NON-LOGICAL METHODS OF PERSUASION IN CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA'S PROTREPTICUS

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In order to understand the apologetic task of the Orthodox Church in the United States after the fall of modernism in both its philosophical and cultural forms, it may be helpful to consider methods of persuasion that the Church has used successfully outside the modernist context to invite people into Christian philosophy, into its way of living. Although such methods should not be taken over uncritically into our own context, understanding our history on this point may help us both to think beyond our own situation and to find the "pitch" of theology so that we may proclaim, with our own voices and in our own time, what Clement calls the New Song sung before all ages, Christ Jesus.

Protrepsis and Postmodernity

Aristotle was the first philosopher known to have written a Protrepticus or "Invitation to Philosophy"; however, only fragments of his work have survived. Clement of Alexandria's Protrepticus was composed toward the end of the second century AD and represents the first (and certainly most famous) Christian example of the


2 Prot. 1.6.5.

3 For an excellent overview of the development of the genre, especially the modern development of the dichotomy between protrepsis as "a call to philosophy" and paraeneesis as "an exhortation to continue in a certain way of life," and a persuasive dissolution of that dichotomy, see Dianna Swancutt, Paraeneesis in Light of Protrepsis: Troubling the Typical Dichotomy, in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., Early Christian Paraeneesis in Context (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 113–53. Swancutt notes that protrepsis may contain elements of each.
genre. In the second century, during the time of the second sophistic, a resurgence of the genre took form in letters, dialogues, and set speeches. The genre was designed to show vividly to an audience the failings and inconsistencies in their present way of living and heal its readers of them by setting those faults clearly before their eyes.

The modes of persuasion employed in the genre of protrepsis lend themselves easily to adaptation for postmodern culture. I use the term "postmodern" advisedly here and throughout in the sense advocated by Lyotard: an "incredulity toward meta-narratives," wherein especially the meta-narratives of science and history are called into question and recognized as contingent, displaceable micro-narratives. Experience is important for understanding micro-narratives, since they—like Wittgenstein’s language games—are only learnt and have meaning when one is connected to the practices or "forms of life" that give rise to them. Experience and practice ground one within the contingency of the game. Lyotard terms knowledge [connaissance] in this connection savoir-faire or savoir-vivre; it is exactly this sort of practiced knowledge that bears persuasive force in the postmodern situation.

In terms of change, postmodern culture concerns itself less with the objective "truth" or "falsity" of a proposition or set of propositions that it will assent to or not on logical or historical

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5 Ibid.
6 David Bentley Hart in his The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) works to develop a theology that witnesses to the postmodern situation by centering the demonstration of his theology on the experience of beauty. He embodies that theology in his prose style which, like Clement’s, has been aptly called "trenchant, but often beautiful." Janet Martin Soskice, Times Literary Supplement 5271 (2004): 8.
7 Meta-narratives, in Lyotard’s terminology, are over-arching stories or large-scale theories (e.g., the universal validity of empirical science, the development of doctrine, or a metaphysical system) that legitimate certain, usually authoritarian, discourses by smoothing over the existing chaos and multiplicity of individual experience. Jean-François Lyotard, La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979), 7.
8 Ibid., 18–23.
bases, than it does with the conversion to a better way of life—a more functional Weltanschauung—by a person who, steeped in that way of living, knows from experience that it actually embodies a joyous and healthy way to live. To change a Weltanschauung is not to simply exchange one or several propositions for another, but, from within one’s own frame of judgment, to “split off” or “abandon” a whole interconnected section of that world or “way” of making judgments. This integrated process is affective and logical, without making a clear distinction between these categories, as well as being deeply interested. It is emphatically not a disinterested, purely logical, way of choosing, as is popularly thought; the complexity of this kind of decision making cannot be reduced to a set of tidy syllogisms.

The mode of protrepsis is relevant to this kind of conversion because it contains within its very form and puts on display the moral integrity—the savoir-vivre—of the speaker, while at the same time constituting for her a moral practice. Rather than relying on the logical validity of a metaphysical system or universal meta-narrative to convince the reader, it convicts her through a contextualized rhetoric that works affectively by drawing out internal inconsistencies between the reader’s way of life and her deeply held, cultural values. It makes a vivid display both of the writer’s own consistency and way of living well (her savoir-vivre) and, at the same time, the palpable disservice the reader does herself in not converting to it. Epictetus famously elaborates these functions of protrepsis in his Discourses:

[Protrepsis] enables you to show an individual or a crowd the contradictions that they are involved in, and that they care for everything rather than what they mean to care for; for they want the things conducive to happiness, but they seek them where they are not to be found.

