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The Second Century Debate about the Therapy of Passions – Various Christian Remedies

1. Introduction

Half of a century ago Eric R. Dodds famously described the period of time when Christianity emerged in the Graeco-Roman world as the ‘age of anxiety’². In his view, an element of good fortune helped to spread Christianity in Roman society, especially as paganism became more irrational and superstitious. More recently Robin Lane Fox has challenged the accuracy of this tag and replaced it with ‘the age of anger’³. No doubt, anger caused by various insane emperors (Caligula, Nero, Commodus), fear of uncertainty, phobias against others (Jews⁴ and Christians⁵), including

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² E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in the Age of Anxiety: Some aspects of religious experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine*, Cambridge 1965. Dodds’ study prompted an academic debate, see more in P. Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Augustine*, New York 1972, p. 74-93.

³ R.L. Fox *Pagans and Christians In the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine*, London 1986, p. 65.

⁴ For instance, pogrom of the Jews in Alexandria in 38 CE, more in, Philo of Alexandria, *In Flaccum*. see W. van der Horst, *Philo’s Flaccus: the first pogrom: introduction, translation, and commentary*, Leiden 2003.

⁵ First persecution of Christians happened in Rome under Nero, see Tacitus, *Annales* 15, 44. Some scholars question this account, among others, see B.D. Show, *The Myth of the Neronian Persecution*, “The Journal of Roman Studies” 105 (2015) p. 73-100,

philosophers⁶, caused some of the strongest emotions in various parts of the Roman Empire and in different strata of Roman society. The historical context of the abuse of political power by emperors (the human factor), famine, plagues and earthquakes (natural causes)⁷, the unkindness and silence of the gods (the religious aspect), led various Graeco-Roman philosophers to question the proper response to these sources of afflictions. Human emotions such as rage, dread, desire, greed, hopelessness⁸ and others called out for, as Martha C. Nussbaum suggested, ‘a therapy’⁹ of the human soul or mind. In brief, you can’t change the character of the emperor, or of the master of your household, you are powerless in the face of nature, you are also weak in comparison with gods of the Pantheon, but you can educate and train your mind. The Roman Stoics¹⁰, the Aristotelians¹¹, Cynics¹²,

see also W.J.C. Blom, *Why the Testimonium Taciteum Is Authentic: A Response to Carrier*, *VigCh* 73/5 (2019) p. 564-581.

⁶ Vespasian expelled Stoic philosophers from Rome, cf. Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana* LXVI 12 and 13.

⁷ Lydia’s earthquake in 17 CE, see Gaius Plinius Secundus (or Maior), *Naturalis Historia* 2, 86, 200; Pompeii’s earthquake in 66 CE. See various discussions in “Vox Patrum” 78 (2021).

⁸ The list of emotions varied in the views of different authors. For instance, Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 7, 111, lists grief/distress, fear, desire and pleasure. Philo Judaeus, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 159 points out four passions: pleasure, fear, distress and anger. For Galen, there were more than four affections, see his *De affectuum dignotione* I 3. For Plutarch the dominant affection is anger, in *De cohibenda ira*.

⁹ M.C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, Princeton 1994.

¹⁰ Among Old Stoics, Zeno defined ‘passion’ as ‘an irrational and contrary to nature motion of the soul’, in Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 7, 110. See Chrysippus, *De Affectionibus* and discussion in T. Tieleman, *Chrysippus’ On Affections: Reconstructions and Interpretations*, Leiden 2003, p. 140-197; for the Middle Stoa, more in P. Steinmetz, *Die Stoa*, in: *Die Philosophie der Antiker*, v. 4: *Die hellenistische Philosophie*, ed. H. Flashar, Basel 1994, p. 491-716. The Roman Stoics will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

¹¹ See, for instance, Theophrastus, *On Emotions*, in Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 45.

¹² Bionis Borysthene wrote a treatise *De Ira*, c. I 16-17 in ed. and tr. G. Indelli, *Filodemo: L’Ira*, Naples 1988, p. 63. On Cynic model of life according to the nature, here understood as harmony with natural needs, see D.E. Aune, *The Problem of the Passions in Cynicism*, in: *Passions and Moral Progress in Graeco-Roman Thought*, ed. J.T. Fitzgerald, London 2008, p. 48-66.

Epicureans¹³ and Middle Platonists¹⁴, including Philo of Alexandria¹⁵ all searched for a panacea to calm down negative emotions and put the passions under the control of the human mind. This was seen as the way to happiness (here: εὐδαιμονία)¹⁶ in this life. The various Christian communities arriving on this scene, such as Pauline, Judeo-Christian and Docetic groups¹⁷ immediately became engaged in the ongoing debate about the power of the emotions. Those early Christian communities, spreading throughout different social strata with greater philosophical interests, would soon propose their own therapies. In order to assess their proposals, we should first sketch out what already was being said about the restriction of affections in the Graeco-Roman milieu.

