

# 1 The First Letter of Clement

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## 1.1 Introduction to 1 Clement

### **1.1.1 Background of the letter**

Why was this letter written?

> **Together read and discuss:** 1 Clement Salutation; 1:1; 44:6; 47:6-7; 63:2-4; 65:1.

### **1.1.2 History of documents of the letter**

Only a few documents of pre-printing days exist of 1 Clement:

- The oldest surviving document is found in the *Codex Alexandrinus* (5th century; this copy lacks 57:7-63:4). This Codex, containing most of the LXX and the New Testament, received the name Alexandrinus from its having been brought by the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch Cyril Lucaris from Alexandria to Constantinople in 1621. In 1624 he donated it to the English King James; it is now in the British museum.
- The oldest complete Greek copy is found in the *Codex Hierosolymitanus* (1056 AD). This Codex is also known as *Constantinopolitanus*, because it was found in Constantinople in 1873 by Philotheos Bryennios (picture). It also contained 2 Clement, the Didache, Barnabas, and the long version of the letters of Ignatius.
- We have a Latin translation in a manuscript from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The translation is probably from the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century.
- There is a Syriac translation as part of a publication of the New Testament, dated 1169-1170.
- There is a Coptic translation, incompletely preserved in 2 documents, from 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.



### **1.1.3 Importance of the letter in the early church**

In antiquity this document was very popular in the churches. Origen (185-254), Eusebius (263-339) and Jerome (347-420) quote from it. Eusebius says that 'the letter is being read in many churches, both in the past and nowadays'. [Eusebius, *History of the Church* 3:16] It was deemed so highly that Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and Didymus the Blind (313-398) from Alexandria both considered it Holy Scripture. This was, it seems, normal in the early centuries. This is clear from:

- *Codex Alexandrinus*: 1 Clement (and 2 Clement) stand immediately after Revelation.
- The Syriac manuscript of the New Testament (1169-1170): 1 Clement (and 2 Clement) stands after the Catholic letters and immediately before the letters of Paul.
- *The Apostolic Canons* (Syriac work, late 4<sup>th</sup> century): lists 1 Clement (and 2 Clement) as part of the New Testament.

### **1.1.4 Who was Clement?**



The document never mentions its writer. It is from 'the church of God that sojourns in Rome' (1:1). But most manuscripts that copied it, and writers who quoted it, mention a Clement as the writer. Traditionally this was understood to be the person who was the fourth bishop of Rome – after Peter, Linus and Cletus. The Roman Christian book *Shepherd of Hermas* mentions a certain Clement in Rome who acted as the *secretary* for the Church. Is this the writer of 1 Clement? Is this the same as the one who later became the bishop of Rome?

Origin says that the writer of this letter is the same Clement as the one mentioned in Philippians 4:3 but it is not clear why he thought so. The best we can assume is that the writer was the secretary of the Church in Rome who later became its bishop.

> **Question:** what can we conclude from the fact that the author did not mention his name in the letter?

### ***1.1.5 Date of the letter***

Clues from the letter give the impression that it should be dated ca. 70-100 AD.

> **Together read** 1 Clement 5:1-7 and draw some conclusions. Peter and Paul died in the Neronian persecution, 64-68 AD.

> **Together read** 63:3 and draw conclusions.

Some people think the letter was written during the last years of emperor Domitian (81-96 AD), when he began to persecute the church, or during the persecutions under Nerva (96-98 AD), because of the impression that Clement lived during times of persecution. For this > **Read together** 1:1 and 7:1.

## **1.2 Content of 1 Clement**

### ***1.2.1 List of the morality of Clemens (right and wrong)***

> **Each individually will read** a part from the letter. 1-2; 3-6; 9-12; 13-15; 17-19; 20-21; 30-31; 35; 37; 48-51; 56-57; 60-61; 62-63; 64-65.

In class we will apportion a part to each student.

Take a sheet of paper and divide it in two columns. In the right column you write very precisely (use terminology of Clement) all things mentioned as bad, and in the left column all things that are mentioned as good.

After this, we will compare notes and see what moral behavior Clement liked most and what he rejected most.

### ***1.2.2 View of Church leadership in Clement***

> **In small groups read and discuss** 1 Clement 42:1-5 or 44:1-5.

What view of Church leadership and apostolic succession did Clement have?

What sort of leaders did the church have?

### ***1.2.3 Clement's view of division in the Church***

> **Together read** and note what Clement says about division: 1:1; 3:1-4; 14:1-2; 16:1; 37:1-38:1; 46:5-9; 47:1-7; 49:5; 51:1-2; 54:1-3; 57:1-2; 63:1-4.

### ***1.2.4 The Gospel according to Clement***

> **In small groups read and list** how Clement describes the Gospel:

- a) 2:3-4; 7:1-4; 8:5; 12:7; 16:17; 21:6
- b) 23:1; 24:1; 26:1; 28:1; 29:1-30:1
- c) 30:3; 32:4; 34:7; 35:1-4; 36:1-6;
- d) 42:1-5; 49:6; 50:6-7; 58:2; 59:2-3; 65:2

After this, we will compare notes and see how Clement describes the Good News.

### ***1.2.5 Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Clement***

What do we learn from 1 Clement about the Church's view of the Trinity toward the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century?

> **Together read and note** how Clement describes Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Salutation; 2:1-2; 8:1; 13:1; 16:1-3; 20:11-12; 21:2; 22:1; 28:3 42:3; 45:2; 46:6; 50:7; 53:1; 58:2; 64; 65:2.

### ***1.2.6 Holy Scripture in 1 Clement***

The congregation in Corinth had the words of God and Christ in their hearts: > **Read together** 2:1; 2:8.

> **Read together** 7:2 Scripture and tradition?

**> Read together 13:1-4:**

- Note that the Holy Spirit speaks through Scripture (13:1a – compare with 53:1 where the ‘sacred scriptures’ are called ‘oracles of God’).
- Also, that the words of Jesus Christ are most important to be remembered (13:1c). These words of Jesus are called ‘holy words’ that must be obeyed (13:3) just as the Hebrew Scriptures were called ‘holy words’ (13:3).
- The words of Jesus quoted in 13:2 do not come from our four Gospels but probably come from another earlier collection. It is remarkable that we do not have literal quotes from the four Gospels at all. Does this mean that those were written late? Or not widely spread? Or should we assume a rather early date for Clement, like 70 AD?

**> Read together and discuss 22:1**

**> Read together and discuss 45:1-2**

Clement often quotes from the Old Testament. He uses the LXX Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. He does quote from the New Testament letters as well, but not so often, and mostly from the apostle Paul. It is not strange that especially 1 Corinthians is often used. The letters of Paul were also seen as Scripture: ‘Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle. What did he first write to you in the beginning of the gospel? Truly he wrote to you in the Spirit...’ (47:1-3).

Clement seems to have used the letter to the Hebrews as well. If Clement was an early letter, the letter of Hebrews may actually be quoting from 1 Clement.

Sometimes Clement quotes ‘Scripture’ but we do not know what he refers to, like in 46:2.

He refers to the Apocryphal book of Judith in 55:4-5.

## **1.3 Lessons of 1 Clement**

### ***1.3.1 How does Clement help shape our knowledge of Church history?***

**> Discuss**

### ***1.3.2 How does Clement shape our view of Bible and tradition?***

**> Discuss**

### ***1.3.3 How does Clement help us today in Egypt?***

**> Discuss**