

General Introduction to the Commentaries

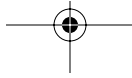
ON ROASTING OLD CHESTNUTS: THE ISSUE OF EPISTOLARY PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

The issue of pseudepigrapha within the canon of Scripture is a critical one from an exegetical, theological and hermeneutical point of view. Do we really have documents in the New Testament that are falsely attributed to one apostolic figure or another? If we do, what does it say about their authority? Are there deception or truth-claim issues involved? Too often, New Testament scholars either dodge these issues or assume that there really is no problem one way or another. Since several of the documents within the present three-volume series are often assumed to be pseudepigraphal, it is necessary at the outset to deal with this issue in some depth.

Preliminary Considerations

What difference does it make whether some of these documents are pseudepigraphal or not? As it turns out, the answer is: a great deal in several ways. As David A. deSilva rightly notes, the issue of pseudepigraphy makes an enormous difference in the way one reconstructs the history of early Christianity and the development of its theological and ethical thinking.

For example, if the epistles known as James and Jude come from the 40s or 50s A.D. and are responding to issues that existed then, possibly including matters arising from the Pauline communities about faith and works, then we have a window into some of the differences in the earliest forms of the Christian faith and in the views of its leading figures. If, on the other hand, these documents are pseudepigrapha from the 80s or 90s, at least James should perhaps be seen as a Jewish Christian document reacting to, rather than being in dialogue with, the Pauline legacy. Again, if the Pastoral Epistles are not authored by Paul, then we cannot conclude that Paul himself chose to structure his communities as he





was about to die, in the way we see ecclesiology expressed in these letters. These are but two examples, but it should be clear that the authenticity question matters in terms of history, theology, ecclesiology and ethics, to mention but a few relevant topics.¹

It is important to stress at the outset that one needs to evaluate the question of pseudepigraphy on a genre-by-genre basis. It is clear that there were pseudepigraphal apocalyptic works both in early Judaism (e.g., portions of the *Enoch* corpus) and in early Christianity (e.g., the *Apocalypse of Peter*). Indeed, one could even argue that pseudepigraphy was a regular feature of the apocalyptic genre of literature.

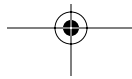
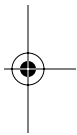
One cannot, however, demonstrate that about ancient ad hoc letters. By “ad hoc,” I mean situation-specific letters written to a particular audience. Although one could make a case for circulated letters of a very general sort accommodating or comports with the practice of writing pseudepigraphal letters, it certainly is more difficult to make such a case for a particularistic letter.

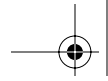
Elsewhere I have given reasons why I think that a convincing case for the pseudepigraphy of 2 Thessalonians or Ephesians or Colossians cannot be made, though the strongest case has been made for Ephesians, precisely because it is likely to be a circulated document and more of a homily than a letter.² My concern is not to rehearse those arguments here, but rather simply to alert the reader that it is not just the documents in the present three-volume series that are discussed when New Testament pseudepigraphy is the subject of conversation. All the documents must be examined on a case-by-case basis. In this commentary we must ask, Do we have pseudepigrapha amongst the Pastoral Epistles or the General Epistles? We may also want to ask, When we are addressing such questions, does it make a difference if a document is a homily rather than a letter?

The truth is, the more that one studies this issue, the more complex it becomes. For example, what counts as authorship? Could a document that contained a source document from a famous person (perhaps at the beginning of a composite document) be attributed to that person? The answer to this question is yes. In fact, we see this in two very different sorts of documents in the New Testament. In 2 Peter we clearly have a composite document, borrowing much

¹See the helpful discussion in David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2004), pp. 685-89.

²See on 2 Thessalonians, Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), introduction; Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letters to Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming), introduction.





of Jude, but also using a Petrine source in its first chapter.³ We also see this phenomenon in the Gospel of Matthew, which uses a special Matthean source, which, I would argue, goes back to the apostle Matthew.⁴ Second Peter is a composite discourse of sorts and falls within the parameters of this study. This reminds us that we must not import into this discussion various modern notions of authorship and intellectual property. The issue is the scope or the flexibility in ancient conceptions of authorship and intellectual property. Were there in fact ancient notions of intellectual property and plagiarism?

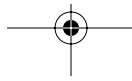
Let us consider briefly another issue that possibly affects this matter. We know that Paul used secretaries, as Romans 16:22 makes evident, and in addition he tells us at the end of Galatians and 2 Thessalonians that he is taking up the pen, which means that he actually wrote or penned only a minority of the words in some of his genuine letters. This raises the pertinent question of whether he might have done something other than just dictate to a secretary. Might he have had a secretary compose a draft to which he then would make alterations? Might he, with plans to revise or correct later, have allowed scribes considerable latitude in composing? Multiple stages of composition are not all that likely, for three reasons: (1) Paul was a man on the move, and so often he was in a hurry; (2) often he had to respond quickly to urgent and emergent circumstances, and his letters bear the mark of this in various places; (3) writing materials were expensive, and paying a scribe was very expensive; and there are enough infelicities and gaps in the genuine Pauline letters to suggest that these documents were never revised, and thus that often they bear the marks of initial dictation. Incomplete sentences are a dead giveaway.⁵

What is more plausible is that Paul, if he was *in extremis*, might well convey his thoughts orally to a trusted colleague or coworker who would then write them down and send them off for Paul. This seems certainly to have been within the parameters of ancient views of genuine authorship rather than pseudepigraphy. We do not in fact find this happening in letters such as Philemon or Philippians, where Paul is still able to dictate letters to those present and send them off while he is under house arrest.

³In the second volume of the present series I will discuss at some length the relationship between Jude and 2 Peter. At this juncture the reader may consult Ben Witherington III, "A Petrine Source in 2 Peter," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1985 Seminar Papers*, ed. K. H. Richards (Atlanta: Scholars Press), 187-92.

⁴See Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SHBC 19 (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), introduction.

⁵One should, however, consider the careful study by E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition, and Collection* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2004).





The Pastoral Epistles are perhaps a somewhat different story. One could argue that if Paul was under duress and not far from the time of execution, he would have had neither the leisure nor setting wherein he would likely be able to dictate letters, nor would many people have free access to the man. Perhaps only one trusted friend or colleague who could bring food and convey messages orally (and later write them down) could come to him at a time if he were under close supervision in the Campus Martius, the military camp on the edge of Rome. This *might* be the case with 2 Timothy, and if so, we might well expect its style to be rather different from the earlier Paulines. However, this does not explain why *all* the Pastoral Epistles manifest a rather uniform style that in some respects distinguishes them from the earlier Pauline letters. Furthermore, it does not explain at all the character of 1 Timothy and Titus, both of which were written while Paul was apparently still a free man and not in Rome. We must look elsewhere for answers to these sorts of questions.

