

The Problem of 1 Clement: Did Fellow Christians Have a Hand in the Deaths of Peter and Paul?

Part 1

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In recent times, challenges have been made to the traditional view that the Apostles Peter and Paul were executed by the Romans during the time of Nero¹ exclusively for their own malicious reasons. In its place, alternative hypotheses have been put forth that cite Christians as unintentional or even intentional contributors to their deaths. Key to such proposals has been an increasingly influential reading of *1 Clement*, particularly chapter 5 where the deaths of Peter and Paul certainly seem to be discussed.

The idea that Christians may have played a role in the deaths of the two premiere apostles of the early church is disturbing on its face. Worse, it carries larger implications about the true state of the primitive church and how much it was bedeviled by conflict and division rather than shared purpose and love. It's an assertion that fits Baur's view of the early church as rife with conflict and poisonous rivalry, and that New Testament (NT) material like Acts that portray a relatively harmonious growth of the church should be seen as historically suspect. The implications are potent.

While this theory is advanced today by partisans of lesser repute, they tend to appeal to more bona fide work that has been conducted by credible scholars who warrant being taken seriously. In this 'Part 1' paper, we will consider the work of three such scholars: Oscar Cullmann, David Eastman, and James Corke-Webster. In a separate 'Part 2' paper, I will put forth some suggestions of my own for consideration.

Brief Synopsis of 1 Clement:

¹ In 2015, Brent Shaw at Princeton published an article that denied altogether the existence of a Neronian pogrom that targeted Christians, arguing in part that the Roman historian Tacitus was mistaken when he penned his account (*Annals*, XV.44) of the Neronian-era fire in Rome and subsequent targeting of Christians for death. Shaw's position has not widely been followed, with several scholars, including Hurtado, effectively knocking it down.

First Clement is a lengthy letter of 65 chapters from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth. The letter is authorially anonymous, but other early church writings consistently cite a certain Clement as the author.² It is commonly surmised that the letter was written near the end of the 1st century, though most modern scholars tend to settle on this timeframe as a kind of qualified default position rather than one rigorously advocated based on internal and external evidence.³ Regardless of the exact dating, there is no serious dispute that *1 Clement* is very early and possibly the oldest extant Christian writing outside the NT currently in our possession.⁴ The letter is marked by a sweeping reliance on the Old Testament (OT) as an authoritative source, as well as several NT books, particularly 1 Corinthians and Hebrews. By providing such a lengthy discourse so early, it is of great importance in gaining insight into a litany of historical issues from formation of the NT canon to developing ecclesiastical organization to name just two.⁵

The primary occasion for the writing of *1 Clement* is clear. Clement of Rome⁶ writes to denounce the overthrowing of the church leadership in Corinth, a “detestable and unholy schism, so alien and strange to those chosen by God, which a few reckless and arrogant persons have kindled...”⁷ Clement believed the group of instigators was small, “one or two persons...rebellng against its presbyters”.⁸ He believed the leadership had been deposed for no good reason.⁹

² Eusebius, *The History of the Church (HE)*, 3.16.1. Eusebius also cites a letter written by the 2nd century Corinthian bishop Dionysius which identifies ‘Clement’ as the author (4.23.11). Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul (not close to Corinth), in the same approximate era as Dionysius, follows suit (*Against Heresies*, III.3.3). Eusebius (*HE*, 3.4.10; 3.15.1), Origen (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 6.36) and Jerome (*De Viris Illustribus*, 15.1) all link Clement to the Clement named as a fellow worker with Paul in Phil. 4.3. Most modern scholars doubt this identification.

³ One of the markers in *1 Clement* traditionally used to date the letter to the mid-90s is the opening verse’s citing of sudden misfortunes and reversals having delayed issuing the letter to Corinth. This is thought to reference the Domitian persecution that Eusebius thought occurred at that time (*HE* 3.17-20). Some scholars are less than convinced of this connection. Welborn has proposed a range of dating between 80-140. See his “On the Date of First Clement.” *Biblical Research* 29 (1984): 35-54. I, too, question linking v1 with a Domitian-era persecution. *1 Clement* is neutral to marginally positive in its attitude toward Rome. This seems a bit odd if it was written in the midst of or in the immediate aftermath of a Roman persecution. I put more weight on *1 Clem.* 44.2-5 that discusses leaders appointed by apostles, some of whom may have been alive at the time of the letter’s writing.

⁴ Inspired by Baur, it is periodically alleged that *1 Clement* is a forgery that was written much later. Given the weakness of the assertion, this view enjoys very little respectable support within the modern Academy.

⁵ Harnack: “[T]he study of ancient church history must begin with 1 Clement, since there is no other foundational document that is able to compete with it with respect to its historical significance.” See his *The Letter of the Roman Church to the Corinthian Church from the Era of Domitian*, trans. by Cerone (Eugene: Pickwick, 2021), 4.

⁶ As indicated previously, *1 Clement* is anonymous. ‘Clement’ isn’t mentioned in the letter. But in recognition of the wide early church witness sampled above, I will refer to the author as Clement.

⁷ *1 Clem.* 1.1. Citations of *1 Clement* are from Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.6.

Their removal was a rebellion against good social order established by God, and the turmoil it had caused had brought disrepute from outside onlookers.¹⁰ Clement accuses the Corinthians of falling back into the destructive behaviors that had prompted Paul to pen 1 Corinthians decades earlier.¹¹ The conflict appears to be generational in nature, “the young against the old.”¹² Importantly for our purposes, Clement tends to identify the origin of the tumult as jealousy, envy and strife.¹³ This leads us to Peter and Paul.

Employing the historical deliberative rhetoric strategy that was common at the time,¹⁴ Clement lists historical examples in chapters 4-6 of how jealousy and envy led to calamitous consequences and in some cases, death. Chapter 4 cites examples from the OT. Chapter 5 then focuses on Peter and Paul:

¹But to pass from the examples of ancient times, let us come to those champions who lived nearest to our time. Let us consider the noble examples that belong to our own generation. ²Because of jealousy and envy the greatest and most righteous pillars were persecuted and fought to the death. ³Let us set before our eyes the good apostles. ⁴There was Peter, who because of unrighteous jealousy endured not one or two but many trials, and thus having given his testimony went to his appointed place of glory. ⁵Because of jealousy and strife Paul showed the way to the prize for patient endurance. ⁶After he had been seven times in chains, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, and had preached in the east and in the west, he won the genuine glory for his faith, ⁷having taught righteousness to the whole world and having reached the farthest limits of the west. Finally, when he had given his testimony before the rulers, he

⁹ “These, therefore, who were appointed...with the consent of the whole church, and who have ministered to the flock of Christ blamelessly, humbly, peaceably, and unselfishly, and for a long time have been well spoken of by all – these we consider to be unjustly removed from their ministry.” *Ibid.*, 44.3. See also 44.6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.1; 39.1; 47.7

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.3. On this, see Welborn, *The Young Against the Old: Generational Conflict in First Clement* (Lanham: Lexington, 2018). Welborn regards 3.3 to be the letter’s problem statement, or concise *narratio*. The full verse: “So people were stirred up: those without honor against the honored, those of no repute against the highly reputed, the foolish against the wise, the young against the old”. Welborn thinks all but the ‘young against the old’ phrase harkens to 1 Cor. 4.10. He makes much of the ‘young against the old’ from Is. 3.5 being added at the end, seeing the verse as a case of rhetorical escalation building to a climax with the last phrase possessing the most gravity.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.2 and throughout. Of the three terms, ‘jealousy’ is used most often by Clement in the letter.

