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Clement of Alexandria,
The Instructor 1.1–1.4, 13

Translated by Bradley K. Storin

INTRODUCTION

Little is known about the life of Titus Flavius Clemens Alexandrinus, or as he is commonly called, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215). We can state with relative certainty that he was born in Athens and that he studied philosophy with several teachers in the eastern Mediterranean before settling in Alexandria as a student of the Sicilian philosopher Pantaenus. After Pantaenus's death between 195 and 200, Clement assumed teaching responsibilities. His school was probably not affiliated with the ecclesiastical organization of the Alexandrian bishop Demetrius, but rather similar to that of other independent philosophical schools in the first and second centuries: it consisted of a group of advanced students who gathered around a charismatic and erudite intellectual. A regional persecution of Christians compelled Clement to leave Alexandria in 203; he may have retired to Cappadocia.

Several surviving texts reveal how Clement articulated his impressive philosophical eclecticism. The three most important are *An Exhortation to the Greeks*, a call to readers educated in classical literature to convert to Clement's brand of philosophical Christianity; *The Instructor*, an ethical treatise consisting of three books that presents God's Word (in Greek, *logos*) along the lines of Stoic "reason" (also *logos*) and offers highly specific guidelines for living a life in accord with the Word/reason; and *Miscellanies*, a collection of theological essays that show deep engagement with philosophers from the pre-Socratic, Platonist, Peripatetic, Stoic, Jewish, and burgeoning Christian traditions. In each of these three works, God's Word takes on a role that corresponds to the text's aim. In this selection from *The Instructor*, Clement understands the Word as an instructor of children (that is to say, new Christians) who guides them to live a life worthy of

PART I: EDUCATION

God. This life consists of reining in negative emotions of the soul (commonly called the passions in philosophical discourse) under the control of the Word (or reason). For Clement, disciplining the body will aid the Christian in disciplining her soul, which is why he gives detailed instructions on proper Christian conduct, decorum, and relationships in the second and third books of *The Instructor*. Only once the passions are subjected to the authority of the Word (or reason) can the Christian embark upon an advanced course of philosophical study and contemplation. The critical Greek edition from which this translation is made is Miroslav Markovich's *Clementis Alexandrini Paedagogus*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 2–8, 62–64.

TRANSLATION

Chapter 1: What the Instructor Promises

1, 1. The groundwork of truth, you children, has been assembled¹ within ourselves as the indestructible bedrock of knowledge of the great God's holy temple. It is the noble incitement laid in our intellectual area and a craving for eternal life that comes through blessed obedience.

In any human being, mind you, there are these three features: habits, actions, and passions.² As a guide to godliness, the inciting discourse³ pertains to [a person's] habits. It is the discourse that underlies the edifice of faith like a ship's keel. Because of it, we are rejuvenated for salvation: we are ebullient, we disown our former convictions, and we sing along with the hymning prophecy, "How good is God to Israel, to those who are upright in heart!"⁴ 2. The prescriptive discourse⁵ has charge over all actions, whereas the encouraging discourse⁶ treats the passions. All three discourses are one, the self-same Word⁷ who snatches a person away from his natural, worldly routine and trains him for the unique salvation of faith in God.

3. So when our heavenly guide, the Word, begins to summon us to salvation, he takes the name "inciting" (properly speaking, this type of discourse, deriving the name of its whole from the part, is "stimulating"; the inciting type of discourse constitutes the whole of godliness since it engenders in

1 Pindar, *Fragment* 194. 2 See Aristotle, *Poetics* 1.1447a28.

3 In Greek, *ho protreptikos*. 4 Ps 72(73):1. 5 In Greek, *ho hypothetikos*.

6 In Greek, *ho paramythētikos*.

7 Clement here relies on a wordplay: the Greek *logos* denotes both "discourse" and "Word."

Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*

the kindred mind a craving for life now and life to come). 4. Since he is simultaneously both therapeutic and prescriptive, the Word now follows himself and exhorts the person who has been incited and undertakes his primary task of curing the passions within us. We should call him by the one appropriate title, our Instructor. He is a practical⁸ Instructor, not a theoretical one, in that his goal is to improve the soul, not to educate it, and to guide it in a life of temperance, not one of knowledge.

