

# Matt. 18:10 In Early Christology and Pneumatology: A Contribution to the Study of Matthean *Wirkungsgeschichte*\*

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## Abstract

The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Matt. 18:10 presents a more complex picture than so far acknowledged in Biblical and Patristic scholarship. After rehearsing the current scholarly views on Matt. 18:10, this article discusses the ways in which this verse was interpreted by the Marcosians, by the author of the Ps.-Clementine Homilies, and in various texts by Clement of Alexandria, Aphrahat, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa. A notable common element bridging temporal, geographical and ecclesiastical boundaries is the Christological interpretation of the Face (πρόσωπον) in Matt. 18:10, via exegetical identification with χαρακτήρ in Heb. 1:3 and εἰκόν in Col. 1:15. Almost equally widespread is the interpretation of the angels in Matt. 18:10 as seven supreme angels, which is carried out via exegetical identification with the “seven eyes of the Lord” (Zech. 4:10) and the “seven gifts of the Spirit” (Isa. 11:2-3, LXX). Less common, though also strongly represented, is the use of Matt. 18:10 to illustrate the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit. While it is certainly true that this verse became a locus classicus of Christian angelology, and while much of patristic exegesis seized upon the obvious ethical implications of the passage, the analysis undertaken in this article shows that Matt. 18:10 also provided scriptural proof for the doctrinal phenomena termed “Face Christology” and “angelomorphic Pneumatology.”

## Keywords

Matt. 18:10, reception history, angels of the face, pneumatology

## I. Introduction

The injunction in the Gospel of Matthew, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their-angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10, RSV), has had

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a fascinating history of reception in early Christianity. As one would naturally expect, much of patristic exegesis seized upon the obvious ethical implications of the passage.<sup>1</sup> Highlighting “God’s special concern for the little ones, for the humble and despised,” is, according to leading contemporary exegetes, the only interpretation by which Matt. 18:10 retains some relevance for today’s world.<sup>2</sup>

There is, however, another side of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* that is well worth studying, especially since many of its elements are generally overlooked in scholarship.<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I will show how a number of writers in the early centuries of the common era, whether so-called Jewish Chris-

<sup>1</sup> For instance, John Chrysostom: “He calls ‘little ones’ not them that are really little... (for how should he be little who is equal in value to the whole world; how should he be little, who is dear to God?); but them who in the imagination of the multitude are so esteemed.... Then in another way also He makes them objects of reverence, saying, that ‘their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven.’ If then God thus rejoices over the little one that is found, how dost thou despise them that are the objects of God’s earnest care, when one ought to give up even one’s very life for one of these little ones?... Let us not then be careless about such souls as these. For all these things are said for this object” (*Homilies on Matthew* 59:4-5; PG 57, col. 578; NPNF translation).

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001) 443; Christopher Rowland, “Apocalyptic, the Poor, and the Gospel of Matthew,” *JTS* 45 (1994) 504-518.

<sup>3</sup> For the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Matthew, see Luz’s commentary for EKKNT, now available in English, in the Hermeneia series (see previous note), as well as U. Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); M. Simonetti (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 14-28* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002); D. Jeffrey Bingham, *Irenaeus’ Use of Matthew’s Gospel in Adversus Haereses* (Louvain: Peeters, 1998). Of some interest are studies on the textual transmission of Matthew in early Christianity: Édouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus* (original French edition 1950; Leuven: Peeters; Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1990); Helmut Koester, *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den apostolischen Vätern* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957); Colby Shannon Morgan, “The comparative influence of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke on Christian literature before Irenaeus: A Corrective of Édouard Massaux, *Influence de l’Évangile de saint Matthieu sur la littérature chrétienne avant saint Irénée*” (unpublished PhD Dissertation; Harvard University, 1969); Wolf-Dietrich Köhler, *Die Rezeption des Matthäusevangeliums in der Zeit vor Irenäus* (WUNT 2/24; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987); Graham N. Stanton, “The Early Reception of Matthew’s Gospel: New Evidence From the Papyri?,” in D.E. Aune (ed.), *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study: Studies in Memory of William G. Thompson* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001) 42-61; Jean-François Racine, *The Text of Matthew in the Writings of Basil of Caesarea* (The New Testament in the Greek Fathers 5; Atlanta: SBL, 2004); Kyoung Shik Min, *Die früheste Überlieferung des Matthäusevangeliums (bis zum 3./4. Jh.): Edition und Untersuchung* (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2005).

tians,<sup>4</sup> Valentinians, or members of the “Great Church,” writing in Greek, Latin, or Syriac, have used the Matthean “Face” and “angels of the little ones” as building blocks for their emerging Christology and Pneumatology, and how this exegesis of Matt. 18:10 resulted in what may be termed a “Face Christology,” and, as its correlative, an “angelomorphic” Pneumatology.<sup>5</sup>

## II. The Face of God and the Angels Beholding the Face in Matt. 18:10

A few words to rehearse the current scholarly views on Matt. 18:10 are in order at this point. This passage stands in between a section in which Matthew was working off Mark (up to Matt. 18:9), and another section that may perhaps come out of Q (Matt. 18:11-35). Among the dominical sayings in Matthew, Rudolf Bultmann judges Matt. 18:10 to be material “of uncertain origin, though possibly Jewish,” which was inserted into the new Jesus-tradition (whether in the written period or even earlier), and thus edited for Christian usage. Specifically, the redactional 10a (“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones”) serves to connect the traditional logion in 10b (“for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven”) with the foregoing section on the little

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this essay, the term “Jewish Christian” will be taken in the sense described by Daniélou in his classic work *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964). As long as the narrative of an early and radical parting of the ways between “Christianity” and “Judaism” remains normative, despite its inability to explain a great deal of textual evidence from the first four centuries, the term “Jewish Christianity” remains useful as a description of ‘Christianity’ itself. For more recent treatments of this problem, see the essays collected in A.H. Becker, A.Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> The terms “angelomorphic” and “angelomorphism” require some clarification. According to Crispin Fletcher-Louis, the terms should be used “wherever there are signs that an individual or community possesses specifically angelic characteristics or status, though for whom identity cannot be reduce to that of an angel” (Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* [WUNT 2/94; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997] 14-15). The virtue of this definition is that it signals the use of angelic *characteristics* in descriptions of God or humans, while not necessarily implying that the latter are angels *stricto sensu*: neither “angelomorphic Christology” nor “angelomorphic Pneumatology” imply the identification of Christ or the Holy Spirit with angels. Cf. Daniélou, *Jewish Christianity*, 118. For a survey of Jewish and early Christian materials that instantiate “angelomorphic Pneumatology,” see Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (AGJU 42; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998) 114-119.

ones. The resulting synthesis offers some insight into Matthew's special vocabulary and theology, and coheres well with his distinctive interest in the association of angels with the Son of man or the devil (13:41; 16:27; 24:31; 25:31; 26:53; 25:41).<sup>6</sup>

The "little ones" are most certainly not children in the biological sense.<sup>7</sup> Some exegetes, patristic (e.g., Chrysostom, cited above) as well as modern, have thought of a special category of disciples—those whom fellow-Christians are likely to despise as socially inferior, spiritually distraught, recently baptized, etc.<sup>8</sup> Matthew's two categories—"the little ones" and those admonished not to despise them—may also be part of a rhetorical strategy to address the entire church.<sup>9</sup> Even though "the saying calls for some elasticity of interpretation,"<sup>10</sup> μικροί may have been a pejorative term, used originally by the adversaries of the Jesus-movement, and later embraced by Christians.<sup>11</sup> As for the idea of angelic representatives in heaven, "twins" or *Doppelgänger* of the

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York; Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963 [1931]) 147-148; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 438; W.D. Davies, Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC 1; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 1989) 2:768; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (WBC 33A; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1993) 525; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook For A Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 364; W.G. Thomson, *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community* (Analecta Biblica 44; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970) 154. For a comparative analysis of Matt. 18:10-14 and Luke 15:4-7, see Thomson, *Matthew's Advice*, 164-174.

