

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON: UNRAVELING THE PROTO-TRINITARIAN APPROACH OF 2 CLEMENT

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I. Introduction

Second *Clement* is not generally considered to be a work of theological profundity. In the words of J. B. Lightfoot, *2 Clement* “as a literary work is almost worthless” and the author is “confused in thought and slipshod in expression.”¹ Another has opined that “its thought is feeble, its theology peculiar.”² Nevertheless, in this article I will attempt to decipher the rationale underlying some of the apparently convoluted statements the author makes. Moreover, I will suggest that *2 Clement* provides a window into one way that some second-century Christians can be plotted on an exegetical and interpretive trajectory that led later to full-flowered Trinitarian formulations. To this end, I will focus on the relationship of Jesus to his Father in *2 Clement*, particularly in the way the author transposes traditional formulations referring to God the Father (especially as we find them today in the NT) and applies them to Jesus.³ This stems from the author’s high Christology,⁴ and although the author of

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¹ J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp* (London: MacMillan, 1889–1890; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 2:206–8. See similarly Robert M. Grant and Holt M. Graham, eds., *First and Second Clement*, vol. 2 of *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1965), 109. Cf. Paul Parvis, “2 Clement and the Meaning of the Christian Homily,” in the *Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Paul Foster (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 32–41.

² M. B. Riddle, “Introductory Notice to the Homily Known as the Second Epistle of Clement” (*ANF* 7:514).

³ For the sake of clarity, I will utilize and capitalize the names of divine persons in *2 Clement* in accord with traditional theological terminology.

⁴ On high Christology in *2 Clement*, see Grant and Graham, *First and Second Clement*, 112–13. Note also the suggestive comments of Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 5.28.5), who mentions the writings of Clement and others who refer to Jesus as God. Could he have in mind *2 Clement*? It is possible,

2 Clement is not always perceived to be a robust theologian, the first few verses of *2 Clement* do reveal an interpretive logic. Put simply, the author views there to be what we might call an overlapping associative relationship between the Father and the Son, so that what can be predicated of the Father can also be predicated of the Son.⁵ This christological conviction undergirds the main aim of the author, which is exhortation. In other words, although this second-century⁶ sermon⁷ was not composed to be a nuanced, theological treatise, by allowing the author's own method as stated in *2 Clem.* 1:1 to serve as a guide, we may be able to decipher a (mostly) consistent pattern that provides a theological substructure. In this article I will consider *2 Clement* in relationship to the NT and some other early Christian writings from the mid-second century and earlier, but my primary interest is in the approach of *2 Clement* itself.

II. "Jesus as the Father"—Implications of *2 Clement* 1:1

The key phrase for the author's interpretive approach can be found in the first verse:⁸ Ἀδελφοί, οὕτως δεῖ ἡμᾶς φρονεῖν περὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὡς περὶ θεοῦ (1:1).⁹ Indeed, these words appear to be programmatic for virtually all that follows. As important as ethical exhortation is in *2 Clement*, this exhortation is

but he more likely refers to *1 Clement* (cf. *1 Clem.* 16:2; 36; 42:1–3; 49), especially since Eusebius has his doubts that *2 Clement* is to be associated with Clement of Rome (*Hist. eccl.* 3.38.4). Cf. Alois Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979), 1:197–98; Adolf von Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* 1/1, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1958), 47–49 (§32).

⁵ "Overlapping associative relationship" is intentionally redundant (all relationships are associative) since it corresponds to the diffuseness of the author.

⁶ This date is virtually unanimously agreed upon. See variously Vernon Bartlett, "The Origin and Date of *2 Clement*," *ZNW* 7 (1906): 123–35; Parvis, "2 *Clement*," 34–37; Wilhelm Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, KAV 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 4; Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 2:240; Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 2:203. Interestingly, Karl Paul Donfried ("The Theology of Second Clement," *HTR* 66 [1973]: 487–51) thinks it may be as early as 98–100.

⁷ There has been debate about whether "homily" or "sermon" is more apt. "Homily" has often been used historically, but "sermon" is probably more widely used today. See Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 25; Christopher M. Tuckett, *2 Clement: Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, Oxford Apostolic Fathers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18–26; Andreas Lindemann, *Die Clemensbriefe*, HNT 17/AV 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 190; Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *From Prophecy to Preaching: A Search for the Origins of the Christian Homily*, VCSup 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 174–87; Ernst Baasland, "Der 2. Clemensbrief und frühchristliche Rhetorik: 'Die erste christliche Predigt' im Lichte der neueren Forschung," *ANRW* 2.27.1 (1993): 78–157. Differences in terminology aside, the most important point to recognize is the exhortatory context of *2 Clement*.

⁸ Lindemann (*Clemensbriefe*, 255–56) posits that 19:1–20:4 was originally the opening or overture to *2 Clement*. Pratscher (*Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 18–21) suggests a different author for this final section based on differences in phrasing and theology. However, Tuckett (*2 Clement*, 31–33) is hesitant to dismiss this section as secondary. Whether or not chs. 1–18 and chs. 19–20 share a common author, 1:1 clearly begins the sermon itself.

