

**WHY WOMEN SHOULD COVER THEIR HEADS AND  
VEIL THEIR FACES:  
CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA'S UNDERSTANDING OF  
THE BODY AND HIS RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN  
THE *PAEDAGOGUS*<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

*In the context of growing misogyny and introversion in early Christianity, Clement of Alexandria stands out as an advocate of gender equality and respect for the broader Graeco-Roman world. He also does not demonize the body, or sexuality. Why, then, in his Paedagogus, does he encourage women to “wear a veil over their face and a covering on their head?” Helping us to answer this question is Clement’s view of the interconnections between body and soul. Also important is the way he crafts his message so as to make it appeal to his target audience. In the context of modern debates about veiling, Clement’s stance helps us to appreciate that, while religious arguments to support the veiling of women might differ, the core message has remained constant over time and across cultures.*

**Keywords:** Clement, Soul, Body, Veiling, Women

**Introduction**

The compulsory veiling of women is a highly-contested issue in many parts of the world today. Muslims especially often insist on it, usually citing a Qur’anic injunction (24:30-31) as the main reason: God says that women ought to cover themselves, so that’s what they/we should do.<sup>2</sup> Other reasons are also given. One is the wish to follow the example of Muhammad’s wives, whom tradition says were covered in public. Another is the urge to keep women pure; in polemical contexts, this position tends to be contrasted to “the West,” where the absence of a similar dress code is seen to contribute to moral degeneration. Yet another reason is to keep faithful to family and group traditions, a stance sometimes heightened in refugee communities.

Opponents of this practice, both insiders and outsiders, argue that mandatory veiling of women – whether it is partial or full, limited to the head or extending to the face and body –

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<sup>2</sup> Orthodox Jews also often point to Scripture, e.g., Num 5:18 (and ensuing traditions, such as *Berakhot* 24a), to support head covering for married women (only). For a range of modern views on this topic in Judaism, especially by those supporting head covering, see Schreiber, L 2003. *Hide and Seek: Jewish Women and Hair Covering*. New York: Urim.

no longer has a place in the civilized world. It discriminates against women, plays into the hands of fundamentalists willing to use more extreme forms of violence against others, and in fact even lacks Qur'anic support. According to this view, poorly-educated women and those who are forced to cover themselves are more apt to veil. The controversial 2004 French government ban of visible religious symbols in public schools emerges from this context.

What is often overlooked in this modern debate is that the veiling of women is not restricted to Islam. We find it in other ancient and modern cultures, such as Judaism, and it also has deep roots in the pre-Islamic world, including Christianity.<sup>3</sup> This presentation explores one late second century Christian defence of this veiling practice, in Clement of Alexandria's *Paedagogus*.<sup>4</sup> Clement offers a fascinating case study. An advocate, like Musonius Rufus, of gender equality and respect for the broader Graeco-Roman world, his ideal world nevertheless would see women "wear a veil over their face and a covering on their head" in public. Of particular interest are the reasons Clement gives for this position, and his rhetorical stance, particularly since these do not accord fully with those favoured by modern proponents of veiling.

### Clement's Comments about Veiling

Clement's writings lack the rancour directed against women that one finds in several other early Christian writers. In fact, the message of the *Paedagogus* is explicitly directed at both men and women, and on the whole Clement is no more restrictive concerning women than he is about men. He makes this clear from the start when he says: "Both men and women practise the same sort of virtue... They who possess life in common, and salvation in common, have also virtue in common and, therefore, education too" (1.10). Moreover, throughout this book advice is either gender neutral, or is adapted to fit the different life settings of both men and women. His comments about veiling are not found in a separate "woman" section; nor do they seem intended to punish women. Rather, they form a very small part of a larger set of recommendations concerning sexual expression directed at both women and men.

