3. Characteristics of the Letter and Its Religious Content

There can be no doubt about the intention and purpose, method and means of the letter. It is clear, transparent, and definite from the first to the last leaf. The charge that the letter is poorly planned and contains superfluous remarks is unjustified.[1] The disputes that have broken out in the Corinthian community, which have resulted in the dismissal of some presbyters (bishops and deacons), are to be abolished as soon as possible, so that the masterminds of the deposition are prosecuted as the culprits. But since the whole congregation either approved of the deposition by a majority decision or—more probably—did not oppose it, the Romans recognize in this behavior the symptom of a general weakness of the Christian community that has seized the so respected and famous Corinthian congregation. According to this, it is first necessary to strengthen the Christianity of the sister congregation. It is the conviction of the Romans that only after they have been strengthened (i.e., after they possess the knowledge and strength) will they be in a position to resolve the disputes. Therefore, the letter is divided into two parts. In the first, larger portion, Christianity as it is and should be is presented to the Corinthian community as a gift and a task in continued exhortations (always taking into account the particular occasion of the letter). In the second portion of the letter, the Roman judgment in relation to the disputes is prepared, reasoned, formulated, and executed with its consequences in the most careful manner

1. It is not necessary to give a detailed explanation of the letter's structure. Everyone can discover it for himself, as soon as he has realized that after the introduction (chapters 1 and 2), the main caesura falls between chapter 36 and 37 and that 59 to 65 functions as a conclusion. The structure may even be described as tight. Excursuses may be noted in a few places, but they are not disturbing. For this very reason, the assumption that the author used older pieces from sermons is unjustified, even though not all the compositions in the letter are original.

(1 Clem 37ff). The Romans look back primarily to the first portion of the letter when writing, "About what belongs to our worship of God—which is quite necessary for those who wish to live a virtuous life, piously and justly—we have sufficiently written to you; for we have dealt with every subject regarding faith, repentance, genuine love, abstinence, moderation, and perseverance" (1 Clem 62.1–2).

Whatever one may think of the remarks about Christianity in the letter, the Roman congregation will receive lasting recognition, as it has grasped the present task of eliminating an evil dispute, not as a particular one, even less by going into concrete details and gossip, but out of the knowledge that one must strengthen the roots, the faith, and the moral vitality, if a weakness shows itself in the leaf and the blossom.[2] This knowledge is truly apostolic, for this is how Paul proceeded. At the same time, it corresponds to the decision of the Roman community to intervene in the turmoil of the sister community at all, for it has thereby demonstrated a Christian common sense that also corresponds to the apostolic view that one should come to the aid of a suffering member.[3] The whole letter in both its parts can be brought under the heading that the Roman congregation itself casually formulated "an exhortatory petition concerning peace and harmony" (1 Clem 63.2).

The extensive prayer, into which the writing concludes (1 Clem 59–61), is not merely the climax of the edifying admonition, but also expresses a special formal peculiarity: The Roman congregation closely unites itself with the sister congregation; therefore the reproaches and admonitions are always given in the first person plural and not in the second person. Yes, the Romans feel themselves to be standing together with the Corinthians in an assembly before God's eyes and celebrating a worship service when writing (see, above all, 1 Clem 34.7). Therefore, the great prayer at the end—which some wished to separate as a later addition because the overall attitude of the letter was not understood and appreciated—does not come as a surprise, but organically follows the previous one. By joining

2. It is also very remarkable that the Roman congregation consistently avoids speaking of itself or even presenting itself as an example in the letter. That makes the worthiest impression! It is completely occupied with the task of making peace in Corinth. Even the difficult experiences that have recently come upon it (the Domitian persecution) only appear at the beginning of the letter to excuse its belated care, and then leaves it aside entirely without any complaint. It wants to help, but does not demand any help itself. The words of prayer, "Deliver our prisoners" (59.4) and "Deliver us from those who hate us unjustly" (60.3) could also have been written in a so-called time of peace.

3. The Roman community has intervened unsolicited (1.1 does not say περὶ τῶν ἐπιξητουμένων παρ᾽ ὑμῶν πραγμάτων, but rather παρ᾽ ὑμῖν). On the fact that it indeed intervenes at all and also demonstrates a domineering attitude, see below.

forces with the Corinthian congregation, the Romans removed from the outset all sharpness from its admonitions and made it impossible for the Corinthians to complain about pedantry and arrogance. The Roman congregation, therefore, is all the more capable of giving its admonitions and instructions all the more urgently and emphatically.

