
This book is a revised version of the author’s doctoral thesis at the University of Bergen in Norway. In spite of its spotlight on the rather esoteric concept of apophaticism, the book starts with a straightforward social-historical chapter on the familiar terrain of Clement as a Christian writer in second-century Alexandria. In broad strokes the author describes the prosperity of the growing city after its foundation by Alexander in the fourth century BCE, its multinational and culturally mixed populace, its ethnic hostilities, eruptions of violence, and its religious diversities and intellectual dependencies.

Hägg brings up many aspects of the problematic origins of Christian Alexandria, highlighting the testimony of Eusebius and the possible ‘gnostic’ origins—although the use of this word proves to be problematic. The author applies it here as a synonym for ‘heretical’ and in conjunction with the thesis of Walter Bauer (p. 42). Another possibility of early Christian presence in Alexandria is through its Jewish origins. The author favors the idea of a first century mission that originates from the church of Jerusalem to Alexandrian Jewry. In this train of thinking, the missionary message to the Alexandrians was Jewish-Christian in character rather than Pauline. In the later part of the second century influence from Rome became stronger and a division between heretical and orthodox Christianity gradually emerged (pp. 50-51). At the end of this chapter the author puts Clement into the equation and admits that in terms of biographical information there is very little to go on (pp. 51. 60). The author does, however, use various studies, published over the last decades that could shed more light on the circumstances in which people like Clement and his predecessors operated in educating converts, potential converts, and interested outsiders. The otherwise commendable roster of bibliography could perhaps use some additional bibliography on the important but shadowy figure of Pantaenus, to whom Clement seems to have referred in his writing.²

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¹ It is the rhetorical device of mentioning a subject by stating that it will not be mentioned; from the Greek word ἀπόφασις: denial, negation. In a theological context it is a technique for speaking in negative terms about God and is often defined as ‘negative theology’.

² *Ecl. 56, 2; Strom. I 14, 1; II 67, 4; 68, 1; Protr. 113, 1; Ecl. 11, 1; 50, 1; Fragm. (Hypot.) 8; Fragm (Hypot.) 22; Adumbr. In 1 John 1, 1; Fragm. 25 (II. Πασχα); Eusebius, HE V 11,
As she approaches the central subject of the book, apophaticism in Clement, Hägg dedicates a long chapter to the philosophical milieu and, in particular, to Middle Platonism (pp. 71-133). She views questions of humans in their relationship to God, and, in particular, how humans approach the uncreated and transcendent God and are able to have knowledge of God who is beyond knowing. The author broaches the subject by investigating some relevant philosophers. She not only discusses the concept of God in Middle Platonism but also considers preliminary issues, such as who can be characterized as a Middle-Platonist, what were their main themes, and how to define the theocentric interests in Platonism? She points out that the theological quest for God and the divine was not alien to Plato himself and that the difference between Plato and Middle Platonism may lie in the fact that the former retained a separation between abstract philosophical principles and theological entities, while the latter dissolved it (pp. 88-89).

As sources for the Middle Platonic doctrine of the divine, the author singles out three authors (albeit with different views): Alcinous, Numenius, and Atticus. The cornerstone of Middle-Platonic philosophy is, in the author's view, the doctrine of the first principles (God, ideas, and matter). With these principles in mind she investigates the three authors further, in spite of the rather fragmentary nature of the evidence. She shows that Atticus was primarily interested in the question of the origin of the cosmos (p. 93), while Numenius' focus was on the ontological dualism between God and matter. Alcinous considered matter as passive, without quality and form and without viewing it in a negative way, i.e. related to evil (p. 94).

The author then addresses the issue of the hierarchy of the divine, which she also defines as levels of being. She investigates the teachings of Alcinous on divine beings and asks whether he views the divine as a singular or a multiple entity. Other issues turn around the knowledge of God, the active and passive aspects of God, the identification of the first God and the Demiurge, and whether Alcinous conceives a God above the first God.

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