Clement mentions veiling twice in his *Paedagogus*. The first is in 2.114:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hoodfar (2003, 6) notes: "prior to the nineteenth century, the veil was never viewed as a symbol of Muslim culture; the practice of veiling and seclusion of women is in fact pre-Islamic and originates in non-Arab Middle Eastern and Mediterranean societies... The first reference to veiling dates to an Assyrian legal text of the thirteenth century BCE, which restricted the practice to "respectable" women and forbade prostitutes from veiling." See Hoodfar, H 2003. More than Clothing: Veiling as an Adaptive Strategy. Pages 3-40 in *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*. Edited by SS Alvi, H Hoodfar and S McDonough. Toronto: Women's Press.

<sup>4</sup> Titus Flavius Clemens, born ca. 150, settled in Alexandria ca. 180, went to Asia Minor ca. 200, died ca. 215. He likely wrote the *Paedagogus* between 190 and 200. The three books of the *Paedagogus* represent the second volume of a planned trilogy: vol. 1, meant to entice people to Christianity, is called the *Protrepticus* ("Exhortation to the Greeks"); vol. 3, meant to lead advanced Christians deeper, to *gnosis*, or perfection, is unfortunately now lost, but parts of it are possibly found in his *Stromata* ("Miscellanies"); and vol. 2 (*Paedagogus*) is intended to be practical, moral formation for (newly-baptized?) Christians. Book 1 of the *Paedagogus* establishes a broad framework, drawing an extended analogy between conversion to Christianity and the birth and nurturing of humans; books 2-3 offer practical advice on daily Christian living.

<sup>5</sup> Greek text and French translation of Clement's ΠΑΙΔΑΓΩΓΟΣ is taken from the Sources chrétiennes editions: Marrou, H-I (ed.) 1960. *Le pédagogue*. Vol. 1. Sources chrétiennes 70. Translated by M Harl. Paris: Cerf.; Marrou, H-I (ed.) 1965. *Le pédagogue*. Vol. 2. Sources chrétiennes 105. Translated by C Mondésert. Paris: Cerf.; Mondésert, C and C Matray (eds.) 1970. *Le pédagogue*. Vol. 3. Sources chrétiennes 108. Paris: Cerf. The Greek text for the SC edition is taken from the second edition of the Stählin edition, with corrections: Stählin, O 1936. *Clemens Alexandrinus*. Vol. 1. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte 12. Leipzig: JC Hinrichs. The English translation comes from Wood, SP 1954. *Clement of Alexandria: Christ the Educator*. Fathers of the Church 23. New York: Fathers of the Church.

*We must avoid any irregularity in the type of garment we choose. We must also guard against all waywardness in our use of them. For instance, it is not right for a woman to wear her dress up over her knees, as the Laconian maidens are said to do, because a woman should not expose any part of her body... I should like, too, not only that it be forbidden them to expose their ankle, but also that it be made obligatory for them to wear a veil over their face and a covering on their head (ἐγκεκαλύφθαι δὲ καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον ἐπεσκιάσθαι προστέτακται).*

The second reference appears in his extended summary to the treatise, found in 3.793, in the context of a mini-summary of the ideal Christian life (53-83):

Further, the man and woman each must come to the church dressed becomingly, with an unaffected walk... Let the woman observe this further practise: Except when she is home, she should be completely veiled (κεκαλύφθω τὰ πάντα), for her appearance will be dignified only when she cannot be seen. She will never fall into sin if she always keeps modesty before her eyes, and retain her veil (τὴν ἀμπεχόνην), nor will she lure others into an occasion of sin by baring her face.

The first passage quoted above occurs unobtrusively in the context of advice that Clement gives on a wide range of issues, covering food (1-18), alcoholic drink (19-34), household items (35-39), behaviour at banquets (40-44), laughter (45-48), indecent talk (49-52), living together in harmony (53-60), wearing wreaths and perfume (61-76), sleep (77-82), sex (83-102), clothing and footwear (103-117), and jewellery (118-129). Each section comprises specific directions and rules concerning what Christians ought to do with their bodies. Since the audience appears to be an affluent group of Christians capable of buying and doing almost anything they want, the moral advice assumes the possibility of people making significant changes in their lives.

