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'Taking up the Mask of Humanity': Clement of Alexandria's Dramatic Understanding of the Two Natures of Christ

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ABSTRACT

In the ninth century, Photios of Constantinople accused Clement of Alexandria of promoting a deficient 'docetic' Christology in his now-fragmentary *Hypotyposes*. This provoked a debate that continues to dominate discussion of Clement's theological understandings—whether his extant christological comments constitute a proto-orthodox position, or reveal the influence of docetism. This paper argues that Photios' accusations have been something of a red herring, and the subsequent debate has obscured Clement's actual christological position. His own thoughts are most clearly articulated in chapter 10 of his exhortatory *Protrepticus*, as Clement presents a christological explanation through the language and metaphor of ancient drama. Christ is described as taking up the mask of humanity and performing the drama of salvation, and Clement leans on a wider contemporary understanding of the relationship between mask (προσωπεῖον) and actor to present this complex doctrine to his readership. Through a focus on this presentation, this paper will offer a solution to a debate that has troubled scholars for over a millennium, and which has blinkered our understanding of Clement's Christian project more broadly.

1. INTRODUCTION

In timeless academic style, the ninth-century patriarch Photios I of Constantinople produced an enormous number of book reviews. His magisterial *Bibliotheca* offers the reader Photios' opinions on the writings of authors from the fifth-century BC until his own time.[1] Three of these

[1] Nearly half of Photios' reviews are lost, but those that survive offer an encyclopaedic introduction to an enormous variety of ancient and late antique material. Treadgold provides a survey of the manuscript history of this work, as well as a fresh translation of its somewhat-fragmentary preface. W. Treadgold, 'The Preface of the "*Bibliotheca*" of Photius: Text, Translation, and Commentary', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977), pp. 343–9.

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reviews consider the works of Clement of Alexandria, as Photios provides a critique of Clement's *Hypotyposes*, *Paedagogus*, and *Stromateis*.[2] In his summary of the now-fragmentary *Hypotyposes* Photios accused Clement of holding an errant christological position, suggesting ultimately that 'he is deluded that the Word was not incarnate, but only appears to be so'.[3] Photios believed that Clement presents a Divine *Logos* who is not, in fact, embodied in his humanity, but only appears to be so. This was an accusation of docetism, a christological position that relegates the human body of Christ to some kind of illusionary or immaterial form.

Clement has long been recognized as a complex author, whose extant writings represent a challenge for the classicist and theologian alike, often mediating cryptic Christian teachings through quotations and discussions of Platonic, Homeric, or other ancient material.[4] Supported by this Clementine obfuscation, Photios' accusations have endured and ultimately contributed to the decline of Clement's reputation as a pioneering Christian thinker in the centuries following his comments.[5] This reputational damage supported a relative lack of interest in the Alexandrian in the Middle Ages, before the Renaissance witnessed his reincorporation as part of the narrative and textual tapestry of the early church.[6] With this resurgence came a renewed debate around Clement's orthodoxy, and his christological understandings lay at the heart of that.[7] Scholars have broadly divided over whether Clement's Christ bears the imprint of later, 'orthodox' Christology, or exposes docetic leanings popular in the late second century. His extant writings appear to entrench confusion on the subject, and no clear resolution has been found. The current state of this debate is considered below, but its dominance in the christological discussion of Clement's oeuvre has, this paper contends, been self-defeating. Rather than considering Clement's position on its own terms, and, crucially, as a product of its own historical context, the debate has essentially retrofitted later standards of ecclesial orthodoxy onto this early Christian figure. This present study rejects that binary, and instead suggests that Clement's extant corpus offers its reader a unique christological position.

This paper proposes a *via media* between the extremes of a retrofitted orthodoxy and 'heretical' docetism. As scholars such as van Kooten have recently illustrated, to reject such later binaries and instead address each early Christian author on their own terms opens up a wealth of new perspectives on present confusion.[8] As such, Clement's corpus must be considered through

[2] Phot. *Bibl.* 109–111. Interestingly, Photios does not provide comment on the *Protrepticus*, aside from a brief reference to an unnamed introductory volume. *Bibl.* 110: '[the *Paedagogus*] is preceded by and combined with another work, in which he refutes the impiety of the heathens'. This oversight is of significance to the interests of this paper, and the impact of this will be explored below.

[3] *Bibl.* 109: ὀνειροπολεῖ …, καὶ μὴ σαρκωθῆναι τὸν λόγον ἀλλὰ δόξαι.

[4] As Heath described, Clement can often fall 'between the cracks' between these two disciplines as a result of his own presentation. See J. Heath, *Clement of Alexandria and the Shaping of Christian Literary Practice* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), pp. 5–6. Clement offers a challenge to the modern scholar, not simply for the turgidity of his prose (as suggested by De Faye) but for the construction of his, at times, convoluted approach to the Christian faith. See E. De Faye, *Clément d'Alexandrie: Étude sur les rapports du Christianisme et de la philosophie grecque* (Paris: Leroux, 1906), p. 2.

[5] Clement was initially praised by figures such as Jerome and Cyril as a learned and intelligent figure, whose teachings were extolled as a model of Christian learning. Cf. Cyril, *Contra Julianum*, 6.216. Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 38.

[6] Though Clement was originally considered a saint within almost every major Christian tradition, he was removed from the *Martyrologium Romanum* in 1749, the fruit of over 150 years of Roman Catholic scrutiny of his status of veneration and his writings. This relegation is somewhat illustrative of Clement's fluctuating popularity within Christian tradition. Clement's writings fell into relative obscurity until the late sixteenth century. As Vioque points out by way of illustration in his article exploring early modern efforts to revive Clement's *Stromateis*, Erasmus published edited works of more than 12 Church Fathers, but 'he failed to publish a single text by Clement, most probably because of the difficulty in finding a suitable manuscript'. See G. Vioque, 'Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* in the Early 16th Century', *Mnemosyne* 76 (2023), pp. 1–24, esp. p. 9. This lack of interest may also account for the relatively poor manuscript preservation of Clement's extant works, as detailed by C. Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels in Clement of Alexandria* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2008), pp. 11–14.

[7] As Cosaert, *The Text of the Gospels*, p. 2 notes, the perception of Clement is thus that he was 'not always orthodox in his views—at least from the perspective of later orthodoxy'.

[8] See, as an example of this approach, G. van Kooten, 'Bleeding God, Not Ichor: Christ the "Gottmensch". A Comparison of the Johannine Incarnate God of Love with Homer's Aphrodite, Plato's Daimōn of Love, and Modern Discourse', in J. Dochhorn, R. Hirsch-Luipold, and I. Tanaseau-Döbler (eds.), *Über Gott: Festschrift für Reinhard Feldmeier zum 70. Geburststag* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), pp. 631–72.

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its own performed cohesion. While Clement offers christological comments throughout his oeuvre, he first articulates his position in his exhortatory *Protrepticus*. Clement presents the work as a foundation to his understanding of the Christian faith, and therefore offers a christological platform within that.[9] Most significantly, in chapter 10, Clement employs a dramatic metaphor to speak of Christ as one who performs 'having taken up the mask of humanity and having been moulded in flesh'.[10] Christ is presented as an ἀγωνιστής stepping out onto the ancient stage, an extended dramatic metaphor that was deliberately chosen. Clement has prepared his readers for Christ's theatrical entry throughout the work. The result is that Clement can call upon contemporary understandings of the relationship between the actor and his mask in presenting Christ as he does. This intentional presentation enables a level of clarity with which the reader can approach Clement's understanding of this complex doctrine, not only within his first major writing, but ultimately across his extant corpus.[11] As Christ assumes τὸ ἀνθρώπου προσωπεῖον, both his fundamental divine nature and essential human nature are exposed. The position Clement articulates is neither docetic nor proto-orthodox, but instead a unique understanding of Christ as singularly divine yet functionally—or performatively—human. In this often-overlooked exhortatory work, we find not only an articulation of Clement's understanding of this divine being, but a resolution to a debate that has raged for over a millennium.

2. THE PHOTIAN CONTROVERSY

Photios' view of Clement is complex. While he is broadly positive about the *Paedagogus* and *Stromateis* he raises serious concerns about the *Hypotyposes*.[12] He questions whether Clement only feigns orthodoxy (ὀρθῶς δοκεῖ λέγειν), as he instead indulges in 'impious (ἀσεβεῖς)' and 'fantastical (μυθώδεις)' legends, embracing theological 'nonsense (τερατεύεται)' in much of his teaching.[13] His accusation of docetism comes at the heart of a review that ultimately accuses the Alexandrian of blasphemy (βλασφημεῖ). As the *Hypotyposes* are now almost entirely lost, modern scholars must discern Clement's Christology through his extant writings—and are left to puzzle whether his supposed christological errors are repeated in these other works.[14] This

[9] Clement articulates the roles of the Divine *Logos* in the opening to his *Paedagogus*, and describes the introductory, exhortatory role of the *logos protreptikos*. See *Paed*. I.1.1.3 (l.91). The *Protrepticus* serves this exhortatory function, calling its reader to embrace the Clementine faith, and its introductory role in his literary project has long been appreciated. See most recently Heath, *Clement of Alexandria and the Shaping of Christian Literary Practice*, pp. 382–93 and A. Le Boulluec, 'Clément d'Alexandrie', in G. Dorival and A. Le Boulluec (eds.), *L'abeille et l'acier: Clément d'Alexandrie et Origène* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2019), pp. 91–5. Citations of Clement's writings are drawn from Stählin's editions of the Greek texts, with volume and page number in parentheses. O. Stählin (ed.), *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 3 vols. (GCS 12, 15, 17; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1905–9).

