

“THE ONLY TRUE BEAUTY” IN THE *PAEDAGOGUS*: The Centrality of Christ in Clement of Alexandria’s Aesthetics

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In 2013, George Zografidis questioned whether an early Christian aesthetics is possible. Two of his five “tentative answers” are justifications for my research: “Patristic aesthetics is possible if the church fathers discussed aesthetic problems,” even though the Fathers did not qualify them as aesthetical issues in their time, and “Patristic aesthetics is possible if it can fertilize contemporary theological and aesthetic-philosophical thought.”² In this article, I will attempt to formalize Clement of Alexandria’s (ca. 150–ca. 215) aesthetics by examining his views on beauty in the *Paedagogus*, giving special attention to his vision of Christ as the only true Beauty.

Since art is a major aspect of aesthetics, we must consider Clement’s views on art at least briefly. Although he does not apply his aesthetics to art in the *Paedagogus*, he was not silent about art.³ As a student of Greek philosophy and culture and as a member of the Alexandrian community,

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²George Zografidis, “Is a Patristic Aesthetics Possible? The Eastern Paradigm Re-Examined,” *Studia Patristica* 59 (2013): 113–35. To be clear, Clement and others of his time did not use “aesthetics” as a term for their views on beauty and art. Applying the term “aesthetics” to views on beauty and art prior to the eighteenth century is technically anachronistic but has become an acceptable practice.

³The earliest treatment of Clement’s art is G. W. Butterworth, “Clement of Alexandria and Art,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 17, no. 65 (1915): 68–76. A recent attempt to look specifically at Clement’s art appears in James A. Francis, “Clement of Alexandria on Signet Rings: Reading an Image at the Dawn of Christian Art,” *Classical Philology* 98, no. 2 (2003): 179–83. For more on Clement and art, Francis recommends portions of Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For general overviews of early Christian art, see J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

Clement was well acquainted with centuries of Greek thought and art.⁴ In the *Protrepticus*, Clement engages Classical and Hellenistic Greek sculptors and painters such as Pheidias (ca. 480–430 BC), Polycleitus (ca. 480–420 BC), Praxiteles (ca. 395–330 BC), and Apelles (ca. 352–308 BC).⁵ Although he is critical of art, Clement notes the skill of the craftsman. As Frederick Norwood has observed, “There is a place, then, with Clement, for artistic appreciation.”⁶ In this article, I will not focus on Clement’s views on art, but rather his view of beauty. I will argue that Clement of Alexandria’s aesthetics in the *Paedagogus* is best understood in his vision of Christ the Creator as the ideal beauty and that humankind partakes in True Beauty when human ethics align with Christ’s moral law.

The only author to refer to “Clement’s Aesthetic” is Eric F. Osborn (1922–2007); he does so in a less than 800-word appendix in *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* originally published in 1957.⁷ Beyond Osborn’s short appendix, there is much to be explored in Clement’s aesthetics. In the growing body of Clementine scholarship, my research is distinct for three reasons. First, scholars who have focused on Clement and specifically his Christology have not made the connection between his aesthetics and his Christology. In V. Ermoni’s article on Clement’s Christology, he does not interact with Christ’s beauty.⁸ In Oleh Kindiy’s dissertation on Clement’s Christology, the word “beauty” is never used, and Kindiy makes only

⁴It is unclear whether Clement knew of the work of his contemporaries Philostratus the Athenian (ca. 170–250) or Philostratus the Elder (ca. 190–ca. 230). Philostratus the Athenian was a Sophist philosopher whose work, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, ponders the value of art and its place in society. Philostratus the Elder was an art apologist whose work, the *Imagines* (or *Pictures*), describes sixty-four paintings in an art gallery (some scholars have suggested that these were not real works). For an excellent compilation of primary sources in aesthetics, see Oleg V. Bychkov and Anne Sheppard, eds., *Greek and Roman Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵Prot. 4.53.4-5; 10.98.1. Otto Stählin, ed., *Clemens Alexandrinus: Protrepticus und Paedagogus*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1972), 41, 71. Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Greeks, The Rich Man’s Salvation, To the Newly Baptized*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 121–23, 213. Like Plato, Clement demonstrates a generally critical view of art but maintains a robust view of beauty. Nickolas Pappas has noted this same dynamic in Plato’s aesthetics: “Art ... is closer to a greatest danger than any other phenomenon ... while beauty is close to a greatest good.” For more on Plato’s aesthetics, see Nickolas Pappas, “Plato’s Aesthetics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 ed.), Edward N. Zalta, ed., <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/plato-aesthetics>.

