

Clement of Alexandria: Liminal Servant, Proto-Liberation Theologian, and Proto-Feminist (Maybe!)

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Abstract

I argue that Clement is a proto-liberation theologian and a proto-feminist. My argument relies on my reading of Clement, and his prolific use of Greek historians, poets, and dramatists to create dissonance with his written text. I argue that Clement has created a multi-level text, a palimpsest without erasing the previous written texts in the manuscript. Clement teaches intellectual play and irony to his students. Clement creates a New Basileia in his classroom. He prepares his catechumens (students) to walk toward the Divine in their own way. In theological terms, Clement is a negative, apophatic theologian. He is also a contextual theologian, and like Philo and Musonius Rufus, Clement engages with the Roman Empire. Clement attacks the slave trade, the basis of the Roman economy, and depicts the slave as having an interior life. Slaves are not just objects. He uses the plays of Aristophanes and Euripides to challenge the status quo thinking on women.

Keywords

Clement of Alexandria, liberation theology, theologian, feminism

Clement of Alexandria¹ is a teacher, a liminal servant, a proto-Liberation theologian and a proto-feminist. He walks with his wealthy young catechumens, the sons and daughters of powerful Alexandrians, out of a status quo acceptance of Roman ideology—what Bob Marley refers to as ‘mental slavery’—into a new *basileia*, a new kingdom, by means of a new song. This new *basileia* is characterized by freedom.² Clement

teaches his students the art of self-transcendence.³ He opens a new world to them by means of suspicions that he will evoke in them, suspicions that will solidify within them. These suspicions will enable them to separate from Roman ideology, moving into a liminal phase and the accompanying *communitas*, and finally into reincorporation into a new *basileia*. Clement creates a world within his classroom, a world at

¹ Clement of Alexandria was likely born of wealthy parents in Athens in 150 CE. He studied under several teachers around the Mediterranean. At some point in his studies Clement became a Christian. He ended up in Alexandria, studying under Pantaeus, a Christian teacher who ran a Christian catechetical school. After the death of Pantaeus, Clement took over the running of the school. He left Alexandria around 202/203 CE, before the pogrom that we will describe, and moved to Palestine, where he worked until his death around 215 CE (Moreschini and Norelli 2005, 250).

² We will see what freedom means for Clement as we proceed through this essay. “Basileia” is the Greek word for our word kingdom, but without the masculine connotations (Turner 1991). In the early twentieth century, Arnold Van Gennep worked on ritual and change. His book, *Rites of Passage*, translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Coffee (1960), set the stage for what Victor Turner would do in the 1960s. Turner’s notion is that change is difficult and that ritual enables us to make the transition, whether that transitional change is part of a micro developmental change, like the movement from birth to childhood, from health to sickness, from life to death, from freedom to prison, or a crisis macro change, from peace to war and back again, from plague to health, from famine to feast. Turner’s transitional stage, the liminal stage, from *limbus*, threshold or doorway, marks the movement from one structure or stage to the next structure or stage. It is a marginal moment, a moment of uncertainty and potential danger. We can think of the grad ceremonies celebrated by high school students. They often end late at night with all the anxiety around the unknown. What will come next? For Clement’s catechumens, liminality marks their transition from being members of an elite, privileged group in Alexandria to a very uncertain future, a future with lots of potential conflict. Eusebius reminds us of the dangers of such a move. Seven of Clement’s catechumens are killed in the arena. In the case of our catechumens, the movement means an extreme alienation from the Roman ideology. One feature of the liminal stage is what Turner calls *communitas*. *Communitas* is the temporary bonding together of people in a transitional phase. For Turner, there are three parts to the liminal phase: separation from the old ideology or stage, a mid-phase, the liminal phase, and reincorporation into a new ideology or stage. Liminality can be a permanent phase for some: criminals, mental patients who never fit in, comedians who always challenge structures, writers, and revolutionaries, those

