

These are the notes from which Father Timothy Kelly taught for his third lecture on ecclesiology at the IRPS Saturday September 4th 2006.

Lecture III The sub-Apostolic Church; by reading sections of Clement of Rome to come to better understand the ecclesiology of the Church.

Dear Students,

I wish I could look at the attitudes of some of the most famous of the Church Fathers of this era – Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyons. But due to the demands of time, Clement’s letter to the Corinthians is my focus. I wish that we had the time to look at them all, but I prefer to help you understand one of these fathers than give you a spattering of all and end up with nothing.

Firstly, I want to mention a few patristic images which we will meet again as we study. These images will dominate early, Byzantine and medieval Christian art. We will return to this subject next month in greater detail and with visuals. Today, I simply wish to teach the surviving power of two Images from the Old Testament – Israel and the Ark of Noah.

Church as the Ark of the Saved Remnant- Ark of Noah

One of the more common artistic motifs in ancient baptisteries is of the Ark of Noah. It sails safely amid the storm, safe amid the danger, full of life amid the destruction and death of the Deluge. The Church has long seen itself as the Ark in which all life was kept safe from destruction and from which there eventually emerged, in the fullness of God’s plan, a saved remnant from whom the whole world would be descended. That remnant was saved only by its obedience to the Will of God - they accepted his order and they lived in peace and harmony. The Ark was, therefore, an analogy for the seminal remnant which would bring the new Eden into existence. The Church was founded by the new Adam, and the Ark would provide creatures for the New Eden for the newly saved people who would be the “Lord’s portion”.

The consistent witness of the Fathers is that the Ark represents the Unity of the Church. For they saw that all manner of beings were inside, yet there was order because God designed the ship. Tertullian writes that nothing should exist in the Church that did not exist in the Ark, because the Church is the typified Ark. He says that just as the dove of the Holy Spirit flew forth from the Ark in

ancient times, so now that same dove flies from the Church which is the type of the Ark...¹ It was possible for clean and unclean to co-exist in the Ark in perfect harmony and peace, because the ship was built according to the divine plan or order.

“The Ark of Noah was nothing else but the sacrament of the Church of Christ. All those who were outside the Ark perished. Only those were kept safe who were inside the Ark. Therefore, we are clearly instructed to look for the Unity of the Church.”²

Or again we hear Cyprian state; **“For the Church is one, and as she is one, cannot be both within and without.”³**

There is also a strong tradition in the ancient writers that the eight survivors in the Ark are a type for the Church, and that therefore the number eight is closely connected to the sacrament of Baptism which is seen as prefigured by the Flood. Only those saved out of the water by God were saved in the flood, so only those saved out of the water of baptism can be saved.

“In the ark of Noah, few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water; proving and attesting that the one ark of Noah was a type of the one Church.... .. But if the Church is one which is loved by Christ, and is alone cleansed by His washing, how can he who is not in the Church be either loved by Christ, or washed and cleansed by His washing? ” Other patristic writers elaborate on the oneness of baptism as a sign of the oneness of the Church. Others have made elaborate comparisons between the different parts of the Ark and the different parts of the Church. Some have seen in Noah a prefiguration of Peter- they both pilot the Lord’s ship to safety.

Church as the NEW ISRAEL

One of the foundational principles which were widely accepted among the early Christians was that they constituted the new Nation of Israel. When they read the Old Testament, and they study the disasters that befell Israel, they see that disunity was always the root of all disaster. When Israel disobeyed God she was full of dissent and strife, cf Hosea. Whenever the nation turned away from God, it split into factions and was weakened.

Paul defended this belief that Christ has founded a New Israel in his Letter to the Galatians. (Gal.3; 15-18) He denied to Israel any right to claim the covenant through flesh alone. For just as God made firm His promise to Abraham in response to the willingness of the patriarch to sacrifice His beloved

¹Tertullian. On Baptism; Chapter VIII; 8.

