

First Clement

Introduction

Outline

- I. Prescript
- II. Introduction: Occasion of the Letter, Then and Now (1:1—3:4)
 - A. Occasion of the Letter (1:1)
 - B. The Once-Splendid State of the Corinthian Congregation (1:2—2:8)
 - C. The Tragic Present State of the Congregation (3:1–4)
- III. The God-Fearing Life (4:1—39:9)
 - A. Against Jealousy (4:1—6:4)
 - B. Admonition to Repent (7:1—8:5)
 - C. Obedience, Piety, Faith, Hospitality (9:1—12:8)
 - D. Humility (13:1—19:1)
 - E. God's Benefactions and His Order (19:2—22:9)
 - F. Parousia and Resurrection (23:1—27:7)
 - G. Transition (28:1–4)
 - H. The Holy and Chosen Ones Must Flee from Slander, Discord, and Pride (29:1—30:8)
 - I. The Way of Blessedness (31:1—36:6)
 - J. Conclusion (37:1—39:9)

- IV. The Ugly Quarrel in Corinth Should Be Settled as Soon as Possible (40:1—61:3)
 - A. The Congregational Office Is Appointed by God (40:1—44:6)
 - B. Noble Men Are Only Deposed by Villains (45:1—46:9)
 - C. Praise of Love (47:1—50:7)
 - D. Direct Admonition to the Authors of the Quarrel: They Must Repent, Submit, and Depart (51:1—58:2)
 - E. Conclusion of the Letter with a Long Prayer (59:1—61:3)
- V. The End of the Letter with a Concluding Admonition and Vows (62:1—65:2)
 - A. Concluding Exhortations (62–63)
 - B. Two Closing Vows and the Confirmation of the Emissaries (64–65)

Transmission

The letter has been preserved relatively well: in the Greek original text and in Latin, Syriac, and Coptic translations. It has been preserved in Greek within the appendix of the biblical codex Alexandrinus (A), though unfortunately with many gaps, the largest of which consists of the loss of an entire leaf containing 57:6—63:4. The complete Greek text is present within a minuscule from the eleventh century (1056), discovered by Bryennios in Constantinople and now kept in the Jerusalem Patriarchal Library. It is the same codex that contains the Did. (H). A Syriac translation (S) is written in a Cambridge manuscript (twelfth cent. CE, 1170), and a Latin translation (L) in an eleventh century codex in the Seminary at Namur. The Coptic tradition consists of two witnesses, a papyrus manuscript from the fourth century in the Staatsbibliothek of Berlin (C), and a very fragmentary papyrus manuscript from the fifth century in the Straßburg University and Landesbibliothek (C1) that contains 1 Clem. 1:1—26:2, though with many gaps. Both translations are in the Akhmimic dialect and are independent of one another. Also of significant text critical value are Clement of Alexandria's extensive quotations of 1 Clem. (see below).