<sup>7</sup> This reading is advocated by Jean Héring, "Un texte oublié: Mt 18, 10. A propos des controverses récentes sur le pédobaptisme," in O. Cullmann et al., *Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne: Mélanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire* (Neuchâtel; Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950) 95-102, here 101. Luz (*Matthew 8-20*, 440, n. 28) points out that "such an interpretation is no longer possible after the change from παιδία to μικροί in vv. 5-6. We might at most consider it for a pre-Matthean original version of v. 10 that we are scarcely able to reconstruct."

<sup>8</sup> Simon-Légasse, "μικρός," *EDNT* 2:427; Wilhelm Pesch, *Matthäus der Seelsorger* (SBS-2; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966) 28-29; Thomson, *Matthew's Advice*, 153; Claude G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels* (New York: Ktav, 1968 [1927]) 2:248.

<sup>9</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 440: "Thus among the readers there could be those who look down on others when, for example, they are in a position of importance as the leaders of the church. Others are not respected in the church either because they are insignificant social or in their status in the church..."

<sup>10</sup> Otto Michel, "μικρός," in *TDNT* 4:653.

<sup>11</sup> According to Wilhelm Bousset (*Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* [HZNT 21; dritte verbesserte Auflage; Tübingen: Mohr 1926] 187-188) and Joachim

believers, this must have been a popular belief, as it is echoed elsewhere in the NT (e.g., Acts 1:15).<sup>12</sup>

Scholars have noted that “the idiom ‘to see the face of’ here connotes access to a sovereign. . . . The addition ‘always’ indicates unrestricted access. It is unusual to have such access to a sovereign, therefore all the more striking to have it to God.”<sup>13</sup> Leaving aside the Mesopotamian background of both courtly and visionary imagery, it should be noted that “already in the Bible court language shifted towards religious and cultic language,”<sup>14</sup> and that the imagery of angels gazing upon the divine “Face” looms large in the apocalyptic literature of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>15</sup>

Matt. 18:10 shows that the apocalyptic themes of the Face and the angels of the face remained important in early Christianity. The exegesis of this verse among various early Christian groups allows us some insight into the process by which, to recall Ernst Käsemann, apocalypticism engendered and nurtured Christian theology.

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Jeremias (*New Testament Theology* [London: SCM, 1971] 1:111-112), the uneducated “people of the land,” whose conflict with the Pharisees becomes acute after 70 CE, correspond to the *νήπιοι* and “the little ones” in the Gospels. This interpretation renders void the objection that *qātôn* in Aramaic or *μικρός* in Greek never designates a disciple as such, but rather a disciple lacking maturity (Str-B 1:591-592; Héring, “Un texte oublié,” 96, n. 2). It is interesting, however, that 2 Bar., a text dated to the early decades of the second century, and presumably written in Palestine, use “the little ones” as a designation for the people of Israel: “Protect us in your grace, and in your mercy help us. Look at the small ones who submit to you, and save all those who come to you” (2 Bar. 48:19). A. F. J. Klijn even lists Matt. 18:10 as a relevant parallel to 2 Bar. 48:19 (*OTP* 1:636).

<sup>12</sup> Scholars adduce comparative material from Iranian, Valentinian, Manichean, or Rabbinic sources. See Davies-Allison, *Matthew*, 770-1; Héring, “Un texte oublié,” 101; Bousset, *Religion des Judentums*, 324; G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, The Age of The Tannaim* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927-1930) 404; Gilles Quispel, “Das ewige Ebenbild des Menschen: Zur Begegnung mit dem Selbst in der Gnosis,” in his *Gnostic Studies I* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1974) esp. 147-157; April D. De Conick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden; New York; Cologne: Brill, 1996) 150-157.

<sup>13</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 364; cf. Hagner, *Matthew*, 526.

<sup>14</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 438 n. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nötscher, “*Das Angesicht Gottes schauen*” nach biblischer und babilonischer Auffassung (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969 [1924]). Nötscher thinks that Matt. 18:10 carries on the ancient court imagery (173). For a presentation of Jewish traditions centering on the vision of God’s “Face” and “Glory,” their Mesopotamian roots and later development from the Second Temple to later Rabbinic Judaism, see C.L. Seow, “Face,” and Jarl Fossum, “Glory,” both articles in K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P.W. van

### III. Matt. 18:10 in Valentinian Thought

Irenaeus of Lyon reports on the following invocation of Sophia in certain rites of the Marcosians:<sup>16</sup>

O, companion of God and of the mystical Silence from before the aeons, through whom the greatnesses that continually behold the face of the Father draw up their forms (ἀνασπῶσιν ἄνω τὰς αὐτῶν μορὰς), taking you as guide and leader...<sup>17</sup>

I leave aside the larger context of the passage, and its various unclaritys.<sup>18</sup> Sophia is here asked to help the initiated to ascend invisibly and to enter the bridal chamber of their angelic counterpart. Matt.-18:10 is used in a somewhat altered form: it is “the greatnesses” that continually behold the face of the Father. Obviously, “greatnesses” here designates certain angelic entities. These angels behold the face of God and function as the heavenly counterpart of the Marcosian initiates on earth. Being “images” of the angels who behold the face of God (εἰκόνας αὐτῶν, as the text goes on to explain), the initiates will reach their authentic being only when united with their celestial models in the wedding chamber.<sup>19</sup>

The designation of angels by the term “greatness” is illuminating for other related passages. Consider the following passage, cited as an example of the

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der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston: Brill; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999) 322-325, 348-352; Andrei Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (TSAJ 107; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2005); idem, “The Face as the Heavenly Counterpart of the Visionary in the Slavonic *Ladder of Jacob*,” in C.A. Evans (ed.), *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation & Transmission of Scripture* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004) 59-76.

<sup>16</sup> For the Marcosians, see the excellent monograph by Niclas Förster, *Marcus Magus: Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar* (WUNT 114; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adv. haer.* 1.13.6 [SC 264; 202-203]. The numbers in square brackets refer to the critical edition, translation, and notes by Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau: *Irénée de Lyon, Contre les hérésies I/1: introduction, notes justificatives, tables* (SC 263; Paris: Cerf, 1979); I/2: *texte et traduction* (SC 264; Paris: Cerf, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> For details, see François Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne et le témoignage de Saint Irénée* (Paris: Vrin, 1947) 418-419; Rousseau and Doutreleau, *Irénée de Lyon I/1* (SC 263) 243; Förster, *Marcus*, 145-150.