¹³ For Epicurus's views on emotions, see Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 10, 28 and his *Opinions on Emotions against Timocrates*, in Philodemus, *On the Stoics* 3, in: *Epicurus, Opinions on Emotions against Timocrates*, in Philodemus, *On the Stoics*, in: T. Dorandi, *Filodemo, Gli Stoici (PHerc. 155 e 339)*, "Cronache Ercolanesi" 12 (1982) p. 91-133. As noted by M. Trapp, Epicureans promoted the ways of achievement of 'a state of physical and mental pleasure' (*Philosophy in the Roman Empire. Ethics, Politics and Society*, Aldershot 2008, p. 39).

¹⁴ See Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 32; Maximus Tyrius, *Orationes* 20, 4; 27, 5 and 41, 5.

¹⁵ See his *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* 269. Philo's ethical theory of controlling passions and promoting *apatheia* has drawn a great amount of academic attention, D. Winston, *Philo's ethical theory*, in: *Band 21/1. Halbband Religion (Hellenistisches Judentum in römischer Zeit: Philon und Josephus)*, ed. W. Haase, Berlin 1983, p. 372-416, J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, London 1996, p. 151-153. More recently (in Polish) M. Osmański, *Filona z Aleksandrii etyka upodabiania się do Boga*, Lublin 2007, p. 201-238; C. Levy, *Philo's Ethics*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. A. Kamesar, Cambridge 2009, p. 146-171. In this place I can only mention Philo's important allegorical interpretation of the Biblical character of 'Eve' as a metaphor for passions, while 'Adam' would stand for the mind. I have discussed this famous allegory in my paper: *Clement of Alexandria on the Creation of Eve: Exegesis in the Service of a Pedagogical Project*, "Studia Patristica" 66 (2013) p. 53-59.

¹⁶ See further comments on this term by Nussbaum, 15, the footnote 5.

¹⁷ We encounter some early Christian Docetic groups already mentioned in the New Testament, see 1 John 4:2 and discussion by T. Rasimus, *Johannine Opponents, The Gospel of John, And Gnosticism*, in: *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans. Qu'avons-nous appris? (Colloque international, Québec, Université Laval, 29-31 mai 2015)*, ed. E. Créghneur – L. Painchaud – T. Rasimus, Leuven 2019, p. 201-218, see also relevant study by U.C. von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, And the Judaisms of The First Century*, London 2015, p. 61-98.

2. The power of the emotions – disturbing experiences among the Graeco-Roman philosophical schools and the search for a remedy

Galen of Pergamon (c.129-c. 216 CE), the well-known physician and philosopher of Platonic inclination, succinctly spelled out the feelings of many people of his time: “the doctrine of the virtues follows necessarily from the doctrine of the emotions”¹⁸. The main task of somebody who aimed to reach wisdom and ‘human flourishing’ (Nussbaum)¹⁹ in their lifetime was ‘progress’ (προκοπή) towards virtue. Plutarch’s title of his work *How a Man may become aware of his progress in virtue*, encapsulates one of many didactic efforts to promote ‘progress in virtue’ as well as to recognise the greatest obstacle: ‘vice’ (κακία). The Stoics and the Middle Platonists upheld that people faced a simple choice: either progress towards virtue, which includes the role of the mind as a guide, or fall into vice and a chaotic existence succumbing to emotions. There was no *via media*²⁰. The philosophical debate did not centre around the issue of whether or not to engage with that effort of progress, but centred around the question: should the affections be totally eradicated (Roman Stoics, but also Alcinous on curiosity)²¹, or just put under the control of the mind (Peripatetics, Sceptics, but also Plutarch)²². Especially among the Roman Stoics the pedagogical effort was placed on a correct response to the various judgments²³ and impressions: examination and if necessary unattachment²⁴. That proposed therapy would include ongoing daily exercise/training (ἄσκησις) of the correct use of or abstinence from those impressions which in turn stir up strong emotions: on one occasion desire, on another anger²⁵. At the centre of the therapy of the passions recommended by the Roman Stoics would be found a meditative way of life²⁶, self-discipline²⁷

¹⁸ Aelius Galenus, *De placitis Hipocratis et Platonis* 5, 6, 1.

¹⁹ Nussbaum, 15, the footnote 5.

²⁰ This dichotomy came from the earlier Platonic theory of the human soul with two aspects (or levels) of the irrational soul: one producing anger and the second desire. Both negative inclinations should be kept under control. On Plato’s theory of the soul, see recent discussion by Ch. Shields, *Plato’s Divided Soul*, in: *Partitioning the Soul Debates from Plato to Leibniz*, ed. K. Corcilius – D. Perler, Berlin 2014, p. 15-38.

²¹ Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 32, 4.

²² Plutarchus, *De cohibenda ira* 453; Plutarchus, *De tranquillitate animi* 465 A-C.

²³ Arrianus, *Encheiridion* 5.

²⁴ See Epictetus, *De Epicteti philosophi dissertationibus* 2, 18, 25.