2, 1. Yet this very Word is also a teaching discourse,⁹ just not now. For the discourse that gives clarity and enlightenment in its doctrines is a teaching discourse. But being concerned with practice, the Instructor begins by inciting us to an appropriate attitude toward our character formation, and then summons us to the performance of our duties by issuing pure precepts and showing us, who come later, examples of those who previously went astray. 2. Both are most beneficial. The former, the exhorting kind, is beneficial for obedience while the latter in turn takes the two sides of the example in a way that corresponds to the previous pairing, so that we may imitate what we accept as the example's good part and avoid what we reject as its bad part.

3, 1. Treating the passions, then, is the next step, as the Instructor fortifies our souls with the examples' encouragement and guides the infirm toward the full knowledge of the truth with benevolent precepts, like soothing drugs.¹⁰ Health, though, is hardly the same thing as knowledge; one is the product of study and the other of treatment. 2. A person still sick from a previous illness can't master any subject of instruction until he regains complete health, for each guideline is not always expressed to students in the same way as it is to the infirm. To the former, guidelines are geared toward knowledge and, to the latter, toward treatment. 3. Then, just as those who have sick bodies need a physician, so too do those who have enervated souls need an Instructor so that our passions may be healed, and only then will he lead us to the Teacher who makes the pure soul ready for an aptitude in knowledge and able to receive the Word's revelation. Trying to gradually make us perfect for salvation, the entirely benevolent Word uses an appropriate and noble plan for effective training by first exhorting, then instructing, and finally teaching.

8 Reading *praktikos* instead of *proaktikos* in the Greek.

9 In Greek, *didaskalikos*. A *didaskalos* was a teacher of advanced students, whereas the instructor (*paidagōgos*) taught beginners.

10 *Iliad* 4.218.

PART I: EDUCATION

Chapter 2: That the Instructor Stands By Us Because of Our Sins

4. 1. Our Instructor, you children, is similar to God his Father, whose Son he is: sinless, blameless, without passions in his soul, undefiled God in human form, a servant to the paternal will, the Word God, the one who is in the Father,¹¹ the one who is on the Father's right side,¹² and God in the form [of God].¹³ 2. To us, he is the spotless image¹⁴ to whom we should try with all our might to assimilate our soul,¹⁵ even though he is completely free of human passions (because he alone is sinless, he is therefore the sole judge). For our part, let us try as best we can to sin as little as possible,¹⁶ for liberation from the passions and illnesses is of the utmost importance, followed by preventing a decline into a routine of sins.

3. The highest achievement, then, is not sinning at all in any way, a condition that, we assert, belongs to God. The second highest achievement is never intentionally partaking of injustices, which is a feature of the sage. The third highest is keeping oneself from ever falling into any number of accidental injustices, a characteristic of those who have been instructed well.¹⁷ In last place, let us rank the ability to linger in sins for only a brief time, for even this is salvific for those summoned to renew the struggle for repentance.

5. 1. By my lights, the Instructor rightly says through Moses, "If someone suddenly dies near [a Nazarite], his consecrated head is immediately defiled, and it should be shaved."¹⁸ By "suddenly dies" he means involuntary sin, and he claims that it defiles the soul. For this reason he swiftly proposes the treatment by counseling that the head be immediately shaved and exhorting those whose mind has a shadow cast over it to depilate the hair of ignorance so that naked mind (this is enthroned within one's head), shorn of its shaggy material (that is, vice), may return to its race toward repentance. 2. Next, he adds a few more words, saying, "[A Nazarite's] earlier days are irrational,"¹⁹ by which he means that sins are declared to be things that have not occurred in accordance with reason. He says "suddenly" to mean involuntarily, and "irrational" to mean an act of sin. For

¹¹ Jn 14:11. ¹² Acts 7:55. ¹³ Phil 2:6. ¹⁴ Ws 7:26.

¹⁵ The goal of the virtuous life in many ancient philosophical traditions. See, e.g., Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b1; Epictetus, *Discourse* 2.14.12.

¹⁶ See Epictetus, *Discourse* 4.12.19.

¹⁷ Philo, *On Agriculture* 178, also distinguishes between intentional and unintentional sins.

¹⁸ Nm 6:9.

¹⁹ Nm 6:12. The biblical text gives further context: "[A Nazarite's] earlier days are irrational [i.e. invalidated], because the head of his vow has been defiled."

Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*

this reason, the Word²⁰ as Instructor has taken charge to prevent irrational sinning. 3. But consider the following statement from scripture: “On this account, the Lord says these things.”²¹ In the subsequent passage he shows his condemnation of a past sinful action, whereupon his just judgment follows, and, as if to say, “Had you not sinned, he would not have made these threats,” he makes it perfectly plain through the prophets, “On this account, the Lord speaks like this,”²² and, “Because you haven’t listened to these words, on this account the Lord says this,”²³ and, “On this account, behold! The Lord is speaking.”²⁴ The prophetic statement comes about “on this account”: on account of obedience, that we may be saved, and on account of disobedience, that we may be trained.

6, 1. Our Instructor, then, is the Word²⁵ who treats the soul’s unnatural passions with exhortations. For aid in the case of bodily diseases is properly called “medical,” a skill taught by human wisdom.²⁶ But the Father’s Word is the only healing physician for human illnesses²⁷ and holy charmer to an ailing soul. “My God,” he says, “save your slave, the one who puts his hope in you! Lord, have mercy on me, since I will cry out to you all day long!”²⁸ 2. For according to Democritus, “the medical skill treats bodily disease, but wisdom separates the soul from the passions.”²⁹ The good Instructor – Wisdom, the Word of the Father, the Craftsman of humankind – cares for all his handiwork, and humanity’s all-healing physician³⁰ treats both body and soul. 3. To the paralyzed man the Savior says, “Get up! Go home, and take the cot on which you were lying!”³¹ Immediately the sick man was made well. To the dead man he said, “Lazarus, come out!”³² The dead man emerged from the ground just as he was before he experienced death, but now with training in the resurrection. 4. Yes and what’s more, he even heals the soul itself with commandments and endowments. Of course, [he heals] with precepts as the occasion arises, but he, being generous with endowments, says to us sinners, “Your sins are forgiven.”³³ With this sentiment, we became his children and received the best and most secure rank from his good arrangement, which, on account of humankind, is engaged first with solar rotations and cycles around earth and heaven, and the rest of the astral

20 Again, Clement plays on the semantic range of *logos*: the Word (*ho logos*) is rational (*logos*), and that which is irrational (*alogos*) is a sin, that is, contrary to the Word.

21 Ez 13:13, 20. 22 Is 30:12. 23 1 Sm 28:18. 24 Jer 7:20.

25 Clement now returns to the theme introduced at 1.1.1.3. 26 See 1 Cor 2:13.

27 See Sophocles, *Women of Trachis* 1208. 28 Ps 85(86):2–3.

29 An otherwise unknown fragment from Democritus, a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher.

30 Callimachus, *Epigram* 46.4. 31 Mt 9:6–7. 32 Jn 11:43. 33 Lk 5:20, 23.

PART I: EDUCATION

cycles, then with humanity itself, on which every effort is spent. His greatest achievement is thought to be this, that he directs a human being's soul to prudence and moderation, integrates beauty and a graceful rhythm into the body, and infuses humanity's actions with rectitude and comportment.

Chapter 3: That the Instructor Is Beneficent

7, 1. As both human and God, the Lord offers every benefit and every service. As God, he forgives our sins; as human, he gradually trains us not to sin. Humanity, then, is understandably dear to God, since it indeed is his handiwork. As for everything else, God has made them by command alone, but he personally manufactured humanity and infused it with a certain quality that only he possesses.³⁴ 2. That which is modeled by him and after him, then, must have been either crafted by him because it was special to God for its own sake or fashioned as special for the sake of something else. 3. Well, if humanity is special for its own sake, then God, being good, loved something good; in this case, there would be something intrinsically attractive in humanity, which would be called God's infusion. But if humanity was special for the sake of other things, God would have had no reason to create it except that, without the existence of humanity, neither could he have been a good craftsman nor could humanity have come to a knowledge of God (for God would not have created the thing for which humanity existed in any other way unless humanity was going to come into existence). God brought to fruition the concealed might that he already possessed – his will – through the external power of creation, taking from humanity the very reason for making humanity.³⁵ He saw what it possessed and what he intended came to exist. For there is nothing that God cannot do.

8, 1. The humanity that God has made, then, is special for its own sake, but what is special for its own sake is akin to the one to whom it is special for its own sake, and to him it is both acceptable and worthy of love. But wouldn't someone love that which is worthy of its love? That humanity is worthy of love has been confirmed; consequently, God loves humanity. 2. For how could it not be loved, given that it was the reason for which the only-begotten Word of faith is dispatched from the Father's

³⁴ See Gn 2:7.