¹⁴ Much has been written on this. A good treatment is Breytenbach, “Historical Example in *1 Clement*.” *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 18, 1 (2014): 22-33. This same rhetorical strategy can be found in 2 Pet. 2, Jude, 1 Cor. 10.1-11, and Heb. 11 among other places. In *1 Clement*, historical examples are used extensively to highlight both good and bad behavior that should be emulated and shunned respectively. Clement does this as part of a broad appeal to the Corinthians to repent and embrace good behavior, order, peace and unity that is fueled by Christ-like humility and modeled by the positive historical examples he presents.

thus departed from the world and went to the holy place, having become an outstanding example of patient endurance.¹⁵

This passage from Clement is the earliest known depiction of Peter and Paul's deaths and the contexts surrounding them.¹⁶ Clement claims they died because of jealousy (ζήλος) (*zelos*), envy (φθόνος) (*phthonos*) and strife (έρις) (*eris*). The obvious question is who was jealous and envious of them to such an extent that they perished because of it. Was it the Romans? Or could this jealousy have resided closer to home?

Cullmann:

Oscar Cullmann was a 20th century scholar of considerable weight. Known today mostly for his functional Christology and his presentation of inaugurated eschatology, he was also an ardent ecumenicist whose extensive dialogue with Roman Catholicism was widely regarded to be constructive. It was his ecumenical passion that motivated his mid-century treatment of Peter that is rightly seen as the most serious Protestant scholarship on Peter in the 20th century.¹⁷ Cullmann attempts to achieve various aims in the book. But of most relevance to us is a 20-page treatment in the 'Martyr' section of the book where Cullmann analyzes *1 Clement* 5 and its larger context.

Cullmann insists that chapter 5 is part of a larger section that extends from chapters 3-6, where seven OT examples of jealousy are paired with seven newer examples of the same thing, including the Peter and Paul examples. For Cullmann, when the entire section is studied, a key theme emerges; the theme of brotherly conflict.¹⁸ The OT examples of Chapter 4 include Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers. Further examples can be seen as more distantly familial, such as David and Saul, and the Exodus 2 account of Moses fleeing to Midian due to being confronted by a fellow Hebrew, one of "his own people" (Ex. 2.11), for killing an Egyptian. These episodes do not depict "hate in a general sense"¹⁹ but intra-tent jealousy leading to disaster that parallels what Clement thinks is the root of the problem in Corinth.

¹⁵ One will immediately note the lack of specifics regarding when, where and how they died. Separately, v7, of course, is routinely cited as evidence that Paul did in fact eventually make his way to Spain before his death as desired (Rom. 15.23-28). But this reading of Clement is contested, as some like P.N. Harrison regard the phrase 'the farthest limits of the west' to be referring instead to Rome.

¹⁶ The NT silence on the actual deaths of Peter and Paul, allusions aside (Jn 13.36, 21.18-19; 2 Tim. 4.6-8; 2 Pet. 1.14-15; others might include 1 Pet. 5.1, but I tend to think not. I also reject Munck's proposal of naming Peter and Paul as the two witnesses in Rev. 11), has figured prominently in debates about the historical reliability and dating of several books, particularly Acts. As we'll see, Cullmann had his own view on this.

¹⁷ Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (Waco: Baylor, 2011). The book was originally published in 1952, with a second edition in 1962.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 101ff.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Drawing on this, Cullmann thinks a trajectory has been set for the next group of newer examples which includes Peter and Paul. His conclusion: “they were *victims of jealousy from persons who counted themselves members of the Christian Church.*”²⁰ He hastens to add that he doesn’t think Christians personally executed Peter and Paul. But he thinks the Roman magistrates “were encouraged by the attitude of some members of the Christian Church, and perhaps by the fact that they turned informers, to take action against others.”²¹ The idea is that while the Romans did the killing, it was members of the church who urged or otherwise gave them reason to do it.²² Although Cullmann chooses not to overly speculate on what may have fueled the jealousy that led to their deaths, he confidently asserts that the Roman magistrates had no reason to be jealous, so Clement can’t be referring to them.²³ Cullmann finds further support in 47.7,²⁴ which he regards as Clement’s own commentary on what he has said about Peter and Paul in chapter 5. Cullmann believes Clement is telling Corinth that just as internal jealousy had led to Peter and Paul’s deaths presumably at the hands of the Romans, so their own internal struggling against each other could lead to theirs, possibly in the same way.²⁵

Cullmann then introduces other data to bolster the ‘informant’ part of his thesis. He cites the famous passage of the Neronian pogrom by the Roman historian Tacitus in which it is recounted that after some Christians were arrested and pleaded guilty for setting the fire in Rome, “then, upon their information,” many multitudes more were convicted and suffered death via brutal and ignominious methods.²⁶ Despite his own echoing of the general reviling of Christians at the time, Tacitus implies that he was sympathetic to the rumor that Christians were being scapegoated by Nero in this case. Regardless, Cullmann sees in this account support for the idea that the Romans went after Christians in part through information given to them by other Christians.

²⁰ Ibid., 102. Italics is Cullmann’s.

²¹ Ibid.

²² The parallel in Cullmann’s proposal to the real-life circumstance of Jesus being executed by the Romans at the urging of the religious leaders (who incidentally were motivated by *phthonon*, envy (Mt. 27.18)) is obvious, though Cullmann himself doesn’t draw this parallel.

²³ Ibid. “[T]he discussion must deal with the jealousy and envy of other Christians and not, for example, with that of the magistrates. The latter really had no reason at that time to be envious or jealous of the Christians, but they might well have had reasons for taking actions against Christians.” In a footnote to this assertion, Cullmann also rules out ‘the Jews’ as being the source of the jealousy Clement speaks of.

²⁴ After discussing the current factionalism in Corinth and citing 1 Cor. 1.12/3.21 against them, Clement says, “And this report has reached not only us but also those who differ from us, with the result that you heap blasphemies upon the name of the Lord because of your stupidity, *and create dangers for yourselves as well.*” Italics mine.

²⁵ Ibid., 104.

²⁶ For context, per Tacitus, the fire in Rome was devastating (*Annals*, XV.38). It lasted over 5 days, and 10 of the city’s 14 districts were essentially destroyed (XV.40). See also Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, XXXVIII.

