

# EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL OF THE FIRST LETTER OF CLEMENT ROMAN TO THE CORINTHIANS: FORMATION BY EXAMPLE

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes formation by example in Clement Romano's First Letter to the Corinthians, focusing on the formative response to the problems of the Corinthian community, especially deviations from Christian behavior and practices. The objective is to examine the formation through the example proposed by Clement Romano. The methodology involves analysis of the Clementine document, considered as a primary source, based on the authors Daniel Ruiz Bueno (2002), Juan José Ayán Calvo (1994), Philipp Vielhauer (2005), Johannes Quasten (1991), and José Joaquim Pereira Melo (2012; 2019). The investigations discuss positive and negative examples in the letter. Clement Romano's educational proposal aims to respond to the conflicts and problems of the Christian community of Corinth.

**Keywords:** Christian education. Early Christianity. Clement Romano. Training by example.

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# **INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

For this study, the *First Letter* of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians was examined. Clement of Rome (35-99) is recognized in the Christian tradition as the third successor of the Apostle Peter in the Roman See. Clement Romano's writing, in his letter addressed to the community of Corinth, demonstrates knowledge of Jewish culture and classical culture, used in his correspondence.

The text of Clement Romanus' First Letter to the Corinthians, written by Clement Romano, examined as a primary source, was originally written in Greek in the middle of the first century. The version used is the one translated by Ivo Storniolo Euclides M. Balancin, for Paulus, 1995 edition. For clarification purposes, the source will be identified throughout this study as *I Letter* of Clement Romanus or *I Letter*.

The research problem focuses on the formative response offered by Clement Romanus to the problems faced by the Corinthian community, especially with regard to deviations from Christian behavior and practices. The investigation carried out focused on formation through the examples exhorted by Clement Romanus in his letter. The main objective of this research is to analyze the formation by example proposed by Clement Romanus in the elaboration of a formative suggestion for the Christian individual of Corinth.

Christianity is based on preaching in the name of love, with God as the figure of greatest benevolence, since "he did not spare his own Son" (BIBLE, 2015, Romans, 8,32). Clement Romanus exhorts the faithful to unconditional and altruistic love, so that, through earthly attitudes, they may approach the divine goodness and conquer heavenly citizenship. These formative exhortations, which were intended to mold the early Christian individual, have been perpetuated over the centuries.

Bishop Clemente Romano advanced in didactics for the Christian formation of children, young people and faithful adults, following the Christian leaders who preceded him, such as prophets of the Old Testament and disciples such as Paul of Tarsus, whose Christian teachings will be mentioned in the course of this research.

Clement Romano's writing, even if addressed to the community of Corinth, proved to be relevant for the entire early Christian community, maintaining it as a pedagogical reference in later centuries.

The investigations on the primary source in question recognize its relevance to the training process and discuss the formation through the positive and negative examples present in the letter.



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The records in the context of classical antiquity end up being limited to the educators of the faith with the largest number of productions, with Paul of Tarsus being the main example. Clementine contributions have as recognition of authentic production only the *First Letter* of Clement Romano. Thus, the investigative research, files and readings focus on the scholars already mentioned above and others, in this section, as secondary sources.

Thus, we list that, regardless of the historical time to be studied, it is evident to consider that the records are part of the social transformations that must be contemplated considering the concrete social, political, economic and cultural relations of that period.

Corinth was a community located in the capital of the province of Achaea, located approximately fifty kilometers from Athens, under the power of the Roman Empire. It was a port city with considerable mercantile flow, where the population maintained social, economic and cultural relations with foreigners and among themselves.

In this scenario, it is considered that education materially represents the ideas of formation of the ideal human being of a certain historical period.

In this production, the period of primitive Christianity is considered as a historical delimitation for analysis, since it is in this period that the production of the *First* Letter of Clement Romanus to the Corinthians occurs.

Historically, society is transformed by human work, which demonstrates these transformations through institutional representations, according to the interests of each era. With this, Clemente Romano and his manifestations established themselves in a perennial way and collaborated in the construction of the educational process, reverberating even in school institutions.

# **CLEMENT ROMAN**

Clement Romanus (?-102) was the third bishop of Rome, after Peter, Linus (10-76), and Anacletus (25-88). This section presents succinct information about the author and his influences. Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202) confirms Clement as the third successor of Peter in the See of Rome and recognizes his role as bishop.

