Clement of Rome

Complete Works

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Ancient Classics Series

The Complete Works of

CLEMENT OF ROME

(fl. 1st century)

Contents

Version 1

The Complete Works of

CLEMENT OF ROME

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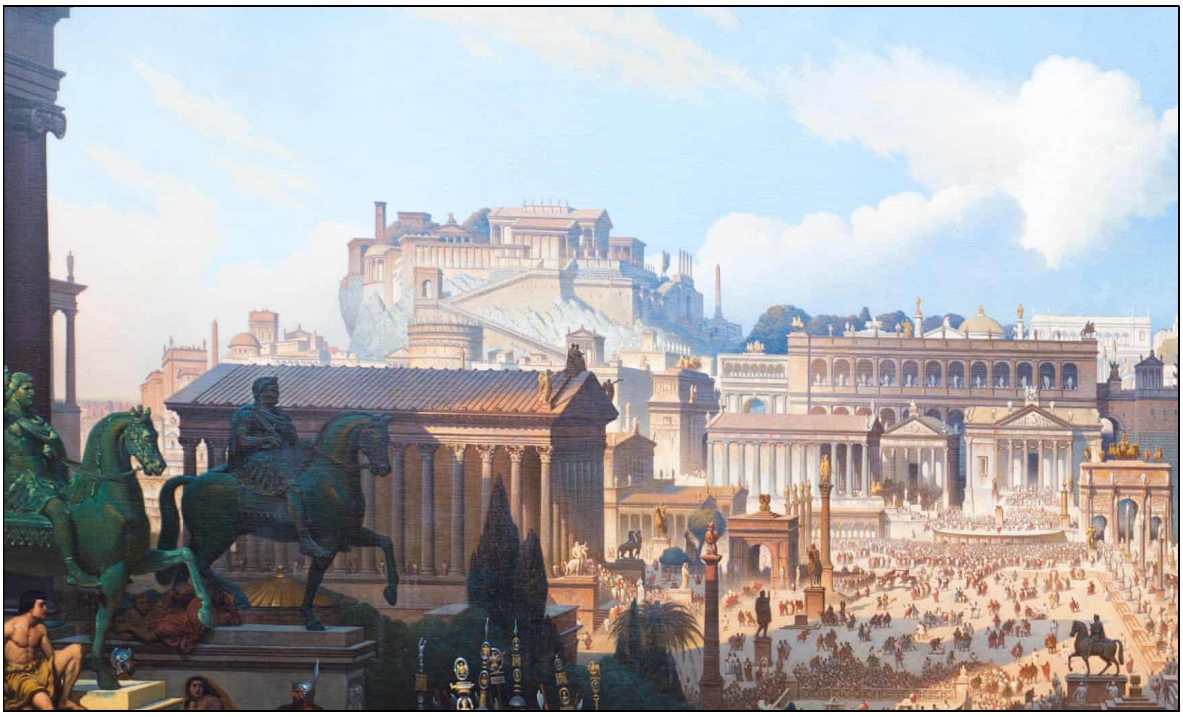
The Translations

Ancient Rome — Clement's likely birthplace



An eighteenth century painting of Rome close to the time of Clement: 'The Martyrdom of Saint Agnes in the Roman Forum' by Joseph Desire Court

Brief Introduction to Clement I (1911) by Alexander James Grieve and Joseph Armitage Robinson

From '1911 Encyclopædia Britannica', Volume 6

Clement I., generally known as Clement of Rome, or Clemens Romanus (*flor*. *c*. A.D. 96), was one of the "Apostolic Fathers," and in the lists of bishops of Rome is given the third or fourth place — Peter, Linus, (Anencletus), Clement. There is no ground for identifying him with the Clement of Phil. iv. 3. He may have been a freedman of T. Flavius Clemens, who was consul with his cousin, the Emperor Domitian, in A.D. 95. A 9th-century tradition says he was martyred in the Crimea in 102; earlier authorities say he died a natural death; he is commemorated on the 23rd of November.