[10] *Protr*. X.110.3 (1.78). For the Greek text see below, n. 57.

[11] The question of whether or not Clement's three major works constitute a formal literary trilogy remains a live debate, and has provoked a number of contributions. Whether or not the *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus*, and *Stromateis* represent a formal literary unit, the *Protrepticus* remains an introduction to Clement's articulation of the Christian faith, and a spiritual platform for his subsequent writings. See further W. Wagner, 'Another Look at the Literary Problem in Clement of Alexandria's Major Writings', *Church History* 37 (1968), pp. 251–60; E. Fortin, 'Clement and the Esoteric Tradition', *Studia Patristica* 9 (1966), pp. 41–56; S. R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1971); J. Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York: Twayne, 1974), esp. p. 106; I. Roberts, 'The Literary Form of the Stromateis', *Second Century* 1 (1981), pp. 211–22; A. Le Boullec, 'Pour qui, pourquoi, comment? Les "Stromates" de Clément d'Alexandrie', in J.-D. Dubois and B. Roussel (eds.), *Entrer en matière: les prologues* (Patrimoines: Religions du Livre; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998), pp. 23–36; J. Kovacs, 'Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher According to Clement of Alexandria', *JECS* 9 (2001), pp. 3–25; A. C. Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the* Stromateis *of Clement of Alexandria* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, 97; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), esp. pp. 15–30; Heath, *Clement of Alexandria and the Shaping of Christian Literary Practice*. Heath surveys the current state of the debate around the existence of the trilogy in an appendix, pp. 382–93.

[12] Indeed, he offers this text as a standard against which the other works are measured, expressing with relief that the *Paedagogus* has 'nothing in common' with the *Hypotyposes* (*Bibl*. 110), while the *Stromateis* is at times unsound (*Bibl*. 111), 'but not like the *Hypotyposes*, some of whose statements it opposes'.

[13] Phot. *Bibl*. 109: καὶ ἔν τισι μὲν αὐτῶν ὀρθῶς δοκεῖ λέγειν, ἔν τισι δὲ παντελῶς εἰς ἀσεβεῖς καὶ μυθώδεις λόγους ἐκφέρεται … Ἔτι δὲ μετεμψυχώσεις καὶ πολλοὺς πρὸ τοῦ Ἀδὰμ κόσμους τερατεύεται.

[14] Hušek offers an insightful discussion around any hope of a retrieval of this lost text, as well as a frank summary of the extant fragments available to modern scholars. See V. Hušek, 'In Search of Clement of Alexandria's Hypotyposes', *JECS* 31 (2023), pp. 19–31. See further J. Plátová, 'How Many Fragments of the Hypotyposes by Clement of Alexandria Do We Actually Have?', *Studia Patristica* 79 (2017), pp. 71–86. Clement's christological comments from this work, such as they may have been, have not survived.

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challenge has led to a significant debate around his articulation of Christ's being—particularly with regards to the relationship between his human and divine natures.

Photios himself had a particular interest in defending the human nature of Christ, and the centrality of the incarnation to the iconoclastic controversy, through which Photios himself maintained a passionate pro-veneration stance, informed his position on the subject.[15] As Ashwin-Siejkowski suggests, his critique of Clement stemmed from a habitual desire to 'search … for the symptoms and seeds of heresy in its earliest sources'.[16] In the *Hypotyposes*, Photios believed he had found 'impious … nonsense' within Clement's own presentation of Christ. Despite some complimentary comments on Clement's learning and style in the *Stromateis* and *Paedagogus*, Photios' concerns with the *Hypotyposes* have come to dominate his Clementine interest.[17] In light of Photios' comments (and with the hindrance of a largely fragmentary *Hypotyposes*) efforts have primarily focused on Clement's *Stromateis*, considered Clement's most theologically rich extant text, replete with enough controversial comments to sustain a lively ongoing debate. Much of the controversy stems from Clement's focus on Christ as the eternal *Logos* of God. Clement's Christology has long been described as a '*Logos*-Christology', he is preoccupied by this divine nature, and articulates that through his designation of Christ as the Divine *Logos*.[18]

As such, the *Stromateis* unsurprisingly stresses Christ's divinity, holding him up as a model of Christian asceticism and restraint, who 'ate, not for the sake of the body, which was sustained by a holy energy, but in order that it would not occur to those who accompanied Him to have a different opinion about Him'.[19] Clement goes on to suggest that Christ 'was totally free from passions; unattainable to any sort of disturbance of feelings, either pleasure or pain'.[20] Clement appears to argue in these maxims that Christ lacks a genuine human nature that *could* suffer or require sustenance, supporting accusations of docetism. While the literary and theological context of these particular statements has been ably addressed in recent years by both Lilla and Ashwin-Siejkowski, they nonetheless contribute to the ongoing confusion around whether or not Clement can be considered Christologically 'orthodox'.[21] In an apparent contradiction, however, Clement earlier in the same work attacks Cassian, Marcion, and Valentinus for their teaching of 'docetism'—further complicating Clement's attitude on this doctrine.[22] Eleven hundred years after they were first written, Photios' accusations continue to influence the debate around Clement's Christology, and a firm scholarly consensus seems elusive.

Despite the strength of Photios' criticisms, a number of scholars have sought to counter his attack, and clarify Clement's christological position against the claims of docetism. This defence is often made as a reflection of an almost proto-Chalcedonian position, and has at times been

[15] Indeed, such was Photios' fervour in this debate that his homily following the introduction of icons into the Hagia Sophia combined a celebration of his christological stance with a clear emphasis on the joy of the victory. Phot. *Homily* 17, in B. Laourdas (ed.), *Photiou Homiliai* (Thessaloniki: Hetaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1959).

[16] P. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial: The Evidence of 'Heresy' from Photius' Bibliotheca* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 11. For a lengthier introduction to Photios' life and thought than space permits here, consult Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial*, pp. 5–16.

[17] Phot. *Bibl.* 110: Clement's 'great learning (πολυμάθεια)' and 'lofty style (ὄγκον σύμμετρον)' are particularly noted by the Byzantine churchman.

[18] For a treatment of this *Logos*-Christology, see most extensively (though with a number of issues) O. Kindiy, *Christos Didaskalos: The Christology of Clement of Alexandria* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008). A review highlighting some of the problems with this study and its contribution can be found at: https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2009/2009.09.19/ (last accessed 20 September 2023). See also P. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria: A Project of Christian Perfection* (London: T&T Clark, 2008). The long-standing question of whether Clement believed in two divine *logoi* is ably addressed by M. Edwards, 'Clement of Alexandria and His Doctrine of the Logos', *VC* 54 (2000), pp. 159–77. See further Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial*, pp. 57–75.

[19] *Strom.* VI.9.71.2 (2.467): ἔφαγεν γὰρ οὐ διὰ τὸ σῶμα, δυνάμει συνεχόμενον ἁγίᾳ, ἀλλ' ὡς μὴ τοὺς συνόντας ἄλλως περὶ αὐτοῦ φρονεῖν ὑπεισέλθοι. (Quoted more fully below, n. 91.)

[20] Ibid.: αὐτὸς δὲ ἁπαξαπλῶς ἀπαθὴς ἦν, εἷς ὃν οὐδὲν παρεισδύεται κίνημα παθητικὸν οὔτε ἡδονὴ οὔτε λύπη.

[21] Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, pp. 103–17; Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial*, pp. 98–101.

[22] See, e.g. *Strom.* III.17.102.1–3 (2.243).

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hampered by confessional or ecclesial interests.[23] Ruther and Pade offered early defences of Clement through a refutation of docetism, while Kelly acknowledged that some of Clement's comments do contain a 'distinctly docetic ring'; however, 'though criticized as such by Photios, Clement was not Docetist, and defended the reality of incarnation'.[24] This conclusion was later affirmed by Kindiy, who insisted on Clement's belief in the incarnation, and Worden, who considered that 'Clement overwhelmingly taught that the *Logos*–Son became *anthropos* and took on actual human *sarx*, in order to suffer for the salvation of humankind'.[25] Those in defence of Clement's 'orthodoxy' maintain that Photios overstates Clement's docetic expressions, and thus reject his criticisms.

In response there remains an ongoing recognition of Photios' accusations, with a range of support for his critique. Ferguson, for example, conceded that 'occasionally he [Clement] comes near to docetism; Jesus was not an ordinary man and could have had no real need to eat. He is even ambiguous about Jesus' suffering'.[26] Others, such as Edwards and Hägg, row back from such an explicit allusion, but repeatedly affirm the murkiness of Clement's theological waters.[27] More recently, Ashwin-Siejkowski concluded that Clement's docetic leanings are 'superficial', and thus argued that Clement is simply 'laconic' on the details of Christ's bodily life.[28] Ashwin-Siejkowski ultimately concedes that scholarly efforts to reconstruct what he calls 'the more intractable elements' of Clement's doctrine are simply hamstrung by the fact that Clement's more dogmatic texts—such as the *Hypotyposes*—do not survive.[29] Scholars are forced to engage Clement's Christology in a scattered way, with no extant systematic doctrinal statements.

