sort of high ecclesiastical office. Other ancient Christian writers have identified the author as Clement, the third bishop of Rome. Eusebius, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria,

³ Cyril Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers*, Vol.1, *The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. Eugene Fairweather (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 39.

Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Basil of Caesarea attest to this.⁴ All the Greek manuscripts attribute it to him.⁵ No historical reasons to reject these testimonies exist.

One famous theory promoted by Dio Cassius is that Clement of Rome was the famous Titus Flavius Clemens, a member of the imperial Flavian family who was executed on the charge of “atheism.”⁶ A spin on this theory is that Clement was a freedman belonging to the family of his namesake.⁷ There is nothing impossible about this last theory, but it cannot be confirmed. In addition, Eusebius and Origen identify him with the Clement of Philippians 4:3.⁸ Patrician scholar Johannes Quasten finds a lack of evidence for all such theories, concluding that “we know next to nothing of the early life of Clement of Rome.”⁹

There is no end to the speculation, but the question of who Clement is continues to affect our interpretation of him. Is he Jewish or Gentile? If Clement has a Jewish-Hellenistic background, this could lead to a portrait of him as a syncretistic theologian, combining Jewish moralism and Hellenistic theology, even if only a little. Most historians argue that Clement was from a Jewish-Christian background and was particularly a hellenized Jew. Proofs of Clement’s Jewish heritage are often drawn from his repeated use of the Septuagint and from apocryphal literature.¹⁰ In writing about

⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.16; 3.4; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.3.3; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1.7.38; 4.17-19; Origen, *On First Principles*. 2.3.6; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.* 8.8; Basil of Caesarea, *De Spirit Sact.*, 29.

⁵ Richardson, 36.

⁶ Dio Cassius, *Hist. Rom.*, 67, 14.

⁷ Richardson, 36.

⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:15; Origen, *Commentary on John*, 6:36.

⁹ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol.1, *The Beginning of Patristic Literature* (Westminster, M.A.: The Newman Press, 1962), 42-43, 95.

¹⁰ L. W. Barnard, "The Early Roman Church, Judaism, and Jewish Christianity," *Anglican Theological Review* 49 (October, 1967): 373-76. Barnard is relying largely on Karlmann Beyschlag's work *Clemens Romanus und der Frukatholizismus: Untersuchungen zu 1 Clemens 1-7* (J. C. B. Mohr: Tübingen, 1966). Barnard also finds Jewish-Christianity in Clement's uses of terms such as "schism, sedition, persecution, and martyrdom" (Barnard, 374).

Clement's liturgical prayer in 1 Clement 59:3-61:3, historian L. W. Barnard finds parallels with Jewish liturgy. He points out that:

Bishop Lightfoot long ago in his famous commentary gave many highly suggestive parallels between the prayer and the Jewish *Shemoneth 'Esreh*, the 'Eighteen Benedictions.' The Talmud states that the 'Men of the Great Synagogue' instituted certain benedictions and prayers and the 'eighteen' were arranged by Simeon ha-Pakoli in the time of Gamaliel II (A.D. 80-120) . . . There is sufficient similarity between Benedictions 1, 2, 17 and 18 and 1 Clement to make it highly probable that in his liturgical prayer Clement was drawing on certain of the daily blessings known and used in the Hellenistic synagogues of the diaspora of his day.¹¹

Historian Jean Daniélou also makes the case that Clement is from a Jewish-Hellenistic background by highlighting the Greek influences in Clement's use of Stoic phrases and his theology of creation.¹² The correlation between Clement and Stoicism will be discussed more fully later, but in the end there seems to be an agreement that Clement has a Jewish-Hellenistic heritage. However, this genealogical background alone does not negate Clement's ability to stay true to his Christian theological heritage.

Clement as an Exegete

Like many early fathers Clement is fond of proof-texting. He utilizes Scripture from both the Old and New Testament to make his point. He quotes Scripture both to emphasize the need for good works in salvation, and to argue that the Corinthians should trust solely in Christ and not in their works. The presence of both emphases leaves critical scholars guessing. Does Clement mean that a person is ultimately saved by works? Or does he mean that one is saved by grace? Is he just a poor thinker, unaware of the apparent

¹¹ Barnard, 378; For more information see J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part I, S. Clement of Rome (New York: Macmillan, 1890), 392-6. Despite this Jewish history, Barnard comments, "It is unnecessary, however, to postulate that the Jewish-Christian traditions which it held were violently opposed to the Pauline theology, as apparently Beyschlag believes" (Barnard, 375).

