

The image of the Teacher in Clement's *Paedagogus* and Gregory of Nyssa's homilies: comparisons and developments

Introduction

It has been my intention for quite some time to analyse the image of the Teacher in the homilies of Gregory of Nyssa. Three years ago I was lucky enough to meet Professor Judith Kovacs in person during a conference in Paris and there we had some very inspiring discussions regarding Gregory and our roles as teachers as university level. A detail she shared with me from her long professional experience was that our role often entailed going beyond merely passing on information to our students, and that more often than not we had to act also as parents, carers and spiritual directors. This insight remained with me, and it was my intention to discuss it further with her last year, when this conference was originally planned to take place. Sadly, it was not be. Today, a year later, Judith is in a better place, and thus, when I came to submit a proposal for this year's conference, I decided to bring together the area of interest I mentioned before, together with my memory of Judith and her renowned interest in Clement of Alexandria. As a model for my study and for my paper, I followed Judith's first article which I had read years before meeting her, at the beginning of my doctoral thesis journey. In that article, Judith had compared and contrasted Clement's and Gregory's commentaries on the Beatitudes. This, therefore, was the *modus operandi* I tried to follow in this study. I shall start with a brief review of the role of the teacher in antiquity; then I shall present the limits of my study. Following this I shall discuss how the two authors use this image in the works selected, and in conclusion draw out any comparisons and developments.

From pedagogues to teachers in antiquity till the 4th century

Several classical authors – like Plato, Euripides and Sophocles – speak about pedagogues in their writings, explaining that the role of such a person was to supervise a child’s conduct in school.¹ By the 4th century A.D. the responsibility of the pedagogue went beyond simply taking the child to school and supervising his progress; it included instruction in moral education.² Pedagogues supplemented what the pupils learned at school,³ and acted as guardians protecting children and youths in the hours they passed away from home. It seems that this promotion in the importance of the role of the moral guardian occurred after this role was adopted by the Romans.⁴ From the sources we find in texts coming from the 4th century, especially in the *Orations* by Libanius, we understand that this was brought about in various manners: pedagogues had the authority to beat children if they misbehaved,⁵ they ordered their pupils to walk looking at the ground in order to avoid being distracted by potential dangers,⁶ they shouted at them in order to hammer lessons in their brains;⁷ in short a child could not become a good man without his pedagogue.⁸ More than this, Libanius clearly states that the pedagogue is a father-figure to his pupil: he “is not inferior to a father with respect to affection. His work cannot be paid even if he is given much.”⁹ The bond between pedagogues and pupils was so strong that when a child died, the grief of his pedagogue might well surpass that of the parents,¹⁰ while in most cases¹¹ former pupils still revered their pedagogues in their adulthood.¹²

¹ A. V. Yannicopoulos, “The Pedagogue in Antiquity,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 33/2 (1985), 173.

² *ibid.* 174.

³ Libanius, *Oratio* 58, 9.

⁴ Henri-Irenée Marrou, “Introduction,” in Clement D’Alexandrie, *Le Pédagogue*, Sources Chrétiennes 67 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1960), 1:15: “À l’origine méprisé pour sa condition servile et son origine souvent barbare, le pédagogue avait vu, au cours des siècles, sa considération augmenter en même temps que l’importance de son rôle: sous l’Empire romain, la *paedagogorum custodia* constitue, à côté de l’action des parents et des maîtres, un des éléments constitutifs de l’éducation. [...] c’est à lui que revient l’essentiel de la fonction d’éducateur sur le plan moral.”

⁵ Libanius, *Oratio* 19, 48.

⁶ Wilmer Cave Write (ed.), *The Works of Emperor Julian*, volume 2 (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, 1913), 258.

⁷ Libanius, *Oratio* 59, 9.

⁸ Libanius, *Oratio* 58, 8.

⁹ Libanius, *Epistle* 172.

¹⁰ Libanius, *Oratio* 58, 10.

