



THE FALSIFIED PAUL  
EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN THE TWILIGHT

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*Caution is called for when all the experts agree.*  
*Bertrand Russell, 1872-1970*

*For Mrs. W. Hofstra-van den Bergh van Eysinga*  
*As well as*  
*Mrs. Dr. R. M. Mispelblom Beyer-van den Bergh van Eysinga*  
*Mrs. M. J. Beukema-Faber*  
*Mr. E. Frater Smid*  
*and Mr. J. H. Ritzema Bos*

The original page numbers from the German version are given in brackets.

## Toward Understanding

On the following pages I would like to take the reader once more over the stretch of road that I myself traveled in my engagement with Paul and early Christianity and that finally led me to the conviction that the Pauline letters in their entirety are inauthentic. Perhaps at the end of this stretch of road we have traveled together readers will be surprised at themselves with regard to how effortlessly and easily they have followed a road at whose end stands the total destruction of their own familiar and beloved conceptions. Perhaps at the end of this road they will even come to realize how little they have really lost and how much they have gained.

It is possible, however, that the case will be entirely different. For the sake of better understanding, therefore, for all those persons who for various reasons are unable to either acknowledge or agree with my constructions, I would like to offer the following for consideration: I am fully aware that in many respects the ideas developed on the following pages are very sketchy. What is presented is not an historical theory set forth and unfolded in every detail, but rather a sketch, or “rough draft.”

There are two reasons why I must accept the risk of presenting certain pieces in a somewhat abbreviated way and totally ignoring others, for which reason I might be misunderstood or accused of lacking historical knowledge of certain circumstances (which I didn't want to present at all): first of all, because I want to address not only the experts but also a wider reading public, and secondly, because it seemed very important to me to present a complete theory of inauthenticity in its inner coherence.

All previous challenges to the authenticity of the Pauline letters, even those of the Dutch radical critics, suffered from the fact that they were unable to provide *a satisfactory overall conception*. In my opinion, the radical theory gains plausibility not on the [10] basis of a host of arguments against the authenticity of the Pauline letters (As I showed in my dissertation on Dutch radical criticism, sufficient arguments of this kind have been advanced in the past without scholars finding it necessary to alter their position), but above all by answering the question that now arises concerning what “really” took place. If Paul was not the writer of the letters, then who was Paul, i.e., who was the person in whose name the letters were written? Was he a legend, a historical figure, or merely a phantom?

This question, which has as its goal not only criticism and analysis, but also synthesis, can only be answered if an internally coherent, plausible overall conception can be presented. In order to bring the entirety into view, however, I naturally could not and may not immerse myself too deeply in questions of historical detail (to which I will gladly return in another place), but must limit myself to presenting more essential points of reference. I would strongly emphasize, however, that to my knowledge the book contains no tenet for which I failed to provide (historical) grounds.

In scholarship, the person who proposes alternative conceptual possibilities is more vulnerable than one who simply criticizes. In that I attempt to set forth an alternative theory for the origin of the Pauline epistles, many parts of the book possibly offer the critic a welcome place to attack. Maybe it would have been better to have dispensed with some theses which might seem all too provoking or audacious. That would have certainly spared me much criticism and much vexation that I must now deal with. I suspect, for example, that among the theses propounded in this book those with which I attempt to resolve the problem of the historical Paul (= *Paulus historicus*) will encounter the greatest consternation. I would certainly recommend to future critics that in evaluating this theory they do not let themselves be guided only by the historical-theological knowledge they learned in school. From the perspective of the inauthenticity of the Pauline letters and on the basis of tradition-historical considerations, the entire theory seems to be completely [11] consistent and illuminating. In any case, this hypothesis, while explaining one of the most difficult problems of a branch of early Christian literature, is like a boomerang for me: the more forcefully I cast it away, the more vehemently it comes back at me.