The message throughout is practical. Clement advises moderation, sensitivity to others, and public decency, not unlike what one might hear today, and also consistent with the Stoic and street wisdom of his day. Bodily health is one of his key concerns. He has much to say about eating nutritious food, getting lots of exercise, reducing alcohol intake, and sleeping well. Clement also insists on simplicity. His model Christian prefers natural wool to coloured silk, locally-grown food, earthenware pots instead of fancy pottery, and a vegetarian diet. Mixed in with this message is a traditional strand that considers heterosexuality normative, and prefers that men and women manage separate public and private spaces.

Clement has a great deal to say, prescriptively, about sex, and related activities that might stimulate what in his view is improper sexual activity.<sup>6</sup> He repeatedly counsels against practices and situations that can inflame people's passions – for instance, excessive alcohol consumption in mixed company, and wearing alluring clothes and jewellery. It is in this context that we find his remark about the veil. When women leave the home, he says, opportunities can arise for them to attract men. If women's entire bodies are covered, the temptations, for them and for the men, will be reduced – especially if they are covered plainly, for the passage immediately following, adds that wearing a purple veil can also be dangerous. This supplementary point allows us to appreciate that for Clement the issue is not primarily exposed flesh; rather, it is behaviour that reveals an interest in fashion, style,

<sup>6</sup> Note Behr's (2000, 3-4) comment: "The supposed harmfulness of sexual activity was a problem that continually vexed ancient doctors from the time of Hippocrates... The popular, hackneyed contrast between the pleasure-loving, licentious (or healthy) pagans and the virtuous, chaste (or repressed) Christians does not stand up to close scrutiny." See Behr, J 2000. *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

and attracting attention, which can lead to improper sexual activities whether a woman is veiled or not. Advice to men is also forthcoming. Clement counsels them not to dye their hair to make themselves look younger, and he criticizes those who have their body hair plucked at barber shops to make their bodies more attractive (3.15-25). While the veiling restrictions placed on women are more onerous than anything the men are being asked to do to curb sexual arousal, the context makes it clear that Clement is concerned with immoderate and improper forms of sexual expression for both genders.<sup>7</sup>

### **Clement's Strategies for having his Comments Accepted**

From the perspective of modern, secular liberalism it certainly comes as a surprise to encounter someone like Clement who not only thinks that he knows enough to tell everyone else how to live their lives, but also assumes that others will actually listen to him. What makes an older person, for instance, think that he can tell teenagers (of all dispositions and social classes) when, under what circumstances, and how often to have sex, and what makes a man think that he should tell women who are unrelated to him what to do with their bodies? What makes a religious leader think that God has stamped his/her programme but not someone else's? And concerning more minor issues, what makes Clement assume that the mattress that best suits his sleeping needs will suit everyone else's, or that the diet that makes his body feel best is to be followed by everyone? The fact that this attitude was prevalent in the ancient philosophical schools and has always been so in religious traditions does not make it any less remarkable.

One thing is sure: If a person is going to be telling others what to do with their bodies, the message needs to be convincing. Why, after all, should women pay any attention to Clement when he says that they ought to veil themselves, unless the message makes sense to them, and to the men in their lives? Moreover, it is one thing for the Iranian government in our day to take this position, then enforce it with the judiciary and the military; it is quite another for a lone Christian moralist to say it at a time when Christians were very much in the minority. Clement's rhetorical strategies, therefore, are an essential complement to his message.