<sup>19</sup> For the Valentinian rite of the bridal chamber, see A.D. De Conick, “The Great Mystery of Marriage: Sex and Conception in Ancient Valentinian Traditions,” *VigChr* 57 (2003) 307-342.

various formulae and ritual actions by which Marcus would have overwhelmed and recruited his patrons:

I wish to make you share in my Grace, since the Father of all continually beholds your angel before His face (ἐπειδὴ ὁ Πατήρ τῶν ὅλων τὸν ἄγγελόν σου διὰ παντός βλέπει πρὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ). Now, the place of greatness is in us (ὁ δὲ τόπος τοῦ μεγέθους ἐνὴμῖν ἐστὶ): it behooves us to be established in the One... Behold, Grace has descended on you: open up your mouth and prophesy!<sup>20</sup>

In this passage, Matt. 18:10 is alluded to, but in a modified form. It is not the angel that continually gazes upon the face of God, but rather God that continually keeps the angel before his face. “Your angel” corresponds to “greatness” in the subsequent sentence, so that the “greatness” abiding in the initiate denotes to the presence of the angel.<sup>21</sup>

According to Irenaeus, Marcus claimed to have received a supreme and all-encompassing revelation.<sup>22</sup> At the center of this revelation lies the figure of the Logos: as manifestation of the ineffable God, the Logos is the also called “primal Anthropos,” or “Body of Truth,” and is composed of thirty letters in four distinct enunciations.<sup>23</sup> As a crowning of the revelation, Marcus is granted the auditory manifestation of this celestial reality: “Christ Jesus.” Marcus must have reacted with a certain disappointment, for he is immediately scolded and instructed as follows:

You regard as contemptible (ὡς εὐκαταφρόνητον) the word that you have heard from the mouth of Truth? What you know and appear to possess is not the ancient Name. For the mere sound of it is what you possess; but you do not know its power. Now, “Jesus” is a symbolic (ἐπίσημον) six-letter name known by all who are of the “calling.” But [the Name] that exists among the Aeons of the Pleroma consists of many parts, and has a different form and shape (ἄλλης ἐστὶν μορφῆς καὶ ἐτέρου τύπου), being

<sup>20</sup> *Adv. haer.* 1.13.3 [SC 264; 194-195]. The Greek has “the place of the greatness is in us”; the Latin reads “the place of *your* greatness” (*locus... tuae magnitudinis*).

<sup>21</sup> Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne*, 417 n. 2.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed presentation and analysis, see Sagnard, *La gnose-valentinienne*, 358-369; Förster, *Marcus*, 229-292. Marcus’ entire tractate (which Irenaeus would have used in his refutation) had the form of revelatory discourses pronounced by a host of celestial entities (Förster, *Marcus*, 391).

<sup>23</sup> “I also wish to show you Truth herself; for I have brought her down from the dwellings above, that you may see her without a veil, and become thoroughly acquainted with her beauty... Behold, then, her head on high, α and ω; her neck, β and ψ; her shoulders with her hand, γ and χ; her breast, δ and φ; her diaphragm, ε and υ; her back, ζ and τ; her belly, η and σ; her thighs, θ and ρ; her knees, ι and π; her legs, κ and ο; her ankles, λ and χ; her feet, μ and ν. This,

known by those who are joined in affinity (συλλενω̄ν) with Him, and whose greatnesses are always (διάπαντος) present with Him.<sup>24</sup>

This passage introduces the following teaching: the six-letter name “Jesus” represents merely the “sound” of the celestial Name, which is all that those of the “calling” (certainly the “psychic” Church)<sup>25</sup> are able to comprehend; the Marcosian initiates, instead, have access to the celestial Name, by virtue of their (presumably “pneumatic”) co-naturality;<sup>26</sup> finally, the “greatnesses” of these initiates continually abide with the Name/Anthropos.<sup>27</sup>

If one reads “greatness” as a term for angelic beings, as seen in the passages quoted previously, this passage can be read as an exegesis of Matt. 18:10. The Matthean admonishment is applied to those who would show contempt for the revelation disclosed to Marcus (namely the celestial “Logos”/“Anthropos”/“Body of Truth”). The “little-ones” are understood to designate the Marcosian elite, who will be joined to their angels (“greatnesses”) and thus participate in the contemplation of the heavenly Anthropos.

A few paragraphs later, Marcus refers to the seven powers praising the Logos.<sup>28</sup> Here “the angels perpetually gazing on the face of God” seem to be a well-defined group of seven highest angels. I will expand on this point later in this paper.

#### IV. Matt. 18:10 in the Ps.-Clementine Homilies

The following passage occurs in *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17:

Of His commandments this is the first and great one, to fear the Lord God, and to serve Him only. But He meant us to fear that God whose angels they are who are *the angels of the least of the faithful amongst us, and who stand in heaven continually beholding*

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according to this magician, is the Body of Truth . . . And he calls this element Man . . .” (*Adv. haer.* 1.14.3 [SC 264; 214-217]). The words of the document quoted by Irenaeus appear in Italics.

<sup>24</sup>) *Adv. haer.* 1.14.4 [SC 264; 218-219].

<sup>25</sup>) Förster, *Marcus*, 232.

<sup>26</sup>) Förster, *Marcus*, 233.

<sup>27</sup>) The initiates are “forms” of the angels, but the angels themselves are “forms” and “sounds” of the Aeons: “La résonance de tous les Éons forme l’Éon sans substance, inengendré, le Plérôme. Ces sons sont donc des ‘formes,’ et ces ‘formes’ sont ‘les anges qui voient sans cesse la Face du Père’ . . . Ces anges sont donc comme le son (ou le reflet) des Éons” (Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne*, 431).

<sup>28</sup>) *Adv. haer.* 1.14.8. Discussion in Förster, *Marcus*, 284-285.

*the face of the Father.* For He has shape (μορφήν), and He has every limb primarily and solely for beauty's sake, and not for use. For He has not eyes that He may see with them; for He sees on every side, since He is incomparably more brilliant in His body than the visual spirit which is in us, and He is more splendid than everything, so that in comparison with Him the light of the sun may be reckoned as darkness. Nor has He ears that He may hear (for He hears, perceives, moves, energizes, acts on every side). But He has the most beautiful shape (καλλίστην μορφήν) on account of man, that the pure in heart may be able to see Him...<sup>29</sup>

What affection ought therefore to arise within us if we gaze with our mind on His beautiful shape (εὐμορφίαν)! But otherwise it is absurd to speak of beauty. For beauty cannot exist apart from shape (μορφῆς); nor can one be attracted to the love of God (τὸν αὐτοῦ ἔρωτα ἐπισπᾶσθαι), nor even deem that he can see Him, if God has no form (εἶδος).<sup>30</sup>

This passage in the Ps.-Clementina was apparently not part of the so-called Basic Writing (now lost), but was introduced by the author of the *Homilies*, who reworked it around 300-320 CE.<sup>31</sup> The homilist used a number of Jewish and Jewish-Christian traditions. For the passage under discussion, there is even solid evidence of a literary source, which was also shared by Clement of Alexandria (more on this in the following section).<sup>32</sup>

Before discussing doctrine of this fragment and its use of Matt. 18:10, it is necessary to sketch out the polemical context of *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17.7-10. The apostle Peter and Simon Magus disagree sharply over who or what constitutes the "true God." To Simon's taste, the divinity of the Bible appears

<sup>29</sup> *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17.7.1-4 (ANF). The Greek text is taken from the latest GCS critical edition: B. Rehm, G. Strecker (eds.), *Die Pseudoklementinen I. Homilien* (3., verbesserte Auflage; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992) 232-233.

<sup>30</sup> *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17.7.9.

