

Series: Early Christians Speak
By Bill Lockwood
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Clement of Alexandria

One of the most outstanding of the “Church Fathers” is Titus Flavius Clement, a native of Athens. He later became known as ‘Clement of Alexandria’ because of his connection with the famous school in that Egyptian city. Clement lived from 150 AD until 215 AD.

Dr. A. Cleveland Coxe edited an edition of Clement’s writings in which he noted of Clement, “So multifarious is the erudition, so multitudinous are the quotations and the references to authors in all departments, and of all countries, the most of whose works have perished, that the works in question could only have been composed near an extensive library – hardly anywhere but in the vicinity of the famous library of Alexandria. They are a storehouse of curious ancient lore – a museum of the fossil remains of the beauties and monstrosities of the world of pagan antiquity, ...”

Clement’s learning was deep and wide. Having searched through various schools of thought for truth he finally came to Alexandria and studied in “something like a Christian university” there under the direction of one named Pantaenus, whom Clement appreciated as “the Sicilian bee.” Clement later succeeded Pantaenus in this catechetical school and had Origen for his pupil along with other eminent men of his age.

Of Clement many Christian men of that age had great things to say. Alexander, a bishop of Jerusalem, speaks of Clement as “his master.” “For we acknowledge as fathers those blessed saints who are gone before us, and to whom we shall go after a little time; the truly blest Pantaenus, I mean, and the holy Clemens, my teacher, who was to me so greatly useful and helpful.”

Cyril of Alexandria calls him “a man admirably learned and skillful, and one that searched to the depths all the learning of the Greeks, with an exactness rarely attained before.” Theodoret wrote, “He surpassed all others, and was a holy man.” Jerome pronounces him the most learned of all the ancients and Eusebius testifies to his theological attainments, and applauds him as an “incomparable master of Christian philosophy” (Coxe, p. 166).

In Clement’s day, many Christians avoided the growing threat to the faith posed by Gnosticism. Clement, however, “is a good example of the intellectual Christian... The majority of the Christians were afraid of Greek philosophy because it was used by the Gnostics to lead men away from the truth. These Christians thought that as soon as a person became a believer he

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should keep his mind free of philosophy lest he be led astray. Clement, however, accepted the idea of Philo that philosophy was the handmaid of theology. He accordingly studied philosophy and showed that the Greeks had taken their ideas from Moses and, accordingly, there was some truth in their writings" (F.W. Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom*, 82).

Titus Flavius Clemens, better known as Clement of Alexandria, became the head of a "Catechetical School" at Alexandria Egypt near the close of the second century. Originally a pagan philosopher, Clement was converted by the Holy Scriptures during his search for the truth. He later became an elder in the church but finally was compelled to leave Alexandria during the great persecution under the Emperor Severus at AD 202.

During the closing year of his life, he was in Jerusalem and later was sound at Antioch. It is believed he died about AD 220.

His primary works included:

- (1) *The Exhortation to the Heath*. In this, his desire was to win pagans to the Christian faith. It "contains a complete and withering exposure of the abominable licentiousness, the gross imposture and sordidness of paganism." It is noted that "with clearness and cogency of argument, great earnestness and eloquence, Clement sets forth in contrast the truth as taught in the inspired Scriptures, the true God, and especially the personal Christ, the living Word of God, the Savior of men. It is an elaborate and masterly work, rich in felicitous classical allusion and quotation, breathing throughout the spirit of philosophy and of the Gospel, and abounding in passages of power and beauty."
- (2) *The Instructor*. This was designed to develop Christians or mature them in the faith. It is an exhibition of Christian faith and morals and a guide to form Christian character. His writings lay down suggestions for the regulation of Christian conduct in all relations, including details on dress, eating, drinking, bathing and sleeping.
- (3) *Stromata*. The aim of this work is opposition to Gnosticism and to furnish Christians with armaments with which to answer the false teachers of the day. It actually is a multi-volume work and furnishes us a good example of an intellectual Christian meeting the philosophers on their own ground. Some later Christians such as Theodoret considered this to be Clement's greatest work. "So multifarious is the erudition, so multitudinous are the quotations and references to authors in all departments, and of all countries, the most of whose works have perished, the works in question could only have been composed near an extensive library – hardly anywhere but in the vicinity of the famous library of Alexandria." His main concept was that the Greeks had borrowed any of their correct concepts from Moses which is why they have some truth in their writings.