Perhaps one of the best examples of the wider role that was assumed by pedagogues is given to us by Clement himself, who in his book *The Pedagogue* unites the duty of this supervisor with that of the teacher,¹³ meaning that most probably by the 3rd century the role of pedagogues had developed into that of teachers of sorts in their own right. The moral and guarding aspects of the role of pedagogues are underlined by a little detail given by John Chrysostom in the late 4th century: he states that when the child has acquired good habits his pedagogue is no longer needed, implying that the sound moral principles imparted by the educator are now put into practice by the child who can take care of himself.¹⁴

The important point to keep in mind is that in antiquity, both non-Christians and Christians believed that a complete instruction came from both these roles, regardless whether they were carried out by two individuals – as was the case the beginning – or by one – as was the case in later ages.

The limits of this study

In this study I shall be presenting the uses that Clement and Gregory make of the terms *παιδαγωγός* and *διδάσκαλος* in some of their writings, namely Clement's *Paedagogus* and Gregory's corpus of homilies. As we have seen, in the first stage there was a clear distinction between the roles of teachers and pedagogues, but this distinction got more blurred with the passing of the centuries, till at some point the two roles got merged into one. This is believed to have happened at the beginning of the Byzantine period,¹⁵ namely at the turn from the 4th to the 5th century, which happens to be time

¹¹ There were, of course, occasions where pedagogues were disrespected and sometimes outright hated (cfr Martial, *Epigrammata* 9, 68.9).

¹² Cave Write, 392.

¹³ Judith Kovacs, "Divine pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher according to Clement of Alexandria," *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9/1 (2001), 3.

¹⁴ cfr John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians* Chapter 3, vv.24-26, *Patrologia Graeca* 61, 656.

¹⁵ Yannicopoulos, 178.

when Gregory of Nyssa died. The fact that in his homilies Gregory hardly uses the term παιδαγωγός (he uses it only 4 times) whereas he uses the term διδάσκαλος 88 times might be an indication that by then for the common people to whom the homilies were addressed, the merging of responsibilities had already taken place; people no longer made a distinction between the two.

Moving slightly back, we know that the term παιδαγωγός is found only two times in the New Testament. The first time it is found in the First Letter to the Corinthians 4:15 where Paul states that “For though you might have ten thousand guardians (παιδαγώγους) in Christ, you do not have many fathers” in order to underline his authority as an apostle and evangelist. The second reference is found in the Letter to the Galatians 3:24-26 “Therefore the law was our disciplinarian (παιδαγωγός) until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian (παιδαγωγόν), for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”

Here Paul says that the pedagogue is the Law. For him the law is somewhat lacking because it was useful only till the coming of Christ, who then completed it and replaced it. Keeping this in mind, and keeping to what we said earlier in relation to the work of the pedagogue being subordinate to the teacher, then Paul seems to be implying that whereas the pedagogue is the Law, then Christ, who followed and replaced the Law, is none other than the Teacher.

At the end of the *Paedagogue* Clement states that the pupils were ready to be passed on to the Teacher; some scholars have suggested that Clement planned to write another volume entitled the Teacher, but this either never got composed, or else it did not survive; others have suggested that the third volume is in fact his *Stromateis*.¹⁶ Thus we can conclude, for the purposes of this present study, that the closest we get to Clement’s ideas about Christ as the teacher are what we have in his *Paedagogus*. This

¹⁶ Kovacs, 23.

hypothesis is given more weight since Clement himself at the beginning of the first book states that the Logos is the Pedagogue as well as the Teacher, therefore any form of instruction – be it ‘academic’ or ‘moral’ – comes from one and the same person: the incarnate Logos.

Regarding Gregory, from my past studies and some of my articles present it is very evident that I am particularly interested in the teaching imparted in his homilies, because there, in my opinion the image of Gregory as a bishop teaching his flock can best be appreciated. Therefore even here I shall be focusing on the data we find in the surviving homilies. Back in Paris, Judith had shown interest in this field that I’m trying to develop, hence this highlighting of the homilies enters in this tribute environment we are giving our fellow scholar.

