The Corinthian church after the time of the Apostle Paul had, for a period, been an exemplary church. Her faith had been firm, her conduct praiseworthy, and her administration in good order. An unhappy turn of event, however, took place when a few young rebel leaders led a revolt against the established authority during which certain presbyters of blameless lives were deposed. The situation occasioned the despatch of a letter from the church of Rome, written by Clement, presumably the church’s foreign secretary. The whole purpose of the epistle was to call for a return to order. The theme of peace and concord occurs throughout I Clement as the epistle is now known, alternating with illustrations drawn from Old Testament and apostolic times as well as from human and natural phenomena. In all these, Clement warns his readers against the evil of strife and discord, and appeals for every virtue that would promote the cause of unity and harmony.

Clement first points to the Corinthians’ attention the order manifested in the natural world. “Let us look stedfastly at the Father and Creator of the whole universe,” he says, and enumerates the heavens and the seas, the elements and the seasons, things terrestrial and celestial, as proceeding along “their appointed courses”, “according to his will”, always “in concord and peace”. Clement’s intention is to show from the...
examples that the established order in nature serves as an ideal pattern of God's perfect rule, a model for the church to emulate. Every natural phenomenon operates just as God commands it. It follows then that every deviation from the appointed course or order – and it is as true in the church as it is in the natural world – is a violation of God's command and constitutes an act of disobedience to his will.

Clement's argument from the natural order has been considered clear evidence of pagan, especially Stoic, influence upon the epistle. The assertion is that in 20, Clement leaves the familiar sphere of Scripture and wanders off into pagan and Stoic territories. R.M. Grant detects a departure of interest from that of the earlier New Testament writers. Discussing the relation between early Christianity and natural science, he claims that initially the apocalyptic message left the early Christians little interest in the natural world the destruction of which was frightfully imminent. Only when they became gradually aware that this was not so that they began to make an effort to study and understand the natural world. However, it should be noted that Clement's interest is hardly a scientific one; he merely uses the examples from nature as rhetorical helps to his theme. Grant acknowledges this fact and in doing so, weakens his own thesis that Clement represents a departure of interest of the early Christians into natural science.

Impressive parallels between I Clement and Stoic literature have also been unearthed. W.C. van Unnik feels that while there are admittedly similarities between the epistle and certain Stoic arguments, there is nevertheless “a marked difference”. To the Stoic, order seems more or less to be established in itself and leads man to think of an organising force behind it. Therefore, the Stoic concludes, it is from nature that the divine force may be known. In I Clement, however, the order mentioned

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6 E.g. by A. von Harnack, L. Sanders and R. Knopf.
7 *Miracle and Natural Law* (Amsterdam 1952) 93f.
9 Grant points to a “feeble beginning” in two apostolic fathers, viz., Clement of Rome and Barnabas. He sees the mention of “the ocean ... and the worlds beyond it” (I Clement 20,8) as stemming from a treatise by Posidonius entitled *On the Ocean* where a similar idea occurs. The concept of worlds beyond the ocean was common in the first century, and it may be found also in Strabo, Seneca the Elder and the Younger and Pseudo-Aristotle's *De Mundo*. *Ibid.*, 94.
11 Linguistically, for example, both Clement and Stoic writers have a common favourite root ταυ-, and words derived e.g. διατευγή, τεταμένος, ἐπιτεταμένος.