<sup>31</sup> Georg Strecker, *Das Judenchristentum in den Pseudoklementinen* (TU 70; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972) 62-65, 267-268, 271. This conclusion is supported by scholarship before and after Strecker.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Collomp, "Une source de Clément d'Alexandrie et des Homélie Pseudo-Clémentines," *Revue de philologie et littérature et d'histoire anciennes* 37 (1913) 19-46; Wilhelm Bousset, *Jüdisch-christlicher Schulbetrieb in Alexandria und Rom: Literarische Untersuchungen zu Philo und Clemens von Alexandria, Justin und Irenäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1915). Despite the pertinent critique of some of Bousset's conclusions (Johannes Munck, *Untersuchungen über Klemens von Alexandria* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933] 127-204), the thesis of a literary source behind Clement of Alexandria and the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies* remains solidly established (see Georg Kretschmar, *Studien zur frühchristlichen Trinitätstheologie* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1956] 68 n. 3).

crude and unsatisfactory, because it does not meet certain standards of perfection derived from metaphysical speculation.<sup>33</sup> Peter rejects Simon's higher God as mere fancy, the result of an imagination harassed by demons,<sup>34</sup> and affirms forcefully his attachment to the Biblical God who made heaven and earth.<sup>35</sup> The passage from *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17 identifies this "true God": not Simon's abstract "great power," distinct from the Creator, but precisely the Creator and Lawgiver, the Biblical God whose luminous and beautiful form is enthroned and worshipped by angels. This anthropomorphic appearance, which includes "all the limbs," such as eyes and ears, is, however, only for our sake: God himself does not need eyes, ears, or any form; yet, unless he showed himself in this most beautiful form, how could anyone long for him, and gaze on him?<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, Simon's statements in *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 5.49, 5.53, 5.61. The descriptions of this lofty divinity appear related to the Middle Platonic definition of the divinity set forth, for instance, in Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* 10, or Apuleius' *De Platone et Eius Dogmate* 190-1. Roelof van den Broek ("Eugnostus and Aristides on the Ineffable God," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* [Leiden; New York: Brill, 1996] 22-41) has demonstrated the existence of a common Middle Platonic source behind the similar "definitions of God" present in *Eugnostus the Blessed*, *The Tripartite Tractate*, and Aristides' *Apology*. Bentley Layton (*The Gnostic Scriptures* [New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1995] 14 n. 2) has singled out the obvious parallels between the discourse on "the parent of entirety" in the *Apocryphon Johannis* and a passage in Alcinous. Thus, the fact that Gnostic speculation on the higher divinity is markedly Middle-Platonic in character, seems hardly disputable. See Birger Pearson, "Gnosticism as Platonism," in *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 164; Ioan P. Culianu, *The Tree of Gnosis* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992); Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, "The Thought Patterns of Gnostic Mythologizers and Their Use of Biblical Traditions," in J.D. Turner, A. McGuire (eds.) *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (Leiden; New York; Cologne: Brill, 1997) 89-101. For a detailed examination of the interaction between Gnosticism, especially the so-called Sethian texts, and the Platonic tradition, see the essays in R.T. Wallis, J. Bregman (eds.), *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), and John D. Turner's monograph, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval; Louvain: Peeters, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 5.62-65. Cf. *Ps.-Clem. Recognitions* 56-58.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 18.22.

<sup>36</sup> Peter's insistence on the "beauty" of God's body, the mentioning of various limbs, and the general "erotic" language (e.g., τὸν αὐτοῦ ἔρωτα ἐπισπᾶσθαι) suggest a certain relation between the passage in *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17 and the mystical exegesis of the Song of Songs in Jewish Shiur Qomah literature. This has already been noted in scholarship: Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960) 41; Gilles Quispel, "The Discussion of Judaic Christianity," in

It is now possible to take a closer look at the use of Matt. 18:10. The verse is crucial for Peter's argument, since it serves as a means of identifying "the true God." This "true God" is, for Peter, the one who is attended by "the angels of the least of the faithful . . . who stand in heaven continually beholding the face of the Father." Implied in such a description is the image of an enthroned deity; and, as Peter adds immediately, the throne-imagery implies that God has a form: "for He has shape and He has every limb."

The wording in Peter's statements suggests that Matt. 18:10 is here combined with Matt. 25:40.<sup>37</sup> The first and most obvious element to suggest this is the replacement of τῶν μικρῶν (from Matt. 18:30) by τῶν ἐλαχίστων, the term used for those whom the Son of Man calls his "brethren" in Matt. 25:40 (τῶν ἀδελφῶν τῶν ἐλαχίστων). Secondly, the final part of *Hom.* 17.7 (verses 4-6) also evokes Matt. 25:40, 45.<sup>38</sup> By way of consequence, there is an overlap between the "face of God" in Matt. 18:10, the enthroned Son of Man in Matt. 25:31-46, and God's "form" or "body" which constitutes the heavenly "model" of-the human being.

It appears, in conclusion, that the use of Matt. 18:10 in the *Ps.-Clementine Homilies* is not very different from that of Irenaeus' Marcosians. Even though the theological frameworks of the texts are very different (one is dualistic, the other rejects dualism, hence terms such as "God" or "Christ" mean different things), both view the "Face of God" in Matt. 18:10 as the enthroned "form" or "body" of God, which they identify with Christ.

The fact that the same exegesis of Matt. 18:10 occurs in Clement of Alexandria is very significant, because Clement has read all the material discussed

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his *Gnostic Studies* II (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1974) 148; Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *HTR* 76 (1983) 287 n. 85.

<sup>37</sup> This has been duly noted in the critical edition: Rehm-Strecker, *Pseudoklementinen*, 1.233.

<sup>38</sup> The argument in *Hom.* 17.7.4-6 runs as follows: honoring the invisible God is possible by honoring his "visible image (εἰκόνα)"; but since this image is quite simply the human being, honoring God ultimately requires feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, etc., as stated in Matt. 25:40, 45. The homilist understands creation "in-the image" to mean that God "molded (διετυπώσατο) man in His own shape (μορφῇ)," i.e., he used as a pattern the beautiful, radiant, divine extent mentioned earlier; what results from this process—the human being—is the "image"; "likeness" refers to the spiritual growth of the image. The same connection between Gen. 1:26 and Matt. 25:36-45 occurs in *Hom.* 11:4. The use of "image" is markedly different from that of Col. 1:15 and the later theology of Irenaeus (*Dem.* 22; *Adv. haer.* 4:33:4), where Christ is the image, while humans are patterned after and oriented towards the image, i.e., Christ.

so far: Irenaeus' account of the Marcosians,<sup>39</sup> the writings of the Oriental branch of Valentinianism, as well as the source used by the *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17.<sup>40</sup>

## V. Clement of Alexandria on Matt. 18:10

Matt. 18:10 occurs five times in Clement of Alexandria's surviving writings: *Strom.* 5.14.91; *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 10.6; 11.1; 23.4; *Quis Dives* 31.1.<sup>41</sup> Among these passages, the latter two are not relevant for the present investigation. The first one, however, displays an interesting formal variation. The text reads:

But indicating "the angels," as the Scripture says, "of the little ones, and of the least, which see God" (τῶν μικρῶν δὲ κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν καὶ ἐλαχίστων τοὺς ἀγγέλους τοὺς ὀρῶντας τὸν θεόν) and also the oversight reaching to us exercised by the tutelary angels, he shrinks not from writing: "When all the souls have selected their several lives, according as it has fallen to their lot, they advance in order to Lachesis; and she sends along with each one, as his guide in life, and the joint accomplisher of his purposes, the demon which he has chosen." Perhaps also the demon of Socrates suggested to him something similar.<sup>42</sup>

Leaving aside Clement's characteristic fusion of Biblical sources with texts and writers authoritative for the Greek philosophical tradition,<sup>43</sup> it is noteworthy that Clement supplements τῶν μικρῶν in Matt. 18:10 with ἐλαχίστων. This is, of course, reminiscent of the passage in the *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, Clement was aware of a text closely related to *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17—most likely one of the sources used by the homilist in his reworking the *Ps.-Clementinian* material. The influence of this source on

<sup>39</sup> According to Colin Roberts (*Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* [London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979] 53), Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* was circulating in Egypt "not long after the ink was dry on the author's manuscript."