Editions and Literature

O. von Gebhardt et al., *Patrum apostolicorum opera I*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1876). — A. Hilgenfeld, *Novum Testamentum extra canonem receptum*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1876). J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers, Part 1: S. Clemens of Rome*, 2 vols. (London and New York: Macmillan, 1890). — F. X. Funk, *Patres Apostolici I*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Laupp, 1901). — In addition to these annotated editions, the well-known texts in the study editions are the following: O. von Gebhardt et al., *Patrum apostolicorum opera ed. minor*, 5th ed. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906). — F. X. Funk, *Die apostolischen Väter*, 2nd ed. (Mohr Siebeck, 1907). — R. Knopf, *Der Erste Clemensbrief*, Texte und Untersuchungen 20.1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899). — The Syriac translation ed. by R. L. Bensly, *The Epistles of S. Clement to the Corinthians in Syriac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899); the Latin translation ed. by G. Morin, *Anecdota Maredsolana; Seu, Monumenta Ecclesiasticae Antiquitatis en Mss. Codicibus nunc Primum Edita*, vol. 2 (Maredsoli: Monasterio S. Benedicti, 1894); the Berlin Coptic ed. by C. Schmidt, *Der erste Clemensbrief in altkoptischer Übersetzung*, Texte und Untersuchungen 32.1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908); the Straßburger text by F. Röscher, *Bruchstücke des ersten Clemensbriefes: Nach dem Achmimischen Papyrus der Straßburger Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, mit biblischen Texten derselben Handschrift* (Straßburg: Schlesier & Schweikhardt, 1910). — A German translation with a short explanation by R. Knopf, “Clemens an die Korinther,” in *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, ed. E. Hennecke (Tübingen: Mohr, 1904), 84–112. — R. Knopf, “Clemens an die Korinther,” in *Handbuch zu den neutestamentlichen Apokryphen*, ed. E. Hennecke (Tübingen: Mohr, 1904), 173–90. — W. Wrede, *Untersuchungen zum ersten Klemensbriefe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1891). — A. Stahl, *Patristische Untersuchungen: Der erste brief des römischen Clemens; Ignatius von Antiochien; der Hirt des Hermas* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1901). — T. M. Wehofer, “Untersuchungen zur altchristlichen Epistolographie,” *Sitzungsberichte der Wiener Akademie, philosophisch-historische Klasse* 143.17 (1901) 102–37. — D. Völter, *Die apostolischen Väter neu untersucht. Vol. 1: Clemens, Hermas, Barnabas* (Leiden: Brill, 1904). — D. Völter, “Bemerkungen zum ersten Klemensbrief,” *Zeitschrift für neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft* 7 (1906) 261–64. — G. Avanden Bergh van Eysinga, *Onderzoek naar de echtheid van Clemens eerste brief aan de Corinthiërs* (Leiden: Brill, 1908). — T. Schermann, *Griechische Zauberpapyri und das Gemeinde- und Dankgebet im I. Klemensbriefe*, Texte und Untersuchungen 34.2 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909). — A. von Harnack, “Der erste Klemensbrief: Eine Studie zur Bestimmung des Charakters des ältesten Heidenchristentums,” *Sitzungsberichte der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Klasse*

(1909) 38–61. — ET: A. von Harnack, “The First Letter of Clement: A Study to Determine the Character of the Oldest Form of Gentile Christianity,” in *The Letter of the Roman Church to the Corinthian Church from the Era of Domitian: 1 Clement*, ed. and trans. Jacob N. Cerone, *Classic Studies on the Apostolic Fathers 1* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 144–68. — W. Praetorius, “Die Bedeutung der beiden Klemensbriefe für die älteste Geschichte der kirchlichen Praxis (1. Hälfte),” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 33 (1912) 33, 347–63, 501–28. — More literature and also studies on the individual translations can be found in O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*. Vol. 1: *Vom Ausgang der apostolischen Zeitalters bis zum Ende des 2. Jahrhunderts*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1913), §11.

Points of Contact and Attestations

There is no doubt that Polycarp of Smyrna knew 1 Clem. He uses it several times in his letter to the Philippians. Even his prescript is designed after that of 1 Clem. Explicit mention of 1 Clem. is first found in Hegesippus (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.22.1) and in Dionysius of Corinth (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.23.11). Shortly thereafter, Irenaeus mentions him and praises him (*Haer.* III 3.3). We find extensive use of 1 Clem. in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata*; see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.13.6, and further at Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.1.15; 7.38; 2.15.65; 4.6.32f; and above all 4.17–19, 105–19; 5.12.80; 6.8.64f. Also there are some echoes at other places which can be demonstrated. Origen and of course Eusebius know of the letter, which was read and used by some Greek writers until the tenth and eleventh centuries. A list of the references and quotations can be found in Gebhardt and von Harnack, *Patrum apostolicorum opera I*, xxiv–xliv; von Harnack, *Geschichte*, 1:40–47; and a very detailed and convenient treatment at Lightfoot, *Clement*, 1:148–200.

Occasion

The letter is sent from the Roman congregation to the Corinthian congregation when disputes broke out in Corinth. The majority of the congregation, led by a few leaders (1:1; 47:6), who presumably used their spiritual (pneumatic) gifts (13:1; 38:1f), stood up against the ministers, the presbyters, and dismissed some of them (47:6; 44:6). The letter from the Romans necessarily takes the side of the ousted ministers, demands their reinstatement, exhorts the congregation to repent and be converted, and instructs the leaders of the quarrel to depart from the congregation (cf. especially 51–58). But the Romans, in addition to the immediate occasion of the

letter, also give a number of exhortations in an excessive number of words about the main elements of Christian conversion and life, without it being possible to see more precisely how these exhortations relate to the actual purpose of the letter; see primarily the first, more extensive main part of the letter (4–38) and the summary in 62:1f.