²Fermillian. Letter to Cyprian; Epistle LXXIV; 15,

³Cyprian. Letter to Magnus; Epistle LXXV; 3.

son, his agapitos, the yehid of his life, so also God affirms His new covenant with the Church in response to the willingness of the new Isaac to be the Lamb of Sacrifice for the new Covenant. A new aquedah has been enacted and a new Covenant entered into. First, God created Israel through his promise made through the angels in the tent in Genesis 18; 14. And then confirmed to Abraham on Mariah in the Aquedah scene of Genesis 28. In that scene, God promised to make Abraham “an assembly of nations” or “**a synagogue of nations**”(in Greek a s n a g g s e n o n) This same position is taken by Eusebius when he calls the Church the “tribe of Christians” thereby replacing descent from Abraham through the bloodline with descent from Abraham through Faith. Or as De Lubac says;” **Israel of the Spirit takes the place of Israel of the flesh.**”⁴ The kernel of the analogy, however, rests upon the unity of Israel, one God, one nation, one covenant, one land, one temple. Then His Church inherits all the prerogatives of the old covenant, including Unity under one God. We will see that Clement’s letter is replete with this imagery.

Clement of Rome

This letter, written a few years before 100 ad. will give us a great deal of insight into the attitudes of the generations who succeeded the Apostles.

Here follows the lecture which follows the text of the Clementine letter.

Salutation has ecclesiological implications

“The Church of God, which sojourns at Rome to the Church of God which sojourns at Corinth, to those who are called and sanctified by the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ; may grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ be with you in abundance.”

Clement of Rome’s letter to the Corinthians, written in response to a crisis in that community, opens with a traditionally fashioned salutation. We are familiar with such salutations from the letters of Paul. Yet this letter, from the very salutation, addressed the problem in the Corinthian Church. Instead of following the example of Paul and Peter, Clement deliberately innovates by designating the Roman Church and the Corinthian Church as merely sojourning in those places.

- (a) The first implication is they are not in their true home, but merely exiles. This analogy immediately brings to mind the sojourning of the Israelites in the desert for forty years. The Church is constantly seeking its true home which is heaven.
- (b) The second implication of this form of address is that the two churches are in the same exiled condition. The sister churches are equally exiles. His plea for

⁴ Henri de Lubac. Catholicism; p.58.

fraternal love within the Corinthian Church is foreshadowed in his salutation of love from one sister in exile to the other.

- (c) The third implication drawn from his use of “sojourning in” is that both communities belong to the same church. The Church sojourns in any city where Christians live. But the Church is one, irrespective of where it sojourns.

UNITY of the Church

When Clement speaks of the *ecclesia theou*, he is always addressing the mystery of the Church. For Clement, the unity of the Church is vital. Nothing is as objectionable as schism, for it wounds the central reality that the Church is one in Christ. The author is single-minded and determined in pursuing his goal, the restoration of ecclesial Unity. The author never strays from his single purpose.

The Fathers had an abhorrence of schism; their great goal was unity in Christ. In this they followed Paul’s lead as outlined in his letters to the Corinthians. Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in the middle of the fourth century, warns his new converts that they must beware of those who claim to be of the Church, but whose *ecclesia* is not of the Catholic Church.

“And if you are ever sojourning in cities, inquire not simply where the Lord's House is (for the other sects of the profane also attempt to call their own dens houses of the Lord), nor merely where the Church is, but where is the Catholic Church. For this is the peculiar name of this Holy Church, the mother of us all, which is the spouse of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God.”⁵

Cyril is typical in his rejection of all dissent. He sees the catholic identity of the Church as based on a commonality of belief and structure of authority. For Cyril, as for Tertullian and others, acceptance of due order is essential.

De Lubac expresses the constant tradition of the Church on Unity;

“The Christian faith always appears to be profoundly one. No doubt it has been lived by very different people who were very far from living it with the same intensity. But it is, nevertheless, radically one: and despite all factual diversities, and all necessary distinctions, its unity remains indivisible.”⁶

⁵Cyril of Jerusalem. *Catechesis XXVIII*, Chapter 27,2.

⁶ Henri de Lubac. *The Christian Faith*, p.227.

The Theme of the letter is the Unity of the Church of God and the breakdown of Unity in the Church at Corinth.

I have chosen to begin at the end of Clement's address. Before he blesses them and closes the letter, he summarizes his intentions in undertaking to address and advise them. He reviews his letter and asks the Corinthians to be obedient to proper authority and to return to due order.

“Therefore, it is right to approach examples so good and so many, and submit the neck and fulfill the part of obedience, in order that, undisturbed by vain sedition, we may achieve the goal set before us in truth wholly free from blame. You will give me joy and gladness if you become obedient to the words we have written, and through the Holy Spirit root out the lawless wrath of your jealousy according to the appeal for peace and unity which we have made in this letter. We have done this, that you may know that our whole concern has been and is that you have peace without delay.”

