

CHAPTER 8

The True Prophet in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies

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The so-called ‘Clementine novel’ claimed to be the autobiographical record of the life of Clement of Rome, a Christian writer who lived at the end of the first century. It describes the biographical and spiritual itinerary of the protagonist and exposes the disputes between the apostle Peter and Simon the Magician, representing the conflict between true and false wisdom. It is preserved in two works, the *Homiliae* and the *Recognitiones*, two independently reworked versions of the now-lost original text from the first half of the third century (usually called the *Grundschrift*) that were composed around the first/second half of the fourth century.

The *Grundschrift* has had many faces: while following the plot of a typical Hellenistic novel, it contained the elements of catechetical instruction and an apology for Jewish monotheism against Hellenic idolatry and philosophy. The *Homiliae* and the *Recognitiones* both contain the same basic material, but the *Homiliae* more faithfully preserves the doctrines of the original work, while the *Recognitiones* are more influenced by later interpretations of theological orthodoxy.¹

I will consider here only the *Homilies* (H) and focus on the doctrine concerning the ‘true prophet’ set out in this work.² According to the author (I will call him Clement), humanity finds itself in a state of loss, which makes it impossible for even the best men to find the truth illuminating the significance of their existence and the world. Only a true prophet and his witnesses can offer salvation and thereby truth because they are the only bearers of divinely inspired knowledge. This poses a problem when it comes to identifying requirements that guarantee the authenticity of the

¹ The Greek text of the Pseudo-Clementines can be read in the GCS edition of Rehm and Strecker 1992; for a discussion of the Pseudo-Clementine work and the problems it poses, see Wehnert 1992; Pouderon 2007; Amsler 2008; Jones 2012; Pouderon 2017. I would like to thank Benjamin De Vos for the additions and corrections he suggested.

² On this topic cf. Côté 2018.

prophet and of his witnesses on the one hand, and the suitability of his listeners to receive and understand his message on the other.

In the present chapter, I will explicate the fundamental role and traits of a prophet, according to the conception thereof found in the *Homilies*, considering in particular three main questions:

- what are the criteria used to identify a true prophet and his witnesses?
- what kind of truth do they teach?
- what is the relationship between the truth transmitted by the prophet and the knowledge deriving from Holy Scripture and rational activity?

Starting Point: The Quest for Truth

In the *Homilies*, Clement explains that since his boyhood he has been searching for the highest good and true knowledge, but he wore out his mind and body until he fell ill without achieving his desire.³ The novel begins with a description of his restless research for an indisputable answer to questions that trouble the young Roman: is the human soul immortal? Is the world eternal, or not? After we die, what will our fate be?⁴

Philosophy, Magic, and Holy Scripture

Clement presents two ways in which he tried to achieve certain knowledge of the truth and salvation: Greek philosophy and magic⁵ but to these we can add the Jewish Scriptures. All three ways reveal themselves to be useless.⁵



Since the Greek philosophers promised to give the answers that Clement was looking for, he started his quest by attending their schools in Rome, but he was disappointed. Hellenic philosophy failed to grasp the truth, because human reason cannot reach certain knowledge about the problems that troubled Clement, but can only express conjectures. He then drew the sceptical conclusion that it is impossible to reach certain knowledge while starting from ignorance. According to him, the Greek philosophers confused truth with accuracy of reasoning;

³ Ps.-Clem. *HV* 2.2; 28.1; cf. Gemeinhardt 2012.

⁴ Ps.-Clem. *HI* 17.2–4: ‘I wish to be made certain of the truth, so as to know whether by chance the soul is mortal or immortal, and whether, if it is eternal, it should be judged for what it has done down here; again, I wish to know what is right and pleasing to God, and whether the world has come to being, and why it has come to being; whether it will not be dissolved, or whether it will be dissolved, and whether it will later be better or no longer exist.’ Cf. Zambon 2018.

⁵ On the relation between philosophy and revelation, see Ramelli in this book (Chapter 3).

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therefore they build castles of conclusions which are only sometimes true by chance, and which can never provide any real certainty about the way things are:

The Greeks, lovers of words and not of wisdom (φιλόλογοι οὐ φιλόσοφοι), devote themselves to the study of problems by means of conjectures, and have formulated many different doctrines (ἔδογματίσαν), believing that the appropriate succession of hypotheses coincides with the truth (τὴν οἰκείαν τῶν ὑποθέσεων ἀκολουθίαν ἀλήθειαν εἶναι); indeed, they ignore that once they have determined false principles for themselves even their conclusions are in accordance with the principle.⁶