⁹ This study will follow the Greek text found in Tuckett, *2 Clement*. All translations are my own.

grounded in the theology and Christology of the sermon, which is laid out particularly in chs. 1–2.¹⁰ In this opening statement the author presses the necessity of thinking of Jesus as (ὡς) one thinks of God. Not surprisingly, this has led to a fair amount of discussion. Does the author intend to identify Jesus as God by this wording?¹¹ Or is this merely denoting an identity of function?¹² Perhaps the point of the author can be summarized rather simply: *whatever* we think of God, we must think of Jesus *in the same way*. This statement not only assumes the divinity of Jesus,¹³ but also begins a pattern found throughout the sermon in which the relationship of Jesus to the Father is conveyed in enigmatic ways.¹⁴

In other words, it is not only in this first verse that the relationship of Jesus to God is described ambiguously, but this appears to be fundamental to the author's christological outlook. To be sure, this does in large part relate to function; certainly Jesus' actions are divine actions. But the necessity of understanding (φρονέω) Jesus as God in 1:1 urges against limiting this relationship to only a functional one. The author seems to be warning against thinking of Jesus *in any way* that is different from the way we think of God; Jesus is to be thought of in every way like God. This is what I refer to as an overlapping associative relationship.

We see this again in 1:4, where it is stated that Jesus "as a father called us sons" (ὡς πατὴρ υἱοῦς ἡμᾶς προσηγόρευσεν). What is interesting about this statement is that, with a couple of possible exceptions, nowhere in the NT does Jesus explicitly call his disciples *sons* or *children*.¹⁵ Instead, fatherhood is attributed to

¹⁰ Donfried, "Theology," 488; see similarly Klaus Wengst, *Schriften des Urchristentums: Didache (Apostellehre), Barnabasbrief, Zweiter Klemensbrief, Schrift an Diognet: Eingeleitet, herausgegeben, übertragen und erläutert* (Munich: Kösel, 1984), 208.

¹¹ See Christa Stegemann, "Herkunft und Entstehung des sogenannten zweiten Klemensbriefes" (ThD diss., University of Bonn, 1974), 87; Wengst, *Schriften*, 228. Pratscher (*Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 40 and n10, 66) does not see the appellation of God being used for Jesus here, though he does believe that 2 Clement shows a nearness (*Nähe*) of Jesus to God, and probably assumes his divinity in, for example, Jesus' actions and in the directing of belief toward him. He does, however, recognize a christological tradition underlying this statement that led to Jesus being called God, noting that in later interpretive tradition it was unproblematic to see 1:1 as a "Gottesprädikat für Christus." See Wilhelm Pratscher, "Soteriologie und Ethik im Kontext von Eschatologie und Schöpfungslehre in 2.Clem 1," in *Eschatologie und Schöpfung: Festschrift für Erich Grasser zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Martin Evang, Helmut Merklein, and Michael Wolter, BZNW 89 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 263n14.

¹² Karl Paul Donfried, *The Setting of Second Clement in Early Christianity*, NovTSup 38 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 99, sees it as an identity of function, not of persons. Similarly, Lindemann (*Clemensbriefe*, 200) states that Jesus here is almost identified with God, but more with God's actions. Cf. Tuckett, 2 Clement, 128.

¹³ So Wengst, *Schriften*, 228; Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 1:162.

¹⁴ Hans Windisch, "Das Christentum des zweiten Klemensbriefes," in *Harnack-Ehrgang: Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte, ihrem Lehrer A. v. Harnack zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag (7. Mai 1921), dargebracht von einer Reihe seiner Schüler* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1921), 128, wonders if 2 Clem. 1 might be an interpolation because things normally ascribed to God are here ascribed to Jesus. However, this perspective is not limited to the first chapter, as the rest of my argument will attempt to show.

¹⁵ In Heb 2:13–14 the words of Isaiah are attributed to Jesus as he calls his brothers his children. However, even in Hebrews the focus is not so much on the fatherhood of Jesus as the

God alone, whereas Jesus calls his disciples *brothers* and refers to their common Father (see, e.g., Matt 12:48–49; 25:40; 28:10; Mark 3:33–34; Luke 8:21; John 20:17). Elsewhere *2 Clement* does follow this pattern that we see in the NT, and fatherhood is attributed to God in reference to believers (*2 Clem.* 3:1–2; 9:10¹⁶). Why would the author seemingly confuse matters (though he tempers his statement slightly with ὡς) by referring to Jesus as if he were a father in 1:4? I would suggest that we find here an instance in which the author transposes characteristics of God the Father and applies them to the Son precisely because we should think of Jesus in every way like we think of God. In other words, if we take 1:1 as a hermeneutical guide for *2 Clement*, then perhaps we have the author intentionally blurring the lines between the Father and Son not because he confused the two,¹⁷ but because he wanted to ensure that his audience thought about Jesus in the same way they thought about God. Thus, the author was explaining the work of the Son in such a way that it reflects his shared divine status with his Father.