³⁵ The Greek is awkward here. The phrase literally reads, "taking from a human being that which he has made a human being" (*labōn para anthrōpou ton pepoiēken anthrōpon*).

Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*

bosom?³⁶ That he is the faith in superabundance, the Lord himself plainly acknowledges and states, “The Father himself loves you because you have loved me,”³⁷ and again he says, “And you adored them just as you adored me.”³⁸ 3. Consequently, what the Instructor wants and what he promises, as well as his attitude in deed and word, advising what one must do and forbidding the opposite,³⁹ is already somewhat clear. It is plain, then, that the other mode of discourse – the teaching discourse – is subtle and spiritual, clings to precision, and involves higher vision; it goes beyond our current focus.

9, 1. It is our duty to return love to the one who lovingly guides us in the best life, to live by the edicts of his resolution, and to perform the Instructor’s works in accordance with our likeness to him, not only by executing his orders or observing his prohibitions but also by turning away from some examples and imitating others as much as we can, so that the phrase “according to image and according to likeness”⁴⁰ may be fulfilled. 2. Since we wander in a deep darkness, we require an infallible and exact guide in life. The best guide is not a blind person leading the blind into the pit, as the scripture says,⁴¹ but the Word who sees keenly and who sees clearly⁴² what lies in our hearts.⁴³ 3. Accordingly, just as that which does not illuminate is not light, and that which does not cause motion is not a mover, and that which does not love is not loving, neither is something good that is unprofitable and does not lead us to salvation. 4. Let us, then, love the commandments by doing the works of the Lord (for even the Word itself, when it visibly became flesh,⁴⁴ displayed the same virtue, which is simultaneously practical and theoretical⁴⁵) and, understanding that the Word is in fact our Law, let us realize that his commandments and counsels are concise and condensed paths to eternity. For the prescriptions are full of persuasion rather than fear.

Chapter 4: That the Word Is Instructor for Men and Women in Equal Measure

10, 1. For this reason, let us accordingly surrender ourselves to the Lord, welcoming noble obedience more and more, holding fast to the firmest of ropes – faith in him – and recognizing that virtue is the same for a man and

36 Jn 1:18. 37 Jn 16:27. 38 Jn 17:23.

39 See *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 3.314, 326; Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham* 130; Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.4.

40 Gn 1:26. 41 See Mt 15:14. 42 See Plato, *Laws* 7.809a.

43 See Jer 17:10; Rom 8:27. 44 Jn 1:14.

45 See Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 1.57; Musonius Rufus, *Discourse* 6.

PART I: EDUCATION

a woman. 2. For if there is one God for both of them, so too is there one Instructor of both. There is one church, one temperance, and one reverence. They share food, and marriage is a union. Respiration, sight, hearing, knowledge, hope, obedience, and love – all these are similar for both. For those whose life is shared, so too is their grace shared, their salvation shared, and their virtue and training shared. 3. For he says, “In this age, they marry and are given to marriage” (in fact, only in this age is the female distinguished from the male) “but not in the age to come,”⁴⁶ where the advantages of this shared and holy life of union do not belong to male and female, but are reserved for any human being who has separated himself or herself from the desire that divided it in two.⁴⁷

II, 1. Therefore, the common term for men and women is “human being.” For this reason, I think that the Athenians used the term “child”⁴⁸ to jointly designate not only the male but also the female, if the comic poet Menander in his *Rhapizomenē* strikes anyone as trustworthy when he states, “My little daughter”; for, by nature, the child is really quite beneficent.⁴⁹

In fact, for simplicity’s sake, “lambs” is a common designation for any male or female living thing. “The Lord is our shepherd”⁵⁰ forever, amen. “Sheep (or anything else at all, for that matter) should not live without a shepherd, and children should not live without the Instructor, or servants without their master.”⁵¹

Chapter 13: That as Right Action Arises in Accord with Right Reason, So Too Conversely Is Sin Contrary to Reason

IOI, 1. This is what sin is: everything contrary to right reason. For example, the philosophers⁵² claim that the principal passions are divided like this: desire is an appetite that disobeys reason, fear is an aversion that disobeys reason, pleasure is an elation of the soul that disobeys reason, and grief is a contraction of the soul that disobeys reason. If, consequently, disobedience

⁴⁶ Lk 20:34–35.

⁴⁷ The idea seems to be that desire (*epithymia*) split the original, androgynous human being into male and female. Divorcing oneself from desire, then, is the means by which one recovers the primal androgyny.

