

**CHRIST DEPICTED AS THE HONOURABLE
LEADER IN THE PEDAGOGUE OF
CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA**

G.D.S. Smit; H.F. Stander; P.J. Botha¹

University of Pretoria

Abstract

Biblical scholars have become increasingly aware of the importance of looking at texts not only in their historical or literary contexts, but also in their socio-cultural context. Many studies have shown that honour and shame were important social values in the ancient Mediterranean world. Unfortunately, claims that are being made in modern studies concerning honour and shame are usually based on the biblical and classical writings. These scholars seldom consult patristic writings. In this article, it is argued that honour and shame were indeed key social values in the writings of the early Church Fathers. This article focuses on Clement of Alexandria's teachings in the first book of the Παιδαγωγὸς concerning Christ, the honourable leader. These values form part of the textual strategy of the author since the honour of Christ is used to advance and propagate certain modes of conduct.

1. Introduction

There can be no doubt that honour and shame were indeed important social values in the ancient Mediterranean world. Many scholars have argued that

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honour and shame should be considered as the key to unlock the ancient text of the New Testament². Recently Stander³ has argued that honour and shame were not only important social values in the classical and biblical writings, but should be considered as the key to understanding the writings of the early Church Fathers as well.

The Pedagogue of Clement of Alexandria serves as a very good social commentary on the values of the ancient Mediterranean society. Clement of Alexandria lived at the end of the second and into the beginning of the third century AD (±155-215 AD, according to Ferguson 1997:260). Although Clement drew much of his inspiration from Philo the Jew, his writings are adamant about Christian ethics. In the ancient Mediterranean world idolatry and promiscuity were very common. Clement urges his followers to keep away from idolatry, and shows how purity should be cherished even though Christians might be shamed by the value system of the Greco-Roman society.

In Galatians 3:24 the apostle Paul writes: ὥστε ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν γέγονεν εἰς Χριστόν, ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν.

(“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” – King James Version).

Concerning the word παιδαγωγός. Lategan (1986:72) writes: “Dit is die grondvorm van die woord wat ons vandag as ‘pedagoog’ ken”. In the Greco-Roman world a pedagogue usually was a slave who had to oversee the education of the children of his master. He was supposed to be a strict teacher and it was expected from him to be unsympathetic towards the failures of his learners. In this regard Clement of Alexandria describes Christ: He is the Pedagogue of the Christians. They are the Children of God and should consider the honour of their Father in their obedience toward the Pedagogue.

According to deSilva (2000:44), the ancient Mediterranean society argued that it was a shame to be a follower of Jesus Christ: ...it “*did prove to be a source for dishonour and the manifestations of one’s neighbours’ lack of esteem...*”. The Christian movement associated themselves with Jesus of Nazareth. Nazareth was not an important place for a leader to come from. Furthermore, in his teachings Jesus confronted the established honourable leaders of society with a value system of love and forgiveness, a system not known in antiquity. This ended up in Christ’s crucifixion. Therefore, in terms of the value system of the ancient Mediterranean society, the community did not reckon the Christian movement as honourable.

² See for example: Peristiany & Pitt-Rivers (1992); Malina (1993); deSilva (2000).

³ See for example the following articles: Stander, H.F. 2003. “Honour and shame as key concepts in Chrysostom’s exegesis of the Gospel of John”. In *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 59(3) and Stander, H.F. 2003. “Eer en skaamte as sleutelkonsepte in Chrysostomos se eksegesi van 1 Korintiërs”. *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif*, 44 (3 & 4), September/Desember 2003, 518-526.

Clement writes to the Christians in the Pedagogue (hereafter called Ped.) to refute the society's view on the honour of the early Christians and their shameful approach towards Christianity.

2. Christ is the honourable Παιδαγωγός

In the ancient Mediterranean world people lived most of their lives in the public eye (Malina 1993:8). To attack the honour of the leader of a group was considered to be an attack on the members of the group themselves. The Mediterranean society frequently attacked the honour of Jesus Christ, even after his death, to portray their view on the lack of honour of the Christian group⁴. Clement is therefore reassuring the Christians that they have an honourable leader, despite the remarks of the outsiders. The Pedagogue has exceptional qualities not found in other Greco-Roman leaders.