²⁵ See for instance, *De Epicteti philosophi dissertationibus* 3, 24, 84-88.

²⁶ Marcus Aurelius, *De seipso* VI 11; VIII 48.

²⁷ Marcus Aurelius, *De seipso* III 8.

and a lack of strong reactions to the events and people that we can't control²⁸. The advice given by Middle Platonists would be quite similar; the difference would place our practice of virtue with the philosophical and spiritual efforts to assimilate to the transcendent God²⁹. The Roman Stoics, Middle Platonists and Peripatetics would agree that, for the achievement of a virtuous life, a life free from the dominance of the passions, primacy should be given to human reason³⁰. Only under its guidance is it possible to grow in virtue and away from the passions. A radically different proposal came from the Epicureans for whom the passions, especially pleasure (ἡδονή), was not a source of distraction but the object of quest. For them, as for Diogenes of Oenoanda, the pursuit of pleasure, which included the affections, was explained as natural, positive, and fundamental³¹.

Having the arrival of Christianity to the Graeco-Roman, Jewish Palestinian and soon Hellenistic stages in mind, I would like to propose the following trajectories of the development of the subject of the passions/emotions. First, chronologically I start with the Apostle Paul and, on the basis of his authentic (or undisputed) letters, I will assess whether or not he was influenced by any type of philosophical school which dealt with the emotions as sketched above. Secondly, again using chronology as a guide, I will briefly note the issue of Jesus' emotions as testified especially in the Gospel of John³². Again, as the emergence of each canonical Gospel was a rather complex process, the question arises whether the theological milieu behind each Gospel reflected the philosophical debate on the disturbance of the emotions.

The subject of Paul's dependence on the teachings of various Graeco-Roman schools of philosophy and indeed, their rhetoric, whether plausible or not, has been a subject of ongoing debate³³. For our discussion it is im-

²⁸ Marcus Aurelius, *De seipso* V 22; V 35; VII 58.

²⁹ Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 28; Philo Judaeus, *De fuga et inventione* 63.

³⁰ Seneca, *Ep.* 76, 9-10; Titus Aurelius Alexander, *De Anima* 3, 1; Maximus Tyrius, *Orationes* 33, 7.

³¹ Diogenes Oenoandensis, *Fragmenta* 25, c. 2, 9 and 29 in: J. William, *Diogenes Oenoandensis Fragmenta*, Lipsiae 1907, more recently M.F. Smith, *The Philosophical Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda*, Vienna 1996.

³² The scope of this paper does not allow me to explore other non-canonical Gospels which depict Jesus' emotions (e.g. anger) either as a child or later in his life as an adult man.

³³ In the most recent scholarship see T. Paige, *Philosophy*, in: *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G.F. Hawthorne – R.P. Martin – D.G. Reid, Downers Grove 1993, p. 713-718; B.W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among Sophists*, Grand Rapids 2002, p. 111-202; R.M. Thorsteinsson, *Stoicism as Key to Pauline Ethics in Romans*, in: *Stoicism in Early*

portant to point out David Ch. Aune's recent contribution to that debate. Aune briefly presents the role of the passions in Paul's correspondence³⁴, together with some modern commentaries on that subject. While engaging with some Pauline letters (1-2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, Romans)³⁵ and vocabulary such as 'endurance of suffering' (e.g. 2Cor 1:3-7)³⁶, 'affliction' (e.g. 2Cor 4:17; 6:4, 8:2) 'grief' (1Thess 4:13-18) 'anxiety' (e.g. 1Cor 7:32-35), 'anger' (Rom 12:19-21), 'sexual pleasures or desires' (Rom 1:26-27)³⁷, Aune argues that Paul's use of philosophical terminology served his didactic purpose. It was his exhortation to commitment to his Gospel and building closer relationships among the members of his churches, as well as warning against those passions which, in Paul's view, had negative power and could destroy Christian life. I endorse Aune's observation about the double purpose of Paul's rhetoric on the passions: on the one hand to build up stronger emotional relationships in the communities of believers (with for instance love and compassion), but also on the other hand to warn them about the danger of 'sinful' emotions to the Christian life, such as sexual lust or greed. This Pauline intuition will remain one of his most significant contributions to the debate about the passions in centuries to come. Even this short note on Paul's didactic use of the passions is very important to our wider discussion of early Christianity. Paul was the most influential Apostle during the second century and his influence on various communities across the whole spectrum of Christianity cannot be underestimated³⁸.

Equally short but important consideration should be given to the second and last set of examples, this time related to the Gospel of John and its portrayal of Jesus' emotions. Here we are dealing with the Christian matrix, which will have a massive impact on the understanding and interpretation of emotions in Christian tradition. No doubt Jesus, as depicted by the fourth Gospel, showed different emotions such as 'joy' (J 15:11), 'grief' (J 12:27) and 'anger' (J 2:14-22). Harold W. Attridge has discussed

Christianity, ed. I. Dunderberg – T. Engberg-Pedersen – T. Rasimus, Grand Rapids 2010, p. 15-38. I am fully aware that the subject of Paul's assimilation of some philosophical ideas is a very complex and attracted attention of many scholars arguing for opposite evaluation. This place in only sketch some elements of that engagement in the context of my discussion of passion.