In *The Shepherd of Hermas* (Vis. ii. iv. 3) mention is made of one Clement whose office it is to communicate with other churches, and this function agrees well with what we find in the letter to the church at Corinth by which Clement is best known. Whilst being on our guard against reading later ideas into the title "bishop" as applied to Clement, there is no reason to doubt that he was one of the chief personalities in the Christian community at Rome, where since the time of Paul the separate house congregations (Rom. xvi.) had been united into one church officered by presbyters and deacons (Clem. 40–42). The letter in question was occasioned by a dispute in the church of Corinth, which had led to the ejection of several presbyters from their office. It does not contain Clement's name, but is addressed by "the Church of God which sojourneth in Rome to the Church of God which sojourneth in Corinth." But there is no reason for doubting the universal tradition which ascribes it to Clement, or the generally accepted date, *c.* A.D. 96. No claim is made by the Roman Church to interfere on any ground of superior rank; yet it is noteworthy that in the earliest document outside the canon which we can securely date, the church in the imperial city comes forward as a peacemaker to compose the troubles of a church in Greece. Nothing is known of the cause of the discontent; no moral offence is charged against the presbyters, and their dismissal is regarded by Clement as high-handed and unjustifiable, and as a revolt of the younger members of the community against the elder. After a laudatory account of the past conduct of the Corinthian Church, he enters upon a denunciation of vices and a praise of virtues, and illustrates his various topics by copious citations from the Old Testament scriptures. Thus he paves the way for his tardy rebuke of present disorders, which he reserves until two-thirds of his epistle is completed. Clement is exceedingly discursive, and his letter reaches twice the length of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Many of his general exhortations are but very indirectly connected with the practical issue to which the epistle is directed, and it is very probable that he was drawing largely upon the homiletical material with which he was accustomed to edify his fellow-Christians at Rome.

This view receives some support from the long liturgical prayer at the close, which almost certainly represents the intercession used in the Roman eucharists. But we must not allow such a theory to blind us to the true wisdom with which the writer defers his censure. He knows that the roots of the quarrel lie in a wrong condition of the church's life. His general exhortations, courteously expressed in the first person plural, are directed towards a wide reformation of manners. If the wrong spirit can be exorcised, there is hope that the quarrel will end in a general desire for reconciliation.

The most permanent interest of the epistle lies in the conception of the grounds on which the Christian ministry rests according to the view of a prominent teacher before the 1st century has closed. The orderliness of nature is appealed to as expressing the mind of its Creator. The orderliness of Old Testament worship bears a like witness; everything is duly fixed by God; high priests, priests and Levites, and the people in the people's place. Similarly in the Christian dispensation all is in order due. "The apostles preached the gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent from God. Christ then is from God, and the apostles from Christ. . . . They appointed their first-fruits, having tested them by the Spirit, as bishops and deacons of those who should believe. . . . Our apostles knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife about the name of the bishop's office. For this cause therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid, and afterwards gave a further injunction (ἐπινομήν has now the further evidence of the Latin *legem*) that, if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. . . . It will be no small sin in us if we eject from the bishop's office those who have offered the gifts blamelessly and holily" (cc. xlii. xliv.).

Clement's familiarity with the Old Testament points to his being a Christian of long standing rather than a recent convert. We learn from his letter (i. 7) that the church at Rome, though suffering persecution, was firmly held together by faith and love, and was exhibiting its unity in an orderly worship. The epistle was publicly read from time to time at Corinth, and by the 4th century this usage had spread to other churches. We even find it attached to the famous Alexandrian MS. (Codex A) of the New Testament, but this does not imply that it ever reached canonical rank. For the mass of early Christian literature that was gradually attached to his name see Clementine Literature.