⁶Frederick A. Norwood, “Attitude of the Ante-Nicene Fathers toward Greek Artistic Achievement,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 8, no. 4 (1947): 443.

⁷Eric Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 181–83.

⁸V. Ermoni, “The Christology of Clement of Alexandria,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 5, no. 17 (1903): 123–26.

a passing reference to aesthetics.⁹ Eric Osborn's 2005 monograph does not cover Clement's aesthetics.¹⁰ John Ferguson interacts the most with Clement's views on beauty in his commentary on the *Paedagogus*, but he has neither made a connection between Clement's views on beauty and Christ, nor brought Clement's aesthetics into a cohesive whole.¹¹

Second, authors who have dealt generally with aesthetics have not thoroughly engaged Clement. Some have not even recognized his contribution. James Schaefer's work, which reconstructs the early Christian and medieval concept of beauty related to creation, has only one reference to Clement. Schaefer considers Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, and Augustine of Hippo as the main early Christian authors who describe the natural world as beautiful.¹² The *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* does not mention Clement.¹³ *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* recognizes Clement as the earliest of the fathers to have an aesthetic, which is a significant statement about Clement, but *The Routledge Companion* does not elaborate.¹⁴ In a significant article on the subject, Arja Karivieri only briefly mentions Clement's assessment of artistic invention (as opposed to imitation) and notes Clement's views on the benefits of philosophy.¹⁵

Third, authors who have noted Clement's connection with the beauty of Christ have not thoroughly developed Clement's views. Paul Saieg recognizes Clement's love for beauty in his methods of persuasion and makes a connection to the beauty of Christ and the moral-ethical necessity to conform one's soul to Him: "He [Clement] wants them to choose to follow Christ for his beauty, his honor, his character, the reward he promises, and because he is the resolution—the harmony—of the dissonant chords of their shared culture. . . . his [Clement's] reader must make a choice to direct the attention of his soul onto Christ and to conform his soul to Him, who is the source of this beauty, for resolution of the dissonance."¹⁶ Claudio Calabrese discerns the heart of the complexity of

⁹Oleh Kindiy, *Christos Didaskalos: The Christology of Clement of Alexandria* (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2007).

¹⁰Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹¹John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 68–107.

¹²James Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 44.

¹³Jerrold Levinson, *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁴Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 26–27.

¹⁵Arja Karivieri, "Divine or Human Images? Neoplatonic and Christian Views on Works of Art and Aesthetics," *NUMEN* 63, no. 2–3 (2016): 200.

¹⁶Paul Saieg, "Non-Logical Methods of Persuasion in Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus*," *St*

Clementine aesthetics, its Greek influences, its relationship to Christ as creator, its rootedness in Christian ethics, and the obstacle it presents for post-enlightenment readers:

Can the Hellenistic esthetics be at the service of a deeper understanding of the Christian message? Is it possible to have a dialogue between the ethical-religious and the esthetic, understanding the beautiful as the very original nature of the world? ... The difficulty of these questions resides more within ourselves than in Clement's texts. ... What we call beauty is as contaminated by irreality as the enlightened concept of reason. Only if we are able to unfold the Logos that creates the beauty in Cosmos can we open the road to the original beauty of the love of God. In order to adapt these claims to Clement's historical and cultural moment, we should take into account the fact that, to him, the Bible was the oldest document and, in consequence, the most pure, to express the root of all poetry.¹⁷

Saieg and Calabrese understand but articulate only briefly all that Clement has to offer in his views on Christ as the True Beauty.

I have limited my research to Clement's *Paedagogus*. This work represents approximately a fourth of the extant Clementine corpus, with more than half of Clement's references to beauty concentrated in it. Clement uses "beauty" (κάλλος) or "beautiful" (καλός) and other forms of καλ- (e.g., δοξοκαλία and φιλοκαλία) more than one hundred times in the *Paedagogus*, making it the seminal place to discover Clement's aesthetics. Additionally, of the thirty-seven chapters that comprise the three books of the *Paedagogus*, three consecutive chapters in Book 3 are titled "On True Beauty" (3.1), "That We Ought Not to Cultivate Artificial Beauty" (3.2), and "Against *Humans* Who Cultivate Artificial Beauty" (3.3).¹⁸

Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 59, no. 3 (2015): 280.