In my judgment, the real dividing line between a genuine letter and a pseudepigraphon is whether the material comes from the mind of a particular person, *not* whether it fully reflects that person's grammar and syntax and vocabulary. To this I would add that a genuine letter comes not only from the mind, but also from the hand, of the author, or is inscribed upon the author's request or behalf.⁶ This seems to have been well within the scope of ancient views of what counted as authorship. I will say more about the Pastoral Epistles in this regard shortly.⁷

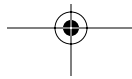
***Epistolary Pseudepigrapha and Intellectual Property in Antiquity:
Framing the Discussion***

At this juncture we must consider the issue of epistolary pseudepigrapha in antiquity and the whole question of intellectual property. This must include a discussion of how the early church fathers in the second and third centuries viewed this issue of authorship and intellectual property, and the ethics of pseudepigraphy. We may assume that their views would not have differed radically from Christians in the first century, though that may be debated. We will tackle these issues together.

First we may ask, Were there epistolary pseudepigrapha in early Judaism and early Christianity of the first two centuries A.D.? The answer to this question is surely yes. We have documents such as *4 Ezra* from the Jewish side, and the

⁶I owe this helpful supplemental point to my friend Dr. Jan van der Watt.

⁷The issue of pseudepigraphy does not arise for the other set of documents in this particular volume—the Johannine Epistles—for the very good reason that they are formally anonymous, attributed to one called either the Old Man or the Elder, depending on what one makes of *ho presbyteros* in 2-3 John.





Epistle to the Laodiceans from the Christian side, though the latter surely is a second-century document created on the basis of the hint in Colossians 4:16 that there was such a letter.⁸ These examples make clear that such documents existed. Neither of these *documents* ended up either in the Jewish or the later Christian canon, so we may wish to ask why they were excluded or, better said, not considered for inclusion in those canons.⁹ In any case, we cannot deny that there were at least a few such documents in play in the New Testament era or a little after it in the relevant religious communities.

This fact raises the important issue of whether such pseudepigraphal documents prompted any ethical questions for early Jews or early Christians, or rather was the creation of such documents simply accepted as part of the literary conventions of the time. We are plagued in part with inconsistent definitions of what might amount to a pseudonymous document within the scholarly community, and so answers to the ethical question have often varied.

Richard Bauckham attempts a taxonomy of such documents, dividing them into various categories. He immediately precludes documents that would have been written within the lifetime of an apostolic figure, but not by him. Bauckham concludes that it is highly unlikely that any such documents exist in the New Testament.¹⁰

Bauckham helps us in various ways to see how difficult it would have been to pass off a pseudonymous letter that was situation specific. For one thing, as he says, not only does the “I” in a pseudonymous letter not refer to the named author, but also the “you” does not likely refer to the named audience, not least because that named audience would likely recognize the document as a forgery!¹¹ He concludes, “But in no indubitably pseudepigraphal letter known to me are the supposed addressees and the real readers identical.”¹² The actual author can only address the actual audience under a literary fiction that involves not only his, but also the audience’s, real identity.

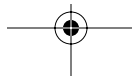
⁸Sometimes the *Epistle of Barnabas* is singled out as a pseudepigraphal letter, but actually it is a treatise, not a letter, as David E. Aune points out in “Barnabas, Letter of,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), pp. 71-73. It is a polemical Christian document from sometime after A.D. 70, probably as late as the first quarter of the second century.

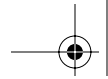
⁹*Fourth Ezra* is probably from the late first century A.D., but the Old Testament canon, it would appear, was not really closed until about that time, so *4 Ezra* could have been included under the third section of that canon, the Writings. See Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

¹⁰Richard Bauckham, “Pseudo-Apostolic Letters,” *JBL* 107 (1988): 469-94; see esp. p. 475.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 475.

¹²*Ibid.*





There is, then, the issue of distance in time and space as well. For a pseudonymous document to work effectively, it needs to be written in the name of a famous enough person at a great enough remove from its putative author and audience that its authority and authenticity would be less likely to be challenged. This presents a serious problem for claims about New Testament letters, all of which, with the possible exception of 2 Peter, were written before the end of the first century A.D., which is to say before the apostolic eyewitnesses or those who had contact with the eyewitnesses had all died off.

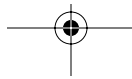
For the sake of clarity, by the term “pseudonymous,” I am not referring to anonymous documents such as Hebrews, nor am I referring to composite documents that have at least some source material by the author whose name is appended to the document. Here we are helped by the more precise definition offered by I. Howard Marshall: “A text is pseudonymous when it is not by the person whose name it bears in the sense that it is written after his death by another person or during his life by another person who was not in some way commissioned to do so.”¹³

We may further refine this discussion by pointing out, as David Meade has done, that we probably should distinguish between pseudonyms that are fictitious and those that are borrowed from real human beings.¹⁴ We may also wish to bracket out the use of actual names of ancient or legendary worthies (e.g., Abraham, Isaac), as no one in the first century would have been deceived into thinking that such figures were still composing documents during the canonizing era. The issue has to do with the use of real names of contemporary or near contemporary persons who were known religious authority figures in that era. The motive for pseudonymity would in fact vary from genre to genre, because, for example, in a pseudonymous apocalypse what is going on is the attempt to pass off history writing as prophecy retrojected into the mouth of a renowned ancient religious figure. The issue of prophecy does not necessarily arise in this way with pseudonymous letters.

Another point is in order at this juncture. It could be argued that the canonical documents given the names “James” and “Jude” are not pseudonymous because even though they are not written by the actual brothers of Jesus, they

¹³I. Howard Marshall, “The Problem of Non-Apostolic Authorship of the Pastoral Epistles” (paper presented at Tyndale Fellowship, Cambridge, 1985), 1.

¹⁴David G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Early Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). This study can profitably be compared and contrasted with Terry L. Wilder, *Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and Deception: An Inquiry into Intention and Reception* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2004). A more extensive bibliography is found below in the present volume.





nonetheless are written by some other unknown early Christian figures who really had those names. This theory is quite problematic precisely because these are documents that both present themselves as being written by Jesus' actual brothers and certainly viewed as such in subsequent centuries by Christians. Indeed, they would not likely have been included in the canon had they not been viewed in that light. So, it is doubtful that the issue of these documents and pseudonymity can be resolved with that artful dodge.

There is another consideration from an ancient educational standpoint. There was a rhetorical exercise called "impersonation" (*prosopopoeia*). This exercise was even taken on by schoolboys, where they would try to write a speech as if they were a famous person speaking—Caesar or Alexander, for instance. This rhetorical technique is in fact found in the New Testament in Romans 7:7-13 when Paul speaks in the first person as Adam, a figure introduced in Romans 5.¹⁵ However, this rhetorical exercise was limited in scope, and to my knowledge it involved only speeches or discourses, not the composition of written documents, particularly letters, using a famous person's name. In addition, in the use of this rhetorical device there was no attempt to deceive or to use someone else's authority to achieve some nefarious aim in these rhetorical exercises. It was also always a famous person from the past who was to be impersonated.

