

Church History and Evidences
Notes: Church "Fathers": Clement

I. Church "fathers" and their writings: Clement

A. Clement of Rome

1. His epistle, 1 Clement (c. 96), was copied and widely read in the Early Church. Clement calls on the Christians of Corinth to maintain harmony and order. It is the earliest Christian epistle aside from the New Testament.
2. Pope Clement I (died age 99), also known as Saint Clement of Rome, is listed by Irenaeus and Tertullian as [a] Bishop of Rome, holding office from 88 to his death in 99. He is considered to be the first "Apostolic Father of the Church", one of the three chief ones together with Polycarp and Ignatius of Antioch.
3. While Clement is traditionally identified as a pope, there is no evidence for monarchical bishops in Rome at such an early date. The epistle is addressed as "the Church of God which sojourneth in Rome to the Church of God which sojourneth in Corinth". Its stylistic coherence suggests a single author.
4. Few details are known about Clement's life. Clement was said to have been "consecrated" by Saint Peter, and he is known to have been a leading member of the church in Rome in the late 1st century. The Liber Pontificalis states that Clement died in Greece in the third year of Emperor Trajan's reign, or 101 AD.
5. Early succession lists name Clement as the first, second, or third successor of Saint Peter. However, the meaning of his inclusion in these lists has been very controversial. There is no evidence for a monarchical episcopacy in Rome at such an early date. There is also, however, no evidence of a change occurring in ecclesiastical organization until the latter half of the 2nd century, which would indicate that a new or newly-monarchical episcopacy didn't establish itself until much later than traditionally thought.
6. Starting in the 3rd and 4th century, tradition has identified him as the Clement that Paul mentioned in Philippians 4:3, a fellow laborer in Christ.
7. According to tradition, Clement was imprisoned under the Emperor Trajan; during this time, he is recorded to have led a ministry among fellow prisoners. Thereafter he was executed by being tied to an anchor and thrown into the sea.

B. Writings

1. Clement's only existing, genuine text is a letter to the Christian congregation in Corinth, often called the First Epistle of Clement or 1 Clement. The history of 1 Clement clearly and continuously shows Clement as the author of this letter. It is considered the earliest authentic Christian document outside the New Testament.
2. The letter was written in response to a dispute in which certain bishop/presbyters of the Corinthian church had been deposed. He asserted the authority of the bishop/presbyters as rulers of the church on

the ground that the Apostles had appointed such. His letter, which is one of the oldest extant Christian documents outside the New Testament, was read in church, along with other epistles, some of which later became part of the Christian canon. The epistle mentions episkopoi (overseers, bishops) or presbyteroi (elders, presbyters) as the upper class of minister, served by the deacons, but, since it does not mention himself, it gives no indication of the title or titles used for Clement in Rome. These works were the first to affirm the apostolic authority of the “clergy”. A second epistle, 2 Clement, was attributed to Clement, although recent scholarship suggests it to be a homily by another author.

3. The letter was occasioned by a dispute in Corinth, which had led to the removal from office of several presbyters. Since none of the presbyters were charged with moral offences, 1 Clement charges that their removal was high-handed and unjustifiable. The letter was extremely lengthy—it was twice as long as the Epistle to the Hebrews—and includes many references to the Old Testament, of which he demonstrates a knowledge. Clement repeatedly refers to the Old Testament as Scripture.

4. 1 Clement offers valuable evidence into the state of the ministry in the early church. He calls on the Corinthians to repent and to reinstate the leaders that they had deposed. He explains that the Apostles had appointed “bishops and deacons”, that they had given instructions on how to perpetuate the ministry, and that Christians were to obey their superiors. The author uses the terms “bishops” and “elders” (presbyters) interchangeably.

5. New Testament references include admonition to “Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle” (xlvii. 1) which was written to this Corinthian audience; a reference which seems to imply written documents available at both Rome and Corinth. 1 Clement also alludes to the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians; and may allude to Paul's epistles to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians, numerous phrases from the Epistle to the Hebrews, and possible material from Acts, James, and I Peter. In several instances, the author asks his readers to “remember” the words of Jesus, although they do not attribute these sayings to a specific written account. These New Testament allusions are employed as authoritative sources which strengthen the letter's arguments to the Corinthian church. Despite Bruce Metzger's claim that Clement never explicitly refers to them as “Scripture,” Clement 56 provides a quote which he refers to as “the holy word;” this quote is found in Hebrews 12:6, *FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE CHASTENS, AND SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.*”

6. Additionally, 1 Clement expressly references the martyrdom of Paul and very strongly implies the martyrdom of Peter (sections 5:4 to 6:1).

7. 1 Clement was written at a time when some Christians were keenly aware that Jesus had not returned as they had expected. Like 2 Peter, this epistle criticizes those who doubt their faith because of the delay of the Second Coming.

8. Clement writes to the troubled congregation in Corinth, where certain "presbyters" or "bishops" have been deposed (the class of clergy above that of deacons is designated indifferently by the two terms). Clement calls for repentance and reinstatement of those who have been deposed, in line with maintenance of order and obedience to church authority, since the apostles established the ministry of "bishops and deacons." He mentions "offering the gifts" as one of the functions of the higher class of clergy. The epistle offers valuable insight into Church ministry at that time and into the history of the Roman Church. It was highly regarded and was read in church at Corinth along with the Scriptures c. 170.

9. *"We should be obedient unto God, rather than follow those who in arrogance and unruliness have set themselves up as leaders in abominable jealousy.... For Christ is with them that are lowly of mind, not with them that exalt themselves over the flock."* 1Clem 14:1; 16:1

10. *"Do we then think it to be a great and marvelous thing, if the Creator of the universe shall bring about the resurrection of them that have served Him with holiness in the assurance of a good faith, seeing that He showeth to us even by a bird the magnificence of His promise?"* 1Clem 26:1

11. In the epistle, Clement uses the terms bishop and presbyter interchangeably for the higher order of ministers above deacons. In some congregations, particularly in Egypt, the distinction between bishops and presbyters seems to have become established only later. But by the middle of the second century all the leading Christian centers had bishops.