¹⁷Claudio Calabrese, "Classical Tradition and Judeo-Christian Revelation in Clement of Alexandria," *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 25 (2020): 51.

¹⁸Unless otherwise noted, English translations of the *Paedagogus* are from Simon P. Wood, trans., *Clement of Alexandria: Christ the Educator* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1954). Because Clement uses gender-specific language when addressing men and women in certain passages, I have altered Wood's translation where he uses "man" for ἄνθρωπος in contexts where I believe Clement is referring to all humans; this has been designated by the italicized *humans*, *people*, or *humankind*. The critical text consulted is the *GCS* (see footnote 5).

These chapter titles may not have been composed by Clement, but they do appear in a twelfth-century manuscript and at least reveal a medieval attempt to formalize Clement's views on beauty.¹⁹

Clement's reference to beauty early in the *Paedagogus* is another reason why this volume is an important place to discover his aesthetics. Early into *Paedagogus* Book 1, Clement connects beauty and virtue by associating the body with beauty and the soul with virtue. He states that the Educator "concerns Himself with the whole creature, and as the Physician of the whole *person* heals both body [σῶμα] and soul [ψυχὴν]" (1.2.6.2).²⁰ He further states that the Educator "guides *humankind's* soul [ψυχὴν] on the right path by the virtues of prudence and temperance, equips his body [σῶμα] with beauty [κάλλει] and harmony" (1.2.6.6).²¹ However, for Clement, it is not as though beauty is only for the body and virtue for the soul; he further develops his position by stating, "Beauty or ugliness is found only in the soul," and, quoting a source that is unknown today, he continues: "'Virtue alone is noteworthy even in a beautiful body [καλοῦ τοῦ σώματος], and comes to full maturity afterward" (2.12.121.2).²² This first mention of beauty in the *Paedagogus* and its relationship to ethics of both body and soul reveals one of Clement's main concerns in the entire *Paedagogus*: Christ, the only true Beauty, wants to restore the body and soul of his human creatures back to their original state of beautiful perfection. In this article, I will examine the three instances in the *Paedagogus* where Clement calls Christ "Beauty" or "True Beauty" while drawing upon most of his uses of *καλ*-words.

THE TRUE BEAUTY, EXTRAVAGANT LIVING, AND IMAGE WORSHIP

In *Paedagogus* 2.10.104–106, Clement addresses the inordinate clothing choices of the Greeks, and, in doing so, he explains that humans are image-worshippers when they turn to imitation beauty rather "than to Beauty itself" (2.10.106.1).²³ For Clement, these "esoteric extravagances" are "indicative of unnatural lust" (2.10.105.3), and people who follow

¹⁹See the note in the apparatus of Stählin, *GCS*, 89. Manuscript F is the 12-century "Laurentianus V 24" parchment.

²⁰Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 8; Stählin, *GCS*, 93.

²¹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 8; Stählin, *GCS*, 94.

²²Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 193; Stählin, *GCS*, 230.

²³Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 181; Stählin, *GCS*, 220.

these practices are "image-worshippers" (εἰδωλολάτρωντας, 2.10.106.1).²⁴ Before examining Clement's accusation of image worship, this article will examine his views on the extravagant living of the Romans. As A. T. Croom has noted, fashion choices changed across time and territories of the Greco-Roman empire, so it is outside of the scope of this article to determine which fashions and fads Clement denounced.²⁵

Clement disapproves of excessive and wasteful living because he sees such choices as directly opposed to Christian teachings and as indicative of the degenerate aspects of Greco-Roman culture. He builds his case with an exposition from Matthew 6:25–33 that addresses the relationship of material possessions to the Father's provision for the flowers and the animals. In this passage, Jesus states, "Do not be anxious about your life. . . . Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (Matt. 6:25–33).²⁶ For Clement, Solomon who "took extravagant pride in his wealth" is a negative example (2.10.102).²⁷ Essential to Clement's understanding of these excessive choices being indicative of the degenerate aspects of Greco-Roman culture, Clement quotes Jesus: "After all these things, the heathen [or Gentiles, ἔθνη] seek" (2.10.103.4).²⁸ He concludes: "Now, if Christ forbids solicitude once and for all about clothing and food and luxuries, as things that are unnecessary, do we need to ask Him about finery and dyed wools and multicolored robes, about exotic ornaments of jewels and artistic handiwork of gold, about wigs and artificial locks of hair and of curls, and about eye-shadowings and hair-plucking" (2.10.104.1).²⁹