Keeping all these points present, the study will now pursue to present the contexts in which the two authors use these two terms which, as we tried to explain, even though are not identical, have many concepts in common.

Clement’s presentation of the teacher/educator in his *Paedagogus*

Clement uses the term *παιδαγωγός* almost exclusively to refer to Christ. The term and its declined forms appear 120 times in this treatise. As we already said, at the beginning of the treatise the Alexandrian states that Christ is the Educator as well as the Teacher:

Let us call Him, then, by the one title: Educator of little ones, an Educator who does not simply follow behind, but who leads the way, for His aim is to improve the soul, not just to instruct it; to guide to a life of virtue, not merely to one of knowledge. Yet, that same Word does teach. It is simply that in this work we are not considering Him in that light. As Teacher, He explains and reveals through instruction, but as Educator He is practical. First He persuades men to form habits of life, then He encourages them to fulfill their duties by laying down clear-cut counsels and by holding up, for us who follow, examples of

those who have erred in the past. Both are most useful: the advice, that it may be obeyed; the other, given in the form of example, has a twofold object either that we may choose the good and imitate it or condemn and avoid the bad.¹⁷

Already at this early stage in the treatise the role of the pedagogue and teacher are united in Christ – the pedagogue here is presented as the one who “leads the way” and not as one who follows, which technically was what pedagogues did as long as their role did not include any form of instruction. Thus, Christ the pedagogue here is also Christ the Teacher. Furthermore, commenting on the verses in the *Letter to the Galatians*, where the Law is presented by Paul as the superseded educator, Clement finds no objection in giving the title of educator now to Christ, covertly implying that in Christ the role of educator is being promoted to something else, higher than the one enjoyed by the Law before.¹⁸ This promoted educator, therefore, can be understood to be Christ the teacher. According to Kovacs, Clement does not pay particular attention to make a distinction between the two terms and “when these terms are applied to Christ, they are often used synonymously.”¹⁹

Despite the length of this treatise, divided into three books, the image of the instructor/teacher given by Clement is not a very varied one. The title is, as we said, applied practically only to Christ; and throughout the text more importance is given to other aspects surrounding the instructor rather than the instructor himself.

The scant details about the pedagogue’s duties and how these are carried out are found in the first book which deals mainly with the pupils of this instructor. Here Clement gives a whole list of different titles that may be applied to these: children, lambs, little calves, doves, chicks and foals. Christ is therefore the all-round educator of all these according their needs.²⁰ The

¹⁷ Paed. 1,1,1.

¹⁸ Paed. 1, 6, 30-32.

¹⁹ Kovacs, 4.

²⁰ Paed. 1,1,3.

insistence made on the young age of all these models conforms to the classical idea that the younger years of life are the ones most suitable for the good formation of a person's character. This is also in line with the theme of spiritual childhood that is put forward by Christ many times in the New Testament.²¹ The Logos, thus, is presented as the educator who guides these little ones – referring to the newly baptized – in how to conduct their lives. As educator, he moulds the characters of those entrusted to his care; he is truly a pedagogue insofar as he is the one who leads his pupils to salvation.²²

For Clement, the pedagogue carries out his duties through example and by practise, not by theoretical instruction. His purpose consists in the improvement of the human soul, namely in achieving prudence and with teaching it how to distance itself from passions. In his practical function, the pedagogue exhorts to establish a moral conduct. According to Clement, the divine pedagogue has three fundamental qualities: knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), benevolence (εὐνοία) and outspokenness (παρρησία).²³ In order to carry out his instruction he uses multiple resources: warnings, reprimands, punishments,²⁴ shaming, healing,²⁵ making promises, rewarding and chaining the irrational impulses of human nature.

