

Interesting Early Christian Literature

by J.B. Galloway

J.B. Galloway explores the significance of early Christian literature, focusing on the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Recognitions of Clement, highlighting their ethical teachings and theological implications.

Scripture: Genesis 49:1, Matthew 5:1, John 14:6, Acts 2:38, 1 Corinthians 6:19, Ephesians 4:24, 1 Thessalonians 4:7, 1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Peter 1:15

Topics: "Early Christianity", "Biblical Ethics"

Description

J.B. Galloway delves into the Testament Of The Twelve Patriarchs, an ancient text that offers high ethical teachings and parallels with the New Testament. It presents the dying patriarchs' guidance for future generations, foretelling the Messiah's coming and the end of troubles. The work emphasizes virtue, righteousness, and holiness, echoing the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. Additionally, the Pseudo-Clementine Literature, attributed to Clement of Rome, provides theological insights and stories of conversion, highlighting the importance of faith and righteousness.

Transcript

Testament Of The Twelve Patriarchs

This curious fragment of antiquity deserves a few words of study. It is important to us because of its high ethical teachings. It was used freely in the early centuries, but soon afterward it disappeared and was unmentioned until a manuscript of it was found in the thirteenth century. There is a verbal correspondence between it and some of the New Testament. There are allusions to several books of the New Testament.

The work professes to be the utterances of the dying patriarchs, the twelve sons of Jacob. It gives the lives of each, embodying some events not found in the Old Testament, and stresses their virtues for the guidance of those who follow them. The book appears in the form of an Apocalypse, picturing the future of their descendants doing wickedly and foretelling the troubles befalling the Jewish race. Also, it shows that God will put an end to their trouble by the coming of the Messiah. The author was looking for a speedy coming of Christ and believed in the resurrection of the body.

The author was doubtless a Jew who had been converted to Christianity. The date of its composition cannot be placed very far in the second century, for it is quoted by both Tertullian and Origen. From internal evidences it appears that it could not have been written later than the revolt of Bar-Cochaba in A.D. 135. It was written between A.D. 109 and 135.

The Testament Of The Twelve Patriarchs On Holiness

Virtue, righteousness, and holiness are encouraged throughout in the twelve divisions of the book. The spirit of the Sermon on the Mount appears all through it We will offer two quotations.

An Open Heaven

From Part III, The Testament of Levi concerning the priesthood and arrogance, Div. 18:

The heavens shall be opened, and from the temple of glory shall the sanctification rest upon Him with the Father's voice, as from Abraham the father of Isaac. And the glory of the Most High shall be uttered over Him, and the Spirit of understanding and of sanctification shall rest upon Him in the water. He shall give the majesty of the Lord to His sons in truth for evermore; and there shall none succeed Him for all generations, even for ever. And in His priesthood shall all sin come to an end, and the lawless shall rest from evil, and the just shall rest in Him. And He shall open the gates of Paradise, and shall remove the threatening sword against Adam; and He shall give to His saints to eat from the tree of life; and the spirit of holiness shall be upon them.

He shows that during the sanctified priesthood of Christ all sin shall be put away and the spirit of holiness shall be upon His saints.

From Part IV, The Testament of Judah concerning fortitude, Div. 24, in speaking about the ministry of Christ he says:

And the heavens shall be opened above Him, to show forth the blessings of the Spirit from the Holy Father; and He shall show forth a spirit of grace upon you, and ye shall be unto Him sons in truth, and ye shall walk in His commandments, the first and the last.

Pseudo-Clementine Literature

The name Pseudo-Clementine Literature, or the Clementina, is applied to a series of writings closely resembling one another and claiming to have been the writings of Clement of Rome. However, the claim is probably false. These works are: (1) the Recognitions, consisting of ten books with many chapters each; (2) the Homilies, twenty in number; (3) the Epitome. Also a few others have been mentioned as the two Epistles on Virginity. They all belong to a class of fictitious literature for a purpose and were written by Jewish Christians.