Protrepsis, for Epictetus, demonstrates its validity by putting into practice the savoir-vivre of the true philosopher both in its aim

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10 Ibid.
11 Epictetus, Discourses 3.23.34.
and its construction. Its aim is to convict her audience, so that they depart saying, “That philosopher has well and truly grabbed hold of me; I must no longer behave as I do.” The speech, therefore, must be not only beautiful enough to captivate her audience, but frank enough to convict them. Epictetus describes the philosopher’s school as a surgery; like the gangrenous patient, the philosopher’s audience should leave feeling a bit cauterized. The tension between these two requirements created a very real temptation for the philosopher (as well as for the modern apologist) to indulge her vices. Because the literary construction of a Protrepsis must be humble, frank, and yet at the same time artful and arresting, vices such as pride or self-righteousness undermine the form of the speech itself, changing it from protrepsis to epideictic. Thus, protrepsis as such display the speaker’s savoir-vivre in its very execution. Clement shows himself in his Protrepticus to be like Epictetus’ “true philosopher,” balancing beauty and frankness in order to put to his readers the question of how they will live. By contrast, the sophist or false-philosopher, who practices epideictic rather than protrepsis by indulging his vices, aims to hear the praise of his audience for his ability as a writer and speaker, as well as to hear how much they enjoyed his speech. Therefore he constructs his speeches primarily as aesthetic works with the result that they either gratify those who already agree with him or they please everyone because he has used his art to make his message innocuous or irrelevant.

Therefore, since Clement provides us with an important Christian example of protrepsis, and protrepsis is an ancient model from which we might learn to develop an apologetics that can proceed with both persuasive moral integrity and an honest acceptance of our own linguistic, cultural, and narrative contingency, let us turn

12 Epictetus, Discourses 3.23.28–29.
13 Epictetus, Discourses 3.23.38.
14 Epictetus, Discourses 3.23.30.
15 E.g., Prot. 12.123.2. I will examine in detail below the way in which Clement insults his readers’ beliefs and practices.
16 Epictetus, Discourses 3.23.37–38.
17 Ibid.
to Clement and examine the modes of persuasion he employs to call his reader to the New Song of Jesus Christ.

**Three Methods**

The seductive songs of the Sirens demonstrated a superhuman power, putting all who passed into a state of shock, and inducing them almost despite themselves to accept their words.\(^{18}\)

Clement’s first lesson to the modern reader is that he begins his apologetic in the radical, beautiful, force and contingency of language. As evidenced in the text above, he understands that power of poetics as something that can pull a person, *almost* against their will, to a conclusion. The trope that persuasive speech has superhuman power—like a divinity or drugs—and can overcome the will of a person is not novel in Clement, but runs deep through Greek thought and is evidenced as early as Gorgias.\(^{19}\) Clement explicitly weaves this tradition into the structure of his apologetic. By mingling the “Song of Moses”—the Scriptures—with the best of philosophy, poetry, literature, and his culture, he creates a stunning rhetorical language that transforms this “Song” into a “soother of grief and wrath, that bids all ills be forgotten.”\(^{20}\)

In his hands, the Scriptures, pointing to Jesus Christ, become “the sweet and true medicine of persuasion [γλυκό τι καὶ ἀληθινὸν φάρμακον πειθοῦ].”\(^{21}\) Clement mixes into his already heady poetics of philosophy, poetry, and Scripture, the divine Word himself—Christ, the λόγος, who “consecrated of old, and worthy of power, has been called [...] the New Song.”\(^{22}\) Thus, Clement mingles the Greek, Hebrew, and Christian traditions of powerful speech into a metaphysical poetics of the divine, saving, and world-creating λόγος, which he deems the New Song. From there, from that potent place of weakness and of folly, he sings for us this New Song, a song that draws his audience

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18 *Strom.* 2.2.9.7.
20 *Prot.* 1.2.4.
21 Ibid.
22 *Prot.* 1.6.5.
almost to the point of madness or compulsion—haunting and forcible as drugs or the sirens beyond their rocks—to the Singer and the Song, to Jesus Christ himself.

As Clement strikes his lyre and begins to sing, three chords ring out at once to move his hearer, and these can be heard at nearly every point in the Protrepticus. These are his lyric aesthetics, the cultural and imagistic dynamics of honor and shame, and the creation of cognitive dissonance and resolution. Let us then investigate these techniques that Clement uses to persuade his reader of the truth and the beauty of life in Jesus Christ.

**Lyric Aesthetics**

The beauty of the *Protrepticus* has not escaped the notice of its translators. Mondésert eloquently says of it,

> Ce petit ouvrage se présente cependant en un style elegant et fin, où le souci de l'art ne paralyse pas ni la spontancité ni l'élan. Fraîcheur, sincérité, enthousiasme, vivacité, profond­eur, eloquence rendent tout à fait séduisant, cet «appeal aux païens».

For an overview of the literary plan of the *Protrepticus*, see C. Mondésert, *Le Protreptic* (Paris: Cerf, 1949), 29–42. In terms of its providence, most scholars consider the *Protrepticus* to have been composed in order to convert pagans to Christianity. This, however, has recently been questioned by Worden, who posits it may have been written to Christians who had lapsed back into paganism. For the majority view see A. Méhat, *Etude sur les ‘Stromates’ de Clément d’Alexandrie* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1966), 305–9; G. W. Butterworth, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), xv–xvi; Eric Osborn, “Clement of Alexandria,” in G. R. Evans, ed., *The First Christian Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 127; John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 149; Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 14; and Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 125. For Worden’s counter argument, see D. Worden, *Clement of Alexandria: His Three Independent Major Works and the Mystery of the Didaskalos* (Langley, BC: Trinity Western University Press, 2010), 29–49. Whether the audience was at one time Christian is inmaterial to our inquiry here; all that matters is that they are not now and hold in common with the author a culture and traditionally Greek morality, which no one would dispute.