Greek philosophy also failed at the ethical level, because many people dedicated themselves to philosophy not because they loved the truth, but because they sought success, that is, power or money.⁷ They were not lovers of wisdom, but lovers of words.⁸ Clement says that he found nothing but ‘the setting up and knocking down of doctrines, and strife, and seeking for victory, and the arts of syllogism’ in the schools of the philosophers.⁹

The second way in which Clement tried to attain knowledge of the truth and salvation was by using magic. He planned to go to Egypt, and to look there for a priest or **magician** who could conjure up for him the soul of a deceased person. Clement eventually gave up this project, because he was convinced by a friend that it was impossible to learn anything true about God by doing what is ungodly. However, it is interesting to note that the reason Clement originally gave for his plan was that he aimed to reach certainty about the fate of the deceased through direct experience, rather than through words and teachings:

The answer of the soul [which will have been evoked from the dead] that it is immortal, will not be given to me by the fact that it speaks or that I hear it

⁶ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 8.3. See Ps.-Clem. *H II* 7.3–4: ‘They, in fact, as if they knew the truth – while they are still looking for it – reject some of the suppositions that are presented to them and keep others, as if they knew; but in reality they do not know which are true and which are false. And it is precisely those who are still seeking the truth who propose doctrines (δογματίζουσιν) about truth, not knowing that he who seeks the truth cannot learn it from his own error. As I was saying, even if [the truth] were in front of him, he would not be able to recognise it, since he ignores it.’

⁷ Ps.-Clem. *H IV* 9.1–2.

⁸ Cf. Ps.-Clem. *H I* 11.7, and Plotinus’ similar opinion about Longinus in Porph. *Vita Plot.* 14.18–20 Henry and Schwyzer. The reasons Plotinus does not consider Longinus a philosopher are not of a moral nature however: Pépin 1992; Männlein-Robert 2001: 142–7.

⁹ Ps.-Clem. *H I* 3.1; cf. *IV* 9.1–2: ‘Neither the multitude nor all philosophers proceed to judge things as they are in a genuine way. We know many in fact, even among those who take great pride in their philosophy, who are vainglorious or wear the cloak of philosophers out of love for wealth and not out of desire for virtue; if they do not obtain what they have dedicated themselves to philosophy for, they turn to mockery.’

speak, but only by the fact that it appears to me at sight, so that, seeing it with my own eyes, by its mere appearance I have a self-sufficient and adequate statement (αὐτοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἰδὼν αὐτὴν αὐτάρκη καὶ ἰκανὴν ἀπόφασιν ἔχω) of the fact that it exists. And the uncertain words coming from hearing will no longer be able to reverse what is proper to sight.¹⁰

Clement makes Peter say that even the Jewish Scriptures cannot provide access to certain knowledge about God, because they contain many contradictory statements about Him. There are many true statements in them, but also many false claims about God, such as when they describe him as weak, passionate, or ignorant.¹¹ Clement finds confirmation of this interpretation in a passage from the Gospels:

As for the fact that true things are mixed with false things, I [i.e., Peter] remember that once he [i.e., Jesus], accusing the Sadducees, said: ‘that is why you are wrong, because you do not know the true things of the Scriptures (τὰ ἀληθῆ τῶν γραφῶν); therefore you ignore the power of God’ [Matt. 22:29]. If he indicated to them that they ignored ‘the true things’, it is clear that there are also false things. But even when he says ‘be prudent moneychangers’, he assumes that there are genuine words and spurious words.¹²

Clement’s reasoning is based on a literal interpretation of the words of Jesus. He argues that if the Sadducees failed to know the ‘true things’, it is clear that there are also false things in the Bible. Moreover, there is another weakness in the Scriptures: anyone can find confirmation in them for whatever theory they have conceived of.¹³ In some ways, they are like a mirror that reflects the spiritual condition of the reader; we find in them nothing more than what we are looking for. Only the pure of heart can find the manifestation of God in them, whereas others will merely find what they want to find.¹⁴ In other words, they can only be useful for one who already knows the truth concerning God:

For the Scriptures say everything, so that no one among those who seek without judgment (ἀγνωμῶνως) can find the truth there, but only what he

¹⁰ Ps.-Clem. *H I* 5.3–4. Cf. Kelley 2008: 361–9.

¹¹ Ps.-Clem. *H III* 42.1–3; 43.3; 50.1–2; Shuve 2008.

¹² Ps.-Clem. *H III* 50.1–2. Cf. Ps.-Clem. *H II* 51.1–2; concerning the *agraphon* here cited by Clement, see *H XVIII* 20.4; Hutt 2012.

¹³ Ps.-Clem. *H III* 9.1: ‘If someone shapes a doctrine that seems reasonable to him as he likes, and then bends down to study them [i.e., the Scriptures], he will be able to draw from them numerous testimonies in support of the doctrine he has shaped.’