Clement reconvenes his teachings against that extravagant lifestyle in *Paedagogus* 2.12. In this instance, he has specific instructions for how women should adorn themselves.³⁰ He begins by emphasizing the importance of interior beauty: "A woman should be adorned, assuredly, but

²⁴Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 181; Stählin, *GCS*, 220.

²⁵A. T. Croom, *Roman Clothing and Fashion* (Stroud, U.K.: Tempus Publishing, 2002). See also Mireille M. Lee, *Body, Dress, and Identity in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Alicia J. Batten and Kelly Olson, eds., *Dress in Mediterranean Antiquity: Greeks, Romans, Jews, Christians* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

²⁶Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages are in the ESV (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) or from Clement's text as translated by Wood, 1954.

²⁷Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 179; Stählin, *GCS*, 218.

²⁸Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 179; Stählin, *GCS*, 219.

²⁹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 180; Stählin, *GCS*, 219.

³⁰Michel Desjardins has noted that "Clement of Alexandria stands out as an advocate of gender equality." For more on Clement and women, see Michel R. Desjardins, "Why Women Should Cover Their Heads and Veil Their Faces: Clement of Alexandria's Understanding of the Body and His Rhetorical Strategies in the *Paedagogus*," *Scriptura* 90 (2005): 700–708.

interiorly; there she should be beautiful indeed” (2.12.121.2).³¹ Clement is concerned that as a woman conceals her “natural beauty by overshadowing it with gold” (2.12.122.2) she “contributes nothing to the growth of virtue, but, instead, pampers the body” (2.12.122.1).³² Clement is concerned with the cultivation of virtue rather than catering to the *comforts* of the body. This is a key point. It is not as though he thinks the body is unimportant. As Harry Maier has argued, Clement holds a high view of caring for self and body.³³ Instead, the Christian woman must not cater to the comforts of the body, but rather, choose to adorn the body with plainness, which for Clement is an important aspect of caring for one’s spiritual self. He states, “Those who worship Christ ought to accept plainness. Indeed, plainness promotes the growth of holiness” (2.12.128.1).³⁴ The writers of Scripture also address the external and internal beauty of a woman. Paul states that “women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works” (1 Tim. 2:9–10). Notice Paul’s concern for both the internal and the external. Peter also commands: “Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (1 Pet. 3:3–4). Clement quotes both passages later in *Paedagogus* 3.11.66.

Clement’s standards for Christians do not end with food, clothing, and excessive accessories. He also takes a contra-Roman position on the issues of slave ownership and public bathing. For Clement, owning too many slaves is extravagant and excessive, and it makes people lazy because they do not work for themselves (3.4.26).³⁵ Concerning baths, Clement is opposed not only to excessive bathing (3.9.47) and the social status that comes along with it (3.5.31), but he is also opposed to the Greco-Roman

³¹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 193; Stählin, *GCS*, 230.

³²Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 194; Stählin, *GCS*, 230.

³³Harry O. Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 3 (1994): 719–45.

³⁴Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 197; Stählin, *GCS*, 233. The connection between holiness and beauty is rooted in the Psalms (27:4, 29:2, 96:9). For more on this subject see James Alfred Martin, Jr., *Beauty and Holiness: The Dialogue between Aesthetics and Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

³⁵For more on Clement’s views of slavery in the *Paedagogus*, see 3.1.2; 3.3.21; 3.6.34; 3.12.84; 3.12.92, 95. For Clement’s views on the public baths, see 3.5.31–33; 3.9.46–48.

practice of public nudity at the baths since it gives occasion to lust (3.5.32). In both issues—slave ownership and public bathing—Clement makes a connection to beauty. In the case of slavery, owning these servants allows a woman to forsake her work and give herself unto vain beauty (3.4.26.3), while in other cases, some slaves were owned only because they were handsome young men, and like cattle, they were milked for their beauty (3.4.26.3). Clement also connects bathing and beauty: “Yet, these women [who bathe publicly], stripping off modesty with their garments, mean to reveal their beauty, but only give unwitting evidence of their moral ugliness. Truly, the lewdness of their desire is made manifest in the body itself” (3.5.33.1).³⁶ The “moral ugliness” of a corrupt woman is revealed in two ways: 1) when she adorns herself excessively, and 2) when she strips off these extravagant clothes to reveal her nakedness.