¹² Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, Vol. 1, trans. and ed. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), 43.

contradiction? Or is he trying to systematize a doctrine of salvation or harmonize both works and grace?

Although 1 Clement is an epistle and not an early “systematic theology,” it appears that Clement does consciously try to harmonize Scripture. J.B. Lightfoot calls this Clement’s “comprehensiveness.”¹³ Clement’s vast knowledge of both testaments allows him to pull passages from many places in Scripture to make a point.¹⁴ The historical validity of Lightfoot’s claim of “comprehensiveness” is challenged by others. Charles Nielsen concludes that this may be too much to ask of Clement, or anyone for that matter. He writes, “proper exegesis is not always concerned with an either/or, yet too many commentators seem to want to make Clement more consistent than either life or Clement really is.”¹⁵

It would be asking more than one should to expect Clement to approach Scripture with modern standards of consistency. And while Clement does not claim comprehensiveness or consistency, he does tell the Corinthians that his letter was intended to touch on “every aspect of faith and repentance and true love . . . ” (62:2). He was in this way, hoping to give the Corinthians a full and somewhat consistent picture of salvation, one which stirred them on to obedience and perseverance through their trials. It is with this in mind that the charge of Judaism may be set in its proper context.

The Charge of Judaism

In his book, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, T. F. Torrance disparagingly argues that Clement “may use the language of election and justification, but the essentially Greek ideas of the

13 Lightfoot, 95.

14 Lightfoot, 95. Clement has a deep love for Scripture and for pulling that Scripture together comprehensively in order to teach coherently. This is easily seen in his emphasis on looking “into the depths of the divine knowledge” (40:1), and studying the “Holy Scriptures, which are true” (45:2). It is not the philosophy of the Stoics to which Clement appeals, but rather he tells the Corinthians to “take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle” (40:1). Clement commends “a good understanding of the sacred Scriptures” and notices when the Corinthians have “studied the oracles of God” (53:1; 62:3). It requires more work to turn Clement against his Christian heritage than it does to simply read him as he defines himself.

15 Charles M. Nielsen, “Clement of Rome,” *Church History* 31 (June 1962): 131.

unqualified freedom of choice is a natural axiom in his thoughts, and entails a doctrine of ‘works,’ as Paul would have said.”¹⁶ Along the same lines, Johannes Weiss analyzed Clement’s Stoic doctrine of faith in God and came to the conclusion that “there is little which is peculiarly Christian which is to be discerned in the epistle’s faith in God.”¹⁷ Has Clement shipwrecked the gospel or does he not appreciate enough the Pauline doctrine of faith and grace, as these charges indicate?

The charge of Judaism is typically derived from key passages such as 1 Clement 30:3 which says, “and be justified by deeds, not by words.”¹⁸ Likewise, in 10:7 we find passages that correlate the “faith and hospitality” of Abraham as a means of acceptance before God. In 11:1 it was because of “hospitality and piety” that Lot was “saved out of Sodom.” In 12:1 Rahab was saved by her “faith and hospitality.” Weiss concludes from such passages that “repentance, perfected in obedience and humility, must be used to obtain forgiveness.”¹⁹

Adding to the evidence, Clement’s use of humility is also interpreted as a means by which a man may obtain salvation. One incriminating passage is found in 30:2-3 where Clement (quoting James 4:6) writes: “‘God’ . . . [resists] the proud but giveth grace to the humble. Let us then join ourselves to those to whom is given grace from God; let us put on concord in meekness of spirit and continence, keeping ourselves far from all gossip and evil speaking and be justified by deeds, and not by words.” Based on these words, Torrance argues that, “Clement substitutes for the New Testament doctrine of sonship, the bare idea of subjection before God.”²⁰

Who can blame Torrance for such a conclusion, when in 19:1 Clement speaks about “the humility and obedient submission of so

¹⁶ T. F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace In The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), 54-55.