2.1 The Pedagogue is ὁ Λόγος

A leader's honourable descent usually was a major factor for the followers' acceptance of his leadership (Malina *et al* 1995:14). For the early Church, the title ὁ λόγος was well-known. Christ was the Logos from the beginning of creation, says the apostle John⁵. He is the image of the invisible God, says Paul⁶. In another instance he is called ὁ Θεός⁷. In Christianity, the earthly things were seldom portrayed positively: the things down here were regarded as temporary and thus surpassing. Heavenly things and the creatures "up there" were seen as honourable.

In the Pedagogue of Clement, Christ is also being portrayed as the Λόγος (Ped. 1, I, 1): He is the Word. He is the One who is able to free man from the customs of this world, and lead him/her unto the path of faith in God (εἷς ὢν (sic) πᾶς ὁ αὐτὸς οὗτος λόγος, τῆς συντρόφου καὶ κοσμικῆς συνηθείας ἐξαρπάζων τὸν ἄνθρωπον, εἰς δὲ τὴν μονότροπον τῆς εἰς θεὸν πίστεως σωτηρίαν παιδαγωγῶν)- Ped. 1, I, 1-2). According to Pilch & Malina (1993:12) one could expect an honourable leader to call his followers to repent from their old ways unto the new⁸. This is indeed what Clement is telling the Christians: he is calling the followers of Christ to leave the customs of the world and to let the Pedagogue lead them from the "worldly customs" towards faith in God. Because he is able to call humankind to freedom, he must be honourable. He is thus a heavenly leader.

⁴ See in this regard Hanson & Oakman (1998:71-73).
See John 1:1-14.

⁶ See Col. 1:15.

⁷ See Rom. 9:5.

⁸ This type of social behavior is called authoritarianism. See how Clement is using the technique of authoritarianism: He states that the Pedagogue invites man to be saved (ἐπὶ σωτηρίαν παρεκάλει - Ped. 1, I, 2).

2.2 The Pedagogue acts wisely

To have a wise leader in antiquity, one who acts with integrity, was honourable for the whole group. A wise leader was able to protect the honour of his group, especially when someone attacked their honour verbally⁹. An honourable leader should have been able to use the right words at the right time (Pilch & Malina 1993:96).

According to Clement, the Pedagogue is a wise leader (Ped. 1, II, 2). He does not get involved in public arguments like the philosophers of their time. His focus is on the bad acts and the sinful thoughts of his group in order to call them to repentance (Ped. 1, II, 16). He is wise, because he is not concerned about earthly honour, but rather about the honour of his Father in heaven (Ped. 1, II, 18). This is yet another reason why the Pedagogue must be considered an honourable leader.

2.3 The Pedagogue acts with authority

To publicly question the leader, was regarded a shame in antiquity. One should rather keep quiet than to question the puissance of someone with higher status (Malina *et al* 1995:87). To accept a leader's authority confirmed his honour as a leader. On the other hand, the obedience of one's subjects was regarded a virtue for a leader as well. To have the ability to control the acts of one's followers was seen as a positive manifestation of a leader's power. It directly influenced his ascribed honour in the community (Pilch & Malina 1993:139-140).

According to Clement, Christ has the ability to control the acts of his followers, and he has the ability to make them aware of their responsibilities towards him, as well as their responsibilities towards God (...εἰς τὴν τῶν δεόντων ἐνέργειαν παρακαλεῖ... Ped. 1, I, 6). An honourable leader had to have the ability to heal the needs of his group: "*The process of healing involves diagnosing the problem, prognosing the outcome, and applying the suitable therapy*" (Pilch & Malina 1993:141). Note how Clement attempts to show the abilities of the Pedagogue in terms of "healing": the Pedagogue works therapeutically (θεραπευτικός... Ped. 1, I, 4) to heal the transgressions of his children. He does not heal their public honour and their status in society, but he heals their basic psychological needs: that is their struggle with sinful thoughts (Ped. 1, II, 21). In another instance Clement remarks:

πρακτικὸς ... δὲ ὧν ὁ Παιδαγωγός, πρότερον μὲν εἰς διάχθεσιν ἡθοποιίας προὔτρεψατο, ἤδη δὲ καὶ εἰς τὴν τῶν δεόντων ἐνέργειαν παρακαλεῖ...

⁹ See for instance Hanson & Oakman (1998 :73).

The Instructor being practical... first exhorts to the attainment of right dispositions and character, and then persuades us to the energetic practice of our duties.

Thus, according to Clement, the diagnosis of the problem is the commitment to learn from the Pedagogue, the prognosis is *the attainment of right dispositions and character*; and the application lies in the *energetic practice of our duties*. This is the third reason, according to Clement, why Christ should be considered an honourable leader, because of his ability to diagnose, prognose, and apply his authority to the needs of the group.

