

First Clement Called Forth by Hebrews

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IT is a familiar fact that Hebrews is first reflected in the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, usually called 1 Clement. A comparison of Heb. 1 with 1 Clement 36 is enough to establish the use of Hebrews by Clement, but this is only the beginning of the evidence, for Bacon reports that in forty-seven places Clement made use of Hebrews. 1 Clement was written at Rome, and it is of no small significance for the criticism of Hebrews that it is first reflected in a document of Roman origin. It is this, among other things, that for most critics compels the conclusion that Hebrews was written to a Roman congregation, if not to the whole Roman church. Whichever of these views be accepted, it was by a writer, and probably from a congregation, familiar with Hebrews that 1 Clement was written.

It is more and more generally held, too, that Hebrews was written toward the close of the first century, probably at the very time when the caprice and malignity of Domitian were including Roman Christians among their objects, that is, between 90 and 96 A.D. It is, in fact, precisely the fact of its use in 1 Clement that supplies a latest possible date for Hebrews: it cannot have been written later than the close of Domitian's reign (A.D. 96), because it is a well attested fact that 1 Clement was written in Domitian's last years. Both reflect a time of persecution and peril. The two documents are thus closely connected in time as well as place.

The writer to the Hebrews finds one chief fault with his Roman readers. They ought, by reason of age and opportunity, to be teachers and leaders, but as a matter of fact they are so backward and infantile that they are hardly ready

themselves for advanced instruction. He finds much that is good in them: heroism, hospitality, liberal helpfulness, noble traits of the earliest Roman church of which Acts and Tacitus give evidence. But they have been slow to undertake that service of Christian instruction and direction which their position and advantages demanded of them. "When ye ought by reason of the time to be teachers, ye have need of instruction." Whether the leadership he calls for is of the Roman church alone, or of the larger Christian body, does not greatly concern us here.

No long time after the receipt of this stern rebuke and challenge, the Roman church through its chief presbyter, Clement, writes to Corinth. The Corinthians are in the midst of a church quarrel, the rank and file being arrayed against the officers of the church. The Roman brethren have learned of this, and seek in the most fraternal way to act as peacemakers. The experiences of Old Testament heroes and of Christian apostles and the analogy of the ordered course of nature are cited in proof of the universal law of harmony. There is nothing to suggest that the Roman church has been appealed to by the Corinthians; the epistle seems rather to be an unsolicited contribution. The Roman church feels a certain responsibility for the sister church at Corinth, and, in a fraternal spirit, transmits a weighty message of advice and instruction for its use. Ignatius a few years after could say to the Romans, "Ye have taught others" (*ἄλλους ἐδιδάξατε*, Rom. 3 1).

In short, the Roman church is here doing the thing that the writer to the Hebrews had so recently been urging it, or a part of it, to do. They are no longer merely entertaining the strangers, ministering to the saints, enduring with heroism the spoiling of their goods, and showing compassion to them that are in bonds; they have added that very grace of teaching and leading, for the lack of which they had just been so sternly rebuked. Are we to refer this to mere chance coincidence? It is difficult to avoid the conviction that this sudden emergence of the Roman church as counsellor and adviser to distant churches is the result of the

stern rebuke of Hebrews.¹ Even if what had been asked was only leadership of the Roman church, the task once undertaken would have led to the wider one; but it is in every way more probable that it was the wider function that was from the first intended.

Such a view at once relieves the difficulty of the opening sentence, which is so strangely apologetic. "Owing to the sudden and repeated calamities and reverses which have befallen us, brethren, we consider that we have been somewhat slow (*βραδύον*) to pay attention to the questions of dispute among you." This apology is not called for by any expectation on the part of the Corinthians that the Roman church would write; their surprise must have been, not that it had not written sooner, but that it wrote at all. But if the Romans are just awaking, under the stimulus of Hebrews, to a new responsibility, and beginning to think what Christian duty of teaching they have, and the Corinthian situation of which they have known for some time comes to their minds, it is not difficult to understand this opening sentence. As they now see, the mere fact of such a situation at Corinth was in itself a call to them to help with instruction and advice.

That 1 Clement is so permeated with the literary influence of Hebrews becomes on this view of their relation more than ever natural and necessary. Something more than mere recentness is necessary to explain the great mass of reminiscence of Hebrews in 1 Clement, especially in Rome, where for nearly three centuries thereafter Hebrews is little noticed. But if Hebrews has just been received, and 1 Clement is written under the spur of its challenge, this frequent reflection of its language and method is only natural.

1 Clement is no inconsiderable work. Did it require an elaborate treatise as long as the Gospel of Mark to inform the Corinthians that it was their duty to live in harmony? Or is it that the Roman church assumes its new function in great seriousness and makes a genuine effort of this first

¹ This view was proposed by the present writer in his *Epistle to the Hebrews* (1908), p. 23, but without detailed evidence.

essay as teacher of churches? I suggest that alike the source, the date, the tone, the purpose, and the bulk of 1 Clement accord remarkably with the view that it was the response of the Roman church to the stirring call of Hebrews to Christian teachership and leadership.

It would surely be artificial to require that the influence of early New Testament writings be sought only within the New Testament itself. Early Christian literature, canonical and uncanonical, was part of one great movement, and its documents may fairly be expected, sometimes at least, to show close connection. Hebrews was one of the most notable of these, and it would be strange if it had produced no traceable effect upon a church of which we know so much, relatively at least, in its day. May we not believe that in 1 Clement we have the literary first fruits of the stirring call of Hebrews to the Roman Christians?