THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH BETWEEN PAUL'S AND CLEMENT'S TIME

DAVORIN PETERLIN

INTRODUCTION

Little can be said about the church in Corinth in the period between c. A.D. 57 and A.D. 95. History is silent about it, and there are no written documents that deal with, mention or even allude to it. The church whose struggles and problems Christendom knows so intimately for the period of early and mid-fifties seems to have completely disappeared for forty years only to loom on the historical stage at the end of the first century.

The overwhelming amount of information which we gather from First Clement concerns the contemporary situation. The epistle describes the state of the church in the time of writing and the immediately preceding short period. How long it took the Roman congregation to hear about and respond to the need of the Corinthian church is hard to ascertain, but the whole process presumably did not take more than a couple of months.

If there was absolutely no information about the preceding four decades, that is, if there were no chapters 1:16-3; 2; 3:1a, often designated as laudatio, that is, "a praise, commendation, eulogy, or panegyric," all that could be gathered about the interim period would be inferences and intelligent guesses. However, these chapters look back to the elapsed forty years, albeit in somewhat idealized manner.

This essay will examine the data provided in this passage of First Clement and try to relate the scarce information to the preceding period of this church's history.

FORM VERSUS CONTENT

The situation as described in these chapters looks almost too good to be true. It can be called the "golden age" of the church. Its very name was "venerable," "famous," and "worth of love."
The passage is formally a *capatio benevolentiae* whose purpose is to capture the readers' attention. It is very natural and logical that the author of a paraenetic document such as First Clement would use the literary device suitable for his purpose. Through his investigation of sources, K. Byschlag reaches the conclusion that the account in chapters 1 and 2 is neither historical nor literal, but fictional and conditioned by the choice of the form. He argues that Clement followed the tradition which is observable also in Hermas (*Similitudes*, X 29, 2 3). Thus Clement modified the Teaching of the Two Ways to fit his purposes, and put it into the form of the highly contrasted opposites of *Einst und Jett*.

It may be conceded that Clement both related and interpreted the data by way of incorporating them into a common and accepted literary form. However, it is not necessary that the utilization of the form on the part of the author equals a conscious literary artifice the purpose of which is to secure the favor of his readers by picturing the situation better than it really was, and it still has to be proved that this fact inevitably implies the falsity of the statements. It is hardly imaginable that the official secretary of a most influential church would falsify data. The falsity of Clement's statements would have been easy to detect by the older members of the Corinthian church, and their pretentiousness exposed. Therefore I will maintain that the account is to be taken as historically trustworthy.

**VIRTUES**

The reasons for such a high reputation of the Corinthian church follow. They are put in the form of four generalizations which represent a progression to a climax. The generalizations reflect the opinion of the visitors who testify in favor of the Corinthian church.

The first quality mentioned is faith. As is made clear later on in the epistle, for Clement the term meant obedience to God's revealed will, fidelity to him, unwavering loyalty to his commandments, and faithfulness. It is used in this sense in Matt. 23:23 and Gal. 5:22.

Pity, listed next, comprises all the virtues and qualities described and enjoined on the readers. It is a comprehensive term for the fullness of Christian life, which Clement does not define further.

As Corinth's main strength lay in commerce and trade, many visitors would visit it on business. Some of them were indeed Christian business persons from other cities or their representatives. Wealthier Corinthian Christians must have had business relations with other large cities of the Roman empire. In addition, the churches of the time kept correspondence with each other. A church letter to another church would be carried to its destination by a local believer or a delegation. It is not necessary to assume that all of the carriers traveled as formal representatives of their home-churches and for the sole reason of delivering the letter, although this was often the case. Letter carriers served as links between the churches and additional sources of information. Itinerant teachers, prophets and evangelists would also stop by on their travels. Finally, some Christian visitors were refugees fleeing from persecution.

