

# OBSERVATIONS ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

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## I. Introduction

In his article in this issue, Prof. Battle draws heavily on 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, the so-called “Pastoral epistles,” for words of counsel and encouragement to other pastor-theologians. If the Apostle Paul composed these epistles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Prof. Battle is abundantly justified in so doing. It is important to note, however, that the vast majority of NT scholars presently deny that the Pastorals derive from the historical Paul and attribute them, rather, to a second century forger concerned to justify innovations in ecclesiastical polity.

In the context of this issue, therefore, it seems eminently appropriate briefly to vindicate the Pastoral Epistles’ Pauline authorship. The work of such distinguished students of the NT as Joachim Jeremias,<sup>1</sup> J. N. D. Kelly,<sup>2</sup> Ceslaus Spicq,<sup>3</sup> and Luke Timothy Johnson,<sup>4</sup> each of whom defends the authenticity of the Pastorals in his commentary on the epistles, renders extended comment on our part unnecessary. We shall argue, nonetheless, for three claims, which, in our view, are worthy of more attention than they have been accorded by both liberal and evangelical scholarship. First, we intend to show that P<sup>46</sup>, the earliest extant collection of Paul’s letters, may in its original form have contained the Pastoral Epistles and that one cannot, therefore, reasonably regard the absence of the Pastorals in present-day copies of P<sup>46</sup> as evidence of the Pastorals’ inauthenticity. Second, we intend to argue that Paul’s employment of multiple amanuenses in the composition of his letters suffices, to a great extent at least, to account for the differences in style and vocabulary that distinguish the Pastorals from the other Pauline epistles. Third and finally, we intend to argue that the techniques of statistical analysis frequently employed to discredit the Pastorals’ authenticity are unreliable guides in inquiries about the authorship of brief texts.

## II. The original contents of P<sup>46</sup>

As to the first claim: it is by no means certain that the now only partially extant papyrus codex P<sup>46</sup> contained a collection of Pauline letters that lacked the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus* (NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953<sup>6</sup>), 3-8.

<sup>2</sup> *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus* (BNTC; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963), 3-34.

<sup>3</sup> *St. Paul: Les Épitres Pastorales* (EtB; Paris: Gabalda, 1969<sup>4</sup>), 157-214.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters to Paul’s Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (The New Testament in Context; Valley Forge, PA; TPI, 1996), 2-32. Cf. also the defenses of the Pastorals’ authenticity in Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Leicester, England and Grand Rapids, MI; Inter-Varsity and Eerdmans, 1990<sup>2</sup>), 18-62 and George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI, and Carlisle, England; Eerdmans and Paternoster, 1992), 13-52 along with the argument for Pauline authorship of 2 Timothy in particular in Michael Prior’s *Paul the Letter-Writer and the Second Letter to Timothy* (JSNT.S 23; Sheffield, England; JSOT Press, 1989), passim.

<sup>5</sup> Although P<sup>46</sup> is ordinarily considered a document of the early to mid-third century, Young Kyu Kim has cogently argued in his “Paleographical Dating of P<sup>46</sup> to the Later First Century,” *Bib* 69 (1988), 248-57: a) that

Jeremy Duff, in particular, demonstrates in his “P<sup>46</sup> and the Pastorals: A Misleading Consensus?”<sup>6</sup> that the circumstance that the number of pages<sup>7</sup> which remained, but are no longer extant, after the transcription of 1 Thessalonians in the lone quire of P<sup>46</sup> which has survived, seems insufficient to contain the Pastoral Epistles, does not necessarily imply that the codex as it originally circulated lacked the Pastoral Epistles. For, as Duff explains, the scribe responsible for P<sup>46</sup> seems to have realized that he was running out of space and to have increased the amount of text transcribed per page in response; indeed, he increased the amount of text per page so much that, if he had maintained the word/page ratio characteristic of the quire’s last extant pages and included no material after Philemon, at least nine pages of his quire would have remained blank.<sup>8</sup> It seems quite probable, therefore, that the scribe in question intended to include further material in his quire.

Admittedly, even if the scribe had maintained the high word/page ratio established in the last extant pages of P<sup>46</sup>, the inclusion of the whole of 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, and the Pastorals in his quire would have required at least nine more pages than the quire contained.<sup>9</sup> As Duff observes, however, the scribe in question could have made room for these epistles by either: a) adding extra leaves to his quire, as the scribes responsible for the Nag Hammadi codices seem usually to have done; or b) adding one or more extra quires to his codex as the scribes responsible for Nag Hammadi Codex I and the only extant manuscript of Origen’s *On the Passover* certainly did.<sup>10</sup> Although one could only with great difficulty, if at all, prove that P<sup>46</sup> as it originally circulated contained the Pastoral Epistles, then, the evidence currently available lends a degree of plausibility to the hypothesis that it did.<sup>11</sup> In any event, the purported absence of the Pastorals from P<sup>46</sup> does not constitute solid evidence that a significant number of Christians in the post-Apostolic era, prescinding from Marcionites and Gnostics, denied the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles.