2.4 The Pedagogue has an honourable position

Clement depicts Christ as the most extraordinary teacher (Ped. 1, I, 4-6). He states a major reason for this remark, i.e. the Pedagogue is the One sitting on the right hand of the Father (ὁ ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ Πατρὸς ... - Ped. 1, II, 11). Clement depicts God as a King, and Christ as his honourable servant on his right hand. The way certain body parts were handled, were usually symbolic of the honour or the shame attributed to that specific part of the body¹⁰. For example, the head of a king was anointed, but a criminal was usually hit in the face (deSilva 2000:31). Just as a community is build on different groups with different values and different levels of honour, so does the body consist of different body parts, some more honourable than others (Pilch & Malina 1993:92). The hand is therefore an honourable body part, especially the right hand. The right hand is the working hand, and thus more important than the left hand. To be sitting on the right hand of a king was considered the most honourable position available to a mortal. When Christ is depicted whilst sitting at the right hand of God, Clement shows his honourable position. He is in God's favour. This places Christ "...in the position of highest honor in the Jewish and Christian cosmos..." (deSilva 2000:32). This must be considered another reason for the Pedagogue's ability to be an honourable leader.

2.4 The Pedagogue is God's Son

The Mediterranean world regarded children, especially sons, as symbols of great honour: they were seen as the token of the grace of the gods (Malina 1993:79). Sons were usually regarded as objects of wealth, because of their ability to protect the household in times of war. They could also strive to alleviate the needs of the household within the community. Someone's lineage was a major factor in determining his honour. To be the son of an important person was exceptionally honourable. In Pedagogue 1, II, 11-12 Clement illustrates one of the most well-known images in Christian thought: the Father-

¹⁰ DeSilva (2000:31) gives a list of "honourable" and "shameful" body parts in the New Testament.

Child relationship existing between Christ and God. The Pedagogue not only has knowledge of God, but he even has God's features: *He is sinless, blameless, and with a soul devoid of passion; God in the form of man, stainless, the minister of his Father's will, the Word who is God, who is in the Father, who is at the Father's right hand, and with the form of God, is God* (Ped. 1, II, 11). *He is to us a spotless image; to him we are to try with all our might to assimilate our souls. He is wholly free from human passions; wherefore also he alone is judge, because he alone is sinless* (Ped. 1, II, 12). The fact that he has God's names as son of God, is a good reason to accept him as an honourable leader, according to Clement.

3. The Pedagogue has a typical client-patron relationship towards his followers

Another aspect in connection with the Pedagogue as an honourable leader is the relationship between Christ and his followers, according to Clement. In the ancient Mediterranean world it was customary for a leader to have his followers as clients (or receivers) of his grace (Neyrey 2004:online). To receive the grace of the patron, a client had to obey the rules put forth by the patron. If a client did not obey the rules of the patron, he could no longer share in the patron's grace with the rest of the group. In this regard, Clement depicts God as the Great Patron of the Christian group. He has the ability to punish all who disobey him (Ped. 1, II, 5), and the one who repents from his disobedience, will be saved (Ped. 1, II, 16).

3.1 The Pedagogue as Mediator of God's grace

In the ancient Mediterranean society people often fulfilled the role of mediators between a patron and his clients (Malina *et al* 1995:16). When a patron was unavailable, someone appointed by the patron himself usually had the role of seeing that the needs of the clients were met. Accordingly, prophets or priests were usually accepted as mediators of the will of the gods.

Consequently, Christ is depicted as the Mediator of God's grace. He serves the grace of God to his children (Ped. 1, II, 4). Christ now has the same abilities as the Father: He now also has the ability to set people free from their sins (Ped. 1, II, 17) and he can wake the dead as well (Ped. 1, II, 17). Therefore, he can be gracious to whomever he wants to be gracious to (Ped. 1, II, 17). Moxnes (2004:29) seems to be correct in arguing that the term "grace" is often misunderstood in modern theology. If one look at the word "grace" through the concept of the social values of the ancient Mediterranean world, one soon realizes that the term is usually connected to the patron-client relationship so well known in antiquity. By using the word *grace* Clement calls to the Christian to realize that they have a Patron, to whom they must pay their debts. It seems that Clement understands the term *grace* in a much broader way than the writers do in the New Testament. In the New Testament the word

grace is usually connected to the acts of God towards his children, but in the Pedagogue it is also connected to the acts of the children toward each other (Ped. 1, II, 4). Because of the *grace* of God, the children must be gracious toward the rest of the group.

