

PENRALLT BAPTIST CHURCH, BANGOR, NORTH WALES

NOTES FOR THEOLOGY STUDENTS THE PASTORAL EPISTLES.

The evening services in Penrallt are lighter and more devotional in content, and I usually skirt around any theological potholes in my way. But the Pastoral Epistles perhaps represent the greatest challenge in Scripture to Evangelical students (and their pastor). My canonical approach to Scripture sails me calmly through most Old Testament problems, but I struggle with the Pastoral Epistles and I am not alone. If you have collected a copy of these notes it is probable that you know the issues involved and that you want to know the answer to one question above all: who, do I believe, wrote the Pastoral Epistles? So I will answer that straight away. Paul. You can now plough through my reasoning or go straight to the conclusion.

Why is there a problem?

On the surface, there does not seem to be any doubt about who wrote the Pastoral Epistles. They affirm that they are from Paul, they are written to his known associates, and they mention more than a dozen other church leaders by name. They do not contain heretical ideas, and theologically they are broadly in line with the other Pauline epistles.

The early church does not seem to have questioned that they were written by Paul. Irenaeus (ca. 180) quoted them as Paul's letters. They were used by Polycarp (ca 135) in the same way he uses other Pauline letters:

"But troubles of every kind stem from the love of money. Therefore, since we know that we brought nothing into this world, and can carry nothing out, we must gird on the armour of integrity." - Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians* 4:1

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." (1 Timothy 6:10, 7 NIV)

Admittedly the epistles are missing from papyrus P46 and Codex Vaticanus (4th century). But we are not sure we have the whole of papyrus P46. Raymond F. Collins suggests "it may have been that the Pastoral Epistles circulated during the second century in a small codex containing Paul's personal letters to his co-workers Timothy, Titus and Philemon."ⁱ They are missing, too, from Marcion's canon, but the "critic with a pen-knife" always chopped huge chunks out of his Bible to suit his own purpose. Tertullian said that Marcion had rejected them because he disagreed with them. We have no reason to disbelieve Tertullian's knowledge of the facts. Later, Jerome commented that Tatian had accepted Titus not 1 and 2 Timothy. Fee comments that "by the end of the second century they are firmly fixed in every Christian canon in every part of the empire and are never doubted by anyone until the nineteenth century."ⁱⁱⁱ

But in the nineteenth century their authenticity was certainly questioned, firstly by F. C. Baur of Tubingen in 1835. Since then the conviction has grown to the point that very few New Testament theologians today hold to the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. After nineteen hundred years and in the face of the Early Church's approval it seems a very dramatic and dubious turnaround. I believe that the "evidence" on which it is based is flimsy. Let us take a brief look at it. As all these arguments are readily available in pretty much all the commentaries and introductions there is no need for me to go into detail.

1) Historical discrepancy: There was no opportunity for these events to have occurred in Paul's life as presented in Acts. Here, he appears to have evangelized Crete, then travelled to Ephesus where he left Timothy and passed on to Macedonia. He is now planning to overwinter in Nicopolis. By 2 Timothy he is in prison in Rome. This does not fit into his journeys as chronicled in Acts where there is no passage to Crete and no opportunity to leave Timothy in Ephesus.

2) Church Government: The church offices mentioned in these epistles are bishop, elder and deacon. They represent a later development of church government rather than a mid-first century one.

3) Vocabulary: This is one of the major arguments used today and goes back to Harrison in 1921.ⁱⁱⁱ Of the 848 words in these epistles, 306 do not appear in the other 10 letters. Only 542 are common to both. Characteristic words are absent from the Pastoral Epistles and the vocabulary is closer to that of the early church than Paul's. A lot of new

vocabulary appears: eusebeia (godliness) represents the Christian faith; epiphaneia instead of paraousia; sophron (sound-minded). All these are typical of the Hellenistic side of things. Much of Paul's vocabulary is missing: for example, dikaiosune (righteousness) is not used in its soteriological sense. We have to acknowledge the general truth of this argument and offer reasons for the differences (while pointing out that they are not as statistically convincing as they might first appear)

4) Doctrine: The strong trinitarian statements of Paul are absent, as are many of the strong statements concerning salvation, to be replaced by a new term "God our Saviour."