¹⁷ Johannes Weiss, *The History of Primitive Christianity*, Vol. 2, ed. Frederick C. Grant (New York: Wilson-Erickson, 1937), 855.

¹⁸ Kirsopp Lake, trans., *Loeb Classical Library: The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1, 1 Clement, (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1985). All references will follow the chapter and verse format.

¹⁹ Weiss, 862.

²⁰ Torrance, 48

many men of such great fame.” “Faith,” writes Torrance of Clement, “can only bring justification when by its very exercise it manifests this quality of abasement before God.²¹ Similarly, Clement says, “Let us observe that all the righteous have been adorned with good works; and the Lord himself adorned himself with good works and rejoiced. Having therefore this pattern let us follow his will without delay, let us work the work of righteousness with all our strength” (33:7-8) Torrance remarks, “this is for Clement justification by faith, and that this is the very essence of his religion.”²²

Torrance adds to the fire when he insists that Clement does not even view Christ as the object of saving faith. He says, “Christ does not only show us the way, but initiates us in the true relation to God. He is not, however, the instrument of our salvation, and the end in one, even though He is called ‘Lord’. In the last resort therefore Clement is unable to ascribe saving significance to Christ Himself.”²³

In a similar argument, Johannes Weiss declares that a “*strong moralism* runs through all its expressions from the first page to the last.”²⁴ Weiss notes that Clement uses Pauline terms of justification by faith but concludes that “this formula is only a borrowed one, and how little the Pauline religion and theology is a living thing for the author and his circle.”²⁵ Weiss adopts this conclusion because:

There stand, in other passages of the letter, two which are completely different; one of which, closely akin to the passage just quoted [32:4], says, ‘to be justified by deeds and not by words’ (30:3). The other stands in an earlier connection: Abraham, St. Paul’s great example of faith received grace ‘on account of his faith and hospitality’ (10:7). Lot was saved because of his hospitality and piety (11:1); Rahab, again like Abraham, on account of her faith and hospitality (12:1). It immediately

²¹ Torrance, 49. Later Torrance concludes that Clement “like the whole mass of Judaistic writers . . . thinks of God’s mercy as directed only towards the pious” (Torrance, 55).

²² Torrance, 49.

²³ Torrance, 47

²⁴ Weiss, 853.

²⁵ Weiss, 861. The sweeping generalizations that occur in scholarship never cease to amaze me. Not only has Weiss been able to judge from a simple letter that Clement does not mean what he says, but also that his entire circle of fellow Christians does not either.

becomes clear that from these formulae how little understanding there was in this age of Paul's great struggle for justification by faith.²⁶

Weiss concurs with Torrance that according to Clement, “God is merciful and it is his will that everyone have help in escaping from his sins; one must only be obedient and submissive to his will and do good works.”²⁷

In a milder approach, what Weiss calls “strong moralism,” Cyril Richardson dismisses as a mere “strain.”²⁸ Richardson finds that this “links him on the one hand with Hellenistic Judaism and the other with Stoicism.”²⁹ And with barely a handful of evidence he concludes that “these instances must suffice to indicate the extent to which Clement has moved away from the Pauline gospel into an atmosphere more concerned with the moral life.”³⁰ But as Richardson graciously adds that, “this does not, however, exclude both acquaintance with, and some grasp of Pauline gospel. The cleavage is not so sharp as is sometimes made out.”³¹

Charles Nielsen rejects some of this interpretation, but replaces it with the concept of a bishop who either knowingly or unknowingly contradicts himself. Nielsen says Clement wavers “back and forth between the idea of gift and the idea of works.”³² Clement is “aware of at least one contradiction in his thought. It is significant that he lets the contradiction stand.”³³ Nielsen argues that Clement is a theologian of contradiction, not harmonization.