As far as the religious and theological character of the letter is concerned, first of all a fundamental methodological error has to be eliminated which has burdened the understanding of the letter in all theological camps since the time of Baur and his school. Although Wrede[4] vigorously opposed him, and Knopf[5] liberated himself from him in a commendable way, there is still much to be done for his complete extermination. The error consists in the fact that one attempts to understand the religious character of the epistle from the Pauline epistles, or even from other Christian writings and ways of thinking, either by the assumption that the writing is a compromise between Pauline thought and Jewish Christianity, which abrades and weakens both in the interest of peace, or by the other related assumption that the author of the epistle had wanted to theologically balance different NT doctrinal terms in their intentions and formulas and, so to speak, reduce them to a common denominator. This is the view of Lightfoot[6] and others, that of Baur and the Tübingen school. Against Baur, it has to be said that in the whole letter neither Judaism nor Jewish Christianity finds the slightest consideration—this important observation will be considered later—and that there is no reason why this should be explained by "compromising diplomatic intentions." In any case, Baur's explanation of the paradoxical deficiency remains understandable and debatable because there really was a great contrast and struggle between Paul and Jewish Christianity in the past. What is entirely incomprehensible to us today, however, is Lightfoot's view, which is at the same time a particularly clear proof of how fundamentally the historical judgment has changed in recent decades. Lightfoot states in his "Introduction" that the letter is marked by three characteristics: (1) comprehensiveness, (2) sense of order, (3) moderation. Then, he writes the following about the first point (I have to cite the entire passage despite its length because it unfortunately still has followers among us today):

> The comprehensiveness is tested by the range of the Apostolic writings, with which the author is conversant and of which he makes use. Mention has already been made of his co-ordinating the two Apostles S. Peter and S. Paul in distinction

4. Wrede, *Untersuchungen zum ersten Klemensbriefe*, 58ff.
5. Knopf, *Clemensbriefe*, vol. 1.
6. Lightfoot, *Clement of Rome*, 1:95ff.

> to the Ebionism of a later age, which placed them in direct antagonism, and to the factiousness of certain persons even in the apostolic times, which perverted their names into party watchwords notwithstanding their own protests. This mention is the fit prelude to the use made of their writings in the body of the letter. The influence of S. Peter's First Epistle may be traced in more than one passage; while expressions scattered up and down Clement's letter recall the language of several of S. Paul's Epistles belonging to different epochs and representing different types in his literary career.
>
> Nor is the comprehensiveness of Clement's letter restricted to a recognition of these two leading Apostles. It is so largely interspersed with thoughts and expressions from the Epistle to the Hebrews, that many ancient writers attributed this Canonical epistle to Clement.
>
> Again, the writer shows himself conversant with the type of doctrine and modes of expression characteristic of the Epistle of S. James. Just as he coordinates the authority of S. Peter and S. Paul, as leaders of the Church, so in like manner he combines the teaching of S. Paul and S. James on the great doctrines of salvation (this is justified from 1 Clem 31–35). We have thus a full recognition of four out of the five types of Apostolic teaching, which confront us in the Canonical writings. If the fifth, of which S. John is the exponent, is not clearly affirmed in Clement's letter, the reason is that the Gospel and Epistles of this Apostle had not yet been written, or if written had not been circulated beyond his own immediate band of personal disciples.

This consideration starts from the premise that Lightfoot and those theologians related to him apparently take for granted that the apostolic writings (or the oldest Christian literature) had been available to the congregations in the empire as peculiar "doctrinal concepts" that they, as such, had to study eagerly and convey, since the inspiration of these writings guaranteed their full uniformity and consistency. But with this presupposition, everything that follows is incorrect. There is, therefore, something tragic about the fact that the most learned and merited exegete of 1 Clement has fallen to it; for (1) what bore the name of Christ and what one read as a Christian was read in the churches of the post-apostolic era in the kingdom first of all for edification, that is, to recognize the will of God and to strengthen obedience according to this will. (2) A church theology did not yet exist at all (neither an internal nor an external compulsion to acquire such a one), but only certain firm basic features of the proclamation, beside them hundreds of *disjecta membra* of a theological kind and of a most diverse origin, on which one