Clement uses four main strategies to market his message. First, his broader teaching about the relationship of body and soul offers his audience practical reasons for acting as he suggests: Training the body, Clement insists, will generate more health in the present, and an increased possibility of eternal life after death. Second, a confident, moderate tone would likely have appealed more to this upper-class audience than a fire and brimstone sermon. In fact, rather than project a cult-like exclusivity and extremism, Clement engages his audience by linking his points to contemporary scientific research and philosophical traditions throughout the Graeco-Roman world. Third, Clement proceeds slowly, hinting at deeper teachings should his audience stay with him longer. Like modern weight-loss programs that promise the quick shedding of 20 pounds, Clement's plan is both encouraging and tantalizing: Christians can quickly make changes to their lives that will immediately impact on their quality of life (e.g., when they reduce alcohol intake and add more whole grains to their diet), while appreciating the need for ongoing improvement that could require his help. Fourth, Clement makes it clear that his message has divine support;

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<sup>7</sup> Note too that Clement, grounded in the culture of his day (although Matt 5:27-30 offered an alternative), does not raise the point that if "uncovered" women are "inflaming lusts" in men (2.114), it's up to the men themselves to curb those lusts, rather than make women responsible. Nor does he raise the possibility that, once Christians have progressed enough spiritually, they may no longer require external curbs on sexual arousal.

it is fully consistent with Scripture, including Jesus' message. In essence, then, Clement is saying: "Trust me. I am not some wild-eyed fanatic. Stay with me and I'll be your moral and spiritual guide."

### Links between Body and Soul

Clement wants to help people purify their body and soul, thereby increasing their chances of gaining eternal life. His message is grounded in a particular appreciation of the relationship between the body and soul, and the soul to God, as well as the assumption that everything matters. He makes it clear to his audience that their thoughts and actions, even minor ones, are part of a larger divine framework.

Like Paul, Clement does not consider the body evil; rather, he sees it as forming a relationship with the soul that can be mutually supportive or detrimental. Numbing the body can numb the soul, so the body needs to be kept fit in order to serve the soul; conversely, a healthy soul is reflected by a healthy body. This view is Platonic, and – at least in its broad outlines – unremarkable in the ancient world. Like Plato too, the soul is expected to dominate in this marriage of body and soul.<sup>8</sup>

How does Clement understand the soul? He considers it not only incorporeal but tripartite. In the opening of Book 3 of the *Paedagogus* he divides the soul into a reasoning/spiritual/apprehension part (λογιστικόν); an irascible, bestial part (θυμικόν); and a covetous, desiring part (ἐπιθυμητικόν).<sup>9</sup> The reasoning part – he calls it the "internal person" – is vital to a person's spiritual health since it can be infused by God and contain the divine. The other two parts can work against it. The irascible part, in his view, can border on madness, while the ever-shifting covetous part is linked to promiscuity.

Two points of clarification need to be made. First, what Clement calls "reason" we might call "inner vision," or "apprehension." This part of the soul apprehends truth, and God.<sup>10</sup> Second, the tripartite division of the soul functions more as a duality, split between the part that leans towards God and the parts that pull away from God – in his words, the "noble and majestic" that "seeks the beautiful simply because (a person) is a creature made by the only true Beauty," and the "concentration upon pleasures of the senses: Feeding like sparrows and mating like swine and goats" (3.37).

The soul also has a life independent of the body. It enters a body at conception. Like the angels, we are told, it never sleeps; when the body sleeps, the thinking of the soul manifests itself in dreams (2.82). Moreover, the soul survives after the body, perhaps re-entering other bodies; however, if a soul has been properly adjusted during a person's lifetime, at the moment of death the body can be transformed into a spiritual body, and survive death.<sup>11</sup>

How does all this ground Clement's insistence on head covering for women? Quite

<sup>8</sup> Note e.g., the dialogue between Socrates and Alcibiades in Plato's *Alcibiades major* 129E.

<sup>9</sup> His view is not unique. For a similar configuration see also Plato, *Republica* 4.439D. Elsewhere in Clement's work, the three parts are sometimes configured slightly differently; e.g., *Eclogae propheticae* 50.1-3 and *Stromata* 6.134.2-136.4: a spiritual part (*pneumatikon*); a bodily part (*sōmatikon*); and a directing part (*hegemōnikon*).