What Clement Says

The preceding arguments seem to stack up the evidence heavily against Clement. There are numerous passages that speak of humility and obedience. But do works of humility and obedience add up to a rejection of grace? Or could it be that Clement is arguing something

26 Weiss, 861.

27 Weiss, 862.

28 Richardson, 38.

29 Richardson, 38.

30 Richardson, 38.

31 Nielsen, 139.

32 Nielsen, 148.

33 Richardson, 39

more akin to a doctrine of perseverance? Clement is writing to a church torn by division, strife, pride, and sinful activity (3:1-3). Morality and the virtues of Christianity were “removed” from Corinth (3:4). Clement believes he is writing to believers (62:3), so the most important thing in his mind is to exhort them to good works. Amidst their daily challenges, he wants to “remind” them of righteousness (62:3) and appealing to James is one of the obvious ways to do such a thing. While Torrance and others are concerned with the perceived disharmony between Clement and Paul, they fail to see Clement’s intentional appeal to Paul in light of James.

The evidence that Clement is influenced by James and attempts to harmonize (in some way) his theology with Paul is brought out by chapters 30-33 and 10-12. Granted, Clement does not plainly say “I am harmonizing Paul and James.” He cannot presciently address reformation issues. He cannot say, “for all of you nervous Protestants out there, I’m one of you.” The issues of his day were different, and the language he uses does not ring all the same bells it does for Protestant theologians today. Nevertheless, Clement seems to be aware that while he is encouraging perseverance, it is necessary to place that perseverance within its soteriological context. Otherwise, the Corinthians will take pride in their morality and forget who is responsible for saving them. To encourage perseverance, Clement appeals to James, to counter pride and trust in one’s works, Clement appeals to Paul.

In paraphrasing James 4:6, Clement writes, “‘God’ . . . [resists] the proud but giveth grace to the humble. Let us then join ourselves to those to whom is given grace from God; let us put on concord in meekness of spirit and continence, keeping ourselves far from all gossip and evil speaking and be justified by deeds, and not by words” (30:2). In 30:3 Clement says “*ergois dikaioumenoi*,” (“be justified by works”) which recalls James 2:21, “*ergon edikaothe*” (“justified by works”).

Similarly, in chapters 10-12 Abraham and Rahab are used as examples of “faith and hospitality.” Again, this is a direct appeal to James 2. James 2:21-22 says, “Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” Clement

says that Rahab was saved because of her “faith and hospitality,” which no doubt refers to the way she harbored the spies sent into Jericho. In James 2:25 James says, “In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?” James relates her hospitality to the spies as evidence of her faith, giving Clement the precedence to use it in his epistle as well. Abraham’s “obedience” and friendship with God are noted by both Clement and James (1 Clement 10:1-2; James 2:23). He clearly wants the Corinthians to demonstrate their justification by their humble works as their fathers did (30:7). And he continues to argue this using other examples of the faithful (Enoch, Noah, and Jacob for example) in the following chapters.

Admittedly, this is a lot of emphasis on works, albeit not entirely unlike the heroes of faith passage of Hebrews 11. However, Clement carefully, and one could argue, consciously, tries to avoid excess. He spends 31 chapters on works of righteousness but reaches chapter 32 and emphasizes that though works of righteousness are important, he does not want his audience to forget the great doctrine of the church, lest they begin to think that they are saved by “works.” Therefore, he recalls the Pauline doctrine of *sola fide* in chapter 32:3-4 by writing:

All of them [Abraham, Jacob, etc.] therefore were all renowned and magnified, not through themselves or their own works or the righteous actions which they had wrought, but through his will; And therefore we who by his will have been called in Christ Jesus, are not made righteous by ourselves, or by our wisdom or understanding or piety or the deeds which we have wrought in holiness of heart, but through faith, by which the Almighty God has justified all men from the beginning of the world: to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The “all of them,” in this passage is a clear and conscious connection between the “fathers” who righteously persevered (Enoch, Abraham, Rahab, Jacob and others) and Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith alone. While Clement appeals to James to encourage works, he anticipates the potential for gross abuse of a such a teaching and intentionally curbs it by appealing to Paul.

