IS 1 CLEMENT 20 PURELY STOIC?*

The 1a Clementis fights against the disorder in the church of Corinth caused by the dismissal of some officers (ch. 44). The author stresses over and again the fact that one should not transgress the appointed rule, but do everything in its own order (ch. 40-41). The incidents in Corinth, however, do not form the contents of this letter; they are no more than the motive. They reveal that there is something wrong in this church and the letter from Rome tries to give a general instruction on the way in which the Christians have to behave themselves. It is an entreaty for peace and concord (63:2) in a general tone, but nevertheless closely connected with the point at issue.

Ch. 20 forms part of the subdivision 19:2—21:8. The author draws attention to the peace and benefits given by God the Creator. The whole universe moves around in good order according to God's command, from which he takes the lesson that it should be the same in the Church. 21:5 is a direct hit against the leaders of the Corinthian opposition and shows that the whole passage has a bearing upon the present situation. The text of ch. 20 runs as follows:

1) The heavens are moved by His direction and obey Him in peace. 2) Day and night accomplish the course assigned to them by Him, without hindrance of one to another. 3) The sun and the moon and the dancing stars according to His appointment circle in harmony within the bounds assigned to them, without any swerving aside. 4) The earth, bearing fruit in fulfilment of His will at her proper seasons, putteth forth the food that supplieth abundantly both men and beasts and all living things which are thereupon, making no dissension, neither altering anything which He hath decreed. 5) Moreover, the inscrutable depths of the abysses and the unutterable statutes of the nether regions are constrained by the same ordinances. 6) The basin of the boundless sea, gathered together by His workmanship into its reservoirs, passeth not the barriers wherewith it is surrounded; but even as He ordered it, so it doeth. 7) For He said, So far shalt thou come, and thy waves shall be broken within thee. 8) The ocean which is impassable for men and the worlds beyond it, are directed by the same ordinances of the Master. 9) The seasons of spring and summer and autumn and winter give way in succession one to another in peace. 10) The winds in their several quarters at their proper season fulfil their ministry without disturbance; and the everflowing fountains, created for enjoyment and health, without fail give their breasts which sustain the life of men. 11) Yea, the smallest of living things come together in concord and peace. All these things the great Creator and Master of the universe ordered to be in peace and concord, doing good unto all things, but far beyond the rest unto us who have taken refuge in His compassionate mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ, 12) to whom be the glory and the majesty for ever and ever. Amen.
The established order in nature is looked upon from a double point of view:

a) it is benefit to us that God has ordered it in this way, because what was to become of the world, if it were not so? it would be a chaos!

b) this harmony which reigns by God’s will in His creation is an illustration, a model for everything which falls under the rule of God, a fortiori for His Church; otherwise one is disobedient to His will and falls under His judgment.

Therefore the author continues in 21:1 with the following conclusion: "Look ye, brethren, lest His benefits which are many turn into judgment to all of us, if we walk not worthily of Him, and do those things which are good and well-pleasing in His sight with concord."

This chapter is considered to be one of the crown-witnesses for Stoic influence upon this letter. It is a clear proof that I Clement has left the sphere of the Bible and that the "theologia naturalis" makes its joyeuse entrée in the church with all its disastrous consequences. According to von Harnack the whole framework of the letter is "Hellenisch"; ch. 20 belongs to the "Ausführungen ...., die über den Zweck des Briefs hinauswachsen und Religion und Naturanschauung so verbinden, dass diese jene zu verdrängen droht". Sanders devoted more than 20 pages to this chapter and adduced a large number of parallels from Stoic sources; his conclusion was: "Cherchant dans l’ordre cosmique des leçons d’éducation morale, une fois de plus, Clément fait figure de disciple du stoïcisme moyen, plus ou moins pythagorisan". Sanders had Knopf as a great forerunner. In his commentary the latter said that there is of course influence from the LXX, where the majesty of the Creator and His work is praised, but he continues: "mit dem Hinweis auf die heiligen Bücher können die Ausführungen längst nicht zur Genüge erklärt werden. Schon der grosse Grundgedanke von 20: die Gesetzmässigkeit und Ordnung des Kosmos, die der vollendete Ausdruck der göttlichen Schöpfertätigkeit sind, ist ganz unjüdisch und überhaupt unorientalisch: der Geist griechischer philosophischer Frömmigkeit kündigt sich hier aufs deutlichste an".

I do not want to question the value of these parallels offered by Knopf and Sanders from the Stoic tradition. The same root ἀγαθός which is so favorite to Clement is found there, and the ἄγαθον is praised by Stoics and Christian alike. Yet I cannot help thinking that there is a marked difference: among the Stoics the order seems more or less established in itself and makes men think 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