This would fit well with the exhortatory aim of the author who, in the first verse, also emphasizes the need to understand Jesus properly because he is the Judge of the living and the dead.¹⁸ As I will argue in what follows, Jesus' role of Judge is not the only way Jesus is like the Father, but this statement underscores the weightiness of understanding Christ correctly; much is at stake. Thus, in 1:1 the author indicates not only that it is necessary (δεῖ) to think of Jesus as one thinks of God, but it is also necessary (δεῖ) for his audience not to give little thought to their salvation, lest they receive but little. Indeed, in *2 Clement* the greatness of Christ underscores the greatness of his salvation. This understanding is expressed by Klaus Wengst:

In *2 Clement* the statement of the divinity of Jesus is not a stand-alone theme. It serves [a purpose] from the start of the preparation of the paraenesis: the greatness

solidarity between Jesus and his brothers (2:11–12). Cf. Geerhardus Vos, "Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke," *PTR* 14 (1916): 22–23. One could also make an argument that Rev 3:19 is a paternal reference to Jesus who disciplines, which is the role of a father. Nevertheless, even if we grant the paternal imagery for Jesus in these texts, their exceptional character would underscore the scarcity of such references in the NT. Thus Wilhelm Pratscher, "Gottesbild des Zweiten Klemensbriefes," in *Gottes Vorstellungen: Die Frage nach Gott in religiösen Bildungsprozessen: Gottfried Adam zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. U. Körtner and R. Schelander (Vienna: self-published, 1999), 374, rightly notes that this is an unusual christological formula.

¹⁶ Although there is some ambiguity at this point, the antecedent to the one referenced in 9:10 is the God who heals (9:7), which does seem to be a reference to God the Father. Moreover, a shift occurs in 9:11 where the words of the Lord (=Jesus) are mentioned. Cf. Pratscher, *Der zweite Klemensbrief*, 70.

¹⁷ Cf. Donfried, *Setting*, 99; Lindemann, *Clemensbriefe*, 239.

¹⁸ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma 1: Translated from the Third German Edition*, trans. N. Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1961), 186–87n5, suggests this phrase is the basis for thinking of Jesus ὡς περὶ θεοῦ in *2 Clem.* 1:1. One could compare *2 Clem.* 1:1 to Acts 10:42: in both texts Jesus is recognized as the Judge of the living and the dead, though it is noteworthy that in *2 Clement* there is no mention of Jesus having been set apart by God (ὁ ὀρισμένος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ) for this task.

of Christ underscores the greatness of the salvation accomplished by him, and that in turn demands something given in return from the recipient of salvation, which consists in a good way of life (1:1–3).¹⁹

Thus, these opening words set the stage for the exhortation that follows, warning the audience against the pull of the world.

This high christological perspective is also found in other writings from the same general period, perhaps most notably in Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius's seven letters exhibit a striking number of passages in which the roles for God and Jesus are conflated or interchanged. For example, we find in Ignatius that both God (*Magn.* 3:1) and Jesus (*Rom.* 9:1) can be described as bishop of the church; prayers may be made to both God (*Eph.* 10:1; *Rom.* 1:1; *Phld.* 5:1) and Jesus (*Eph.* 20:1; *Rom.* 4:2); Ignatius desires to reach both God (*Rom.* 4:1) and Jesus (*Rom.* 5:3); and he seems to identify the Spirit as coming both from God (*Phld.* 7:1) and Jesus (*Eph.* 17:2). Additionally, Ignatius can use the same title for different persons in the same context. For example, in *Eph.* 1:1 Ignatius speaks of God, apparently as distinct from Christ Jesus, then in the next phrase mentions the blood of God, which must refer to the blood of Jesus.²⁰ It is clear that Ignatius is quite eager to identify Jesus as θεός.²¹

In light of these passages, it is interesting for the present argument that 2 *Clement* features a number of other texts in which Jesus is not only described in overlapping terms with the Father, but texts in which θεός is apparently even used as an appellation for Jesus. I will discuss this phenomenon in more detail below, but at this point I will introduce a few relevant texts in anticipation of the following discussion: 2 *Clem.* 12:1b describes the Parousia as the appearing of God; 2 *Clem.* 13:4 identifies the words of Jesus as those of God; and 2 *Clem.* 4:4 may have Jesus in mind when it notes the necessity of fearing God.²² Nevertheless, some have argued that even these (or some of these) references to θεός must refer to the Father.²³ Even Pratscher, who recognizes that 1:1 and 13:4 are important evidences for the understanding of Christ as God, sees the surrounding context of 11:7–12:1a to be determinative for taking 12:1b as a reference to the coming of God the Father. Similarly, the parallel passages to 2 *Clem.* 4:4 (*Acts* 5:29; 1 *Clem.* 14:1) lead Pratscher to conclude that fearing

¹⁹ Wengst, *Schriften*, 228: “Im 2. Klemensbrief ist die Aussage von der Gottheit Jesu kein eigenständiges Thema. Sie dient von vornherein der Vorbereitung der Paränese: Die Größe Christi unterstreicht die Größe des von ihm gewirkten Heils, und das wiederum verlangt eine Gegengabe der Heilempfänger, die in einem guten Lebenswandel besteht (1,1–3).” See also Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 70–71.

²⁰ Note the possible readings for *Acts* 20:28.

²¹ See also Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 1:1; *Eph.* 7:2; 19:3; *Rom. inscr.* 3:3; Thomas G. Weinandy, “The Apostolic Christology of Ignatius of Antioch: The Road to Chalcedon,” in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71–84.

²² So Wengst, *Schriften*, 228.

²³ See, e.g., Lindemann, *Clemensbriefe*, 200, 210, 235.

God the Father (not Jesus) is in view in *2 Clem.* 4:4.²⁴ However, I would suggest that the author of *2 Clement* intentionally conflates the categories pertaining to Jesus and God throughout his sermon in support of his statement in 1:1.²⁵ No example is more obvious in this regard than the focus on the will (θέλημα) of Jesus in *2 Clement*.