Provenance, Date, and Author

This document, which is very important for the history of ancient Christian piety and ancient congregational life, acquires a special value because it is not only classified according to its origin and destination, which it identifies at the outset, but also because its date of composition can be determined with a satisfying degree of certainty. The letter could not have been written too long after the deaths of Peter and Paul, at most about a human lifetime.¹ This is proven in 1 Clem. 5:1–6:2 which speaks of the two apostles and of the victims of the Neronian persecution: they all belong to the recent past, to “our generation” (1 Clem. 51). Of course, the date of the letter should not be placed too close to the actual apostolic age. This is prohibited by the already established theory of apostolic succession (1 Clem. 42), by the observation that the first ministers, appointed by the apostles, have already died (44:2f), that the church of Corinth is called ancient (47:6), that there are members of the church in Rome who from their youth until old age have walked blamelessly as Christians (63:3). These observations suggest at least the end of the second Christian generation. A more precise assessment is permitted from 1 Clem. 1:1. The dangers and hardships mentioned there should be interpreted as a persecution experienced by the Roman community. This persecution must have been a later one than the Neronian persecution, on which 5:1–6:2 reflects. According to our knowledge of early Christianity, it can be none other than the Domitian persecution. Domitian persecuted the church in Rome toward the end of his reign. The letter must have been written while there was a break in the persecution, or immediately following its conclusion, in the final phase of Domitian’s reign, or even at the beginning of Nerva’s reign, thus around 95 or 96 CE.

From the beginning to the end, 1 Clem. is a letter from the entire Roman congregation. From the first to the last sentence the 1st person plural is used. But in the tradition, the letter is transmitted under the name of a certain individual man, Clement, whose name is never mentioned within the letter: Yet Dionysius of Corinth in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.23.11 already called 1 Clem. τὴν διὰ Κλήμεντος γραφεῖσαν (ἐπιστολὴν ὑμῶν). The tradition

1. TN: “Menschenalter” can mean either “generation” or “lifetime.”

could very well be accurate. Even if the letter is written in the name of the Roman congregation, it is written by a singular, outstanding man, as the strictly uniform style already proves, and the author may very well have been called Clement; it was a man who belonged among the leaders of the Roman congregation in the time of the second generation and who appears in the later tradition as the second or third bishop of Rome. Unfortunately we know nothing more about him. The letter reveals a skillful homiletician with an excellent command of the LXX, but who also knows how to use forms of contemporary Greek oratory. Beyond the immediate needs of the moment, he has delivered a product of literary art that goes beyond the form of a real letter and, in broad, homiletical trains of thought and designs, portrays the ideal, proper Christian way of life.

I. Prescript (1:0)

Translation

^{1:0} The congregation of God which dwells in Rome as a sojourner, to the congregation of God which dwells in Corinth as a sojourner, called and sanctified according to the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. May grace and peace from Almighty God be given to you in fullness through Jesus Christ.

Textual Notes

The prescript is based on the prescript of 1 Corinthians, which was almost certainly intended (see 47:1–3), and on that of 1 Peter, whom the author also knows. The author of the letter does not identify himself. The whole congregation takes the floor (cf. Mart. Poly. prescript). *παροικεῖν* communicates the idea of temporary residence in a foreign country (see also 1 Pet 1:1, 17; 2:11; Heb 11:13; Herm. *Sim.* I 1). On *κλητοῖς ἡγιασμένοις*, see 1 Cor 1:2; both words could be equivalent to one another, but the one can also be subordinated to the other. Calling and sanctification take place according to the antecedent, salvific will of God (29:1) through the Lord Jesus. Christians are the new people, yet chosen from the very beginning, and their formation is conditioned upon the appearance of the Lord. *παντοκράτωρ* occurs often in the letter (cf. 2:3; 32:4; 60:4; and also 8:5), is rare in early Christian literature, with the exception of Revelation, but is used frequently in the LXX.