These limitations (and Photios' enthusiasm for the work) have primarily led to the focus on the *Stromateis* in this debate. The *Paedagogus* plays a supporting role, and the *Protrepticus* is largely absent from such conversations. In support of Clement's orthodoxy, both Kindiy and Worden construct their argument either wholly or primarily upon the *Stromateis*. In seeking to complicate the picture, Ashwin-Siejkowski does not even cite the *Protrepticus* once.[30] The *Protrepticus* is traditionally viewed as limited because of its introductory style, and more

[23] R. B. Tollinton's magisterial two-volume *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914) offered a comprehensive image of Clement's life and ideas and has been since criticized for presenting this Alexandrian author as an almost 'Anglican' figure. See on this J. Carleton-Paget, 'Clement of Alexandria and the Jews', *SJT* 51 (1998), pp. 86–98, at pp. 92–3. More recently, Zuiddam represents a desire to homogenize Clement's thinking into a latterly imposed orthodoxy. See B. Zuiddam, 'Early Orthodoxy: The Scriptures in Clement of Alexandria', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 21 (2010), pp. 307–19.

[24] T. Ruther, 'Die Leiblichkeit Christi nach Clemens von Alexandrien', *Theologische Quartalschrift* 107 (1926), pp. 231–54; P. Pade, *Λόγος Θεός: Untersuchungen zum Logos-Christologie des Titus Flavius Clemens von Alexandrien. Eine dogmengeschichtliche Studie* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1939); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (5th edn., London: A. and C. Black, 1977; repr. London: Continuum, 1993), p. 154.

[25] Kindiy broadly overlooks Photios' accusations, and instead affirms that 'Clement believed in the full-value Incarnation of Christ which he held, in fact, in his reproof of Docetism'. Kindiy, *Christos Didaskalos*, p. 127. Kindiy supports this position through an appeal to *Strom*. III.17.102–103.3 (2.243); VI.9.71.2 (2.467); VII.17.108.2 (3.76). D. Worden, *Clement of Alexandria: Incarnation and Mission of the Logos–Son* (Diss. St Andrews University, UK, 2016), p. 240. Worden likewise built his argument primarily upon interactions with the text of the *Stromateis*.

[26] J. Ferguson, 'The Achievement of Clement of Alexandria', *Religious Studies* 12 (1976), pp. 59–80, at p. 71. Ferguson references the ideas suggested by Clement in the passage from the *Stromateis* quoted above, nn. 19–20.

[27] M. Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 23; C. Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 196.

[28] Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial*, p. 111.

[29] Ibid.

[30] This is despite offering his reader (*Clement of Alexandria on Trial*, p. 96) an analysis of 'the statements on this subject from Clement's existing oeuvre' in conversation with contemporary docetic teachings. The text is in fact cited only four times in Ashwin-Siejkowski's entire monograph. This is in contrast to 20 references from Book I of the *Stromateis* alone. Such a dearth of textual engagement is representative of similar studies on Clement's thought. Ward, in his recent study of Clement's scriptural engagement, offers only 23 references to the *Protrepticus*, in contrast to 34 to the first book of the *Stromateis* alone. Osborn's magisterial introduction to Clement and his writings offers 78 references to the *Protrepticus*, but this is again in contrast to 115 from *Stromateis* Book I alone. A picture of the consistent oversight of this exhortatory work emerges from modern scholarly engagement with the Clementine corpus. See Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial*, pp. 173–4; H. C. Ward, *Clement and Scriptural Exegesis: The Making of a Commentarial Theologian* (Oxford: OUP, 2022), pp. 224–5; E. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), pp. 309–11.

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theologically lightweight than Clement's later writings.[31] Ashwin-Siejkowski was right to express regret at the lack of Clement's dogmatic writings, but Clement himself admits that he does not offer worked-out dogma or theological teaching. Rather, he presents a synthesis of philosophical praxis with Christian ethics and doctrine to create a complex presentation of the faith that rewards diligent study.[32] This diligence must be extended towards the *Protrepticus* too—and this paper seeks to offer a corrective, both to Photios—who first overlooked the work in assessing Clement's oeuvre—and to his successors, on both sides of the debate.

A careful evaluation of the *Protrepticus* as both the foundation for Clement's intellectual Christian project, and as a product of the Alexandrian milieu in which Clement lived and wrote, will enable a fresh approach to this christological complexity. This text provides the reader with an introduction to Clement's understanding of this difficult Christian doctrine. Part of the reason why this text has so often been left out of this debate is the manner in which Clement presents these ideas. They are wrapped inside a theatrical metaphor that Clement has developed as the work has unfolded, and a recognition of its full ramifications necessitates more than only a theological reading. For as Clement presents Christ in chapter 10 of the *Protrepticus* as the divine actor assuming the mask of humanity, against the backdrop of a clever dramatic construction, he offers a deeply cultural presentation of this early Christian teaching, and the broader ancient context is thus vital for any right reading of this passage, and ultimately the right approach to Clement's understanding of the nature of Christ.

3. THEATRICAL MASKING AND CLEMENT'S AUDIENCE

Clement's introduction of Christ as an ἀγωνιστής assuming his theatrical προσωπεῖον in *Protrepticus* X does not reach for such language on a whim, but rather represents the climax of a careful articulation of relevant dramatic imagery throughout the work. Clement has been eager to present the divine as *dramatis personae*, and equally careful to draw a clear distinction between πρόσωπον and its instrumental προσωπεῖον so as to emphasize the place of theatrical masking within the work. All of these efforts enable Clement to draw on wider cultural ideas around theatrical performance and masking in antiquity. His use of πρόσωπον/προσωπεῖον plays upon a cultural acceptance of the blurring between two natures on the dramatic stage that allows Clement to set out his own theological ideas.[33] This common term is brought into

[31] As the above discussion illustrates, the work is considered to offer less theological material, and overall to be a weaker writing than its lengthier successors. As noted (see above, n. 2), Photios himself does not pay close attention to the *Protrepticus*. Osborn offered a survey of Clementine research in the second half of the twentieth century; aside from Brontesi's sizable monograph on Clement's doctrine of salvation, in which the *Protrepticus* is considered, the work was largely absent from new studies. E. Osborn, 'Clement of Alexandria: A Review of Research, 1958–1982', *Second Century* 3 (1983), pp. 219–44. Cf. A. Brontesi, *La soteria in Clemente Alessandrino* (Roma: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1972).

[32] This is, after all, the author who considers truth to be scattered throughout creation like the limbs of Pentheus after his savage dismemberment in Euripides' *Bacchae*. See *Strom*. I.13.57.1 (2.36). He further suggests in his *Stromateis* that the diligent reader will be able to find the wisdom in his work as though it were flowers scattered through a field, or fruit trees spread throughout an orchard—the dross must be sifted through to find the desired insights. Cf. *Strom*. VI.1.2.1 (2.422–3). He also notes that the *Stromateis* itself is by no means a systematic text—instead offering a collection of notes 'stored up' to enable him and his readers to recollect wisdom as they work their way through them (ibid.).

[33] This discussion must be caveated by a recognition of the immediate danger that lies in taking Clement's language within a theological framework that has dominated discussions of Clement's Christology. The term πρόσωπον develops a later sense of theological 'personhood' and it is important to stress that this is not Clement's intention here. As Podbielski elaborates: 'the word usually rendered as "person," "το πρόσωπον," has never lost, in Greek, its original meaning of "face," while acquiring … altogether twelve other related meanings … its technical theological meaning is only the last of these'. This latter meaning comes to dominate the usage of πρόσωπον in late antiquity—Maximus the Confessor, e.g., uses the term 373 times in his extant writings. M. Podbielski, 'The Face of the Soul, the Face of God: Maximus the Confessor and πρόσωπον', in S. Mitralexis *et al*. (eds.), *Maximus the Confessor as a European Philosopher* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), pp. 193–228; quotations from pp. 197–8. At the end of the second century, this Christianization of the term had yet to occur, and it instead retained a primary performative sense, either of character and role, or, crucially, of masking. See, e.g. πρόσωπον as face: Hom. *Il*. 7.212; 18.414; idem *Ph*. 457; LXX Gen. 43:3; as mask: Arist. *Po*. 1449a36; 1449b4; Dem. *On the False Embassy* 19.287; as person: 1 Thess. 2:17; LXX Mal. 1:8. Within this semantic range, the instrumental derivation of 'προσωπεῖον' exclusively expressed a sense of masking. See Theophrastus, *Char*. 6.3; Dioscorides Pedanius, *De Materia medica* 3.144.4; Lucian, *Nigrinus* 11.10. It is this dramatic sense that Clement exploits in his christological comments in *Protrepticus* X.

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an alien subject for Clement's audience and helps illuminate a doctrine that Clement considers fundamental to his gospel message.

Clement invited his reader to situate the gods within this theatrical realm with a repeated emphasis on the dramatic throughout the work. Christ was introduced in chapter 1 as 'the true acting-champion, who is being crowned upon the theatre of the whole world'.[34] This true divine actor competes against the gods of Greece and Rome, and as he does so, 'heaven' becomes a 'stage', while his readers are transformed into a theatrical audience as 'spectators of truth' surveying this heavenly 'stage of life'.[35] In contrast to the victorious serenity of Christ the ἀγωνιστής, the gods are associated with ὑποκριταί, and are shown to be the subject of comedy and calamity as Clement 'wheels' them out as though on an imagined ἐκκύκλημα.[36] The result of this framing is that Clement's turning to Christ and his προσωπεῖον instantly conjures an image of an actor and his mask. At the heart of the theatrical experience stood the actor himself, playing a role, masked and costumed. Clement adopts that language in his description of the incarnate Christ, evoking a deeper understanding of this special relationship between actor and stage identity, one that was emblematic across the Greco-Roman world.