Our concern is with documents that could actually be called forgeries because there was at least some attempt to deceive some audience, near or far.¹⁶ Deceit is deceit, whether it is for political or financial or personal or spiritual gain. The issue is whether we have documents in the New Testament purporting to be by one person, a famous person, but really by another who has not been authorized by the famous person to write. It is interesting that it was not until 1792 that an English scholar, Edward Evanson, first suggested there might be pseudepigrapha in the New Testament.¹⁷ Prior to that time, this was not an issue of real debate in the church when it came to canonical books.

Nondeceptive Pseudepigrapha? Views in the Early Church

Scholars in the modern era have often suggested that although there are definitely pseudepigrapha in the New Testament, there is in them no attempt to deceive. It has also sometimes been added by such scholars that the writers were writing in the spirit, or as part of the legacy or school, of Paul or Peter or James, or even that

¹⁵See Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

¹⁶See Wilder, *Pseudonymity*, p. 3.

¹⁷In a work titled *The Dissonance of the Four Generally Received Evangelists, and the Evidence of Their Respective Authenticity Examined* (see Wilder, *Pseudonymity*, p. 4).





they were pneumatic persons who could speak for others or in others' names.

On the surface of things, it is historically plausible that something like the school idea could have happened. We have, for example, the case of Pythagoras. Iamblicus tells us that his disciples wrote in his name, since they attributed to him all that they had learned (*Vit. Pyth.* 158, 198). Although it certainly is conceivable that this practice could have happened with disciples of Paul or Peter or James, on closer inspection there is a problem with this sort of reasoning. The disciples of Pythagoras were not writing situation-specific or ad hoc documents to some particular audience using their master's name. They were writing philosophical treatises—a very different matter.

If we consider, for example, 2 Timothy or Titus, these letters contain so many personal details and appear to be addressing a particular historical situation that it is hard to avoid the conclusion, if they are pseudepigraphal, that there is an intent to deceive the audience, trying to make it appear as if they are by Paul's own hand, not merely written in the spirit of Paul.¹⁸ We also have no sound historical evidence that Paul or Peter or James ever had "schools" in the sense that we may talk about Greco-Roman schools where people were trained to speak and write like famous persons. Discipling certainly went on; the sources are quite silent as to whether apostolic coworkers or disciples of apostles were trained to imitate *the writings* of their apostolic figures.

Furthermore, it is perfectly clear that nonapostles, or those who were not even eyewitnesses of much of what they wrote, such as Luke or Mark, felt free to write in their *own* names, and their works were included in the canon under their own names. We also have anonymous New Testament documents that were deemed to have integrity and authority and were included in the canon (e.g., Hebrews, 2-3 John).¹⁹ We also have composite documents like 2 Peter, which do have a link with the reputed author. These things are all demonstrable, and they make it un-

¹⁸See Lewis R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles*, HUT 22 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), pp. 24-55; deSilva, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 686-87.

¹⁹Here we must reject Kurt Aland's attempt to lump together anonymous and pseudonymous documents, "The Problem of Anonymity and Pseudonymity in Christian Literature of the First Two Centuries," *JTS* 12 (1961): 39-49. Anonymous documents do not appear to be part of an attempt to deceive anyone about their provenance. For a pseudonymous document to be successful, to be believed and to have its intended effect of being a word of its reputed author, it must successfully deceive its intended audience. Otherwise, it was seen as disreputable or of lesser value, as the older study by Frederik Emanuel Torm on Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian literature showed (*Die Psychologie der Pseudonymität im Hinblick auf die Literatur des Urchristentums*, Studien der Luther-Akademie 2 [Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1932]). Torm is helpful and correct about the psychological dynamics involved. He rightly points out that in antiquity the defense of "rhetorical impersonation" is never used to justify creating such a doc-





likely that there would have been a felt need for pseudepigraphy in the New Testament era, *unless* someone really did have the desire to deceive and felt a lack of authority to speak in his or her own voice or anonymously.

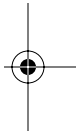
There are further problems with facile reasoning that pseudepigraphy would not have been a problem in the first-century church. Sometimes this reasoning takes the form that we find in James Dunn's work, in which he argues that since pseudepigrapha were not a problem for early non-Christian Jews, they would not have been a problem for early Christian Jews. Dunn of course points to writings such as *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* or the *Letter of Aristeas*.²⁰ The problem with these examples, as E. Earle Ellis has shown, is that *1 Enoch* is an apocalyptic work attributed to an ancient legendary figure, which means that it is of a very different ilk than ad hoc letters, and *4 Ezra* likewise is a document attributed to an ancient figure. The *Letter of Aristeas*, though called a letter by Josephus (*Ant.* 12.100), is clearly some kind of treatise, like those produced by the students of Pythagoras, and so it does not demonstrate acceptable pseudepigrapha in early Judaism. Furthermore, these documents were not included in the Hebrew canon, which was fully formed by the end of the first century A.D. or the early second century A.D.²¹

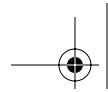
ument. Still helpful also is the older discussion by Donald Guthrie in his *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990), pp. 1011-28.

Equally unconvincing is Aland's argument that if someone was speaking in the Spirit, it did not matter who that person claimed to be, or who others later claimed that person to be, as long as the voice was from God. There were, no doubt, oracles of the risen Lord spoken, for example, in Revelation through John of Patmos. But they are presented as exactly that, oracles of the risen Lord spoken by John, not words of the historical Jesus during his ministry. In other words, one should not claim that the pneumatic nature of early Christianity led to a blurring of the concern about who said what and when, and then extend that reasoning to provide a justification or explanation for pseudepigrapha. Even more amazingly improbable is the argument of K. Koch that Paul in heaven was speaking through his disciples in the pseudepigrapha ("Pseudonymous Writing," in *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith Crim [Nashville: Abingdon, 1976], p. 713).

²⁰See J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1977); *The Living Word* (London: SCM Press, 1987), pp. 83-84.

²¹In fact, it should be noted that letters in general are not included in the Old Testament canon at all as discrete documents, though of course there are some letters within Old Testament documents, particularly within historical documents such as 2 Chronicles. All of the Jewish pseudepigrapha that Richard Bauckham discusses as discrete documents are extracanonical, which is interesting indeed (see Bauckham, "Pseudo-Apostolic Letters," pp. 478-87). The *Baruch* correspondence and the Epistle of Jeremiah and the Epistle of Enoch (*1 En.* 91-107) do not help us much, and we may in fact think that there were good reasons why such documents were omitted from the Old Testament canon. Bauckham can point within the canon to 2 Chronicles 21:12-15 and Daniel 4 as examples of probable pseudepigraphal letters, but even this can be debated. The fact is that the Old Testament canon provides very little evidence of relevance, very little precedent for this phenomena being seen as acceptable as part of some sacred text by early Jews.