24 “This little work is presented in a style nonetheless elegant and fine, where the care of its art paralyses neither its spontaneity, nor its movement. Freshness, sincerity, en-
In a more characteristically British style, Coxe remarks,

It is an elaborate and masterly work, rich in felicitous classical allusion and quotation, breathing throughout the spirit of philosophy and of the Gospel, and abounds in passages of power and beauty. 25

Norden, in his German work on Clement, compares the first chapter of the Protrepticus to the prooemium of the pastoral roman of Longus, who was perhaps a contemporary of Clement. He calls the style of the Protrepticus "refined" because of its rhythm, word choice, and composition. He even adds to his comparison with Longus' poetry that the opening of the Protrepticus sounds like that of an epic poem or something close in effect to an ode of Pindar. 26 Clement's style is also deeply affected by that of both Plato and the Bible. His most recent English translator, G. W. Butterworth, aptly says of Clement that "He uses the language of Plato as unconsciously as he uses that of the Scriptures; and it need hardly be said that when he writes under these two influences he is at his very best." 27

Clement achieves this striking beauty by letting his apology fade in and out of poetry. An analysis of Clement's prose meter reveals that he often slides into dithyrambic and hymnic verse. 28 Clement's masterful use of poetic techniques, such as the employment of meter, parallelism in word order, chiasmus, and the emphatic repetition of words creates a cultured and florid style typical of good, Asiatic, second-sophistic writing, as might appear in Lucian or Maximus of Tyre. His deployment of higher-level stylistic devices such as hortatory, rhetorical and informative questions, apostrophe, emotive exclamations, and paratactic asyndeton also

thusiasm, vivacity, depth, and elegance make this 'appeal to the pagans' thoroughly seductive.” Mondésert, Le Protreptique, 27.

25 Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., A n t e-Ni c e n e Fi t h e r s 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1896), 167.

26 Eduard Norden, Di e A n t i k e K u n s t p r o s a (Leip z i g : T e u b n e r, 1898), 589.

27 George. W. Butterworth, "Clement of Alexandria's Protrepticus and the Phaedrus of Plato," T h e C l a s s i c a l Q u a r t e r l y 1 0 . 4 (1916): 198-205, at 205.

worked together with his high prose style to make his work readily recognizable to the Greek cultural elite as a well-executed piece of moral literature, at home among the προτρεπτικοι λόγοι of the Stoics and Cynics.²⁹ Clement uses this high style together with his nearly omnipresent quotation of biblical and classical texts to bridge the gap between the Spartan prose of the scriptural Christ and the Attic grace of the universal λόγος his audience would have found convincing, engaging, and authoritative.³⁰ The style of the Protrepticus is of a quality arresting enough that it would have held even the interest and investment of a contentious audience due to the work’s imposing beauty as a piece of literature.³¹

Clement employs these aesthetic techniques to persuasive ends as he plays his “New Song” in counter-point chords, changing between major and minor: He plays the beautiful strains of order and Christian harmony against the frenzied discord of pagan cacophony. As he moves through the first chapters of the Protrepticus, Clement alternates these aesthetics as he writes about pagan and Christian life. The changes are harsh and draw the reader into a desire for the palpable consonance of Christ.

I can tell you a tale of another legend and another singer, Eunomus the Locrian and the Pythian grasshopper. A solemn assembly [πανήγυρις] of Greeks, held in honor of the dead serpent, was gathering [συνεκροτεῖτο] at Pytho with Eunomus singing [ἀδοντες] a funeral ode for the reptile .... There was a competition [ἡν ἀγων] and Eunomus was playing [ἐκιδάριζεν] the lyre in the heat of the day, at the time when the grasshoppers, warmed by the sun, were singing under the leaves along the hills. They were singing [Ῥημόν], you see, not to the dead serpent of Pytho, but to the all-wise God, a spontaneous natural song, better than the measured strains of Eunomus. A string breaks [Ῥηγνυται] in the Locrian’s hands; the grasshopper settles on the neck of the lyre [ἐφιπταται] and begins to twitter there as if upon a branch: whereupon the minstrel, by

²⁹ Ibid., 68.
³⁰ Ibid., 77–118.
³¹ Ibid., 65–67.
adapting his music to the grasshopper’s lay, supplied the place of the missing string. ... How in the world is it that you have given credence to worthless legends [πὴ δὴ οὖν μύθοις κενοῖς πεπιστεύκατε], imagining brute beasts to be enchanted by music, while the bright face of truth seems alone [ἀληθείας δὲ ὑμῖν τὸ πρόσωπον τὸ φαινόν μόνον] to strike you as deceptive and is regarded with unbelieving eyes?32