III. *The Will of the Father and the Son*

In *2 Clement* the reader who knows the NT will find some familiar passages pertaining to the will of God. For example, Jesus' statement in 9:11 that those who do the will of his Father are his brothers (ἀδελφοί μου οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ποιῶντες τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου) reflects similar statements in Matt 12:50, Mark 3:35, and Luke 8:21.²⁶ This is consistent with the way the NT speaks of the will of God—the divine will in the NT refers almost always to that of God the Father. Of the forty-nine times in the NT that θέλημα is used in reference to God or Jesus, at least forty-seven refer to the Father,²⁷ and only one (Eph. 5:17), or possibly two (Acts 21:14), refer to Jesus.²⁸

It is particularly interesting that *2 Clement* focuses distinctly on doing (ποιέω) the divine will.²⁹ What is notable about this usage compared to the NT is the unique way the author refers not only to doing the will of the Father (8:4; 9:11; 10:1; 14:1a), but also to doing the will of Christ in 6:7. Additionally, the statement about doing the will of the one who called us (τὸ θέλημα τοῦ καλέσαντος ἡμᾶς) in 5:1 most likely also refers to the will of Christ,³⁰ as does the mention of doing the will of the Lord (ποιήσωμεν τὸ θέλημα κυρίου) in 14:1b.³¹ Thus, we have in

²⁴ Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 40 and n10.

²⁵ See similarly Stegemann, "Herkunft und Entstehung," 87.

²⁶ Cf. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett, "2 Clement and the Writings That Later Formed the New Testament," in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 270–71.

²⁷ Will of God: Mark 3:35; John 7:17; Acts 13:22; 22:14; Rom 1:10; 2:18; 12:2; 15:32; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:5; Gal 1:4(!); Eph 1:1, 5, 9, 11; 6:6; Col 1:1, 9; 4:12; 1 Thess 4:3; 5:18 (though in Jesus Christ); 2 Tim 1:1; Heb 10:7, 9, 10, 36; 13:21; 1 Pet 2:15; 3:17; 4:2, 19; 1 John 2:17; 5:14; Rev 4:11. Will of the Father: Matt 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; 26:42; Luke 22:42. Will of the one who sent Jesus: John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38–40; 9:31.

²⁸ Most agree that τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου in Eph 5:17 refers to Jesus (and most also agree that τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ in Col 1:9 is God's will). Acts 21:14 is more ambiguous. The phrase τοῦ κυρίου τὸ θέλημα γινέσθω likely refers to the will of Jesus, but Lord here could refer to God. Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AB 18c (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 690; Acts 18:21.

²⁹ Donfried, "Theology," 493. He lists only 5:1; 6:7; 8:4; 9:11; 10:1 in support of this view, though it is unclear why he includes 6:7, which explicitly refers to the will of Christ, in a discussion on doing the will of the Father.

³⁰ This is due to the close association with the words of the Lord in 5:2, as well as the role of Jesus as one who, along with his Father, calls his people (1:8; 2:7). Cf. Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 99; Lindemann, *Clemensbriefe*, 212.

³¹ This last point is by no means obvious. However, note the allusion here to Jer 7:13, which is attributed to Jesus in Matt 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46. Given this explicit citation of Jer 7 by

2 *Clement* four references to doing the will of God, and possibly three references to doing the will of Christ. Not surprisingly, given the paucity of references to the will of Christ in general in the NT, there are no NT texts that speak of *doing* the will of Christ. Moreover, one prominent feature of the relevant NT texts is that they speak of Christ doing the will of his Father, thus indicating a distinction between the roles of the Father and the Son—a distinction which is not clear in 2 *Clement's* references to *θέλημα*.³² In light of this, 2 *Clement's* references to *doing the will of Christ* are striking for the apparent freedom they reveal on the part of the author to move beyond traditional language in order to communicate the close relationship between Jesus and his Father.³³

I would suggest the reason for this interpretive move is the author's conviction that if his audience is to appreciate the greatness of their salvation, they must think of Jesus as they think of God (1:1). Thus, what we see in these transpositions of Jesus and God reveals the author's interpretive approach: since Jesus must be understood to be just like God, one is free to describe both Father and Son with overlapping terminology. This leads to some distinctive formulations, particularly when compared to what we find in the NT.

If this assessment is correct, then it is unnecessary to think of the author as naively equating the Father and the Son, as some have suggested.³⁴ Instead, the author is illustrating that to think of Jesus as one thinks of God the Father gives one the freedom—perhaps even the obligation—to understand Jesus as doing all the things that the Father does, even if it goes beyond scriptural or traditional precedents. Although this approach is certainly confusing at points, it is consistent with what we find in some other writings of this era. Again, Ignatius of Antioch is illuminating as a second-century author who freely transposes titles and roles of the Father and the Son, yet while also demonstrating his understanding that the Father and Son are different persons. This is perhaps

Jesus, and since *κύριος* most often refers to Jesus, it is best to understand *κύριος* in 14:1b to refer to Jesus, especially in line with the present thesis of an overlapping associative relationship. For the view that *κύριος* here refers to God, see Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 178.

³² Also note the references in Matthew, in particular, to the need for the disciples to do the will of Jesus' Father (7:21; 12:50).