¹⁴ Ps.-Clem. *H XVI* 10.2–5.

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desires, while the truth is reserved for those who have intelligence (τοῖς εὐγνώμοσιν). Intelligence, then, consists in preserving love for Him who is the cause of our being.¹⁵

This does not mean that there is no truth about God in the Scriptures, but rather that true and false statements are mingled in them. The false claims about God are written to test the reader,¹⁶ but it is impossible to distinguish the truth from untruth without some external criterion. Peter indicates two criteria: the first is creation, and the other is the teaching of Jesus. We can accept every utterance that agrees with the order of creation as true.¹⁷ However, this criterion cannot be applied by humanity in its present state of ignorance and corruption: the ‘smoke’ that obscures the minds of men ‘has prevented them from recognising [distinguishing?], by raising their eyes, the creator from the project and has prevented them from knowing what is accepted by him’.¹⁸ Therefore, to be a disciple of the prophet is the only way to obtain truth from the Scriptures.

Truth is Only Revealed by the ‘True Prophet’

Clement was sceptical about the human ability to know the truth with certainty, excepting certain basic ethical statements.¹⁹ As Peter explains, ‘the love of men towards God is sufficient for salvation’, but in order to love God and to be saved, men first need to know Him, and through sin men have lost their ability to recognise Him through his benefits and deeds in the world and history.²⁰ Peter therefore concluded: ‘one who seeks the truth, how could he receive it from his own ignorance? Even if he found it, not knowing it, he would pass by it, as if it were not there.’²¹ Neither philosophy, nor magic arts, nor the Scriptures can satisfy the human desire to know the truth.

In the first homily Clement provides a vivid description of the actual human condition. Men are like people locked up in a house filled with

¹⁵ Ps.-Clem. *H III* 10.4. ¹⁶ Ps.-Clem. *H XVIII* 20.2.

¹⁷ Ps.-Clem. *H III* 42.1–3: ‘since something of the Creator is manifested in the order of creation, whatever is in harmony with this order is also in conformity with the nature of God’ (cf. *Wisd.* 13:5; *Rom.* 1:19–21). See also the discussion by Carlson 2013: 137–213.

¹⁸ Ps.-Clem. *H I* 18.3.

¹⁹ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 6.4. On the apologetic use of sceptical philosophical approaches in the Christian tradition see Swain 1968. On the recognition of the prophet/sage, see Hall in this book (Chapter 5).

²⁰ Ps.-Clem. *H III* 8.1. ²¹ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 6.3–4.

smoke. They cannot see anything. If there is anyone in the house that loves the truth, he can only call for help and hope that someone outside will come and open the door to disperse the smoke, allowing the sun to once again enlighten the people in the house.²² This rescuer can only be a true prophet:

The rescuer I say is the true prophet, who alone is able to enlighten the souls of men, so that they may with their own eyes recognise the way to eternal salvation. Otherwise it is impossible [. . .]²³

So it is impossible to turn to a saving truth without his [i.e., the Prophet's] teaching, even if one forever seeks it where it is not to be found. But it was, and still is, in the word of our Jesus.²⁴

The only source of certain knowledge of the truth is the prophet: 'knowledge [of beings as they are] cannot be obtained if the prophet of truth has not first been recognised', because 'it is proper of the prophet to reveal the truth, just as it is proper of the sun to bring the light of day', and 'the true is what is approved' by him.²⁵

Therefore, in order to obtain true and certain knowledge it is indispensable to recognise who the true prophet is. This task is made easy by intrinsic evidence, which makes the sincere seeker of the truth immediately certain of recognising it when he meets the prophet or one of his witnesses. Clement once hoped that the sight of a conjured soul would give him this kind of certainty (based on the evidence of visual perception), which the words of the philosophers were unable to give him, and which is peculiar to the teaching of the prophet.

Peter explained to Clement that identifying the prophet is an easy task, because the prophet reveals himself as such with evidence superior to that of a sense object for the perceptive faculties.²⁶ Everybody, irrespective of their condition and level of instruction, can thus recognise the prophet when they meet him:

Therefore, letting go of everything else, one must entrust oneself only to the prophet of truth. And we are all able to judge whether he is a prophet,

²² Ps.-Clem. *HI* 18.4: 'It is necessary that the lovers of truth (τοῦς φιλαλήθεις) who are inside the house, crying from the depths of their heart, call for help with a truth-loving thought, so that someone who is outside the house invaded by smoke, approaching, opens the door, and the sunlight, which is outside, can enter the house, and the smoke of the fire, which is inside, be expelled.'

²³ Ps.-Clem. *HI* 19.1–2. ²⁴ Ps.-Clem. *HIII* 54.1.