The Recognitions of Clement

This is a kind of theological romance. The author does not seem to present the facts for the truth, but chooses the disciples of Christ and their friends as the principal characters, and from their discourses he weaves a story containing most of the important beliefs of the Church therein. The date and authorship have been keenly discussed, but with no uniformity of opinion. The first, second, third, and even the fourth centuries have been designated as the time of its composition. But the fact that it is quoted by Origen proves that it could not have been written any later than

A.D. 231. There is scarcely another writing which is of so great importance for the history of Christianity in its early stages as this work.

The Story Given in the Recognition of Clement

The Clement of the Recognition is the chief character of the story. The first book begins by saying, "I Clement, born in the city of Rome, was from my earliest age a lover of chastity; while the bend of my mind held me bound by the chains of anxiety and sorrow." As the waves of anxiety arose, he began to seek the truth from the philosophers. As he traveled about he was more and more dissatisfied with the schools of philosophy until he finally heard of Christ and was converted by the preaching of Barnabas at Rome. He later went to Caesarea, and was introduced to Peter, who cordially received him. He became an attendant of Peter and was instructed by him. At this time Peter was engaged in discussion with Simon Magus in order to refute his errors. This discussion continues with many chapters on almost all the major questions of Christianity and enters into many points of Jewish history. It becomes a regular theology on Christian doctrine.

In the third book, twelve were baptized as Christians; and among them were Clement and Niceta and Aquila, who afterwards proved to be his brothers. After much discussion and instruction on Christian doctrine and usages as they traveled about, it was decided that the twelve should divide into bands for a short time. This occurs in Book 7. Clement rejoiced that he was to stay with Peter and showed great affection for him. Peter inquired about his family history; and Clement said that he came from a noble stock of the Caesars. His father was named Faustinianus, and his mother's name was Matihildia; and twin brothers were born before him, named Faustinus and Faustus. He had learned from his father that, when he was five years old, his mother had a dream that if she did not leave the city for ten years she and her children should perish by a miserable death. Then his father put his mother aboard a ship with the twins and a servant with money to go to Athens and educate the boys there. After a season he sent to Athens to find out about her; but she was not found. After sending several times, he left Clement with guardians and went to search for his wife and the children; he had not been heard of again for more than twenty years.

After this, Peter went to an island called Aradus, and while here he found a poor woman asking alms. He inquired of her why she was in this miserable plight. She told him how she was born of noble parents, and was the wife of a good man to whom were born twins and afterwards another son. Then her husband's brother tried to entice her into sin; and, to avoid this sin and bringing trouble between the brothers, she told her husband that she had had a vision indicating that she and her two sons would die a violent death unless she fled from the city for ten years. Her husband, hearing it, sent her to Athens and while she was on the way a great storm arose and they were shipwrecked, but she escaped to the shore. The next morning when it was light she tried to find her sons, but could not, and supposed they were drowned. An old woman gave her refuge with her in a hut, and they had lived together until the woman was afflicted, and now she was trying to support both by begging. At this Peter was astonished and inquired of her from what country she came; she feigned one thing after another, and said she was an Ephesian. Then Peter said, "Alas, I thought that some joy had come to you today; for I had suspicioned that you were a certain woman that I just recently heard about."

Clement had come up while they were talking, and Peter had bidden him to return to the ship before him. When the woman would hear more about this woman, Peter told her about the Roman citizen who had sent away his wife to Athens, and told her that the young man whom he had sent on to the ship was the son. Then she cried out, "He is my son." Peter inquired what his name was and she said Clement. And Peter said, "It is he."

Then the woman cried for Peter to lead her to the ship at once, but fainted. He lifted her up and she revived, and he took her by the hand and led her to the ship. Clement came out and she uttered a loud scream and began to embrace him. He would push her aside in astonishment, but Peter said, "Cease,

what mean you, Clement? Do not push away your mother." After this happy meeting, a great multitude assembled to see what was happening. When they would depart, the woman said, "Is it right for me to depart and leave the old, sick woman who has befriended me and shared her hut?" Then Peter said in the midst of the crowd that he was a preacher of righteousness, and they went over, and he said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, let the woman arise." Then she was healed and raised from her bed; they gave her money and departed. Clement's mother lodged with Peter's wife on the journey. She inquired of Clement about her husband, and was told that he had gone in search of her and had not been heard of since.