The blessed apostles who founded and built up the Church handed over episcopal government to Linus, the Linus whom Paul recalls in the letter to Timothy. Lino was succeeded by Anacleto. After him, in the third place, after the apostles, the episcopate fell to Clement, who had seen the apostles themselves and had been in relationship with them, who still kept alive in his ears their preaching and before his eyes the tradition (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies III*, 3, 3).



The Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (265-369), in his work *Ecclesiastical History*, highlighted Clement Romanus as an important contributor to the Christian formative proposals in the early church.

Since it is impossible for us to enumerate by name all those who in the first generation of the apostles were pastors and even evangelists in the churches of the whole world, it is natural that we should mention by their names and in writing only those whose tradition is preserved to this day thanks to their memories of apostolic doctrine. There can be no doubt, therefore, that such are Ignatius, in his letters whose list we have given, and Clement in the letter admitted by all, which he wrote in the name of the church of Rome to that of Corinth (EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Hist. Ecl. III*, 37.4; 38.1).

Although the *First Letter* does not mention Clemente Romano as the author, since antiquity there has been consensus on his authorship (PEREIRA MELO, 2012). Two ancient witnesses of this information are presented here: Dionysius and Hegesippus. During the papacy of Anicetus (155-166), Hegesippus passed through Corinth and recorded this passage by mentioning Clement Romanus' Letter to the Corinthians. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, reported that the First Letter of Clement Romano, following custom, continued to be read to the faithful (FRANGIOTTO, 1995, p.15).

One of the *objectives of the First Letter* of Clement Romanus was to reaffirm the instructions and exhortations made forty years earlier by Paul of Tarsus. The reality of Corinth had specificities highlighted by Paul of Tarsus in his epistles. For example, the new Christian community was beginning its journey along with the expansion of the port city of Corinth.

The historical moment when the *First Letter* was written occurs during the full development of the Roman Empire. In this context, the Roman Empire supported the socioeconomic and political bases of its time and allowed the encounter and development of various forms of religiosity, including the beginning of Christianity. The origin of the Christian religion is linked to the history of the Roman Empire, recognized as one of the largest territorial and political organizations in the history of humanity.

The world, constituted by the Roman Empire, was difficult for the majority of the population, which contributed to the dissemination and acceptance of Christian thought. "Early Christianity was born in this atmosphere and among people predisposed to accept the supernatural." (ENGELS, 1969, p. 23).



In the letters, the community of Corinth received instructions on living as Christians in a city that evolved from huts to stone houses, paved squares and temples (GRIMAL, 2003, p.30). Corinth became a city with diverse social relations and knowledge.

The letter that traveled from community to community, from country to country, was first and foremost a bond between scattered brothers, always committed to unity. They wrote, consulted and helped each other. Travelers were often bearers of a message from the community of origin. The churches wrote to each other; the bishops, in particular, maintained a correspondence among themselves and with the communities that was expanding (HAMMAN, 1995, p.37).

According to Pereira Melo's (2012) interpretation, one of Clemente Romano's concerns was to emphasize the importance of ecclesiastical organization and, in a subtle way, the authority of the Church of Rome (PEREIRA MELO, 2012, p.183). Even if, in that context, Rome was not yet considered the exclusive center of the Christian faith.

The language and the breadth of the argument show that Rome could not claim any authority in relation to other communities, but it cannot be denied that the *First Charter* is a document of the will and capacity of the Roman community (PEREIRA MELO, 2012, p.183).

Historically, early Christianity in Corinth had a wealthy minority and a poor majority, mirroring the city. Responding to the needs of the time required social change by offering an attractive but unattainable future in earthly life. The search for heavenly citizenship helped to maintain the way of life.

The *First Letter* brings Christian precepts from the Apostolic Period, where welcome was natural for those renewed by the Good News of Christ. This practice was based on the greatest commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39) and encouraged in the communities.

Intended for a community with internal conflicts due to disputes between different social and age sectors, the intervention of the bishop of Rome was necessary. The *First Charter* was organized to deal with these examples and issues.

# **FORMATION BY EXAMPLE**

Formation by example has been present in the history of Christianity since its origins. Christians, at first, seem to have no pretensions to elaborate a theory, but a practical rule of life. According to Coelho (2016), since the origins of their history, citizens have sought to



clothe their formative values with practical contents, not appealing to abstract knowledge devoid of immediate applicability in the social reality to which they were inserted.