<sup>10</sup> See Taylor, C 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 21, 86: "In the modern world, reason tends to be defined procedurally, in terms of instrumental efficacy, or self-consistency. In Antiquity, "reason" was thought to be a vision of order in the cosmos... To be rational was to have the correct vision, or in the case of Aristotle's *phrōnēsis*, an accurate power of moral discrimination."

<sup>11</sup> So also 1 Cor 15:44. For a parallel notion see the closing saying of the *Gospel of Thomas*, where Jesus promises to make Mary male in order that she may "enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (114).

simply, the noble and majestic part of the soul needs all the help it can get to establish balance, ideally dominance, over the other parts of the soul. The body can help by remaining healthy, and by reducing opportunities for the emergence of anger, lust and other base emotions. A soul with a healthy superior part, he thinks, will naturally lead a person to act in ways acceptable to God, but correcting bodily actions can also serve to strengthen that part of the soul.

#### A Moderate, Confident Tone

Clement's *Paedagogus* seeks to convince through common sense and moderation rather than fear and extremism. Although his message is ultimately about salvation and correcting actions so as to attain it, there is almost no talk of punishment and damnation. Moreover, although the message is decidedly Christian, especially with its first book and the closing sections of the last one both rooted in Jesus and the Bible, much of it could pass as good, basic advice for most people throughout history. Put in modern terms his core message is: "Do you want to stay healthy, feel good, and be respected by your peers? Let me tell you how you can make simple changes to your life that will leave you energized and feeling better about yourself than you have in a long time."

Clement also writes with the certainty of one who, like Paul (1 Cor 2:16), believes himself to have the mind (*νοῦς*) of Christ – representing the reasoning part of the soul, and God himself.<sup>12</sup> By frequently referring back to the Bible for support, he offers either literal interpretations or allegorical ones when these better serve his needs, and he picks and chooses passages at will. He does not search the Bible for inspiration. Rather, his inspiration seems to be innate, and he uses the Bible to support what he already knows. What Clement projects is confidence, balance, and prior knowledge of the deepest structures of the cosmos.

#### An Introductory-Level Engagement

Since it is the soul that ought to drive the body, and the rational/divine part of the soul that ought to drive the whole of it consistently, one would think that the way to shape Christians would be to work on that spiritual part of the soul, for instance through prayer and other meditative techniques. Clement, however, turns instead to offering a thousand and one pieces of advice concerning the body. Why? In part, at least, he does so because he wants to get Christians started on making changes. He gives people simple directions to follow: "Act this way because I tell you to," he suggests, "and later you'll act this way because you'll understand for yourselves the reasons and be able to progress spiritually in other ways." Clement is priming the pump, adding a little water until the source generates its own in abundance.<sup>13</sup>

In presenting himself as the one who generates life for those who accept his message, Clement considers the audience his "children," whom he carefully nourishes. He relies heavily upon developmental and educational imagery to build this framework, presenting

<sup>12</sup> For comments on how this style was common in Antiquity, and certainly present in Clement (especially the *Strōmateis*), see Kovacs, J 2001. Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher According to Clement of Alexandria. *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9:3-25. E.g., "Clement presents the Gnostic (elevated Christian) teacher as the image of the Lord, who mimics his creative work and shares in the execution of the divine plan for salvation, an activity he designates by the term *οἰκοδομία*" (Kovacs 2001, 6).

<sup>13</sup> Clement considers the stage of moral purification as preliminary to higher levels of spiritual development. This view was common in the philosophical schools in Antiquity.

“the process of becoming a Christian as analogous to the process of conception, embryonic development, birth and growth.”<sup>14</sup> One of his favourite metaphors is seed and field, applied to both procreation and teaching (e.g., 2.83, 91). This metaphor has implications for his understanding of the ideal audience, as Buell (1999, 50) notes:

When the seed and soil model for procreation is rendered analogous with the educational process, Clement wields a powerful rhetorical tool for constructing arguments about the legitimacy and authenticity of tradition and the individuals involved in its transmission. The radical asymmetry of seed and soil imagery permits Clement to emphasize the linear transmission of tradition: The teacher as sower plays the active, penetrating role, implanting seeds of Christian tradition into the passively receptive learner.