who choose the margins and those who have marginalization chosen for them. To step back a bit from this, Pliny in his letter to Trajan writes about his practice of dealing with Christians. He writes, “For the moment this is the line I have taken with all persons brought before me on the charge of being Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution” (1969, 293). Of course, this is the younger Pliny, and in his response to Pliny’s letter, Trajan advocates caution and concern about false accusers. Trajan does agree that if the charges are found to be correct then the person in question should be punished (Pliny 1969, 295). If by punishment we mean execution, then this is not a slap on the wrist. It’s an unforgiving, permanent, intolerant exclusion. Let us take an example of how Victor Turner’s notions of liminality might work in a current political situation. Imagine a young man in the areas of Russia, distant from Moscow, who has just been conscripted to join the Russian invasion of the Ukraine. Until now, the young man has not been affected by the war and is content to accept Putin and the Kremlin’s explanation for the war. Suddenly, he and his peers are in a panic. His parents urge him to leave the country. He does so, with a small backpack and very little money. He is separating from Russian ideology and the constrained security that he has always known. He is in a marginal state, a liminal phase. In the cafes and on the streets in his foreign temporary home, his peers talk about the war. He hears different news reports. Slowly he is being incorporated into a new way of being. He continues to live in a liminal phase, he has no job and no prospects. His parents and his girlfriend are far away. Notice that if we combine Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1981) notions of ethical decision making with Victor Turner’s notions of liminality, that our young man begins his liminal journey at Kohlberg’s stage one, moving out of fear for his own life. As his journey continues, he moves up the ethical decision-making ladder, perhaps even to feeling the pain and fear of the Ukrainians. From the Kremlin’s point of view, he is a deserter and a criminal who can be imprisoned, a permanent stage of liminality in Russia. From a Western point of view, he has experienced transcendence, he is free.

³ For Bernard Lonergan (1978), self-transcendence is any overcoming of ideological barriers or bias, any extension of horizons.

odds with the dominant world.

We can witness Clement's success as a liminal servant by an external witness, Eusebius.

⁴ In book six, chapter one of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius writes this: "But when Severus raised a persecution against the churches, there were illustrious testimonies given by the combatants of religion in all the churches everywhere. They particularly abounded in Alexandria, whilst the heroic wrestlers from Egypt and Thebais were escorted thither as to a mighty theatre of God, where, by their invincible patience under various tortures and modes of death, they were adorned with crowns from heaven. Among these was Leonides, said to be the father of Origen, who was beheaded, and left his son behind yet very young" (1976, 217). Eusebius writes that Origen was 17 when his father was martyred (1976, 219). His father's property had been turned over to the imperial treasury, and his family were left in difficult circumstances. But Eusebius is quite taken with the life and work of Origen. He writes: "the life of Origen, indeed, appears to me worthy of being recorded, even from his tender infancy (Eusebius 1976, 219). Eusebius places the events of 202 CE in Alexandria in this way. He writes: "in the tenth year of the reign of Severus, when Alexandria and the rest of Egypt was under the government of his viceroy Laetus, and the churches were under the episcopal administration of Demetrius, the successor of Julian, that the kindled flame of persecution blazed forth mightily, and thousands were crowned with martyrdom" (Eusebius 1976, 218). He writes, "It was then, too, that the love of martyrdom so powerfully seized the soul of Origen, though yet an almost infant boy" (Eusebius 1976, 218). Clement was not so seized, and he fled Alexandria, leaving his property behind, and going to Cappadocia in eastern Turkey where he died by the year 215 CE (Fanning 2001, 24). Eusebius chooses to focus his account on the Severan persecution on Origen, who, himself, never refers to Clement, as his presumed teacher and former head of the catechetical school that he will take over. Eusebius writes, "...There was no one at Alexandria that applied himself to give instruction in the principles of the faith, but all driven away by the threatening aspect of persecution, some of the Gentiles came to him (Origen) with a mind to hear the word of God" (Eusebius 1976, 220). In chapter four, Eusebius names the catechumens who were martyred in Alexandria in 202 CE: "of these, then, the first was that Plutarch, mentioned above, at whose martyrdom when led away to die, the same Origen of whom we are now speaking, being present with him to the last of his life, was nearly slain by his countrymen, as if he were the cause of his death. But the providence of God preserved him likewise then. But after Plutarch, the second of Origen's disciples that was selected, was Severus, who presented in the fire, a proof of that unshaken faith which he had received. The third that appeared as a martyr from the same school, was Heraclides; and the fourth after him, was Heron: both of these were beheaded. Besides these, the fifth of this school that was announced a champion for religion, was another Severus, who, after a long series of tortures, is