<sup>40</sup> Collomp, "Une source de Clément d'Alexandrie."

<sup>41</sup> For Clement's use of Scripture, see Percy Mordaunt Barnard, *Clement of Alexandria's Biblical Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899); Michael Mees, *Die Zitate aus dem Neuen Testament bei Clemens von Alexandrien* (Quaderni di "Vetera Christianorum" 2; Bari: Istituto di Letteratura Cristiana Antica, 1970).

<sup>42</sup> *Strom.* 5.14.91 (Greek text in the GCS edition by O. Stählin et al., *Clemens Alexandrinus* [4th ed.; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1985] 2:386).

<sup>43</sup> For-an-analysis of Clement's exegetical techniques and of his overall hermeneutic strategy, see David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 183-234, 287-295.

Clement of Alexandria includes a certain exegesis of Matt. 18:10. Before entering into a more detailed discussion, however, it is necessary to sketch out the doctrinal framework to which the exegesis of Matt. 18:10 is subordinated.

On the basis of the tradition inherited from the “elders,” Clement furnishes a detailed description of the spiritual universe, which features, in descending order, the Face, the seven first created angels, the archangels, finally the angels.<sup>44</sup> The Face and all levels of the angelic world are characterized by a certain corporality.<sup>45</sup> This corporality is only relative, however, since the beings on any given level can be described at the same time as “bodiless”—from the perspective of inferior ranks—, and “bodily”—from the perspective of superior levels of being.<sup>46</sup>

Most interesting is the use of Matt. 18:10 in this context. Clement of Alexandria identifies the Face of God mentioned in Matt. 18:10 with Christ, the Logos; quite naturally, then, he identifies the πρόσωπον of Matt. 18:10 with the χαρακτήρ of Heb. 1:3 and the εἰκὼν of Col. 1:15.<sup>47</sup>

As for the “angels ever contemplating the Face of God” in Matt. 18:10, Clement is familiar with the idea that “the whole world of creatures... revolves in sevens” and that “the first-born princes of the angels (πρωτόγονοι ἀγγέλων ἄρχοντες), who have the greatest power, are seven.”<sup>48</sup> He can easily furnish another series of exegetical assimilation: the “angels of the little ones” in Matt. 18:10 are the “thrones” of Col. 1:16, and “the seven eyes of the Lord”

<sup>44</sup> *Excerpta* 10.6; 12.1. Cf. *Paed.* 1.57, 1.124.4; *Strom.* 7.58. This worldview, shared by Jewish and Jewish-Christian texts such as the 2 *Enoch*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, or the *Epistula Apostolorum*, is part of a tradition that Clement ascribes to the so-called elders. See in this respect Jean Daniélou, “Les traditions secrètes des Apôtres,” *ErJb* 31 (1962) 199-215; Christian Oeyen, “Eine frühchristliche Engelpneumatologie bei Klemens von Alexandrien,” *IKZ* 55 (1965) 102-120, and *IKZ* 56 (1966) 27-47; Bogdan G. Bucur, “The Other Clement of Alexandria: Cosmic Hierarchy and Interiorized Apocalypticism,” *VigChrist* 60 (2006) 251-68.

<sup>45</sup> “But neither the spiritual and intelligible beings, nor the archangels, nor the *protocists*, not even [Christ] himself, are without form, without shape, without frame, and bodiless (ἄμορφος καὶ ἀνείδεος καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀσώματος); rather they do have both individual form and body (καὶ μορφήν ἔχει ἰδίαν καὶ σῶμα)” (*Excerpta* 10.1).

<sup>46</sup> “Thus, compared to the bodies here (such as the stars) they are bodiless and shapeless (ἀσώματα καὶ ἀνείδια); yet, compared to the Son, they are measured and sensible bodies (σώματα μεμετρῆνα καὶ αἰσθητά). Likewise is the Son in regards to the Father” (*Excerpta* 11.3).

<sup>47</sup> *Strom.* 7.58.3-6; *Excerpta* 19.4.

<sup>48</sup> *Strom.* 6.16.142-143.

of Zech. 3:9; 4:10, and Rev. 5:6.<sup>49</sup> All of these passages become, for Clement, descriptions of the seven *πρωτόκτιστοι*, celestial beings “first created.” Of these highest he says the following:

Among the seven, there has not been given more to the one and less to the other; nor is any of them lacking in advancement (*προκοπή*); [they] have received perfection from the beginning, at the first [moment of their] coming into being, from God through the Son; . . . their liturgy is common and undivided.<sup>50</sup>

There can be no doubt that Clement echoes Second Temple Jewish angelological speculations,<sup>51</sup> and that among its direct predecessors one should count not only the Marcasian “seven powers praising the Logos” (discussed above),<sup>52</sup> but also the “first created ones” (*πρωτοι κτισθεντες*) in the *Shepherd of Hermas*,<sup>53</sup> and the seven spirits of Revelation.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Strom* 5.6.35; *Eclogae* 57.1; *Excerpta* 10.

<sup>50</sup> *Excerpta* 10.3-4; 11.4.

<sup>51</sup> Ezek. 9:2-3; Tob. 12:15; 1 En. 20; 90:21. The *Prayer of Joseph* seems to imply that Israel ranks higher than the seven archangels, as chief captain and first minister before the face of God. In *Jubilees*, the angels of the presence are “first created” (*Jub.* 2:2; 15:27). Other relevant passages are T. Levi 3:5; 4:2; T. Judah 25:2; 1 QH 6:13. See also James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) 87-89, 126-127; Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 124-151.

<sup>52</sup> The Valentinian speculation on Matt. 18:10 as “the seven powers praising the Logos,” mentioned earlier, is obviously reworking (in its own dualistic framework) a shared Christian tradition. The same holds true for the treatment of the “Face.” De Conick states that “the image of the Son as the Father’s Face may have played a significant role in Valentinian theologies” (“Heavenly Temple Traditions and Valentinian Worship: A Case for First Century Christology in the Second Century,” in C.C. Newman, J.R. Davila, G.S. Lewis [eds.], *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism* [JSJ 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999] 325); cf. also Förster, *Marcus*, 206: Matt. 18:10 was Marcus’ “Lieblingsvers.” Yet, the repeated occurrence of the same designation in Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* 1:57; 1:124:4; *Strom.* 7:58I; *Excerpta* 10:6; 12:1) and Tertullian (*Adv. Prax.* 14) suggests that “Face” as a Christological title was a tradition that appealed to a broader segment of Christianity.

<sup>53</sup> The *Shepherd of Hermas* mentions a group of seven consisting of the six “first created ones” (*πρωτοι κτισθεντες*) who accompany the Son of God (*Vis.* 3.4.1; *Sim.* 5.5.3). The text mentions the Son and the first-created angels in the same breath (*Sim.* 5.2.6, 11; 5.6.4, 7), suggesting that, even though they are clearly subordinated to the Son of God, and accompany him as a celestial escort (e.g., *Sim.* 9.12.7-8; cf. *Vis.* 3.4.1; *Sim.* 5.5.3) the six are his “friends” and fellow-counselors (*Sim.* 5.5.2-3).