A revealing comment occurs in the *Paedagogus* when, in supporting the recommendation that Christians restrict the placing of wreaths on their heads (2.61-76), Clement touches on a scriptural “mystery” (μυστικόν): The crown of thorns worn by Jesus not only represents the sins of the world that he carried on his head, but points to a link with the brambles on the burning bush revealed to Moses, showing the continuity of revelation (2.74-75). Having said that, he quickly stops himself, saying: “I have departed from the manner of the moralist (παιδαγωγικόν) and encroached upon the field of the teacher (διδασκαλικόν)” (2.76). For Clement, the deeper exegesis of Scripture represents a higher level of teaching; he considers his role in the *Paedagogus* as more basic and practical in nature. It aims to get Christians well started.<sup>15</sup> By slipping this exegesis into his text, however, Clement entices his audience, while reinforcing his own authority. His point, in essence, is: “Carry through with this first stage in your instruction, then I’ll lead you deeper; here’s an inkling of what awaits you.”

### Divine Support

As we have seen, Clement portrays himself as a transmitter of divine knowledge, able to guide others to salvation. His authority comes from the information about God and his Son that he is able to provide, and also from the links that he is able to draw between biblical texts and his own moral exhortations. Running through the *Paedagogus*, then, is a representation of God. Clement sees God interacting with humans in three key ways: Inserting a divine element into each human soul, guiding humans throughout their lives, and deciding what to do with them when they die. Clement’s God infuses the body with a soul, and injects into that soul a divine component.<sup>16</sup> The result is a part residing in each individual that is able to sense the divine. Clement does not develop this idea in the *Paedagogus*, but the implication seems clear: Clement is in touch with the divine within him, so is able to lead others with a sure hand; with more work, the audience too will learn how to recognize the divine within them.

Clement’s God also nourishes people throughout their lives. We see this idea expressed by the use of two central metaphors, which underline the view that humans cannot reach their goal alone: Humans are like infants needing a breast (1.34-52), or children in need of a tutor (e.g., 1.1-52). The very term “*paedagogus*,” of course, refers to a private tutor who, in Antiquity, was the pupil’s constant attendant, disciplining both his mind and character.

<sup>14</sup> Buell, DK 1999. *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 108.

<sup>15</sup> Clement contextualizes his work in 1.3, noting the progressive path to salvation that leads from persuasion/conversion (προτρέπων) to education (παιδαγωγών), then on to teaching (ἐκδιδάσκων). Part two is his primary concern in the *Paedagogus*.

<sup>16</sup> Rizzerio dramatically likens this to divine rape. See Rizzerio, L 1989. Le problème des parties de l’âme et de l’animation chez Clément d’Alexandrie. *La nouvelle revue théologique* 111:389-416.

Divine nourishment is thought to come from revelation that is available in the Bible. For Clement, the Bible is the assigned textbook in the course known as life. The *Paedagogus* is chock-full of biblical quotations that effectively complement Clement's recommendations, suggesting that, when properly interpreted, the Bible gives humans direction on how to inhabit their body.<sup>17</sup> God is also thought to nourish through his son, who provides the breasts from which we suckle (1.41). Clement claims that, just as a woman's breast milk is the blood that has been transformed into food suitable for infants, so too does Jesus' blood transform into breast milk to feed us. We might call this lactation as salvation. Those linked to Jesus, therefore, are much better fed than others (3.36), and the proof of superior Christian nourishment can be seen by comparing the actions of Christians with those of others.

Clement's God either transforms or destroys bodies at the moment of death. They can be transformed into spiritual bodies as a result of the superior training during a person's lifetime. The underlying message here is clear: If you want to keep some form of your body when you die, you will need to undergo a vigorous course of spiritual training.