This dramatic context is further foregrounded by Clement's careful contrast between πρόσωπον and προσωπεῖον throughout the work, one that has not only allowed him to present the Greco-Roman gods 'on-stage' but enables him to bring Christ there also. Every single use of πρόσωπον until this point (and, indeed, beyond it) has been to describe the 'face' of man, gods, or places. In contrast, Clement reserves προσωπείον solely for the language of theatrical masking, and this ring-fencing of the two terms has created a deliberate parallel between the gods of Greece and Rome and Christ himself. Clement therefore reserves πρόσωπον for a citation of the LXX, or for the description of the face of various statues, a personification of truth itself, or the face of Helen's Homeric lover.[37] Each passage provides a context that reinforces Clement's use of πρόσωπον as 'face', and Clement in fact affirms this distinction shortly after his description of Christ in chapter 10, concluding the chapter by suggesting that the blessing this divine actor brings floods 'the whole face of the earth'.[38] This use appears deliberate, stressing its different sense in contrast to the use of προσωπεῖον only a few lines prior, and reinforcing to the reader that this is a dramatic presentation of Christ's two natures.

Other than this use in chapter 10, Clement only employs προσωπεῖον twice in the work. In both instances, it is to discuss the deception of the Greco-Roman gods, divine beings that Clement is keen to show as fraudulent and cruel. Clement informs his readers that his investigation into the gods will 'strip these terrifying masks from the crowd of the gods'—he will unmask these gods and show the disappointing reality that lies beneath.[39] Clement affirms this idea two chapters later, when he accuses his readers of succumbing to their deception. 'Under the masks of demons (προσωπείοις δαιμονίων) you have made into a comedy that which is holy'.[40] The 'gods' are demons, wearing masks of gods and attempting (with broad success) to deceive the inhabitants of the Roman world. Clement has associated this idea of masking with the divine in these first few chapters, showing the gods as demons in theatrical masks, playing a part they ought not to. These are demons, lesser beings who have 'acted up' as gods, but Clement has unmasked this deception. Having set up this context (and contrast), Clement next uses the term

[34] *Protr*. I.2.3 (1.4): λόγος οὐράνιος, ὁ γνήσιος ἀγωνιστὴς ἐπὶ τῷ παντὸς κόσμου θεάτρῳ στεφανούμενος.
[35] Ibid. IV.58.4 (1.46); II.12.1 (1.11).
[36] Ibid. I.2.1–4 (1.3–4) and IV.54.4 (1.42) express how the gods are shown on stage; in II.12.2 (1.11) Clement speaks of 'wheeling out' the gods onto the 'stage of truth' itself. The gods are associated with the ὑποκριταί of their supporters; cf. I.2.2 (1.4).
[37] Clement cites Deut. 30:15 in *Protr*. X.95.2 (1.69–70); he describes the faces of a number of statues in chapter 4 (IV.46.4 [1.35]; IV.54.2 [1.42]); he speaks of 'the bright face of truth' in 1.2.1; and speaks of Helen and her lover Paris in 2.35.2.
[38] *Protr*. X.110.3 (1.78).
[39] Ibid. II.27.5 (1.20).
[40] Ibid. IV.58.4 (1.46).

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to describe Christ himself. His masking will be shown to lead to something quite different from the deception of the Greco-Roman gods, but nonetheless exploits the dramatic connotations of his description.

Clement is clearly leaning on a broader cultural understanding in his presentation of theatrical agency in this text. Masking and dramatic performance had long been overlapping concepts on the Roman stage, and before that of course masks formed an intrinsic part of Greek theatrical performance.[41] Such performances, with either Roman or (more popularly, particularly in Alexandria) Greek origins, were as diverse as they were abundant in late second-century cities such as Alexandria. Performances ranged from full-scale productions, to the staging of excerpts, sung arias, lyric passages, the staging of Homeric epic, and a variety of popular mime forms.[42] This diversity expressed the themes and senses of ancient drama as they were diffused more broadly 'to the entire populace through the performances of the *tragôidoi* and pantomimes and many other less direct cultural channels'.[43] Theatre was not some classical preserve of fifth-century Athens, it was a mass media in an ancient world where entertainment and public spectacle were part of everyday politics, society, and culture.

Performing a dramatic role was in itself a multi-layered participation in ancient spectacle. The mask represented this, setting apart the actor from any other kind of non-theatrical performer. 'Costumes and masks are not just decorative accessories of the actor; in an important sense they are what makes a performer an *actor* rather than any other kind of performer'.[44] New media that emerged during the first and second centuries embraced the importance of masks, and pantomime in particular saw masks as central to the art form.[45] By the mid-second-century masking was commonplace in this more informal performance genre, as it was in the performance of traditional tragic plays or excerpts, setting apart the actor or mime from the audience and the crowd of other street performers by its presence.[46] The cognitive link between the mask and the actor was reinforced through a multiplicity of venues in the ancient city. Performers occupied formal and informal performance venues, literary efforts celebrated masking and the skill of actors and mimes, and even artwork (domestic and public) emphasized the link between the mask and the actor. Hall highlights a fresco preserved in Herculaneum showing an actor and mask after a theatrical performance (Fig. 1).[47] The idea that the two were almost symbiotic was reinforced throughout ancient society, and there can be little doubt that Greco-Roman readers would quickly assume a theatrical dynamic to any employ of προσωπεῖον.

The theatrical dynamic that the mask created is fundamental to Clement's metaphor in *Protrepticus* X. Though early evidence for the response to theatrical masks is severely lacking, Meineck considers a fascinating passage from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* that offers a window into the perception of the masked and costumed actor in antiquity. Xenophon's Socrates visits

[41] See T. Kinsey, 'Masks on the Roman Stage', *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 58 (1980), pp. 53–5. Kinsey notes that masks were already in use in Roman theatres by the time of Terence (p. 54).

[42] R. Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Boston, MA: HUP, 2008), esp. pp. 26–7, discusses all of these and demonstrates the range of theatrical performances available to the ancient audience.

[43] P. Easterling and R. Miles, 'Dramatic Identities: Tragedy in Late Antiquity', in R. Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 95–111, at p. 107.

[44] E. Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering Under the Sun* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), p. 19.

[45] Lucian describes the mask of the pantomime (different from that of the tragic actor yet inherited from him) in his treatise on the genre. *De Salt*. 29. Nonetheless, he reveals that traditional Greek tragic masks continue to be used in performance in his day: *Pseudologista*, 19.

[46] In the mid-first-century pantomime masks began to be adopted across Asia Minor and Italy, and within a century this practice had spread through the entirety of the Greek-speaking portion of the Roman empire. Cf. J. Jory, 'Some Cases of Mistaken Identity? Pantomime Masks and Their Context', *BICS* (2001), pp. 1–20, at p. 2.

[47] Hall, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 18.

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Fig. 1. Wall painting from Herculaneum showing an actor and mask after a performance.[48]

the houses of Parrhasios the painter, Cleiton the sculptor, and Pistias the armourer.[49] Socrates guides the painter and sculptor through a number of questions that allow him to ascertain that one can both represent and stir human emotional responses through artistic creation. As Meineck summarizes, 'Xenophon's story proposes that a person's *ethos* can be visually replicated through mimesis, and that character and emotions "show through" the face, eyes, and movements of the body'.[50] The tragic mask represents a combination of the skill of all three men—the colours of the painter, the crafting of the sculptor, and the form-fitting of the armourer. It is Aristotle who first applied πρόσωπον to the tragic mask, taking a term that at its very core means 'before the gaze' and suggesting that the mask itself demanded such a name.[51] Dramatic performers must strive to communicate the emotional and experiential role in which they are cast, and the mask, as both an object and a representation, was understood to be a conduit for those efforts.

These efforts bridged ontological divides. Acting in antiquity was a purely masculine profession—there were, traditionally, no female actors.[52] Nonetheless, there were plenty of female characters—including figures such as Medea, Deianeira, and Hecuba, who all dominate the

[48] Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 9019.

[49] Xen. *Mem*. 3.10.1–15.

[50] P. Meineck, 'The Neuroscience of the Tragic Mask', *Arion* 19 (2011), pp. 113–58, at p. 143.

[51] Ar. *Poet*. 1449a35.

[52] Exceptions can be found, e.g. Seneca speaks of private stages in Rome in which both men and women dance, while Apuleius describes a ballet of 'the Judgement of Paris' in which female dancers can also be found. These appear to be later, Roman exceptions, rather than the norm. See Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, 7.23.3; Apuleius, *Meta.* 10.29–32. See further H. Kelly, 'Tragedy and the Performance of Tragedy in Late Antiquity', *Traditio* 35 (1979), pp. 21–44, esp. pp. 26–7.

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dramas in which they play a part.[53] There were also divine characters such as Dionysus and Aphrodite, all of whom would have been represented by male actors in masks and simple costumes. The mask allows for this ontological shift, and this was something understood by the ancient audiences themselves. Again, early comments on this shift are lacking, but the excellently preserved Pronomos Vase (Fig. 2) allows us to glimpse something of this ontological perception.