<sup>54</sup> Rev. 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, 5:6; 8:2. The interpretation of the seven spirits in Revelation has been and still remains a matter of debate. According to the majority of commentators, patristic and modern, Revelation connects the seven spirits/eyes/lamps of the Lord (Zech. 3:9; 4:10) with the rest/tabernacling of the seven spiritual gifts (Isa. 11:2-3; Prov. 8:12-16). A significant

The seven *protocists*, however, also carry a definite Pneumatological content, since Clement identifies them not only with various types of angels, but also with the “seven spirits resting on the rod that springs from the root of Jesse” (Isa. 11:1-3, LXX) and “the heptad of the Spirit.”<sup>55</sup> Fortunately, scholarship on Clement of Alexandria has already discussed the Alexandrian’s so-called “angel Pneumatology,” or, more recently, “angelomorphic Pneumatology,” allowing the present writer not to enter into further details.<sup>56</sup>

To conclude this section, it appears that, in Clement’s interpretation of Matt. 18:10, “the face of God” is a Christological title, while the angels contemplating the Face occupy a theological area of confluence of angelology and Pneumatology. On this latter point—Matt. 18:10 as a proof-text for Pneumatology—Clement’s exegesis finds a surprising confirmation in the writings of the famous early Syriac author Aphrahat.

## VI. Matt. 18:30 in Aphrahat the Persian Sage

Among Syriac writers, I will only refer to Aphrahat “the Persian Sage.”<sup>57</sup> There are good reasons for such a limitation. First, Windrid Cramer’s study of the use of Matt. 18:10 in early Syriac literature has already provided a comprehensive survey of relevant texts and authors. Even though my own

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minority argues that Revelation connects the seven spirits/eyes/lamps of the Lord (Zech. 3:9; 4:10) with the seven angels of the presence (Tob. 12:15; 1 En. 90:20-21). This position is defended by Joseph Michl (*Die Engelvorstellungen in der Apokalypse des hl. Johannes* [München: Max Hueber, 1937]), and, more recently, by David E. Aune (*Revelation* [WBC 52; 3 vols.; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1997] 1:33-35). Patristic authors from the fifth century onwards are overcautious, given the potentially dangerous character of the passage (see the fragments from patristic commentaries provided by Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: the Greek text with introduction, notes and indices* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1909] 5-6, and Michl, *Engelvorstellungen*, 113-134). It is certain, in any case, that the connection between Isa. 11:2-3 (the seven gifts of the Spirit) and Zech. 4:10 (the seven lamps) was an established *topos* in patristic exegesis: Karl Schlütz, *Isaias 11:2 in den ersten vier christlichen Jahrhunderten* (Münster: Aschendorf, 1932) 34.

<sup>55</sup> *Strom.* 5.6.35; *Paed.* 3.12.87.

<sup>56</sup> Oeyen, “Engelpneumatologie”; B. G. Bucur, “Revisiting Christian Oeyen: ‘The Other Clement’ on Father, Son, and the Angelomorphic Spirit,” *VigChr* (forthcoming); Gilles Quispel, “Genius and Spirit,” in M. Krause (ed.), *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Pahor Labib* (Leiden: Brill, 1975) 158, 164, 168.

<sup>57</sup> For details on Aphrahat, see the introductory studies by Marie-Joseph Pierre, in *Aphraate, “Les Exposés”* (SC 349; Paris: Cerf, 1988) 33-199, and Peter Bruns, in *Aphrahat, Unterweisungen* (FC 5/1; New York; Freiburg: Herder, 1991) 35-71.

interpretation of Aphrahat diverges from Cramer's, there is no point in duplicating the presentation of primary sources.<sup>58</sup> Second, my interest for this essay lies mainly in highlighting the patristic use of Matt. 18:10 in the service of Christology and Pneumatology. Finally, and most importantly, Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, although written during the second quarter of the fourth century, are, by virtue of their noted "archaism" or "traditionalism," a unique treasure trove of older exegetical and doctrinal traditions.

Indeed, unlike his younger contemporary Ephrem of Nisibe, Aphrahat can be described as "entirely traditional, that is, he transmits the teaching that he received, lays out *testimonia* pertaining to each topic, in order to convince or reassure a reader whose intelligence functions according to this logic of faith."<sup>59</sup> He represents "an *unicum* in the history of Christian dogma", because his "singularly archaic" Christology is "independent of Nicaea and... of the development of Greco-Roman Christology."<sup>60</sup> Most important for my argument is the fact that "there is next to nothing in his writings to suggest that he had much of any contact at all with... the earlier writings of the Greek Church Fathers."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Winfrid Cramer, "Mt 18, 10 in frühsyrischer Deutung," *OrChr* 59 (1975) 130-146. In his commentary on the Diatessaron, Ephrem Syrus interprets "the angels of the little ones" as a metaphor for the prayers of the believers, which reach up to the highest heavens; with the translation of this work into Armenian, echoes of Ephrem's interpretation will be found among writers such as Eznik of Kolb. Later authors (Jacob of Edessa, Išo'dad of Merv, Dionysius Bar Salibi) are mostly quoting Matt. 18:10 as a proof-text for the existence of guardian angels.

<sup>59</sup> Pierre, "Introduction," in *Aphraate, "Les Exposés"*, 66. For the difference between Aphrahat and Ephrem on the issue of "traditionalism," see Robert Murray, "Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature," in R.H. Fischer (ed.), *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus* (Chicago, Ill.: The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1977) 110.

<sup>60</sup> Ortiz de Urbina, *Die Gottheit Christi bei Aphrahat* (OrChrA 31.1; Rome: Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1933) 5, 22; Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986 [1948]) 160. More recently, William L. Petersen argued the same thesis, even though his views on Aphrahat's Christology are quite different: Aphrahat is "untouched by the Hellenistic world and Nicaea," he represents a subordinationist Christology, which is the "Christology confessed by early Syrian Christians, a relic inherited from primitive Semitic or Judaic Christianity" ("The Christology of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage: An Excursus on the 17th *Demonstration*," *VigChr* 46 [1992] 241, 251).

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Golitzin, "The Place of the Presence of God: Aphrahat of Persia's Portrait of the Christian Holy Man," published in a volume edited by the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras, Mount Athos: *ΣΥΝΑΞΙΣ ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΙΑΣ: Studies in Honor of Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonos Petras, Mount Athos* (Athens: Indiktos, 2003) 401.