In the context of this study, the *First Letter* is extensive and full of teachings that have been read to the community of Corinth and, subsequently, in the various churches and Christian communities throughout the ages due to its content. The relevance that the content of the *First Letter* of Clement Roman brought to Christians stands out in the fact that, despite being dense, it has become a constant teaching in Christian communities.

The pedagogical content of the *First Letter* is presented beyond the examples illustrated since the objective was to exhort good Christian morals, having said that,

It is possible that the relevance of the letter was associated with its formative content, since it dictates behaviors, appropriate to the Christian man, according to the understanding of Clement Romanus. The letter contains precepts already known to Christians, such as love, union, and hierarchy experienced in Christian community organizations. Exhortations on the aforementioned precepts contributed to the conceptualization of the Christian man's ideology (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p.32).

We cannot forget that a small group of young people acted in an undignified way, according to the position of Clement Romano, and removed the presbyters: "unworthy of Christian conduct to hear that the firm and ancient Church of Corinth, because of one or two people, is in revolt against its presbyters" (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.48).

The Corinthians should be reminded of the correct Christian actions and, therefore, the figure of Christ was reintroduced to them as the main model. Clemente Romano reaffirms the actions of Christ, using the concepts listed in the *First Letter*: he exhorts the faithful about the benevolent man who will inherit the kingdom of heaven and the constant human effort in search of heavenly citizenship, as the only way to bring the Christian closer to divinity (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p.47).

Clemente Romano used examples in the *First Letter* as a pedagogical resource. Positive examples are role models, while negative ones should be avoided. This educational process is based on cultural practices that express traditions (COELHO, 2016, p.109), helping Christians to maintain firmness in the faith and Christian experience.

In this sense, the invitation is in charge of the choices of actions presented: choose the positive example and remain in the faith or repeat the mistakes and suffer the consequences, presented through the negative examples. Respect for Christian principles would therefore be the correct choice, according to Clemente Romano (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p.51).



When Clement was faced with resistance to the hierarchies, he made the intervention as a way to prevent the expansion of this small rebellion and presented his dissatisfaction with these discords, without opening up to ambiguous interpretations: "Dear, it is shameful, very shameful and unworthy of Christian conduct to hear that the firm and ancient Church of Corinth, because of one or two people, is in revolt against its presbyters" (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.38).

He resumed the importance of tradition by reminding us that the ancient and famous community must pay attention to behaviors that please "those who created them" (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.21). Otherwise, he could suffer, since "envy and discord ruined great cities, and destroyed great nations" (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.27).

As a way to solve the conflict, the community was exhorted: "[...] repent of your iniquity ... Let us prostrate ourselves and convert to his piety, abandoning vanity, discord and envy, which lead to death" (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.29). She was also instructed in the possibility of regrets for attitudes that displease.

Noah, known in Christian tradition for building an ark to house animals before the flooding of the Earth, and Jonah, who disobeyed God, braved a storm and was swallowed by a whale until he repented and fulfilled the divine will. These figures appeal to the values they represent.

Citing the example of Noah and Jonah's repentance, Clement Romanus evoked the possibility of redemption for Christians. In this way, the examples allude to the action expected by Christians who commit sins and, specifically, it would be the first action to be carried out by young dissidents (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p.52).

Clemente Romano, in his letter, consolidated this model of formation and refers to tradition again: he brings to light models such as Abraham (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.22) - a character from the Christian tradition who accepted God's call, left his family to seek Canaan, the promised land - Aaron (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.36) - a character from the Christian tradition sent by God to find his brother, Moses, and assist in the liberation of the slaves from Egypt - and Moses (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.40) - a character of the Christian tradition known for the pilgrimage of Egyptian slaves to Canaan. They illustrate the positive examples, in addition to reiterating the relevance of respect and the rewards that await those who fulfill the duties of a Christian subject.

The path to heavenly citizenship is therefore presented and is in communion with the church and with other Christians. In this way, Clemente Romano acted in the sense of elaborating a Christian profile, which was manifested in his pedagogy of



example. Overcoming obstacles is presented by reinforcing positive examples and condemning negative ones (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p.54).