Lastly, he finds further support for his position in his reading of Romans, Philippians and Galatians. Cullmann cites Rom. 15 for evidence that division and perhaps even pre-existing hostility toward Paul existed in the church of Rome prior to his visiting them.²⁷ For Cullmann, this is confirmed by Philippians, which he thinks Paul wrote while imprisoned in Rome. Paul's lament in Phil. 1.15-17 that some members of the Christian community in Rome, motivated by envy and strife, acted with a quarrelsome spirit and brought affliction and trouble upon him, make several things clear to Cullmann. First, the Roman church was beset with similar struggles with envy and strife as the church of Corinth. Second, the seeds of calamity were already in place before Paul arrived in Rome. Third, it lends support to the location of Paul's death being in Rome, which makes the Tacitus account of the Neronian pogrom highly relevant and congruent with both the Pauline corpus and *1 Clement*.²⁸ Regarding Galatians, Cullmann focuses more on Peter than Paul, believing Peter was in a tight spot with the Jerusalem church and that the 'varied troubles' cited by Clement probably relate to difficulties Peter was having with the once mother church "and their overzealous helpers."²⁹

In the end, Cullmann thinks that Clement, unlike the author of Acts, had good reason to allude to the deaths of Peter and Paul in his letter. For Cullmann, when it comes to the NT and Acts specifically, "The Christians who had caused the death of other Christians did not offer an edifying example for others."³⁰ But for Clement, he "had every reason for mentioning it in *his* writing, in order to show what danger threatens the most valuable members of a church at the hands of pagan persecutors, if the church is divided by jealousy."³¹ Jealousy weakens the church from within, making it vulnerable to attack from without, a la Will Durant's (ironic) take on the ultimate fate of the Roman Empire.

Critique of Cullmann:

Cullmann's proposal is formidable and serious. It contains a number of strengths that should be highlighted. First, Cullmann takes *1 Clement* seriously in terms of historical accuracy. While Clement's elevated rhetoric throughout the letter is widely recognized, Cullmann doesn't use this as an excuse to diminish the

²⁷ Cullmann., 106.

²⁸ Cullmann makes much of Clement's statement in 6.1 about the "multitude of the elect" having been tortured as an example "among us". It signals to Cullmann both the place (Rome) and time/event (Nero's persecution of Christians) of the newer examples of jealousy Clement cites. This verse comes right after the chapter 5 account of Peter and Paul, but Cullmann thinks the verse links back to chapter 5 as well as looking forward to the additional examples listed in chapter 6. Ibid., 108.

²⁹ Ibid., 106. See also 53.

³⁰ Ibid., 104. He goes on, "Did the author [of Acts], who wishes to show the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ, perhaps have scruples about speaking of this grievous and momentous jealousy?" Cullmann is obviously sympathetic to the view that Acts was written sometime after the deaths of Peter and Paul, and that the author was aware of their deaths but chose not to include them in his account.

³¹ Ibid.

accuracy of its contents.³² He mostly (though not entirely) takes *1 Clement* as it is and interacts with it without undermining the author or what he says in the letter. If only the same could be said of how critical scholars interact with the biblical material, including Cullmann himself.³³

Second, Cullmann is quite correct that the *1 Clement* 5 account of Peter and Paul should be seen in light of a larger pericope and in light of the purpose of the entire letter. On the surface, if Clement is attempting to address schismatic behavior within the church of Corinth that is being fueled by jealousy, and if both the old and new examples he lists in chapters 4-6 further that end, it's not unreasonable to see these negative examples as intending to highlight internal rather than external strife. There is no reason to think the toppling of the presbyters in Corinth was due to any external pressure. Clement certainly believes it was an inside job, and we have no reason to doubt this. Cullmann's interpretation of chapter 5 is not inconsistent with this.

Lastly, Cullmann is also correct that the practice of citizens and groups within the Empire informing the Roman authorities of things they thought should be acted upon was real. Jesus is the obvious example of this, as all four Gospels portray the religious leaders seeking relief from the Roman authorities on the Jesus question.³⁴ One can also find this dynamic periodically in Acts. There is considerable debate on whether Clement knew Acts, or the oral and written source traditions associated with it. This is a question we will touch on in Part 2. But for now, it's irrelevant. What the biblical accounts show is that the dynamic of appealing to Roman authority to intervene in some real or perceived (or trumped up) problem was not an uncommon part of the culture. Cullmann's take on chapter 5, again, is not inconsistent with this.

That said, while I'm loath to take issue with the esteemed Prof. Cullmann, there are several aspects of his proposal that warrant questioning. The biggest strength of Cullmann's presentation, in my view, is his analysis of chapter 5 in light of chapters 3-6. If we accept that this pericope of *1 Clement* exhibits brotherly or even familial conflict as a consistent theme, his conclusion about

³² This approach stands in contrast to F.F. Bruce, who says about *1 Clem.* 5, "In a rhetorical essay of this kind we do not expect the precision which is properly looked for in a work whose primary purpose is the supplying of historical information." See his *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 447. See also Harnack, 91. A more skeptical version of this is Wrede, who didn't think Clement had a clear grasp of the situation in Corinth which leads to a lack of vividness and certainty in how he addressed his audience. See his *Studies in 1 Clement*, trans. by Cerone (Eugene: Pickwick, 2023), 1-53. Originally written in 1891.

³³ The biggest lasting influence of Cullmann's book was his 80-page exegesis of Mt. 16.17-19, in which he embraced flawed form-critical techniques of dissection that uprooted the passage from its Caesarean context and placed it historically within the Passion material. In effect, Cullmann said the passage, while authentic, was uprooted out of its original historical setting by the author of Matthew and dropped into a different historical context entirely.

³⁴ Mt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 18.

Peter and Paul falling victim to internal jealousy might be reasonable. But I'm not sure Cullmann isn't overstating his case.

As we've seen, there are indeed brotherly examples of jealousy contained in Clement's list of examples. But this isn't true of all cases, including the OT examples of chapter 4. Three of the seven OT examples are not brotherly at all, and are at best hazily familial.³⁵ Moreover, in the David example, Clement includes a reference to the envy of the Philistines, which is the opposite of brotherly or familial strife. And while brotherly conflict can be seen as one sporadic theme of these examples, there are other themes as well.³⁶ Most notably, in my view, is the intermittent theme of jealousy leading to disrespect of leadership. This is clearly the case in the Aaron and Miriam example Clement cites from Num. 12, as well as the Dathan and Abiram example, both of which were about resisting the leadership of Moses in the desert. Beyond that, one could suggest that all seven examples constitute to some degree a rebellion against God's authority. This theme is transparently consistent with the tenor of Clement's entire letter and might have been a better theme from which Cullmann could have argued his case. Of the newer examples in chapters 5 and 6, none of them are obvious examples of brotherly jealousy, though one example is broadly familial.³⁷

So, while the examples cited by Clement do indeed provide some material for Cullmann to draw upon, it is neither unanimous nor inevitable to conclude from this alone that fellow Christians contributed to the deaths of Peter and Paul. As to the alleged familial or brotherly aspect of Peter and Paul's deaths fitting well within Clement's larger purpose to stop such strife within the church at Corinth, this is indeed compelling. But again, a perusal of Clement's examples doesn't make it obvious that each one tightly fits this purpose in the way Cullmann thinks. The David and Philistines example clearly doesn't. The example of jealousy and strife bringing down cities and nations (6.4) is too broad to fit the bill. And the example in 6.2 of women being tortured as the mythical Danaids and Dircae also does not provide a clear link. In fact, none of the newer examples clearly stress brotherly conflict at all, in part because unlike the OT examples, those on the other side of the strife in these cases aren't specifically named.

