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Darius Jankiewicz

Andrews University, darius@andrews.edu

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June 23, 2010

Clement And Origen On Christ Our Example

by Darius Jankiewicz

Clement of Alexandria

Consider the mysteries of love, and you will then have a vision of the bosom of the Father, whom the only-begotten God alone has declared. God himself is love, and for the sake of this love he made himself known. And while the unutterable nature of God is as a Father, his sympathy with us is as a Mother. It was in his love that the Father became the nature which derives from woman, and the great proof of this is the Son whom he begot from himself, and the love that was the fruit produced from his love. For this he came down, for this he assumed human nature, for this he willingly endured the sufferings of humanity, that by being reduced to the measure of our weakness, he might raise us to the measure of his power. And just before he poured out his offering, when he gave himself as a ransom, he left us a new testament: "I give you my love." What is the nature and extent of this love? For each of us he laid down his life, the life which was worth the whole universe, and he requires in return that we should do the same for each other. (Clement, *Quis Dives Salvetur* 37 in *Clement of Alexandria: The Exhortation to the Greeks*, ed. G. W. Butterworth, Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1960, 346)

Plainly, then, the other kind of discourse, the didactic, is powerful and spiritual, observing precision, occupied in the contemplation of mysteries. But let it stand over for the present. Now, it is incumbent on us to return His love, who lovingly guides us to that life which is best; and to live in accordance with the injunctions of His will, not only fulfilling what is commanded, or guarding against what is forbidden, but turning away from some examples, and imitating others as much as we can, and thus to perform the works of the Master according to His similitude, and so fulfill what Scripture says as to our being made in His image and likeness. For, wandering in life as in deep darkness, we need a guide that cannot stumble or stray; and our guide is the best, not blind, as the Scripture says, "leading the blind into pits." But the Word is keen-sighted, and scans the recesses of the heart. As, then, that is not light which enlightens not, nor motion that moves not, nor loving which loves not, so neither is that good which profits not, nor guides for salvation. Let us then aim at the fulfillment of the commandments by the works of the Lord; for the Word Himself also, having openly become flesh, exhibited the same virtue, both practical and contemplative. Wherefore let us regard the Word as law, and His commands and counsels as the short and straight paths to immortality; for His precepts are full of persuasion, not of fear. (Clement, *Paidagogos* 1.4.3, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 2:211)

Origen

Let us now see how we are to understand the expression "invisible image," that we may in this way perceive how God is rightly called the Father of His Son; and let us, in the first place, draw our conclusions from what are customarily called images among men. That is sometimes called an image which is painted or sculptured on some material substance, such as wood or stone; and sometimes a child is called the image of his parent, when the features of the child in no respect belie their resemblance to the father. I think, therefore, that that man who was formed after the image and likeness of God may be fittingly compared to the first illustration. Respecting him, however, we shall see more precisely, God willing, when we come to expound the passage in Genesis. But the image of the Son of God, of whom we are now speaking, may be compared to the second of the above examples, even in respect of this, that He is the invisible image of the invisible God, in the same manner as we say, according to the sacred history, that the image of Adam is his son Seth. . . Now this image contains the unity of nature and substance belonging to Father and Son. For if the Son do, in like

manner, all those things which the Father doth, then, in virtue of the Son doing all things like the Father, is the image of the Father formed in the Son, who is born of Him, like an act of His will proceeding from the mind. . . . And thus also the existence of the Son is generated by Him. (Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.6, *ANF* 4:248)

But both Jesus Himself and His disciples desired that His followers should believe not merely in His Godhead and miracles, as if He had not also been a partaker of human nature, and had assumed the human flesh which “lusteth against the Spirit;” but they saw also that the power which had descended into human nature, and into the midst of human miseries, and which had assumed a human soul and body, contributed through faith, along with its divine elements, to the salvation of believers, when they see that from Him there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but enter upon the life which Jesus taught, and which elevates to friendship with God and communion with Him every one who lives according to the precepts of Jesus (*Origen Contra Celsus* 3.28, *ANF* 4:475).

[Click here](#) to learn how Clement and Origen's views compare to contemporary Adventist anti-trinitarians.

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