II. Introduction: The Occasion of the Letter, Then and Now (1:1—3:4)

In 1 Clem. 1:1—3:4, the author provides the Corinthians with the impetus for this letter (1:1) and details their former state of obedience and the great fame they had won among Christian congregations (1:2—2:8), as well as the current pitiful state of congregation (3:1–4).²

A. Occasion of the Letter (1:1)

Translation

^{1:1} Because of the dangers and hardships that suddenly and quickly occurred, one after another, we now turn our attention, a little late in our opinion, to the disputes that have arisen among you, beloved, and to the insurrection which is unfitting and is foreign for the elect of God, that ugly and godless insurrection, which has inflamed a few hasty and impudent people to such a degree of folly that your venerable and renowned name has been tremendously damaged.

Textual Notes

The apology can only refer to the persecutions that have affected the Roman congregation. The Neronian persecution is in the distant past and is referred to in 1 Clem. 5 and 6. Since the congregation still numbers itself among the Neronian martyrs (5:1), only Domitian's oppression can be meant here. On the Domitian oppression, see Lightfoot, *Clement*, 1:104–14; Knopf, *Nachapostolische Zeitalter*, 88–96, then Preuschen, *Analecta*, 1:11 and the literature mentioned there. Dio Cassius LXVII 14, along with Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.17–20, 1 Peter, and Revelation are the main sources, and Dio testifies to the Roman persecution. Added to this is the monumental tradition of the catacombs (cf. Marucchi, *Archäologie*, 36ff). The Roman persecution of Christians during Domitian's reign took place certainly toward the end of his rule. According to our passage, it took place suddenly and happened repeatedly. τὰ ἐπιζητούμενα παρ' ὑμῖν πράγματα are “the things which are in question with you” and indeed not “the things for which you have asked us.” ἀλλοτρίας καὶ ξένης: 1 Clem. loves using a twofold approach to define

2. TN: This paragraph is not present within the original German text but has been added for the sake of unity and clarity in the newly formatted English edition.

matters more closely, and the following evidences a number of similar formations. On στάσις, the following, especially 1 Clem. 40, reveals something more detailed: It is an uprising of the congregation against its ministers, some of whom have been deposed (see introduction, pp. 61–62). That the ringleaders are few in number (ὀλίγα πρόσωπα) is more clearly articulated in 47:6. On ἀξιαγάπητος, see also 21:7. The clustered compositions with ἀξιο- are Hellenistic, starting with Xenophon. Ignatius is very fond of them. On ἀξιαγάπητος, see Ign. *Phld.* 5:2. On the rhetorically exaggerated expression πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, see 1 Thess 1:8; Ign. *Eph.* 8:1. — βλασφημηθῆναι in AH; (βλασφημεῖσθαι) CC¹; but βλαφθῆναι in LS.

B. The Once-Splendid State of the Corinthian Congregation (1:2—2:8)

Translation

^{1,2} For who has stayed with you as a guest and did not admire your glorious and firm faith, your prudent and gentle Christian piety? And who did not praise your great hospitality and perfect and secure knowledge? ³ For you did all things without respect to the person. You walked in God's statutes, were obedient to your superiors, and showed reverence to your elders. You encouraged the younger to be humble and honorable. You commanded the women to perform all their duties with an impeccable, honorable, and pure conscience, while loving their husbands in the proper manner. You also taught them to keep themselves within the bounds of subordination, to furnish the household with honor, and to be reasonable in every respect.

^{2,1} You all were humble and in no way arrogant. You preferred to obey rather than command. You preferred to give more than to receive. You were content and were careful with what Christ offered you for your pilgrimage. You carefully locked up his words in your heart, and his sufferings were before your eyes.

² Therefore a deep and blessed peace and an unquenchable desire for good were bestowed upon all, and the Holy Spirit was poured out abundantly upon all. ³ Full of holy intent, in good confidence, with pious trust, you stretched out your hands to Almighty God, imploring him to be gracious to you if you had done wrong against your will. ⁴ Day and night you toiled for the entire brotherhood, so that through (your) merciful disposition and inner compassion the number of his elect might