A most natural place for the Christian visitor was a local Christian church. Although all Christians were called to showing hospitality, it was particularly enjoined upon the primitive church leaders (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). Local presbyters were in charge of housing visitors. They also may have had at their disposal the money from the church chest allotted for the purpose of providing for visitors. But hospitality often went beyond the time the
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A visitor stayed in their city. The church would provide traveling companions. The purpose was "to ensure a safe and successful arrival at his or her destination. It seems to be a key means of Christian hospitality in antiquity." Therefore it comes as no wonder that the third commended Corinthian virtue was hospitality, "love of strangers." Taken over from ancient Near Eastern generosity, hospitality was a cherished Christian virtue (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9). The reference in 1:2 is the first of the four in First Clement (10:7; 11:12; 12:1). Its negation, i.e., inhospitality, is mentioned in 35:5. There it is put at the end of the list of vices modeled according to Romans 7, and represents a culmination, according to Clement, of wickedness. The prominence of the theme of hospitality in First Clement has intrigued commentators. Whatever the cause of the denial of hospitality later on, it can be positively stated that the Corinthian church was an exemplary church in this respect for four decades, and the visitors hailed the congregation for it.

The list closes with knowledge. The term gnōsis does not carry here a technical esoteric meaning, but is, as further explication shows, much larger for it includes also faithfulness to that which is known, namely God's will for a believer. This knowledge brings blessing (10:3) and is beneficial to others (12:5; 44:1).

THE LIST OF HOUSEHOLD DUTIES

The ground for such unrestrained commendation of the church in Corinth is condensed in the following two short statements of laudatio. The first exalts the impartiality of Corinthian Christians of Clement's day. In the Corinthian church of Paul’s time the poor Corinthian Christians had been neglected or harassed by the better-off and advocates of certain theological outlooks looked down on those who differed from them. About the period beyond Pauline correspondence Breytenbach aptly comments that "it seemed as if the Corinthian Christians took note of Paul's advice for we read that they did not allow social class to influence the life of the community." In spite of this, the assertion of impartiality comes as something of a surprise because in the following lines Clement stresses paying due respect to certain classes of people by certain other classes of people in the church. In the second statement the phrase "to walk in God's laws" (also in 3:4; 40:4) in a similar vein puts more emphasis on the accommodation to orderliness decreed by God than on the actual value of keeping single commandments because of their benefit for the individual. These statements appear to point to different directions: on the one hand the members of the church had paid no undue attention to who or what their brother was. Their unity was based on their fundamental equality before God. On the other hand, they paid great attention to how God's laws regulated their mutual relationships in the congregation. They had been given to secure the smooth functioning of the congregation, and did not imply inequality, but differences of services.

After this follows an extended list of brief statements that portray the situation within the church during the "interlude" period. The careful arrangement of a household code (Haustafel) which regulated the duties within a household was characteristic of both Hellenistic and Jewish literature. Christians took it over and extended it to comprise the whole church. The New Testament precedents of such Gemeindetafel are Eph. 5:22-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:18-3:10; 1 Tim. 2:8-15 where the whole congregation is divided...
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Clement uses the same form again later in chapter 21. However, the absence from First Clement of the term "in Christ," the characteristic Christian addition to ancient household codes, is conspicuous. Another difference is that, unlike Paul's, Clement's lists follow an arrangement which can tentatively be called hierarchical. Finally, contrary to Paul, Clement does not mention masters and slaves.

Thus, first, we learn that the Corinthians were obedient to their rulers. D.A. Hagner remarks that the obedience to higher authority is just "another theme germane to Clement's purpose." As for the term for the "rulers," A. Lemaire is of the opinion that it reflects the usage of the Roman community. An indirect proof is to be found in the fact that the term is peculiar to the epistle to the Hebrews (13:7, 17, 24) which is commonly thought of as having been composed in Rome. Although the nature of the relation between Hebrews and First Clement is still hotly debated, some kind of relation appears likely.

The responsibility of those rulers of the community is depicted in Hebrews as pastoral, ethical, and religious rather than ecclesiastical. Who are they? Heb. 13:7 reveals that "the founders of the community who have died (as martyrs?)" are among them. The group may have included also prophets as Acts 22 clearly shows.