³³ Among NT writings, the author seems to have at least known Matthew and Luke. So Gregory and Tuckett, "2 *Clement* and the Writings," 270–71, 277, though they stop short of affirming that the author of 2 *Clement* used these gospels directly. Additionally, (though it is debated) the author seems to be acquainted in some way with Paul's letters (and possibly Hebrews), though these are not explicitly cited (cf. 2 *Clem.* 14:2). It has also been suggested, based on 2 *Clem.* 12:2, that the author knows the *Gospel according to the Egyptians* and/or the *Gospel of Thomas*. It is by no means clear, however, that he is deriving his information from these sources. Cf. Tjitze Baarda, "2 *Clement* and the Sayings of Jesus," in *Logia: Les paroles de Jésus—The Sayings of Jesus*, ed. Joël Delobel (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1982), 529–56, who observes the differences in 2 *Clem.* 12:2 and these sources.

³⁴ Rudolf Knopf, *Das nachapostolische Zeitalter: Geschichte der christlichen Gemeinden vom Beginn der Flavierdynastie bis zum Ende Hadrians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1905), 377, sees in 2 *Clement* "die naïve heidenchristliche Anschauung . . . dass . . . Christus direkt mit Gott identifiziert." Cf. Bartlet, "Origin and Date," 133; Tuckett, 2 *Clement*, 231, 242n22.

clearest in the salutations that make a distinction between Jesus and his Father (*Magn. inscr.*; *Rom. inscr.*; *Eph. inscr.*; *Phld. inscr.*), though it is also evident in numerous other texts (*Magn.* 6:1; 7:1; *Trall.* 3:1; *Smyrn.* 8:1).³⁵ Thus we have corroboration that an early Christian author's use of overlapping descriptions or titles need not entail a wholesale confusion of persons.

IV. Other Instances of an Overlapping Associative Relationship

1. Overlapping Roles

In addition to the "Jesus as the Father" statements and the will of Christ statements in *2 Clement*, we can identify a number of other texts in which we find an overlapping associative relationship. First, closely related to the will of Christ statements is the author's approach to the divine commandments—to do the will of God or Christ is to follow the commandments. What is interesting in *2 Clement* is that although we have statements that mention both doing the will of Christ and doing the will of the Father, the commandments seem to be Christ's commandments alone (3:4; 8:4; 17:3).³⁶ Moreover, as I will discuss in greater detail below, in some of these statements it is not easy to determine whether the Father or Son is in view.

One of the most notable examples in this regard is 17:3, which twice mentions the commandments (ἐνταλμα, ἐντολή) of the Lord. Although one might expect the Lord to refer to Jesus, the next verse (17:4) attributes the words of Isa 66:18 to this (apparently) same Lord, which may give one pause for identifying the Lord of 17:3 as Jesus.³⁷ However, 17:4 also speaks of the appearing of the Lord, which almost certainly refers to the Parousia, and 17:6 is particularly relevant, as it speaks of the commandments (ἐντολάς) of Jesus Christ. Additionally, the redemption of each one according to his deeds (κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ) in 17:4 seems to refer in *2 Clement* (as in the NT) to the work of Jesus.³⁸ Thus, although 17:3 might refer to the Father as Lord, it is more likely that κύριος here refers to Jesus.³⁹ In any case, the way the author describes the relationship between the Father and Son here is both remarkable and confusing.

Another example of the overlapping of roles is seen in the way that both Jesus calls (καλέω, 1:8; 2:4, 6–7; 5:1; cf. 1:4.) and the Father calls (10:1; 16:1) the disciples to salvation. However, while the author speaks of being saved in general on several occasions, it may be worth noting that only Jesus is explicitly

³⁵ So J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (Hendrickson, MA: Prince, 2007), 93.

³⁶ There is one generic reference to commandments in 19:3, though the term utilized is *πρόσταγμα*, and might come from a different author or context (so Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 19–21).

³⁷ I will say more about OT citations below.

³⁸ This phrase in the NT may also be used in association with Jesus' Parousia. See Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 11:15; 2 Tim 4:14; Rev 2:23; 18:6; 20:12; cf. Matt 16:27. These may derive from Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12.

³⁹ See the fuller discussion of κύριος below.

identified as the one who saves (σώζω) in 2 *Clement* (1:4; 2:7; 4:1–2; 9:5; probably 1:7; 3:3; 8:2), and to think of salvation is to think specifically of Jesus (1:1–2).⁴⁰