### Conclusion

Why, then, should women cover their heads and veil their faces? Clement's answer is simple: Because veiling will reduce sexual tensions, thereby increasing the health of a woman's body and soul, and the health of the men around them. An extended answer would add: Increased health, which is part of a broader regime of life changes, will also allow a person to move to the next level of instruction, further increasing the quality of spiritual life and the likelihood of the body surviving death in a transformed state.

To what extent does Clement's view on veiling resemble that given by some modern Muslims? On the surface the differences are more striking than the similarities. Throughout the *Paedagogus* Clement frequently refers to the Bible to support his message, but when he encourages women to cover themselves he does not point, e.g., to 1 Cor 11, or to any other biblical text.<sup>18</sup> Scripture gives him authority in general, but it is not directly used to support veiling. Clement also does not recommend veiling to distinguish Christian from non-Christian women, even though elsewhere he does not hesitate to talk about the superior quality of the Christian message. Nor does Clement think that women are in danger of being raped on the streets if they are uncovered. Rather, he treats veiling un-polemically, as a part of the comprehensive physical training package that is required of both men and women, with a view to strengthening the soul, progressing along the Christian path, and gaining eternal life.

The broader message, however, is remarkably similar cross culturally, nearly two millennia later. Both Clement and modern Muslims depend on their scriptures to support the God-given nature of their message, both consider their group's moral guidelines superior, and both function within universalist and moralist frameworks, comfortable with a "one rule fits all" model. Both also see no problem with male religious leaders telling women (and men) what to do with their bodies.

A fascinating complication arises in this comparison. Clement writes primarily for the

<sup>17</sup> Clement believes that those clues can also be found in the Greek classics; in their better moments, they are in line with Scripture, and occasionally even dependent on it (Plato having learned from Moses).

<sup>18</sup> In 3.63, when he strongly discourages women from wearing wigs, he does refer to 1 Cor 11:3. If a woman's head is man, Clement notes, quoting Paul, and if a man's head is Christ, what happens when the woman's head is covered by artificial hair?



social elite of his day, a situation that might be surprising given the limited number of elite Christians in his day; but it is certainly not surprising when it comes to the veil, since we know that in pre-Islamic Mediterranean societies the veil tended to be a sign of high status. On the whole, the same applies to Muslim societies through the centuries, at least until recent times.<sup>19</sup> The complication is that the veil in modern Islam is more often associated with non-elite segments of the communities: The more educated the woman, the less likely she is to veil – or, in places where veiling is compulsory, the more likely that an educated woman will seek ways around the law.<sup>20</sup> In other words, a practice that in Clement's day pointed to high social standing has now more commonly become a religious marker.<sup>21</sup>

While the audiences and the rhetoric may differ, however, the overlap is still striking. For at least some early Christians and modern Muslims veiling is thought to be better for the community's spiritual development, thereby marking a higher level of morality.

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<sup>19</sup> According to Hoodfar (2003, 6-7), "veiling – especially when accompanied by seclusion – was a sign of status and was practised by the elite in the ancient Greco-Roman, pre-Islamic Iranian and Byzantine empires. Muslims subsequently adopted the veil and seclusion... Nonetheless, it was not until the Ottoman Empire... and particularly until the reign of the Safavids (1501-1722) in Iran that the veil emerged as a widespread symbol of status among the Muslim ruling classes and urban elite."

<sup>20</sup> A recent study with Canadian data suggests that social standing and education play a role in determining whether Muslim women will veil. The higher the education level, the less likely that the women family members will veil. See Meshal, RA 2003. Banners of Faith and Identities in Construct: The Hijāb in Canada. Pages 72-104 in *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*. Edited by SS Alvi, H Hoodfar and S McDonough. Toronto: Women's Press.

<sup>21</sup> Hoodfar (2003, 7) adds the controversial remark: "It is noteworthy that it is only since the nineteenth century, after the veil was promoted by the colonial occupiers as a prominent symbol of Muslim societies, especially in the travelogues and scholarly publications... that Muslims have justified veiling as Islamic rather than as a cultural practice."