Here the rulers are followed by the presbyters (in the sense of the group consisting of all elderly male Christians of the church), and are different from the "rulers." It may well be that the term "rulers" covered all leading men in the congregation; that is, those designated in the rest of the epistle as bishops, presbyters (excluding elderly men without any ministry) and deacons. F. Gerke suggests that all rulers in the above sense were chosen from among the rather amorphous group of elderly members of the congregation. These considerations seem to fit the hypothetical structure of the Corinthian church in the period between the rather undefined charismatic non-structure of I Corinthians and a somewhat structurally more defined church in A.D. 96.

In spite of all this, there is not much that can be said about the rulers on the basis of First Clement. Due respect must be paid to them simply because they are rulers. As for the presbyters, the question has been raised whether there is a charism of age (63:3). E. Schweizer answers affirmatively and adds that to walk in faith till one is old is a gift of grace; and so by no means all the old church members are elders, but those "who are blameless, married only once, whose children are believers" (Titus 1:6). In the sociological group of the older church members, therefore, those who perform a special ministry are referred to more and more clearly as the "older men," just as among the widows the "widows" appear as a special group (1 Tim. 5:9f).

So it can be inferred that the presbyters as church officials, or at least as the people who performed certain services or ministry, have been introduced in the Corinthian church shortly after Paul's death.

The young were properly taught and disciplined so that their thoughts (and behavior) were "in moderation and dignity." From the other occurrences of the word for "dignity" (honor, honorable) in First Clement it is obvious that the aberration of precisely this quali-
ty among the young is seen by Clement as erroneous and destructive.

The women, treated next, seem to have been exemplary in practicing this virtue; not only was their behavior in general (doing “everything”) characterized by it, but also their behavior in their homes, too. They were “discrete,” “had sound mind,” but also “observed the proper measure” in their dealings at home (1 Tim. 2:15; Mark 5:15; Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 5:13). Other virtues enjoined upon women and practiced by them were affection to their husbands and obedience (to them) (Eph. 5:22ff.; 1 Cor. 14:34).

The portrayal of women takes proportionately more space and goes into more detail than the portrayal of other classes in the church. The reason may be seen in the fact that the whole section was most probably modeled after Titus 2:4-5a, which the writer of First Clement took over in its entirety introducing only minor alterations. It is possible that there was a common catechesis from which both Paul and Clement drew although G. Fee thinks that the passage in Titus is modeled after the general framework of 1 Tim. 5:1-2a.

On the other hand, the women seem to be put in the spotlight in each household list in First Clement. In analogy with 1 Timothy where much attention is directed to them because of their role in, and importance for, the particular problem of disunity in the church, it is likely that they are dealt with here in a similar way for the similar reason.

It is worth noticing in conclusion that the clause in Tit. 2:5b, which Clement stops short of quoting, states that such behavior of women prevents the blaspheming of the word of God. This is reminiscent of the blasphemy of the name of the Corinthian church (1:1) and of the name of God (47:7), seen by Clement as the result of the failure to observe the prescribed regulations.

“PROFOUND AND RICH PEACE”

Chapter 2 opens with what looks like a summary. The emphatic all at the beginning of the sentence stresses that each individual, as well as all classes within the church, was of one mind with the others. Three pairs of opposites comprise the following sentence: the Corinthians preferred humility to pretentiousness (or arrogance), obeying orders to issuing them, and giving to receiving (which is an allusion to Acts 20:35 or to an oral tradition containing the saying).

The Corinthians used to be content with Christ’s rations. In classical and Hellenistic Greek the word denoted supplies for traveling money, and provisions, especially of an army, but also an ambassador’s traveling allowance. In a metaphorical sense, as here, it was used of “qualities and practices which assist Christian life.” It is possible that Clement refers here to charismata. Alternately, he implies specific “duties” or “ministries” in the church in the positional sense as described in chapters 40-44. It is not likely that the term refers to the previously depicted virtues since they are seen predominantly as the Corinthian Christians’ own accomplishment.