In Pedagogue 1, II, 13 Clement directly draws a correlation between the obedience of the Pedagogue towards the Father, and the subsequent acceptance of his followers as children of God. The Christians are now adopted as children. Now, the obedience of the Son serves as motivation for the obedience of the children of God (Ped. 1, II, 13). By being an honourable Son of God, the followers of Christ are called to obey God and his Christ.

In Pedagogue 1, V, 46 Clement asks about the identity of these adopted children of the Father, and comes to a definite conclusion: Οἱ παῖδες, ἡμεῖς (*We are the children!*). Therefore, the Christians are encouraged not to obey shameful people. Nor are they to see the Church leaders as the most honourable people, but they must persist in the example of Christ. All followers of Christ are regarded as God's children. Therefore, all Christians have the responsibility to exalt the name of their Father (Ped. 1, III, 27-28). The Pedagogue is thus an honourable leader because he not only is the Mediator of the grace of the Father, but through him, all followers are regarded as children of God.

3.2 Man and woman equal in the grace of the Pedagogue

The social position of women in the early Church is a topic often referred to in modern studies¹¹. An interesting fact in Clement's arguments concerning God as the Patron and Christ as the Mediator of God's grace is that Clement never distinguishes between man and woman in terms of their relationship toward the Pedagogue. In fact, Clement explicitly states that God never intended to make a distinction between a man and a woman when it comes to their faith. Although Clement makes a few sharp remarks toward women and their clothing¹², it seems that Clement had a different approach to women than most of the other Church Fathers. In Pedagogue 1, IV, 41 Clement says:

Let us, then, embracing more and more this good obedience, give ourselves to the Lord; clinging to what is surest, the cable of faith in him, and understanding that the virtue of man and woman is the same. For if the God of both is one, the master of both is also one; one church, one temperance, one modesty; their food is common, marriage an equal yoke; respiration, sight, hearing, knowledge, hope, obedience, love all alike.

Man and woman have the same virtue (... τὴν αὐτὴν ἀρετὴν ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς εἶναι νενοηκότες) in the eyes of the Pedagogue. The only

¹¹ See for example: Rabichev (2004); Cornelius (2002) and Penn (2001).

¹² See for instance Clement's Pedagogue 2, II concerning the wearing of certain clothes by women.

difference between a man and a woman is situated in their different roles in marriage. They both marry, but they have different needs and they have different obligations. However, in faith they are the same. This is so much more a reason to accept the Pedagogue as an honourable leader, argues Clement, for women are not excluded from his group.

4. If one accepts the Pedagogue as an honourable leader, accepts his rules

Clement argues that he who accepts the leadership of the heavenly leader, should accept his teachings. His teachings are summarised in Pedagogue 1, VII, 62: *To obey God, and not humans, that is the instruction of the Pedagogue.* Clement gives a few reasons to show the Christians why it is important to accept Christ's honourable leadership:

Like the general directs the phalanx, consulting the safety of his soldiers, and the pilot steers the vessel, desiring to save the passengers; so also the Instructor guides the children to a saving course of conduct, through solicitude for us; and, in general, whatever we ask in accordance with reason from God to be done for us, will happen to those who believe in the Instructor (Ped. 1, VII, 64-66).

Disobedience towards the Pedagogue is identified by Clement as the root of all evil (... γούνη ὅτι ἠμαρτεν ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος, καὶ παρήκουσε τοῦ Θεοῦ. -Ped. 1, XIII, 36). To share in the grace of the Pedagogue, one must follow his rules (Ped. 1, XIII, 38). Sin is therefore irrational (Ped. 1, XIII, 30-53). Moreover, the question is: what are these rules? It is the things God teaches them in Scripture (Ped. 1, XIII, 47). The children of God are therefore called to believe in the honourable leadership of the Pedagogue (Paid. 1, XIII, 48) taught through Scripture.

5. Conclusion

It seems that Clement built on the New Testament writers' concept of honour and shame, noting especially the idea that the Christian community has a new leader, who required them to follow his new rules. The Christian, having given up most of the things dear to them for the sake of Christ, had to be continually reminded that they serve an honourable cause, even though the Greco-Roman community despises them. This is probably one of the basic reasons why the language of honour and shame is so prominent in the Pedagogue of Clement of Alexandria.

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