³⁴ D.Ch. Aune, *Passions in the Pauline Epistles*, in: *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought*, London – New York 2008, p. 221-237.

³⁵ I would also include in the discussion Paul's *Epistle to Galatians* with 5:19-21.

³⁶ These references are mine.

³⁷ But also see 1Cor 5:1-8; 6:9-10; 10:8; 2Cor 12:21; 1Thess 4:3.

³⁸ More in *Paul in the Second Century*, ed. M.F. Bird – J.R. Dodson, London 2011.

these strong emotions displayed by Jesus³⁹. Staring with ‘anger’, Jesus’ aggressive behaviour in the temple was motivated, according to the Gospel of John, by ‘zeal’ (ζήλος), which is not exactly ‘anger’ (ὀργή). Still it shows a clear affinity with anger in Jesus’ reaction. Grief, in the Gospel of John, denoted by the verb ταρασσω, expresses the commotion of Jesus’ soul⁴⁰. While, ‘joy’ (χαρά), although a positive affection, expresses another form of disturbance of the soul. In the light of the fourth Gospel, we clearly see a human aspect of Jesus, the ‘Word who became flesh’ (J 1:14), who, unlike an ideal Stoic sage, shows emotions, or in the Stoic context, imperfections, yet is still proclaimed as divine. In my view, this is a highly interesting feature of the Gospel of John, the latest canonical Gospel, as it does not try to compete with the philosophical ideals of the sage or holy man, it shows its autonomy and, on the contrary, preserves the testimony of Jesus’ emotional responses to various circumstances of his life.

In conclusion to this section, I wish to propose that in our chronological period (1st-2nd CE) the disturbing power of the emotions was given significant attention. With the exception of the Epicureans, the philosophical schools tried to propose different methods of dealing with their destructive nature. The emerging Christianity, in its pluralism of traditions, engaged with that discussion but its engagement during the first CE did not yet receive a specific philosophical formation. For this to be corrected, we need to wait until the second century and the greater assimilation of philosophical models into Christian ethical proposals. Before we discuss that assimilation, another source of negative emotions needs to be noted.

3. Dealing with cosmological fears – apocalyptic tensions and the response from myth

Both gentiles and Jews of the first century of the CE witnessed the tragic fall of Jerusalem in Judea and the dramatic explosion of Mount Vesuvius in southern Italy. They were overcome by fear and shock⁴¹.

³⁹ H.W. Attridge, *An “Emotional” Jesus and Stoic Tradition*, in: *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, ed. I. Dunderberg – T. Engberg-Pedersen – T. Rasimus, Grand Rapids 2010, p. 77-92, especially here 80-82.

⁴⁰ Attridge pays attention to the various manuscripts as they use different Greek to denote Jesus’ response.

⁴¹ Flavius Josephus, *De Bello Judaico* 19-23; Gaius Plinius Caecilius (Minor), *Epistula* VI 16 and 20.

Strong emotions ran through human minds in the face of both tragedies. At the same time the religious mindset in Palestine, where Christianity originated, was saturated with apocalyptic expectations: the end of the world was thought to be near and humanity waited for God's mighty judgment. It is well established by modern scholars that the proclamation of the original Christian message about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, as well the expectation of his quick return, happened in the context of Jewish apocalypticism⁴². The Book of Revelation, to give one example, encapsulates this literary genre. On one side early Christians were influenced by the apocalyptic scenario of the end of the current world, on the other, natural and political events seemed to confirm that the current world was reaching its final stage. The powers of this world were shaken; the split between the realm of darkness or death and the realm of light and life were more visible than ever. Not surprisingly, theologians and exegetes searched for the source of that current drama. Is the transgression in Paradise affecting the present age? Is God's providence still acting in this level of reality or does some type of Fate dominate this earth? Some answers were proposed by Christian theologians who assimilated Stoic and Platonic notions in order to provide their fellow believers with a better understanding.

Irenaeus of Lyons, the second century Christian Apologist, preserves in his polemic an intriguing account of a Christian myth⁴³ with its central story about the power of the passions in the cosmic scenario. This story, by Irenaeus' theological standards, captures the error of heresy. The significance of this narrative relates to the Christian theological attempt to respond to the question 'why we are in this world in the first place', or 'why we are separated from God and how can we be redeemed?'. These questions were echoed in a complex document preserved later during the same century by Clement of Alexandria which received the title: the *Excerpts from Theodotus*⁴⁴. Again, as in the case of the previous philosophical therapies, the Christian myth suggested a way of healing from the destructive passions. First, let's recreate the main features and characters of the myth.

⁴² More in a highly valuable study related to my discussion in A.Y. Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, Leiden 2000.