The left-hand figure among the three actors on the right of the image holds a female mask, identifiable through the white paint that is used for women in red-figure painting, as two genuine female figures elsewhere on the vase exemplify. The figure holding this mask, however, is red-figure, a male. He is an actor, dressed for the part of a woman and holding the mask of his role. The painter has created the moment before (or perhaps after) the cast have performed, and the ontological duality of the actor can thus be represented.

This figure is a man, yet when the mask is assumed, is understood to be a woman. Who they are has not fundamentally changed, yet in a way it has—for a woman would now stand before the audience. Clement buys into this broader understanding in the ancient public consciousness

Fig. 2. Detail of the Pronomos Vase, showing three actors, one holding a female mask.[54]

[53] Euripides' *Medea*, Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, and Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*, respectively.

[54] The Pronomos Vase (Athens, c.400 BC), Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico. Image accessed: https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/carc/resources/Introduction-to-Greek-Pottery/Keypieces/redfigure/pronomos. Last accessed 2 November 2023.

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that recognizes a complexity in the assumption of a mask on the theatrical stage. To assume a mask was—in antiquity—to present to your audience a new person, an actor whose act would follow. And masking was inherently connected to theatrical performance, over and above all other media. Inviting someone to assume a προσωπεῖον was inviting someone to become an other who would perform a role for the spectators. This dramatic sense was an inescapable ancient connotation, and Clement embraces the cognitive implications created in the minds of his reader. This performative dynamic unlocks Clement's understanding of the incarnation of Christ, and enables his comments on the Divine *Logos* in both this text and his subsequent writings to be reframed within a coherent expression of the doctrine of Christ across his extant corpus.

4. CLEMENT'S ΠΡΟΣΩΠΕΙΟΝ

For Clement, Christ is the living *imago dei*. He alone offers a representation of the 'image' or 'face of God'.[55] Christ is Clement's visible representation of God before a watching humanity, and nowhere is this more apparent than in chapter 10 of the *Protrepticus*. This chapter offers in many senses the climax of Clement's appeal to an embrace of the Christian faith. Having roundly dismissed the gods of Greece and Rome in chapters 2–6 after the introduction of chapter 1, chapter 10 appeals to the readers to reject custom (συνήθεια) and instead become 'lovers of the word (φιλολόγους)'.[56] Clement introduced that Divine *Logos* in chapter 1, and in chapter 7 he returned once again to this subject. Chapter 10 represents the climax of this Christian articulation, as Clement at last describes his Saviour. As he does so, he presents Christ as an actor stepping out on stage, masked and costumed, to perform his divine drama.

> The Divine Word, truly the most manifest God, is made equal to the master of the universe, for he is his son and 'the Word was in God'. His coming was first proclaimed but not believed, nor was he recognized when having taken up the mask (προσωπεῖον) of humanity and having been moulded in flesh, he began to perform the drama (δρᾶμα) of salvation for mankind. For he was the true performing-champion (ἀγωνιστής), and a co-champion (συναγωνιστής) with his creatures … he readily illuminated God for us.[57]

This passage has been wholly overlooked in previous considerations of Clement's doctrine of Christ, but Clement picks up on a number of themes suggested in chapter 1 of this work as he finally describes the incarnate Christ to his watching readership-audience.[58] This manifestation of God is moulded into flesh and puts on the mask of humanity, in order to enact the performance of salvation—a performance that elevates man to co-champion status. Christ is therefore the illumination of God himself. Clement introduces to his unbelieving audience a complex doctrine, the incarnation, through this dramatic metaphor, and it is a revealing choice. Not only does this metaphor allow Clement to ultimately dismiss the pagan gods, but it perfectly (and surprisingly) encapsulates Clement's understanding of the doctrine of the incarnation.

Clement's entire work has differentiated between the Greco-Roman gods and the Divine *Logos* whom he worships. Where the former are shown to be misanthropic, the latter is

[55] See *Strom*. VII.3.16.6 (3.12); VII.10.58.3–6 (3.42–3); *Exc. Theod*. 1.23.5 (3.114–15).

[56] *Protr*. X.93.3 (1.68).

[57] Ibid. X.110.2–3 (1.78): ὁ θεῖος λόγος, ὁ φανερώτατος ὄντως θεός, ὁ τῷ δεσπότῃ τῶν ὅλων ἐξισωθείς, ὅτι ἦν υἱὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ 'ὁ λόγος ἦν ἐν τῷ θεῷ,' οὔθ᾽ ὅτε τὸ πρῶτον προεκηρύχθη, ἀπιστηθείς, οὔθ᾽ ὅτε τὸ ἀνθρώπου προσωπεῖον ἀναλαβὼν καὶ σαρκὶ ἀναπλασάμενος τὸ σωτήριον δρᾶμα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος ὑπεκρίνετο, ἀγνοηθείς· γνήσιος γὰρ ἦν ἀγωνιστὴς καὶ τοῦ πλάσματος συναγωνιστής … ῥᾷστα ἡμῖν ἐπέλαμψε τὸν θεόν.

[58] For the passages from chapter 1, see below at nn. 84–5, 87–8.

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philanthropic; where the former bring only death and toil, the latter offers eternal life and wisdom.[59] Ultimately, Clement considers the Greco-Roman gods to be so utterly beneath Christ that he cannot help but exclaim, 'how have you been taken in by worthless myths … when the bright face of truth alone seems to strike you as deceptive?'[60] With such a gulf between these divine performers, some kind of level playing field is required to present the stark contrast in both class and ontology. The ancient stage, in epistemological form at least, affords the perfect opportunity. Where the gods are shown to perform evil deeds (such as their love of even human sacrifice enumerated in chapter 3),[61] Christ's is a 'drama of salvation (τὸ σωτήριον δρᾶμα)'. Where the masks of the gods hide the weaker beneath the stronger, Christ's mask covers the power of the divine with the humility of humanity. This dramatic presentation of the divine allows for an equal presentation of the Greco-Roman gods and of Christ, and it is clear in this work who the victor in this contest is—Christ, the true ἀγωνιστής.

This description is not simply about defeating the gods, it is about introducing Clement's Divine *Logos* to an audience freed from the deceptive hold of these demonic beings. As Clement introduces Christ, both his human and divine natures are a part of his description. This dramatic metaphor unlocks that duality. Clement stresses Christ's divinity. He is 'the Divine Word, truly the most manifest God … for he is his son (ὁ θεῖος λόγος, ὁ φανερώτατος ὄντως θεός … ἦν υἱὸς αὐτοῦ)'.[62] Equally, however, he presents Christ in physical humanity. For he has 'taken up the mask of humanity and … been moulded in flesh (τὸ ἀνθρώπου προσωπεῖον ἀναλαβὼν καὶ σαρκὶ ἀναπλασάμενος)'.[63] This description offers an explanation of the divine Clement is calling his readers to worship. Where the gods were lesser beings pretending to be greater than they are, Christ is a greater being who assumes the lesser costume. His salvific performance is undertaken masked and costumed in humanity. The result is that Christ is able to play the mortal in the 'arena of truth … where the master of the Universe presides as judge'.[64] The masks of the 'gods' distorted reality. Even the greatest divine beings were revealed as incoherent or unconvincing. How else is it that there are multiple figures named Asclepius, Hermes, or Hephaestus?[65] These 'gods' are mere frauds. In comparison, the mask of Christ elevates his reality. It is assumed before the spectators of truth identified in chapter 2.[66] He does not pretend to be more than he is, but rather adopts the costume of the lesser in order to perform salvation for Clement's audience.

The humanity of Christ is evidently central to Clement's presentation, as he exploits the ontological complexity of theatrical masking on the ancient stage. Though he appears before his audience as human, he remains, under the mask, a god. Ashwin-Siejkowski concluded his brief discussion on the incarnation by noting that in Clement's thought 'the encounter with the divine *Logos* cannot be constrained to the physical body of the Saviour'.[67] In *Protrepticus* 10, however, Clement demonstrates how the physicality of the Saviour is fundamental to his performance of salvation. It is because he takes up the mask and costume of humanity that he is able to perform as human for a human audience. He is understood as human. He is, for all

[59] Clement describes the gods openly in such negative terms. *Protr*. III.42.1–3 (1.31): 'Come then and let us make this addition: your gods are inhuman and manhating demons (Φέρε δὴ οὖν καὶ τοῦτο προσθῶμεν, ὡς ἀπάνθρωποι καὶ μισάνθρωποι δαίμονες)'. In stark contrast IX.85.3 (1.64): Christ is 'a lover of man, [and so] the Lord calls all men to come to a full knowledge of the truth (Φιλάνθρωπος δὲ ὢν ὁ κύριος πάντας ἀνθρώπους 'εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας' παρακαλεῖ)'.

[60] *Protr*. I.2.1 (1.3).

[61] Ibid. III.42.1–43.4 (1.31–3). Clement stresses (III.42.8–9) how despite hailing the gods as 'saviours (σωτῆρες)' the Greeks in fact find themselves faced by those who revel in 'slaughtering' (ἀποσφάττοντες) mankind.

[62] *Protr*. X.110.2 (1.78).

[63] Ibid. X.110.3 (1.78).

[64] Ibid. X.96.3 (1.70).

[65] Clement offers such mocking questions in his fierce attack on the gods in chapter 2 of his exhortation: *Protr*. II.19.1 (1.15).

[66] *Protr*. II.12.1 (1.11). See above, at n. 35.

[67] Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial*, p. 103.