said to have been beheaded. Of women, also, Herais, who was yet a catechumen, and, as Origen himself expressed it, after receiving her baptism by fire, departed this life. But among these, Basilides must be numbered the seventh; he who led the celebrated Potamiaena to execution" (Eusebius 1976, 225). Eusebius writes that because of Potamiaena's faith, "... many others, also, of those at Alexandria, are recorded as having promptly attached themselves to the doctrine of Christ in these times" (1976, 225). Eusebius ends this section in chapter six where he refers to Clement: "in the first book that he wrote, called *Stromata*, gives us a chronological deduction of events down to the death of Commodus. So that it is evident these works were written in the reign of Severus, whose times we are recording" (1976, 225). This is where our story ends. My thesis is that these martyrdoms were not passive resistance, but active resistance, aided by the way Clement taught his catechumens, an active resistance that was threatening to the Roman Empire. So let us begin our examination of one stage of their preparation, the *Paedagogus*, an ethical preparation, a series of lectures and classes, that Clement presents to the catechumens. (Clement does refer to the spectacles near the end of the *Paedagogus*, at the end of chapter 11 of book three, before he enters final prayers and blessings. He tells the catechumens not to go to spectacles because the spectacles are against the "just". (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* translate this phrase as referring to Christ, the Just One. Simon P. Wood prefers the "just," meaning Christian believers.) Clement refers to the spectacles as "the seat of plagues," a reference from Psalm one, verse one. Is Clement making an ironic reference here to spectacles and the deaths of Christians? On the face of it, no. There is a lot of talk about avoiding spectacles in general, but if there was any inkling that there were tensions in the Alexandrian community currently, it is possible, considering how often Clement speaks and writes with an ironic purpose.) The dates for these martyrdoms can be confidently asserted based on the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity in Carthage, in March 203 CE, during the birthday celebration for the son of Septimius Severus, Geta. Septimius Severus has been given a bad name by Eusebius. Recent historians suggest that the events in 202/203 CE in Alexandria, were a local persecution, perhaps not unlike the 38 CE attack on Jews in Alexandria. Of course, we can see that Eusebius, who entitled the final chapter of his *Ecclesiastical History*, "The Book of Martyrs," has claimed in his narrative that the Church was built on the blood of martyrs. Recent research however has found that generally Rome was tolerant of varieties of religious worship, and that local persecution, probably based on jealousy, was the origin and basis of persecution. William Tabbernee writes that the supposed decree that Eusebius refers to, the decree that forbids Christians from practicing their faith has only one dubious source, the *Augustan History*. He contends that Tertullian approved of Septimius Severus, saying that

become engaged. They persevere. They enter a permanent liminal state as far as the Romans are concerned. And there is nothing passive about their deaths in the colosseum, their deaths are active protests against the Roman system. So, yes, Clement is a proto-liberation theologian.⁵

Given our long Christian history since before Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, to the present scandals in the Church, it is difficult to read Christian writings without cynicism. Boccaccio and Chaucer both present clerics who fleece their simple flocks. I propose to read Clement with the unrecorded questions, queries, quibbles, concerns and conversations with his catechumens, as the reverse of our modern expectations. Clement is cynical and condemning of the lifestyles and values of the elite aristocrats of Alexandria and the Roman Empire. He does not fleece his flock, he educates his catechumens, and he confronts the Empire. He is one of the good guys. At least this is my suspicion, and I hope to demonstrate this in my essay.