Cullmann's appeal to 47.7 mentioned earlier where he suggests a potential parallel in the current strife in Corinth leading to Roman 'trouble' with what

³⁵ This would be the Moses example from Exodus cited previously, the David and Saul example, as well as the Dathan and Abiram example from Num. 16.

³⁶ Death is also an intermittent theme in chapters 4-6. But as with other identified themes, it is neither uniform nor constantly present in every example. So as with the brotherly strife theme, we can affirm that this may have been one point Clement was trying to make, while not going beyond the text as Cullmann does to extrapolate that this was the only or most important point Clement was trying to make.

³⁷ This would be the example of jealousy fueling spousal estrangement in 6.3.

happened to Peter and Paul is no sure thing.³⁸ I'm inclined to view this as Clement alluding to divine judgment, which seems to me is more the immediate context of the passage and is the clear OT context of the "young and old" reference in the letter's problem statement (3.3).³⁹ It is also consistent with Clement's warning in chapter 57 of divine judgment if the usurpers don't repent and refuse to submit to the presbyters they ousted.⁴⁰

In sum, while Cullmann's read of the pericope and subsequent hypothesis of Peter and Paul's demise cannot be dismissed, it can fairly be considered inconclusive. And as stated earlier, this is the strongest part of his argument. In assessing the other aspects of his proposal, greater vulnerabilities emerge.⁴¹

His citing of Tacitus is a problem. The Tacitus account of the fire and related pogrom doesn't support Cullmann's theory of internal jealousy fueling Peter and Paul's deaths. As we've seen, Tacitus does reference arrested Christians providing information to the Roman authorities. But clearly, the motivation for this wasn't internal jealousy, but fear and survival instinct. Tacitus seems sympathetic to the idea that Christians were being scapegoated for the fire.⁴² Which means that for Tacitus, the Christians who pleaded guilty to setting the fire pled guilty to something they hadn't perpetrated. Fear of Roman judgment fuels an act such as this, not internal jealousy within the church. Cullmann seems to recognize this isn't his strongest argument.⁴³ But in a way, it undercuts his argument, given his view of the timing of Peter and Paul's deaths occurring during or around the time of the pogrom (which itself is an assumption, albeit a valid one).

³⁸ 47.7 has notable affinity to 14.2. In neither case are the civil authorities clearly in view. This syncs with Lindemann that *1 Clem.* is unconcerned about Roman action resulting from intramural turmoil within Corinth. See his chapter on *1 Clem.* in Pratscher (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Waco: Baylor, 2010), 47-69.

³⁹ Now of course, divine judgment can certainly occur through second causes (*WCF V.2*). But the Roman authorities are not in view here, except through a mirror-reading that struggles to be consistent with the tenor toward Rome in the rest of the letter. It's the blaspheming of God and the rebelling against Christ by rebelling against the presbyters that Clement is stressing here, with accompanying divine judgment being far more consistent with the on-point reference to Is. 3.5 in 3.3. See also 41.3-4.

⁴⁰ Clement skillfully inverts his rhetorical strategy in chapter 63, where he emphasizes obedience to their leaders to attain divine favor in contrast to the chapter 57 strategy of obedience to avoid divine judgment.

⁴¹ As a preview, I'm not yet done critiquing Cullmann's handling of this pericope. In my view, he, Eastman and Corke-Webster all exhibit similar tendencies in their reading of this passage that may be problematic. I will address this in the end summary.

⁴² Tacitus is officially agnostic on the truthfulness of the rumor that the fire was 'treacherously contrived' by Nero (*Annals*, XV.38). But the fact that Tacitus comes back to this rumor multiple times in his chronicling of the fire indicates not only how prevalent the rumor must have been at the time of the fire, but also Tacitus' willingness to call ample attention to the rumor without questioning its truthfulness. It is also notable that Tacitus says the alternative to Nero's involvement in the fire was that the fire was an accident. This would seem to rule out, at least to Tacitus, the possibility that Christians deliberately committed criminal arson.

⁴³ "Of course my interpretation of *1 Clement* 5 does not stand or fall with the adducing of this passage from Tacitus." Cullmann, 108.

Cullmann also cites later apocryphal writings to provide conceptual support for his framework. He believes that in both the *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of Paul*, the jealousy motif of their martyrdom is maintained.⁴⁴ That's not exactly right, at least not as Cullmann has framed the jealousy issue as a brotherly intra-camp phenomenon.⁴⁵ In these documents, it is ultimately the madness of Agrippa and the rage of Nero respectively, without any reference to Christian in-fighting, that leads to both of their deaths, albeit in different ways, for different reasons and as distinct events. Cullmann's read of *1 Clement* is quite isolated from the traditions contained in the surrounding literature, both biblical and extra-biblical. This doesn't automatically render his thesis false. But it does create real room for competing approaches.

Cullmann's appeal to Romans and Philippians suggesting bad fruit existed between Paul and the church(es) (Rom. 1.7; 16.5) at Rome is attractive for his position.⁴⁶ But even if one takes a more fractious view of Romans, Rom. 15 does not really convey a sense of dread on the part of Paul when he describes his upcoming planned visit to them.⁴⁷ Phil. 1 can hardly be extrapolated into an overarching enmity toward Paul by the church in Rome.⁴⁸ That Paul may not have universally been adored hardly equates to an entrenched groundswell of opposition.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁵ Cullmann even admits this, but then dismisses as "primitive form(s)" the presented contexts of pagan husbands being jealous of Christian wives who followed the counsel of Peter and Paul. So Cullmann affirms the truth of the underlying jealousy motif he thinks exists while rejecting how both documents expressly couch it. This is Cullmann's version of Harnack's philosophical (not evidential) kernel and husk hermeneutical approach.

⁴⁶ What's also attractive is Cullmann's acceptance of Philippians as authentically Pauline, contra Baur. The provenance of Philippians is disputed, though I agree with Cullmann that it was likely penned in Rome.

⁴⁷ The difference in tone between Rom. 15 and, say, 2 Cor. 1.23-2.2 is clear. I concede there may have been some tension surrounding Paul in the church of Rome. But the fact that there are no real specifics about the situation in the church until halfway through chapter 11 of Romans indicates to me that any tension or conflict that may have existed was not front and center in Paul's mind. My read of Rom. 15 (really 14-16) is of Paul being diplomatic and politically sophisticated in addressing a church he had no formal relationship with at that time. For more on this, see Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2018.