Through his drawn-out, idyllic description Clement places the scene before the eyes of his reader, involving them psychologically and emotionally in the tale. He does this in several ways. First, Clement creates distance between the reader and the story by introducing himself as a mediator between the reader and the Jabula in the persona of the narrator: “I can tell you a tale ...” At the very beginning, then, Clement frames the story he tells within a conversation between himself and his reader. He does not dwell on this interjection, but quickly passes over it in order to engage the reader in the tale. The narration begins by setting a familiar scene, a funerary ἀγών for the serpent at Pytho, and focuses the reader intently on it. In the first half of the story, he invites the reader into the story’s temporal distance from the narrator through his use of imperfect verbs (συνεκροτεῖτο, ἦν, ἐκθάρὰζεν, ἤδον). The imperfect, too, serves to “set the scene” of the narration by its vivid depiction of ongoing action that unfolds before the reader’s eyes in this distant and legendary past. Once the reader is thoroughly engaged in the world of the story, Clement heightens the vividness of the effect and focalizes the story’s climax by using the historical present (ῥήγνυται, ἐφιππαται). These techniques move and engage the reader by their beauty. Then, once Clement has lulled the reader into this world where crickets sing to the all-wise God in the heat of lazy afternoons, he jars the reader from the fantasy by re-introducing the voice of the narrator and breaking the narrative frame. Clement resumes the conversation he began in order to correct his demonstrably foolish

32 Prot. 1.1.1–1.2.1. Clement’s recounting of this beautiful tale draws deeply on Plato’s Phaedrus. On the many and intimate connections between the Protrepticus and the Phaedrus, see Butterworth, “Clement of Alexandria’s Protrepticus and the Phaedrus of Plato,” 198–205.
reader, whom he himself has seduced into foolishness. He first corrects the reader's interpretation of the tale, which he ascribes to "the Greeks," and then, identifying the reader with the Greeks whom he has just corrected, he incredulously lambasts his reader, almost yelling at them: "πώς δὴ ὃν μύθοις κενόις πεπιστεύκατε?" 33 Clement uses this narrative technique to create a contrapuntal alternation between pleasure and pain, first seducing his reader into enjoying a beautiful tale and then confronting him as the narrator—in another kind of ἀγων—to reprove the reader of his seduction.

Thus, Clement insults his hearers and the pagan reading of the tale that he positions them to have. Clement continues on in this vein, raising his philosopher's παρρησία almost to a fever pitch. 34 He rants in this tone against all the pagan rites and travesties committed in the name of the gods for whom Eunomus stands: the "mad revels of the Bacchic rite ... satyrs and frenzied rout and all." 35 Clement even puts his reader in the place of the perverse:

I cannot bear the thought of all the calamities that are worked up into tragedy; yet in your hands the records of these evils have become dramas, and the actors of the dramas are a sight that gladdens your heart. 36

Plucking their emotions by the exercise of his παρρησία, like the strings on his own lyre—pulling them out of themselves and so causing them pain—Clement creates in his readers the desire to return from the shame and ugliness of this rebuke and the world it exposes back into what is beautiful and good. 37 Finally, after bearing down on his reader for nearly as many lines as he seduced him with, Clement grants him resolution to the tension he created, giving him a soothing vision of τὸ καλὸν:

33 "How then can you believe these empty tales?" Prot. 1.2.1.
34 The use of frankness, even to the point of shame, was an important feature of the philosopher (e.g. Plato, Apol. 30e-31b). For an excellent, if surprisingly ignored, treatment of the topic of παρρησία, see the slim volume, Michel Foucault, Fearless Speech (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001).
35 Prot. 1.2.2.
36 Ibid.
37 On this structure of pleasure and pain, see Aristotle, Nic. Eth. 1154a26–b2.
There is a new Song, the song of the Levites, "Soother of grief and wrath, that bids all ills be forgotten." There is a sweet and genuine medicine of persuasion blended with this song. 38 This kind of cathartic pleasure was well known to the Greeks as well as the Romans, long before Clement's time. 39 Thus, the reader is brought back to gladly hear the harmony of Clement's Christ singing again his New Song. These alternating aesthetics revolve through the Protrepticus; many passages are involved in this dynamic. 40 By plying the emotions of his readers, not only does he build in them an aesthetic desire for his Christ, but he also destabilizes their emotions. Making them move back and forth between pleasure and pain, pain and pleasure, he holds their attention rapt and as he agitates their (he assumes) uncontrolled desire, he opens their ἐπιθυμητικὸν to desire what is good by making it pleasurable and to shun what is bad by making it painful. 41

Honor, Shame, and Image

Throughout the work, Clement's hortatory knits together a host of metaphors and images that are not only rich in cultural meaning, but also create a semantic divide running through the very center of Greek culture. This divide inscribes the poles of the moral and therefore religious choice that Clement demands of his readers, between the worship of idols and the worship of Christ. An exhaustive catalogue of these is beyond the scope of our endeavor here, 42 but a sample of some of the more common images are:

38 Prot. 1.2.4.
41 See Plato's discussion of the ἐπιθυμητικὸν in Rep. 434d–441c; for Aristotle's rejection of it as part of the soul see De Anima 432a–b; for its incorporation into ὀρέξεις see, De Anima 414b, where he says its object is the pleasant; for the Stoic contrast with fear as avoiding pain, and ἐπιθυμία as desire for good see, SVF 3.391.
42 For an extensive catalogue of nature-related metaphors and references in Clement's three major works, see Mable Gant Murphy, Nature Allusions in the Works of Clement.
The classical logic expressed in antitheses between the metaphors is clear. Clement uses this classical logic to force his reader to take a stand and to push them toward a revolutionary decision, toward a new way of life. He does this by expertly weaving the images together in order to present vividly before the reader's eye the values between which he wants them to choose.