In order to prevent misunderstanding, I would like to point out that with the theses of this book, which, after all, deals with only one piece of early Christian history, no claim at all is made to have discovered the complete historical "truth" concerning early Christianity. It is not at all my view that the results I arrive at in this book place in question or render null and void everything that the representatives of the authenticity hypothesis have said and written until now. I myself have learned from most of them and have always felt the greatest admiration for the analytical acumen of New Testament exegetes (above all in the last century) and for their skill in sniffing out the problems of the

text and solving them (in an entirely different way, to be sure, than takes place here).

I would regret it very much, therefore, if the present book were regarded by biblical scholars only as a provocation. I myself understand this book rather as an invitation, as an offer of conversation to experts as well as interested laity. Perhaps I will be able to call forth from one or the other a new consideration of the authenticity question. But maybe the opposite will be the case, and the representatives of the authenticity hypothesis will be able to convince me with sound arguments of the correctness of their position and thus, in a good Christian way, call back their errant brother to the ground of clear, sound teaching.

All in all, I hope that this book will not only have an exciting and stimulating effect, but will also be a contribution to greater freedom in the theological discussion. Perhaps in the future it will be possible to discuss more openly and more candidly problems which for various reasons—not only for pure scholarly reasons, I believe—have been rendered taboo by theologians and whose consideration was reserved only for non-theologians. In this regard, [12] precisely the decisive, fundamental questions in New Testament scholarship are much too important to be relinquished to dilettantes or visionaries. Professional theologians as well, and especially they, cannot allow the freedom to be able to think in new ways to be taken away. If the present book can make a small contribution to this, its purpose would be entirely fulfilled.

I certainly do not expect that this book will produce a “revaluation of all values.” Assuming that one day the inauthenticity hypothesis becomes accepted by the majority of scholars, a great deal of water must still flow down from under the scholarly mills; a great number of scholarly works must be written that, in more tenacious and more patient scholarly work, further develop and substantiate what is suggested here in only a rough outline, or perhaps show this to be an erroneous path.

Even after reading this book, for most readers the Christian world will remain as it was until now. In the pulpits, in Bible classes, or in religious instruction, people will continue to speak of the apostle Paul and his letters. His adventures on missionary journeys, his letters to Christian churches will continue to provide material for edifying preaching, fanciful romances, and boring hours of instruction.

There is nothing at all to object to here. For me it would be sufficient if those persons who continue to speak of “Paul” were

more aware than before that we have to do here also with only a working hypothesis. I would be happy if from now on everyone who appeals to the letters of Paul would at the same time bear in mind that the authenticity of seven Pauline letters in no sense represents an absolutely established historical fact, but—just as the hypothesis of inauthenticity—is only a hypothesis, and indeed, as every scholar who has struggled with the unending difficulties and problems of Pauline studies will confirm, a very complicated hypothesis.

In the future, the value of both hypotheses, the authenticity hypothesis as well as that of inauthenticity, will have to be assessed in terms of which of the two is best able to resolve the manifold problems [13] of the Pauline letters in the most illuminating and simple way. Such a competitive battle between entirely different orientations would nevertheless then be something new in the history of New Testament scholarship, in which until the present time the hypothesis of authenticity has occupied an absolute and unquestioned monopoly.

Basically, I can wish nothing more and nothing else than that in a hopefully not too distant future the recognition of the authenticity of seven Pauline letters will no longer represent—as until today—the unexamined presupposition for New Testament research, but rather the result of thorough reflection. That I personally entertain great doubt about this and in my opinion the future will belong to the simpler, clearer, and historically more probable hypothesis of inauthenticity is a quite different matter.

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## Chapter 1:

The Investigation of the Pauline Letters  
as a History of the Discovery of their Inauthenticity*The Interest Awakes*

**F**or a long time, my interest in the person and work of the man to whom the following pages are dedicated was not particularly great. Even during my theological studies it was difficult for me to feel comfortable with the man from Tarsus. For me, as for so many other theological students, he still stood entirely in the shadow of that other man from Galilee. My interest in him resembled one's interest in the friend of a good friend. Although one is not sure how to deal with him, as a matter of simple courtesy one can also not entirely ignore him.