The Paedagogue, as presented by Clement, is also the one who renews his pupils. Through his instruction they never grow old²⁶ and enjoy their renewed youth.²⁷

The second and the third book deal mainly with the teachings imparted by this Paedagogue; therefore here we have the moral instruction that soon came to be regarded as the proper duty of the pedagogue. The content goes into the minutiae of what a Christian should eat and drink; how he should

²¹ Mt 18:3; Mt 19:14; Mk 10:15; Jn 3:3

²² Héctor García Cataldo, "La representació del *Pedagogo* en Clemente de Alejandría" *Byzantion nea Hellás* 37 (2018), 159.

²³ Paed. 1,11,97.

²⁴ Paed. 1,8,61.

²⁵ Paed. 1,8,66.

²⁶ Paed. 1,5,20.

²⁷ Paed. 1,5,19.

sleep and dress; who are the people he should associate himself with; what should be his attitude toward the somewhat lax and libertine habits popular in a cosmopolitan city such as Alexandria,²⁸ and so on. Despite the complexity of the content, these books result in being the most interesting part of the whole treatise,²⁹ even though the discussion tends to get confusing at times due to Clement's numerous divergences from the subjects at hand. According to Marrou the practical instruction given in these two books follows three paths: that of philosophy, that of reason and that of the gospel.³⁰ Through these paths Clement espouses Hellenistic wisdom with Christian ideals, showing that Christ the Paedagogue is he who brings together the elements that lead to a good life. Going back to our original point of discussion – namely how is the Paedagogue/Teacher presented in this book – we arrive to the same conclusion as before: not much is said about him, but rather more about his teaching.

In conclusion: in short we can say that Clement speaks about who the pupils are and what is the subject matter they are taught. The details on the Paedagogue/Teacher himself amount only to certify that he is the Logos and that he uses different manners of instruction in order to form his pupils in the best way possible. There is not much variety in his presentation of this paedagogue/teacher.

The Teacher in Gregory's homilies

Moving to Gregory of Nyssa, as we said he uses derivatives of the term *παιδαγωγός* only four times in his homilies, and he does not use it to refer to individuals, but rather to circumstances that bring about a progression in the a person, like for example in the third homily on Ecclesiastes where he says that the sickness a glutton feels after eating too much becomes his tutor when he's about to eat again. If, on the other hand, we take into

²⁸ Simon P. Wood, "Introduction" in Clement of Alexandria, *Christ, the Educator of Little Ones*, The Fathers of the Church 23 (New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1954), xiv-xv.

²⁹ Marrou, 43.

³⁰ Marrou, 46-61.

consideration the word διδάσκαλος, the use is much more frequent and much more varied. In total he uses the word 88 times in 15 different works. The term appears mostly in the hagiographical homilies, 47 times in all, then 22 times in the exegetical homilies, 10 times in the moral homilies, 5 in the funereal homilies and 4 times in the christological homilies.

The term is used mostly in the eulogy in honour of his brother, where it is found 31 times. Here the teacher is Basil, but sometimes the image is used also to identify behaviours that have made Basil what he is, and that can thus – and should – be put into practice by all. The first use of the term in this eulogy refers to teachers who share the same rank of apostles, prophets and shepherds, and this is what Basil was for Gregory.³¹ Along the eulogy Basil is compared to great figures from the bible like John the Baptist, Elijah and Moses for in all of them pedagogical characteristics abound which were present even in Basil. The ideal teacher Gregory sees in his brother is one who is strong willed, tireless, extremely disciplined on his own body, unshakeable in his convictions and desirous to draw near God through purity, just like John.³² Taking on different qualities found in Elijah, according to Gregory the teacher is to be zealous for the faith, abhors who acts scornfully, examines everything, is dignified in his simplicity, is silent and fasts.³³ The teacher, like Moses, acts as a lawgiver who brings together Greek wisdom and the true faith, preferring the solitude of the desert rather than the bustle of cities.³⁴ The teacher is also one who imparts protection other than good example and instruction: he prays for the needs of his people in times of illness and famine, but he also puts his possessions at stake in order to acquire food which is offered to everyone;³⁵ from heaven he still protects his people.³⁶ Keeping Basil as model, we understand that for Gregory the teacher is he who has his heart set only on God and

³¹ Bas. 110, 1.