It thus is hard to see how these examples support the notion that Jews or Jewish Christians would not have had problems with an epistolary pseudepigraphon, especially if it claimed to be by a near contemporary or apostolic figure.²² As Richard Bauckham himself says in evaluating the possibility of a document such as James or Ephesians or 1 Peter (which are circular documents) being a pseudepigraphon, “the more exegesis tends toward envisaging a specific situation as addressed in these letters, the less likely pseudepigrapha becomes.”²³ We may add also that the closer the documents were written to the time of their putative author, the less likely they could pass as genuine. As we will see, all of the New Testament documents that we are analyzing herein are in varying degrees situation specific, with the possible exception of 2 Peter. The other documents that we will be dealing with are not just offering vague generalities, nor are they general paraenetic treatises.

Bauckham makes the helpful point that only 2 Peter among the New Testament letters contains indications that it is addressing its immediate *and* a later audience (see 2 Pet 1:12-15, especially v. 15).²⁴ This suggests that it has a broader intended scope than ad hoc letters. In fact, it appears to be the only New Testament document that is not really situation specific. It could, then, be a pseudepigraphon, but only if it does not contain a Petrine source, which it certainly appears to do, just as it contains source material from Jude and elsewhere, but I will say more about this in due course.

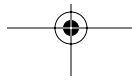
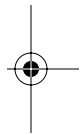
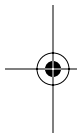
It is also not cogent to argue, as Dunn does, that on this matter we may distinguish the attitude of Jewish Christians in the first century A.D. from that of Gentile Christians in the second century A.D. We have no historical basis for such a distinction that suggests that pseudepigrapha were fine by early Jewish Christians in the first century, but not for later Gentile Christians. It is of course true that there were *additional* reasons to object to pseudepigrapha in the second-century church and later, but that is another matter.

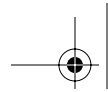
There are indeed clear objections by second- and third-century Christians to such a practice. For example, the Muratorian Canon, perhaps our earliest canon list (other than that of Marcion), makes note of the *Epistle to the Laodiceans* and the *Epistle to the Alexandrians* as “forged in Paul’s name” by Marcion’s supporters. Two other classic examples are the supposed correspondence between

²²See E. Earle Ellis, “Pseudonymity and Canonicity of New Testament Documents,” in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige, JSNTSup 87 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), pp. 212-24.

²³Bauckham, “Pseudo-Apostolic Letters,” p. 488.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 489.





Jesus and King Abgar and between Paul and Seneca.²⁵ There was a document called *3 Corinthians*, composed by a bishop (!) in the second century, who said that he did it out of admiration for Paul. But when this author confessed to being the originator of this document, Tertullian says that he lost his ecclesiastical position (*Bapt.* 17).

Some of these later documents did take the form of letters, so again we certainly cannot deny there were pseudepigraphical letters in early Christianity. But also we cannot deny that there were perceived to be real problems with such documents. One can also point to Tertullian's judgment, in the very same document cited above, of the Asiatic presbyter who composed the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (= *Acts Paul 3*). The man was brought to trial and defrocked for the composition of this document, and Tertullian says that this is exactly what should have happened with a forger. One can also point to the famous story of Bishop Serapion of Antioch, who around A.D. 200 first approved the reading of the *Gospel of Peter* in Rhossus in Syria, but when he read the book and realized that it was being used to support the docetic heresy, he found some parts of the book to be unorthodox and therefore a forgery (see Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6.12, 3-6).

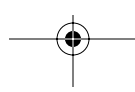
If we go even further into church history, we can cite the example of Salvian, a priest in Marseilles, who is called on the carpet by his bishop for forging a document in the name of Timothy around A.D. 440. Or again, there is Jerome, who actually catalogued types of pseudepigrapha, dividing them into forgeries and falsely attributed works. He listed various criteria for discerning forgeries: (1) Could homonyms be the cause of the false attribution? (2) Is the book in question inferior in subject matter or content to other works by the same author? (3) When was the work written in comparison to when the putative author lived? (4) Do statements in the book contradict or conflict with the undeniably authentic documents by this person? (5) Is the style of the work appropriate to its language, author and time of composition?²⁶ There are a variety of such stories that may be cited from early church history.²⁷

One then can understand the argument that Dunn has made, that these sorts of judgments happened because by the second century and later there were heretics afoot in the church, and this prompted a heightened concern about which documents were authentic and which were not. But I would point out

²⁵At least Seneca lived during the time of Paul and in a city that Paul likely visited!

²⁶See Karl K. Hulley, "Principles of Textual Criticism Known to St. Jerome," *HSCP* 55 (1944): 104-9.

²⁷Salvian offered in his defense the claim of modesty: he was avoiding pretense or an honor claim for himself. See Bruce M. Metzger, "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," *JBL* 91 (1972): 8-9.





that this concern about forgeries and also about false teaching did not arise for the first time in the second-century church. In fact, we definitely see this concern already in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, where Paul takes the trouble to sign his documents to guarantee that they are from him (see Gal 6:11; 2 Thess 3:17; 1 Cor 16:21).

Forgery and Intellectual Property in the Greco-Roman World

Forgery certainly was an issue in the first century A.D., and not just within the confines of the church. In a classic study, Bruce Metzger, followed now by Terry Wilder, showed that there was definitely a concept of intellectual property in the ancient Greco-Roman world, and it was seen as a scurrilous practice to put words into someone else's mouth to damage them, or even to secure greater credence and authority for one's own ideas (the latter being more to the point for our interests).²⁸

First, Metzger is able to show that ancient authors had a serious concern about the production of forgeries using their names. For this reason, Galen, for example, even wrote a book entitled *On His Own Books* to let people know which works were genuine and which were not.²⁹ In this book he both listed and described his original works to avoid pseudepigrapha being pawned off as his own work.³⁰ Of course, this story also shows that forgeries were not uncommon, but the important point is that Galen objected to such practices and did not see it as a harmless literary convention that everyone accepted. Second, Metzger points out "that persons in antiquity were aware of the concepts of forgery and plagiarism is plain from the existence of a wide range of words used to describe and condemn such practices e.g., κίβδηλευεῖν, νοθεύειν, παραχαράττειν, πλαττειν, ῥαδιουργεῖν. . . . That scholars in antiquity were able to detect forgeries, using in general the same kinds of tests as are employed by modern critics is also well attested."³¹

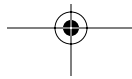
Furthermore, there were specific literary practices that ancient writers used within their documents to protect their intellectual property from being co-opted, added to, or subtracted from. Terry Wilder puts it this way: "A writer could protect his work by: (1) pronouncing a curse in the document to warn others against altering it [see Rev 22:18-19]; (2) binding the authorial attribution

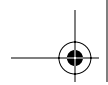
²⁸Cf. Metzger, "Literary Forgeries," pp. 3-24; Wilder, *Pseudonymity*, pp. 35-73.