Clement builds on his own suspicions about Roman ideology, and not only the brutality and violence used by the Romans to entrench their world view and domination, but the injustice of a system based on slave labour and passes these suspicions on to his catechumens over a series of lectures collected in three volumes, the *Protrepticus*, the *Paedagogus* and the *Stromateis*. We will focus primarily on the *Paedagogus*, but

with one vital reference in the *Protrepticus*, and a few equally vital references in the *Stromateis*.

Clement's three volumes match Victor Turner's three phases of a rite of passage. The *Protrepticus* moves the new believer out of the grip of superstition. Clement shows us his knowledge of Greek traditions, quoting numerous sources, illustrating what he sees as foolish beliefs, separating his catechumens from old ideologies. The *Paedagogus* is the liminal stage, moments of transition from older, now rejected, emptied values, a free space, a place of preparation for entry into the gnostic faith illustrated in the *Stromateis*. This final stage in the rite of passage is a reincorporation into a relationship with the divine that transforms the believer.

How does Clement successfully bring his catechumens along with him in a confrontation with the Roman Empire? My thesis is that Clement's method of concealment and allusion is how he creates engagement with his students. In the *Stromateis*, Clement writes about concealment, an approach not unlike the parables used by Jesus. Clement is often severe on the surface, telling them how Christians should behave, but underneath Clement alludes to the Greek poets, philosophers, and playwrights. Euripides and Aristophanes offer a dissonant note to his song. The moments of discovery, the uncovering of Clement's allusions, the uncovering of his intent, gives power and energy for the liminal struggles.⁶

he was well disposed to Christians, employed a Christian as his personal physician, and had saved numerous high-born Christians from the mob. (Tabbernee 2007, 182-185). He writes that the pogrom at Carthage was initiated by the local pagan population.

⁵ In this connection I would like to consider some ideas from Courtney J. P. Friesen in her book, *Reading Dionysus: Euripides' Bacchae and the Cultural Contestation of Greeks, Jews, Romans and Christians* (2015). In chapter eight of this book, entitled, "Clement on Pleasure and Dying with Euripides' Bacchae," Friesen makes a connection between martyrdom and protest. She writes: "for Christians too, willing death was a culminating marker of virtue, not least because Jesus had likewise offered himself. Martyrdom, therefore, becomes a means both of imitating Christ, and resisting the ultimate tyranny, the demonic powers of which Rome was

merely a temporal representative" (Friesen 2015, 118). The word martyr in Greek means witness. Friesen looks at this witness as a protest, a movement challenging the injustice of the current world regime. As we noted earlier, *The Bacchae* presents Dionysus as replacing the current regime with a new, joyful god. *The Bacchae* comes from outside the city, a static place, bringing life-giving energy from the lonely, wild, mountainous, liminal places.

⁶ In the *Stromateis*, Clement writes, "For many reasons, then, scriptures hide the sense. First, that we may become inquisitive, and be ever on the watch for the discovery of the words of salvation. Then it was suitable for all to understand, so that they might not receive harm in consequence of taking in another sense the things declared for salvation by the Holy Spirit. Wherefore the holy mysteries of the prophecies are veiled in the parables—preserved for chosen men, selected to

Of course, like any good teacher, Clement has many tools in his toolbox. He identifies with what they love. Like them, Clement loves and is full of pride for the great Greek texts: Euripides, Sophocles, and Aristophanes, Hesiod and Homer, Thucydides and Herodotus, and Plato, and even an almost contemporary philosophical hero, Musonius Rufus. As we will see, Clement interprets and reinterprets some of these texts. He understands them deeply. Clement knows and recites in different catalogues in the *Paedagogus* consumer items that wealthy young Alexandrians take delight in. He knows the different types of wine, sauces, jewellery, fish, fruit, and where they can be found all around the Mediterranean. He acknowledges that like them, he loves wine, but recommends buying local, drinking in moderation and later in the day after his lectures. Clement teases them, challenges, and rages at

them. In all these ways he creates commitment, and *communitas*.