It is my contention that 1 Clement is primarily an appeal to restore the theological Unity of the Church. The Unity he seeks is not simply the Unity within the Corinthian Church, but for Christ's Church on earth. Unity is attacked when the peace and the harmony of any part of the Church is disturbed. He prays; **“Give harmony and peace to us and to all who dwell in the Church.”** (Chap 60, 4)

Clement sees two evils at Corinth:

(a) schism in the Church, which has torn apart the unity of the Church which is willed by God, (similar to Paul's complaint in his two letters to the Corinthians); and

(b) rebellion (stasis) against due order. This rebellion has destroyed harmony and peace in the Church and is the cause of the schism.

The first, schism, offends against Unity; the second, rebellion, offends against Divine order. By rebelling against duly instituted authority, Corinthian Christians place themselves in a state of schism from the Church of God founded upon the Apostles: they have broken with a discipline or law established for all the Church by the Apostles. (chap 44;2). What is worse, they have followed unworthy leaders, and given scandal to others by their breach of obedience. (Chap 47;6) ⁷

OTHER THEMES in FIRST CLEMENT

⁷ See Chapter 3, for development of this argument

Many themes besides Ecclesiastical Unity are to be detected in this long letter, e.g. (a) cosmic order, (b) Roman primacy, (c) office and authority within the Church. But I believe that I will be able to show that when each of these is examined closely, the text itself will support my contention that each of these very important themes enters the letter in support of the author's plea for unity through order, peace and harmony. Let us look briefly at each of these subjects now, although a longer treatment of cosmic order and office will be found later in this paper.

Cosmic order. Clement makes use of the cosmic order as an example of the order desired by God for the Church. We will examine these references in the next section in some detail. But even this analogy is utilized for promoting his argument that unity is God's will for His people.

Roman Primacy. There have been scholars who have claimed that this epistle was written primarily to assert the primacy of the Roman Church over the Church at Corinth. But I contend instead that the Roman Church writes this letter as a matter of great importance, not to establish any form of authority over the Christians at Corinth or to make an early statement about Roman primacy, but because the events at Corinth strike at the very heart of a vital aspect of the Church's existence, its unity. **Goodspeed**, in his History of Early Christianity, implies that this letter was written to establish the authority of the Bishop and the Church at Rome over the Church at Corinth. He says that the Roman Church "**was looking about for some church that needed instruction.**"⁸ Most scholars, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, are dubious about that thesis today. As we have already read above, the author states his purpose in 63;4 without mentioning anything of his authority over them or of the superiority of his church over theirs. Such arguments are often reading later theology back into 1 Clement. "**We have done this that you may know that our whole care has been and is directed to the swift attainment of peace**". (63;4)

But to ignore the responsibility that Rome assumed in giving direction and advice is to fail to appreciate that the Church saw itself, and sees itself as a single entity, though sojourning in different cities and nations. **Richardson** says;

"Rome very definitely thinks it is her duty to intervene, (chap 24) and she sends envoys to see that matters are put right..... This implies more than a casual relationship with the other churches....it does indicate that the Roman Church took more seriously its responsibility as a sister Church"⁹

Church office and authority. Over the centuries, many writers have seen in 1 Clement proof that the Christian priesthood is the theological and chronological successor of the Temple

⁸ Lightfoot, History of Early Christianity, p.282.

⁹ Cyril Richardson, Early Christian Fathers. P. 37.

priesthood. We will look at that claim again in Section 4. Suffice it to say at this point that the reason Clement mentions the Levitical priesthood is as an analogy of divine order, rather than any attempt to suggest that the Christian Church has to be structured in accordance with the Old Testament Law. This point, that ordered structure goes hand in hand with peace is succinctly put in Chap 54,2: **“Only let the flock of Christ be at peace with its duly appointed presbyters.”**

To establish with certainty why the Roman Church wrote this letter to Corinth, let us examine the most ancient references to this epistle, and the opinion of modern scholars **Eusebius**, in his Ecclesiastical History Book 3,16 tells us that;

“Clement has left us one recognized epistle, long and wonderful, which he composed in the name of the Roman Church and sent to the Church at Corinth, where dissension had recently occurred.”