⁴⁸ In Greek, “child” (*paidarion*) is a neuter noun (it is not gendered), in contradistinction to “son” (*huios*), a masculine noun, and “daughter” (*thugatēr*), a feminine noun.

⁴⁹ Menander, *Fragment* 361. ⁵⁰ Ps 23:1. ⁵¹ Plato, *Laws* 7.808d.

⁵² The following taxonomy of the soul’s passions closely mirrors that of the Stoic philosophers. See for instance, Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 7.111; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.11–4.14; Pseudo-Andronicus, *On the Passions* 1–5.

Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*

to reason is the generative cause of sin, how isn't it necessary that obedience to the Word,⁵³ which we of course call faith, is the productive cause of what is called "right action"?⁵⁴ 2. For indeed virtue itself is a disposition of the soul in harmony with reason throughout the whole of one's life. Above all, as the most important point, they define philosophy itself as devotion to rightness of reason, so that every offense that occurs because of a gross failure of reason is necessarily and reasonably designated as a sin. 3. For example, when the first person sinned and disobeyed God, it says that "he was made similar to the animals."⁵⁵ By sinning against reason, the person was reasonably thought to be irrational and made similar to the animals. 102, 1. Wisdom also speaks on this point: "A stallion is a lover of pleasure and an adulterer"⁵⁶ and it was made similar to an irrational animal. Wherefore, it further adds, "It neighs at everyone who sits upon it."⁵⁷ It means that the person no longer speaks, for the one who sins against reason⁵⁸ is no longer rational, but in fact an irrational beast, given up to desires⁵⁹ on which all pleasures sit.

2. The followers of the Stoics give an action made in accordance with obedience to reason the name "proper" and "obligatory."⁶⁰ What is obligatory then is also proper, and obedience is built upon commandments. Being the same as precepts in that they have truth as their goal, they instruct us in our desired objective, which is regarded as the end.⁶¹ The end of godliness is eternal repose in God; our end is the beginning of eternity. 3. Of course, the proper exercise of godliness is the enacting of one's duty through works, on which basis duties are reasonably associated with actions, not words. The action of the Christian soul is the activity of rational truth enacted through its partner and ally, the body, according to a refined sense of judgment and appetite. Our duty in life is [to foster] a single intention that conforms to God and Christ, and this is accomplished in eternal life. For

53 Or "reason." 54 In Greek, *kathēkon*. 55 Ps 48(49): 13(12), 48(49): 21(20).

56 Sir 33:6a. Either the text is corrupt or Clement incorrectly quotes Sirach, which reads, "A stallion is like a mocking friend" (*bippos eis ocheian hōs philos mōkos*). Clement supplies "a lover of pleasure and an adulterer" (*ho philēdonos kai ho moichos*). As amended, it suits his argument; the original, however, fails to pertain to the subject.

57 Sir 33:6b. Clement correctly quotes the second half of the verse.

58 Or "the Word." 59 See Rom 1:24.

60 See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 7.108. An obligatory act (*kathēkon*) is that which is reasonable according to nature (e.g. keeping one's health); a proper act (*proēkon*) is that which is reasonable within society (e.g. taking care of one's parents). Both are virtuous.

61 In Greek, *telos*. The term's philosophical usage connotes a sense of culmination.

PART I: EDUCATION

the life of Christians, in which we are now being instructed, is an ordered system of rational actions, that is, the infallible practice of the Word's⁶² teachings, which we in fact call faith. **103, 1.** The ordered system consists of the Lord's commandments, which, being of course divine notions, are inscribed within us as spiritual precepts, arranged for ourselves and our neighbors. Indeed, even the latter bounce back to us again, like a ball that returns to its thrower due to its solid nature.⁶³ For this reason, duties are also necessary for divine instruction, as orders issued by God and offered for our salvation. **2.** Since some of these necessities pertain only to life here, while others ready us for flight from this life to living well over there,⁶⁴ some of our duties, by analogy, are imposed for living, while others for living well. And so whatever is issued for ordinary life has been made public for the masses. But as for what relates to living well, from which eternal life results, one can contemplate those matters, in a general outline, by reading the scriptures themselves.

62 Or "reason's."

63 The idea here seems to be that what goes around comes around. Just as a ball bounced on the ground comes back up into the thrower's hands, so too do virtues practiced by someone pay off in how that person is treated by others.

64 That is, in eternal life.