³² Bas. 119-120.

³³ Bas. 122-123.

³⁴ Bas. 124-126

³⁵ Bas. 124.

³⁶ Bas. 114, 18.

banishes anything that might distract him,³⁷ thus storing up wealth in treasury of heaven and therefore he is truly worthy of being imitated.³⁸ In the second homily in honour of the 40 martyrs of Sebaste, Basil is once again referred to as a teacher who knew how to take the best out of what did not belong to the Church for the benefit of the people.³⁹

Considerable use of the term is made in the panegyric in honour of St Gregory Thaumaturgus. First it refers to Origen, Gregory's teacher, who had the wisdom of putting Greek thought at the service of theology.⁴⁰ All other uses refer to Gregory, who, soon after exorcising a pagan temple, starts to instruct the people of the city how to trust in God's providence and to live virtuous lives.⁴¹ Again he is presented as the teacher who brings harmony among disputing brothers,⁴² the one who is a true judge of character not judging by appearances,⁴³ the one who brings liberation to those afflicted by demons⁴⁴ and who has the power to cast demons out.⁴⁵

In the homilies in honour of St Stephen the foremost teacher is the Spirit who endows the saints with true faithfulness bringing them to choose fidelity over their lives.⁴⁶ In the second homily the term is used to refer to Christ⁴⁷ and his followers, namely the apostles and the martyrs⁴⁸ who followed in his footsteps.

In the homilies on the Song of Songs this image is used 18 times, and it refers to three different circumstances. Many times it is used in the feminine, and therefore the teacher here is the Bride who seeks to teach other souls the promises that the Bridegroom makes.⁴⁹ Later she is the

³⁷ Bas. 117, 6.

³⁸ Bas. 133-134.

³⁹ XL Mart. 160.

⁴⁰ Thaum. 13.

⁴¹ Thaum. 26.

⁴² Thaum. 29.

⁴³ Thaum. 39.

⁴⁴ Thaum. 43.

⁴⁵ Thaum. 52.

⁴⁶ Steph. I 92.

⁴⁷ Steph. II 97.

⁴⁸ Steph. II 98-99.

⁴⁹ Cant. 45, 20.

teacher of the true nature of humanity freed from the darkness of sin,⁵⁰ and she who teaches the souls to be steadfast in their virtuous life.⁵¹ She is a teacher through her diligence and carefulness,⁵² and teaches others about the benefits of the wound of love created by the Bridegroom.⁵³ As a teacher, she identifies the Bridegroom as her kinsman (ἀδελφιδός), she knows who he is⁵⁴ and knows where he lives.⁵⁵ Her knowledge of him makes her see through his eyes, and therefore her teaching is what she gets through her union with him.⁵⁶ She is also the one who knows how to teach the sacred mysteries of the faith through a language that her students are capable to understand,⁵⁷ thus bringing them to know the Bridegroom.⁵⁸

The image of the teacher is also used to refer to certain parts of the body inasmuch as their functions are taken by others in their instruction: teachers are like the eyes for they show the way⁵⁹ and instruct others how to lead a life of good conduct.⁶⁰ Teachers are compared to teeth which bring out the beauty of the vocal capabilities of the voice through good and clear instruction.⁶¹

The final use of the term διδάσκαλος refers to Christ, presenting him as the Good Shepherd who teaches and feeds his flock with instruction on everything true, honourable, just pure, gracious, virtuous and praiseworthy.⁶²

Solomon is the teacher-protagonist in the homilies on Ecclesiastes. He is the one who teaches others from his own experience the futility of certain

⁵⁰ Cant. 51, 10.

⁵¹ Cant. 134, 5.

⁵² Cant. 269, 3.

⁵³ Cant. 377, 14.

⁵⁴ Cant. 379, 3.

⁵⁵ Cant. 434, 17.

⁵⁶ Cant. 435, 15.

⁵⁷ Cant. 381, 14.

⁵⁸ Cant. 435, 8.