²⁵ Ps.-Clem. *HII* 5.2–3; 6.2; 8.2; cf. also *III* 54.1; *XVIII* 10.4–5.

²⁶ Ps.-Clem. *HI* 20.1: 'he [i.e., the Prophet] can indeed be found, for he [i.e., Peter] showed me that the truth of the speeches about the prophet is even more evident to the ears than the things you see before your eyes. So I was astonished and wondered why, although the things that everyone is looking for are before them, no one notices.'

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even if we are completely uneducated, ignorant of sophistry, novices in geometry and not initiated into music. God, who cares for everyone, made the discovery of him very easy, so that neither the barbarians were too weak, nor the Greeks were unable to find him. So finding him is an easy task.²⁷

The assertion that the recognition of the true prophet is ‘very easy’ stands in sharp contrast to the complexity and contradictory nature of the other forms of knowledge that Clement explores, namely, philosophy and magic, and the disorienting mixture of truth and error found in the Scriptures. By contrast, as Peter says, all men are able to judge when it comes to the prophet.

But what are the parameters according to which one can verify whether someone really is the prophet? Peter explains that it is necessary to test the prophet by ‘every prophetic investigation’ (πάση τῇ προφητικῇ ἐξετάσει), or ‘by the prophetic promise’ (διὰ τῆς προφητικῆς ἐπαγγελίας). Once the prophet has been tested and recognised as true – and only then – we must accept him and all his teachings without further enquiry or doubt.²⁸ What appears wrong or incomprehensible to us in his teachings depends on our own ignorance, not on his deficiency, because he is always (not occasionally) inspired by the Spirit of God, and all he teaches is true.²⁹

The reference to the ‘prophetic promise’ as a criterion for ascertaining the authenticity of the prophet makes the relationship between Scripture and the figure and words of the true prophet complex and interesting. Even if the Bible contains such a mixture of truth and error about God that it alone does not suffice for true knowledge for those who study it, there are promises made in it that the true prophet must fulfil in order to be recognised as such.

The most important of these prophecies can be read in Gen. 49:10, a passage that the ancient Christian tradition interpreted as the

²⁷ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 9.1–2.

²⁸ Ps.-Clem. *H I* 19.5–6: ‘first of all, the prophet must have been examined with every criterion of prophetic authenticity (πάση τῇ προφητικῇ ἐξετάσει) and recognised as true; after that, he must be given faith in everything and his statements no longer examined in detail one by one, but received, because they are now certain by virtue of an established faith, and received with an infallible judgement’ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 11.1: ‘First of all, one must investigate the prophet with every judgement, by means of the prophetic promise (διὰ τῆς προφητικῆς ἐπαγγελίας), and when one has known him one must follow without doubt the other words of his teaching . . . , knowing that he who says these things cannot have a nature to lie.’

²⁹ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 11.2–3.

announcement of the coming of Christ.³⁰ Peter explains to Simon the Magician that on the basis of this text, which certainly has been written ‘without error’,³¹ it is possible to identify the true prophet:

It is written in the first book of the Law, towards the end: ‘There shall not cease to be a head from Judah, nor a guide from his thighs, until he comes to whom it belongs; and he shall be the expectation of the peoples’ [Gen. 49:10]. If, therefore, one is able to see the one who has come after the loss of a head and a guide from Judah, and who will be the expectation of the peoples, he will be able – on the basis of the things fulfilled – to recognise the truth of this passage and of the one who has come.³² And by obeying his teaching he will know which things in the Scriptures are true and which are false.³³

This passage describes a circular relationship between the prophet and Scripture, which is problematic from a logical point of view: the true prophet is the one who fulfils the promise contained in Scripture; but the teaching of the prophet is the key to discerning what is true and false in Scripture.

Beside the fulfilment of the promises, another criterion of authenticity for recognising the prophet is the ‘prophetic investigation’. The prophet is true if his prophecy comes true. If a prophet has announced the occurrence of events that have actually taken place, it will be possible to believe in the future fulfilment of prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled on the basis of those that have already been fulfilled³⁴ These prophecies have a secondary value in relation to the saving teaching that the prophet brings to men; they serve to certify to their hearers that he who utters them is indeed worthy to be heard.

Peter adds an important formal criterion to the fulfilment of prophecies and the biblical promise: true prophecy is clearly uttered without any ambiguity or obscurity like that of the prolix and confused oracles of the heathens, which need an interpreter to be understood.³⁵ Among many obscure predictions it is possible that some come true, but this does not

³⁰ Gen. 49:8–12 was already interpreted in a messianic sense in the Jewish tradition and is often cited by ancient Christian authors as Christological prophecy (cf. Rev. 5:5). A systematic commentary on Gen. 49 can be found in Hippolytus’ treatise *On the Blessings of the Patriarchs* (I 11–28); see also Iust. *Dial.* LII 2; CXX 4; Orig. *PA* IV 1.3; Eus. *DE* I 3.45; Iul. *Gal.* fr. 62 Masaracchia (= Cyr. Alex. *C. Iul.* VIII, 253 C–E); Simonetti 1960.