5) Ethics: The life-style of Christians in these Epistles is bourgeois. It is middle-class, respectable, conformist, i.e. later than Paul's day.

The above is a very brief, and in particular I have not done justice to points number 3 and 4.^{iv} I am sure that we must acknowledge that there are big differences in style and content between the Pastoral Epistles and the other Pauline epistles. We do need to offer some kind of explanation.

Answers to the Objections

1) It is certainly impossible to fit these journeys into the Luke-Acts account. The only reasonable solution I can see to the problem is to argue that Paul was released from prison in Rome after two years (as he hoped to be), resolved to travel east to revisit some of the churches rather than west as he had previously intended (Rom 15:23-29), was re-arrested and died in Nero's persecution of the church. This, in fact, is the version passed on by Eusebius (fourth century) who says that Paul was released after his two years in prison in Rome where Luke takes leave of him. Of course, it might just be Eusebius' own or someone else's reconstruction from the same texts as we have, but we cannot lightly dismiss it.

2. This seems to have fallen rather out of vogue at the moment and rightly so. The exchange between Ignatius and the Christians of Asia Minor show that patterns of church government differed widely from region to region. There is no reason at all to date those found in the Pastoral Epistles as "late". In fact, to me, they seem rather early and primitive compared to the mid-second century. Bishops and elders appear to be interchangeable terms, unlike later practice. Indeed, Donald Guthrie observes that overall, the qualities demanded of the bishops, elders and deacons in these epistles are "quite unexceptional."^v Fee comments; "The weakness of this view is perhaps also demonstrated by the fact that the entire spectrum of church government, from the hierarchical episcopacy of Roman Catholicism, through the mediating expression of Presbyterianism, to the extreme congregationalism of the Plymouth Brethren, all find their support for their polity in these letters."^{vi}

3. John Stott counters objections based on the vocabulary of the Pastoral Epistles by citing Bruce Metzger who presents general doubts about statistical studies. Furthermore, some of the material in the Epistles is quotation of other sources, so those sections will certainly have a different vocabulary. Earle Ellis claims that 43% of 1 Timothy, 46% of Titus and 16% of 2 Timothy use material that is pre-formed, such as Christian hymns, doxologies, credal confessions etc with give-away tags such as "this is a trustworthy saying."^{vii} I think that these arguments seriously undermine the "non-pauline" objections and make Pauline authorship an acceptable option. Despite that, any examination of the vocabulary shows that there still remain significant differences which will demand an explanation.

4. There is no doubt that we do not get the same doctrinal depth from these Epistles as we have come to expect from the other Pauline epistles. John Stott is correct to observe that there is a degree of subjectivity in such judgements,^{viii} and undoubtedly the general theology is Pauline (all those who deny Pauline authorship agree that they come from Pauline circles), nevertheless they do differ in content. This needs explanation.

5) True, there is an atmosphere of respectability and of conformity to prevailing social values. It is pretty clear from the book of *Revelation*, that some churches had begun to rest on their laurels long before the end of the first century. But it is still pretty radical stuff! Christians are encouraged to live by faith, love, and purity, within the light of eternity. Try that in a pagan world without anaesthetics and anti-biotics. (Try it in the twenty-first century with consumerism, post-modern dismissal of absolute truth, sexual permissiveness, and binge culture!).

Why Object to Pseudonimity?

So, you might argue, maybe some well meaning person in Paul's theological circle chose to dash off a few letters in his name. Does it matter? The Early Church recognised their inspiration and authority and accepted them. So should we. After all, we are not suggesting that we cut them out of the Bible. Howard Marshall says: "Current tendency is to argue that the author of the Pastoral Epistles did a good job in this own day, even if he did not do it as well as Paul would have done."

^{ix} Well, I think it does matter and here are my reasons.