The epistle was published in 1633 by Patrick Young from Cod. Alexandrinus, in which a leaf near the end was missing, so that the great prayer (cc. lv.-lxiv.) remained unknown. In 1875 (six years after J. B. Lightfoot's first edition) Bryennius published a complete text from the MS. in Constantinople (dated 1055), from which in 1883 he gave us the *Didaché*. In 1876 R. L. Bensly found a complete Syriac text in a MS. recently obtained by the University library at Cambridge. Lightfoot made use of these new materials in an Appendix (1877); his second edition, on which he had been at work at the time of his death, came out in 1890. This must remain the standard edition, notwithstanding Dom Morin's most interesting discovery of a Latin version (1894), which was probably made in the 3rd century, and is a valuable addition to the authorities for the text. Its evidence is used in a small edition of the epistle by R. Knopf (Leipzig, 1899). See also W. Wrede, *Untersuchungen zum ersten Clemensbrief* (1891), and the other literature cited in Herzog-Hauck's *Realencyklopädie*, vol. iv.

Portrayal of Pope Clement I from an eleventh century mosaic, St. Sophia of Kyiv

An eleventh century fresco depicting Saints Cyril and Methodius bringing Saint Clement's relics to Rome, Basilica of San Clemente, Rome

First Epistle of Clement

Translated by John Keith, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1885

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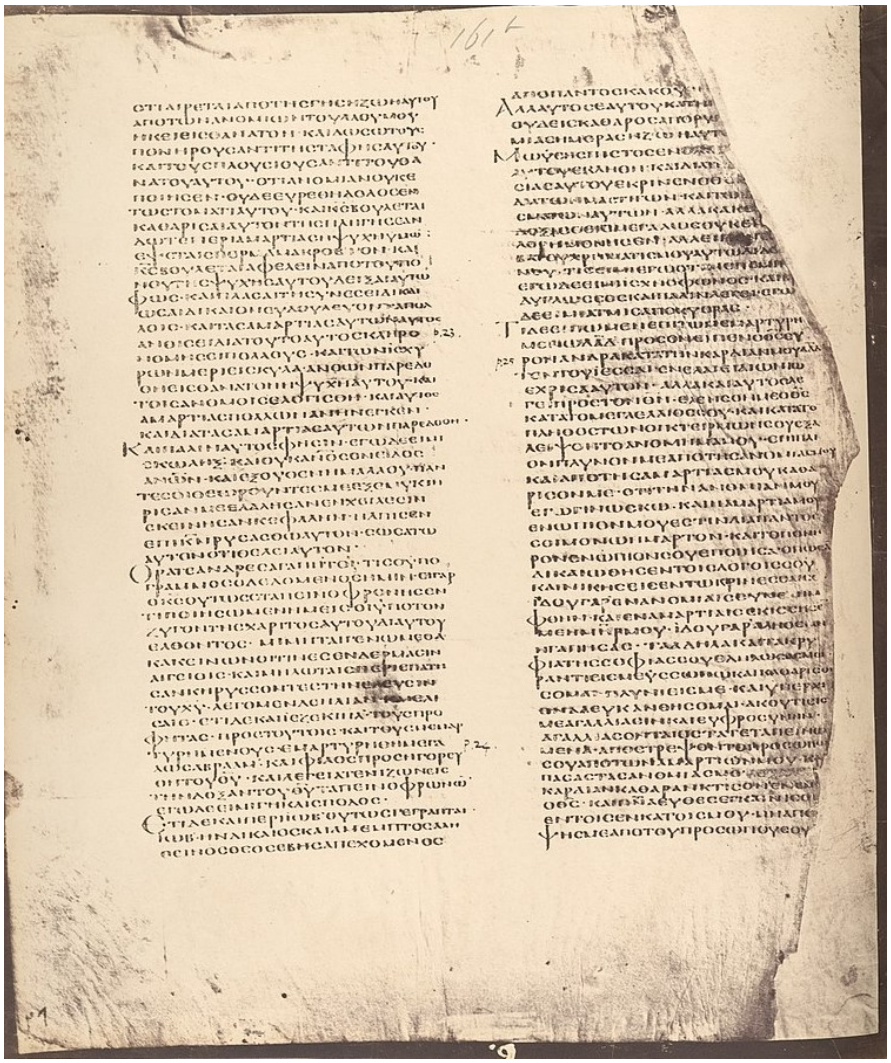

Facsimile of the Epistle of Clement, from the Codex Alexandrinus

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