⁴³ I discuss the use of the myth by Christian authors in *Valentinus' Legacy and Polyphony of Voices*, London – New York 2021, p. 37-60.

⁴⁴ See my recent discussion of the document in *Valentinus' Legacy* p. 141-160, especially p. 147 with the quotation of the passage 78, 1-2.

According to Irenaeus' version⁴⁵, and here I present only a sketch of the myth, the youngest of the spiritual beings in the realm of perfection, named here as a feminine Wisdom/Sophia, moved by her strong emotion (πάθος)⁴⁶. She desired to know the Father⁴⁷. This Apophatic Father, the God of All, was beyond her reach, because of his divine, perfect nature, Sophia/Wisdom expressed 'love/affection' (στοργή/*delectio*) and at the same time another strong emotion: 'despair/anxiety' (ἀγών/*magna agonia*). Both emotions were directed to the Father, but while the first aimed to stay in communion with the Father, the second came as a result of an awareness of the 'incomprehensible' (ἀκατάληπτος) Father. Her perplexity leads to a lack of stability in her movements. Her actions become chaotic and, now unbalanced, she starts the process of creation of the lower reality. As a consequence, that new creation is far from perfection. Irenaeus' summary of the myth ascribes four main passions to Sophia/Wisdom: being in 'distress' (λυπέω), 'fear' (φοβέω), 'feeling of displacement' (ἐξίστημι) and 'being lost' (ἀπορέω)⁴⁸. Her imperfection, now a state of turmoil, causes her to fall outside the previous realm of perfection. That dramatic change even alters her name, now only echoing the Hebrew term for Wisdom. She is ensnared with passions. But here comes the second stage of the myth: the story of the salvation of Wisdom and the therapy of her emotions. Another being is descending from the realm of perfection in order to save her. This is the Saviour, her partner. The Saviour heals her uncontrolled passions and is even able to turn them into matter⁴⁹. Saved and liberated, Sophia is overwhelmed by joy and produces a spiritual offspring.

Whether or not Irenaeus' version preserved the original plot, we don't know. However, his synopsis suggests that some Christians, in order to prescribe 'therapy' of emotions, linked the cosmological events (Sophia's emotions as the cause of her fall) with the status of the human soul and they argued for the hope of salvation or the possibility of healing. As in

⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I 2, 2. We have also another version in Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 6, 36, 3. In my reconstruction of the myth, I follow Irenaeus' account with commentary from E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the 'Valentinians'*, Leiden 2006, various pages and I. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism. Myth, Life Style, and Society in the School of Valentinus*, New York 2008, p. 97-107. The Greek and Latin text follows the French edition from A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau (SChr 264, Paris 2008).

⁴⁶ Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, p. 288-291.

⁴⁷ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I 2, 2.

⁴⁸ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I 2, 3.

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I 4, 5.

the case of Sophia/Wisdom, also in relation to the human soul, redemption is possible by the divine Redeemer. What seems to be the current stage of separation can be repaired with help from the Divine. The myth, criticised by Irenaeus as a product of heresy, still addressed the current stage of history as not ruled by fate, a dark and depressing abyss without hope, but rather as a temporary experience of chaos with its end in sight. The myth brought together cosmology and anthropology, connecting the journey of the spiritual being Sophia with the one the human soul.

To sum up this part, I wish to highlight that, for some Christians of the early second-century, the struggle with emotion received a new cosmic context. Still, it offered hope of liberation from the rule of the emotions.

4. The emotions and Christian revelation – good or bad? Tolerate or eradicate? Anthropology

Having sketched out the cosmic struggle with the emotions represented in the myth of the fallen and rescued Sophia/Wisdom (a metaphor for the human soul?), I now turn to various examples of Christian anthropologies and different responses to the nature of the emotions. Clement of Alexandria and his ‘therapy’ of emotions has drawn significant attention among modern scholars⁵⁰. They highlight various philosophical elements (Stoic, Middle Platonic, Pythagorean, Philonic) which influenced Clement’s views on the passions. However, in my approach I have also underlined a combination of the Stoic notion of a Sage/Tutor with the Scriptural examples of Christ as a Healer/Tutor in Clement’s Christology⁵¹.

⁵⁰ Among many studies, which directly discuss Clement’s views on emotions, see S.R.C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria. A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*, Rome 1971, p. 60-117; E. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, Cambridge 2005, p. 238-224; P. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria. A Project of Christian perfection*, London – New York 2008, p. 94-100; R. Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, Cambridge 2009, p. 94-97; J.L. Kovacs, *Saint Paul as Apostle of Apatheia: Stromateis VII, Chapter 14*, in: *The Seventh Book of the Stromateis*, ed. M. Havrda – V. Hušek – J. Plátová, Leiden – Boston 2012, p. 199-216; K. Gibbons, *The Moral Psychology of Clement of Alexandria. Mosaic Philosophy*, London – New York 2017, p. 103-104; M. Havrda, *Clement of Alexandria*, in: *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy*, ed. M. Edwards, London – New York 2021, especially p. 359-361.