He also writes that **Irenaeus** had believed Clement had met with Peter and Paul and that their preaching still rang in his ears, and that ;

“When, in the time of Clement, no little dissension arose in the Church at Corinth, the Church in Rome sent a most powerful letter to the Corinthians urging them to peace and renewing their faith and the tradition which they had recently received from the apostles.” (Ecclesiastical History. Book V; 6,3)

ORDER ORDER ORDER

The Roman authors of this letter are determined to impose uniformity and order in Corinth. They use images that conjour up images of order in the minds of the listeners. These images are

1. We, the army of Christ , ought to be compared to the Imperial army,(37:1-4)
2. We, the body of Christ, ought to be compared to the human body. (37;5 - 38;1.)
3. The orderliness in which our Christian communities should serve God ought to be able to be likened to the orderliness that existed in Israel's service of the Lord. (40 & 41.)
4. The account of "our apostles' who "also knew that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopacy" to forgo such a disorder ought to be likened to the action of Moses when "the priesthood had become an object of jealousy and the tribes were quarreling as to which of them had been honored with that glorious dignity."(43 & 44.)¹⁰

1. The analogy of the Roman Legion as symbol of the perfect Unity to which Clement calls the Corinthian Christians.

It has been remarked by some scholars that the utilization of the Roman legion as a laudable example of good order is strange for a fledgling Christian Community. He uses the Roman legions as examples of order. (Chap 37) I think that this usage may indicate a great deal about the membership and the attitudes of the Roman Christian community. This letter is almost contemporary with the Book of Revelation. Yet, the differences between these two documents are enormous. Whereas in Revelation, the city of Rome is described as the "great harlot", whose attacks upon the Church must be resisted to the point of death, Clement chooses to use her army as an example of good order. In Clement, one finds a much more positive opinion of the Roman state, (the prayer in 60.4 - 61.) The Johannine community in Asia Minor saw the Roman legions as foreigners, whose intrusion into their world was unwelcome and violent. It speaks volumes about the Hellenization of the Roman Jewish/Christians that their bishop, although probably Jewish, could allude positively to this same army. Clement and his Roman confreres know that the very values they are attempting to impress upon the rebels at Corinth are the same values that have made Rome so powerful and rich - unity and acceptance of due order. These two seminal documents of our faith "**provide us with evidence of the diverse and creative ways in which Christians sought to come to terms with the Greco-Roman culture and society within which the church was so rapidly expanding.**"¹¹

¹⁰Noll p.61.

¹¹ Holmes p.22.

Like the Old Testament analogies, this image also is utilized for the promotion of good order and thus the establishment of Unity.

“Let us, therefore serve in our army, brothers, with all earnestness, following his faultless commands. Let us consider those who serve our generals, with what good order, constant readiness, and submissiveness they perform their commands. Not all are prefects, nor centurions, nor in charge of fifty men, or the like, but each one carries out in his own rank the commands of the emperor and of the generals.” (37;1-3)

2. The analogy of the human Body as a symbol of the perfect unity to which Clement calls the Corinthian Christians.

Clement uses the analogy of the Body twice. In the first instance, (chap 37;5.) he is very much in the same mode as Paul in speaking of the dependence of the various members of the body on each other. But unlike Paul’s analogy, which stresses the headship of Christ over the other members, Clement speaks of the mutual subjection of each human organ to the common needs of the whole body.

“ Even the smallest parts of the body are necessary and useful to the whole body, yet all the members work together and unite in mutual subjection. so that the entire body may be saved.” (chap 37;5b.)

Paul’s argument was that neither Opollos, nor Cephas, nor himself was worthy of being followed; that that honor belonged to Christ himself and to no human teacher. (1 Corinthians 1;12) But Clement approaches the problem in his day differently. Rather than utilizing the analogy only to reinforce the headship of Christ, he also stresses the organic unity of the Church, and how each member depends on his neighbor; **“So, in our case, let the whole body be saved in the Christ Jesus, and let each man be subject to his neighbor.”** (chap.38;1.)

The Clementine use of the analogy of the human body is an appeal for the unity born of fraternal dependence and fellowship. It follows closely upon his use of the analogy of the legion, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that both analogies point to the same ideal, which is the Perfect Unity of the Church in love, harmony, and peace. Neither in the army, nor in the body can there be unity unless there is harmony and peace among the individual members. Clement reminds the Corinthians that the Church

cannot survive in Corinth without Unity, and that they must create that unity by loving each other in peace and harmony.