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intents and purposes, human. The audience recognize that in assumption of the mask they witness a performer who remains themselves yet is very much also the one they play. The actor playing Hecuba in a performance of Euripides' *Trojan Women* may be a young Athenian man, but he very much becomes the defeated Trojan queen as he performs. The same is true for the actor playing the humiliated Sophoclean Ajax, or the murderous Aeschylean Clytemnestra.[68] As Cyprian made clear, writing only a few decades after Clement, the masked performance of the actor could shift the ontology of the performer—'a man may be broken down into a woman, his sex changed by his art'.[69] Clement's readership understands the actor to hold both roles fully and simultaneously—that the very ontological presentation of the actor under the mask is of fundamental and essential duality. Physically, the Saviour is human, even if that humanity remains an assumed persona; just as with the actor on the Pronomos Vase holding his female mask, he remains what he is yet becomes what he performs.

Clement reveals an understanding of the two natures of Christ here, one that sits uncomfortably against the binary of 'orthodoxy' and 'docetism' established in modern scholarly discourse. Clement's Christ is received as both actor and character, and this in turn implies a *kenosis* within this divine being. Christ puts on the costume and mask of humanity. This implies he was complete without it; it was assumed by him, not an integral part of him. As such, he is logically able to lay it back down should he so desire. This is not a simple description—Clement has laid the groundwork for the distinctiveness of this explanation of the incarnation through his comments regarding the masking of the demon-gods. This is a theological statement written into this exhortatory work. The divine Christ assumes humanity, to play the part of Saviour on the stage of earth. Where the gods assumed masks of deception, to deceive the audience of humanity with their falsehood by pretending to be more than they are, Christ puts on the costume of the lesser, in order to fulfil a role in many senses beneath his cosmic supremacy. This represents a subtle change from the docetism of Photios' accusation—Clement is advocating for a Christ with a divine nature, yet who is able to perform as human when necessary.

Clement speaks of the union of Christ—the union of both human and divine in one nature—as he prepares for his performance by taking up the mask and assuming fleshly form, τὸ ἀνθρώπου προσωπεῖον ἀναλαβὼν καὶ σαρκὶ ἀναπλασάμενος.[70] His choice of verbs is particularly telling. In his use of ἀναλαβὼν we see an active taking up of his human mask—he assumed his role by his own volition. Clement's use of ἀναλαβὼν demonstrates the agency of the Divine *Logos* in embracing his human state, but Clement's use of the participle ἀναπλασάμενος is of even greater interest. The simple verb, πλάσσω, is used in another biblical incarnation. As Christ puts on the mask of humanity and is moulded into fleshly form, he reflects the Father's action in the LXX translation of Genesis 2, where God 'shaped/moulded the man dust from the earth (ἔπλασεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς)'.[71] In the same way, Christ is here moulded into human flesh. This single line also exposes Clement's grasp on the relationship between Father and Son. Christ takes up his humanity; the Father oversees his moulding into a man. Christ the divine enters humanity with his divinity through this double ontology. Clement's presentation of Christ echoes the Greek Genesis—a man is being made here, a man that remains God (partly through his agency in the self-creation of his humanity). This idea is only further reinforced by a further comment in chapter 11, that Christ was 'clothing himself with bonds of flesh (σακρὶ ἐνδεθείς)'.[72] The Father moulds the Son into flesh, but as Edwards notes, 'the Son is a power or

[68] See Sophocles' *Ajax* and the three plays of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, respectively.

[69] Cyprian, *Ep.* 60.2. Cyprian is famously hostile about the actor he is describing in this short epistle, and he urges his addressee, Euchratius, to ensure that the church is not 'polluted' by this individual's presence (60.1).

[70] *Protr.* X.110.2–3 (1.78).

[71] Gen. 2:7.

[72] *Protr.* XI.111.2 (1.78–9).

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dunamis in his own right'.[73] Christ is equally involved in this incarnating process, taking up his mask of humanity. This active agency illustrates his pre-existence and pre-completion before assuming humanity; he is taking up a new role. As Clement reflects the ontological dualism of the ancient actor, Clement offers his reader a very real humanity of Christ.

Clement does not offer a systematic christological position in his surviving writings, but this articulation neither allows the reader to recognize an 'orthodox' position in his thought, nor does he present a defence of docetism. In his discussion of Clement's theological controversies, Ashwin-Siejkowski sought to present Clement's thinking in contrast to contemporary docetic texts. Such texts provide a sense of Christ as wholly divine, with no substance to his humanity. The *Gospel of Philip*, for example, suggests that Christ's humanity was a stealthy deception:

> Jesus took them all by stealth, for he did not appear as he was, but in the manner in which [they would] be able to see him. He appeared to [them all. He appeared] to the great as great. He [appeared] to the small as small. He [appeared to the] angels as an angel, and to men as a man.[74]

Philip suggests that Christ appears to all creatures as one of their own, and has no substance in his form. He offers simply some 'likeness' (ϩⲓⲛϩ) or 'shape' (ϫⲭⲏⲙⲁ) of a human body—but no genuine human action and interaction. For Clement there is no sense of deception to Christ's humanity. Clement's Greco-Roman demons were fundamentally deceptive, for they assumed masks yet claimed not to be performing another role. Clement's Christ is fundamentally undeceptive, for he admits to playing a role, but encourages his audience to understand and embrace that, for their own salvific good. Clement does not hide Christ's true nature in his performance of humanity; this is an open and honest playing of his role. Where *Philip* suggests an essential deception to Christ's humanity, Clement in fact affirms the opposite, and weaponizes this idea of deception against Christ's opponents, the gods of Greece and Rome. Instead, Clement buys into a cultural understanding that theatrical performance is not deception; it is imitation. Ancient theatrical performance embraced the 'art of imitation through which characters are rendered lifelike and plot and action offer an adequate representation of reality'.[75] It is recognized that the character is not who they claim to be, but the audience nonetheless affirm that role and treat the character as such. The gods broke down that convention in claiming not to be performing a role at all, Christ abided by it in stepping into his performance of humanity. Clement's Christ onstage is not the docetic shapeless man of *Philip*—he performs the role of the man he claims to be, while simultaneously existing as divine under his mask of humanity.

The anti-docetic polemic of the apocalypse of *Melchizedek* allows us to further affirm Clement apart from a docetic position:

[73] M. Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 67. Cf. e.g. *Strom*. VII.9.52.1–2 (3.38–9).

[74] *Gos. Phil*. 57.30–58.1: ⲁⲗⲒⲤ ϥⲓⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲭⲓⲟⲩⲉ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉϥ·ⲟⲩⲱⲛ[ϩ̣] ⲅⲁⲣ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ· ⲛ̄ⲑⲉ ⲉⲛⲉϥⲭⲱⲟⲟⲡ· [ⲛ̄ϩ̣]ⲏ[ⲧⲥ ⲁ] ⲗⲗⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧ· ⲁϥⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ̣ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲑⲉ ⲉⲧ [ⲟⲩⲛⲁⲱ] ⲟⲙ̄ ⲟⲟⲙ· ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲣⲟϥ· ⲛ̄ϩ̣ⲏⲧⲥ ⲛ[ⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲉ ⲧⲏ] ⲣⲟⲩ ⲁϥⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ̣ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲁⲩ ⲁϥ[ⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ̣] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ [ⲛ̄]ⲛⲟⲟ ϩ̣ⲱⲥ ⲛⲟⲟ ⲁϥⲟⲩⲱ̣[ⲛϩ̣ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ] ⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ ϩ̣ⲱⲥ ⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲁϥⲫ̣[ⲩⲱⲛϩ̣ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ] [ⲛ̄ ⲛ̄] ⲁⲣⲧⲉⲗⲟⲩ ϩ̣ⲱⲥ ⲁⲣⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲣⲣⲱⲙⲉ ϩ̣ⲱⲥ ⲣⲱⲙⲉ· Trans. W. W. Isenberg, in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

[75] F. Zeitlin, 'Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama', *Representations* 11 (1985), pp. 63–94, at p. 79.

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> They will say of him (i.e. the Saviour) that he is unbegotten though he has been begotten, (that) he does not eat even though he eats, (that) he does not drink even though he drinks, (that) he is uncircumcised though he has been circumcised, (that) he is unfleshly though he has come in flesh, (that) he did not come to suffering though he came to suffering, (that) he did not rise from the dead he arose from [the] dead.[76]

Likewise, Clement's Christ is fully divine, yet he functions as fully human. He is able to suffer with us, as *Quis Dives Salvetur* affirms, both in his sympathy with the human plight, and in his endurance of the limitations of mankind.[77] In *Protrepticus* I Clement is even able to describe (by implication) Christ as 'the breathing instrument [of God]', in whose image humanity was fashioned—because in his role as human being, Christ can live and breathe.[78] Clement's Christ is not the Christ that *Melchizedek* attacks. He is not some phantom or composed of some immaterial substance—Clement's Christ is received as and functions as human. This is a crucial distinction, and really does articulate what is a unique christological position at the end of the second century. Clement leans into the sense of προσωπείον to generate a clear sense of theatrical masking and explores this language through a complicated metaphor overlaid with biblical references and anti-docetic elements.