That my interest in the apostle nevertheless awoke one day had less to do with the man himself than that even while I was still a student the luster that surrounded the radiant figure of Jesus began to diminish. It wasn't that the person of Jesus had lost its fascination and mystery. But it could not be denied that as my struggle with the historical sources increased, the picture of the man from Nazareth, that at the beginning of my theological studies had stood so graphically before my eyes, became increasingly pallid and unclear. Even in introductory seminars we learned that only very little of what was transmitted to us as relating to Jesus really reached back to the historical Jesus. We heard that the teachings and pronouncements of Jesus as well as some of the narrative material represented later church constructions. The Gospels as a whole, therefore, were not reliable eyewitness accounts, but kerygma, i.e., proclamation, affirmations of faith. Instead of this, one could also have said "pious fantasy." But no one dared to make such a statement. [15] And it would surely not really have done justice to the matter. Be as it may, however, the picture of the real—historical—Jesus remained scarcely recognizable behind the later "church constructions."

What our theological teachers taught us about the impossibility of knowing the historical Jesus (concerning whom we know nothing more than the fact that there had been such a person) as well as about the creative imagination of the Christian communities after Jesus was shocking for many students. Although my own personal relationship with the "Lord Jesus" had always been characterized by friendly reservation and rather a bit

of north-German coolness, I could also not deny being somewhat disconcerted. What was critical about the whole affair was that the historical arguments that our teachers brought forth against the authenticity of certain teachings and stories of Jesus were immediately illuminating for me and that, in contrast to other students, after a few days I was already overcome. There could be no doubt that the historical contours of the man from Nazareth had been wiped out by later tradition so as to be unknowable. Thus, anyone who expected from the historical man Jesus some kind of guidelines or directions for the here and now must always be resigned to the fact that what seems to be an authentic pronouncement of Jesus in truth does not derive from him at all.

At that time, in connection with this, I encountered for the first time a problem that even later would engage me again and again, namely, the relationship between history and faith. I had always held the view that my personal faith must be independent from what took place (or did not take place) 2000 years earlier in Palestine. A faith that is based on particular historical findings, which from one day to the other can be depicted in an entirely different way by historians, seemed to me to be a highly questionable affair and incompatible with the nature of faith, which had to be a deep certainty of existential (not historical) fundamental truths. At the university, however, I now became aware that at least the Christian faith possessed a pronounced historical inclination. That is already made clear in the apostles' creed, [16] which in its so-called second article recites pure historical facts (or at least facts which are perceived by the church as historical): "I believe in Jesus Christ... born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead and buried..."

The adherence of the Christian church to particular historical facts, so-called facts of salvation, seems to me, until today, to be intellectual and human impudence, since, on the one hand, no person is really in a situation to totally investigate the historical truth-content in these statements and since, on the other hand, the nature of faith becomes completely falsified if it is degraded to maintaining the likelihood of historical data.

In any case, the loss of historical certainty with regard to the person of Jesus of Nazareth had as its consequence that I gradually turned away from Jesus and to the historical Paul. That reflected the need for a stronger historical confirmation for faith. I wanted to know what the beginnings of the Christian faith were

like. In addition, I hoped that from the figure of Paul, whom I assumed stood in the full light of history, an illuminating beam of light would also fall on the person of the Nazarene, swinging to and fro between kerygmatic appearance and historical existence.