2. *Overlapping Titles*

Although one can perhaps identify some sort of order or balance when looking at the overlapping of roles in the ways just mentioned (i.e., divinity of Jesus and the Father, doing the will of Christ and the Father, calling unto salvation), the task becomes more difficult when looking at the overlapping names or titles for both Jesus and the Father in 2 *Clement*.⁴¹ Not surprisingly, the Father of Jesus is referred to as God throughout the sermon.⁴² However, Jesus also seems to be referred to as God in texts such as 2 *Clem.* 12:1b; 13:3–4; and perhaps 4:4.⁴³ Although the explicit identification of Jesus as God is relatively rare, we do find examples of it in the NT (see John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Rom 9:5; Tit 2:13; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:1; 1 John 5:20),⁴⁴ Ignatius of Antioch (*Smyrn.* 1:1; *Eph.* 1:1; 7:2; 19:3; *Rom. inscr.* 3:3), and Clement of Rome (1 *Clem.* 16:2). It may also be significant that in two of the relevant texts in 2 *Clement* the identification of Jesus as God is bound very closely with references to Jesus' Father. Thus, 2 *Clem.* 12:1b speaks of the appearing of God (most likely a reference to the Parousia of Jesus⁴⁵), but in both 2 *Clem.* 12:1a and the previous verse (11:7) we find references to the Kingdom of God, which must refer to the Father of Jesus. Although this apparent vacillation could be an indication of the author's theological dullness, given the proximity of these occurrences of θεός and the patterns heretofore suggested, perhaps we could say that this is an intentional alternation—one that is consistent with the overlapping associative relationship we find throughout the sermon. Similarly, in 2 *Clem.* 13:4 the words of Jesus, possibly from Matt 5 and/or Luke 6, are referred to as the words of God,⁴⁶ and the previous reference to the words of God (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ) in 13:3, which seems to introduce the words of Jesus in 13:4, therefore also seems to refer to Jesus.⁴⁷

A third possibility for the use of God in reference to Jesus comes in 2 *Clem.* 4:4. Here the exhortation to fear God is sandwiched between references to Jesus the Lord who has the authority to determine who is and is not saved (4:2,

⁴⁰ Pratscher ("Gottesbild," 374) proposes that 10:1 implies that God also saves.

⁴¹ Pratscher ("Soteriologie und Ethik," 263) rightly observes that it is hard to determine who is in view when God/Lord is used, though I will attempt to describe a pattern in usage in what follows.

⁴² 2:2–3; 6:1, 9; 9:4, 7; 11:1, 7; 12:1a, 6; 13:3; 14:1–2; 15:2–3 (ch. 15 is discussed below); 16:1; 17:1, 7; 18:1; 20:5; see also 19:1; 20:1–5. Given the ambiguity of portions of 2 *Clement*, some of these examples should be viewed as *probable* references to God (e.g., 15:2–3; 16:1; 17:1).

⁴³ Of course, the programmatic statement in 1:1 should also not be forgotten.

⁴⁴ See Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, SBT 2/17 (London: SCM, 1970), 136–41.

⁴⁵ See also 2 Pet 3:12.

⁴⁶ These words may reveal familiarity with Matt 5:44, 46 and/or Luke 6:32, 35. See Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 174–76; Gregory and Tuckett, "2 *Clement* and the Writings," 271–73.

⁴⁷ So also Tuckett, 2 *Clement*, 243.

5), rendering it quite likely that, even though different names are used, fearing θεός in 4:4 may also refer to Jesus.⁴⁸ However, the possible allusion to Matt 10:28 that stresses the need to fear God the Father renders this assessment tentative. Thus in at least two, and possibly three, instances (12:1b; 13:3–4, maybe 4:4), θεός seems to be used for Jesus.

This leads us to a consideration of how the author of *2 Clement* utilizes the title κύριος. As one might expect, in association with general NT and early Christian usage, κύριος often clearly refers to Jesus in *2 Clement* (4:1, 5; 5:2; 6:1; 8:2, 4–5; 9:5,⁴⁹ 11; 12:2; 14:1; 14:5), though some references are quite nebulous. Part of the difficulty in identifying κύριος in these instances relates to OT citations attributed to the Lord. As noted above, one of the most confusing passages in this regard is found in ch. 17. What makes this passage particularly challenging is the way that Lord is not only used to refer to Jesus (compare 17:3 with 17:6), but also to the Lord who speaks in Isa 66:18 (*2 Clem.* 17:4). Similarly, in *2 Clem.* 13:2 we also find the words of Isa 52:5 (along with an unknown source) attributed to the Lord in a context that refers to Jesus as God in 13:3–4.⁵⁰ Both of these texts could lead to confusion, but it appears that in these two texts the author has taken statements spoken by the Lord in Isaiah and attributed these to *Jesus* the Lord. This conclusion seems to find further support in the citation of Isa 29:13 in *2 Clem.* 3:5,⁵¹ a text in which the speaker is identified in the next verse (4:1) as the Lord whose words echo Matt 7:21.⁵² Thus, it seems that κύριος for the author always refers to Jesus. Although we do not always find this level of consistency with titles in other writings, this does accord with what we know of early Christian confessions (Acts 2:21, 36; 1 Cor 12:13; Rom 10:9). We may find a similar consistency in *Barnabas*, which exhibits a predilection for identifying the Son of God as κύριος, though even this title is also (rarely) used for the Father of Jesus in *Barnabas* (see apparently *Barn.* 6:12).

This leads us to a fourth ambiguous text in *2 Clement*, and the one I find most vexing when searching for a consistent pattern: *2 Clem.* 15:3–4. Although I argued for the previous three texts that the Lord speaking in Isaiah is identified with Jesus, in 15:3 the reference is to *God* who speaks in Isa 58:9. This seems to refer to the Father. However, the next verse (15:4), which apparently explains the Isaianic reference, seems to indicate that the *Lord* is the one who was speaking in Isaiah in 15:3. The question arises: in *2 Clem.* 15:3–4, do God and Lord refer to the same person, or to different persons speaking in Isaiah? (Alternatively, does 15:4 simply refer to the words of Jesus the Lord that stand

⁴⁸ Pace Tuckett, *2 Clement*, 166n43.