Clement is explicit that the human nature of Christ is essential to his performance of the drama of salvation, but also that it is subordinate to his fundamental divine nature. It is something assumed; as God clothes him in human flesh, he takes on this new role.[79] Clement has built up his performative metaphors to offer his audience this understanding of Christ. His human nature is essential for the salvation that Clement advertises in this work, and this description provides an overview of Clement's unique christological position. Clement's Christ looks suspiciously close to the docetic Christ but is crucially different. While the divine nature lies at the heart of his divine performance, his Christ presents as both human and divine, offering two natures for the audience of humanity to recognize and interact with. Not only is the human nature subordinate to the divine, but that human nature functions exactly as its subject intends. It is performed, and in many senses illusionary, yet it is also very much understood as real and material. The result is a fresh clarity to Clement's scattered christological comments in this work and beyond.

[76] *Melch*. 5.2–11: <ⲁⲩⲱ> [ⲟ]ⲛ ⲥⲉⲛⲁϫⲟⲟⲥ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲁⲧ̀[ϫ]ⲡⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ ⲉⲁⲩϫⲡⲟⲩ ⲉⲩⲟⲩⲱⲙ [ⲁ]ⲛ ⲉⲱϫⲉ ⲉⲩⲟⲩⲱⲙ [ⲉ]ⲩⲥⲱ ⲁⲛ ⲉⲱϫⲉ ⲉⲩⲥⲱ· ⲟⲩⲁⲧ̀ⲥⲃⲃⲏⲧⲩ̀ ⲡⲉ ⲉⲁⲩⲥⲃⲃⲏⲧⲩ̀· ⲟⲩⲁⲧ̀ⲥⲁⲣⲁϩ ⲡⲉ ⲉⲁⲩⲱⲟⲙⲡⲉ ϩⲛ̄ ⲥⲁⲣⲁϩ· ⲙ̄ⲡⲩ̀ ⲉⲓ̈ ⲉⲡⲡⲁⲑⲟⲥ <ⲉ>ⲁⲩⲉⲓ̈ ⲉⲡⲡⲁⲑⲟⲥ· ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲧⲱⲙⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧ̀ⲙⲟⲟⲩⲧ̀ <ⲉ> ⲁⲩⲧⲱⲙⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ [ⲛⲉⲧ̀]ⲙⲟ[ⲟ]ⲩⲧ̀· Trans. S. Giversen and B. A. Pearson, in *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[77] In his treatise on *The Rich Man's Salvation* Christ is described as God made visible to man, 'and while the unspeakable part of him is Father, the part that has sympathy with us [in our sufferings] is mother. … For this reason he came down, for this reason he put on humanity, for this reason he willingly suffered human things, that, being brought to the measure of our human weakness, whom he loved, he might bring us to the measure of his power'. *QDS*. 37.2 (3.184): καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄρρητον αὐτοῦ πατήρ, τὸ δὲ εἰς ἡμᾶς συμπαθὲς γέγονε μήτηρ … διὰ τοῦτο καὶ αὐτὸς κατῆλθε, διὰ τοῦτο ἄνθρωπον ἐνέδυ, διὰ τοῦτο τὰ ἀνθρώπων ἑκὼν ἔπαθεν, ἵνα πρὸς τὴν ἡμετέραν ἀσθένειαν οὗς ἠγάπησε μετρηθεὶς ἡμᾶς πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν ἀντιμετρήσῃ. The idea that Christ suffers runs against docetic thought, and this text, though often equally overlooked in the discussion of Clement's ideas, suggests that Clement recognizes in Christ a human suffering to which the watching humanity can relate and feel understood in.

[78] *Protr*. I.5.4 (1.6): καλὸν ὁ κύριος ὄργανον ἔμπνουν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐξειργάσατο κατ᾽ εἰκόνα τὴν ἑαυτοῦ.

[79] It is possible that this theatrical impermanence is applied by Clement to Christ's humanity. What exactly Clement understands to happen to the mask of Christ when he leaves the earth is unclear, but his description of the relationship between Christ as pedagogue and believer as faithful pupil in the *Paedagogus* (see below, n. 95) at no point necessitates the ongoing human nature of Christ but suggests the possibility that Christ's human nature is laid down after the act of atonement and salvation at the cross. Though not of primary concern to this paper, Clement's emphasis on Christ's spiritual instruction in the *Paedagogus* (and in particular Book One) is perhaps even clearer once one recognizes the christological context informing his focus in this later work. For more on the idea of Christ as pedagogue in this text, a picture that is shaped by the current discussion, consult Kovacs, 'Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher According to Clement of Alexandria'.

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5. A NEW CLEMENTINE CHRISTOLOGY

Clement's dramatic presentation of Christ provides the key to unlocking his various christological comments in both the *Protrepticus* and the wider trilogy. Clement's exhortatory work is not particularly concerned with intra-Christian polemics, and as such makes no comment on the theological positions of his opponents. He does, however, furnish his reader with a picture of his Divine *Logos* from the outset of his introduction to the faith. After all, the entire mission of human existence, as Clement understands it, is 'to entrust ourselves to Him … looking upon that as the work of our entire lives'.[80] Christ is central to his appeal to faith, and at the outset of this intellectual project, Clement's Christ is neither 'orthodox' nor docetic. Clement instead articulates his own christological expression, privileging the divine nature, yet offering a very real humanity as Christ performs the drama of salvation. This Clementine position is suggested by his theatrical description of Christ's nature in chapter 10 and allows us to align his seemingly contradictory comments throughout his corpus, including the hints offered elsewhere in the *Protrepticus*.

While Clement is not overt in his dismissal of his Christian opponents in the *Protrepticus* (unlike, for example, the lengthy named attack on Basilides and his followers in the *Stromateis* III), this new christological model does allow us to identify an anti-docetic current flowing through this text. As noted above, Christ is a breathing, living being.[81] Clement further reinforces this idea as he describes Christ as 'clothed in the bonds of flesh', something he concedes is 'a divine mystery' at the start of chapter 11.[82] Only a few lines after his theatrical emphasis on the relationship between Christ's two natures, Clement affirms the felt reality of the human nature. The Christ that Clement encourages his readers to encounter is one who can be engaged with as human, treated as a physical creature, interacted with and experienced. The ontological mystery of the ancient, masked actor is expressed in Clement's Christ—a real human who nonetheless remains truly and wholly divine.

In contrast to this affirmation of Christ's genuine presentation as human, the gods themselves are critiqued in contrast as mere phantoms, in a strange mirror of the more extreme docetic view of the body of Christ. Clement builds on Plato's own language in his *Phaedo* to attack the gods:

> How then is it that these ghosts and demons are gods, when in reality they are unclean and hateful spirits, all are agreed that they are base and filth (δεισαλέα), sunk down and 'skulking around graves and tombs' where they are half-seen as 'ghostly phantoms'. These are your gods, these shadows and ghosts![83]

The gods are phantoms, they are base and vile (Clement's use of δεισαλέα quite literally describes the gods as excrement). Though Christ is absent from this passage, Clement is explicit that such gods are risible subjects, and thus implicit that his own God would have nothing in common with such devilish beings. His God, the living, breathing Divine *Logos*, is no docetic or demonic phantom. In contrast, the gods themselves can make no such claim to genuine reality. It is the Greco-Roman gods, and not Clement's Christ, who most align with the kind of docetic expression articulated by the *Gospel of Philip.*

[80] *Protr*. XII.122.2–3 (1.86).
[81] Ibid. I.5.4 (1.6). See above, n. 78.
[82] Ibid. XI.111.2 (1.78–9). See above, n. 72.
[83] Ibid. IV.55.5–56.1 (1.43–4): πῶς οὖν ἔτι θεοὶ τὰ εἴδωλα καὶ οἱ δαίμονες, βδελυρὰ ὄντως καὶ πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα, πρὸς πάντων ὁμολογούμενα γήινα καὶ δεισαλέα, κάτω βρίθοντα, 'περὶ τοὺς τάφους καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα καλινδούμενα,' περὶ ἃ δὴ καὶ ὑποφαίνονται ἀμυδρῶς 'σκιοειδῆ φαντάσματα'; ταῦθ᾽ ὑμῶν οἱ θεοὶ τὰ εἴδωλα, αἳ σκιαί. Clement borrows from Pl. *Phd*. 81, c–d.

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The result of this comparison is that the duality of Christ's nature, as Clement understands it, is felt throughout the entire work. This is particularly the case in Clement's opening book. Clement is very clear that Christ who has appeared 'in his own person to humanity … is both God and man'.[84] He then continues, Christ 'is the new song … the manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια) which has now shined out among us'.[85] Clement echoes this idea in his passage in chapter 10, describing Christ again as God manifest among humanity (φανερώτατος).[86] Christ has visibly come among his creatures. This manifestation is further entrenched by Clement's comment that the *Logos* appeared to Moses through the burning bush, and the Israelites through a pillar of fire, but 'flesh is of more honour than a pillar or a bush' and so he 'shall speak to you, He "who being in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself", the God of compassion who is eager to save man'.[87] In Clement's understanding, 'the Word of God speaks, having become man, in order that such as you might learn from a man how it is possible for even man to become a god!'[88] The crowning glory of the *Logos*' participation in human history is the Christ-event, and it is this that allows the performance of Christ to reach its salvific end, to raise up humanity itself to the heavenly realms.[89] This crowning appearance of the Divine *Logos* is closely linked to his incarnation—as Clement illustrates through his quotation of Phil. 2:6, and humanity's own response to the Christ-event sparks eternal life for them. As chapter 10 explains, the humanity of Christ is integral to his salvific performance, and chapter 1 suggests it is inherent to the success of that performance.