²⁹Metzger, "Literary Forgeries," p. 6.

³⁰See Wilder, *Pseudonymity*, pp. 42-44.

³¹Metzger, "Literary Forgeries," pp. 12-13. We must give up the myth that ancient persons were incapable of using critical judgment in such matters. That is a modern prejudice too widely held.





with the text by means of a seal or an acrostic; (3) making known the document's size by citing the exact number of lines/stichoi in it [see, e.g., the very end of Josephus's *Antiquities*]; (4) informing others of what the work contained in chronological order; or (5) using trusted friends to circulate his writings before they could be altered or distorted."³² All of these practices were known and used in the first century A.D., and we find some of them in use in the New Testament. Another practice used for such authentication was to inscribe a personal signature, as Paul did, which was not in fact a regular practice in ancient letter writing in the Greco-Roman era.

Furthermore, we find evidence that when falsification was discovered to have happened, there were moves to correct the problem. The example of Diogenes Laertius may be cited. Diogenes tells us that Athenodorus, the librarian of Pergamon, was caught having falsified some existing Stoic works (7.34). Once discovered, the falsified material was eliminated, and the original writings restored to their original form. Another good example is the lament of Quintilian that only one of his famous rhetorical court speeches was properly published (*emiseram*). He goes on to complain that although many speeches circulated under his name, they had few words in them that were actually his (*Inst.* 7.2.24).

In a detailed study, Wolfgang Speyer³³ points out that there was already in the sixth century B.C. in Greece a concept of intellectual property. For example, Herodotus, the father of Greek historiography, questions whether Homer authored the Cyprian poems (*Hist.* 2.116-117). Aristotle doubted that Orpheus authored the Orphic poems (*De an.* 1.5). Furthermore, there seems to have been a growing awareness and concern about this problem as we progress toward and into the first century A.D. Diogenes Laertius speaks of how Xenophon tried, to no avail, to claim that the published works of Thucydides were his own (*Lives* 2.57). We regularly find critical and discerning comments about the issue of authorship in Greco-Roman writers. Cicero comments that he doubts that the *Sibylline Oracles* are authentic or inspired (*Div.* 2.85, 110-112). The Roman historian Suetonius argues that some works attributed to Horace likely were spurious, due to their style (*Vit. Hor.* 3). Suetonius even says that Augustus himself condemned those who wrote under another person's name (*Aug.* 55). He adds a story involving the Emperor Claudius about a man found guilty of forgery. Claudius had the forger's hands cut off once he was convicted of the crime (*Claud.*

³²Wilder, *Pseudonymity*, p. 42.

³³Wolfgang Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung*, HA 1/2 (Munich: Beck, 1971).





15). Such examples could be multiplied,³⁴ but these are quite sufficient to make the point.

Frederik Emanuel Torm was right when he concluded, “The view that religious circles of Greco-Roman antiquity ‘understood pseudonymity as a literary form and straightway recognized its rightness’ is a modern invention.”³⁵ Pseudonymity was not seen as an acceptable literary practice; rather, it was seen as a serious literary problem in the Greco-Roman world, and it could even incur criminal penalties. Christian reactions to forgery in the second and third centuries as cited above were not atypical of the entire early Christian period. This of course does not mean that modern conceptions of copyright law applied in antiquity, but a strong case can be made that there was a clear understanding of intellectual property and personal integrity when it came to claiming authorship of some document. Plagiarism was recognized as a real problem, not an approved literary device.

And So?

Some New Testament scholars have frankly recognized this problem and have drawn the logical consequence for how one would have to view documents such as the Pastoral Epistles if indeed they are pseudepigrapha. Lewis Donelson puts it this way: “In the interest of deception [the author of the Pastoral Epistles] fabricated all the personal notes, all the . . . commonplaces in the letters . . . and any device that . . . might seem necessary to accomplish his deception.”³⁶ This, it seems to me, is the honest and inevitable conclusion that follows once one realizes that there was no accepted ancient literary convention that involved epistolary pseudepigrapha and if one concludes that the Pastorals, or other New Testament documents, for that matter, are pseudepigraphal.

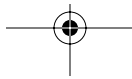
Ellis goes on to show at length how one has to conclude that if documents such as the Pastoral Epistles and 1-2 Peter are pseudepigrapha, then these documents surely did intend to deceive the audience about this matter, for they exorcise all guile, hypocrisy and deceit while at the same time practicing it in literary form.³⁷ Ellis is particularly concerned about apostolic pseudepigrapha (i.e., using the names of Paul, Peter, James, Jude). He concludes, “The role of the apostle in the earliest church, the evidence for literary fraud in Greco-Roman antiquity, and the New Testament letters themselves combine to show that apostolic pseudepigrapha were a tainted enterprise from the start. At no point in

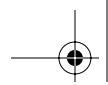
³⁴See Wilder, *Pseudonymity*, pp. 45-46.

³⁵Torm, *Psychologie der Pseudonymität*, p. 19.

³⁶Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument*, pp. 24, 55.

³⁷See Ellis, “Pseudonymity and Canonicity,” pp. 220-23.





the church's early history could they avoid the odor of forgery. Only when the deception was successful were they accepted for reading in the church, and when they were found out, they were excluded."³⁸

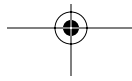
One must then ask how in the world this might comport with one further factor: early Christians writers such as Paul believed that both orally and in writing they were speaking the word of God, a truthful word, not merely the words of human beings. This is already evident in what is generally recognized as Paul's earliest letter. He says, "And we thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thess 2:13). The word of God was spoken and written by figures such as Paul, and this is how they viewed their communications. The documents attest to a concern for truthfulness in all things, especially since the word of God was being communicated.

Finally, it is worth reiterating why successfully devising a pseudepigraphon would have been especially difficult. Carl Joachim Classen puts his finger on it: "Most poems, works of fiction, novels are written for the world at large for future generations; and this applies to historical accounts as well. Letters, on the other hand, are more immediately relevant, addressed to an individual or a specific group at a specific time in a particular situation, though there are, of course letters composed to be preserved and published and appreciated also later for their literary form or for their content."³⁹ Just so, and this remark sets up a series of questions that one needs to ask about the New Testament letters that we will be dealing with in the present volumes, but most of all it makes clear how difficult it would be to produce a successful pseudepigraphon—it would likely have to be situation and content specific, but for a situation and with a content that did not actually address the putative audience, but rather another and later one.

