CLEMENT’S ANGELOLOGICAL DOCTRINES:
BETWEEN JEWISH MODELS AND PHILOSOPHIC-RELIGIOUS
STREAMS OF LATE ANTIQUITY

Monika Recinová

1. THE SOURCES OF CLEMENT’S ANGELOLOGY

Angelology is a constitutive element of Clement of Alexandria’s theological project. For Clement the existence of angels was a part of revelation attested to by Scripture. Nevertheless, his own angelology is a consequence of the blending of several originally independent traditions. The belief in intermediary beings between the transcendent God and the material world formed a part of the generally accepted worldview of second-century Alexandria. As Eric Robertson Dodds remarks:

Virtually every one, pagan, Jewish, Christian or Gnostic, believed in the existence of these beings and their function as mediators, whether he called them daemons or angels or aions or simply ‘spirits’ (πνεύματα).¹

The angelological conceptions of the ancient church were not solely a Christian invention, but they derived from several originally independent traditions: the notion of angels as independent beings is, on the one hand, the heritage of biblical texts, and on the other, the later development of Jewish intertestamentary literature (in particular Enoch literature or Jubilees).

The exposition on daemons as subsistent intermediary beings was also a standard component of the Middle Platonist theological system, as can be seen e.g. from the Didascalicus of Alcinous.² The Middle Platonist worldview was similarly hierarchical and involved intermediary spirits. Between a transcendent God and the visible world was a ladder of intermediary beings

---

² Cf. Ludwig Früchtel, “Klemens von Alexandreia und Albinus,” Philologische Woche-
schrift 57 (1937) 591–592.
represented by the Second Mind, the lesser gods, the stars, and the daemons governing the sensible universe.³

A crucial thinker who was the first to represent the junction of the biblical heritage and contemporary Middle Platonism was a Jew, Philo of Alexandria. Philo, influenced by Middle Platonism, identified in his De gigantibus 6 the Greek category of δαίμονες with the category of the (fallen) δαίμονες of the Septuagint. This identification assisted Philo and later Christian writers who followed him, such as Athenagoras of Athens⁴ and Clement of Alexandria, in creating a new synthesis between these two traditions.

The third source for Clement’s angelology was the Gnostic speculations on different spiritual powers. Demonology formed a constant element of various Gnostic mythologies known to Clement. Clement’s angelology can also be understood as an orthodox response to the Gnostic teaching concerning evil intermediary cosmic powers.

In the patristic period we do not encounter one definitive angelology of the Christian church, but diverse angelological doctrines of various Fathers of the church. As a result of these various sources, Clement’s angelology also represents as a whole an original synthesis of the following different traditions: apocalyptic Jewish writings (1Enoch in particular) in the first place; an older Christian angelology (particularly of the Shepherd of Hermas, which Clement considered the canonical Scripture); in part the angelology and demonology of Philo of Alexandria; the Greek daemonology of the Platonist tradition, and, negatively, also Gnostic speculations about the heavenly world.

2. Earlier Scholarship on Clement’s Angelological Doctrine

The aim of this survey is to present Clement’s angelological doctrines in their context of intertestamentary Judaism and late Greek Antiquity. An important predecessor of these endeavours is the German scholar Friedrich Andres († 1947), who wrote a pioneering comparative treatise on the angelology of the early Greek apologists in its connection to Greek philosophical

---