



St. Clement of Alexandria: Selected Works

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St. Clement was an early Greek theologian and head of the catechetical school of Alexandria. Athens is given as the starting-point of his journeyings, and was probably his birthplace. He became a convert to the Faith and travelled from place to place in search of higher instruction, attaching himself successively to different masters: to a Greek of Ionia, to another of Magna Graecia, to a third of Coele-Syria, after all of whom he addressed himself in turn to an Egyptian, an Assyrian, and a converted Palestinian Jew. At last he met Pantæus in Alexandria, and in his teaching "found rest". The place itself was well chosen. It was natural that Christian speculation should have a home at Alexandria. This great city was at the time a centre of culture as well as of trade. A great university had grown up under the long-continued patronage of the State. The intellectual temper was broad and tolerant, as became a city where so many races mingled. The philosophers were critics or eclectics, and Plato was the most favoured of the old masters. Neo-Platonism, the philosophy of the new pagan renaissance, had a prophet at Alexandria in the person of Ammonius Saccas. The Jews, too, who were there in very large numbers breathed its liberal atmosphere, and had assimilated secular culture. They there formed the most enlightened colony of the Dispersion. Having lost the use of Hebrew, they found it necessary to translate the Scriptures into the more familiar Greek. Philo, their foremost thinker, became a sort of Jewish Plato. Alexandria was, in addition, one of the chief seats of that peculiar mixed pagan and Christian speculation known as Gnosticism. Basilides and Valentinus taught there. It is no matter of surprise, therefore, to find some of the Christians affected in turn by the scientific spirit. At an uncertain date, in the latter half of the second century, "a school of oral instruction" was founded. Lectures were given to which pagan hearers were admitted, and advanced teaching to Christians separately. It was an official institution of the Church. Pantæus is the earliest teacher whose name has been preserved. Clement first assisted and then succeeded Pantæus in the direction of the school, about A.D. 190. He was already known as a Christian writer before the days of Pope Victor (188-199).

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