⁵¹ Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria*, p. 94 and p. 211-213. In the past I have placed Clement’s views on Christ as the healer alongside Clement’s ecclesiology as a community of learning and receiving healing.

In the current context my short reference to Clement of Alexandria points out that, in the case of Clement, we find an example of an author whose project of therapy was centred on Christ as the healer of the human soul⁵². This motif is unknown to Philo in whose theory of the divine Logos there is no intervention from the Logos into the realm of the human passion, nor any form of guidance. Divine intervention is absent from all schools of Graeco-Roman philosophies. However, in Clement's view, under Christ's education, the mature Christian is able to reach a total eradication of the passions (ἀπάθεια). This is the freedom from distractions, which enables the stage of contemplation⁵³. Now, I wish to turn to two less well-known examples which illustrate two other trajectories of dealing with the emotions in a Christian context.

The first example, demonstrating yet another way of dealing with the passions closely related to anthropology and the role of Christ, can be found in the Coptic document from the Nag Hammadi, the *Teachings of Silvanus*⁵⁴. Like Clement of Alexandria, the *Teachings of Silvanus* is also not a systematic treatise on ethics or the passions, but a Christian exhortation to a certain way of life. In a similar way to Clement, the document assimilates various elements from its philosophical Graeco-Roman background in order to strengthen the value of its proposal. In the centre of that proposal is the role of 'the guiding principle' (ἡγεμονικόν)⁵⁵. The role of the mind as the inner guide is vital in the process of transformation from the earlier 'animal-like' existence to the Platonic postulate of the assimilation to God (*Doctrina Silvani* 108, 26-27: ἐΓΓΟΝΤῚ ἡΜΟΙ ΕΠΝΟΥΓΕ). To *Silvanus* the Christian mature life is ruled by the reason/mind, which is continuously illuminated by the divine Guide: Christ. That sort of life totally differs from the one ruled by the passions symbolised by 'animals' or the 'animal nature' of other people. The document presents a clear dichotomy: life according to the mind, which leads to God, as opposed to mere existence submerged in the passions, with disastrous consequences. *Silvanus* describes the passions as 'robbers' (Coptic: ἄλῃστες or Greek: ληστής) or 'wild, savage beasts' (Coptic: θηριον or Greek: θηρίον). The didactic

⁵² Havrda, *Clement of Alexandria*, p. 358.

⁵³ I endorse Lilla's observation, in *Clement of Alexandria*, p. 103.

⁵⁴ I have introduced and discussed the ethics of this document recently in my paper *The Teachings of Silvanus (NHC VII, 4) and the Education of the Christian Mind*, "Gnosis: The Journal of Gnostic Studies" 3/2 (2018) p. 177-200. Here, I wish to offer some adaptation of my previous discussion to the current context.

⁵⁵ *Doctrina Silvani* 87, 12.

of the document clearly warns its readers against the destructive power of the ‘animal nature’⁵⁶. The passions are mighty powers: uncontrolled affections, wrong intentions and barren ambitions. These vivid images are not an original invention of *Silvanus*. This document continues the Alexandrian allegorical tradition originated by the Jewish exegete: Philo. In Philo’s didactic any evil act reduces human beings and transforms their souls into wild animals. One of Philo’s ethical paradigms states that human beings, through correct or incorrect affiliation, become either better or worse. *Silvanus* depicts the intense tension between two poles: the human mind *versus* the fierce passions or ‘beasts’⁵⁷. In the outlook presented by *Silvanus* Christians face two opposite ways of life: one ruled by evil spirits/beasts (darkness/κακῆ), and the second the realm of God (light/ποῦς)⁵⁸. It is not, however, a static observation; on the contrary, it is a military battle and *Silvanus* argues that people participate in the warfare between ‘wisdom’ (σοφία) and ‘folly’ (τῆντατῶν). The Christian has freedom of choice. *Silvanus* warns against a number of attitudes which unveil certain weaknesses of his Christian milieu, among them are: ‘love of praise’, ‘fondness of contention’, ‘tiresome jealousy’ and ‘desire of avarice’ – all suggesting rather well-to-do, educated and cultured people. *Silvanus* refers to classical Stoic passions: lust/ἡδονή⁵⁹, desire/ἐπιθυμία⁶⁰, λύπη/grief⁶¹ and fear/φόβος⁶². *Silvanus* remains an important witness to a parallel argument/world? to Clement of Alexandria’s assimilation of the Graeco-Roman and Philonic legacies into the Christian tapestry on which the passions are presented as a serious obstacle to the achievement of perfection. Both Christian authors,

⁵⁶ *Doctrina Silvani* 87, 28-29; 89, 3; 93, 19-21; 94, 2-3; 105, 7.