⁴⁸ If one were to try to rescue this position by appealing to 2 Tim. 4.16 as proof that Paul had no friends in Rome (or per Stuhlmacher, that Paul was 'controversial' in Rome), one will then have to contend with 2 Tim. 1.15 which implies that Paul had no friends in Asia, where he spent considerable time (Acts 16-20) building up the church amidst serious opposition (2 Cor. 1.8-10). That's clearly not the meaning of either verse.

⁴⁹ This gets into the Sisyphean task of identifying Paul's opponents in his writings. To say that little consensus exists understates things. An example is Porter (ed.), *Paul and His Opponents* (Atlanta: SBL, 2005). Eight scholars tackle this question focusing on differing and overlapping parts of the Pauline corpus. There is as much disagreement as agreement on the identity of the opponents which, in my view, speaks to the limitations of mirror-readings.

We should also note that Cullmann's handling of Philippians is a bit cavalier. He implies that the group giving Paul trouble in Phil. 1 are either the same or of the same ilk as those whom Paul labels as dogs and evildoers in Phil. 3.⁵⁰ This is almost certainly incorrect. In Phil. 1, while Paul laments that some are preaching Christ out of impure motives, he nonetheless rejoices that Christ is being preached regardless of motive (v18). In contra, Paul has nothing good to say about those he discusses in Phil. 3, and none of their characteristics are applied to those in Phil. 1. The Phil. 1 folks are in Rome, while the Phil. 3 group is a threat to the saints in Philippi 800 miles away. These are two different groups. So, while Cullmann's reading of Philippians doesn't make or break his larger argument, the imprecision with which he goes about his business in this case should warrant viewing his larger proposal through appropriately critical eyes.

Lastly, there is Cullmann's view of the structure of chapters 4-6. He thinks Clement tried to achieve a balanced literary structure, with seven examples from the OT balanced by seven newer examples of his generation. But in doing so, Cullmann thinks Clement had to throw in some generic newer examples to get to seven because he didn't have enough real-life examples to tap.⁵¹ He concludes that Clement created a "deliberately artificial arrangement".⁵² A response: First, the balanced structure Cullmann insists is there may not actually be there.⁵³ The list of newer examples might be seven; but it might also be six or eight depending on how one chooses to lump or not lump items together.⁵⁴ Next, if Clement was straining to achieve a structural balance in this section, why was this not done elsewhere? For example, in what may be regarded as the flip pericope to chapters 4-6, Clement lists positive examples of good behavior in chapters 9-12. Like chapter 4, he begins with OT examples. But this time, Clement lists only five examples, and no balancing newer examples. Third, his suggestion that Clement ran out of good material is quite incredulous. The most obvious and seemingly relevant example would be Jesus,⁵⁵ but others might also be mentioned.⁵⁶ One

⁵⁰ Cullmann, 106.

⁵¹ Ibid., 93. Regrettably, this is also Bauckham's view. See his "The Martyrdom of Peter in Early Christian Literature," in *The Christian World Around the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 283.

⁵² Cullman, 93.

⁵³ If ζήλος is used as an anaphoric keyword, we do get to seven examples apiece. So, Clement may have had a structure in mind. But it's not clear-cut based on the insertions and interconnected nature of several examples.

⁵⁴ Cullmann separates 'the pillars' of 5.2 from Peter and Paul in 5.3ff to get to his 7 and 7 construct (although he also thinks Peter and Paul are included with the pillars in Clement's mind (p.94)). This is possible, but it's also possible to see them commonly linked and one consolidated example (see Harnack, 91). He also only notes cities being overthrown in 6.4, and not also the nations being uprooted. And on the OT examples, if we break up the David example so that Saul and the Philistines are treated separately, the OT examples go to eight.

⁵⁵ It is perplexing that Clement did not cite the betrayal of Jesus, given that it is the preeminent example of the exact point Clement seems to be trying to make, if Cullmann's thesis is right.

⁵⁶ One might think of Sosthenes, particularly if the Sosthenes of 1 Cor. 1.1 is the same as the Sosthenes of Acts 18. Given the popularity of the name "Sosthenes" at the time, most scholars are hesitant to forcefully affirm a common identity (although Calvin does). But most scholars are also unwilling to shut the door on

might reasonably conclude that it is Cullmann, not Clement, who is embracing an “artificial arrangement”, in part to dismiss or devalue the examples in chapter 6 that don’t really fit his thesis, which then makes it easier for him to argue what he argues about Peter and Paul.⁵⁷

Eastman:

David Eastman is an adjunct Fellow at the University of Regensburg and Chair of Bible at the McCallie School. In 2014, he published an article that built on Cullmann while attempting to take the discussion further.⁵⁸ He thinks Cullmann’s proposal “has received less scholarly attention than it deserves.”⁵⁹ Eastman’s piece contains several highlights:

In line with his research emphasis in other publications, Eastman thinks Clement’s mentioning of Peter and Paul is consistent with the thesis that the Roman church was claiming the two great apostles of the early church for itself in order to establish its ecclesiastical authority. Eastman finds considerable evidence for this hypothesis in various early and medieval church writings that postdate *1 Clement*.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, despite the absence of clear historical markers in *1 Clement* which identify Peter and Paul and their deaths with Rome, he still considers it a reasonable historical inference and isn’t “necessarily arguing for a radical re-reading of *1 Clement*.”⁶¹

Eastman approvingly summarizes Cullmann’s position, regrettably not challenging the less than great reading of Philippians critiqued above. More positively, Eastman draws attention to the ‘false brothers’ motif periodically seen in the NT (although Eastman only cites 2 Cor. 11.26). He goes further than Cullmann in rejecting the idea that non-Christian Jews in Rome were the source of the jealousy that befell Peter and Paul. While he notes in passing the hostility of non-Christian Jews toward the message and messengers of Christianity

the possibility. For more on this, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 69-70.

⁵⁷ If we follow Cullmann’s reasoning all the way through, we might have to say that Clement believes Christians are something of a pestilence if their jealousy is negatively responsible for the upheaval of entire cities and nations (6.4). Given how badly this doesn’t fit, it’s not surprising that Cullmann sidelined this example and others.

⁵⁸ Eastman, “Jealousy, Internal Strife, and the Deaths of Peter and Paul: A Reassessment of *1 Clement*.” *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 18.1 (2014): 34-53.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁰ Eastman ably surveys this material in his *The Many Deaths of Peter and Paul* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2019). Though unrelated to *1 Clement*, he proposes that by the 4th century, the ecclesiastical and theological powerbase was in the East, namely Antioch and Constantinople. He believes the varied church writings that sought to identify Peter and Paul with Rome and even link their deaths together was an attempt to balance the scales and reassert the authority of the Roman church in the face of the Eastern-dominated ecumenical councils of 325 and 381.