Having exposed Clement’s view of extravagant living, this article will now focus on the accusation of image worship as it relates to beauty. Clement states, “Such men turn rather to imitation beauty, artificial ornamentation, than to Beauty itself, and are, therefore, image-worshippers in the true sense of the word” (2.10.106.1).³⁷ This passage reveals Clement’s understanding of humankind’s decadent path away from Christ to idols, which is accompanied by a delusional version of the truth: “They must be considered strangers to the truth, who do no more than day-dream about the nature of truth, fashioning it more to their own fancy than according to knowledge” (2.10.106.1).³⁸ This connection between image worship and a departure from the truth is not original to Clement. Paul states that depraved humans exchange “the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. . . . They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25-23). It seems very likely that Clement is thinking about Romans 1 in this passage; he quotes it earlier in this same chapter (see 2.10.86.3). Clement addresses unnatural lust (2.10.105.3) just as Paul does: “God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity” and “dishonorable passions” (Rom. 1:24, 26). For Clement, this departure into debaucherous idolatry is in opposition to Christ, who is called Beauty.

In other passages, Clement brings together the two topics discussed in

³⁶Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 226; Stählin, *GCS*, 255.

³⁷Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 181; Stählin, *GCS*, 220.

³⁸Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 181; Stählin, *GCS*, 220.

this section—extravagant living and image worship. He bemoans the fact that humans “have invented mirrors to reflect all this artificial beautification” (3.2.11.3).³⁹ He continues: “If Moses forbade his people to fashion any image to take the place of God, is it right for these women to study their reflected images for no other reason than to distort the natural features of their faces?” (3.2.12.1).⁴⁰ In this passage, Clement correlates vain beauty (using a mirror to distort the natural features of the face) to the fashioning of an image. He does this again when he challenges women not to take part in the “gaudy embellishment nor worship images” (2.12.127.1) as the Hebrews did when they used their jewelry to create a golden calf.⁴¹ Clement jeers those who fashioned the calf, and so “derived no benefit either from their art or from their plan, but only provided our women a striking lesson” (2.12.129.2) that the best place for jewelry is in the trash or in a melting pot.⁴²

Thus far, we have examined Clement’s view that extravagant and inordinate life choices are a sign that a person is following their lusts and departing from the truth of Beauty. This has all been a negative description of the ugliness of the idolater. The next section of this article will show a positive example of Beauty and how humans can attain this Beauty.

THE INCARNATION AND GODLIKENESS OF THE TRUE BEAUTY

In the opening sentences of *Paedagogus* Book 3, Clement states, “Beauty is what is true, for it is in fact God” (3.1.1.5).⁴³ Additionally, the believer should strive to be “like God” and “possess true beauty with no need of artificial beauty” (3.1.1.5).⁴⁴ In order to be like God, the believer must be “performing good deeds” and adorning themselves with the “holy garment of self-control” rather than adorning themselves with the elaborate, artificial beauty of the Romans (3.1.1.1).⁴⁵ This call to good deeds and self-control as a way of being *like God*, who is true Beauty, is an example of Clement’s direct connection between his aesthetics and his Scripture-informed ethics. In this passage, he not only challenges humans to be like

³⁹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 208; Stählin, *GCS*, 242.

⁴⁰Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 208; Stählin, *GCS*, 242.

⁴¹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 197; Stählin, *GCS*, 233.

⁴²Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 196; Stählin, *GCS*, 232.

⁴³Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 200; Stählin, *GCS*, 236.

⁴⁴Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 200; Stählin, *GCS*, 236.

⁴⁵Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 199; Stählin, *GCS*, 235.

God, but he also marvels that God would become like a human. I will examine two passages where Clement connects true Beauty to the incarnation and calls upon Christians to be like God, who became a human.

