

# Introduction

THE DEEPEST GRATITUDE THAT Christianity owes to tradition relates to the collection and preservation of the writings of the New Testament. However, next to the transmission of the New Testament is the most important foundational document (*Urkunde*) we have received from the earliest history of the church: the so-called 1 Clement, that is, the extensive letter from the Roman Church, the congregation of the capital of the world, to the Corinthian Church, the congregation of the Greek metropolis, which originated during the reign of Domitian. Rome and Greece appear here together in the transition from the apostolic age to the post-apostolic age, and Rome is the spokeswoman. This is of utmost importance; but the requisite consequence does not follow from this fact. Neither the Roman Church, which is primarily in view in this letter, nor the Protestant churches, nor historical-theological scholarship appreciate this writing as it deserves in their research and teaching. What it is ultimately about can be summarized in one sentence: From the New Testament writings, one cannot grasp the essence and spiritual structure of the great church of the Greeks and Romans, how it was formed in the first century and how it became the mother of all churches—one can only approach it tentatively and with uncertainty from here—however, in 1 Clement, the oldest church of the Gentiles presents itself in spirit and essence, and one can by means of simple analysis both ascertain its elements and foresee its continued development into the Catholic Church. Therefore, this letter forms directly the foundation for the study of the ancient history of the church, while the majority of the writings compiled in the New Testament are testimonies to the short, paleontological

epoch<sup>1</sup> (so to speak) of the history of Christianity. This classical epoch has been denied a direct continuation.<sup>2</sup>

From here arises the necessary conclusion that the study of ancient church history must begin with 1 Clement, since there is no other foundational document (*Urkunde*) that is able to compete with it with respect to its historical significance. From this insight, the following work emerged: a presentation in an elementary form that does not deal with many individual and sublime foundational questions.<sup>3</sup> It is a necessary addition to the textbooks that exist on church history and hopes to introduce every student of theology to the most ancient history of the church through 1 Clement. If this happens, the student will be placed upon a firm foundation, will understand the development that begins here, and will be protected from the greatest danger that lurks here, namely overestimating particular phenomena (e.g., primitive, gnostic) within the development of the earliest history of the church, and letting it cloud one's view of the main elements. The one who has worked through and understood 1 Clement is immune to the mistakes of taking a measure of the particular phenomena of the most ancient church history and substituting a distorted, generalized picture in place of the genuine one.<sup>4</sup>

1. TN: Harnack uses the expression “paläontologische Epoche” numerous times throughout his works. Christoph Marksches explains that Harnack’s use of the expression refers to “the entire writings of Early Christianity from the first three centuries” (“Harnack’s Image of 1 Clement and Contemporary Research,” 58). For a more in depth explanation of Harnack’s usage of this expression and its meaning, see Marksches, “Harnack’s Image of 1 Clement and Contemporary Research,” 59–60.

2. The distinction made here is not to be understood as an absolute distinction. From the New Testament writings, lines can be drawn to the nascent Catholic Church, and, on the other hand, 1 Clement evidences original Christian features of the first order. Nevertheless, in the main, the distinction rightly exists.

3. The predecessor of this work is an investigation which I published in 1909 in the proceedings of the Prussian Academy, “Der erste Klemensbrief. Eine Studie zur Bestimmung des Charakters des ältesten Heidenchristenums” (translated in this volume under the title “The First Letter of Clement: A Study to Determine the Character of the Oldest Form of Gentile Christianity,” 144–168). I have taken over a number of lengthy constructions, word-for-word, from that publication, and so this new work can be understood as a greatly expanded and augmented reworking of the earlier one. Among the foundational questions, I consider to be of significance those that pertain to the emergence of church law and, similarly, those which one can and has linked with the letter. Whether and to what extent one wishes to deal with them must remain open.