Until recently, Clement has been interpreted as a rather innocuous figure, "...a contemplative, writing in a noncontroversial style" (Clement of Alexandria 1954, xii). I argue, however, that Clement challenges not only the Alexandrian practice of child exposure, as Justin Martyr did before him, but also slavery as an institution, the very basis of the Roman economy.⁷ Clement is neither gentle nor noncontroversial when he attacks child exposure, and the subsequent actions of fathers who sleep with male or female children, sold into sexual slavery, the same children who were previously exposed by their fathers (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 276). Clement goes to the root of the problem. He calls it luxury. In chapter three of book three, Clement writes, "Luxury has deranged all things; it has

knowledge in consequence of their faith; for the style of the scriptures is parabolic. For He was clothed with all virtue; and it was His aim to lead man, the foster-child of the world, up to the objects of intellect, and to the most essential truths by knowledge, from one world to another" (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 509). Allegory, metaphor, parable, all indirect speech, and humour, are all examples of both concealment and revelation. One purpose of concealment for Clement in his time and place is to avoid persecution by the Romans and to keep the catechetical school open. Is this like Jean Paul Sartre's play *Les Mouches* performed in Paris in 1943 during the Nazi occupation, his "theatre of resistance"? Sartre rewrote Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and waited to see how Parisians in the know and Nazis in the dark would read the play differently. Sartre intended to both reveal and conceal. In his book, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, David Dawson writes in his concluding remarks, "although allegorical readers of scripture in ancient Alexandria sought to convince their audiences that they were interpreting the text itself, they were actually seeking to revise their culture through their allegorical readings" (1992, 235). In the same book, Dawson uses the following quotation from Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* in an epigraph to the same closing chapter: "The Bible's claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer's, it is tyrannical-it excludes all other claims. The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality-it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy" (Auerbach 1968, 14). This is fascinating. *This means that Clement's hermeneutical method is not only an interpretation of scripture, but an interpretation and ultimately a rejection of the current world!* David Dawson returns to Erich Auerbach in his later book, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (2001),

where he dedicates two chapters to Auerbach. Figural reading is a recent notion that allegory and typology are two different but basically similar hermeneutical approaches. Clement uses typology as well as allegory. Clement uses both allegory and typology in book one, chapter five which we will examine in more detail later. A Greek philosopher, like a Hebrew prophet, are types of Christ, the Logos and archetype. His praise of the Greek philosophers as possessing types of the divine truth are fully expressed in the Logos. Typology and allegory are ways of interpreting scripture that are of a higher nature than simple literal interpretation. Philo, which we will refer to later in this essay, borrows allegory from the Greeks. Clement, like Philo, is immersed in Greek writing and interpretation. This is his main stated purpose in writing his theology. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. I-X (Kittel 1964-1976). Erich Auerbach (1968) is very worth reading here. He compares the Odysseus of Homer with the Abraham of Genesis, and Petronius' Fortunata with the New Testament's Peter. Auerbach's point is that the Hebrew and early Christian writings focus on complexity and depth in the characters, even the poor, unlike the surface readings of the Greek and Roman writings.

⁷ Boswell's (1988) book begins by referencing Clement and Justin Martyr, who both attack the custom of child abandonment or exposure. Infants who were exposed on the trash heaps of African and European cities were often rescued and raised to be slaves or prostitutes. The notion is that fathers who exposed their own infants might later sleep with their own children who were raised as prostitutes.

disgraced man” (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 276). What Clement means is that luxury has separated the rich from everyone else who supports their luxury. I argue that this is Clement tearing down the Roman economic system of slavery.