⁶¹ Eastman; 2014, 36.

recorded periodically in Acts, he detects no such hostility among the Jewish rulership *in Rome*. Thus, non-Christian Jews can't be the source of the jealousy Clement speaks of. For Eastman, the Jewish community in Rome post-Claudius expulsion (Acts 18.2) wasn't organized or powerful enough to move the Roman authorities to action. On this, it's interesting that Cullmann considers the Christians in Rome to be unworthy of jealousy by the magistrates, while Eastman considers the Jewish community in Rome to be unworthy of getting the attention of the magistrates. Yet, both scholars acknowledge Rome's role in the actual killing of Peter and Paul. Their shared conclusion that Christian jealousy is to blame seems rather forced given what they've already ruled out on rather scanty evidential grounds.

Eastman then argues that the OT examples of jealousy highlighted in *1 Clem.* 4 reflect Aristotelian notions of jealousy as being primarily familial and provoked by feelings of special favor. Although he doesn't try to fit the newer examples of chapter 6 into this construct, he thinks it applies to the Peter and Paul examples, especially Paul. Eastman cites passages in the Pauline corpus which seem to depict people or groups who are challenging Paul's apostolic authority. He sees this as proof that Paul was opposed in various locations and that the source of the opposition was jealousy at Paul's "claim of special privilege."⁶² While there may be something to this, I would caution that on multiple occasions, including those cited by Eastman, Paul is turning down apostolic privileges and even degrading his own qualifications precisely because he does not want to lord his apostleship over his readers.⁶³ At best, we can ascribe jealousy to these cases only indirectly through a mirror-reading which assumes that because Paul chose to forego privileges and brought himself down to size, he must have been addressing jealousy issues among his readership. That's an inference heaped on an inference.⁶⁴ Moreover, one might think it methodologically inconsistent for Eastman to appeal to 'internal' opposition to Paul recorded in writings mostly outside the provenance of Rome, while discounting 'external' opposition to Paul recorded in the same writings.

Lastly, Eastman tries to put meat on the bone by citing the malevolent Alexander of 2 Tim. 4 as a possible informant that led to Paul's final arrest and execution. Eastman is to be commended for appearing to consider this passage authentic. One might hope this means he affirms Pauline authorship of the letter. Alas, he doesn't disclose where he stands on this question, which is a rather important silence considering the amount of historical weight he puts on the Alexander

⁶² Ibid., 47.

⁶³ 1 Thes. 2; 1 Cor. 9, 15; 2 Cor. 10-11; Phil. 3.

⁶⁴ It also, in my view, inadequately accounts for the honor-shame, self-promotion and desire for exaltation culture in Corinth that has been well documented by Meeks, Theissen, Pogoloff, and others (and also observed in real-time by Seneca and Quintilian and can be seen in *1 Clem.* 13-19). While jealousy can be part of a mix like this, it is primarily the rejection of humility that Paul was rhetorically confronting in the Corinthian passages. His own self-denial is provocative because it's an open defiance of the boasting status culture dominant in Corinth.

episode.⁶⁵ For Eastman, the context of 2 Tim. 4.6-16 “strongly suggests” a link to Paul’s arrest through betrayal by Alexander.⁶⁶ Eastman is not the only scholar to toil in this field. Many commentaries on the Pastoral Epistles dabble in whether and how closely to link Alexander to Paul’s imprisonment, with different scholars reaching different conclusions.⁶⁷

In the end, as with Cullmann, Eastman puts forth a serious case that the evidence “points strongly” in the direction of Christian jealousy being the cause of Peter and Paul’s deaths.⁶⁸ But as with Cullmann, his case is inconclusive due to the selectivity of the material upon which he relies and how he handles it.⁶⁹ His proposal is also incomplete in that he focuses his argument on Paul and doesn’t directly address what Clement says about Peter. Nor does he substantively address the examples in *1 Clem.* 6 despite professing the need to read the Peter and Paul accounts “through a more thorough treatment of the broader literary context.”⁷⁰ But Eastman should be applauded for introducing additional texture unaddressed by Cullmann that can aid the discussion.

Corke-Webster:

James Corke-Webster is a member of the Department of Classics at Kings College in London, among other impressive scholarly alignments. In 2023, he published an article that attempts to reframe the larger topic of the persecution of Christians in the early centuries of the church. Unlike the Cullmann and Eastman pieces, Corke-Webster is not focused on the Peter and Paul question. But he draws on his expertise in Roman history and culture and applies it, in part, to *1 Clement*.⁷¹ In doing so, he brings a fresh perspective to the Peter and Paul issue.

⁶⁵ For a good critique of the unsatisfactory nature of the pseudonymity and various fragment hypotheses as it relates to authenticity, see Porter, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023). Kümmel effectively attacks the fragment hypothesis from the vantage point of pseudonymity, believing 2 Timothy was written by a “pupil of Paul”. See his *Introduction to the New Testament*, 14th rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 271-2.

⁶⁶ Eastman, 49. He agrees with Dibelius/Conzelmann that the larger passage should be read within a legal context while appearing to doubt the second Roman imprisonment theory. This approval of Dibelius/Conzelmann is fine, but arguably problematic considering they labeled this section of 2 Timothy as “stylized” (artificial), which isn’t the best ground upon which to suggest a preservation of authentic tradition, as Eastman does. See Dibelius and Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 122.

⁶⁷ As brief example, referring to v14, Porter believes a strong link “is simply asking too much from the verse and the statement.” (*PE*, 680-1). Towner, on the other hand, believes “[t]he grammar of the sentence certainly allows this option...” See his *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 631.

⁶⁸ Eastman, 53.

⁶⁹ To be fair, in his *Many Deaths*, he refers to this 2014 article as presenting a (mere?) “possibility”.

⁷⁰ Eastman, 43.

⁷¹ Corke-Webster, “By Whom Were Early Christians Persecuted?” *Past & Present* 261.1 (2023), 3-46.

Corke-Webster's overall contention is that Christians were persecuted by outsiders less due to their religion, but instead for personal reasons and even enmity birthed internally within the community. He expands on the views of Cullmann and Eastman in identifying 'delation', the act of one person accusing and informing on others, as a cultural norm that was likely a major factor in arousing the attention of outsiders to go after Christians. Corke-Webster rejects what he thinks is the outdated work of other mainstays in the field who cast the issue of Christians being targeted for violence due to "the irrational hatred of non-Christians for stereotyped conceptions of Christians' supposed shared beliefs or behaviors..."⁷² Instead, "persecution of early 'Christians' arose from insiders – whose actions were motivated by commonplace rational concerns, rather than fear or suspicion of a religion other than their own."⁷³ In other words, he is arguing that internal communal friction was the main accelerant that moved external parties like Rome into negative action against Christians, rather than outsiders persecuting Christians out of a reflexive hatred of Christianity.⁷⁴ Put simply, the persecutors were being reactive rather than proactive; acting upon information received through delation, rather than initiating persecution to satisfy their own malice or distaste toward this new faith.

Corke-Webster marshals an impressive deposit of evidence as proof of this assertion. Of note is his appeal to Justin's *First Apology*, likely written in the mid-2nd century. He argues that in this *Apology*, written to the Roman Emperor, Justin himself engages in 'delation' against others who likely self-identify as 'Christians'. In the end, Justin calls upon the Emperor to 'punish' them because they are not true Christians as evidenced by their foul conduct. Corke-Webster asserts that examples like Justin demonstrate not only that delation was a common cultural phenomenon of the time, but that Christians themselves adopted it by denouncing other 'Christians' to the Roman authorities.

Thus far, Corke-Webster is to be commended for his attempts at precision and not going beyond what the evidence suggests. For example, he is more accurate than either Cullmann or Eastman in putting 'Christians' in quotation marks, implying that a true Christian can be perspectival or even just a label. In doing this, he seems to say that just because both sides in a dispute may self-identify as 'Christian' doesn't automatically mean that both would have been considered true Christians. This accords well with both many NT texts as well as the Justin

⁷² Ibid., 12.

⁷³ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁴ Corke-Webster tries to be careful here in not building an inviolable wall between sociology and religion as if they are unrelated. He acknowledges that "religious issues" (rather than religious identity) are necessarily part of communal "social intimacy". Ibid., 14. It's interesting that he doesn't expressly acknowledge the reverse, a la Paul's one body theology of 1 Cor. 12 that's taken up by Clement in *1 Clem.* 37.

example he cites. Also, he rightly restrains the urge to take a few examples and definitively extrapolate universally.⁷⁵

That said, he does, I fear, go farther than he ought in saying that competition with other teachers and associated threats to his own livelihood were Justin's primary motivation to call for imperial punishment of his supposed foes. This is not readily supported by the text; certainly not nearly as much as the issue of correct doctrine and conduct being Justin's preeminent concerns, and that he didn't want the 'true'⁷⁶ faith sullied in the eyes of Rome by imposters practicing a different religion under the guise of Christianity. While this feud could have been 'internal',⁷⁷ and while there also could have been personal motivations at work, such readings diminish the clear thrust of the early chapters of the *Apology* to beseech the Emperor to investigate what is true and judge accordingly, rather than judging on labels alone. In doing this, Corke-Webster's view of Roman persecution being rooted in personal or communal animus arguably overrides or steers away from the intensely religious wheat and chaff milieu of the *Apology*.⁷⁸

Nonetheless, believing he has established the normality of delation and its intra-tent dynamic as opposed to persecution being based on lethal squabbles over religious tensions between different communities, Corke-Webster turns to the Neronian pogrom and *1 Clement*. He takes up the Tacitus account discussed earlier. But he adopts a peculiar reading, dissenting from the idea that the Christians who gave up their kin did so unwillingly. Instead, he invokes an argument from silence⁷⁹ and suggests that because being an informant could entail immunity from prosecution as well as financial rewards,⁸⁰ the Christians in

⁷⁵ He limits his conclusion here as only demonstrating "the fundamental plausibility of the hypothesis." (Ibid., 17). But the restraint he shows here gives way to more speculative extrapolation elsewhere as we'll see.

⁷⁶ 'True' and 'truth', à la the Johannine corpus, are regular refrains throughout the *First Apology*.

⁷⁷ While this is a reasonable inference, it is indeed an inference. Justin doesn't name anyone in particular; he only lists a few characteristics of those he opposes and wants to separate himself and the true faith from. Unlike Paul's NT letters to his ecclesial audiences where opponents are discussed, it can hardly be assumed that the Roman Emperor would have a personal or detailed understanding of the 'who' to which Justin refers. If Justin had specific pedagogical competitors in mind as Corke-Webster thinks, he likely would have named them.

⁷⁸ Justin also tackles the 'atheist' charge against Christians. To me, his thorough treatment of the subject was not birthed by an intra-tent accusation, but rather was a view that had gained solid currency in the Roman social world and was being used against Christians. In my view, Paul's teaching on the State is very consistent with this (see also Jesus' direct and indirect statements on the Imperial Cult in Mk 10-12), which means this issue/tension had real staying power. This complicates Corke-Webster's view that persecution of Christians was not caught up in any rival inter-camp religious hostilities, either real or imagined.

⁷⁹ It's well established that arguments from silence are less powerful than appeals to direct evidence. But that doesn't render all arguments from silence valueless or without merit. In this case, however, Corke-Webster's appeal that when it comes to the Christians providing information under duress, "Tacitus does not say so, and the alternative is equally possible..." (Ibid., 26-27) is altogether unconvincing.

⁸⁰ And in the case of Antistius Sosianus, relief from exile, per Tacitus (*Annals*, XVI.14). It's curious that Corke-Webster doesn't cite this detailed episode of delation, perhaps because Tacitus elsewhere notes

this case snatched for personal gain, or perhaps retribution. In response, the context of the passage makes no indication of this.⁸¹ Tacitus was no friend of Christians. He appears to share the larger negative cultural sentiment towards Christians. If the Christian informers were pursuing their own spiteful or greedy self-interests by pointing fingers at other Christians, Tacitus would have gleefully pointed it out. As with Corke-Webster's take on Justin, the thrust of what is actually said in the text is obscured and even replaced with what isn't there. The idea that Christians provided information to the authorities under duress fits far better with the context Tacitus sets of an Emperor needing a scapegoat for a ruinous fire in which he himself was rumored to be involved. Applying maximum pressure on individuals that would not widely be defended to gain, through information, a pretext for a wider brutal distraction is the best reading of Tacitus by far.⁸²

Corke-Webster sees Tacitus as relevant to Peter and Paul's deaths because he locates their examples in *1 Clem.* 5 as well as the first few examples of chapter 6 with the Neronian pogrom. He asserts that these examples link "persecution to community fragmentation" and that ζήλος, φθόνος, and έρις are terms "describing internal community conflict rather than outsider hostility."⁸³ Corke-Webster believes *1 Clement* is about persecution being stirred up by internal division. He takes issue with the view that non-Christian Jews were the agitators in this situation, rightly noting that *1 Clement* does not evidence anti-Jewish sentiment. Thus, the friction in Corinth "cannot be characterized simplistically as a conflict between different religions."⁸⁴ The implication is that Peter and Paul's deaths in chapter 5 are an on-point warning against intra-Christian warring leading to Roman crackdowns (even though *1 Clement* doesn't evidence anti-Roman sentiment either, which is arguably a problem for Corke-Webster's reading).

In response, the attempt to link Tacitus with the jealousy motif of *1 Clem.* 5-6 requires a good bit of shoveling out the dirt that exists and replacing it with dirt from elsewhere. Nowhere does Tacitus characterize the Christians acting out of 'jealousy' or satisfying pre-existing grudges when they provided information to the Romans. In order to imply a link from Tacitus to the 'jealousy' motif in *1 Clem.*

that Sosianus was later expelled once again for having "broken" his exile and cites him as an 'informer' who used his "abilities, wrath and power...to evil ends" (*Hist.* IV.44). To me, this provides a more well-rounded picture of delation, showing that consequences could go both ways, thus potentially entailing a social regulatory function.

⁸¹ This is true not only of the arrested Christians informing on others, but also that they themselves might have been initially arrested due to the delation of others unmentioned.

