



THE BEREHA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

A Timely Reading

In light of events precipitated by the tragic death of George Floyd, a Facebook post by a former teacher—then colleague, friend, and church elder—recommended “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr., a practical statement of moral philosophy drawn from his theological training and church heritage. I read it years ago and thought it should be required somewhere in the high school curriculum—and recommended for everyone else. Encouraged by my friend’s post, I found it online and re-read it last week-end—time spent well. Read it [here](#).

“That Dog Died”

“The church in the West is unquestionably in poor shape today, but this is neither the first time nor will it be the last. Like an eternal jack-in-the-box, the church will always spring back. No power on earth or in the church can keep the gospel down, not even the power of Babylonian captivity and confusion, ‘At least five times,’ G. K. Chesterton notes, ‘the Faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases, it was the dog that died.’” - Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance* (Baker Books, 2003), 109.

Learning From An Ancient Teacher

David Anguish

Pending COVID-19 developments—and life’s vaporous nature generally (Jas. 4.14)—I am to teach a two-part series at this fall’s Harding Lectureship on, “The New Testament Canon: Authoritative Books or Mandated Collection?” I’ll utilize a three-part study I prepared when *The Da Vinci Code* movie was released (2006) and later revised (2016; read part 1 [here](#)). The invitation has provided an opportunity to research the subject beyond what I was able to do in 2006 and I’ve set out to read several books and articles. My goal is not primarily to add to my notes—though I’ll no doubt tweak them—but to add depth and nuance to my understanding of a complex subject I think is generally neglected in popular apologetics.

This article, however, is not about the canon, or even apologetics per se. It’s about a discovery I made when I decided to read some of the ancient writings repeatedly mentioned in the sources I’m reading, extra-canonical Christian documents (though some were included in some canon lists) which are cited as important for understanding the process of canon formation in the first four centuries.

I began with *1 Clement*, a late first century letter from “the church of God that sojourns in Rome to the church of God that sojourns in Corinth” (from the Salutation). The book’s 65 short chapters comprise 44 pages in Michael Holmes’s edition.¹

Clement confronts division in Corinth, a different situation from the one in 1 Corinthians, by citing examples of unity and emphasizing attitudes and behaviors required to realize it. As he said, “We have written enough to you, brothers, about the things that pertain to our religion and are particularly helpful for a virtuous life, . . . For we have touched upon every subject—faith, repentance, genuine love, self-control, sobriety, and patience—and have reminded you that you must reverently please Almighty God . . .” (*1 Clement* 62.1-2a).

I had decided I would read Holmes’s introduction only

Knowing What We Believe

Apologist Ravi Zacharias died May 19 after a 48-year career devoted to “teaching Christians to engage with skeptics and arguing that the Christian worldview has robust answers to humanity’s existential questions” (Daniel Silliman, *Christianity Today*, May 19, 2020; link [here](#)).

I first learned of Zacharias in the early 1990s when the mother of one my high school apologetics students gave me a cassette recording of one of his lectures. I heard him in person in 2015 at Oklahoma Christian University.

I mention him here, however, because of 4-minute video excerpt from a panel discussion I found while looking for another scholar’s presentation (link [here](#)). He expressed his concern that “emergent churches will actually produce a generation of people who will not be able to handle the challenge of Islam and the other major world religions,” adding, “the Muslims have shown us up. *We don’t know what we believe.*” He then expanded on a statement by fellow-panelist R. C. Sproul: “You can’t show a counterfeit if you do not know what the genuine is.’ *And this is the big price we’re going to pay very dearly as the result of this kind of lack of proper teaching*” (my emphasis).

His comments remind me of a story I recall from the lecture on the cassette I mentioned: A street preacher kept at it despite the fact that passersby went out of their way to avoid him. Asked why he persisted when clearly no one was listening, he said, “I used to preach in the hope I could change them. I now preach lest they change me.”

after I had gotten a feel for the writing myself, but as I read the first 6-8 chapters I was struck with how often Clement used Scripture quotations and allusions. So I decided to pause and read the introduction where I found this paragraph.

To support his arguments and appeals the author makes extensive use of scripture (in the form of the Septuagint), particularly Genesis and Psalms, as well as some pseudepigraphical or unidentified sources (8.3; 17.6; 23.3–4; 46.2; 29.3?). He also draws upon traditions about and words of Jesus (but not, apparently, in the form preserved in the Synoptic Gospels). It is virtually certain that he used 1 Corinthians, and very likely Romans and Hebrews as well (beyond these, however, no firm conclusions may be drawn regarding the other writings that came to be included in the New Testament).²

Holmes helpfully added footnote citations of the various references. I counted 136 OT references, 67 NT, and 5 pseudepigraphical. I didn’t account for duplicates, distinguish quotations from allusions, or separate multiple references using the same saying (e.g., Prov. 3.34; Jas. 4.6; 1 Pet. 5.5).

I’ll make two observations. First, *1 Clement* is book, chapter, and verse teaching. By that I don’t mean that he cited references (our modern references were unknown to him) or engaged in proof-texting. He wove the biblical text into his argument to tie it together and authoritatively support it. It’s a “thus says the Lord” call for change. We who teach now would do well to compare our use of Scripture to Clement’s.³

Second—and the reason he could do the first—the author knew Scripture thoroughly. The sense one gets is that he knew the teaching so well that he could naturally cite and apply it as befitting the situation. Clearly, he had been well taught (catechesis; cf. Luke 1.4; 1 Cor. 14.19; Gal. 6.6) and evidently assumed his readers would also know the teaching. As we think about church equipping and completing our mission, we would do well to ask if we are teaching as extensively.

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Notes

¹ In his introduction, Holmes notes the “long-standing tradition of dating [1 *Clement*] . . . to ca. AD 95-97,” but also refers to indications that it “could have been written anytime during the last two decades or so of the first century.” Michael W. Holmes, ed. & trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 35-36. Forty-four is the number of English language pages; the book has Greek on one page and English on the facing page.

² *Ibid.*, 37.

³ Preachers seeking fresh illustrations might consider reading *1 Clement* which includes several that require only slight updating for modern use.

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