³¹ Ps.-Clem. *H* III 48.2.

³² The translation is conjectural because the passage is corrupted: οὗτος τὴν περικοπήν ἐκ τῶν ἀποτελεσθέντων < . . . > ἄληθῆ τῶν ἐληλυθότα ἐπιγνώσκει.

³³ Ps.-Clem. *H* III 49.1–2. ³⁴ Ps.-Clem. *H* II 10.1–2. ³⁵ Ps.-Clem. *H* III 12, 1–3.

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have anything to do with authentic prophecy.³⁶ Pagan oracles are the result of an occasional possession of the prophet by a demonic power, which deprives the oracle of his or her reason,³⁷ whereas the prophecies made by Jesus, who is constantly in possession of the Spirit, are clear and accurate, and therefore easy to verify by our sense perception:

Our master, on the other hand, never resorted to any of these wizard tricks, but – as I said before – since he was a prophet, and, thanks to an innate and inexhaustible spirit (ἐνφύτῳ καὶ ἀεννάῳ πνεύματι), always knew everything, he talked about it confidently, so as to clearly (σαφῶς) foretell his own sorrows, the places, the established times, the ways, the fixed terms. . . . In the same way, he said in a clear voice (σαφεῖ φωνῇ) the things that would come later and that we could see with our own eyes; so that among those to whom the word was addressed the deed might also be fulfilled. For the prophet of truth offers the demonstration (τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀποδείξεως), so that the listeners may believe.³⁸

Jesus spoke clearly (σαφῶς, σαφεῖ φωνῇ), and the plain words he uttered corresponded with the evidence of what happened, which his disciples could see with their own eyes (cf. 1 John 1:1–3). This sensory evidence – the kind that Clement sought when he planned to invoke a dead man in Egypt – offers Jesus' listeners proof of the truth of his teachings, and disposes them to accept with confidence even those parts of his doctrine they are unable to verify. The emphasis Clement places on the clarity of the prophet's words and the sensory evidence of their realisation is consistent with his refusal of the allegorical interpretation.³⁹ According to Clement, God does not reveal himself through absurdities.

Finally, in order to identify the true prophet there is also a requirement on the side of the seeker: they must truly look for truth. Only 'lovers of truth' can see and recognise the prophet when he appears.⁴⁰

The Role of the Witnesses

The knowledge of God that the true prophet alone possesses and imparts to others can only be received from him. This is so even if we can only listen to the disciples who knew him and are now his witnesses. As Peter explains to Clement,

³⁶ Ps.-Clem. H III 14, 1–2.

³⁷ Ps.-Clem. H III 13, 3: 'Such an idea [i.e., the belief that the prophet does not always know the future, but only when he is under the action of the spirit] is precisely one of those who are possessed and made mad (μανικῶς ἐνθουσιῶντων) by a spirit of disorder, of those who lay drunken near the altars and are full of the fat of sacrifices.'

³⁸ Ps.-Clem. H III 15, 1–3. ³⁹ Ps.-Clem. H VI 17, 1–3; 18, 3; 19, 1.

⁴⁰ Ps.-Clem. H I 18, 4; 20, 7; XI 27, 2.

if you want to know the things concerning God, you must learn them from the true prophet alone, because he alone knows the truth. If any one else knows anything, he has received it from him or from his disciples.⁴¹

This is possible because the authentic witnesses of the prophet are like ‘living images’ of him: they do not convince by argument, but show the listener the words and the deeds of the prophet, and in a certain sense make him present to the listener. This way of understanding the function of a witness is similar to what Aristotle writes about witnessing in court: witnessing is a matter of stating whether something happened or not, not of expressing an opinion concerning the quality of the fact.⁴²

When Clement listened to a Christian preacher for the first time, the apostle Barnabas in Alexandria, he was astonished, and remarked, ‘I realised that he was telling the truth, not with dialectical art, but by innocently and without contrivance exposing what he had heard and seen done and said by the Son of God who had appeared.’⁴³ And when the Alexandrian philosophers mocked Barnabas for his naivety, Clement answered with a fundamental statement about how Christians transmit their truth:

We have received only the command to tell you the admirable words and deeds of the one who sent us and, instead of logical demonstration, we offer you as witnesses (ἀντὶ τῆς λογικῆς ἀποδείξεως μάρτυρας παρέχομεν) many of those among you – and I remember well their appearance – as living images (ἐμψύχους εἰκόνας), sufficient testimonies.⁴⁴

Christians do not ground their knowledge of the truth on the persuasive power of reasoning, but on trustworthy witnesses. Testimony requires, first of all, that the witness is worthy of faith; but it is also necessary that the person who receives the testimony is willing to accept it and arrive at the consequences of what they see and hear through the witness, so long as the witness is a ‘living image’ of the truth.