1) If the Early Church had known they were fakes they would not have accepted them into the canon. Tertullian, in his *De Baptism*, 17, talks about the pseudonymous Gospels written in the second century, none of which were accepted by the Church. This is consistent from the second century up. Bishop of Antioch, Serapion, in the early third century, rejecting the *Gospel of Peter* said "We, brothers, receive both Peter and the other apostles of Christ. But pseudepigraphia in their name we reject." Indeed, the whole point of writing a radical gospel (radical to the author, heretical to the main body of the church) in the name of an apostle was to give it legitimacy. The Early Church was content (after suitable discussion) to include the book of Hebrews in the canon, although they could not trace who wrote it. The Early Church never accepted a work they knew had been written by someone else. Full stop.

2) It deflects attention from the plain meaning of the text. Why write these epistles at all? They do not propose any particular doctrinal strand that we can tell. In fact they are criticised these days for being doctrinally bland. Why go to all the trouble to write them in Paul's name? As I understand it, the only explanation really offered is that Paul's influence was waning and that they were written to bolster control in Pauline circles: "If anything about the circumstances of the Pastoral Epistles is clear, it is that their immediate occasion is the development of groups within the churches which are regarded as opposed to the authority and teaching of Paul."^x But at the end of the first century when the Corinthians were in need of some pastoral support the Roman church was happy to delegate the task of writing to Clement, one of their leaders (maybe their "bishop", maybe not). Admittedly Rome was not in the Pauline circle as such, but even so, you could write in your name at the behest of the others. Why pretend to be Paul? Worse, if Paul was still alive you were risking big trouble. If he was recently dead everyone knew it and you were being plain ridiculous. If he was long time dead then you could only touch on the problems obtusely for risk of giving the game away and being found out, in which case why write at all? The Pauline Epistles are not theological classics in the style of Romans or Ephesians, but they are at least consistent in tackling local problems in a low-key manner. Indeed, the kind of problems that the Ephesians are suffering do not seem to fit into the latter part of the first century by which time it had become a very strong, influential church (possibly after the residence of the Apostle John among them.) The problems suggested in these epistles would seem to fit in the early days of the church, i.e. when Paul was still alive. Other arguments offered are that there was need for better structure in the church (but the proposals in the Pastoral Epistles are hardly revolutionary) and there was the beginning of Gnostic heresy (but this only began to be a problem much later than these were written).

3) It cheapens them. Paul's plans to visit Timothy personally (1 Timothy 3:14, 4:13) are "a piece of gratuitous irony and in bad taste" if not by Paul."^{xi} The letters mention seventeen well-known friends who are Christians by name. Presumably this is all made up? The only get-out would seem to be that the letters contain fragments of genuine Pauline epistles which were otherwise unpublished. But if so, why write three epistles? One further point here: the human element of these epistles is very strong. Paul cares deeply for Timothy and Titus. This was not typical of fabrications of the time. Bishop Handley Moule wrote: "*The human heart* is in it everywhere. And fabricators, certainly of that age, did not will understand the human heart."^{xii}

Half-way Solutions on Offer

I admit that the vocabulary and doctrinal content are different from the other Pauline Epistles. So is there a half-way solution on offer? Clearly, if not from Paul they come from someone close to him, so why not Luke? This was first proposed by Moule,^{xiii} who suggested that Luke might have been given very free rein by Paul to write on his behalf. Wilson and Quinn both suggested that this probably happened after Paul died^{xiv} But surely, in the latter case everyone would have known that? And Luke could easily have written in his own name. No, it doesn't convince me.