Tearing down is a good place for us to start with Clement, and we start at the very beginning of the *Protrepticus*, in the very first verse. At the beginning of his first volume, the *Protrepticus*, Clement quotes from Euripides’ play, *Rhesus* (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 171). He refers to Amphion and Arian, minstrels, whose musical skills enable the one to lure a fish, and the other to build the walls of Thebes. Move forward to the end of the *Protrepticus*, in chapter 12, and we see Clement refer back to his initial reference, except in this case, instead of building a city with a song, Clement quotes another play by Euripides, the *Bacchae*, in which the walls of a city are torn down by a song. This is Clement’s new song, it is what he is offering to his catechumens, and as we can see, it sets Clement and his catechumens up against the Roman Empire (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 205). Clement writes in this last chapter, “let us then avoid custom as we would a dangerous headland, or the threatening Charybdis, or the mythic sirens. It chokes man [*sic*], turns him away from truth, leads him away from life: custom is a snare, a gulf, a pit, a mischievous winnowing fan” (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 205).⁸ Here he quotes Homer, telling his catechumens that they must tie themselves to the mast of their ship of life.

This is where Clement begins with the liminal journey on which he is leading his catechumens. And where does he take them? To

a place of freedom. And this place of freedom? In book four of the *Stromateis*, Clement writes, “...since, in the case of people who are setting out on a road with which they are unacquainted, it is sufficient merely to point out the direction. After this they must walk and find out the rest for themselves” (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 410).

We have seen the starting point of this journey, and the ending point, the separation and the reincorporation, let us now look briefly at the midpoint, the liminal phase, the lonely marginal state where decisions are made. We will look at the highpoint of the midpoint, the climax and the rapid denouement. This highpoint is where we see Clement get angry with a quivering rage over the sexual excesses he sees in the practices of the wealthy men and women of Alexandria in the 190’s CE. This quivering rage culminates in book three, chapter three of the *Paedagogus*, where he says, “These wretched men do not realize that furtive indulgence in intercourse often creates tragedy; a father not recognizing the child he had exiled by exposure, may have frequent relations with a son turned catamite, or a daughter become a harlot, and the freedom with such license, is indulged may lead fathers into becoming husbands of their children” (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 276). Clement goes on to describe the behaviour of wives who abandon their infants but cherish and pamper their pets.

But Clement is not just challenging private behaviour here. He is also challenging public behaviour and institutions. He writes, “These things your wise laws allow, people may sin legally; and the execrable indulgence in pleasure they call a thing indifferent...Such was predicted of old, and the result is notorious: the whole earth

⁸ De Jauregui (2010) writes that one of the most important ancient literary witnesses to the Greek mysteries, and to the Orphic cults, is the *Protrepticus* of Clement of Alexandria. After comparing the song of Christ to that of Orpheus in the exordium of the work, Clement dedicates substantial paragraphs (2.12-22) to the refutation of the pagan mysteries of which Orpheus is poet and founder, especially those of Dionysus and Demeter, as the basis for his exhortation later in the peroration to follow the true mysteries of the Logos. Because of information offered by Eusebius (PE 2.22.64) when he transcribed the text 150 years later, the traditional idea has been that Clement knew the mysteries from personal experience prior to his

conversion. However, Eusebius alleges this direct knowledge to give greater authority to Clement’s description. De Jauregui continues, “... his description comes from a written source” (2010, 147). My reading is that Clement has used *The Bacchae* by Euripides as his source. De Jauregui (2010) writes that the Orphic mysteries and Christianity had four elements in common: 1) The survival of the soul after death; 2) The devaluing of this vale of tears; 3) Humans live in an original state of impurity but can become pure; 4) Individual and intimate relations with the divine.

has now become full of fornication and wickedness” (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 277).