Here are the questions for our study: (1) Do the letters that we are examining appear to be situation specific? The answer to this question seems to be yes, with the exception of 2 Peter. (2) If they are not situation specific, do they show signs of addressing a broader audience over a longer period of time? Again, 2 Peter is the exception, as it seems to be such a document, but not the other letters. (3) Do these letters have literary pretensions? We must distinguish here between a facile use of literary and rhetorical devices and literary pretensions. We do find the former in some of our documents, but one would be hard

³⁸Ibid., pp. 223-24.

³⁹Carl Joachim Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament*, WUNT 128 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), p. 46.





pressed to argue that any of these documents, including 2 Peter, were deliberately written for the purpose of publication or later literary appreciation. We may question whether any of these documents would then have been viewed as valuable or of lasting merit if they are pseudepigraphal.

In light of all these considerations, what must we conclude? At the very least, we must reject the older paradigm of F. C. Baur and others that assumed the general acceptability of epistolary pseudepigrapha to early Jews and Christians because it was an acceptable literary genre or literary practice. There were various inhibiting factors to such letters being accepted either within or outside of the Jewish and Christian sectors of society. There was indeed a concept of intellectual property and also of plagiarism in the Greco-Roman world. Thus, although there may be pseudepigrapha within the New Testament, the burden of proof falls squarely on the shoulders of those who make that claim. In this study we will consider authorship of the letters case by case, or in some instances group by group (i.e., the Johannine Epistles).

THE QUESTION OF SERMONS AND HOMILIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Since the early church period, it has not been unusual to misclassify a document as a letter. Two good examples of this phenomenon will suffice. First, there is the document known as *2 Clement*, which, although called a letter by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.38), clearly gives evidence of being a sermon read aloud to a congregation (*2 Clem.* 15:2; 17:3; 19:1). Second, there is the book of Hebrews, which P^{46} , one of our earliest witnesses, positions between Romans and 1 Corinthians. In the uncials (A, B, C, H, I, K, L, P) it is placed after 2 Thessalonians but before the Pastoral Epistles. In both instances the handling of the document shows that it is viewed as a letter, indeed as some sort of Pauline letter in the case of Hebrews.⁴⁰

It is important as well to recognize that one could argue that rhetorical discourses, such as Paul's letters contain, which were orally delivered in worship services as part of those services, also served as sermons of a sort. In fact, almost the entire discussion of homilies in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* is taken up with the issue of the use of rhetoric in shaping early Christian proclamation.⁴¹ But what do we really know about ancient Jewish and Christian sermonizing? In fact, apart from what we find in the New Testament, we know very little about early Jewish sermonizing. But perhaps we are not looking in the right places or in the right ways.

⁴⁰On which, see Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, forthcoming).

⁴¹See J. Andrew Overman, "Homily Form (Christian and Early Hellenistic)," *ABD* 3:280-82.



**On Jewish Sermons**

We need to understand from the outset that ancient sermons may have looked quite different from modern ones. For example, ancient sermons were not necessarily expositions of a particular, or even of two or three, biblical texts. Of course, there was no New Testament when the writers were living, and thus for them the Old Testament was the sacred Scripture (see 2 Tim 3:16).

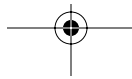
But even so, there were early Christian sermons based on a variety of resources. There were of course sermons based on Old Testament texts, but also sermons based on early Christian tradition, including the Jesus tradition, and sermons based on general biblical themes. Also there were rhetorical discourses using all kinds of resources. Expository preaching of the Bible was not the only thing going on in the first-century world of Jewish or Christian preaching. Where, then, should we begin to explore this matter?

Part of the problem in discussing this matter is that there is considerable debate about the existence of synagogues in the first century A.D., “synagogues” here meaning purpose-built Jewish religious buildings. This clouds the issue of what could have been going on in such places.⁴² Most scholars have concluded that there were in fact synagogues in the first century A.D., not merely because they are mentioned in the book of Acts, but because Josephus also mentions them (*J.W.* 2.285-291 [adjoining another plot of land in Caesarea Maritima; cf. *J.W.* 7.43-44, about one in Antioch]), and because of the inscriptional evidence (SEG 17, no. 16) from Berenice in Northern Africa, dated to A.D. 56, which speaks of the repair of a *synagōgē*—clearly not a reference to people! We may also point to the purpose-built structures at Masada, the Herodium, and at Gamala. We now have also the careful argument of Rainer Riesner that there is evidence in Jerusalem itself of the existence of synagogues in the New Testament era. We may also point in particular to the Theodotus inscription.⁴³ We may conclude, then, that there were such synagogue buildings. But what went on in them?

It seems clear that the synagogue was not yet the very formal institution that it was to become after A.D. 70. The very fact that Paul, as an unknown visiting speaker, could be repeatedly invited to speak in such places all over the eastern Roman Empire should tell us that early synagogues, at least in the Diaspora, did not have a fixed rotation of proclaimers.

⁴²On the debate about the existence of synagogues in the first century A.D., see Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 255-57.

⁴³Rainer Riesner, “Synagogues in Jerusalem,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, vol. 4 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 179-210.





The earliest clues that we have on synagogue worship come from Philo of Alexandria (*Leg.* 3.162-168; *Mut.* 253-263), and what he tells us indeed suggests a less formal institution that met sometimes in homes and sometimes in purpose-built buildings, and met for prayer and what we might call Bible and religious study—an early version of Hebrew school—and some form of worship on Shabbat (Friday evening). Later talmudic evidence about a lectionary cycle of readings, sometimes anachronistically projected back into the first century, probably is not that relevant. But what we can say is that there is clear evidence of the reading of Torah in the worship service and its exposition in some form.⁴⁴

We look to the brief synopsis offered in Luke 4:16-27, which may provide us with some clues. There we have reading of Scripture, exposition of a sort, and exhortation in reply to the response of the audience. There seems clearly enough to have been an interactive dimension to this experience. Questions could be put to the speaker, who would answer, perhaps after the initial exposition. We know that there were early rules of exegesis laid down by Hillel in the first century (the so-called Seven Rules). One would comment on a particular text and then relate it to other texts, sometimes in a sort of chain reference or catena-like citation (cf. Philo *Spec.* 2.62; *Prob.* 81-82).⁴⁵

On the Rhetoric of Jewish Christian Sermons

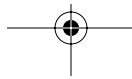
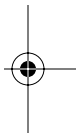
What comports with this picture is what we find recorded in Luke's synopses of synagogue sermons offered by early Christians such as Paul. We may compare, for example, Acts 13:15-41. Notice in verse 15 that there is an invitation to offer "a word of exhortation" (*logos paraklēseōs*), the very same phrase used to describe the highly Jewish and textually oriented discourse that we call Hebrews (Heb 13:22). This suggests that at least one form of synagogue homily involved *paraenesis* based on Scripture exposition. In other words, it had an ethical and practical aim; it was not just an expounding of interesting ideas. This is hardly surprising, since early Judaism was more focused on orthopraxy than on orthodoxy.⁴⁶

Lawrence Wills, in an important essay, has argued that this "word of exhortation" form of homily had three parts. First came the *exempla*, which was a reasoned exposition of the main thesis, usually with illustrations from one or more Scriptural text. This part laid out the facts, sometimes in narrative form, and illus-

⁴⁴See Lee I. Levine, "The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered," *JBL* 115 (1996): 431-32, 439-41.