One other solution which is well worth looking at comes from someone who is highly respected in Evangelical circles, Howard Marshall. In his excellent *International Critical Commentary* (1999) he sets out his solution. He feels that the differences between the Pastoral Epistles and the other Pauline Epistles are too great for him to explain other than by

acknowledging that the former were written by a pseudonymous writer. A group of concerned leaders in the Pauline circle, anxious that their influence over the Pauline churches is waning soon after the death of Paul, ask one of their number to write to the churches in Crete and Ephesus. After all, Paul's letters were known to be read in public and they have at hand fragments from Paul that have never been circulated. The writer uses most of these up in Titus, and then composes 1 Timothy. Either the churches never discover that the letters did not in fact come from Paul's own hand, or they knew but, like the book of Hebrews, the information did not get handed down to posterity. In this case, we should treat the Pastoral Epistles in similar fashion to Hebrews, as being from the early apostolic circle, author unknown, but sincere and authentic and containing genuine fragments from the Apostle's own hand.^{xv}

Concluding Remarks: My Suggestion

The Early Church received these Epistles as from Paul, so do I. It seems to me that none of the objections take into account Paul's circumstances. He had previously been through two years' imprisonment in Rome under great strain, was released and was once more under arrest. He was getting on in years and it was now harder than ever to cope. The years of illness, prison and physical hardships had taken their toll. Indeed, his situation seems to have worsened this time round in prison (2 Tim 4;16-18). Even his friends had abandoned him now. Anecdotal arguments are not accepted in theological circles, and certainly not in essays, but as this is not a formal piece of work, just let me say this. Once I heard a very famous Scottish preacher. I had read his books, heard tapes of him in his prime, and once, just once, as he was about to retire I was able to sit in a church and listen to him in person. I was struck by his grace, his gentleness, his sincerity, his kindness, and the shallowness of his sermon. It was nowhere near the blistering, incisive Evangelical exposition for which he was famous. Maybe it was a bad day, maybe he was just tired and burnt out, but his gentle chidings for us to be nice, attractive people seemed a million miles from his previous superb theological exhortations. Maybe, too, Paul was just tired, ill, and struggling to cope. Please do not tell me that because it was Paul he would not have been like that. Even he had his limits. We do not know what happened to him for sure after the close of the book of Acts. So let us say that he was released, and after a spell in Ephesus he travelled back to Rome, to rest from his labours, only to walk into the horror of Nero's madness. His usual helpers had been left in the churches of Asia Minor and they too had been caught unawares by the swiftness of Nero's campaign. Feeling alone and abandoned, with the Roman church diving for cover, he was forced to use an amanuensis with whom he was not used to working and to whom he gave freer rein than he had ever done in the past. The combination of all these circumstances would most certainly have resulted in a very different style and vocabulary.

This is Paul on the edge, still fighting to keep the churches in line, but no longer able to deal with more than the immediate subject at hand. He knows that this is the time to hand over to the next generation, but his strength and energy are ebbing fast. The pain, the tiredness and the immediate threats are closing in on him like a dark cloud. The fragments of hymns, doxologies and credal confessions which are sustaining his spirit in prison creep into the letters and colour their vocabulary. His last act is to encourage the younger leaders to take up the cause in his place.

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ⁱ Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) p.2

ⁱⁱ Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*. NIBC (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1988) p.23

ⁱⁱⁱ P. N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921)

^{iv} I sincerely recommend that you read the very good section on this subject in I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*. ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), pp. 63-79

^v Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (London: The Tyndale Press, 1957), p.25

^{vi} Fee, p.21

^{vii} John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*. BST (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996) p. 25

This is an excellent commentary and well worth buying for your personal collection.

^{viii} *idem* p. 26

^{ix} Marshall, p. 80

^x *idem* p.41

^{xi} Stott, p22 quoting C.F.D. Moule "The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles: A Reappraisal." In *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1982) p. 128

^{xii} "The Second Epistle to Timothy" (Religious Tract Society, 1905) p21 quoted by Stott p23

^{xiii} C.F.D. Moule "The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles: A Reappraisal." BJRL 47 (1965) pp430-53

^{xiv} S.G. Wilson, *Luke and the Pastoral Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1979)

J.D. Quinn, "The Last Volume of Luke: The relation of Luke-Acts to the Pastoral Epistles." In *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, ed. C Talbert (Danville, Va: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978) pp.62-75.

^{xv} Marshall pp. 84-86