

Series: Early Christians Speak
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Clement of Rome

Clement was the name of more than one “Apostolic Father.” One was from Rome and the other hailed from Alexandria. It is common, therefore, to distinguish them by adding “of Rome” or “of Alexandria.” Clement of Rome was the earliest, being a bishop of Rome in the late *first century*, within twenty years of Paul’s visit there.

His letter, called *1 Clement*, was sent to the church at Corinth by three messengers and addressed the factions in the church there. The report had been to Clement that some younger members had deposed of the older elders. Clement therefore argues that the church had no right “to terminate the ministry of elders, or their successors, appointed by the apostles” (*Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson).

The letter has “considerable value for understanding early Christianity.” Clement uses the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament extensively as well as alluding to 1 Corinthians of Paul. He is familiar with the Synoptic Gospels, Acts, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews and 1 Peter.

Clement writes in conciliatory style calling for strong moral lives. In a unique passage, Clement compares the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to the phoenix rising from its own dead flesh. It is also important to note that “there is no hint of Roman ecclesiastical authority.” Instead, Clement is satisfied with appeals from the gospel of Jesus Christ as an interested party.

Another writing called *2 Clement* is not really a letter but a homily or sermon based upon Isaiah 54:1. It is the oldest complete Christian sermon known (*Ibid.*). It was not until the fourth century that this letter came to be associated with *1 Clement*.

Some suggest that this Clement is the same as he who is mentioned in Philippians 4:3, although the writings contain no proof of that. Most scholars, however, believe this to be the case (*The Church Fathers – The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. ix, ed. Allan Menzies, p. 227). This introduces the specific date of *1 Clement*. It is clear from the writing that it was composed soon after some persecution (chapter 1) and the question is whether it was during Nero’s reign at Rome (60s) or Domitian’s (90s). The probability seems to favor the latter. Eusebius (4th century writer) speaks in admirable terms of this great letter and declares it to have been publicly read in the churches.