While the positive formative examples led the Christian people to heavenly citizenship, the completely harmonious citizenship after life, the negative formative examples presented the moments when the Christian was removed from the heavenly reward of eternal life at the side of Jesus Christ.

In this sense, Clement Romanus insists on the recognition of sin and, to the sinner, he recommends repentance in order to keep the community united. To this end, he evoked Christ as the model of a good example (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p.55).

Clemente Romano lists as negative examples "the ignorant, the foolish, the foolish and the coarse" (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.23) using the Corinthians themselves as a negative example. It also uses figures considered historical for Christians, such as Lot's wife: a character from the Christian tradition known for doubting God's orders and being transformed into a pillar of salt. "In the writing, purposeful for the formation of Christian conscience, the community of Corinth is taught to distinguish between right and wrong through examples" (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p.56).

Therefore, brethren, let us be humble, putting aside all feelings of boasting, vanity, folly, and anger, and let us do what is written. [...] Let us remember, above all, the words of the Lord Jesus, when he taught us about benevolence and patience. Thus he said: "Be merciful, that you may be treated with mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven you; as you act, they will also act with you; as you give, so will they also give you; as you judge, so will they judge you; as you treat with kindness, so they will also treat you; the measure you use is the same as the one they will use for you (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.24).

# Therefore,

The conflict generated had to be overcome just as the adversities were overcome by other characters already known to Christians. To exemplify, the paraded figures are used not only for their acts, but also to elucidate what consequences they suffered (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p. 56)

Other figures are listed bringing examples of sacrifice in the name of faith. These characters come into focus by clarifying that among the positive and negative examples, it is the positive ones that Clement Roman instructs the faithful to follow.

It is better to be in conflict with ignorant men, lacking in common sense, proud and boastful in their arrogant speeches, than to be in conflict with God (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.39).



According to Clement Romanus, the root of the sins of the Corinthian community has a name: envy. In this regard, Leite (2012) identified it as *zēlos*. Leite (2012), when recording some of the rhetorical figures used by Clemente Romano, pointed out that one of them is the "anaphora": 'exaggerated repetition of the same word as in the case of chapter 4, 8-13 where the word *zēlos appears six times* – 16 times between 4 and 6. Thus, by reproducing this term so many times, Clemente Romano identifies and leaves in the community's sight what must be fought immediately (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p.58)

Clement Romanus evokes, on this term, Cain and Abel: Cain/Abel "[...] You see, brothers, that jealousy and envy produced fratricide<sup>5</sup>" (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.26). Esau and his brother, Jacob's father: Jacob's father "[...] Because of envy, our father Jacob fled from the presence of his brother Esau" (CLEMENTE ROMANO, 1995, p.26).

The First Letter of Clement Romanus, full of obvious negative examples, presents different panoramas where sin occurs, thus presenting various ways to avoid it, as well as justifying why this should be done. With this, Clemente Romano reaffirms his methodology and judges it as sufficient for the reestablishment of harmony in the community (RODRIGUES, Amanda Silva, 2021, p.60)

Clement Romanus suggests following positive examples for members of the Christian life, highlighting obedience, benevolence, and discipline as essential. He believes that these principles, grounded in divine faith, are crucial to keeping the community together. These values must form the profile of the Christian man idealized by Clement Romano.

Nothing but obedience, benevolence, discipline in his acts for the collective good, believing in divine power and maintaining community life made up the Christian man intended by Clement Romanus.

#### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study analyzed the *First Letter* of Clement Roman to the Corinthians under the focus of the examples presented by the author throughout the writing of the extensive letter addressed to the Christians of the community located in Corinth, port city, capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

The letter is addressed to the bishop of Rome of that period, Clement Romano. The author presented, in the course of his writing, approximately forty examples of lawsuits,

<sup>5</sup> Fratricide: 1 Crime of one who kills a sister or brother. 2 War between peoples of the same race or of the same blood. (MICHAELIS, 2021)



judged between positive or negative. These examples were analyzed according to a specific methodology to obtain analyses on the Clementine document.

The negative examples condemned by Clement Romanus elucidated attitudes that occurred among the Corinthians, with envy being the main condemned sin. Such behavior led to the deposition of the elders and opened up the disobedience of the rioters against the will of God. These examples were described along with their consequences, in order to rescue the discipline of the community and solve issues that hurt the correct Christian action. Disobedience and disunity were objectively condemned to remind us that such actions are contrary to Christian teachings.