Unfortunately, I would realize very quickly that this hope would be difficult to fulfill. Strange to say, it soon became evident that, although Paul had been a contemporary of the historical Jesus, he had nothing at all to say about him. On closer examination, his letters contain practically no statements about the historical figure Jesus. In his well-known book on Paul, the theologian G. Bornkamm speaks of the “amazing state of affairs” that Paul nowhere speaks “of the Rabbi from Nazareth, the prophet and miracle-worker who ate with tax-collectors and sinners, or of his Sermon on the Mount, his parables of the kingdom of God, and his encounters with Pharisees and Scribes.”<sup>1</sup> Everything that we learn from Paul about Jesus remains peculiarly pallid and unsubstantial: Jesus is “born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal 4:4); as the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16) and a descendent of David (Rom 1:4; cf. 2 Tim 2:8), [16] he belongs to the people of Israel (Rom 9:3f.; 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5; cf. Acts 22:3); [17] he suffered (Rom 8:17; cf. 2 Tim 2:11), he died on the cross (Rom 6:6; Gal 5:24; 6:14; Col 2:12), he was buried (Rom 6:4) and resurrected (Rom 4:24f.; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:4ff.; etc.). When and where all this took place, we do not learn. As in the apostles’ creed, there is a yawning gap between the birth and death of Jesus. In contrast to the creed, in which at least Mary and Pontius Pilate are mentioned, in the Pauline letters not only is the name of Jesus’ mother missing, as well as that of the Roman governor, but also other names and concepts imparted to us by the Gospels (e.g., John the Baptizer, Joseph, Galilee, Gethsemane and Golgotha). Only the leaders of the earliest community — Cephas (or Peter), James, and John — are mentioned (Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12; 1 Cor 15:17).

On the whole, therefore, one can say, if we were dependent on Paul alone for knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth, we would know nothing at all about him — little more than that there was a man named Jesus, that he died and, according to the belief of the writer of these letters, rose from the dead. We would not know when and where he lived.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 110.

Basically, the fact that Paul says nothing at all about the historical Jesus was very curious — just as strange as the related fact that immediately after receiving the revelation calling him to be an apostle he went to Arabia for three years (Gal 1:17f.) instead of visiting the Jerusalem community, as one might expect, whether to make contact with its leaders or to acquire more information about the life of the person who had appeared to him at Damascus (Acts 9:3f.). Can one imagine that someone who had just experienced the decisive turning-point of his life through a revelation took no notice and had no interest in the earthly past of the one who stood in the center of this revelation? In any case, I myself was not able to replicate the tenacious ignorance with which Paul dealt with the history of Jesus. The main theological arguments set forth at this point by most scholars — e.g., Paul was exclusively interested in the exalted Christ, or perhaps more radical, Paul employed Jesus only as a pattern for his own theological conceptions—were rationally illuminating, [18] but too theoretical. They may have been satisfactory for an academic theologian who perceived the apostle primarily as the bearer of an idea (often only his own idea). But this would not suffice for someone who perceived Paul as a man of flesh and blood, whose conduct must be humanly and psychologically replicable. — Or was the Paul of Galatians finally not a flesh and blood being, but only the product of an academic theologian? — To be sure, at that time I had not yet asked myself this question. But I was surprised at how easy it was for most theologians to pass over this peculiar state of affairs — i.e., the puzzling silence of Paul with regard to Jesus — and return again to the day's agenda. I didn't want that to be the case for me.

Although I still had no explanation for this peculiar behavior of Paul, my historical (or should I rather say criminal?) curiosity about the apostle Paul was awakened for the first time. From the beginning, my interest in him had less to do with his theology, which seemed to me in part very cloudy and inconsistent, but with the puzzle and inconsistency of his biography. Only later did I realize that there was a direct connection between the biographical and theological inconsistencies and that the theology of the writer of the letters is much easier to understand if the historical problems associated with the person of Paul are first resolved.

*The Sources*

Whoever wants to be informed about a particular person from the past or present, and not to be dependent only on reports, conjectures or opinions of others, needs reliable sources. For many people, the study of sources, which, at least for early Christian sources also presupposes knowledge of foreign languages (old Greek, Latin, and Hebrew), seems to be a laborious, boring and dry affair. They immediately reach rather for secondary literature [19] in order to be informed secondhand about the person they are interested in. I have never felt that way. For me, reading sources always presents an absorbing, indeed, downright exciting affair. It is well known that every biography, every study of a particular historical person, is always colored by the view of the one who writes. Such presentations might suffice for a first orientation; over time, however, it could become somewhat boring. The source material is already ordered in a particular way; everything is dovetailed into an overall concept, and there is nothing further to discover. Secondary literature reminds me of a park that is certainly beautiful to look at and in which everything is well ordered and arranged, but which for this very reason nevertheless produces sterility and boredom. Reading sources, on the contrary, seems to me like a path through a wild, desolate countryside. It is dangerous and full of adventure. A discovery could be waiting behind every tree or bush; with every line, every subordinate clause, every word, a door could be opened to another world, hidden until now; the writer could give up his secret and divulge that he is really someone entirely different than the researcher assumed until now. The “danger” of one’s own reading of sources should not be underestimated. It consists in the possibility that in the end the reader will arrive at a conception of things all his own that brings him into sharp conflict with conventional views and conceptions.

