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 **Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher according to  
Clement of Alexandria**

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Journal of Early Christian Studies

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 9, Number 1, Spring 2001

pp. 3-25

10.1353/earl.2001.0012

ARTICLE

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher  
according to Clement of Alexandria**

*Judith L. Kovacs (bio)*

The centrality of **παιδεία** in Clement's explication of Christianity is well known.<sup>1</sup> He presents Christ as the consummate **παιδαγωγός** and **διδάσκαλος**,<sup>2</sup> who seeks to train all humanity up to perfection:

Therefore since the Logos himself has come to us from heaven, it seems to me that we need no longer have resort to human teaching, seeking knowledge in Athens or the rest of Greece or Ionia. For if we have as **[End Page 3]** teacher the one who has filled everything with his holy activities—creation, salvation, beneficence, law-giving, prophecy, teaching—this teacher now gives us all instruction, and, through the Logos, the whole universe has now become Athens and Greece.

(Prot. 11, 112.1)<sup>3</sup>

One aspect of Clement's portrayal of Christian **παιδεία** that has not been fully explored is what Clement says about his own teaching.<sup>4</sup> Relevant to this topic are not only those texts where Clement speaks directly of his own activity as teacher<sup>5</sup> but also his descriptions of the perfect Christian, whom he calls the Gnostic. André Méhat, arguing against the view that Clement's Gnostic is a "solitary dreamer," points to texts that describe teaching as an essential characteristic of the Gnostic.<sup>6</sup> In *Strom.* 2.10.46.1, for example, Clement says:

Our philosopher clings to these three things: first contemplation, secondly the performance of the commandments, and third the training (**κατασκευῆς**) of good men. When these things come together, they complete the Gnostic. **[End Page 4]** But whichever of these is lacking makes knowledge (**τὰ τῆς γνώσεως**) incomplete.<sup>7</sup>

According to Méhat, the perfect Gnostic is an idealized picture of Clement's teacher, Pantainos, as well as a reflection of Clement's own life.<sup>8</sup> There is much we do not know about Clement's activity as teacher, including the debated question of whether he was the official head of a catechetical school in Alexandria.<sup>9</sup> What is quite clear from Clement's

own writings is the exalted view he had of the vocation of the Christian teacher. This is illustrated by *Strom.* 7.9.52.1-3,<sup>10</sup> which is part of a lengthy treatment of the superior character of the Gnostic Christian:

The exalted position of the Gnostic is extended further by the one who has undertaken to superintend the teaching of others (ὁ τὴν προστασίαν τῆς τῶν ἑτέρων διδασκαλίας ἀναλαβὼν) and accepted the management (τὴν οἰκονομίαν) in word and deed of the greatest good on earth, through which he mediates union and fellowship with the divine. Just as those who worship earthly things pray to statues as if they hear, and confirm their [End Page 5] covenants before them, so also in the case of living statues, that is human beings, the true magnificence of the Word is received from the trustworthy teacher (διδασκάλου), and his beneficence towards them is credited to the Lord, in whose image the true man, as he educates (παιδεύων), creates and refashions the person being instructed (τὸν κατηχούμενον ἄνθρωπον), renewing him to salvation. As the Greeks call iron Ares and wine Dionysus, giving them a higher meaning (κατὰ τινα ἀναφοράν), so the Gnostic, who considers the benefit done to his neighbor as his own salvation, would rightly be called a living image (ἄγαλμα ἔμψυχον) of the Lord, not because of the character of his physical form but because he symbolizes the Lord's power and because of the similarity of his preaching.

Clement presents the Gnostic teacher as the image of the Lord, who mimics his creative work and shares in the execution of the divine plan for salvation, an activity he designates by the term οἰκονομία. This word appears frequently in Clement's works, in senses ranging from household management to providence to the divine plan for salvation.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of *Stromateis* 7 Clement uses it to characterize the power of the Logos to order all things:

This [the nature of the Son] is the highest excellence, which arranges everything according to "the will of the Father" (John

6.40) and steers the whole world in the best way, performing all things with untiring, limitless power . . . . The whole host of angels and gods has been subjected to him, to the Word of the Father, who has been...

# *Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher according to Clement of Alexandria*

JUDITH L. KOVACS

The centrality of παιδεία in Clement's explication of Christianity is well known.<sup>1</sup> He presents Christ as the consummate παιδαγωγός and διδάσκαλος,<sup>2</sup> who seeks to train all humanity up to perfection:

Therefore since the Logos himself has come to us from heaven, it seems to me that we need no longer have resort to human teaching, seeking knowledge in Athens or the rest of Greece or Ionia. For if we have as

1. See Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1961), 46–62. Jaeger discusses the various senses of the term παιδεία in the ancient world in *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1945), v: "Indeed it is difficult to define. . . . It is impossible to avoid bringing in modern expressions like *civilization, tradition, literature, or education*. But none of these really covers what the Greeks meant by *paideia*. Each of them is confined to one aspect of it; they cannot take in the same field as the Greek concept unless we employ them all together. . . . The ancients were persuaded that education and culture are not a formal art or an abstract theory, distinct from the objective, historical structure of a nation's spiritual life. They held them to be embodied in literature, which is the real expression of all higher culture."

2. In *Paed.* 1.1.1.4–2.1 Clement explains these terms as follows: "Let the Logos be called by the single name παιδαγωγός, which suits him well, since the pedagogue is practical, not systematic, and his aim is to improve the soul, not to teach it (διδάξαι), and to introduce it to the life of moderation, not the life of knowledge. And yet the same Logos also acts as teacher (διδάσκαλος), but not at present. The one who reveals and explicates in matters of doctrine is the Logos acting as teacher. The pedagogue, who is concerned with practical life, first exhorted us to attain a firm character and now urges us on to carry out our duties, by delivering faultless precepts and displaying as examples to those who come after the errors of those who have gone before." All quotations from the *Paidagogos*, *Protreptikos*, and *Stromateis* are my own translations. Quotations from the *Paidagogos* are from the *Sources Chrétiennes* edition: *Le Pédagogue, Livre I*, ed. Henri-Irénée Marrou and Marguerite Harl, SC 70 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1949). Jaeger, *Early Christianity*, 133 n. 29, points out that



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