After this, they came to Laodicea, where Niceta and Aquila were. Peter, seeing it was a good city, decided to stay there for ten days. When Niceta and Aquila inquired who the unknown woman was, Clement told them it was his mother, whom God had given back to him.

Then Peter related the story to them of the woman. When he was telling about her seeking and crying out for her sons, Faustinus and Faustus, when she was shipwrecked, Niceta and Aquila cried out, "Are these things so, or are we in a dream?" Peter said, "Unless we are mad men, they are so." Then they said, "We are Faustinus and Faustus." And they would go at once and embrace their mother, who was sleeping. But Peter asked that they let him prepare her mind for the surprise.

When she had risen, Peter went to her and spoke to her about the true religion, and she said she was ready to give up her old idolatry, and was ready to be baptized. And as she was speaking of her sons, they could scarcely refrain themselves, so rushed upon her and began to kiss her. She said, "What meaneth this?" Peter told her not to be disturbed, for they were her sons, Faustinus and Faustus.

Then Niceta told his mother how on the night that they were shipwrecked they were captured by pirates and sold to a very honorable woman, named Justa, and that she had had them educated in the Greek literature and philosophy. And that when they had grown up, they had been with Simon Magus and had heard Peter's discussions with him, and had become Christians. Soon she recognized her sons, and a little later she was baptized.

Then in Book 8: The next morning after, Peter and the twin brothers went out to the sea to bathe, and after that they retired to a secret place to pray. But as they prayed, a certain old man, a workman, as he appeared from his clothing, approached them to see what they were doing, and asked to converse with them. Many discussions in many chapters, on the Christian religion, follow. Almost three books are given to these discussions, and the old man is not convinced of the truth of Christianity until finally he tells of his sad fate: how his wife had fallen in love with a slave of the house, and had told him of a vision to get away from him with her twin sons, and that he had gone out to seek her, but in vain.

Peter asked him how he knew that his wife had deceived him; he then told him that his brother had said that she had first tried to get him to take her, and when he would not she told him that she had had a vision about a violent death that awaited her and her sons if she did not leave the city, that she might run away with the man with whom she had fallen in love. Then Peter asked him if he would believe and turn to Christianity if he would restore to him his chaste and true wife, with his three sons.

The old man said as it was impossible for him to do so, so it was impossible that it should take place. Then Peter pointed out his sons to him and named them. When the old man heard their names, he fainted away, and the sons came and lifted him up. At this time, the wife of the old man, having found out somehow that her husband had been found, rushed up and cried out, "Where is my husband, my lord Faustinianus, who has been so long afflicted, and searching from city to city for me?" And the old man ran

up and embraced her. Then Peter requested the crowd to disperse, and they returned home with him.

After a season together, the old man was instructed by Peter and his family, and finally believed and was baptized. Simon Magus tried to keep the old man from the way of truth, but Peter refuted his discussion, and all ended happily.

The Recognitions Of Clement On Holiness

Filled with Spirit

From Book II, chapter 21, the following is given as the words of Peter:

Then going to God chaste and clean, we shall be filled with the Holy Spirit.

In speaking of baptism in Book III, chapter 67, these words occur:

He being first anointed with oil sanctified with prayer, that so at length, being consecrated by these things, he may attain a perception of holy things.

The Clementine Homilies On Holiness

All the existing early fragments of Christian sermons for the first three centuries are in the form of homilies. In the Clementine collection there are twenty of these.

In Homily II, chapter 42, "The Right Notions of God Essential to Holiness," we find these words:

But I do not think, my dear Clement, that any one who possesses even so little love to God and ingenuousness, will be able to take in, or even hear, the things that are spoken to him. For how is it that he can have a monarchic soul, and be holy, who supposes that there are many gods and not one only?

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