Even humility is not seen as a work for which one can take credit. Contrary to other critics of Clement, Nielsen rightly points out that

Clement views humility as a gift, not as a “righteous act.”³⁴ Clement urges Christians not to brag about their humility because “we have everything from him” (38:4). In 56:1 he says that “humility” is “given.” Works of righteousness are not ours but we are “adorned” by God with “good works” (33:7). In the same passage in which Clement speaks of being “justified by deeds,” he clearly sees that these deeds (including humility) belong to those who are “blessed by God” (30:8).³⁵ As Robert Grant and Holt Graham explain, “Justification is by faith alone (32:3-4), but Clement, like Paul, cannot believe that it excludes the practice of ‘the works of love’ (cf. especially Rom. 6:1). Idleness is no virtue; readiness for ‘every good work’ (Tit. 3:1; 2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17; 2 Cor. 9:8) is indispensable.”³⁶

Clement does not see a contradiction between Paul and James. He believes that justification is by faith alone, but his apparent clarification, seems to point to the fact that he does not want it to appear contradictory, as Nielsen asserts.³⁷ This is why Clement can fully draw the two teachings together and say, “Why was our father Abraham blessed? Was it not because he wrought righteousness and truth through faith?” (31:2) Truth and righteousness are a natural result of faith.³⁸

Commentators become critical when Clement uses the term “justification” with both the doctrine of faith alone and in reference to works. But if Clement is harmonizing James and Paul, then both usages are possible and theologically accurate. Undoubtedly, we

³⁴ Nielsen, 136.

³⁵ It is passages like these that are used as proof texts by Torrance to demonstrate that Clement understands justification by righteous acts such as humility, but then fails to note these important clarifications.

³⁶ Robert M. Grant and Holt H. Graham, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*, Vol. 2, *First and Second Clement*, (New York: Thomas Nelson 1965), 59.

³⁷ Nielsen, 134. “I can only conclude, then, that Clement meant what he said in ch. 32, meant it so strongly, in fact, that he let it stand knowing full well that it flatly contradicted the major emphasis of the letter.”

³⁸ J. B. Lightfoot said on this passage that “we have seen Clement combining the teaching of S. Paul and S. James . . . So here, after declaring emphatically that men are not justified by their own works but by faith . . . he hastens to balance this statement by urging the importance of good works.” Lightfoot, 100.

cannot measure Clement's precision by sixteenth or seventeenth-century protestant theological sophistication. Had he lived at the time of the reformation he may have chosen to clarify even further these points, but in his day and age this was not necessary. To judge him by that is to invoke a standard flawed by anachronism.³⁹

Torrance also sees Clement as positing Christ as a mere moral example. "The death of Christ is brought in as an example," writes Torrance of Clement, "that having His death before our eyes we may have an insatiable desire to do good, and to be humble before God . . . In the last resort therefore Clement is unable to ascribe saving significance to Christ himself."⁴⁰ Christ is not the substitutionary atoner of our sin.

It is true that Clement presents Christ as our example. He does so often enough that one may easily come to this conclusion. But Christ presents himself in such a way when he washes his disciples' feet (John 13), and when he makes the statement: "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in his love" (John 15:9). It is natural for Clement to find in Christ's sacrifice both an atonement and example. That Clement argues for more than an example is clear when he says, "In love did the Master receive us; for the sake of love which he had toward us did Jesus Christ our Lord give his blood by the will of God for us, and his flesh for our flesh, and his soul for our souls" (49:6).

More evidence of this can be found in 7:4, "Let us fix our gaze on the Blood of Christ, and let us know that it is precious to his Father, because it was poured out for our salvation." In 12:7 Clement finds a type of Christ in Rahab's scarlet thread. He says, "And they

³⁹ It is fair, despite the difference in periods, to wonder how close theologically Clement would be to a Protestant understanding of justification and the issues surrounding it. Righteousness in Clement usually refers to the fruit of faith in sanctification. Clement uses phrases such as "reckoned or accounted" (10:6) which are quoted from Genesis 15:6 (LXX), but no further explanation is given. Clement's concern was not about any Corinthian belief that they needed righteousness in order to be justified, but that they didn't need to be righteous after being justified.

⁴⁰ Torrance, 47.

proceeded to give her a sign, that she should hang out a scarlet thread from her house, foreshadowing that all who believe and hope on God shall have redemption through the blood of the Lord.” And again in 21:6 he says, “Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us.” In these instances there is a clear reliance on the blood of Christ for redemption.