The question as to how to distinguish reliable from false testimony has been a permanent issue for Christian communities since their beginnings, because of the multiplicity of conflicting traditions each claiming to derive from the authentic teachings of Christ. Just as contradictory statements in Scripture make it unserviceable to whoever wants to learn the truth from it, the contradictions between different Christian traditions threaten the

⁴¹ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 12, 1–2. Cf. Ps.-Clem. *H XI* 35, 4–5; *XVII* 19, 1–7.

⁴² Aristot. *Rhet.* I 15, 1376 a 13–15; Guérin 2015: 51. On the notion of a ‘witness’ and related terms, see Strathmann 1970.

⁴³ Ps.-Clem. *H I* 9, 2–3; concerning Clement’s encounter with Barnabas, see Verheyden 2008.

⁴⁴ Ps.-Clem. *H I* 10, 5–6.

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trustworthiness of them all. Christians thus had to face the problem of distinguishing true and false traditions. The conflict between Peter and Simon the Magician, one of the fundamental topics in the *Homilies*, is an image of this opposition.⁴⁵

The transmission of truth through a chain of witnesses implies a primacy of the oral over the written word. This applies even to the Old Testament; Clement states that the Law was given to Moses to be transmitted orally (ἀγράφως) to seventy wise men, so that the subsequent generations could live in accordance with it. It was only after Moses' assumption that another writer, who was not a prophet, put it in writing.⁴⁶

Similarly, there is an oral tradition descending from the true prophet, the trustworthiness of which is based on the trustworthiness of its witnesses: according to Clement, a reliable preacher of the truth must compare his teachings with those of James and find them in agreement.⁴⁷ When Simon the Magician claimed to possess the teachings of Christ after receiving them from him in a vision, Peter replied that God speaks in visions and dreams to his enemies, but reveals himself openly to his friends. Thus if Simon's teaching were true, they would agree with the teachings of the apostles, and Simon should be a friend and co-worker of the apostles rather than their adversary.⁴⁸

What Kind of Knowledge Do the Prophet and His Witnesses Transmit?

The prophet has a constant and not occasional knowledge of the present and the future,⁴⁹ which means that he does not know in the same way as a physician, for instance, whose predictions about the development of an illness are based on the present state of the patient and certain signs.⁵⁰ The prophet possesses the whole knowledge of present and future without having to learn or obtain it: 'He alone among all men knows, even though he has not learned.'⁵¹

In his disciples, knowledge of the truth takes the form of a revelation. This is neither a simple physical experience, such as a vision or dream, nor

⁴⁵ According to Clement, Simon is well instructed in the Greek *paideia*, but uses it only to deceive people, and is completely dedicated to the magical arts (*H II* 22, 3; 25, 2–3; *IV* 4, 2). By contrast, Peter is an example of the use of dialectical skills in the service of the clarification of truth (*H III* 41, 2; *XV* 2, 3–4). The opposition between the two is also expressed by the different kinds of miracles they work: miracles aiming only to amaze and seduce the audience, or to help them with their needs (*H II* 33, 1–2, 4–5; 34, 1–2). Cf. Côté 2001.

⁴⁶ Ps.-Clem. *H III* 47, 1–4; *Ep. Petri* I 2. ⁴⁷ Ps.-Clem. *H XI* 35, 4.

⁴⁸ Ps.-Clem. *H XVII* 18.6; 19.4–7. ⁴⁹ Ps.-Clem. *H III* 13.2–3; 15.1.

⁵⁰ Ps.-Clem. *H III* 11.1–3; 12.1–3. On a physician's knowing through signs, and the way this reflects on the divide between technical and inspired divination, see Simonetti in this book (Chapter 1); on its application to the medical field, see Petridou's analysis of Galenic technical methodology (Chapter 7), esp. pp. ***.***.