### III. Qualitative evidence

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features of P<sup>46</sup> frequently thought to exclude an earlier dating, such as the omission of the *iota adscriptum* and the usage of *nomina sacra* (256-7) have parallels in papyri conventionally dated before A.D. 100; b) that the calligraphy of P<sup>46</sup> exhibits a number of traits, such as a consistent, “striking effort to keep to the upper line” (249) unparalleled in papyri dated later than A.D. 100; c) that its overall style closely resembles a number of papyri dated earlier than A.D. 100 (250-54); and d) that P<sup>46</sup>, consequently, probably originated before A.D. 100.<sup>6</sup> NTS 44 (1998), 578-90.

<sup>7</sup> Although the final pages of this quire are no longer extant, one can calculate the number of pages that it originally contained, because the middle leaf, which: (a) in any quire is easily identifiable as the only leaf on which two recto pages face one another, and (b) in this quire contains legible page numbers, has survived.

<sup>8</sup> Duff, “P<sup>46</sup> and the Pastorals,” 584.

<sup>9</sup> We offer the estimate of Eldon Jay Epp, which appears in his, “Issues in the Interrelation of New Testament Textual Criticism and Canon,” in Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders, ed., *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 485-515 at 498, n. 49. Epp errs, incidentally, in attributing to Duff the claim that the scribe would have required “about four extra pages” and then “correcting” this claim with his own estimate of nine in n. 49. Duff, in fact, offers substantially the same assessment as Epp. “With only a fraction more compression [!] on the missing pages,” Duff writes, “the scribe would have needed an extra four leaves [1 leaf = 2 pages] to be added to the end of the codex in order to fit in the Pastorals” (“P<sup>46</sup> and the Pastorals,” 587).

<sup>10</sup> “P<sup>46</sup> and the Pastorals,” 587-8.

<sup>11</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, who earlier claimed that P<sup>46</sup> “almost certainly did not contain... Timothy (1-2) and Titus” (*Book and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995], 59, n. 74) has recently reversed himself in the light of Duff’s findings, admitting that “it can be cogently argued that the Pastorals did have a place in it” (“The New Testament Canon: Recent Research and the Status Questionis,” *Canon Debate*, 267-94 at 285).

As to the second claim: a great mass of the qualitative evidence ordinarily alleged against the Pastorals' authenticity seems irrelevant to the questions of the epistles' authorship and date of composition. For many, if not all of the stylistic differences between the Pastorals and the rest of the Pauline corpus seem explicable by the hypothesis that Paul, when composing the Pastoral Epistles, employed an amanuensis other than those he employed when authoring the undisputed epistles. As E. Earle Ellis observes,

In the Graeco-Roman world the use of a secretary was a necessity for any extensive writing and it varied with the circumstances, from taking dictation to being a co-author. It is fully evident in Paul's epistles and need not have been limited to dictation *verbatim et literatim*, as some assume. [In fact] it probably went beyond that since in antiquity a trusted and gifted amanuensis customarily shaped the vocabulary, style and composition of an author's work.<sup>12</sup>

#### **IV. Quantitative evidence**

As to the third claim: the quantitative analyses of the Pastorals' language that fueled opposition to the Pastoral Epistles' authenticity for much of the twentieth century seem now to be thoroughly discredited.<sup>13</sup> In support of this not uncontroversial assessment, we offer three examples of authors whose work tends to undermine the stylometric case against the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles.

Thomas Arthur Robinson, first, debunks a mainstay of the linguistic-mathematical case against the Pastorals' authenticity in his "Grayston and Herdan's 'C' Quantity Formula and the Authorship of the Pastoral Epistles."<sup>14</sup> Specifically, Robinson demonstrates: a) that Kenneth Grayston and Gustav Herdan, in their classic 1959 article on the Pastorals' authorship,<sup>15</sup> artificially inflate the "C" quantity<sup>16</sup> of the Pastoral Epistles by treating the Pastorals as a literary whole rather than three, individual epistles; and b) that, when one treats the Pastorals as discrete units, their "C" quantities do not diverge dramatically from those of the undisputed Pauline Epistles.<sup>17</sup>

Anthony Kenny, second, in his *A Stylometric Study of the New Testament*,<sup>18</sup> decisively refutes the claims of Andrew Q. Morton, who employs criteria like sentence length, the frequency and position of common words like  $\delta\epsilon$  and  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ , and the grammatical category (nouns, verbs, etc.) of words that close sentences, to dispute the authenticity of all of the Pauline epistles except Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians.<sup>19</sup> Specifically, Kenny shows that Morton's methods either: a) yield results susceptible to a more benign interpretation than Morton gives them; b) lead to absurd results; or c) are otherwise

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<sup>12</sup> "The Pastorals and Paul," *ExpTim* 104 (1992), 45-7 at 45.

<sup>13</sup> We are deeply indebted for the arguments of this section to Anthony E. Bird's "The Authorship of the Pastoral Epistles—Quantifying Literary Style," *RTR* 56 (1997), 118-37.