“Why do we tear and rip apart the members of Christ, and rebel against our own body and reach a level of insanity that we forget that we are members of each other?”
(Chap 46;7.)

3. The analogy of Israel’s orderliness as symbol of the Unity to which Clement calls the Corinthian Christians.

The Early Church at Rome contained large numbers of Jewish converts. Peter and Paul influenced them in their very different opinions on the identity of the Church as the new Israel. It was inevitable both sociologically, theologically and intellectually that this Christian community would view itself and its mission in very Jewish language and employ Jewish images to express the Gospel. **Rahner** says;

“The newly-born Church was conscious of living in continuity with Israel, whose history was interpreted in the light of the central event of the.... death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹²

Clement stresses the continuity between Israel and Church. Israel is a typos for the Church. Since the Logos, Jesus the Christ, had been with God since before Creation, the Church had its origin in the divine mind, and was revealed by the actions of Christ once Incarnated. First , God created Israel through his promise made through the angels in the tent in Genesis 18;14. and then confirmed to Abraham on Moriah in the Aquedah scene. God first reveals Israel, which he creates through his promise to Abraham. Then, in the fulness of time, He reveals the Church. The Church is build upon the promise to Peter and the Apostles in Matt 28; **“I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.”** God’s intention was always to reveal His Church, but He waited for the fullness of time to do so.

J.N.D. Kelly states;

“The Church is regarded as the new, authentic Israel, which has inherited the promises which God made to the old. So Clement of Rome sees in its election the fulfilment of the prophecies that Jacob would become the Lord’s portion and Israel the lot of His inheritance.”¹³

¹² Rahner, Encyclopedia of Theology. p.217.

¹³ J.N. D. Kelly. Early Christian Doctrines, p.190.

Israel was the Lord's portion and that merit has now been inherited by the Church. in 30:1 Clement addresses the rebels as the Lord's portion, **agiou oun meris**. Some see this as proof that the rebels are Levites from the Essene community. But, it much more likely that Clement is referring to their position as members of the new portion of the Lord, the Church. Christ himself had strengthened the typos by calling the Twelve on a mountain (Mark 3;) Thus he deliberately supports typology of the Church as the New Israel receiving her mandate from God on a mountaintop, just as Israel had received hers at Sinai.

“The Church was foreshadowed in the Twelve gathered around the Suffering Servant, the tiny elected remnant destined to spread out over the whole world. It was then born on the Cross, and at Pentecost as the people of God of the new and eternal covenant.”¹⁴

5. The analogy of the choice of the Tribe of Levi as a symbol of the Unity to which Clement calls the Corinthians Christians.

Clement constructs this difficult analogy as a way of showing the Corinthians his solution to their crisis. That Clement sees a parallel between the Levitical priesthood and the presbyterate is undeniable. **“Yet this parallel is quite secondary and subordinate to the analogy itself, which compares the action of Moses in a crisis situation concerning the religious leadership of Israel with the action the Apostles took to perpetuate the episcopacy.”**¹⁵ He does not ignore the differences between them. Although the Christian priesthood is closely analogous to Aaronic priesthood, it does take its authority from it; the authority of Christian presbyters does not spring from Moses or Aaron, but from the Apostles, (Chap 43.) They are not blood descendants of Aaron but rather are descendants in faith of the Apostles. In this, he may have been influenced by Paul's statement in Galatians 3:16 which is often read by the Fathers as a rejection of the claims of hereditary relationship with God due to bloodline.

“Christ ransomed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for our sakes. For it is written;”Cursed is He who hangs upon a tree” so that the blessing of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brothers, in human terms, I say that

¹⁴ Karl Rahner. P.214.

¹⁵Noll p.79.

nobody can amend or annul even a human will once ratified. “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his descendent forever.” It does not say “and to his descendants” as referring to many, but as referring to one, who is Christ ”. (Galatians 3; 13-16.)

Clement’s knowledge of the claims likely to be put forward by the Levites argues for his being of Jewish birth and culture himself.

Clement 44.

Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and there would be strife on account of the office¹⁸⁸ of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions,¹⁸⁹ that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. We are of opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them,¹⁹⁰ or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole Church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate¹⁹¹ those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties.