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A CONCEPT OF *NEW SONG* IN *THE EXHORTATION TO THE GREEKS* OF CLEMENS OF ALEXANDRIA

A concept of a New *Divine Song* deserves a particular attention in the apologia of Clemens of Alexandria – *The Exhortation to the Greeks* – because it displays all the significant issues of the Christian doctrine, the matter that still is lacking a proper recognition.

We believe that the process of indicating the essential points of the New Song – το σμα το καινον - is subject to a certain structural regularity. The way the essence of New Song is presented in the introductory part, we may take as a shortened version of the complete Christian concept. In our opinion, a logical regularity between the basic notions of the concept is revealed in the existing logical links. Clemens succeeds in this task mostly by his perfect skill in utilization of epithets, and their intensive usage – as well as their multifaceted features, characteristic of the apologetic genres – along with the desired emotional response, provides the author with the possibility to disclose steadily the New Song to the reader. At every stage of introducing some epithet or basic Christian notions, Clemens points at the Biblical material relevant to their idea and meaning, which helps him in achieving the successive communication of the reader with the Holy Writ. In order to verify the Christian notions and ideas, as well as to demonstrate finally the superiority of the New *Divine Song* – as regards to the *Old Song* and Hellenic culture and religion, Clemens sets off the Christian notions against the essentials of Hellenic culture.

In the first place, the number and frequency of epithets is aimed to reveal the enhance feature of the concept of New Song that is successively revealed, and at the same time, they play the part of logical connections between these essential ideas of the said concept. Clemens skillfully uses all

these logical links, and practically, every suitable instance to provide the case with the material on Greek mythology and Biblical themes.

The amount and meaning of the epithets that comes forward at some stage of the Christian concept, is determined by the factor of a particular idea or notion that is to be set. In the first chapter of his *Exhortation*, Clemens molds the concept of the New *Divine Song* against the background of classical antiquity. Bearing this in mind, he brings in the essential postulates of New Song step by step, in order to fix them in the perception of a reader.

We can view the very first postulate of the New Song as an attempt to fix its origin and idea. Clemens presents the New Song by telling the mythic story of Amphion of Thebes and Arion of Metimenes that was widely known in Greece. According to the well-known version of the myth, Amphion succeeded in luring a fish by means of his musical skills, and Arion managed to build the walls of Thebes. Clemens also reminds of the myth about some sophist from Thrakia who could tame wild beast by his singing and could make oak trees move to music.¹ (Protr. 2)² It is significant to note the connection of the tonality of the *Old Song* with Orpheus. Orpheus is viewed as a symbol of religion and culture – and traditions of classical antiquity in general – and he is opposed by an apologist of Christianity with the New Song. The author sets off these myths against others, which he needs to illustrate the superiority of the New *Divine Song* against the *Old Song*, and provides his own interpretation of the well-known version of the myth: "I can also tell you of another legend and another minstrel akin to these, namely, Eunomus the locrian and the Pythian grasshopper. A solemn assembly of Greeks, held in honour of a dead serpent, was gathering at Pytho³ and Eunomus sang a funeral ode for the reptile. Whether his song was a hymn in praise of the snake, or a lamentation over it, I cannot say; but there was a competition, and Eunomus was playing the lyre in the heat of the day, at the time, when the grasshoppers, warmed by the sun, were singing under the leaves along the hills. They were singing, you see, not to the dead serpent of Pytho, but to the all-wise God, a spontaneous natural song, better than the measured strains of Eunomus. A string breaks in the Locrian's hands; the grasshopper settles upon the neck of the lyre and begins to twitter there as if upon a branch: whereupon the minstrel, by adapting his music to the grasshopper's lay, supplied the place of the missing string. So it was not Eunomus that drew the grasshopper by his song, as the legend would have it, when it set up the

¹ The allusion implies Orpheus, Euripides, *Rhesus*, 924.

² The cited passages are taken from A. Butterworth's translation of Clemens of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, Cambridge 1919.

³ The allusion at Delphi oracle.

bronze figure at Pytho, showing Eunomus with his lyre, and his ally in the contest. No, the grasshopper flew of its own accord, and sang of its own accord, although the Greeks thought it to have been responsive to music. (Protr. 2-4).

Thus, from the point of view of the concept of the New song, Clemens develops a mythological version more admissible to him, where – according to his interpretation – the image of a cricket reflects a natural harmony existing in the order of the universe. There Clemens explains *the first important postulate* of the concept of New song, identifying it with world harmony. He also sets out the opposition of the New and *Old Songs*: the first being natural and identical to the harmony of the universe, and the second being artificial. He states that the song of a cricket is the sound of divine harmony existing in nature that establishes the conformity of the existence of the universe; correspondingly, we are supposed to take it as a genuinely natural melody that praises the wise God that confers it with harmony. Clemens also notes that any melody created by some Greek musician will prove its artificiality – and therefore, it is inadmissible. It cannot be admissible even for the fact of its ascribed ability to change the nature of the wild beasts. (Protr. 4). According to the author, another point that proves the superiority of the sole divine melody – as regards to the Old Song that has various rings – either Phrygian or Lydian or Dorian, the New song is indivisible and identical to the harmonious order of the universe. "The new music, with its eternal strain that bears the name of God" (Protr. 6).

The excessive usage of epithets by the author is mostly aimed at two points: 1. To defend a purely apologetic style of the genre which implies the stating of the notion favoured by the Tauthor in the consciousness of the listener; 2. To introduce conceptual changes of epithets, the usage of which – as we see the fact – gives the author a possibility to present the essence of his own idea in succession. Following the introduction of the epithets that link the concepts of the New song, the major point for the author in the concept of the new song, is to state the following new moments: he puts forward the fact of the similarity of the New song and the harmony of the universe and of the supreme truth. The consciousness of the reader records also for the first time the connection of the New song with the Bible as its source: "Let us bring down truth, with wisdom in all her Brightness, from heaven above", (Protr. 6) The truth will cover all with the light of its rays, everyone who is absorbed by the darkness, "For out of Sion Shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem", (Isaiah II. 3.). "That is, the heavenly Word, the true

champion". (Protr. 6). "This is the New song, the song of Moses; Soother of grief and wrath, that bids all ills be forgotten"⁴ (Protr. 6).

At this point the author brings in his *second most important postulate* on the superiority and purpose of the New song and its noble mission becomes clearly visible: "But far different is my minstrel, for He has come to bring a speedy end the bitter slavery of the daemons that Lord it over us; and by leading us back to the mild and kindly yoke of piety He calls once again to heaven those who have been cast down to earth. He at least is the only one who ever tamed the most intractable of all wild beasts-man"; (Protr. 8) i.e. a man is given the only norms of the rightful ethics. Correspondingly, Clemens views his own sermon as an intermediary that "Let the prophetic voice, which shares in the song of truth, come forward, speaking words of pity for those who waste away their lives in ignorance and folly,-"or God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (St.Matthew III. 9; St. Luke III. 8.). (Protr. 8).

whereas God Himself is imbued with pity for such lot of mindless humans. When mentioning them the author uses the Biblical words: "offspring of vipers" (St. Matthew III. 7; St. Luke III. 7). (Protr.11).

At this stage *the third important postulate* of the New song is brought in: Logos that signifies the New song: "Yet if any even of these snakes chooses to repent, let him but follow the Word and he becomes a "man of God" (1 Tim. VI. 11).Others are figuratively called "wolves" (St.Matthew VII. 15) clothed in sheepskins". (Protr. 10).

At the same time, Clemens introduces *the fourth postulate of the concept* where two significant issues are underlined: another fact of stating the connection of the New song with the Bible as with its source, and the demonstration of the connection of the *novel canticle* with the Holy Spirit as with the guiding force of its action. The notion of Holy Spirit is stated here as the driving force of the New song:

"It has made men out of stones and men out of wild beasts. They who were otherwise dead, revived when they but heard the song. Furthermore, it is this which composed the entire creation into melodious order, and tuned into concert the discord of the elements, that the whole universe might be in harmony with it." (Protr. 11). " This pure song, the stay of the universe and the harmony of all things, stretching from the centre to the circumference and from the extremities to the centre, reduced this whole to harmony,⁵ not in

⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* IV. 221.

⁵ The way the New song is characterized here, is associated with the ideas of Stoics about the divine order of the Universe.

accordance with Tracian music, but in accordance with the fatherly purpose of God. By the power of Holy Spirit He arranged in harmonious order this great world, yes, and the little world of man too, body and soul together". (Protr. 13). "He makes music to God, and sings to the human instrument". "For thou art my harp and my pipe and my temple".⁶ Clemens explains that kithara in this case signifies harmony, while avlos – the spirit, and the temple – the word; (Protr. 13).

To strengthen the fourth postulate, Clemens introduces new epithets that help again to prove the similarity of the New song with *logos*; he also provides an explanation of what is this novel canticle and what represents a man himself that the New song is aimed at.

Here we can set aside *the fifth postulate* of the author's concept where the task of the final goal of the New song is developed:

"What then is the purpose of this instrument, the word of God, the Lord, and the New song? To open the eyes of the blind, to unstop the ears of the deaf, and to lead the halt and erring into the way of righteousness; to reveal God to foolish men, to make an end of corruption, to vanquish death, to reconcile disobedient sons to the Father. (Protr. 15).

Thus, we consider that the scheme of Clemens' *New song* concept is based on the grounds of the five major issues:

1. New song as an entity with its naturalness, and the Bible as the source of its origin;
2. The superiority of the New song to the Old and the demonstration of its purpose;
3. The similarity of the New song to Logos;
4. Re-statement of the derivation of the New song from the Bible and Holy Spirit – to underline its connection with the guiding force of its actions;
5. Demonstration of the final goal of the New song.

After this preamble the author presents their detailed analysis and explanation, defining the point by introducing a variety of Christian images and a number of Biblical examples. He summons new epithets, rearranges the accents, and displays every postulate from a different aspect.

He starts with the explanation of the essence of the New song, stressing the way the term New song should be perceived; its similarity with the Logos is also underlined. He explains that one must not consider the New song as if it were some kind of new arms or a new house because meaning a Word, it

⁶ The source of this quotation is unknown. According to Butterworth, It may be a fragment of an early Christian hymn, the metaphors retain similarity with Psalm. lvii. 8; 1 Corinthians vi. 19.

was "before the morning star" (Psalm CIX. 3 (Septuagint). and, "in the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God". (St. John I. 1.). "But error is old, and truth appears to be a new thing; still, not one of these nations (Prygians, Arcadians or Egyptians) existed before this world." (Protr. 17).

At this point, the problem of a human being as regards to the New song is also included, i.e. the postulate is set forward that stresses the existence of both from the beginning and their derivation from the sole source;

"But we were before the foundation of the world, we, who, because we were destined to be in Him, were begotten beforehand by God. We are the rational images formed by God's Word, or Reason, and we date from the beginning on account of our connexion with Him ,because "the Word was in the beginning".(St. John I. 1). Because the Word was from the first, He was and is the divine beginning of all things; but because He lately took a name- the name consecrated of old and worthy of power, the Christ- I have called Him a New song." (Protr. 17).

After that Clemens returns to the second and third postulates that we have mentioned in connection with the purpose of the New song and its similarity with Logos. Yet, now both these issues are united with the word of the New song, in order to reveal its similarity with Christ and His Mission:

"The Word, then, that is the Christ, is the cause both of our being long ago (for He was in God) and of our well-being. This Word, who alone is both God and man, the cause of all our good, appeared but lately in His own person to men; from whom learning how to live rightly on earth, we are brought on our way to eternal life. This is the New Song, namely, the manifestation which has but now shined forth among us, of Him who was in the beginning, the pre-existent Word. He formed us, taught us, in order that hereafter as God He might supply us with life everlasting." (Protr. 19).

Clemens develops the second postulate when he admits a confrontation between the Old and New songs. In order to put forward the superiority of the latter, he finds new stricter epithets for the Old song:

"For the wicked, crawling wild beast makes slaves of men by his magical arts, and torments them even until now, as it seems to me, after the manner of barbarians, who are said to bind their captives to corpses until both rot together. Certain is that wherever this wicked tyrant and serpent succeeds in making men his own from their birth, he rivets them to stocks, stones, statues and suchlike idols, by the miserable chain of daemon-worship; then he takes and buries them alive, until they also, men and idols together, suffer corruption." (Protr. 19).

Linking the New song to the Old Testament is another point of interest in studying the author's reasoning. He finds a group of new epithets to present

the way the New song expressed itself in the Biblical predictions: "By wonders and signs in Egypt, and in the desert by the burning bush and the cloud that, followed the Hebrews like a handmaid. By the fear that these wonders inspired He exhorted the hard-hearted; but afterwards, through Moses and Isaiah and the whole company of the prophets, He converts to the Word by more rational means those who have ears to hear". (Protr. 21).

Clemens completes the formation of the New song concept with its final aim. The salvation of a man he considers the decisive argument of the concept and while discussing the details of the problem he accentuates several matters.

He starts with the importance of the humanization of Logos, and after paying tribute to the vast contribution that the prophets had done in declaring the New song to the people, he concentrates on the role of Prophet John who prepared the people to the declaration of New song:

"John also invites us to salvation and becomes wholly a voice of exhortation. Let us then inquire of him. "Who and whence art thou?"⁷ (Protr. 22).

the author completes the explanation of the essence of the New song with the reality of people's communion to the New song:

"Take poet in purifications meet for Him, not of laurel leaves and fillets embellished with wool and purple, but crown yourself with righteousness, let your wreath be woven from the leaves of self-control, and seek diligently after Christ. "For I am the door," (St. John X. 9.) He says; which we who wish to perceive God must search out, in order that He may throw open wide for us the gates of heaven." (Protr. 27).

On the basis of mythological material of the New song – as an adequate matter of harmonious order and therefore, the sole true sound of the essence of the universe – Clemens switches to the gradual negation of the Old song. For him, the tradition of classical antique culture is epitomized by Orpheus and other musicians of equal scope – and blames them for comprising the wrong principles of Universal harmony on mankind:

"Cithaeron, and Helicon, and mountains of Odrysians and Thracians, temples of initiation into error, are held sacred on account of the attendant mysteries. For my own part, mere legend though they are, I cannot bear the thought of all the calamities that are worked up into tragedy; yet in your hands the records of these evils have become dramas, and the actors of the dramas are a sight that gladdens your heart. But as for the dramas and the Lenaeon poets, are altogether like drunken men." (Protr. 6).

⁷ Homer, *Odyssey* I, 170.

He also blames poets and musicians – the representatives of the Old Testament for inculcation of violence and madness in the religious festivities. This element he explained as the inculcation of paganism by introducing the tragic parts in the ceremony of the religious cult. He believed that sculptures and drawings served to the strengthening of the senseless rituals while in fact they were nothing except wooden logs and boulders, and thus, through lies they put under the yoke of the slavery the genuine shining freedom that the citizens possess (Protr. 9).