The antithesis of the freedom of Christ and the slavery of idols stands the heart of the metaphorical system Clement creates. By their chants and enchantments, they have yoked down and held captive in the lowest slavery [ἐγκατατµή δουλεία καταλείποντες] that noble freedom—the only real freedom—which belongs to those who lead their way of life under heaven [τῶν ἵπτων οὕς εὐφρανόν πετολευμόνων]. But far different is my minstrel, for He has come to bring to a speedy end the bitter slavery of the demons that lord it over us; and by leading us back to the mild and kindly yoke [κύριονν] of piety He calls once again to heaven those who have been cast down to earth. He is the only one who ever tamed the most intractable of all wild beasts—man: for he tamed the birds, that is, flighty men; reptiles, that is, crafty men; lions, that is, passionate men; swine, that is, pleasure-loving men; wolves, that is, rapacious men. Men without

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Table: Antitheses between Christ and Idols

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<th>Idols</th>
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<tr>
<td>Free Person</td>
<td>Slave</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Harmony,</td>
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<td>Sophrosyne</td>
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<td>Light</td>
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<td>Sight/Hearing</td>
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[1.3.2, 1.4.3, 1.4.4, 1.5.1-1.6.3, 10.98.4, 12.119.2, 12.120.1, 12.106.1, 12.105.1, 8.77.3, 4.61.4, 12.119.1]

By “classical logic” here I mean a logic that forces a choice between two mutually exclusive options, such as true and false or good and evil, without permitting a middle ground. For the full development of this notion and its revolutionary force, see Alan Badiou, “The Three Negations,” Cardozo Law Review 29.5 (2008): 1877–83.
understanding are stocks and stones; indeed a man steeped in ignorance is even more senseless than stones. [...] And God ... did raise out of those stones, that is the Gentiles who trust in stones, a seed of piety sensitive to virtue [...] If any even of those snakes chooses to repent, let him but follow the Word and become the “human being” of “God.”

Clement brings together several common Greek cultural metaphors: first is that passions are a kind of slavery; second, that animals, because they lack reason, are pure passions (thus, particular animals can typify certain passions); and third, that to be truly human is to be free from the passions and so to be virtuous or “tamed.” For instance, in the passage above, Clement elaborates the metaphor of the irrationality of animals by connecting deliberate “deafness” to the message of Christ with the snake who “stop[s] up [his] ears or shuts off [his] hearing” and so by an irrational stubbornness keeps himself from the truth. Christ delivers the believer from this “slavery” by offering “real freedom [δυνατὸς ἐλευθερίας]” from the passions he lists in this passage. Clement constructs this deliverance by contrasting the metaphorical “yoke” of slavery [ἐσχάτη δουλεία καταξωμένης] and the “yoke” of piety [τῆς θεοσθεβείας ... ἔγον], which he connects with the pagan gods and Christ respectively. Thus, the way of life of the Christian “under heaven” [τῶν ὑπ’ οὐρανῶν πεπολιτευμένων] is the way of freedom from the passions—and so the way of becoming truly human—and the way of life of the pagan is slavery to them, dragging the human person down to the level of the animals.

The host of images Clement assembles ties together the central virtues and vices of Greek (especially philosophical) culture.

44 Prot. 1.3.1-2.  
45 Prot. 1.106.1.  
46 Prot. 1.3.1-2.  
47 For treatment of the four cardinal virtues through the history of Greek literature, including Clement of Alexandria, see Helen North’s magisterial study, Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 328–36; for Clement on these virtues see Strom. 2.18.78.1; for discussion in relation to Philo, see Eric Osborn, Clement of Alexandria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 81–98. For a further example of Clement constructing Christian virtue in distinctly philosophical terms, compare Prot. 1.4-5.
introducing these metaphors for virtue and vice, he introduces a palpable and compelling logic of honor and shame.\footnote{48} To openly choose against these virtues would be both serious and extremely dishonorable.\footnote{49} By making the choice a question of honor, Clement raises the stakes and his audience's attention. As we saw in the passage above, Clement—in contrast to popular messages about cannibalism and incest circulating about Christianity—attaches the positive, honorable, metaphors to Christ, who brings freedom and "tames" human beings, and by taming them turns them from "beasts" into "human beings."\footnote{50} On the other hand, he disturbingly attaches dishonor and "bitter slavery" to traditional Greek religion, calling the gods tyrannical "demons" that are worshipped in the idols of the Greeks "who trust in stones." By inter-connecting these deep metaphors, Clement not only reverses and re-figures the negative images Christianity carried in pagan society, but also the positive images associated with traditional, imperial religion. Using a technique that inverts and re-appropriates cultural forms, where he elaborates how the New Song creates harmony in the microcosm of the human person as well as in the macrocosm of the universe itself, with, e.g., Plato, Tim. 30a–c, 37a, 47a–e, 80b–c, Laws 688a–b, and 689d–e. For extended discussion of this theme in philosophy, see Dominic J O'Meara, Platonic philosophy in his Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).