4. One could argue that the doctrinal development of the church in the following period could not be understood from 1 Clement, because it remains silent about the heresies. Yet this argument is inaccurate. Granted, one cannot foresee from this letter what theses and in what forms the heresies would appear; nevertheless, how the churches will answer them with firm doctrines of faith and knowledge is clearly evident in it, and this is the main point because it will determine the fight decisively. But what

We have excellent detailed commentaries on the letter, especially those by Lightfoot (1890)<sup>5</sup> and by Knopf (1920)<sup>6</sup>—see also my commentary (1876)<sup>7</sup>—and I can only hope that they are being worked through. They do not, however, make superfluous the attempt to target directly the historical understanding of this foundational document (*Urkunde*) directly through analysis, and at the same time to introduce it into the basic repertoire of theological education. Therefore, I have also provided a German translation<sup>8</sup> here, partly to explain the letter through the translation itself, and partly to make it possible for those who still have difficulties reading it in the original language, because unfortunately we must reckon with this state of affairs in a large number of students. However, they too should interact with the explanations and remarks given here, which in many cases refer to the Greek text.<sup>9</sup>

When I published the letter together with my friend von Gebhardt (†) in 1875, there was only one manuscript, and that manuscript itself was incomplete. Today, we have six, not more or less indifferent copies,<sup>10</sup> but rather six principal manuscripts (two Greek, one Old Latin, one Old Syriac, and two Coptic). The transmission of the letter is therefore firmly established, and also in this respect (the richness and goodness of ancient tradition) it comes alongside the writings of the New Testament. The manuscript discoveries of the last fifty years have not come anywhere near as close to any ancient Christian writing like that of 1 Clement. They also show the high esteem in which the writing was held in ecclesiastical antiquity. It is the purpose of this work to give back to it—a letter that had been entirely forgotten from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, which then gradually reappeared—its status as the oldest and most distinguished foundational document (*Urkunde*) of the ancient church of the Greeks

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it contains about the moral and ecclesiastical principles of life, about the community in order and worship, and about ministry is to be taken as the immediate starting point for subsequent developments.

5. Lightfoot, *Clement of Rome*, vol. 1.

6. Knopf, *Die Lehre der Zwölf Apostel*.

7. Gebhardt and Harnack, *Patrum Apostolicorum Opera*.

8. TN: Here rendered into English.

9. With these remarks, I do not intend to explain the letter with an evenly prepared commentary, but instead I have deliberately proceeded eclectically and have essentially limited myself to what I deemed necessary for the purpose of this work. With regard to translation, I am grateful to older translations for some apt expressions. I have not, however, compared them methodically.

10. TN: Harnack's use of “gleichgültige” (“indifferent”) establishes, by way of contrast, the value of all extant manuscripts. Among the extant manuscripts of 1 Clement, none are insignificant.

and the Romans. By following my monograph on Marcion published nine years ago with such a monograph on 1 Clement, I am guided by the intention to make the two most important phenomena of the post-apostolic age as clear and bright as possible and to influence the teaching of church history accordingly, this time in a form expressly intended for students since I often treated 1 Clement in seminars and gave a one hour lecture on it in the winter semester of 1928/1929.

The noble, in the best sense of the word, letter of 1 Clement belongs to the Church of Rome; even today it may strengthen its Catholic self-confidence. The peace treaty between the Vatican and Fascist Italy that we have just witnessed has rekindled this self-confidence. An eloquent proof of this is the treatise by the important Italian church historian Chiappelli “Gesù e Roma” (“Nuova Antologia,” Nov. 1, 1928) with the motto from Dante “Di quella Roma onde Cristo è Romano.” Here, Jesus and Rome—strangely without respect to 1 Clement—are presented according to a hyper-historical method as the great syzygy, chosen by Jesus, who has determined and dominated the history of the church. Forty-three years ago, in a chapter entitled “Katholisch und Römisch” in the first edition of my *Lehrbuches der Dogmengeschichte*<sup>11</sup>—which is as far as I know the first in Protestant historiography—I established the historical connection between these two great phenomena of church history and strengthened this proof in subsequent editions. But to form the syzygy “Jesus and Rome” lies outside critical-historical possibility and can only be achieved by political speculation which leaves the domain of real history. Nevertheless, Chiappelli tried it and placed the eternal Rome according to the wish of Jesus (!) on the throne next to Jesus. Fascist Italy and the Roman Church will gratefully welcome this new theology of history, but historical research must reject it and at the same time fear that eccentric speculation will discredit the true realization that “Catholic” and “Roman” really belong very closely together. Jesus and Rome cannot be connected with each other on any historical line without the mediating role of Hellenism and the Greek Church.

11. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*.