In the same chapter, Clement refers favourably to the barbarians, sounding like Thucydides. He writes, “Of the nations, the Celts and Scythians wear their hair long, but do not deck themselves. Both these barbarian races hate luxury...I approve the simplicity of the barbarians: loving an unencumbered life, the barbarians have abandoned luxury. Such the Lord calls us to be—naked of finery, naked of vanity, wrenched from our sins, bearing only the wood of life, aiming only at salvation” (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 277).

This is Clement’s rallying cry. The *Paedagogus* is at its emotional, motivational peak. Clement is tying his cry to Greek, Roman and barbarian traditions, against the current laws and customs of his contemporary world. The rebellion of his catechumens is not only based on a new song, but on the ancient, authentic songs of their forefathers and foremothers. Clement believes after all, that the divine reaches out and has always reached out to all, everywhere. Their protests put them in an ancient and ever new tradition. We are near the end of Clement’s liminal teaching here.

There is a subtle surprise here, yet more evidence that scholars have missed Clement’s elegant argumentation. Immediately after Clement’s, “I forget myself,” we read a consumer’s list of slaves necessary for a banquet:

...I must now revert and must find fault with having large numbers of domestics. For, avoiding work with their own hands and serving themselves, men have recourse to servants, purchasing a great crowd of fine cooks, and people to lay out table, and of others to divide the meat skillfully into pieces. And the staff of servants is separated into many divisions; some labour for their

gluttony, carvers and seasoners, and the compouncers and makers of sweetmeats, and honey-cakes, and custards; others are occupied with their too numerous clothes; others guard the gold like griffins; others keep the silver, and wipe the cups, and make ready what is needed to furnish the festive table; others rub down the horses; and a crowd of cup-bearers exert themselves in their service, and herds of beautiful boys, like cattle, from whom they milk away their beauty. (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 278)

The rage is palpable here and remember that the word ‘rage’ is the first word of Homer’s *Iliad* (2011, 1). A modern screenwriter writing an updated *Satyricon* could quote Clement directly here, laying out a banquet scene worthy of Federico Fellini. Clement writes, “Take away, then, directly the ornaments from women, and domestics from masters, and you will find masters in no respect different from bought slaves in step, or look, or voice, so like are they to their slaves. But they differ in that they are feeble than their slaves, and have a more sickly upbringing” (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 280).

This is the turning point of Clement’s presentation. He wants his catechumens to become suspicious of the Roman ideology. He wants them to see the humanity of the slaves. And he offers them a solution to their problem. He writes in chapter 10, referring to “...the well-known Pittacus, king of Miletus, (who) practiced the laborious exercise of turning the mill. It is respectable for a man to draw water for himself, and to cut billets of wood which he is to use himself. Jacob fed the sheep of Laban that were left in his charge” (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 283-4). Clement has gone back to the personal, draw your own water and cut your own wood.⁹

Clement is a liminal servant and a proto-liberation theologian.¹⁰ He’s one of the good

⁹ Ironically, in the *Gospel of Thomas* we read, “Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift the stone, you will find me there” (Meyer 2008, 149).

¹⁰ For a sampling of liberation theologians see: Boff (1997); Bonino (1983); Cone (2008); Freire (2014); Guevara (1968, 2004); Gutierrez (1973); Miranda (1974);

Moltmann (1990); Segundo (1982); Torres (1969). My approach to Clement is to read him according to the hermeneutic circle of Juan Luis Segundo. In his book, *The Liberation of Theology*, Segundo explains the hermeneutic circle and states that the best exponent that he has seen of the hermeneutic circle is James Cone in his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Segundo applies

ones. As for whether Clement is a proto-feminist, we can say that he is in need of his own liminal servant. In chapter four of the *Paedagogus*, the shortest chapter of the *Paedagogus*, early in his presentation to his catechumens, and therefore opening up the possibility to discuss and debate, setting a tone for his whole presentation, Clement quotes Musonius Rufus. He writes that women and men have the same virtues and the same need and right to education (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 211). Certainly a good starting point for Clement, but he seems to have forgotten his comments in chapter four by book two, chapter seven, when he writes that the special virtue for women is silence (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 253). In book three, chapter ten, when writing about exercise for men and women, Clement writes that women should be ready to reach a drink to her husband when he is thirsty (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 283). He also writes in that chapter that women should always be ready to work hard, reaching out as well to the poor and