Whether or not Clement intended his three major extant works to be understood as a trilogy,[90] the *Protrepticus* represents the beginning of his intellectual project. The Christ that is introduced at the opening of that project is neither docetic nor traditionally 'orthodox'. Instead, Clement presents a victorious Christ whose salvific work is accomplished through the assumption of a humanity that does not affect his divinity, nor subsume it. Rather it is a humanity that is fundamentally subordinate to it, put on for the purpose of performing salvation, but not necessarily with a sense of permanence and ongoing human experience. The explanation of chapter 10 illuminates Clement's scattered comments on the nature of his Divine *Logos* found throughout this exhortatory work. His flesh is experienced as an ancient audience experiences a masked actor; it is very much understood, revealed, and responded to. Yet it is also temporary and 'unreal'. Beneath the mask lies the true reality of the performer, but both performer and audience agree to suspend that reality in favour of a collective understanding of a new presentation. Clement's Christ is like such a dramatic actor, a champion-actor, but nonetheless a simple actor. His humanity is put on, logically it could also be taken off, and his divinity remains unchanged in being his fundamental nature. Ontologically for Clement, Christ is fully God, yet functionally, he is fully man.

[84] Ibid. I.7.1 (1.7): νῦν δή ἐμεφάνη ἀνθρώποις οὗτος ὁ λόγος, ὁ μόνος ἄμφω θεός τε καὶ ἄνθρωπος.

[85] Ibid. I.7.3 (1.7): τοῦτο ἐστι τὸ ᾆσμα τὸ καινόν, ἡ ἐπιφάνεια ἡ νῦν ἐκλάμψασα ἐν ἡμῖν. Worden, *Clement of Alexandria: Incarnation and Mission of the Logos–Son*, p. 152 notes that this is one of three references to John 1:1 in chapter 1.

[86] Cf. *Protr*. X.110.2–3 (1.78).

[87] Ibid. I.8.3–4 (1.8–9): ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ κίονος καὶ βάτου ἡ σὰρξ τιμιωτέρα … αὐτός σοι λαλήσει ὁ κύριος, 'ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ: ἐκένωσεν δὲ ἑαυτόν' ὁ φιλοικτίρμων θεός, σῶσαι τὸν ἄνθρωπον γλιχόμενος. Clement cites Phil. 2:6 here.

[88] Ibid. I.8.1 (1.8): ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος γενόμενος, ἵνα δὴ καὶ σὺ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου μάθῃς, πῇ ποτε ἄρα ἄνθρωπος γένηται θεός.

[89] Whilst fascinating, the question of whether Clement is advocating for the deification of humanity in this passage is beyond the scope of the present study. Several contributions have been offered in pursuit of this question. See G. W. Butterworth, 'The Deification of Man in Clement of Alexandria', *JTS*, os 17 (1915–16), pp. 157–69; C. Lattey, 'The Deification of Man in Clement of Alexandria: Some Further Notes', *JTS*, os 17 (1915–16), pp. 257–62; E. Yingling, 'Ye Are Gods: Clement of Alexandria's Doctrine of Deification', *Studia Antiqua* 7 (2009), pp. 93–9; M. D. Litwa, 'You are Gods: Deification in the Naassene Writer and Clement of Alexandria', *Harvard Theological Review* 110 (2017), pp. 125–48; B. Bucur, '"Ever Reaching for Higher and Higher Places": Clement of Alexandria on Spiritual Ascent', in D. Springer and K. Clarke (eds.), *Patristic Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), pp. 130–51.

[90] See above, n. 11.

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Clement's christological position is not some unconsidered proto-orthodoxy, nor does he offer a docetic presentation of the Divine *Logos*. Instead, Clement offers his readers a unique Christology. The false binary created by modern scholars in response to Photios' comments has blinkered discussion of Clement's christological position and obscured the uniqueness of it. The conversation has only been further hindered by the lack of interest in the *Protrepticus*, and the resulting oversight of some crucial and illuminating comments. This paper has sought to counter those errors and offered a fresh perspective on Clement's foundational comments regarding his christological understanding. Clement is not a docetic believer, nor is he 'orthodox' in the manner understood by later commentators such as Photios. His Christology is uniquely Clementine, as he offers a christic humanity that is imported for the salvation event—the incarnation and salvific work of Christ—but does not become an intrinsic part of who Christ is. His nature as divine remains unchanged, and though humanity experiences Christ through that lens—the incarnation event is much like the burning bush or the pillar of fire and cloud—the divine being himself is unaffected by the appearance of something other.

Though space does not permit a comprehensive survey of Clement's further comments on the two natures of Christ in his later writings, this new framework provides clarity for Clement's remarks on the subject beyond the *Protrepticus*. The variety of possible interpretative solutions offered by scholars since Photios' accusations demonstrates how confusion still reigns over Clement's christological comments, but the platform provided by the *Protrepticus* resolves this tension. One of Clement's most controversial remarks on the nature of Christ can be found in *Stromateis* VI:

> It is ludicrous to claim that the body of the Saviour, as a body, needed any necessary nourishment in order to support its continuance/existence. He ate, not for the sake of the body, which was sustained by a holy energy, but in order that it would not occur to those who accompanied Him to have a different opinion about Him, in a similar way as those who later claimed that His appearing in flesh was an illusion.[91]

Ashwin-Seijkowski points to the context in which this passage can be found, and suggests Christ becomes an example of the 'freedom from any bodily distraction' that is the fruit of the gnostic τελείωσις for which Clement advocates.[92] Such an interpretation goes some way to countering the docetic reading of this text, but any sense of docetism is removed if one understands that underpinning the τελείωσις to which the Christian is invited is a salvific performance undertaken by the divine *performing* as human. Not only would we expect to see him act as a human, we would fully understand that such actions are nothing more than elements of the wider role, and not in and of themselves a necessity to the sustaining of this divine being. More than this, the example provided by Christ is enacted before our eyes, and the believer is encouraged to imitate Christ as a result of this.[93] Christ enacted a drama of salvation, as human (though truly as divine). He therefore played out his role, eating to satisfy those with whom he engaged, countering the suggestion that his flesh was an illusion. Nonetheless, he was able to act, and able to refrain from food if necessary, precisely because under his human mask was an unchanged and untainted divine being.

[91] *Strom*. VI.9.71.2 (2.467): ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ μὲν τοῦ σωτῆρος τὸ σῶμα ἀπαιτεῖν ὡς σῶμα τὰς ἀναγκαίας ὑπηρεσίας εἰς διαμονήν, γέλως ἂν εἴη· ἔφαγεν γὰρ οὐ διὰ τὸ σῶμα, δυνάμει συνεχόμενον ἁγίᾳ, ἀλλ᾽ ὡς μὴ τοὺς συνόντας ἄλλως περὶ αὐτοῦ φρονεῖν ὑπεισέλθοι, ὥσπερ ἀμέλει ὕστερον δοκήσει τινὲς αὐτὸν πεφανερῶσθαι ὑπέλαβον.

[92] Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial*, p. 98.

[93] See in particular, *Protr*. XI.117.1 (1.82).

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6. CONCLUSIONS

Clement was not a docetist, indeed, he attacks his opponents Marcion and Cassian and Valentinus for being docetic (δόκησις).[94] Such an assault, which vehemently condemns those who believe in docetism as slanderous (τὴν γένεσιν διαβάλλοντες), seems as perplexing as Clement's seemingly sympathetic comments discussed above. This new model for Clement's christological understanding resolves this confusion. Clement here refutes his opponents for suggesting that birth is evil, and thus Christ in human form would be tarnished by such evil. Clement can speak with such vitriol against this position because he does not consider the humanity of Christ to be a hindrance to his faith. Rather, through a recognition that this humanity does not affect his fundamentally divine nature, Clement celebrates Christ as performing salvation in his human form. He is not a docetic believer and is therefore free to attack those who maintain this position.

Similarly Clement does not offer an 'orthodox' or 'proto-orthodox' christological position in his *Protrepticus*. Instead, I have suggested he articulates a unique Clementine position that acts as a doctrinal foundation for his later comments on the subject. Clement writes amidst a Christian context that is considerably more disjointed, segregated, and isolated than that of his fourth- or fifth-century successors. He does not participate in the kind of debates and exploration of this doctrine that came to command the attention of the church in these later centuries. There is no mainstream or reactionary doctrinal context for Clement to consider his own perspective against. The later language of this debate itself is yet to be created. The result is that Clement is left to express and explore this doctrine on his own. He reaches for the theatrical metaphor of the actor and his mask to express the relationship of the divine and human brought about in the incarnation.

The result is a clarity, within Clement's understanding, of a hugely complex teaching, a clarity that allows him to set a platform for his later works. The description of Christ and the relationship between his two natures offered in this first work sets the reader up to proceed into the deeper spiritual gnosis of the *Paedagogus* and *Stromateis*, with an emphasis on their connection to a divine Christ. The Clementine Christ articulated in the *Protrepticus* frees this author up to advance his intellectual spiritual project, inviting the reader to embrace a divine Christ who, though human in salvation, will ultimately engage with the reader as divine tutor and mystic guide.[95] The distraction of the Photian debate obscures this unique christological position, but a recognition of this stance will allow for a reconsideration of Clement's Christ in light of the platform of the *Protrepticus* that Clement himself creates.

[94] *Strom*. III.17.102.1–3 (2.243).

[95] Cf. e.g. *Paed*. I.1.1.3–4 (1.90), where Clement describes how his *Logos* is both 'heavenly guide' and divine 'pedagogue'.

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