Corinthian believers also listened to, memorized, and practiced Christ’s words. They probably possessed a collection of Christ’s sayings, transmitted orally and possibly arranged for catechetical purposes.

The vividness of the expression “you held his sufferings before your eyes” and its incorporation in this context convinced Hagner that this is an allusion to Gal. 3:1. It means that for the Corinthians Christ’s sacrifice was one of the foremost teachings and incentives
for life. It is worth observing that all three assertions are Christocentric.

As a consequence, or perhaps in this way, they received "profound and rich peace." It has been argued that the phrase "profound peace" is a set-phrase and should be interpreted as a unit. Thus W.C. van Unnik examined twenty-five occurrences of the phrase and concluded.

Überschaut man dieses Material, dann ergibt sich, dass, wo ein deutlicher Kontext vorliegt, der Ausdruck "tiefer Friede" immer mit der Lage eines Staates verbunden ist und aussagt, dass dieser Staat sich in einem überaus glücklichen Zustand befindet, weder behelligt von auswärtigen Feinden noch von Revolutionen im Innern, sich also in vollständiger Harmonie befindet.\textsuperscript{36}

The phrase, rooted in Greek political terminology, would be differently applied in psychological and eschatological contexts, but also in Christian. For one, the church described with these words is not disturbed from the outside. From the very beginning the Corinthian church enjoyed a rather favorable attitude from the Roman magistrates. It seems to have been free from persecution.\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, it was indeed a "longa Pax" in the temporary sense as Beyschlag argued.\textsuperscript{18} However, it is not only the absence of the outside pressure or disturbance, but also the harmonious life within the church in which everyone does what is best for all and required by God.

Another consequence was that the Holy Spirit was poured on all of them. The unity of the local body of believers is confirmed in this way. They walked in the laws of God (1:3), they paid heed to Christ's words and deeds (2:1), and the Holy Spirit was poured on all of them. The Trinitarian formula is unmistakable.

It has been objected that the idea of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the reward for moral living marks Clement's digression from the New Testament orthodoxy into religious moralism.\textsuperscript{21} On the other hand, the Holy Spirit must have been present and working in the Corinthian believers even prior to the outpouring mentioned, since they would not have been able to behave as they did without the Holy Spirit. Even if we consented that the Holy Spirit was "poured out abundantly" as a reward, it is nowhere asserted that the Corinthians had lived as they did in order to receive the reward, or that "Clement constantly believes that the Holy Spirit comes only as a reward to personal piety."\textsuperscript{40}

The verse does not support work-righteousness, the idea that people are being saved by doing good deeds. Clement's sole purpose was to persuade the Corinthians to change their behavior. Consequently what people do is given prominence in the letter. After all, Clement's alleged departure from the New Testament teaching is not so great in light of the passages such as 2 Cor. 13:11, Phil. 4:8-9 and Matt. 13:11-12. It seems that he only drew logical conclusions from them.\textsuperscript{49}

C.M. Nielsen\textsuperscript{46} believes that the Holy Spirit came in this instance as the reward, but also even prior to that as the originator of ethical conduct. The stress must consequently fall on "abundantly." God rewarded the Corinthians for their faith and piety (1:2) showing his abundant mercy by leading them into deeper spiritual realities. If this "abundance" implies a qualitative advance in comparison with the state of the church in 1 Corinthians, there is nothing in the text that would help us discover its precise nature or manifestations.
"Insatiable longing to do good" pervaded their conduct. This made them even more sensitive to their sins so that they were concerned even about involuntary sins (2:3) and prayed for God's forgiveness of them. They were also so "sincere and guileless" (2:5) that they held no grudge against each other (2:5), but mourned over the faults of fellow believers and apparently reckoned them as their own, that is, either assumed some responsibility for them or wept for them as if they were mourning over their own faults (2:6), which is more likely. They never regretted any of the good things they did (2:7) and this allusion to Titus 3:1 reiterates the idea from 2:2 of having always and only good things on their minds. The pronoun all implies here the whole range of good deeds, as it does also in 1:3 (two occurrences) and 2:8.