<sup>14</sup> *NTS* 30 (1984): 282-88.

<sup>15</sup> "The Authorship of the Pastorals in the Light of Statistical Linguistics," *NTS* 6 (1959-60), 1-15.

<sup>16</sup> The "C" quantity of a literary work = [the number of words peculiar to the work in question + the number of words common to every work of the author's corpus] / [the total number of words in the work in question]. Cf. *ibid.*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Bird's account of these developments in "Quantifying Literary Style," 124-8.

<sup>18</sup> Oxford: Clarendon, 1986.

<sup>19</sup> Kenny discusses Morton's work in his *Stylometric Study*, 101-15. Bird, likewise, discusses Kenny's work in "Quantifying Literary Style," 134-5 and Morton's in *ibid.*, 129-32.

fundamentally unsound. For example, Kenny shows that the sentence-length distribution figures for Romans in Morton's 1978 *Literary Detection*<sup>20</sup> differ so markedly from those employed in Morton's 1966 *Paul: The Man and The Myth*<sup>21</sup> that a consistent application of Morton's authenticity tests would lead one to conclude that the text of Romans Morton uses in 1966 has a different author than the text of Romans employed by Morton in 1978.<sup>22</sup> Kenny, similarly, demonstrates that Morton's authenticity tests based on (1) the frequency with which  $\delta\epsilon$  and  $\gamma\alpha\rho$  appear as the second word in a sentence and (2) on the frequencies of various categories of last words in sentences, if applied to the Aristotelian corpus, yield the absurd conclusions, respectively, that (a) Aristotle wrote neither *Metaphysics* Z and H nor *Nichomachean Ethics* Z,<sup>23</sup> and (b) that Aristotle did not write *Nichomachean Ethics* Δ and I nor *Politics* B and Γ.<sup>24</sup> Morton's methods, in short, seem unreliable.

Kenneth J. Neumann, third, in his *The Authenticity of the Pauline Epistles in the Light of Stylostatistical Analysis*,<sup>25</sup> assesses the usefulness of 617 possible quantitative criteria of authenticity<sup>26</sup> and eventually rejects all but four as unreliable.<sup>27</sup> Even these four uniquely suitable criteria, however, prove unreliable in practice, identifying the letters to the churches in Rev 2 and 3, for instance, as epistles of Paul. Neumann, regrettably, does not so much as consider the possibility that the Pastorals might prove authentic in his study, whose principal significance, in any event, seems to lie in its unintentional demonstration of the inadequacy of quantitative methods of analysis for the purpose of determining the authorship of the Pauline epistles.

## V. Conclusion

The text of the Pastorals itself, then, whether evaluated by qualitative or quantitative means, seems to have little worthwhile to contribute to the debate over the Pastoral Epistles' authenticity. In such a situation, it seems, one who would determine the authorship of the Pastorals should rely principally on external evidence: quotations of the epistles, the opinions of early authorities, etc. The external evidence as to the Pastorals' authenticity, however, seems uniformly to favor the Pauline authorship of all three epistles. No one seems to have questioned the authenticity of the Pastorals in antiquity except Marcionites and Gnostics, and even in these cases, the examples of 1) Tatian, who, according to Jerome,<sup>28</sup> accepted Titus; and 2) those Marcionites who, according to Chrysostom,<sup>29</sup> appealed to 2 Tim 1:18 in defense of their doctrine of a twofold Godhead; prove that opposition was not universal. The only external evidence even potentially prejudicial to the case for Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, in fact, seems to be the supposed absence of the Pastoral Epistles from the original text of P<sup>46</sup>. We have shown above, however, that P<sup>46</sup> in its original form may well have included the Pastorals and that the opposite conclusion, in any event, is undemonstrated.

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<sup>20</sup> *Literary Detection: How to Prove Authorship and Fraud in Literature and Documents* (Bath: Bowker, 1978).

<sup>21</sup> Morton and James McLeman, *Paul, the Man and the Myth: A Study in the Authorship of Greek Prose* (London: Hodder & Stoughton).

<sup>22</sup> Kenny, *Stylometric Study*, 108.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>25</sup> SBL.DS 120; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Table III.A in *ibid.*, 120-23.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Bird's discussion of Neumann's work in "Quantifying Literary Style," 135-7.

<sup>28</sup> *Commentarius in Titum, prologus*; CCL 77C, 3. We owe this reference to Duff ("P<sup>46</sup> and the Pastorals," 582, n. 12).

<sup>29</sup> *Homilia II in Epistulam II ad Timotheum*, PG 62, 613-18 at 615.

When one follows the appropriate methodology in investigating the Pastorals' authenticity, giving priority to external evidence, therefore, the authorship of the Pastorals appears difficult to dispute. This is good news, of course, for all who uphold the inspiration and inerrancy of all 66 books in the Protestant, biblical canon; in light of Prof. Battle's findings, moreover, it is especially good news for the discouraged pastor-theologian.