With regard to the apostle Paul, the matter of sources is rather simple. In general, it can be said that our historical knowledge of the apostle rests primarily on two “pillars.”

a) Even today, the best known and most popular source of information is still the book of Acts; although Acts has a decided drawback in that its historical value is questioned today by an increasing number of scholars.

b) Although more prosaic, the letters transmitted in the New Testament under the name of Paul are more solid with regard to their historical value. We have to do here with thirteen letters, or

fourteen if the letter to the Hebrews is included, although it makes no explicit claim of Pauline authorship. [20]

- the letter to the Romans (Rom)
  - the first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor)
  - the second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor)
  - the letter to the Galatians (Gal)
  - the letter to the Ephesians (Eph)
  - the letter to the Philippians (Phil)
  - the letter to the Colossians (Col)
  - the first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess)
  - the second letter to the Thessalonians (2 Thess)
  - the first letter to Timothy (1 Tim)
  - the second letter to Timothy (2 Tim)
  - the letter to Titus (Tit)
  - The letter to Philemon (Phlm)
  - [The letter to the Hebrews]
- According to the generally held view today, only seven of these definitely derive from Paul:
- the letter to the Romans
  - the first letter to the Corinthians
  - the second letter to the Corinthians
  - the letter to the Galatians
  - the letter to the Philippians
  - the first letter to the Thessalonians
  - the letter to Philemon

In the view of most scholars, these letters represent the earliest literary testimonies of early Christianity, which are supposed to have been written in the time between 50 and 60 CE, prior to the Gospels (written after 70 CE).

Before we turn to the letters of Paul and the numerous problems connected with them, however, we will deal with that source which for most Christians even today represents the crucial basis for their picture of Paul. [21]

*The Basic Elements of Our Picture of Paul*

**W**hat do we know about Paul, or what do we think we know about him? Perhaps in religious instruction or somewhere else we once heard,

1. that we have to do here with a Jew named Saul,

2. that to begin with this person was a persecutor of the early Christian community,
3. that outside Damascus he was then suddenly converted (“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”) to Christianity
4. and then became the most important Christian missionary and undertook several missionary journeys through the Mediterranean region
5. so that finally, after being taken prisoner in Jerusalem, he was brought to Rome.

If we ask where this historical data derives from, which we regard as absolutely certain and which determines our picture of Paul, we have to admit that it is not from contemporary testimonies regarding the apostle and also not from his letters (from which some things can be derived only indirectly), but from Luke's Acts (9:4ff.; 13:2ff.; 21:27ff.). This must be a severe disappointment for someone who is highly interested in established historical facts. He will anxiously ask himself, can a work that begins with an extensive description of the ascension of Jesus that in no way sounds particularly symbolic be regarded as a reliable historical source? As has long been known in theological circles, in many ways Acts is more like an imaginary, marvelous romance than an historical portrayal, even if in the preface the writer takes on the appearance of an historian and follows the customs of an ancient historian in his presentation. As we will see in more detail, in its portrayal of the person and work of the apostle, Acts interweaves the earthly and the heavenly, the historical and the legendary, in a wondrous and indistinguishable way. [22]

*Acts — An Eyewitness Report?*

**F**or evaluating the historical value of Acts it is also important to observe with regard to the author of the work (= "Luke") that we do not have to do here with an eyewitness, as was earlier often assumed. Basically, this is self-evident from what has just been said. One should reckon that an eyewitness would hardly find it necessary to relate legends for the reader instead of historical events. In any case, it is recognized in present day New Testament research, even by conservative scholars, that, contrary to what was earlier often assumed, the author was not a traveling companion of Paul.