indiscriminately built oneself up. (3) The Old Testament was exclusively the inspired *litera scripta* (see below), and in every respect it was considered a sufficient divine, foundational document (*Urkunde*). The word of Christ and the "pneumatics" of the apostles, the prophets, and teachers or even the congregations competed with this foundational document (*Urkunde*), but did not yet present itself as a divine dictate and was therefore of a different kind than this, that is, not a regulation of faith but support. (4) Compared to the novelty and power of the fundamental proclamation and the overwhelming impression of the Old Testament interpreted in Christian terms, "doctrinal concepts" could at first only have a subordinate meaning. However, they could offer other difficulties and impulses in detail in addition to edification. (5) The contrasts of the apostolic age (Jewish Christianity in various forms, Paul) were extinguished for Rome, Corinth, and the west of Asia Minor around the year of 100 CE, (6)—especially with regard to 1 Clement—the compilation of Peter and Paul in the letter has nothing to do with the contrast that once prevailed here, nor with Peter's doctrine; but additionally, the material that is related to 1 Peter, James, and Hebrews in the letter must not be used in the way that Lightfoot uses it, even if it were certain that Clement read the letter of James and knew 1 Peter as Peter's letter.[7] These letters are cited without the authors' names or rather, they were not at all cited but the author takes individual sentences (in no way especially characteristic) from them tacitly into his own constructions. The fact that here, in addition to the all-dominant edifice, another intention prevailed, or that the author wanted to introduce authorities and convey doctrinal concepts, is therefore entirely excluded. Only in relation to Paul, whose letter is explicitly cited (1 Clem 47), is the situation different. Here, the author has made an effort to conform himself to the apostle at a very important point (see below).[8]

7. The doubt as to whether 1 Peter was handed down as Petrine is based on the observation that it is also abundantly written out in Polycarp's letter, as it is in our letter, but also tacitly and without the author's name, while there, as here, Paul was cited by name and cited as an authority. It should also be remembered that 1 Peter is missing within the Muratorian Fragment.

8. The most remarkable thing about post-apostolic literature—which is regularly overlooked—is its autonomy and its total or essential independence from the literature of the most ancient time, or rather the apostolic age. Clement, Ignatius, Hermas, 2 Clement, Barnabas—everyone has his own Christianity, in which Paul or other ancient figures only plays a role. Dutch critics have recognized this and concluded that the oldest literature is not authentic. This is, of course, fundamentally wrong; but to make artificial connections with this literature among the post-apostolic fathers in order to derive their doctrine from the apostolic doctrines is no less wrong. The different forms of Christianity in the century from ca. 50 to 150 are almost exclusively connected to the Old Testament and the *kerygma* of God and Christ. For the Christians of the second

The strongest impression one gets from the letter is that the new religion was primarily not a cultic, nor an enthusiastic, nor a gnostic or speculative-mysterious movement, but rather a moral movement founded on the basis of the monotheism felt with the highest seriousness and liveliness, or better, on the basis of the reality of God. It is about a holy life, about the knowledge and observance of the will of God and about the performance of the good, or rather good works (see 1 Clem 2.2; 32.1ff; etc.). From the first to the last leaf, this fundamental character is strongly expressed in the letter, and one must descend to Calvin in Geneva, the Puritans of England and the New England states, in order to find in the common religion the sovereignty of God's holy laws so naturally as the Alpha and Omega of all living things. But the conviction that those who have received this salvation owe it to the election of God, which cannot be fathomed any further, who has provided a fixed number as the people of his property, also can be found here. Ultimately the content of the moral law of God (δικαιώματα) is similar in Clement and the Puritans: for there and here it is by no means antithetically directed towards the world, as if the world itself was the evil principle, but directs itself towards the positive ideals of obedience, moral purity, and sublimity (ἁγνότης, σεμνότης) as well as to the peace that can be won by gentleness and humility, love and service, and that presents itself in corporate unity. The moral ideal is not escapism and asceticism—it is esteemed as a special gift of God (1 Clem 35.4), but rarely mentioned, and where it is remembered, ascetics receive a warning against arrogance (1 Clem 38.2)—but the complex of all the positive virtues that produce a holy and pure, a peaceful and charitable (1 Clem 48.1) life with others. It is, in a word, simple morality, illuminated by the presence and power of God, which is what matters to the Roman Christians. The natural forms of existence and the differences between one another on the basis of possessions and education are taken for granted and should be regarded as gifts from God and used for the good of the whole. In the sense and in the style of the "Haustafeln" (household codes) of the Pauline epistles, warnings are repeatedly given to the old and young, the spouses, women, and educators. Clement writes, "Let our whole body remain safe and sound in Christ Jesus, and let everyone order himself with respect to his neighbor in accordance with the *charisma* of his neighbor. Let the strong take care of the weak, but let the weak have respect for the strong. Let the rich give to the poor, and let the poor thank God that he has given him one through whom his need is fulfilled. Let the wise man show his wisdom not in words but in good deeds. Let the humble not testify to his own humility, but let someone else