Contrary to Torrance’s view, Clement finds salvation in the sacrifice of Christ. Christ’s death both saves us and gives us an example to live by, yet our high priest (36:1), through his “sufferings,” was the real “provision” for our salvation (2:1-2). Clement is not a perfect theologian, but it does appear that moralistic living is a product of our salvation, in his theology. One perseveres because one is saved by Christ. Salvation does not come by works, as he has been charged with teaching, but rather through the blood of Christ which saves the elect (chapter 16) and enables them for righteous living.⁴¹

The Charge of Stoicism

The second charge against Clement, that of conflating Christianity and Stoicism, is also not as black and white as one might think. Terminology indicative of Hellenism, examples from pagan mythology, and most importantly, Clement’s focus on the realm of nature and its order, have all driven many historians to conclude that Clement, mixing stoic philosophy into his theology, reads Paul through the Greek lens of order and nature.

Why is this important to his understanding of salvation? Clement’s appeal to the order of the physical universe is important to his argument that unrighteousness is a result of spiritual disorder. Clement, as Torrance writes, “links salvation directly on to the Father and creation.”⁴² “Characteristically,” continues Torrance, “Clement finds this gracious will of God for our salvation illustrated, not by the

⁴¹ A. C. McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought: Early and Eastern*, Vol. 1, *From Jesus to John of Damascus*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), 85. McGiffert says that Clement “agreed with other Christians of his day that salvation is to be had only by obeying God and doing his will.” Despite obvious phrases in Clement that teach otherwise, McGiffert insists that Clement truly thought works were salvific.

⁴² Torrance, 48.

work of Christ, so much as by the good deeds of God in creation.”⁴³ In order to encourage fellow Christians to godly living, sound doctrine, and to promote order in the Church, Clement appeals to universal and natural order, but merely appealing to natural order and creation does not necessitate a Christianity fettered by Stoicism.

The so-called “Stoic” passages of 1 Clement are not without biblical precedence. While Grant and Graham are drawn to the conclusion that Stoicism did have an influence on Clement, they also note that these primary passages of discussion (20-27) have parallels with the Old Testament as well. Chapters 20:1-2 and 24:3 reflect Psalm 19:1-2. They note that “Clement’s use of ‘abyss’ (20:5) recalls the Old Testament (‘abyss in Job 38:16, a passage from which he quotes in 20:7), while ‘basin’ of the sea recalls Psalm 64:8 (Sinaiticus), and ‘gathering together’ is from Genesis 1:9. The ‘bounds’ placed around the sea (20:6) are from Job 38:10, and Clement quotes the next verse (38:11) in Job immediately.”⁴⁴

Other so-called Stoic passages could also easily be attributed to Scripture. When discussing the resurrection and nature, it is likely that Clement has foremost in mind 1 Corinthians 15. And, given that he is writing to the Corinthian church and appeals to the Corinthian letter of Paul, this makes perfect sense. For example, the resurrection is proved by saying, “Let us look, beloved, at the resurrection which is taking place at its proper season. Day and night show us a resurrection. The night sleeps, the day arises: the day departs, the night comes on” (24:2-3). While these descriptions may sound Stoic, they are also clearly Pauline and fit within the context of 1 Corinthians 15. In 1 Corinthians 15:40-41 Paul also draws an analogy from the stars, sun, and moon to show that heavenly bodies are not all the same. Similarly, Clement finds an example of the resurrection from seeds planted in the ground, showing that they eventually bring about fruit. Grant and Graham believe that this has Stoic roots.⁴⁵ Yet, this same example is used of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:36-38.

43 Torrance, 48.

44 Grant and Graham, 44.

45 Grant and Graham, 50.

And finally, both Clement and Paul call Christ the “first-fruit” of the resurrection (1 Clement 24:1; 1 Cor. 15:20).⁴⁶

But it is 1 Clement 20 that is often seen as the chief example of Stoicism in this epistle. For example, in Clement 20:1-2 he writes, “The heavens moving at his appointment are subject to him in peace; day and night follow the course allotted by him without hindering each other.” Edwin Hatch writes that in Stoic philosophy, “the sense of order of the world” brought about the “consciousness of one God.”⁴⁷ That is, one can derive God from observing order. It is argued that Clement is doing the same.