In classical Athens, a central cultural base for second-sophistic literature and values, one could even lose one's citizenship for πείρα. See Aeschines' Against Timarchus (esp. 1.185, 1.29, and 1.108); for the classic, if now dated, treatment, see Kenneth James Dover, Greek Homosexuality (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), esp. 19–38. Also useful are Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Vol. II: The Use of Pleasure, Robert Hurley, tr. (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) and more recently, from a social-history perspective, James Davidson, Courtesans and Fishcakes (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997). Davidson's work corrects many of the inadequacies perceived by social historians in Foucault's work and replaces it with a far more balanced account.

which has recently been dubbed “culture jamming,” he shockingly invites his readers to turn from the animalistic and irrational shame of idol worship to honorable humanity and freedom in Christ. In fact, the image-networks even become metonyms for those choices, for idolatry and Christianity; throughout the work, the reader only has to see one of these images to know which choice Clement is presenting. Thus, their ongoing presentation and alternation in Clement’s poetics becomes a visceral kind of moral reasoning that Clement uses to persuade his readers by sounding deep cultural resonances among a network of ideas that now evoke a moral choice between Christ and the idols.

But Clement does more than simply sounding the resonances; he raises them against a social and personal horizon. By presenting his own face—the reader’s other—in the hortatory rhetoric of the narrator, Clement creates a situation of rhetorical agonism that calls the honor of the reader into question. 52 For example, at the

51 Asheen Nomai, in her article “Culture Jamming” in the Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), offers the following definition, "Culture jamming appropriates a dominant cultural form and then alters it in a way that becomes a comment on the form itself, often with a critical edge. . . . [It] interferes with cultural communication in an attempt to inscribe it with an alternate meaning that is critical of the original." Although the term “Culture jamming” (a play on jamming radio signals) was only coined in 1984, it has been a powerful technique used over the last century to change the shape and logic of dominant social discourses by critical publications such as Ballyhoo—a response to social conditions that caused the stock market crash in 1929—and www.adbusters.org—which continues that tradition online today—as well as social movements such as Dada and Surrealism (ibid.). Perhaps the most successful and recent application of this technique has been in the “Truth” anti-smoking campaign. Through reversing and re-figuring symbols designed to embody the social capital accrued by smoking—such as Joe Camel and the Marlboro Man—by setting them in hospital-wards and body bags, this campaign effectively changed the dominant discourse about smoking from being “cool,” “sexy,” and “manly” to being “unhealthy,” “unattractive,” and “dirty.” To my knowledge, no other exploration of culture jamming techniques in antiquity has been undertaken.

52 In David Cohen, Law, Sexuality, and Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14–70, Cohen describes the logic of agonistic behavior by examining classical Athens and several modern Mediterranean “face-to-face” societies. Honor, being competed for in this social “tribunal,” is for Cohen a zero-sum game; that is, when an aggressor dishonors an individual, the honor which was once the individual’s becomes that of the aggressor. As such, all members, or at least all honorable members,
beginning of chapter 10, Clement—through the character of the narrator—addresses his readers directly ("But you say it is not reasonable ...") and goes on to compare them in their judgments to babies throwing up on their mothers’ breasts and, a little later, to the classic Platonic image of the stubborn horse that tries to shake the charioteer. Thus, by putting his readers in the rhetorical position of “shamelessness,” he demands from them an answer to the questions he is constantly putting them in the form of his counter-point: Will they recover their honor and recognize the truth, or will they wallow like animals in the shame of their paganism? Thus, Clement adds honor and shame into the dynamic of his counter-point.

**Cognitive Dissonance and Resolution**

Clement’s reasoning is not only implicit, but explicit as well. Through his rhetoric, Clement creates very real, if deeply felt, cognitive dissonance for his reader. He does this through a dual strategy: He connects the vision of virtue that he and his reader share in common with the web of Christ-images he has created, and vice, with the Idol-images. First, Clement ties statements of Greek cultural values concerning the definition of the divine—evinced from the words of their most honored philosophers and poets—to his network of Christ-images. For instance, Clement quotes, among others, the Stoic philosopher Cleanthenes, who offers a

of an agonistic society are automatically engaged in this contest for honor, at one another’s expense. It is the simulation of this contest that lends dynamism and power to the kind of philosophical παράνοια Clement expresses here.

53 “But you say it is not reasonable to overthrow a way of life handed down to us from our forefathers... Why do we no longer sputter into our parents' bosoms... making ourselves the objects of laughter? [The gift of God] could never have been hated or rejected had you not been completely carried away by custom... like stubborn horses that refuse to obey the reins and take the bit between their teeth, you fled from our arguments. You yearned to shake yourselves free from us, the charioteers of your life... (Prof. 10.89.1–3).” For the image of the charioteer of the soul in Plato see, Phaed. 246a–254e; this image is a favorite of Clement’s.