and third generation, this is only praiseworthy.

do it" (1 Clem 38.1–2). These admonitions culminate in the repeated praise of love, which intensifies into a hymn (1 Clem 49; 50). No morbid addiction to martyrdom, no ostentation, and no complacent reflection disturbs the serene and simple seriousness of the whole posture and determined will to love. To such an extent all *échauffement* is missing, and it seems so self-evident that the congregation is given the leeway to really do what is good everywhere, that in many places one believes to have before one's eyes a letter from a time in which Christianity has carried out its assimilation to the world without relinquishing or curtailing its ideals. The pneumatic element is present as much as is the memory of the imminent return of Christ (1 Clem 23). Both topics must be discussed later; here it suffices to say that "the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (1 Clem 2.2) is seen in its most important consequences not in the ecstatic, but in the production of the Christian state itself and its essential traits, and that at the same time the delay of the return of Christ in judgment is explained with an intensification of the imminent judgment. Neither element provokes a stormy or even an intensified inner agitation within the author.

All the more versatile and animated is the testimony of the one living God, the creator and ruler. Indeed, we have no work from the ancient Gentile church before Origen, in which it is pronounced with such inwardness and in such a richness of relationships. A great number of the constructions in the letter serve it. Here, we can clearly see what the former Gentiles experienced and felt first and foremost in the new religion, which brought them into an indissoluble relationship with the living source of all things. Everything else receded behind this continuing experience; God in nature, his creative will, his lawful administration, and his orders are praised; God in his work in history, establishing an end and determining boundaries; God as the power that has foretold and prepared everything; God who peers into what is hidden; God as judge; God as the redeemer and as the giver of all good gifts; God as the force that alone leads to himself, *a deo per deum ad deum*. All convictions and sentiments awakened by living theism are offered here in astonishing reverence and joy.[9] One could claim from every individual construction that it is not original; but he who is unable to feel the joy and the full seriousness of the simple knowledge of

9. In the foreground is God as Master (δεσπότης) or as the πατὴρ καὶ κτίστης τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου (1 Clem 19.2) or ὁ μέγας δημιουργὸς καὶ δεσπότης τῶν ἁπάντων (20.11), indeed, in truth, everything has already been said with it. The name "Father" in the ethical sense is completely relegated to the background. Here, there is a clear difference from the New Testament letters. Note, however, the importance Clement attaches to emphasizing God's nearness (see, for example, 21.3: Ἴδωμεν πῶς ἐγγύς ἐστιν, καὶ ὅτι οὐδὲν λέληθεν αὐτὸν τῶν ἐννοιῶν ἡμῶν οὐδὲ τῶν διαλογισμῶν ὧν ἐποιούμεθα) and his mercy (see 20.11: ἡμεῖς οἱ προσπεευγότες τοὶς οἰκτιρμοῖς θεοῦ).

God in these testimonies which are constantly springing up in the letter, and to distinguish them from religious stylistic exercises, must be denied the ability to distinguish the articulation of sincere religious life from the semblance of such a life. But if it is argued that the poetic prose and the rhetorical clothing of numerous passages cast doubt on that sincerity, it must not be forgotten that it was caused by the example of the Psalms, which was an indispensable garment that could not be missing from a document that, in times of diminishing taste, went from one cosmopolitan city to another and was to be read out loud publicly. The author has the greatest difficulty in escaping the aesthetic taste of the day, even if he is convinced of the objective purity of his ideas. However, one must say this of the letter: No polytheistic sub-tone, base intention, and no selfishness disturbs the articulation of a living knowledge of God.