Before returning to *Paedagogus* 3.1.1, we will look back to Book 2 in which Clement continues his polemic against "a false sense of beauty" (δοξοκαλία) while promoting a life of simplicity.⁴⁶ He considers the Lord Jesus who "had nowhere to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20):

The Lord ate His meal from an inexpensive bowl; made His disciples recline on the ground upon grass; washed their feet, girding Himself with a linen towel; He, the humble God, Lord of the universe, carried a foot basin made, be it noted, of no precious silver brought from heaven. He asked the Samaritan woman, who had drawn water from the well with a bucket made only of clay, to give Him to drink; He did not seek the gold of kings, but taught us to rest content with what will quench thirst. Beyond question, He confined Himself to the useful, not the ostentatious, good. When He ate and drank at banquets, He did not require metals dug out of the earth, or dishes that tasted of gold or silver, that is, poison, as if exuding from steaming matter (2.3.38.1).⁴⁷

For Clement, the Lord Jesus was an inspiring example of plainness, and Clement suggests that He calls his followers to do the same. Quoting Matthew 19:21, he states, "Indeed, the Lord also said: 'Sell what thou hast, and give to the poor and come follow Me'" (2.3.36.2).⁴⁸ Those who become like Christ by following Him in this life of simplicity will have the most valuable possessions: "faith in God, belief in Him who suffered, [and] good works toward men" (2.3.36.2).⁴⁹ Clement does not envision the one following Christ to be living a reclusive life apart from others; this vision of beauty in simplicity will result in good works *toward others*.

Returning now to Clement's statement in 3.1.1.1: "Beauty is what is true, for it is in fact God."⁵⁰ Clement does not mean "God is beauty, and

⁴⁶Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 127; Stählin, *GCS*, 179.

⁴⁷Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 127; Stählin, *GCS*, 179. See also 2.10.109.3 where δοξοκαλία is translated as "vanity."

⁴⁸Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 125; Stählin, *GCS*, 178.

⁴⁹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 126; Stählin, *GCS*, 178.

⁵⁰Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 200; Stählin, *GCS*, 236.

beauty is God,” in the way that a pantheist might suggest that “God is nature and nature is God.” Clement’s statement is a declaration of the deity of Christ in the incarnation. It is as if he is saying, “Christ, the true Beauty, is God; God is Christ, the true Beauty.” Clement’s intent is made clearer in the next statement: “God is in man and a man is God, as the Mediator, fulfilling the will of His Father” (3.1.1.2).⁵¹

Clement continues his theme of the incarnation by dealing with the body of Christ. Just as he warned against excessive ornamentation and adornment of the body, he explains how Christ has redeemed the body of flesh: “God has freed the flesh from corruption and . . . clothed it with incorruption, clothing the flesh with the holy ornament of eternity, immortality” (3.1.1.3).⁵² He continues this theme of immortality when he deals with the unsightly body of Christ, quoting Isaiah 53:2 and asking: “Yet, who is better than the Lord? He displayed not beauty of the flesh, which is only outward appearance, but the true beauty of body and soul: for the soul, the beauty of good deeds; for the body, that of immortality” (3.1.3.3).⁵³ Clement once again links aesthetics and ethics in his phrase “the beauty of good deeds.” Eric Osborn traces Clement’s relationship of the incarnation to ethics in these three mysteries: “The first mystery (father and son) produces the second mystery (God and humankind) which produces the third mystery (human love for neighbor).”⁵⁴

Clement stated, “[Christ displayed] the true beauty of body and soul: for the soul, the beauty of good deeds; for the body, that of immortality” (3.1.3.3).⁵⁵ Just as the body and the soul of the Savior are not at odds, neither should the body and soul of humans be. In fact, part of becoming like God is having a soul and body that are in harmony. Clement also calls on believers to become like Christ in his immortal body. The body of Christ is eternal. Humankind becomes like the beautiful Christ by clothing itself, not in extravagance that perishes and leads to idolatry, but with incorruption and immortality. Just as Clement rejects the docetic notion to deny the body of the Lord, he also rejects the gnostic way of diminishing the importance of the body. Clement does not see a shedding of the flesh as necessary for attaining true beauty. He sees the opposite, a

⁵¹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 200; Stählin, *GCS*, 236.

⁵²Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 201; Stählin, *GCS*, 236.

⁵³Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 201; Stählin, *GCS*, 237.

⁵⁴Eric Osborn, “Clement of Alexandria: God Discarnate and God Incarnate,” *The Expository Times* 118, no. 8 (2007): 373.