Despite the similarities, it seems that the natural order has a different function in Clement’s argument. W. C. Van Unnik, contrasting Stoic philosophy and Clement’s theology in his article “Is 1 Clement 20 Purely Stoic?” argues that:

Among the Stoics the order [of the universe] seems more or less established in itself and makes men thinking . . . that there must be behind it an organizing power, and that it is from the order of nature that this divine power can be known; in 1 Clement the order is established by the command of the Creator and reveals the will of God, the keynote of the passage being not so much the order in nature as the command of God.⁴⁸

For Stoicism, nature proves God’s existence, but for Clement it proves the “will of God.” As Nielsen observes, “Certainly when one reads 1 Clement one gets the overwhelming impression of the power of God’s will.”⁴⁹ It is not so much that order in the universe proves

⁴⁶ Weiss does not find the fact that it is found in Scripture to be satisfying. He says, “And we hear the Hellenistic notes - which we have noticed before - of 'life' and 'immortality' which have been previously sounded in Christianity.”

⁴⁷ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages Upon the Christian Church*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 171.

⁴⁸ W. C. Van Unnik, “Is 1 Clement 20 Purely Stoic?” *Vigiliae Christianae*, IV (1950), 184.

⁴⁹ Nielsen, 133; see also, D.W.F. Wong, “Natural and Divine Order in 1 Clement,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 31 (1977): 81-87.

God's existence, but that order in the universe demonstrates that God's will is for order to exist in the churches.⁵⁰

Finally, the famous Phoenix chapter (25) is offered as evidence. Here Clement uses the Phoenix mythology as an example of resurrection from the ashes of death. Even with the pagan history of this myth, this was not an unusual story for a Christian to believe at this time. As Clement's translator Kirsopp Lake writes, "this story was supposed by Christians to be sanctioned by the LXX version of [Psalm 92:12], where there is a confusion between *phoinix* = phoenix, and *phoinix* = palm tree."⁵¹ It would be reasonable for Clement to use this as an example if he believed that Psalm 92:12 read, "The righteous shall flourish like the phoenix" rather than "like the palm tree." Cultural influence is evident here, but it is not without Scriptural support, even if that support is misunderstood. Scripture remains the source of Clement's argument and it is probably best to understand any imitation of Stoicism as far less intentional than his appeal to the Bible itself.

Old South Wales

The Corinthian church of Clement's day continued to struggle with living righteously much the same as when Paul wrote to them. Their reputation as "ready unto every good work" (1 Clement 2:7; c.f. Titus 3:1) was being surpassed by the sin, strife, jealousy, and disorder (1 Clement 3:2). "Righteousness and peace" were far removed from them (3:4). To encourage perseverance in righteousness, Clement pulls seemingly contradictory statements from both Paul and James and weaves them together to make his point. James is suitable to supply Clement with the material he needs to encourage the Corinthians to live godly. And Paul supplies what he needs to remind them that living godly is ultimately a gift of God through faith in Christ. To persevere in the faith is proof of one's justification, but it is not the foundation of one's justification. Justification and sanctification are not strictly separate categories for Clement, and that

50 Taking his usual moderate stand, J. N. D. Kelly calls these "echoes" of later Stoicism (J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Rev. [New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 1978] 83.)

51 Lake, 53 n.1.

is undoubtedly the source of the confusion and discomfort over his epistle. But he does seem to see the latter as a result of the former.

To live orderly and in submission to God is to follow the examples of not only those fathers such as Abraham and Jacob, but also the examples given by God in nature itself. Borrowing from the created order, while containing reflections of Stoicism, is not without Scriptural precedence. Like John using the term “logos,” Paul quoting from Greek poets (Acts 17:28), and Jude referencing the book of Enoch (Jude 14), Clement does not transcend his culture, but uses what he believes is true and biblical from culture to effectively reach those to whom he writes.

In the end, Clement wants the Corinthians to demonstrate their faith by persevering in the trials and temptations of this world. His method of doing so may not fit our modern preferences, but it is not New South Wales either.