⁵¹ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 10.2.

the result of a learning or reasoning process, but rather the sudden and unexpected appearance of something that imposes itself on the mind:

To say ‘those to whom the Son will reveal him’ [i.e., the Father, Matt. 11:27] means that such a truth is not learned through teaching, but only through revelation (οὐ διδασκαλία . . . ἀλλὰ ἀποκαλύψει μόνον). Revelation takes place without the need for a voice, but by the sole will [of God], when what lies hidden in an inexpressible way in all human hearts is unveiled. And so it happens that one knows not for having been instructed, but for having understood (οὐ διδαχθέντα, ἀλλὰ συνέντα). For the one who has understood, it is not possible to prove (ἀποδείξει) this to another (because he has not learned it as a result of an instruction), nor is he able to reveal (ἀποκαλύψει) it, because he is not the Son, unless he declares himself to be the Son.⁵²

Truth is less the product of an autonomous activity of the human intellect than a condition in which those who completely rely on the true prophet find themselves. Otherwise, even magicians and philosophers could attain it. Thanks to their act of faith, the faithful obtain from the prophet an immediate and evident vision of things, and thus understand.⁵³

Although revelation is not a matter of sense perception, it happens in a way that can be compared to sense perception. If someone has the requisite organ to perceive a certain object, and there are no obstacles, when they are in the presence of the object they perceive it clearly and without any doubt.

Sense perception is not, however, purely passive. It requires a certain application of attention on the part of the recipient. In the same way, when someone who authentically seeks the truth is in the presence of the prophet, they recognise him as such and accept his word, even before they know and understand his teachings. Revelation takes place when the individual is oriented towards truth and seeking it.⁵⁴

The evidence (ἐνάργεια) of the prophet’s words removes all doubt from those who have recognised him. This is similar to what the Stoics called

⁵² Ps.-Clem. *H XVIII* 6.3–4. In Ps.-Clem. *H XVII* 18.1–3, Peter remembers that he experienced such a revelation when, thanks to a revelation received from the Father, he declared Jesus to be the Christ and the Son of God (Matt. 16:16–17): ‘a revelation is learning something without having been instructed, without a vision or dreams’ (τὸ ἀδιδάκτως, ἄνευ ὄπτασις καὶ ὀνείρων, μαθεῖν ἀποκάλυψις ἐστίν). And that’s really how it is. In the [understanding? here there is a gap] placed in us in a seminal form by God, the whole truth is found; it is hidden or revealed by the hand of God, who works in a way proportionate to the merit of the one who knows.’

⁵³ Cf., for instance, Philo *Leg. all.* III 228: ‘It is better to trust in God and not in uncertain reasoning and unstable conjectures (ἄριστον οὖν τῷ θεῷ πεπιστευκέναι καὶ μὴ τοῖς ἀσαφῆσι λογισμοῖς καὶ ταῖς ἀβεβαίοις εἰκασίαις); Knight 1993.

⁵⁴ Ps.-Clem. *H I* 20.7; 21.3–6.

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katalêptikê phantasia (καταληπτική φαντασία),⁵⁵ but revelation has this intrinsic evidence: its acceptance is the result of a free choice between faith and unbelief. This is why Clement can say that all those who seek the truth have it in front of them, but only a few recognise it.⁵⁶

The similarity between the clear perception of an object of the senses and one's recognition of the true prophet makes it clear why Clement – through the words he attributes to Peter – strongly highlights the disciples' direct physical experience of Jesus. According to him, the experience of the disciples is superior to any supposed supernatural vision, because it offers the disciple the possibility of questioning the Master and receiving his answers, knowing with certainty who their interlocutor is:

A prophet – after he has first given an assurance that he is indeed a prophet – is given a sure faith (ἀσφαλῶς πιστεύεται) in the things he has said clearly (ἐναργῶς); and – since he has been recognised as truthful in advance – answers the learner when examined and questioned at will by him. On the other hand, he who relies on a vision or a dream may fall into error. In fact, he ignores the one in whom he places his faith, who may be an evil demon or a deceiving spirit who pretends to be what he is not in his speeches.⁵⁷

On the other hand however, unlike in sense perception, the truth known through revelation is not something new that comes from outside, but rather the manifestation of an understanding of reality that is already present in the hearts of men, even if they have become unconscious of it. This is precisely why they are no longer capable of correctly interpreting the order of creation, which would enable them to recognise God, and they need the intervention of the prophet. The manifestation of this hidden truth is not the result of human effort, but of God's intervention.

⁵⁵ In fact, when Clement first met Peter and was briefly instructed by him, he declared that he had no doubts anymore, such that Peter himself would not be able to change Clement's mind again (Ps.-Clem. *H I* 21.1. 5–6). Cf. Ioppolo 1990; Hauck 1988.

⁵⁶ Ps.-Clem. *H I* 20.1; VII 7.3.

⁵⁷ Ps.-Clem. *H XVII* 14.3–4. The emphasis with which Clement denies that visions are able to demonstrate the divine origin of knowledge serves to refute Simon the Magician's claim to possess deeper knowledge than Peter (insofar as it is not based on the senses, but rather on visions of incorporeal realities) (*H XVII* 5, 6; 13.1–2; 14.1–4; 16.2; 17.1.4–5; 18.4). One may think that Clement here implicitly argues against Paul, insofar as he claimed his dignity as an apostle on the basis of a vision of the risen Christ, even though he had not known either the historical Jesus or his disciples (Gal. 1:11–19; Gal. 2:9).