⁵⁷ *Doctrina Silvani* 84, 19-26: “[...] intensify the struggle against every folly (τῆντατῶν) of the passions of love (ἡγάθος ἡπερως) and base wickedness (τιπονηρία) and love of praise (τῆντῆμαεισοῦ) and fondness of contention (τῆντῆμαειτῶν) and tiresome jealousy (εὐροσε) and wrath (πῶων) and anger (τοργῆ) and the desire of avarice (τεμῶνια ἡντῆμαειρηνα)”, tr. M. Peel – J. Zandee, in: *The Coptic Gnostic Library. Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. B.A. Pearson, Leiden – New York 1996, p. 278-369. Cf. *Doctrina Silvani* 108, 6-8; 110, 12-14.

⁵⁸ *Doctrina Silvani* 93, 34-94, 4: “It is good for you, o man, to turn yourself towards the human (εὐρεκακτῆ ἐπρωμε) rather than towards the animal nature (εὐφύσις ἡτῆνῆ) – I mean towards the fleshly (nature). You will take on the likeness of the part towards which you will turn yourself.”

⁵⁹ *Doctrina Silvani* 105, 25 and 108, 6.

⁶⁰ *Doctrina Silvani* 84, 25; 90, 4-5; 105, 23.

⁶¹ *Doctrina Silvani* 92, 1.

⁶² *Doctrina Silvani* 87, 1; 88, 10; 108, 19-20; 114, 19.

although in different ways⁶³, will appeal to the Saviour Christ, both will highlight the role of the mind in the process of controlling the passions. Although Clement and *Silvanus* belong to two different Christian milieus, their ‘therapies’ are in dialogue.

Before I discuss the third selected example of a proposed Christian therapy of the passions from the *Gospel of Thomas*, I would like to consider the following two questions. In the light of literary evidence such as the New Testament documents, the Apostolic Fathers and other sources, can we assume that anxiety about the passions was a growing trend among Early Christian authors and communities? Or, on the contrary, was a radical way of dealing with the passions a very strong feature of the earliest Early Christian life, which was later during the second century tamed by a more balanced, rational approach? Recently my examination of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*⁶⁴, with its very encratic tendencies, suggested the former trajectory: the blend of various philosophical ideas prompted some Christians to compete with the asceticism of their neighbours. However, we have to keep in mind that, during the first and the second centuries, various communities developed their ethical teaching in different direction and there was no one pattern. Some started with an encratic and docetic stance (e.g. Marcion in Rome), others were more libertine (e.g. Carpocrates), while yet another group searched for a form of moderation (e.g. Clement of Alexandria). Having said that, I wish to move to the third and last document of the *Gospel of Thomas*⁶⁵. The seventh Saying in the *Gospel of Thomas* has the following warning: “Jesus said, ‘Blessed is the lion which becomes man when consumed by man; and cursed is the man whom the lion consumes, and the lion becomes man’”⁶⁶. This is a very intriguing statement, which first has to be assessed within the framework of the *Gospel of Thomas*.

⁶³ The important differences between Clement and *Silvanus*’ Christologies are that Clement uses more Scriptural material to discuss the role of Christ, here the Tutor and the ‘healer’, while *Silvanus* focuses on his direct impact on the Christian mind without any references to the Christian Scriptures. Also, in Clement’s Christology, or rather Logos-theology we find more Middle Platonic mindset, while *Silvanus* is happy with the Roman-Stoic background without any metaphysical interests.

⁶⁴ P. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria and the riddle of the Gospel of the Egyptians*, “*Studia Patristica*” 2022 (forthcoming).

⁶⁵ For further details on the text, discovery, and the content of this document, see and S. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas. Introduction and Commentary*, Leiden 2014, p. 62-90.

⁶⁶ My translation follows Lambdin. The similar and in my view original statement is preserved in the Papyrus Oxyrhynchus, 654, 40-42, however this text is seriously damaged and reconstructed.

Recently April D. DeConick proposed a chronological structure of this document and placed our Logion in the latest stage of the development of the text (80-120 CE)⁶⁷. For modern Biblical studies related to the canonical Gospels, it is evident that each one of them shows stages of development and of composition of the material: they were written over some time, in different areas, for different audiences and assimilated the earlier oral traditions as well as written sources in various ways. DeConick argues that a similar development can be traced in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Some of Sayings come from an earlier stage of the composition of the Gospel (30-50 CE), they preserve oral traditions, finding some parallels with the sources known to the Synoptic traditions. Other Sayings were included later (50-60 CE): those which reflect eschatological material come further in time (60-100 CE), while the Christological motifs as well some ethical debates came in the final stage of reduction (80-120 CE)⁶⁸. Our seventh Saying echoes that final phase. Howard M. Jackson's valuable study on this Saying places it with the development of the Platonic tradition that influences some early Christian material⁶⁹. In the light of Jackson's commentary, the seventh Saying deals with the power of the passions and expresses a warning to the listeners or readers of the Gospel not to give in to their strength. First, the passions are compared to wild beasts (here: a lion); this motif is also echoed in the *Teachings of Silvanus*⁷⁰, which has the power to devour the Christian (here: the man). However, in the Gospel we may find a more vivid echo of the passage from Plato's *Republic* (436 A-441 C and 588 B-589 B). In the Platonic context the human soul has many images of Greek mythological monsters, which stand for various powers of the soul. If the soul is not under the rule of the mind, 'many-headed beasts' spring forth⁷¹. Jackson suggests that the Saying exhorts the Christian to a transformation from the earlier animal-like way of life under the control of the passions (here: beasts/lion) to the most noble way of life 'like a man', that

⁶⁷ A.D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, London – New York 2007, p. 10.