54 Grounding the Christian vision of God in the Greek philosophical and poetic traditions is the primary rhetorical task of books 6 and 7 respectively. Clement is looking “for fellow workers in the search” for God among the Greeks. Cf. Prot. 6.68.1 & 7.73.1.
description of the divine in terms of the Greek traditional morality that Clement has already appropriated into his network of images:

He [Cleanthenes] did not conceal what thoughts he had about God: “You ask me what the Good is like? Then listen! The Good is ordered, holy, pious, just, self-ruling, useful, beautiful, right, severe, without pretense, ever expedient, fearless, griefless, helpful, soothing pain, well-pleasing, advantageous, steadfast, loved, esteemed, consistent ...”

Clement caps off his description saying, “Here, I think, he [Cleanthenes] clearly teaches of what nature God is.” Other select examples of Clement weaving virtue into his network of Christ-images are: Christ as the “charioteer” who “yokes together the team of mankind”; self-control [σωφρονίστης] as the “harvest” of which the human person is the “first-fruits”; the human being as Odysseus—bound to the wood of the cross, as he sails past the Siren’s songs of pleasure—who has taken the Word of God as his “captain [κυβερνήτης]”; the knowledge of God as the “sun and light”; and Christ as the “morning star” who “dispenses life by his own rays.” By tying Christ together with metaphors that are deeply rooted in Greek culture and morality, Clement viscerally aligns his presentation of the Gospel with the noblest elements of audience’s culturally constructed moral logic.

Second, drawing contrast with the beauty of philosophy and traditional Greek morality, he argues that the “common opinion and religious customs” of the Greeks are a form of moral slavery. To do this, he connects the mythical narratives and cultic practices that his hearers are actually engaged in to his network of Idol-images. For example, by allegorically interpreting Euripides’ Bacchae,
Clement takes the image of the “drunken frenzy” of Pentheus—who, because he is dressed as a maenad in fawn skins, is ridiculed even by Dionysius—and turns it into a metonym for paganism in general.63 No image could be farther from the Christ-images Clement has assembled, which are typified by self-control [σωφροσύνη]. In fact, when Clement takes up his next contrapuntal change, he appeals to the reader “to return from this madness to sober [σωφρονεῖσσαν] salvation.”64 He contrasts the slavery of the “Maenads ... who are initiated in the loathsome distribution of raw flesh” that represent traditional Greek religion to the “daughters of God ... who declare the solemn rites of the Word, assembling as a sober [σωφρωνή] company,” who represent the Church, in order to draw his reader toward their shared and highest cultural good, which is embodied in Christ.65

Throughout his work, Clement throws these two webs of belief up in rhythmic, continual, and sustained contrast to one another.66 In the end, the Greek reader cannot sustain the tension. In short, by creating a poetics grounded in classical logic, Clement forces a choice between the core beliefs of his culture about God and the cultic practice and mythos meant to express them. Clement makes the reader feel, palpably, that they cannot exist together and that Christ, the great harmony of all things, is the only possible resolution.67

63 Prot. 12.119.1.
64 Prot. 12.118.5.
65 Prot. 12.119.1.
66 Though it is beyond the scope of this article to explore the whole tradition of non­logical persuasion in antiquity, it is extremely interesting to see Clement’s project in light of passages like the following from Plato Tim. 47b–e: “For not only has speech been appointed for this same purpose, whereto it contributes the largest share, but all such music as is expressed in sound has been granted, for the sake of harmony: and harmony, having her motions akin to the revolutions in our own souls, has been bestowed by the Muses on him who with reason seeks their help, not for any senseless pleasure, such as is now supposed to be its main use, but as an ally against the discord which has grown up in the revolution of our soul, to bring her into order and into unison with herself: and rhythm too, because our habit of mind is mostly so faulty of measure and lacking in grace, is a succor bestowed on us by the same givers for the same ends.” Cf. also, Plato, Rep. 401d–e and Aristotle, Pol. 1340a.
67 “The divine Scriptures and institutions of wisdom form the short road to salvation.
his *Protrepticus* puts into practice his own dictum that “Truth and falsehood are not distinguished by mere comparison, but falsehood is forced out by the practice of the truth and put to flight.”68 Through his contrapuntal poetics, Clement creates a viscerally emotional, aesthetic, social, and intellectual framework for moral-religious reasoning grounded in his own cultural context. Having so offered the problem and its clear solution, Clement can leave his readers with a powerful choice—salvation or judgment: “Ὑμῖν δὲ ἔτι τὸῦτο περιλείπτειν πέρας τὸ λυσιτέλου ἐλέσθαι, ἢ κρίσιν ἢ χάριν.”69