⁴⁹ 9:5 explicitly identifies Jesus as the Lord who saves.

⁵⁰ Isaiah 52:5 is also cited in Rom 2:24, but there in reference to the name of God. Cf. Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 172.

⁵¹ Cf. Matt 15:8; Mark 7:6. Jesus may be portrayed in *2 Clement* as the speaker of Isaiah even when the words are not found in the NT, though several of the quotations do have NT parallels.

⁵² Additionally, in this same context (3:3) the reference to the one through whom we were saved (δι' οὗ ἐσώθημεν) probably refers to Jesus.

in agreement with Isa 58?)⁵³ This decision is difficult, but I think it is best to see two different persons—both God the Father and Jesus the Lord—as the speakers of Isaiah in this context, especially since 15:4b might also contain an Isaianic allusion (cf. Isa 65:1, 24⁵⁴). Whether or not 15:4b is an additional (though subtle) Isaianic reference, it is best to take God in 2 *Clem.* 15:3 to refer to the Father of Jesus, and the Lord speaking in 2 *Clem.* 15:4 to refer to Jesus. I base this on two factors.

First, θεός most often refers to the Father throughout 2 *Clement*, and in every other instance κύριος seems to refer to Jesus. Second, although Jesus is often clearly seen to be the speaker of Isaiah, in at least two other instances God the Father seems to be in view as the speaker of Isaiah.⁵⁵ Thus, it would be consistent for the reference to the creator God in 15:2—which is likely a reference to God the Father—to be the God who speaks Isa 58:9 in 2 *Clem.* 15:3. If this assessment is correct, then perhaps we can detect a pattern in which Isaianic references attributed to κύριος refer to Jesus, whereas θεός speaking the words of Isaiah refers to the Father.⁵⁶

It is not my intention to defend every interpretive move the author makes—we may indeed find some inconsistencies, or at the very least some imprecise formulations. However, I do think a pattern can be detected. We seem to have an author who has taken seriously his own advice in 1:1, which has led him to transpose freely the works and even the names of Jesus and God the Father given his conviction that they share the closest imaginable relationship (note especially 12:1; 13:2–4; 15:3–4).⁵⁷ One further point is worth noting: it appears that the author has used θεός for both Jesus and his Father, but κύριος seems to be used only for Jesus. Perhaps this further reflects the concern of 1:1, that the audience elevate their understanding of Jesus to the same plane as God, whose supremacy would have been assumed.

⁵³ Pratscher (*Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 194) prefers this option.

⁵⁴ Although precise verbal correspondence is not present, this allusion is eminently possible given the significance of the latter chapters of Isaiah in 2 *Clement*.

⁵⁵ Though, admittedly, these references are not certain. It is not clear who the speaker is in 2:1; 7:6. *Second Clement* 2:1 contains a citation of Isa 54, and although the speaker is not identified, a number of references to God are included in the explanatory comments. Similarly, 7:6 cites Isa 66:24 (cf. Mark 9:48), which could refer to either the Father or the Son (the text does not identify the speaker). Perhaps it is slightly more likely that this refers to Jesus given the correspondence with Mark 9:48. But if that is the case, then would we also need to attribute Isa 54:1 in 2:1 to Jesus, since this text is quoted in Gal 4:27 (though not on the lips of Jesus as in Mark 9)? These are difficult decisions, and a definitive answer to every question may not be within reach.

⁵⁶ Recently Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and the Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), has argued for the practice of *prosopological exegesis*, by which early Christian authors often identified distinct, divine persons speaking in specific OT texts. The use of Isaiah in 2 *Clement* might be an additional avenue to explore in light of this proposed reading strategy.

⁵⁷ And yet this is a bit subtler than what we find in Ignatius of Antioch.

V. *Spirit in 2 Clement*

Hitherto we have considered the role of the Father and the Son in *2 Clement*, but it will also be instructive to consider the Spirit in *2 Clement*.⁵⁸ In 2 Clem. 9:5 the preexistent Christ is said to have first been spirit before he became flesh. A bit more reflection on the Spirit is found in ch. 14, which connects the preexistence of Jesus in the spiritual realm with the preexistence of the church in the spiritual realm (14:2). Indeed, the flesh is said to *be* the church, just as Christ is said to *be* the Spirit (14:4; cf. 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 3:17).

The Spirit in *2 Clement* is christological and ecclesiological, though the Spirit plays little role in the outworking of the Christian life.⁵⁹ For the present purposes, it is noteworthy that the Spirit is associated strongly with Jesus and is explicitly stated to be preexistent (cf. *Barn.* 6:14; 19:7; *Herm. Sim.* 5:6). Additionally, in distinction from later, standard articulations in Christian theology, it is possible that the author of *2 Clement* views the Spirit as a *mode* of Christ—both before his incarnation and presently, Christ seems to be equated with the Spirit (9:5; 14:2, 4).⁶⁰ However, we must be cautious at this point since we find similar statements elsewhere in the NT and other early Christian writings, which may *seem* in places to conflate the Son and the Spirit (1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 3:17; *Ign., Magn.* 15:1; *Herm. Sim.* 5:5; 9:1), but often these same writings do recognize distinctions between the two (1 Cor 12:4–6; 2 Cor 13:14; *Ign., Magn.* 13:1).⁶¹