⁶⁸ This proposal is still open to a critical discussion as the clarity about the content of some Sayings is not so convincing to allocate them within the proposed frame, still a general guidance, this attempt is very helpful.

⁶⁹ To my knowledge Jackson's study is one of the best engagements with the metaphor of this Saying and it is still highly valuable commentary, see his *The Lion Becomes Man. The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition*, Atlanta 1985, especially p. 175-213.

⁷⁰ See my earlier discussion of this metaphor in the *Teachings of Silvanus* in this paper.

⁷¹ See discussion of the examples in Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man*, p. 184-203.

is ruled by the mind. It is therefore possible that the Christian community would be familiar with some Platonic metaphors, which they would find attractive and valuable. With this metaphor in the *Gospel of Thomas*, we are, in my view, dealing with the larger phenomenon somewhere later during the second century. Some Christian communities and their asceticism became captivated with the eradication of the passions and they searched for various metaphors to explain the necessity of that inner struggle, the danger of compliance and the ultimate reward: the return to the original stage in Paradise: life with God without stain of sin and passions⁷². Within the theological context of the *Gospel of Thomas* this Saying underlines the importance of the current moment of time: a call (of the Saviour) to change from one type of existence to another, this transformation must be done now in order to conquer the power of the inner beasts, that is the passions.

To sum up, Clement of Alexandria, *Silvanus* and the *Gospel of Thomas* show a clear concern about the life of the Christian. He or she needs to respond to the revelation not only in terms of faith and a new theological outlook, but also with an emphasis on anthropology: the human soul must be, in some cases, liberated (*Silvanus*, the *Gospel of Thomas*) or strengthened (Clement of Alexandria) against the passions which not only distract, but also overwhelm, the soul and endanger its salvation.

5. Conclusions

The emerging Christian didactic did not invent one of its chief enemies: the passions *πάθος*. Rather, as I have argued, there continued to be a diversity of emotions, afflictions and cravings presenting obstacles to the fulfilment of Christ's message. In the new context, the passions received a great deal of attention, however with an awareness of previous Jewish and Graeco-Roman 'therapies'. Christianity added the central role of the Saviour as the divine Healer; various Christian groups put different emphases on grace or self-transformation, yet during the first and the second century, the struggle against the passions was one of the central

⁷² I have pointed out that in the context of the Nag Hammadi, yet another Coptic document which expressed that kind of interested in assimilation of Greek ideas into a new didactic frame is the fragment of Plato's treatise badly translated into Coptic, see P. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Plato in Bad Company? Plato's Republic (588b–589b) in the Nag Hammadi Collection: A Re-Examination of Its Background*, "Gnosis: the Journal of Gnostic Studies" 5/2 (2020) p. 172-187.

motifs of its teachings. In some cases a cosmological myth was involved: ('Sophia/Wisdom'), in others rational arguments (Clement of Alexandria, *Silvanus*), or metaphorical images ('lion' in the *Gospel of Thomas* or beasts in *Silvanus*). Various didactics used different tools to address their audiences: cosmological (myth) for some, anthropological (the mind – emotions relation) argument for others, while theological (salvation) was the main concern for all Christian authors. This diversity of 'therapies' came along with the unity of purpose (here: salvation). That combination of diversity and unity will continue in centuries to come, while the new elements such as Egyptian and Syriac monasticism, Origen and Cappadocians in the East, and Augustine in the West, will all add new features.

The Second Century Debate about the Therapy of Passions – Various Christian Remedies

(summary)

The disturbing power of the passions or affections, collectively known as *πάθος*, was the subject of a remarkable debate in Graeco-Roman philosophical schools, as well as in Philo of Alexandria and soon among various early Christian authors. This paper contributes to the recent approach to this subject but also explores new contexts. It examines cosmological (myth), anthropological (the mind – emotions relation) and theological (salvation) ways of addressing that problematic supremacy of emotions. Although it summarises earlier philosophical views, it focuses on Christian documents from the second century and their witness to that ancient debate. By comparison with the diversity of Christian views on the passions, the paper highlights the diverse 'therapies' proposed by Christian authors. In conclusion, it points out common motifs among Christian responses to the passions, as well as the differences in their remedies.

Keyword: allegory; cataclysm; Clement of Alexandria; the *Gospel of Thomas*; Middle Platonism; Neopythagoreism; Nag Hammadi; myth; passions/emotions; Philo of Alexandria; Roman Stoicism; *Teachings of Silvanus*

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