**Conclusion**

Like all deliberate action, as Aristotle says, faith begins with choice that comes from desire.70 Therefore, the way in which we come to
faith—at least for the ancients—and continue in faith is through our desires, rightly ordered. “Rightly” here is, of course, determined by the icon into whose conformity we are being shaped, by the τέλος of our vision. In order to evoke a desire to be saved in his reader, Clement employs a set of rhetorical techniques that shape desire and, at the same time, present a compelling and beautiful vision of what it is possible for a human being in society to become. All these rhetorical strategies have to do with the creation and ordering of the passions in the hearer, aligning them with the λόγος of the one true God. They are ethical appeals that show their strength in their very weakness. Clement is not trying to persuade his readers of a view of the universe different from their (and his) own; he is relying on the fact that he and his readers hold in common traditional Greek moral values, a belief in the divine, and the notion that any definition of the divine must exemplify those moral values. He is trying to move them to change their lives—to be formed by a different, more coherent, beautiful, and just vision of the world (Weltanschauung). He wants them to choose to follow Christ for his beauty, his honor, his character, the reward he promises, and because he is the resolution—the harmony—of the dissonant chords of their shared culture. If Christ is the New Song, he is still music in a recognizable mode. Out of the desire Clement evokes, his reader must make a choice to direct the attention of his soul onto Christ and to conform his soul to Him, who is the source of this beauty, the resolution of the dissonance, the harbinger of honor and justice, and the bearer of salvation. Without both perception and similarity, the reader cannot have faith and is barred from deeper experience of God.

Clement’s use of these terms is notably unstable, for these uses, see Strom. 6.14.114.4, Strom. 2.19.100.3, and Strom. 5.14.94.5–96.3; for a fuller discussion of this theme in the context of Clement’s anthropology, see Behr, Asceticism and Anthropology, 135–41.

Whether that mystical experience is initiated through a ritual act, such as baptism, remains uncertain, although several texts in the Protrepticus seem to indicate something of the sort. On similarity to God as a kind of theosis in the philosophical tradition, see Daniel C. Russell, “Virtue as ‘Likeness to God’ in Plato and Seneca,” Journal of the History of Philosophy 42.3 (2004): 241–60. See also Jacques Fantino, L’homme
I propose that such an approach may have something to teach Christians who desire to share the Gospel in our present cultural and philosophical situation. Given the considerations mentioned above in the introduction, the three techniques that have been discussed from Clement’s *Protrepticus* seem to apply. First, by creating a work of beauty that will engage an audience through its aesthetic value alone, the Church can captivate a wide range of people at the level of their desire, which is an important place from which we decide the shape of our lives. Further, in producing works of compelling beauty, contemporary Christians—like Clement—would be appropriating the professional *techniques of quality* that bestow both verbal and visual authority, and so gain *de facto* legitimacy and persuasive value. Second, having effectively absorbed the audience in the medium of the Christian message, a successful invitation to Christianity might then create a visually or metaphorically disjunctive moral problematic, in place of the logical, empirical, or historical approaches that have dominated the last 100 years. To do this, as we saw, Clement, engaged in a form of “culture jamming” through his bold παρατονία that created powerful, new meaning for images by giving them a deeply compelling grammar that undercut unethical cultural forms through their appeal to higher, ethical ones. Through re-figuring these images, he worked to persuade his audience that Christianity—rather than being a cannibalistic orgy of atheists—was the embodiment of virtue and beauty, and that the “traditional” religion of the Empire had no honor at all, but was itself the atheist bacchanal that the culture had imputed to Christianity.

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72 Again, the works and success of David Bentley Hart are exemplary here.
74 For an overview and discussion of the primary sources of these accusations, see McGowan, “Eating People,” 416–22.
75 For a theoretical description of how this kind of reversal or détournement functions, see Umberto Eco, “Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare,” in Helen Wolff and Kurt Wolff, eds., William Weaver, tr., *Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays* (London: Har-
today, therefore, could employ a similar strategy by juxtaposing the beautiful visual, iconographic, and hymnic traditions of the Church with the contemporary and ubiquitous totems created by marketers that are designed both to throw our desires into disorder and to hide and perpetuate the wild, Bacchic, and often obscene oppression and injustice required to fulfill them. Thus, like Clement, we can create an iconic and metaphorical cultural critique that both embodies the Gospel and, at the same time, positively moves people to Christ because it is based in our highest shared cultural values. Thus, Christians could communicate a gripping vision of Christ by driving a powerfully visual and affective wedge between the highest moral values of our culture (love, justice, freedom, peace, etc.) and the failing institutions that purport to give them form. Third, by creating aesthetic and ethical cognitive dissonance between the core beliefs of American culture and the capitalist institutions and brands of social-religion (including, now, Atheism) that are supposed to embody them through the rhythmic and artistic employment of those re-figured images, one could move the audience to see that these beliefs take on their true and radical meaning in Christ and, what’s more, to see how those values can be authentically lived only in Christ and through the life of the Church. Finally, to be successful, such a strategy—like Clement’s protrepsis—would need to enact in its very execution the savoir-vivre of the values it relied upon to persuade its audience. That is, it would have to embody love, justice, peace, and so on without falling into mere bombast, pride, or self-righteousness as apologists (for whatever cause) so often do. Thus, by returning to our roots—to the revolutionary techniques that lie at the beginning of our faith—we can move creatively forward beyond the chop and wake of modernist apologetics: With honesty and grace, we may again articulate the beautiful, ethical, and clarion call of Christ for the ears of our disillusioned and postmodern world.


76 A real difficulty that Clement did not face, but is uniquely presented by a pluralist culture such as ours is the task of creating a convincing and non-alienating implementation of classical logic.