⁵⁹ Cant. 217, 2.

⁶⁰ Cant. 218, 6.

⁶¹ Cant. 228, 9.

⁶² Cant. 439, 2.

endeavours,⁶³ instructs them how to participate in the good⁶⁴ and to see God as the foremost provider of everything necessary in life.⁶⁵

Moving on to the moral homilies, in a brief reference to teachers⁶⁶ in the homily on almsgiving Gregory presents their twofold role: they are instructors of virtue and also those who teach children to inscribe letters in wax, teaching them first elements of knowledge. In passages such as this we see the fusion of the roles of teacher and pedagogues. Another mention of the teacher's role refers to life who teaches the rich to make good use of their wealth.⁶⁷ In the homily against those who practice usury, the teacher is Christ who teaches his disciples to forgive the debts of others as they hope God forgives theirs.⁶⁸

In the homily against those who are vexed by criticism, the teachers here represent the pastors, namely Gregory himself, who discipline their congregation when their conduct leaves to be desired: they correct and give counsel, use harsh words and rebuke, seek to teach virtue and if need be they close the church's doors, causing vexation, anger and blasphemy among those who do not tolerate being corrected.⁶⁹ The image of the teacher inscribing letters in wax in order for the pupils to follow them is used here as well, but this time the option of severely punishing negligent students is included in the picture.⁷⁰ Finally the teachers are equated to the lovers of truth and are therefore the enemies of those who refuse correction for their mistakes.⁷¹

Death is the first teacher in the homily against those who delay their baptism, teaching them that their delay might be the cause of their eternal

⁶³ Eccl. 319.

⁶⁴ Eccl. 356.

⁶⁵ Eccl. 370-371.

⁶⁶ Benef. 93

⁶⁷ Benef. 100.

⁶⁸ Usur. 201.

⁶⁹ Cast. 325-326.

⁷⁰ Cast. 326.

⁷¹ Cast. 332.

damnation.⁷² The next teacher is the voice of the Lord which teaches that those who do acts of charity will inherit the kingdom of heaven.⁷³

In the oration for empress Flacilla's funeral ceremony, a teacher is mentioned four times – probably Gregory here refers to the presider of the ceremony, namely the patriarch of Constantinople. Here the figure of the teacher is lauded for keeping silent in such a mournful circumstance.⁷⁴

Finally in the Christological homilies the image of the teacher is used to denote mainly Christ. In the sermon for the day of lights Christ is the man who through his baptism is singled out to the people as the teacher of righteousness⁷⁵ whom all have to follow.⁷⁶ In this homily the title of teacher, but in the negative, is given to Jezebel who instructed her husband in the way of idolatry;⁷⁷ this seems to be the only occasion where this title is given a negative overtone. In the homily against Evagrius the inefficacy of teachers who are not able to pass on their message to bring others to salvation is underlined.⁷⁸

Conclusion

From this quick analysis it is clear that Gregory went beyond Clement in his use of the image of the teacher. Whereas the duties of the pedagogue or teacher are in most cases similar in both authors, dealing with instruction in the faith and in good conduct, Clement seems to limit them only to Christ. Gregory on the other hand expands the title and the duties to saints and bishops, characters from the bible and also to non-humans like body parts and death. Gregory is very eloquent in his praise of the characteristics that teachers should possess – such as the ability to instruct clearly, having solid

⁷² Bapt. 359.

⁷³ Bapt. 370.

⁷⁴ Flac. 475, 476, 482.

⁷⁵ Diem. Lum. 226.

⁷⁶ Diem. Lum. 228.

⁷⁷ Diem. Lum. 234.

⁷⁸ Deit. Euag. 334, 337.

theological convictions and a practical love for their flock – but such qualities are not as clearly pointed out by Clement. In conclusion we may say that the Nyssen developed more this image presenting the positive (and sometimes negative) results achieved by the correct (or incorrect) implementation of this role.

Jonathan Farrugia

University of Malta

jonathan.farrugia@um.edu.mt