The author has the highest admiration for the order of the divine world government, and the fact that he hardly speaks of miracles at all is probably connected with it. This great chapter in the history of ancient Christianity is almost completely omitted by him. Neither do miraculous phenomena have a place where he draws the ideal picture of a Christian community (1 Clem 1; 2), nor where he describes God's work. He certainly was not "afraid of miracles." He reminds his readers of Old Testament miracles, and he bases the hope of the resurrection, in addition to a cosmic-rational line of reasoning, on the story of the phoenix (1 Clem 24; 25).[10] The choice of this common Greek narrative, which does not present the process as a miracle, but rather as a natural phenomenon, is significant. The work of God is everywhere natural law and miraculous simultaneously. But he is either unaware of contemporary Christian miracles, which would be applicable here, or he is afraid to use such singularities. The vast field of miraculous healings and the exorcisms of demons, be it by Christ or by others in the present, is not even touched upon, as the author hardly has anything to do with demons, Satan, or the devil anywhere.[11]

The organ that establishes the connection with God is faith. But this—apart from the passage where Pauline propositions are thought of—is only

10. Jesus' resurrection is considered only as the first case of the resurrections.

11. The devil appears as "the adversary" only once (1 Clem 51). The later traits of ascetic self-disparagement are still completely absent, as Tertullian, for example, shows. How humility is to be understood in the letter is shown immediately by 1 Clem 2. It is contrasted with pompousness and arrogance. Especially characteristic is 1 Clem 48.5–6: "A man may have faith, he may be able to expound his knowledge, he may be wise in judging thoughts (speeches?), he may be holy in his deeds. The greater he thinks he is, the humbler of mind he must be, and must strive for that which is useful to the whole." See my treatise, von Harnack, "'Sanftmut, Huld und Demut' in der alten Kirche," 113–29.

clear to the author as an active obedience of faith. Faith means to accept God as creator and Lord and to obey his will through good works. But there is also an important additional feature: the humility associated with meekness is inseparable from obedience of faith. It is one of the central concepts of the letter[12] and imbues faith with the manner in which the author conceives of it. The fear of the judge is not absent, but it does recede. This can be explained by the fact that the author is aware of God's unrestrained mercy, which looks at sins and forgives them. Sin is spoken of rather frequently in the letter, but it is spoken of within the context of the comforting maxim that God at all times and always granted the possibility for a change of mind (repentance), and that the remission of sins follows after the change of mind, and that all men were and are able to change their mind, that is, to perform obedient faith. For Christians, another special aspect is that they have escaped the dominion of sin, are therefore capable of sinlessness, and sin only involuntarily. The author also considers the grave sins of the Christian to be among involuntary sins, and here too he does not doubt their inheritance. However, it requires a hard and constant struggle of the brotherhood on behalf of the sinning brother, and above all, the conversion and repentance of the sinner himself. Nevertheless, the most joyful optimism dominates the author's disposition, for repentance is always available. Through renewed faith and love, God's mercy for forgiveness is always won anew. The proof that "the grace of repentance" is always accessible is almost the main purpose of the letter (see 1 Clem 2; 50; 51). Therefore, there is a lack here of the agonizing and restless fear of God and the oscillation between fear and hope that is characteristic of so many Gentile Christian monuments[13] (see, e.g., Hermas and 2 Clement). Admittedly, this optimistic conviction of faith is miles away from Paulinism, since Clement is unable to bear clear witness either to the tenacity of sin or to its characteristic of guilt, despite the quotations of the Psalms which it expresses.[14] In the Pauline and Augustinian churches, this whole view will be perceived as religiously poor and flat, but it is close to numerous sayings of Jesus, and one cannot deny

12. See 1 Clem 2; 13; 16–19; 21; 30; 31; 38; 44; 48; 53; 55; 56; 58; 59; 62.

13. TN: Here, Harnack uses the word "Denkmäler," which could be translated as monuments, memorials, statues, etc. In his address at the *Studentenkonferenz* in Aarau, Switzerland, Harnack uses the same term and clarifies his meaning. He writes, "There are the monuments from all epochs of the last two thousand five hundred years and beyond. By monuments, I mean all that which is still extant from bygone ages, be it buildings, statues, inscriptions, coins, documents, handwriting, etc." (Harnack, "What Has History to Offer," 48).