⁴⁵See Peter H. Davids, "Homily, Ancient," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 515-18, esp. pp. 515-16.

⁴⁶Though it is clear enough from Saul of Tarsus's zealous activities against Jewish Christians that orthodoxy was of some concern as well (see Gal 1).





trated them. Second came the *conclusions* based on those facts laid out in the first part of the homily. This section was introduced by words such as *dio* (“therefore”) or *dia touto* (“through this” or “because of this”) or some other Greek particle or conjunction. Third came an *exhortation*, usually with imperatives.⁴⁷

It is argued that this three-part form can be seen in the following Jewish and Christian texts: Wisdom of Solomon 13-15; *Testament of Reuben* 5:1-5; *Testament of Levi* 2:6—3:8, *Testament of Benjamin* 2:5; 3:1; 6:6; 7:1; 8:1; Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 13:14-41; 20:17-35; 1 Corinthians 10:1-14; Hebrews 1:1—2:1; 1 Peter 1:3-11; *1 Clement* 6:1—7:2; 42:1—44:6; Ignatius, *Ephesians*; and the *Epistle of Barnabas*. Building on the work of Wills, and to some extent critiquing and refining it, C. Clifton Black noticed that in fact this threefold pattern is an ancient rhetorical pattern such that the first part of the homily corresponds with the rhetorical *narratio*, the second part corresponds with the proposition and the arguments based on the narration (*probatio*), and the final exhortation corresponds with the peroration. In fact, this form reflects a primitive sort of deliberative rhetoric whereby one is trying to modify the audience’s belief or behavior in some way in the near future.⁴⁸

This following of a rhetorical format in early Jewish and Christian preaching should in no way surprise us. It was part of the harvest of Hellenism even in Israel. The rhetorical handbooks or guidebooks to persuasive speaking in Greek had been in circulation from the fourth century B.C., and there can be no doubt that this heavily influenced even early Judaism. In fact, one may see the Qumran community as a reaction to the over-Hellenization of early Judaism in Jerusalem. But their protest did not stem the tide of Hellenization. The building program of Herod the Great was intent to turn Jerusalem into a cosmopolitan city influenced by Greek culture, as the building of the theater and the hippodrome right in the shadow of the temple makes evident. There was in fact a school of rhetoric right in Jerusalem during Paul’s day, and we need not doubt that it affected the preaching of those who spoke in synagogues where Greek was spoken, including in Jerusalem.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Lawrence Wills, “The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity,” *HTR* 77 (1984): 75-99.

⁴⁸See C. Clifton Black, “The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon: A Response to Lawrence Wills,” *HTR* 81 (1988): 1-18; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 406-7.

⁴⁹On this matter, see Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1998), pp. 90-98; Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 54-60. On the whole issue of Judaism and Hellenism, the classic study is Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, trans. John Bowden, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), to which one must add Hengel’s *The “Hellenization” of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989).





We must also reckon with the influence of Jewish schooling in a more general sense as well. Speaking of students at a sabbath school in Alexandria, Philo tells us that what was taught to these students: “They were trained in piety, holiness, justice, domestic and civic conduct, knowledge of what is truly good or evil, or indifferent, and how to choose what they should do and avoid the opposite, taking for their defining standards these three—love of God, love of virtue, love of people” (*Prob.* 83). This almost reads like a summary of many of the major topics discussed in these early Christian letters and homilies (see, e.g., 1 John), and we may be reasonably sure that these same sorts of topics of orthopraxy were regularly preached in the synagogues, as well as in early Christian house churches.

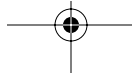
It is, then, insufficient to note that Luke presents his early Christian sermon summaries in rhetorical format in the book of Acts, as if this were something that Luke imposed on sermons that had no such format. It is more likely that his work reflects the earlier patterns that he had seen and heard in synagogues and elsewhere.⁵⁰ For example, the rhetorical form of Hebrews is now well established, though there is of course debate about the particulars.⁵¹ This is a profoundly Jewish Christian sermon in rhetorical format. As such, it fleshes out for us what such sermons could look like both in the synagogue and in the church, and this one is intended for Jewish Christians, so it gives us an even clearer picture of what sort of discourse was thought to be viable by and for Jews, including Jewish Christians.

It becomes clear, as we will see, that telling stories and drawing lessons from biblical material and early Christian experience, and even from personal stories, were often the basis of such preaching. The narration of salvation history, Christ’s story, personal history or some combination of these was the platform from which conclusions were drawn and exhortations made. As Larry W. Hurtado has recently rightly emphasized, it was the experience of God in the risen Christ in crisis events, in worship, in fellowship, that led to the expressions of faith and sermonizing that we find in the New Testament. The experiences led to the profound searching and researching of the Scriptures, now read through christocentric glasses, and what resulted were remarkable Christian prayers, hymns, sermons and a host of other things.⁵² These documents, which we will

⁵⁰See Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 39-51.

⁵¹On which, see Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, forthcoming).

⁵²Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).



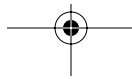
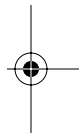


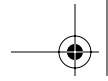
be examining, are part of the literary residue of such remarkable Christian experiences and reflections.

Of course, it is true that not all early Christian sermons followed a rhetorical pattern. One would be hard pressed to find such a pattern in some of the material that we will be studying in these volumes. What we can say at this juncture is that 1 John, James, Hebrews and probably Jude should be seen as homilies of one sort or another, with Hebrews most closely following rhetorical conventions. These documents have either no or very minimal epistolary elements, and they should never have been analyzed primarily as letters in the first place. On the other hand, we have the Pastoral Epistles (perhaps excepting 1 Timothy, which is more of an exhortation) and 2-3 John, which definitely can, and probably should, be analyzed primarily as letters. This is the sort of genre division that will guide our study in these volumes.

What is important to recognize about all these documents is that they are intended to be pastoral in character and are not, in any case, theological or ethical treatises. Their uses of Scriptures and other resources are primarily homiletical rather than exegetical in character, and what we actually find in these documents is not theology and ethics, but rather theologizing and ethicizing into specific situations, done in a manner meant to persuade. These documents are, by and large, words of exhortation, with ethics and practical matters to the fore, although theology is not neglected.

