

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY

Clare Gardom, PhD candidate,
University of Oxford

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Abstract

Clement of Alexandria's Paedagogus contains advice for new Christians in the second to third century on how to conduct their lives appropriately. By drawing on scripture and classical philosophy and medicine Clement proposes a moderate asceticism which seeks to control the body but also to respect it. He addresses the question of how a Christian should live in pagan society, and how individual Christians of different backgrounds should behave in order to promote the flourishing of the Christian community. Underlying his advice is his understanding of the person as a plasma, with both body and soul created by God.

Key words: Clement of Alexandria, anthropology, senses, asceticism, soul-body relationship, Platonism, Stoicism

The call for papers issued for this conference describes how the technological developments of the last few decades have resulted in a transformation of human society: "The recent technological revolution has shaken the former foundations of the world: the former identities, authorities, and hierarchical and social structures of civil societies." It is a challenge indeed for us to work out what it means to be a human, let alone a good human, in this changing world. But I am going to argue that, among the resources we have to help us navigate this, Clement of Alexandria is a rather good guide.

Clement lived in Alexandria, a Greek-speaking city in Roman Egypt, in the second to third century AD. It was a wealthy, bustling trading hub where goods from India and Africa arrived before being taken on to Rome. It was a city of many gods and temples – Egyptian, Greek, and Roman – with a strong historic Jewish community, as