14. For more about this and about a conflict between the author and Paul, see below.

a congregation that follows it its place in Christianity. Such a congregation will have deeper experiences later.

Knowledge (*gnosis*) is highly esteemed, indeed it belongs beside the main elements of the new religion along with faith, piety, and hospitality (see 1 Clem 1).[15] However, it does not pass over to external areas, but instead remains entirely within the understanding of the revelations of the creator God within the visible world[16] and the regulations of the Old Testament, and receives its deepest content through Christ. For it is through him that knowledge is supposedly raised to a new, higher level and makes accessible "the immortal *gnosis*," that is, the *gnosis* that has the invisible and eternal within itself as its content and transmits it as a possession (see 1 Clem 36). If the letter thereby opens a vista towards the development of the next subsequent period, wherein "the immortal *gnosis*" plays an important role, it is nevertheless quite far from the author himself to paint this *gnosis* and to shape it with philosophy or the resources of some wisdom cult. No post-apostolic writing bears so few "gnostic" characteristics as this letter.[17] When Clement speaks of "the depths of divine knowledge" (βάθη τῆς θείας γνώσεως; 1 Clem 40.1), into which Christians gain insight, he also means here exclusively or mainly the proper understanding of the Old Testament in its theistic and moral respects.[18] Nevertheless, he also attests to the fact that *gnosis* is different and grows among Christians, and that increased knowledge means increased responsibility (1 Clem 41; 48).

Baptism is mentioned once in passing (1 Clem 42.5) and the Lord's Supper is alluded to several times and is highly esteemed (1 Clem 7.4; 12.7; 21.6; 44; etc.). But the author did not deal with these sacred acts in detail. In an intimate and detailed letter to Christians, this is conspicuous, and one can assume from this silence in the context of the whole letter that he rationalized the mysteries, even if Christianity was a mystery religion to him, which can be proved by his thoughts about the blood of Christ.

15. The compilation is not random. The mention of hospitality in this context is particularly noteworthy (cf. 1 Clem 10–12: "faith and hospitality" or "hospitality and piety"). It proves that under the circumstances of the time, this virtue was particularly necessary, that many virtues converged in it, as in a focal point, and that it must have formed a *nota confessionis* against the ruling greed.

16. TN: That is, within nature.

17. A narrow path leads over to the apologetic *gnosis*, and none at all to the *gnosis* of the excited apocalyptic and the mysteriosophy.

18. "The depths of divine knowledge" must have been a well-known term at that time, though not a common one. Paul uses it (1 Cor 2:10) and John speaks of "the depths of Satan" (Rev 2:24). But then, in Christianity, the term is attested among the Gnostics (see Iren. *Haer.* II.22.3; II.28.9; Tert. *Val.* 1; Hipp. *Haer*. V.6).

"The blood of Christ": what the author has to say about Christ, he offers not as his own *gnosis*, but as an expression of a fact of which he only has to remember. But this fact dominates all statements, because everything for the author is determined "in Christ" and "through Christ" so that, according to the author, "Christ" must be consulted as coefficient to every religious contemplation, statement, and function, be it with regard to God or to human beings. Therefore, in order to avoid great repetitions, I am content with this statement and will return to his "Christianity," in the specific sense of the word, in the following analysis. But it may already be said here that ability to recognize the meaning of Christ and to make a statement does not correspond to the pan-Christism[19] of the words.

In 1 Clem 35.1–3, the author summarizes the gain of the Christian religion: "How exhilarating and wonderful are the gifts of God, life in immortality, joy in righteousness, truth with candor, faith with confidence, self-control with holiness, and all these things lie within the realm of our understanding. But what then are the good things that will only be prepared for those who have endured? The craftsman and Father of the eons, the Most Holy one, he alone knows their greatness and their beauty." Each individual piece and its compilation are not entirely transparent. But it is certain that, compared with the Gospels and Pauline Epistles, there is something different here. Whence comes this *fructus religionis* and the knowledge on which it is founded?

19. TN: The word "Panchristismus" in German is an invention of Harnack's, and I have decided to maintain it in the translation. The term reflects Harnack's previous statement that Christ is everywhere (*pan*) the coefficient to every religious act within the letter.