One might ask, What is the real importance of these documents, tucked away toward the back of the New Testament canon? We can answer that they are very important. They give us a window on early Christian life between the middle of the first century and the early second century. Indeed, they are some of the very few resources that directly deal with this largely hidden period of time. Acts, as we are well aware, stops its narrative in about A.D. 60-62 with Paul in Rome, and it is the only historical monograph that we have from and about the first-century church. The Gospels, though written later, provide no direct evidence, but only indirect evidence, of what Christian communities were like in the last third of the century. In this regard, the Gospels are unlike these sermons and letters, which do provide a more direct window into this important period as the apostles were dying off and the torch of Christian faith was being passed to another generation. Although the book of Revelation, especially chapters 1-3, does give us a glimpse of church life in the 90s in Asia, it is only a glimpse in passing, for John's focus is primarily on the future. There is much to be gained from close analysis of this material if we are to understand the end of the apostolic era and how the transition was made to a time when there would no longer be apostles. But there is another reason why this literature is crucial, and to that we now turn.





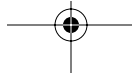
The Rhetoric of Christian Preaching

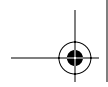
In her detailed lectures, Averil Cameron has shown that Christian discourse going all the way back to the first century A.D. and forward into the Middle Ages was one that was shaped by, and sought to shape, society. It was not shaped merely by and for its own conventicles and churches. Christianity was profoundly an evangelistic enterprise, so it is not a surprise that it would adopt and adapt the familiar and popular forms of speaking and writing of the day and use them to its own ends to convict, convince and convert many for Christ. Cameron aptly says,

Christianity was not just ritual. It placed an extraordinary premium on verbal formulation; speech constituted one of its basic metaphors, and it framed itself around written texts. Quite soon this very emphasis on the verbal formulation of the faith led to a self-imposed restriction—an attempt, eventually on the whole successful, to impose an authority of discourse. And eventually—though only after much struggle and with many variations—this approved discourse came to be the dominant one in the state. The story of the development of Christian discourse constitutes part of the political history. . . . Early Christian rhetoric was not always . . . the specialized discourse its own practitioners often claimed it to be. Consequently its reception was easier and wider ranging than modern historians allow, and its effect correspondingly more telling. The seemingly alternative rhetorics, the classical or the pagan and the Christian, were more nearly one than their respective practitioners, interested in scoring off of each other, would have us believe.⁵³

If we wish to understand early Christian preaching, then at least a good measure of our attention must be focused on various of these documents that we will examine in these volumes. Likewise, if we wish to understand pastoral advice and exhortation in an age when apostolic influence was waning or even (in the case of 2 Peter) perhaps over, we will do well to look closely at these documents. Furthermore, if we want to understand why it is that later great church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Melito of Sardis, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine and many others used rhetorical forms in their preaching and teaching, we will want to look closely at these documents, for it was both the wider culture and the original Christian source documents that draw on rhetorical forms and practices, which led to that sort of rhetorical sermonizing after the apostolic age. We even have a figure such as Lactantius (A.D. 250-300), who taught rhetoric prior to his conversion and continued to use it afterwards, gaining fame as the “Christian Cicero.” In short, I am

⁵³Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 19-20.





arguing that there is some real continuity between the way the early church sermonized and advised in the first century and the way the church continued to sermonize and advise, using rhetoric in various ways, well into the Middle Ages and beyond.

Of course, there were some such as Tertullian or Jerome, who, once heresy began to arise in a persistent way, raised questions about the use of rhetoric in early Christian discourse and acts of persuasion. Tertullian famously asked, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?" (*Praescr.* 7). Jerome asked, "What has Horace to do with the Psalms, Virgil with the Gospels, or Cicero with the Apostles?" (*Epist.* 22.29). Perhaps both men were feeling something of a guilty conscience, since both had used rhetoric in the service of the faith in the past!

The point that I wish to make, however, is that this tension is little in evidence in the first-century documents. Although Andrew Overman is right that "as early Christian preaching was more and more influenced by classical rhetoric and its techniques and conventions, certain Church Fathers began to feel a tension between rhetoric and Christian preaching,"⁵⁴ this tension is not really evident in the earliest period. Paul and the author of Hebrews especially were happy to use rhetoric as a means of shaping proclamation and acts of persuasion.

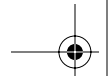
In short, we should not think that it was Christianity's adaptation to Greek philosophy and rhetoric in the second century and in following centuries that accounts entirely for what we find in prominent later proclaimers and pastors such as John Chrysostom and Augustine. The church began to go down this path already in the first century, especially in the person of Paul, and this means that there is a formal continuity of sorts between the earliest proclamation and the developing discourse of early Christianity. Recognizing this factor can help us better understand the development of early Christianity in the post-apostolic period.

But there are also some important social corollaries to what I am saying. Christian literature was far from simple or ordinary. For example, Christian letters often were far longer, more complex and more intellectually challenging than common letters of the era. This means in turn that at least the writing leadership of the early Christian movement was not merely literate, but in some cases rather well educated, especially in things like rhetoric, which was in fact a part of Greco-Roman education before one got to its highest levels.

The Christian movement was led by some who, at least educationally, were among the elite of society, for only 10 percent of the general populace was lit-

⁵⁴Overman, "Homily Form," p. 281.





erate to this degree or in this way. Although this Christian elite may have been small in number, they were huge in influence in their own day and later, for it is their documents that have been preserved in the canon of the New Testament. And if we read Paul's letters and Acts closely, we can see a regular pattern of some of the elite being converted, and then they use their homes and resources to provide a venue for Christianity to exist in a particular locale. This pattern seems to have continued in the second-century church and beyond that time.

The social and discursive situation had already been set in motion in the first century A.D., especially by the apostle to the Gentiles and his coworkers, for the future of the church was to largely be with Gentiles. And if we look for one reason why Christian proclaimers were having so much success, it is in part because, as Averil Cameron says, "certain elements in the body of discourse loosely called Christian in the first two centuries were in fact extremely well suited to the cultural conditions of the early Empire."⁵⁵ I and many others have been pointing out lately that Paul, for example, takes up the rhetoric of the imperial cult and simply transfers it and applies it to Jesus; but this is only one example of a sophisticated rhetorical move meant to persuade a largely Gentile audience about Jesus.⁵⁶ There were many such sophisticated intellectual and rhetorical moves used by early Christians to persuade a diverse Greco-Roman world, a world that had in common the Greek language, Greek culture and Greek rhetoric.

Christianity did not strive to be a reclusive cult; it wished to convert as much of the populace as possible. In that process it offered discourse that both insiders and outsiders could understand. More to the point of this study, since we are examining documents written exclusively to Christians, discourse was offered that those who used to be outsiders but were now insiders could grasp, appreciate and embrace. Since it is Paul who sets something of the paradigm for subsequent proclamation, discourse and letter writing (in this study we will see his mark in Hebrews, 1 Peter and James), it is well that we begin with those documents attributed to him at the end of his life: the Pastoral Epistles. To them we now turn.

⁵⁵Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 41.

⁵⁶See Witherington, *Thessalonians*.