⁸² I also think Tacitus doesn't comport well with Corke-Webster's larger contention that persecution was birthed from intra-tent strife and related delation. Tacitus' characterizing of Christianity as a mischievous evil superstition and that the multitudes who were executed were done so due to their 'hatred against mankind' reflect broader normalized social negativity toward Christians that embody a more aggressive rather than reactive posture.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

5-6 such that communal delation is the culprit, Corke-Webster has to appeal to other examples that aren't exactly contemporaneous in time or circumstance with the pogrom to create a plausibility structure that can't be proven to apply in this case. This can be a reasonable step, so long as it doesn't countervail the on-point accounts absent compelling evidence. But in my view, based in part on the above, Corke-Webster's proposal doesn't quite get there.

This view is aided by what appears to be Corke-Webster's handling of the sources. He states early on that the once accepted view that Christians were proactively persecuted due to negative views of Christianity by outsiders is what we tend to find in "*Christian* sources."⁸⁵ He surmises that it's irresponsible to assume the same mindset that these sources present when investigating the subject of Christian persecution, as doing so will result in one finding the very thing assumed. This tends to lead to a devaluing (or in the case of Justin, only a partial treatment) of these Christian sources in his investigation and leads to a very different result about the source of persecution (Christian in-fighting rather than Roman or Jewish hatred). He is correct that Christian sources present points of view that should not be above challenge. But all sources are like this, and he notably does not subject his favored sources to the same degree of criticism. Again, this is not automatically flawed. Some sources are better than others and can be relied upon more responsibly than others based on various authenticity criteria. But here, might Corke-Webster be favoring or disfavoring material based on how well it fits his construct?

This explains several unfortunate omissions that to some degree puncture his thesis. First, no responsible treatment of Christian persecution, and that of Peter and Paul in particular, can ignore the NT texts, particularly Acts. Corke-Webster's presentation has remarkably little to say about the repeated harassment (and worse) of Christians by external parties as recorded in Acts. Moreover, the NT contradicts the assertion that ζήλος should automatically be seen as having intra-tent connotations when persecution or conflict is the context. Acts 5 records the apostles being imprisoned due to the jealousy of the Sadducees with no reference to delation. Acts 13 and 17 record separate instances of jealousy fueling abusive treatment of Paul by the local religious leaders with only the latter containing delation overtones (17.6ff). Notably, in three separate places (Acts 22.3; Gal. 1.14; Phil. 3.6) Paul uses this word to describe his own misguided 'zeal' in his pre-Christian state, with his persecution of the church being the context in each case. In none of them is Christian in-fighting being depicted.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid., 10. Emphasis is Corke-Webster's.

⁸⁶ The historical reliability of Acts is beyond our scope. We'll simply note that a number of commentaries and studies published in recent decades have persuasively argued for the reliability of Acts, and even skeptical treatments are considerably less skeptical than the earlier Cadbury/Dibelius/Haenchen/Conzelmann era.

Now, Corke-Webster is quite correct that the dividing lines between ‘Christians’ and ‘Jews’ were not hard and fast in the first century,⁸⁷ and that care needs to be taken when tackling this subject given the social and cultural connections and associations that mutually existed.⁸⁸ But reducing persecution’s origins to expansive intra-tent dynamics and related delation blurs the issue completely if the NT has a say. Given Clement’s clear knowledge of at least some NT books and related traditions, a thoughtful treatment of Clement’s known or likely sources certainly seems germane to a responsible interpretation of *1 Clement*.⁸⁹ Corke-Webster does draw attention to Clement’s clear reference to 1 Cor. 1.12 to argue that internal factionalism is the issue at hand. But he then cites Paul’s admonition against appealing to secular courts to resolve communal disagreements in 1 Cor. 6 to argue that Clement was concerned about the peril of Christians involving the Romans in their disputes. The problem is that Clement himself never cites this section of 1 Corinthians, despite his obvious knowledge and use of the epistle. This raises questions about how sure we can be of Corke-Webster’s contention that Clement had Roman persecution and possible delation in mind when composing *1 Clement*.⁹⁰ This is obviously relevant to how one should interpret what Clement says about Peter and Paul, and his purpose in doing so.

Summary:

All three scholars surveyed here have shed important insights into the possible nature of Peter and Paul’s deaths and how *1 Clement* fits into this picture. They attempt to locate and interpret *1 Clement* within what they believe to be larger cultural and political realities of the Roman social world to better fill out the incomplete picture Clement provides. Eastman’s emphasis on Aristotelian notions of special favor provoking familial jealousy, and Corke-Webster’s emphasis on delation are distinctive attributes that could be relevant to the topic. But as even they acknowledge, their detective work cannot be said to have solved with firm precision the facts surrounding Peter and Paul’s death.

I’ll conclude with a final observation. I agree with Cullmann and secondarily with Eastman that the *1 Clem.* 5 treatment of Peter and Paul needs to be seen within a larger context that extends from chapters 3-6. We’ve already pointed out that the various examples Clement lists in chapters 4-6 don’t lend themselves to the

⁸⁷ One top-level example of this is the multiple speeches in Acts referring to Jews, Men of Israel, as ‘brothers’.

⁸⁸ The amount of literature devoted to the ‘parting of the ways’ between Christians and Jews, Christianity and Judaism, is immense, with major scholars occupying varying places along this full spectrum of scholarship.

⁸⁹ The standard treatment here is Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 1973). Hagner is bullish on Clement’s use of the NT. Others such as Gregory, Barrett and Lindemann are more minimalist, but still recognize Clement’s familiarity with underlying traditions reflected in several NT writings.

⁹⁰ As we’ve seen, Lindemann certainly doesn’t see it that way, and I also have my doubts.

uniform interpretation of brotherly/familial strife that Cullmann in particular tries to impose on the text. But perhaps most telling is that all three scholars fail to interact with the last two (or three) examples of the pericope, located in *1 Clem.* 6.3-4. Cullmann dismissed them as extraneous examples only included by Clement to achieve a balanced literary structure. Eastman and Corke-Webster ignore them entirely.

What are these examples? The first is marital estrangement (v3), while the next two are the overthrowing of great cities and the uprooting of great nations (v4), all due to 'jealousy'. These examples are more general (in my view, more sweeping) in scope than the prior examples in which specific people/populations/events are the focus. In my view, the inclusion of such examples complicate the attempt to affix a uniform tactical purpose equally to all the examples. While 'jealousy' is a common theme throughout, thus justifying treating chapters 3-6 as a self-contained pericope, it does not appear that 'jealousy' always refers to brotherly or familial jealousy, nor consistently contains delation overtones. Certainly, these last examples do not. It is, therefore, not surprising that these examples would be ignored or discarded in attempting to find a common intra-text theme which leads to the view that Christians had a hand in Peter and Paul's deaths. But what's needed is a different interpretive grid that does justice to the entire pericope, rather than the picking and choosing we've too often seen in this study. Part 2 of this study will present my attempt at a different and hopefully better approach.

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