If that were the case, one must ask why Luke presents a picture of Paul that is entirely different from the picture of the apostle in the letters. Philipp Vielhauer observes, “The writer makes historical mistakes regarding the life of Paul that no companion would make,” and offers as evidence for this, “apart from all the rest,” the following peculiar circumstance: “A man who reserves the title and honor of an apostle exclusively for the twelve and consistently denies this for Paul, even though Paul claimed the apostolate for himself and defended it, cannot be a companion of Paul.”<sup>2</sup>

For the assumption that the author of Acts was an eyewitness, appeal is often made to the so-called “we-accounts.” In these passages the writer suddenly continues his account in we-form, which gives the impression to the reader either that the writer himself was present at the reported events as an eyewitness or that he at least made use of a source written by an eyewitness. For example, Acts 16:9-13 reads:

16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

16:10 And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. [23]

16:11 Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis,

16:12 and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days;

16:13 and on the Sabbath we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

It is clearly recognized today, however, that the “we-accounts” are a skilful literary fiction. According to Vielhauer, who can be cited here as representing the opinion of many other scholars, the author of these passages “employed the literary means of the personal report in order to feign eyewitness character for some passages concerning Paul.”

With rejection of eyewitness character for the writer of Acts, also disposed of is the view deriving from early church tradition,

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<sup>2</sup> *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), 391.

according to which we have to do here with the doctor and fellow worker of Paul named Luke who is mentioned in Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24 (cf. 2 Tim 4:11).

Summary: The author of Acts is an otherwise unknown to us, Christian writer (from the second century), who himself did not know Paul personally. What he tells us about Paul and his activities are not first-hand reports. The heightened interest of the author in miraculous, wondrous stories, healing-, escape-, and punishment-miracles, and the “predominance of personal legends”<sup>3</sup> gives the impression rather that we have to do here not with a presentation of history, but with the transmission of legendary tradition. [24]

*Paul in Wonderland*

The reader will perhaps take exception at the curious heading with which I now make a transition to a discussion of Paul in Acts. But at this point I could not forgo the allusion to the well-known children’s book by the Englishman Lewis Carrol (*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*). I certainly do not want to claim thereby that the literary value of Acts resembles that of a children’s book—whereby I also don’t want to say anything against children’s books. In this somewhat provocative way, however, I would like to call attention to a situation that is important to consider again and again, namely, that the great majority of historical statements made in Acts about the life and person of the apostle Paul are legendary in character<sup>4</sup> and thus are to be enjoyed only with great caution.

Although all this is known to most theologians and recognized by them, it must nevertheless be strongly emphasized again and again because the consequences that result from this are still too little considered. One may as well admit that in Acts we in no way have an historical work in our present-day sense. But then, out of an understandable dilemma — apart from the letters, from where else should we get our information about the apostle Paul and early Christianity? — again and again, all the misgivings notwithstanding, one still turns back to Acts to cannibalize it for early Christian history.

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<sup>3</sup> Vielhauer, *Geschichte*, 393.

<sup>4</sup> Uta Ranke-Heinemann even speaks of the fairy-tales of Acts (*Nein und Amen*, p. 197).

The basic methodological principle that one follows in doing this is sincerely simple: everything that somehow seems miraculous or imaginary is unhistorical; and everything, on the contrary, that proceeds in a rational and natural way and also agrees somehow with the letters is historical. This method, however, which in its most cultivated form is even employed by the critical New Testament scholar G. Bornkamm in his prudent and well-considered book on Paul, has fatal similarity with that of a man who, [25] at any cost, wanted to hold on to a historical kernel in the story about Little Red Riding Hood and, to this end, removed all the mythic components (the wolf who speaks, red riding hood and grandmother in the stomach of the wolf) in order to hold fast to the historical existence of a little girl named Red Ridinghood who visited her grandmother in the forest sometime long ago and met a wolf on her way.