Among the positive examples, Clemente Romano highlighted the relevance of the obedient, giving, benevolent and humble role of the figures described. These examples are suggested for imitation. In addition to Jesus Christ, the faithful were also exhorted to imitate the attitudes of the figures who won the recognition of God.

The analyses sought to answer what formative response Clement Roman offered to the problems faced by the community of Corinth, especially regarding deviations from Christian behavior and practices. The research indicated that the formative response offered by Clemente Romano consists of imitating positive examples in search of divine approval and community well-being, simultaneously condemning negative examples. It is observed that Clement Romanus established a counterpoint between actions that were well regarded in the eyes of God and those condemned.

It is concluded that the author, in a didactic way, presented figures from the Christian tradition and their attitudes; He then explained the consequences suffered by the condemned acts – in the case of negative examples – or the divine recognitions – in the case of positive examples. In this way, he guided on what actions should be carried out by the members of the community: inspired by positive examples and Jesus Christ.

Clemente Romano's editorial office, by parading figures who represented the Christian action expected with fear of God, sought to convince the community. The turmoil that occurred in Corinth led the then bishop of Rome to resume order, respect and Christian harmony in the famous community. To this end, the exhortation was not limited to the figure of Christ, the perfect model of imitation.

The author of *the First Letter* used earthly figures close to the members; he recalled prophets, figures and passages from the Old Testament; he presented Jesus Christ as the consolidator of Christian unity; in addition to describing the results of wrong actions. The



community's conviction was exhorted as the only solution, which could not be postponed and without the need for further reinforcement.

Clement Romano, in drafting the lengthy *First Letter*, made sure that reading full of rhetorical arguments was sufficient to cease the conflict, ensure the well-being of the community and avoid similar situations in the future. It is also observed that the author guides the faithful on which examples to imitate, in addition to Jesus Christ, and which to strongly condemn. In this action, Clemente Romano calls on the entire community to contribute to the maintenance of obedience, respect for the leaders sworn in and the rescue of community unity.

By analyzing the formation by example proposed by Clement Romanus, the elaboration of a formative suggestion for the Christian individual of Corinth is identified. The community had already received guidance from Paul of Tarsus, and in this regard, Clement Romanus took the opportunity to exhort a community aware of Christian precepts.

Remembering the teachings proved to be a viable alternative for reestablishing order. The formative suggestion adopted by Clement Romanus were the examples known to the community, already instructed, but forgotten by the disobedient young people. In drafting a letter to the entire community, it is understood that Clement Romanus does not only hold dissenters accountable, but also the small actions performed individually that undermine community harmony. In this scenario, envy and disobedience must be fought by each person to establish an unshakable order.

It is concluded that the formation by example in *the First Letter* of Clement Romanus, analyzed as an educational proposal to the Corinthians, occurred through the identification of attitudes of disobedience and envy. These actions were condemned with the presentation of negative examples of similar attitudes, promoted by well-known figures, and their consequences. The positive examples were exhorted in order to reproduce the attitudes described about well-known figures who, by remaining firm in faith, obedience and humility, could serve as an example with the greatest model to be imitated: Jesus Christ.

The relevance of the work lies in the essentiality of the positive and negative examples present in the letter for the effective formation of Christians in the community of Corinth. These examples are the main educational tool because it demarcated what should be avoided and what should be imitated. Therefore, the formation by example proposed by Clementine pedagogy is one of the broadest and most complete of the first century and, therefore, recognized by the Christian tradition to the present day.



It is also considered that the representation of positive and negative examples is a strategy based on the concreteness of life. For that historical moment, describing and presenting the positive actions corresponding to the ideal of the Christian man was the educational proposal adopted by Clement Romano.

Clemente Romano's didactic proposal went beyond the limits of Corinth by listing what he recognized as a profile of a citizen and not just a Christian. In this way, he presents to the citizens of Corinth that the Christian profile is not dissociated from the social profile. This realization recognizes the difficulties of Christian life in an important city for that moment.

Finally, it is understood that the Clementine educational proposal is the result of numerous determinations of its historical context, expressing an educational project that, for Clement of Rome, would be sufficient to respond to the main conflicts and problems of the Christian community of Corinth. Therefore, it became elementary for that moment.



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