⁵⁵Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 201; Stählin, *GCS*, 237.

redeeming of the body when our bodies become like Christ in immortality. This aligns with Paul's teaching: "For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53).⁵⁶

Not only do humans become like God by shedding excessive adornment and putting on incorruption, as will be demonstrated in the next section, humans also become like God when they obey the command to be fruitful and multiply: "In this role, *humankind* becomes like God, because he cooperates, in his *human* way, in the birth of another human" (2.10.83.2).⁵⁷ In obedience to this command given at the creation of the world, humans reflect God's creative power by partaking in *pro-creation* which results in children made in God's image. In the beauty of the incarnation, God becomes human so that humans can become like God; whereas, in the beauty of creation, we discover that humans were already beautifully made in the image of God before the fall (Gen. 1:31, 2:9).

THE TRUE BEAUTY, CREATION, AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

In Book 3, chapter 7 of the *Paedagogus*, Clement states that humankind is created "by the only true Beauty" (3.7.37.1).⁵⁸ He connects true Beauty to creation in the context of his criticism of those who live for pleasure. A life of "self-indulgence [τρυφή]" and "pleasures [ἡδονὰς]" is "foreign to true love of the beautiful [φιλοκαλίας]" (3.7.37.1).⁵⁹ In the previous chapter, Clement warned that Christians should be careful "not to turn love of the beautiful into love of self [φιλόκαλον εἰς φιλαυτίαν]" (3.6.34.10).⁶⁰ These warnings of self-indulgent pleasure-seeking are compared to the creatures of creation. On the one hand, those who seek pleasures are "feeding like sparrows and mating like swine and goats" (3.7.37.4) and are not behaving like a "noble and majestic animal who seeks the beautiful" (3.7.37.1).⁶¹ Clement's use of animals in this passage is not just for the purpose of providing a negative example for scorning humans; in fact, he labels humankind as "animal" (ζῷον): "By nature, a *human* is a noble

⁵⁶Concerning Clement's view of the incarnation, V. Ermoni states: "The Word took human flesh in order to purify and sanctify it. . . . He took our passible flesh and our actual nature, to the end that we may imitate His examples and keep His precepts." Ermoni, "The Christology of Clement of Alexandria," 124.

⁵⁷Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 88; Stählin, *GCS*, 208.

⁵⁸Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 230; Stählin, *GCS*, 258.

⁵⁹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 230; Stählin, *GCS*, 258.

⁶⁰Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 227; Stählin, *GCS*, 256.

⁶¹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 230; Stählin, *GCS*, 258.

and majestic animal [ζῷον] who seeks the beautiful, simply because he is a creature [δημιούργημα] made by the only true Beauty” (3.7.37.1).⁶² His use of ζῷον does not diminish humans but rather shows that humankind is part of God’s beautiful and orderly creation. Clement’s rationale should not be missed. He believes that humans are beautiful because they are made by the Creator, who is the true Beauty.

Clement not only sees humans as a “noble and majestic animal” (3.7.37.1), he also sees plants as a beautiful part of God’s created order. He states, “Like everything that is beautiful, the flower gives pleasure by being seen, and we should give glory to the Creator by looking at and enjoying its beauty” (2.8.70.5).⁶³ Animals also have natural beauty: “Is it not odd that horses and other animals roaming about the fields and meadows, and birds soaring above them, pride themselves on their natural beauty . . . yet women, as if they are less perfect than animals, consider themselves so lacking beauty that they need artificial beauty that is bought and painted on?” (3.2.11.1).⁶⁴ The natural beauty of creation—humans, animals, and plants—comes from Christ, whom Clement calls the Creator. Christ as Creator is taught in the final paragraphs of *Paedagogus*: “So great is the Word, this Educator, the Creator of the world and of *humankind*, become the Educator of the world, also, in His own person” (3.12.100.2).⁶⁵ Clement also states that the Educator has “the authority to speak [on behalf of the Father] because He is God and Creator” (1.11.97.3).⁶⁶

Elsewhere in the *Paedagogus*, Clement’s views on humans made in the image of God are connected to his view of beauty in creation. This is important for distinguishing humans from animals. He states, “It is absurd for those who have been made to the image and likeness of God to adopt some unnatural means of ornamentation, disfiguring the pattern by which they have been created, and preferring the cleverness of *humans* to that of their divine Creator” (3.12.66.2).⁶⁷ Clement believes excessive adorning of the body and lustful pleasure of the body to be unnatural and

⁶²Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 230; Stählin, *GCS*, 258. This is not the only time Clement uses ζῷον for people. Clement uses “animal [ζῷον]” or “living creature” to refer to humans when contrasting them with “irrational” animals. In 1.12.100, humans are called rational animals. In 2.5.46, humans are an animal that can laugh.