The reference to "involuntary sin" (2:3) triggers off a short digression (2:4). Clement explains that the Corinthian Christians' compassion was so great that they spent "day and night" in fervent intercession. The athletic motif of agon was probably very familiar to both Romans and Corinthians from the Isthmian games. The intercession was being offered on behalf of the whole brotherhood (similarly in Col. 2:1). The Corinthian Christians properly understood their responsibility within the divinely ordained plan of salvation.

This profound spiritual unity is emphasized by the reference to the absence of "all schism and sedition" (2:6). The pronoun all, conspicuously frequent in this section, entails the notion of completeness both in number (implicative sense) and in degree (amplicative sense) as in 3:1. In other words, they abhorred all kinds of divisions. The mention of these two terms here seems, however, rather awkward since nothing in this section even remotely requires them. They are used here either in the most general meaning of dis-sention possibly caused by the unforgiven sin (cf. 2:6), or inserted here in anticipation of the following chapters. Beyschlägel draws an interesting parallel with Hermas, Similitudes IX 29, 3-4, and concludes that the term schismata undoubtedly refers to the denial of forgiveness, and thus as its mention here. The Corinthians' splendid character (or "citizenship," Lake) likened to a cloak, and the motivation for their disposition in His fear (that is, the fear of God),serve as motif-bridges with the following chapter: both of them occur in 3:4.

The quotation from Prov. 7:3 (LXX), emphasizing that the integrity and conviction visible in their actions stemmed from heeding God's precepts, concludes chapter 2. In spite of that, the thought extends into the next chapter. The first clause lays out, in the form of the summary, the outcome. To be able to fully appreciate it, here is a list of various translations of the two terms Clement uses: The Corinthian church enjoyed "glory" (Lake), "reputation" (Grant), "good repute" (Standforth), "great popularity" (Richardson). It was given "greatness" (Glimm), "opportunity for expansion" (Grant), "enlargement" (Lake), "growing members" (Richardson).

SUMMARY

What are the reasons for such a dramatic change from the previously so turbulent church of Paul's day? We do not know unless we accept the most obvious explanation: that the believers took seriously Paul's words, written or spoken, and turned unreservedly to God for forgiveness, support, and strength.

After he had written 2 Corinthians, Paul presumably visited the church in Corinth for
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the third time as he had promised in 2 Cor. 12:14 and 13:1. When exactly that happened we do not know. He might have visited Corinth in the fall of the very same year and spent the winter there before going back to Jerusalem with the collection. Alternatively, he visited it after the Roman imprisonment, since on the way to Rome as a captive he did not pass through Corinth, but of that we have no reliable information.

In the period that followed, the differences that had troubled the church largely vanished. The various groups within the congregation (whether thought of as different classes or different house-congregations) lived together in harmony. The church enjoyed long and undisturbed peace. The believers cared for each other and forgave each others' mistakes and sins. They were content with whatever gift God gave them and in turn God chose to bless them even more richly.

The church structure is emerging, but is not yet clearly visible. There were older members in the church who had been there from its beginnings, whose long-time obedience and faithfulness to God secured them a position of authority. From among them emerged leaders with more precise duties: pastoral, preaching and leading services. The variation of terminology shows that the church organization still remained largely in flux.\[15.15\]

Notes

6. Ibid., pp. 194-96.
7. Ibid., p. 198.
10. Grant/Graham, p. 17.
11. Didach; see also Hermas, Similitudes IX, p. 27.
15. For a summary of different views see Chadwick, "Justification," pp. 281-83.


22. Ibid., p. 907.


24. The terms are used interchangeably in First Clement.


26. For the variety of the bearers of the title in the First Clement see Grant, *First*, p. 19.


30. Ibid., p. 235.


34. Hagner, *Use*, p. 221.


36. Ibid., p. 277.


42. Nielsen, "Clement," p. 44.


45. The word "God" is found in only one manuscript, but the meaning is clear.