The following quotes are drawn from Aphrahat's first and sixth *Demonstrations*:

And whatever man there is that receives the Spirit from the water (of baptism) and grieves it, it departs from him until he dies, and returns according to its nature to Christ, and accuses that man of having grieved it. . . . This is the Spirit, my beloved, that the Prophets received, and thus also have we received. And it is not at every time found with those that receive it, but sometimes it returns to Him that sent it, and sometimes it goes to him that receives it. Harken to that which our Lord said, Despise not one of these little ones that believe on Me, for their angels in heaven do always behold the face of My Father. This Spirit then goes frequently and stands before God and beholds His face, and whosoever injures the temple in which it dwells, it will accuse him before God.<sup>62</sup>

And definitely did He show concerning this stone: *Lo! on this stone will I open seven eyes* (Zech. 3:9). And what then are the seven eyes that were opened on the stone? Clearly the Spirit of God that abode on Christ with seven operations, as Isaiah the Prophet said, *The Spirit of God shall rest and dwell upon Him, (a spirit) of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and of courage, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord* (Isa. 11:2-3). These were the seven eyes that were opened upon the Stone, and *these are the seven eyes of the Lord which look upon all the earth* (Zech. 4:10).<sup>63</sup>

Aphrahat argues here one of the axioms of his ascetic theory: the Holy Spirit departs from a sinful person, and goes to accuse that person before the throne of God. It is quite striking that the work of the Holy Spirit is presented in unmistakably angelic imagery (the Spirit “goes frequently,” stands before the divine throne, and beholds the Face of God) and supported by recourse to Matt. 18:10. If the two passages from the *Demonstrations* are combined—and it is certainly legitimate to do so, given the common theme (the Holy Spirit), and the formal structure (evidence from the Scriptures for the activity of the Spirit)—it becomes apparent that Aphrahat uses the same cluster of Biblical verses that we encountered earlier in Clement: “the seven eyes of the Lord” (Zech. 3:9; 4:10); “the seven gifts of the Spirit” (Isa. 11:2-3); the “angels of the face” (Matt. 18:10). I submit, therefore, that, just as in the case of Clement, we have here an echo of the tradition about the highest angelic company, combined with a definite Pneumatological content.

<sup>62</sup> Aphrahat, *Dem.* 6.14-15. For the Syriac text, see J. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes* (PS 1-2; Paris, 1894 and 1907). The English translation is that of J. Gwynn, in the *NPNF* series.

<sup>63</sup> Aphrahat, *Dem.* 1.9.

Yet, the use of Matt. 18:10 as a Pneumatological proof-text does not mean that Aphrahat himself consciously and actively promoted an angelomorphic Pneumatology. It should be noted that this is neither the only way in which Aphrahat interprets Matt. 18:10,<sup>64</sup> nor the only image he uses for the Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, it is quite obvious, from the way he writes, that Aphrahat does not see himself as proposing anything new or unusual. He is most likely transmitting an older tradition.<sup>66</sup>

It is certain, however, that no direct literary connection exists between Aphrahat and Clement of Alexandria.<sup>67</sup> If one were to speculate about a common source for the cluster of Biblical passages and Pneumatological exegesis of Matt. 18:10 that occurs in both authors, a possible candidate would be the source(s) used by *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> See the simple quote (in fact, a loose combination of Matt. 18:3 and 18:10) in *Dem.* 2.20.

<sup>65</sup> Aphrahat also views the Spirit as God's "spouse," as "mother" of the Son and of all creation, as "medicine," and as the "breath" that constitutes the divine image imparted to Adam. For more details, see W. Cramer, *Der Geist Gottes und des Menschen in frühbyzantiner Theologie* (MBT 46; Münster: Aschendorff, 1979) 59-85.

<sup>66</sup> The connection between Zech. 4:10, Isa. 11:1-3, and Matt. 18:10 illustrates very well what M.-J. Pierre calls a "network of scriptural traditions," similar to the Palestinian Targum, which Aphrahat inherited from earlier Jewish Christian tradition. Some of these traditions were embodied in a "series of *testimonia* that might have circulated orally and been transmitted independently from the known biblical text..." (Pierre, "Introduction," in *Aphraate, "Les Exposés"*, 115, 138, 68; cf. Murray, "Rhetorical Patterns," 110). As a matter of fact, Aphrahat is "one of the richest witnesses" to the use of *testimonia*, with *Dem.* 16 furnishing "the largest collection ever realized by a Father."

<sup>67</sup> Among Greek patristic writings available in Syriac translation, "Hermas, Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen are conspicuous by their absence" (Sebastian P. Brock, "The Syriac Background to the World of Theodore of Tarsus," in his volume *From Ephrem to Romanos* (Aldershot; Brookfield; Singapore; Sydney: Ashgate Variorum, 1999) 37.

<sup>68</sup> Quispel ("Genius and Spirit," 160, 164) is convinced that the tradition behind both Clement and Aphrahat goes back to Jewish Christian missionaries "who brought the new religion to Mesopotamia," and were also "the founding fathers of the church in Alexandria." De Conick (*Recovering The Original Gospel of Thomas: A History of the Gospel and Its Growth* [LNTS 286; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005] 236-241) holds that the near-simultaneity of such a mission, originating from Palestine, explains the Palestinian-Syriac cluster of ascetic vocabulary and imagery in Syria and Alexandria. Classic scholarship on this issue includes Georg Kretschmar, "Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese," *ZTK* 64 (1961) 27-67; Peter Nagel, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (TU 95; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966); Robert Murray, "The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism," in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of E.G. Rupp* (London: SCM, 1975) 65-77.

In conclusion, the angelomorphic Pneumatology detected in the writings of Clement and Aphrahat represents an *echo* of older tradition, which in their time were still acceptable. A few decades after the Persian Sage's *Demonstrations*, the Pneumatomachian crisis will impose a different treatment of Matt. 18:10.

## VII. The End of Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Matt. 18:10 in the Cappadocians

The angelomorphic Pneumatology illustrated by Clement and Aphrahat, as well as the use of Matt. 18:10 to support it, became the subject of severe polemics during the debates on the divinity of the Holy Spirit that followed the Arian controversy. Here are two excerpts from Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea, summarizing much of the arguments in play:

who... would not agree, that every intellectual nature is governed by the ordering of the Holy Spirit? For since it is said *the angels do always behold the Face of My Father which is in heaven* (Matt. 18:10) and it is not possible to behold the person (ὑπόστασιν) of the Father otherwise than by fixing the sight upon it through His image (διὰ τοῦ χαρακτήρος); but the image (χαρακτήρ) of the person (ὑποστάσεως) of the Father is the Only-begotten, and to Him again no man can draw near whose mind has not been illumined by the Holy Spirit, what else is shown from this but that the Holy Spirit is not separated from any operation which is wrought (ἐνεργείας ἐνεργουμένης) by the Father and the Son? Thus the identity of operation (ἐνεργείας) in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shows plainly the undistinguishable character of their substance (φύσεως).<sup>69</sup>

The pure, intelligent, and super-mundane powers (ὑπερκόσμοι δυνάμεις) are and are styled holy, because they have their holiness of the grace given by the Holy Spirit... The powers of the heavens are not holy by nature; were it so there would in this respect be no difference between them and the Holy Spirit... And how could "thrones, dominions, principalities and powers" live their blessed life, did they not "behold the face of the Father which is in heaven" [Matt. 18:10]? But to behold it is impossible without the Spirit!... in the order of the intellectual world it is impossible for the high life of Law to abide without the Spirit. For it so to abide were as likely as that an army should maintain its discipline in the absence of its commander, or a chorus its harmony without the guidance of the choirmaster (τοῦ κορυφαίου μὴ συναρμύζοντος)... Thus with those beings who are not gradually perfected by advancement (οὐκ ἐκ προκοπῆς τελειούμενοις) but are perfect from the moment of the creation (ἀπ' αὐτῆς

<sup>69</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *To Eustathius, on the Holy Trinity, and of the Godhead of the Holy Spirit*, 13. The Greek text is taken from F. Mueller (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* III, 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1958).