⁶³Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 153; Stählin, *GCS*, 200. For more on the beauty of flowers, see 2.10.103 and 2.12.121.

⁶⁴Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 207; Stählin, *GCS*, 242.

⁶⁵Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 274; Stählin, *GCS*, 290.

⁶⁶Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 86; Stählin, *GCS*, 148.

⁶⁷Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 250; Stählin, *GCS*, 273.

in opposition to the Creator's intentions for the body. He also cautions those who, piercing their ears, "do violence to nature" when "it is only the Word who reveals true beauty", and he warns those who "insult true beauty with the defilements of their sexual pleasures" (3.11.56.4–5).⁶⁸ In another passage, he calls Christians "the living image of God" and warns that they should not crown their heads with wreaths like "dead idols," but rather, they should await the "beautiful crown of flowers that never fade" (2.8.73.2).⁶⁹

As noted earlier, Clement relates idolatry to turning away from Beauty. Laura Nasrallah has shown that Clement uses idol imagery to explain how humans turn from resembling images of wood and stone to resembling again the image of God.⁷⁰ Clement not only likens humankind's rejection of God to idolatry; he also describes humankind's ugly path away from God as a rejection of the Creator and actions unworthy of the image of God. For instance, when women cover their natural beauty with cosmetics, they "insult the Creator of *humankind*, implying that He has not given them the beauty they deserve" (3.2.6.4).⁷¹ Again, while describing the women who are covered with makeup, Clement maintains that if you pull back their covering, you "will not find dwelling within any worthy image of God" (3.2.5.2).⁷² He further uses Creation imagery to ridicule them. Quoting an unknown source, he calls these women "an ape painted up with powder" and, harkening back to the opening chapters of Genesis, he states that a "serpent-seducer has transformed women into harlots" (3.2.5.4).⁷³

⁶⁸Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 244; Stählin, *GCS*, 268.

⁶⁹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 156; Stählin, *GCS*, 202.

⁷⁰Laura Nasrallah, "The Earthen Human, the Breathing Statue: The Sculptor God, Greco-Roman Statuary, and Clement of Alexandria," in *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2–3) and Its Reception History*, ed. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 128–29.

⁷¹Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 204; Stählin, *GCS*, 239.

⁷²Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 203; Stählin, *GCS*, 238.

⁷³Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 203; Stählin, *GCS*, 238. The reader may be tempted to view Clement's verbal chastisement in this passage as especially demeaning of women. But Clement goes on to use the same strong language for men in *Paedagogus* 3.3.15: "Garishness has, in fact, gone so far that not only women are sick from this disease of attachment to frippery, but men, too, have become strongly infected by it. Unless they rid themselves of artificial beautification, they will never become well again" (Wood, 211). If Clement's harsh words were for women only, then he should most certainly be put on trial for the unfair treatment of women. But in my review of Clement, he elevates women as the Apostles do by admonishing them in the same way he does their male counterparts. (See also footnote 29.)

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to formalize Clement's aesthetic around the three passages in the *Paedagogus* where he calls Christ "Beauty." In doing so, I have demonstrated that Clement's aesthetics is centered around Christ as the true Beauty and runs parallel with his Christian ethics. This article has examined the relationship between Clement's Christ-centered aesthetics and image worship, extravagant living, creation, the image of God, Christ's incarnation, and the invitation to Godlikeness. In conclusion, I offer these statements as five essential points of Clement's aesthetics in the *Paedagogus*: (1) Christ is the only true Beauty; (2) True Beauty created a beautiful world and humankind in the image of God; (3) Humans distort and depart from true Beauty when they seek artificial beauty and unnatural lusts indicative of extravagant adornment and excessive living, which is image worship; (4) To redeem his once perfect creation, true Beauty became a human in the incarnation so that humans could become like Christ; and (5) Humans who follow Christ will reflect true Beauty in righteous deeds.