Thus, although *2 Clement* is ambiguous at this point, there does seem to be sufficient reason to doubt that a strict identification between the Spirit and Christ is intended since Christ does appear to be distinct from the (spiritual) church (*2 Clem.* 14:2, 4).⁶² Nevertheless, the author's ecclesiological comments are striking for the remarkably close relationship they posit between Christ and the church (14:2; cf. *Rom* 7:4; 1 Cor 10:16; 12:27; *Eph.* 1:22–23; 4:12; 5:23; *Col* 1:24).⁶³ The author also manifests a fluidity of thought that refers to the church as spiritual (*πνευματική*, 14:1–3) but also as flesh (*σάρξ*, 14:4). Thus, we should allow for the possibility that the author has utilized familiar, pneumatological terminology in an unreflective way.⁶⁴ If so, it may be that the author of *2 Clement*

⁵⁸ "Spirit" will be capitalized in this discussion in accord with my stated approach, though I will exercise some interpretive discretion since it is far from clear that the Holy Spirit is always in view where *2 Clement* employs pneumatological language.

⁵⁹ See Wilhelm Pratscher, "Das Geistverständnis des 2. Klemensbriefes im Verhältnis zu dem des Neuen Testaments," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Theologie* 3 (2000): 38–51, esp. 48–49.

⁶⁰ Tuckett, *2 Clement*, 72–73.

⁶¹ On the Spirit's relationship to Christ in the NT, see the classic study of Geerhardus Vos, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 91–125.

⁶² Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 91.

⁶³ A term often used to describe this relationship is "syzygy," from the Greek σύζυγος ("yoked together"). See Pratscher, *Der zweite Klemensbrief*, 184; Tuckett, *2 Clement*, 73.

⁶⁴ Tuckett, *2 Clement*, 72–73.

has a more defined understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son than he has between the Spirit and the Son.

VI. Conclusion

Three reflections are in order for the proposed interpretive strategy of 2 *Clement* in the context of early Christian theology.

First, the author of 2 *Clement* demonstrates a fascinating christological-interpretive approach to scriptural traditions that posits an overlapping associative relationship between the Father and the Son. This is revealed in his opening statement, that we must think of Jesus as we think of God. What is immensely interesting about 2 *Clement's* approach is that it leads the author to explain Jesus in ways that go beyond how the NT describes the Son's relationship to the Father. Thus, *whatever* can be predicated of God can be predicated of Jesus. I would suggest that this approach explains why we find so many apparently ambiguous and imprecise statements about the Father and the Son in 2 *Clement*.

However, a significant factor that gives one pause from dismissing the author's theological perspective is that in places he does recognize a distinction between the Father and the Son.⁶⁵ This is clear not only in 1:1 and in the other texts we have considered, but also in the doxology of 20:5: τῷ μόνῳ θεῷ ἀοράτῳ, πατρὶ τῆς ἀληθείας, τῷ ἐξαποστειλαντι ἡμῖν τὸν σωτῆρα καὶ ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ἀφθαρσίας, δι' οὗ καὶ ἐφανερώσεν ἡμῖν τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὴν ἐπουράνιον ζωὴν, αὐτῷ ἢ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. ἀμήν. Even if one were to consider most of 2 *Clement* 19–20 to be secondary, there is still good reason to posit a common author for 20:5 and 1:1–18:2.⁶⁶ The inclusion of 20:5 as a doxological conclusion to the sermon of 1:1–18:2 lends further support to the view that the author did indeed recognize a distinction between the Father and the Son throughout the sermon, even if in places he describes them in overlapping (and confusing) ways.

Second, as noted at the outset, what we seem to find in 2 *Clement* is a window into one way that some second-century Christians can be plotted on an exegetical and interpretive trajectory that led later to full-flowered Trinitarian theology.⁶⁷ Not only does the Son (whom we can identify as θεός) share the closest imaginable relationship to God, but pneumatological language is also found in conjunction with the preexistence of Christ. The Son serves as a Janus figure, looking at once toward the Father and also toward the Spirit. Thus, we have the presence of all three Trinitarian persons, though we do not find a fully developed Trinitarian theology. The close relationship posited between the

⁶⁵ So Lindemann, *Clemensbriefe*, 239; Donfried, *Setting*, 99; Pratscher, "Geistverständnis," 42n11; Tuckett, 2 *Clement*, 69.

⁶⁶ Lindemann, *Clemensbriefe*, 260; Pratscher, *Der zweite Clemensbrief*, 20–21, 234. See also n. 8 above.

⁶⁷ See also Pratscher, "Gottesbild," 375.

Father and the Son—which is primarily in view in *2 Clement*—may have been particularly important in the early church as a catalyst to consider further the interrelationship between all three divine persons.

Third, a word on the context of these reflections is relevant: all of what the author of *2 Clement* says about the need to think of Jesus as we think of God serves the purpose of exhortation. In other words, all of *2 Clement's* theological reflections on the Father and the Son (and on the Son and the Spirit to a lesser degree) serve a practical and ethical purpose—to think of Jesus as God is to appreciate the greatness of salvation (1:1–2). Thus, while we might not find an entirely coherent or fully Trinitarian theology in *2 Clement*, we do find an early Christian preacher wrestling with the implications of a high Christology and its significance for the early Christian community. Perhaps, at least in this respect, *2 Clement* is more profound than has often been recognized.