τῆς κτίσεως εὐθὺς τελείῳ), there is in creation the presence of the Holy Spirit, who confers on them the grace that flows from Him for the completion and perfection of their essence.<sup>70</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa explains that the Face of God referred to in Matt. 18:10 is none other than the Son, because πρόσωπον in Matt. 18:10 is the same as χαρακτήρ in Heb. 1:3. Even though Matthew does not state it explicitly, the angels do not have direct access to the Face: they are rather *enabled* to see, being guided, and illumined by the Holy Spirit. In fact, for Gregory, this is what reveals the “identity of operation” between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, from which one is bound to infer the identity of substance.<sup>71</sup> Basil mentions the “supermundane powers,” angelic beings that “are not gradually perfected by increase and advance, but are perfect from the moment of the creation,” only to insist that the Spirit is to the angels as an army commander to his troops, or a choirmaster to a choir.

At first sight, the use of Matt. 18:10 in an apology for the divinity of the Spirit seems peculiar—especially since elsewhere (*Adv. Eun.* 3.1) Basil also uses the verse to support the teaching about guardian angels. In light of earlier uses of Matt. 18:10, however, such as those echoed by Clement and Aphrahat, it can be conjectured that the verse carried some weight in the Pneumatomachian argument. It is noteworthy that Basil still accepts the identification of the angels in Matt. 18:10 with the “thrones, dominions, principalities and powers” of Col. 1:16, while Gregory still equates πρόσωπον (Matt. 18:10) with χαρακτήρ (Heb. 1:3). Basil’s description of the Spirit as a “choirmaster” who ensures the order and harmony of the celestial liturgy also has unmistakable angelic overtones, stemming perhaps from the “high angelology” of the opponents.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Basil’s reference to “those beings who are not gradually perfected by increase and advance, but are perfect from the-moment of the creation,” seems a clear enough

<sup>70</sup> Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 16.38. The Greek text is taken from B. Pruche, *Basile de Césarée: Sur le Saint-Esprit* (SC 17bis; Paris: Cerf, 1968).

<sup>71</sup> For a description of the argument, together with extensive presentation of its philosophical and exegetical background, see Michel R. Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2001).

<sup>72</sup> “Commander of the heavenly hosts” is a title commonly associated with the archangel Michael; Enoch in 2 Enoch, and Enoch-Metatron in the Rabbinic Hekhalot tradition, take on the role of “celestial choirmaster” in charge of directing the angelic liturgy before the Throne of Glory. In later Rabbinic lore, Enoch-Metatron’s role in the angelic liturgy is more elaborate: while leading the choir, he also pronounces the divine Name; but he is also kind

evocation of the *protocists* about whom Clement had said that they are not lacking in advancement (*προκοπή*), but have received perfection from the beginning, at the first [moment of their] creation.<sup>73</sup>

It seems, then, that just as Arianism was articulating an archaic doctrine of *Christos Angelos*, so also were the Pneumatomachians using a theology of the Holy Spirit that may be traced back to angelological speculations in Second Temple Judaism.<sup>74</sup> Even while they offer one of the last echoes of the Face Christology, the passages from Basil and Nyssen illustrate the demise of angelomorphic Pneumatology.

### VIII. Conclusion

In the foregoing pages, I have discussed the ways in which Matt. 18:10 was read by Valentinian groups, by Jewish Christians, and by representatives of the so-called Great Church, before and after the Arian and Pneumatomachian crises. These analyses have led to the conclusion that the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Matt. 18:10 presents a more complex picture than so far acknowledged by Biblical and Patristic scholarship.

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enough to protect his angelic chanters from its divinely devastating effects by “go[ing] beneath the Throne of Glory... and bring[ing] out the deafening fire”—only so can the angels safely participate in the awesome liturgy of the heavens (3 *Enoch* 15B; cf. *Synopse* 390.164). For extensive discussion of these traditions, see A. Orlov, “Celestial Choirmaster: the Liturgical Role of Enoch-Metatron in 2 Enoch and the Merkabah Tradition,” *JSP* 14 (2004) 3-29.

<sup>73</sup> *Excerpta* 10.4; see discussion above. The roots of this idea might lie far back. According to the *Book of Jubilees*—a very popular work of ‘rewritten Bible’ also known as “the little [i.e., detailed] Genesis”—“the nature of all the angels of the presence and of the angels of sanctification was *circumcized* from the day of their creation,” and these supreme angels are the heavenly model and destination of the people of Israel. Circumcision in *Jubilees* expresses the same perfection that Clement or Basil would have expressed in ontological terms; and we note a similar preoccupation to link the highest angelic company and the perfected believers.

<sup>74</sup> This thesis has been developed with regard to Arianism in classic studies, such as Kretschmar, *Trinitätstheologie*, and Joseph Barbel, *Christos Angelos: Die Anschauung von Christos als Bote und Engel in der gelehrten und volkstümlichen Literatur des christlichen Altertums: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Ursprungs des Arianismus* (Fotomechanischer Nachdruck mit einem Anhang; Bonn: Peter Hannstein, 1964). Gieschen (*Angelomorphic Christology*, 114-19) offers a brief presentation of “angelomorphic Pneumatology.” For the presence of angelic or angelomorphic Pneumatology in the fourth century, see the summary in Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 122-123 (discussion) and n. 270 (patristic references).

It is certainly true that this verse “became a locus classicus of-Christian angelology.”<sup>75</sup> More needs to be said, however. Various early Christian exegetes have chosen to emphasize one or several of the imagistic components of the verse (God; the Face of God; the angels; their act of intercession; the little ones; the relation between the angels and the little ones), using Matt. 18:10 as scriptural proof for the doctrinal phenomena that I have called “Face Christology” and “angelomorphic Pneumatology.”

A notable common element bridging temporal, geographical and ecclesiastical boundaries is the Christological interpretation of the “face of God” in Matt. 18:10. Almost equally widespread is the identification of the angels in Matt. 18:10 with the seven supreme celestial entities, which is carried out via exegetical identification with Isaiah’s “seven gifts of the Spirit” and Zechariah’s “seven eyes of the Lord.” Less common, though strongly represented by Clement of Alexandria and Aphrahat, is the use of Matt. 18:10 to illustrate the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit.

Just as “Name” Christology, “Wisdom” Christology, or “Glory” Christology, once crucial categories in the age of Jewish Christianity, gave way to a more precise vocabulary shaped by the new environment of the Church and the Christological controversies of the third and fourth centuries, so also was “Face” Christology destined not to become a major player in classic definitions of faith. No major disturbances are recorded in this regard; the term was never formally rejected, it simply went out of fashion.

With advent of the new theological paradigm in the wake of the Arian and Pneumatomachian confrontations, the Holy Spirit in angelic disguise and the associated use of Matt. 18:10, became highly problematic, and ultimately a theological liability. The exegesis of Matt. 18:10 illustrated by Clement and Aphrahat was rejected. Echoes of a polemical counter-exegesis can be discerned in the curious referencing of Matt. 18:10, a text normally useless for Pneumatology, in the polemical writings advocating the divinity of the Spirit.

Finally, the texts discussed in this paper understand the “little ones” as a designating “the elect”—whether Marcus’ initiates, Clement’s “true Gnostics” or Aphrahat’s “sons of the covenant.” This coheres well with Joachim Jeremias’ hypothesis, mentioned earlier, about the early usage of μικροί in Matthew’s community.

<sup>75</sup> Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, 441.

In a larger religio-historical perspective, the use of apocalyptic themes such as the divine “Face” and the “angels of the Face” as building blocks for an emerging Christian doctrine of Christ and the Holy Spirit illustrates a larger phenomenon, namely the indebtedness of pre-Nicene theology (and, by reaction, even of later Christian thought) to the categories inherited from Jewish apocalyptic literature.