beggars (Roberts and Donaldson 2012, 283).¹¹

Clement is a vital, exciting teacher who engages his catechumens, wealthy, educated young men and women in Alexandria, a world centre for trade and learning. Clement is at the centre of the ancient world, and it is from here that he challenges that world, using both the best songs and singers of ancient cultures, Greek, Hebrew and barbarian, with a newer, more recent song and singer, Jesus Christ from Palestine. Clement wants to dismantle a system that permits luxury, a system that separates men and women, the rich and poor, from each other. Clement is teaching his catechumens a path of transcendence, a way forward, where each will walk in their own way. Unfortunately, in regard to women, Clement has offered a good starting point—men and women have the same virtue and the same need to educate and train that virtue—but he wanders back into older customs, a place where women bring their men a beer at the end of thirsty day.¹²

the hermeneutic circle to our reading of the Biblical text. He writes: ...two preconditions must be met if we are to have a hermeneutic circle in theology. The first precondition is that the question rising out of the present be rich enough, general enough, and basic enough, to force us to change our customary conceptions of life, death, knowledge, society, politics, and the world in general. Only a change of this sort, or at least a pervasive suspicion about our ideas and value judgments concerning those things, will enable us to reach the theological level and force theology to come back down to reality and ask itself new and decisive questions. [...] The second precondition is intimately bound up with the first. If theology somehow assumes that it can respond to new questions without changing its customary interpretation of the scriptures, that immediately terminates the hermeneutic circle. Moreover, if our interpretation of scripture does not change along with the problems, then the latter will go unanswered; or worse, they will receive old, conservative, unserviceable answers. Segundo presents the four stages of the hermeneutic circle succinctly: firstly, there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. Secondly, there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole theological superstructure in general and to theology in general. Thirdly, there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is to suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. Fourthly, we have our new

hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountain-head of our faith (i.e.: scripture) with the new elements at our disposal. Clement's love of scripture extends to the ancient Greek writers like Euripides and Aristophanes, Homer, Hesiod, Sophocles and Aeschylus, who he quotes from throughout his writing. Clement uses all these sources to critique the Roman culture in which he lives.

¹¹ Martha Nussbaum has a lovely chapter on Musonius Rufus where she addresses the question whether Musonius Rufus was a feminist. Her conclusion is that he is not ready for prime time (Nussbaum and Sihvola 2002, 298-313.)

¹² This is almost too stereotypical for words. It reminds me of the Rat Pack in the late 1950's and early to mid 1960's, and almost every male comic ever since. It reminds me of my father's teasing words to my mother. Unless Clement is doing his best Norm MacDonald, this cannot be taken ironically, or can it? Clement does use irony throughout his text. Is Clement baiting his catechumens? It's fun to think about. But this a topic for another paper. Do Clement's catechumens act as liminal servants here? Do they lead him back to the good path? Otherwise, we can say that Clement is a not ready for prime-time feminist, or even a not quite ready proto-feminist.

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My name is Jim Ryan. I am a graduate student in the Interdisciplinary Program at York University, focussing on history, education and feminism. I am 70 years old, have spent 30 years teaching students in high schools in Brampton, and am married, with two children, now in their 20's. Like Clement, I am a bibliophile. I play banjo and guitar for young children and ride my bike on the rail trails around Georgetown. When I was a student in the 1970's and 1980's at the University of Toronto, I was fascinated by the feminists and liberation theologians that were teaching and publishing at that time. I spent my 30 years as a teacher in high schools thinking about the questions raised by those feminists and liberation theologians.