Whoever has achieved this understanding of the truth becomes its transmitter – not in the sense that they can dispose of it, demonstrating or revealing the truth to anyone, but in the sense that he becomes a witness of it. Indeed, the disciples of the prophet are his witnesses, because they make it possible for their listeners to encounter Christ himself. Nevertheless, revealing the truth to the listeners is not actually the work of the witness, but of the prophet; only the prophet knows the thoughts of men and who is worthy to recognise him.⁵⁸

Despite his criticism of Simon the Magician and the Greek philosophers, Clement was not opposed to the use of dialectic, and often describes Peter's involvement in confutations or demonstrations with his disciples and adversaries.⁵⁹ Jesus did not explain his teachings through rational argumentation, but only declared them. He may have done this because he was speaking to people who were able to understand him, being already instructed in the Law and the worship of the One God, and perhaps because he had little time. But he left to his disciples the task of teaching the Gentiles the rational foundations of his doctrine in order to convert and instruct them.⁶⁰

The knowledge revealed by the prophet can thus be clarified by reason; nevertheless, the certainty of the truth of Christian doctrine does not depend on the successful rational demonstration of it, but rather upon the prophet who teaches it. When Clement tried to convert his father he was asked: 'what new commandment can anyone give beyond what the ancients urged us to obey?', and he replied: 'there is a great difference, father, between the doctrines of the true religion and those of philosophy; for the true religion receives its proof from prophecy, while philosophy, furnishing us with beautiful sentences, seems to present its proofs from conjecture'.⁶¹

Conclusion

According to Clement, only the true prophet can give a true and certain answer to the questions he posed at the beginning of his own inquiry concerning the destiny of the soul and the cosmos.⁶² There is only one God, who is the Creator and Ruler of the cosmos and of human beings,

⁵⁸ Ps.-Clem. *H XVIII* 8.1–4.

⁵⁹ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 14; *XV* 2.3–4; *XVI* 2.1; *XVII* 8.1–3. For an examination of the philosophical theses of the Pseudo-Clementines, see Barnes 2008 and Geréby 2008.

⁶⁰ Ps.-Clem. *H XVII* 7.1. ⁶¹ Ps.-Clem. *H XV* 5.2–3.

⁶² Ps.-Clem. *H I* 3.2–4; 17.1–4; cf. *V* 2.2; 28.1.

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and he rewards the immortal soul of each person according to his or her merits.⁶³

The prophet offers clear signs of his identity. He fulfils the prophecies contained in Scripture, and his own prophecies are unequivocally fulfilled. However the evidence of these proofs is only such for those who genuinely seek the truth, while everyone else remains blind and deaf before the prophet and his actions. Love of the truth is a disposition of the intellect that depends on the will: it does not enable people to find what they are looking for, but allows them to recognise the truth when it is manifested to them. Thus Clement reconciles two perspectives that are in tension, perhaps even contradiction, with each other: on the one hand, the truth is before everyone's eyes and endowed with a form of evidence for the rational soul; on the other hand, only a few people recognise it as such and embrace it.

Recognition of the truth is possible, because the truth that the prophet and his disciples reveal is not something alien and external to men, but already present within them in seminal and hidden form, and inscribed in the order of creation and the Scriptures. The function of the prophet consists in making what human beings are no longer able to see for themselves once again evident to those who are worthy of it. Faith in the prophet does not absolutely exclude the exercise of reason or recourse to the Scriptures, but is rather the condition for the possibility of carrying out such activities in accordance with the truth.

According to Clement, as for many Christian intellectuals, Christian truth is reconcilable, at least in part, with Hellenic culture, and can use it as a useful tool in order to develop and articulate its own content in conceptual form. But the root of Christianity lies in human individual experience, and is akin to a physical perception insofar as it implies a certain acquaintance, a being present to its object.

The truth that is transmitted by the Christian tradition is not universal or identical in all who believe it like a mathematical proposition, but rather insofar as each individual can receive the truth from an encounter with only one teacher, Christ, through the mediation of his witnesses. This encounter can be described as an act of seeing; it is not the transmission of a *corpus* of teachings. The content of this experience can only secondarily and partially be expressed in the form of a complex of true propositions. Christianity has a relationship with sense experience that cannot be overcome, and which makes it a fundamentally different kind of knowledge than philosophy.

⁶³ Ps.-Clem. *H II* 12.3; X 4.3–4; XV II.1.

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