Now—in spite of U. Ranke-Heinemann—Acts is not a fairy tale of the brothers Grimm. But the example should nevertheless remind us to exercise caution in determining the historical kernel for many of its stories. We must obviously reckon with the possibility that our attempt to determine the kernel will be like peeling an onion: we think we have reached the kernel but always hit only another peel. — With regard to the entire subject, already at the beginning of the century, the Jewish writer Samuel Lublinsky correctly remarked in his book *Das werdende Dogma*:

Exactly like the Gospels, Acts, from which alone we know something about the life of Paul, is constructed from mythological and rational components. It is not sufficient here to characterize what are obviously legends as apocryphal without at the same time having a sense of mistrust about the apparently genuine components, which also could be fabricated for tendentious reasons.<sup>5</sup>

*With Rabbi Gamaliel*

**F**or the author of Acts, although Paul is a Jew, his family home was not in Palestine, but in the Jewish diaspora; he is said to have been born in Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3), in those days a Hellenistic city (today in Turkey) with a mixed, Greek and oriental population. Paul is supposed to have received his religious training from Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). The Jewish-rabbinic

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<sup>5</sup> S. Lublinski, *Der urchristliche Erdkreis und sein Mythos, Vol. 2: Das werdende Dogma vom Leben Jesu* (1910), 66.

tinge that one notices in many passages in the Pauline letters is usually explained from this background. The name of Rabbi Gamaliel is also well-known in Jewish tradition.<sup>6</sup> [26] This certainly does not prove, however, that the information in Acts is also historical. In any case, in Jewish writings of the first two centuries CE there is no mention of a rebellious student of Gamaliel named Paul or Saul. It is also very remarkable that the supposed student of Gamaliel, who certainly would have received instruction from him in the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, cites passages from the Old Testament exclusively from the Greek version—as if in his life he had never learned Hebrew! (see below: *Paul—the Non-Jew*).

#### *Paul the Persecutor*

**P**aul first appears on the scene in Acts as a persecutor of Christians. He is present when Stephen, the archetypal Christian martyr, is stoned, and as we are told at the very end of the story, he “took pleasure in his death” (Acts 8:1). The story of the death of Stephen the martyr is portrayed by Luke in very dramatic colors. The theatrical and histrionic character of the presentation is only exceeded by modern biographers of Paul, for whom the stoning scene offers a welcome opportunity to teach the reader (who is presumably comfortably stretched out on his couch at home) the meaning of fear, through a very thorough and detailed portrayal of the strange and archaic death penalty with which those of the Jewish religion punished the blasphemer. The German author Dieter Hildebrandt speaks of the “critical choreography of the concentric stoning:

One is surrounded on every side. The faster ones have caught up with the sacrifice. A very loose corral is built, just narrow enough to prevent an escape but still at a favorable distance from the throwing and thrashing of the others; for after the first stoning of the witness, dozens of arms are raised all at once, a whole whirl of projectiles is released, flying rubble, a chaotic bombardment. Even the torturers do not go entirely without bruises, or a minor injury, or a bloody nose.”<sup>7</sup> [27]

In Hildebrandt’s literary fantasy Paul is “only a sneering observer of the gruesome scene. But that allows him to appear all the more loathsome. The others at least have fury in their stomachs, the

<sup>6</sup> Regarding Rabbi Gamaliel I see *Strack-Billerbeck*, vol. 2, 527, 636ff.

<sup>7</sup> D. Hildebrandt, *Saulus – Paulus. Ein Doppelleben* (1989), 39.

scalp is deluged by an orgasm of rage, they are beside themselves over Stephen the blasphemer. But Saul knows how to control himself and does not dirty his hands. He simply watches with satisfaction.”

If unlike Hildebrandt one does not read fantastic things into the text which are not there (Paul as a “sneering” observer), one will perhaps come to the conclusion (if one sets aside the literary effect it makes) that the entire stoning scene produces very little for a biography of Paul. As Hildebrandt, indeed, rightly observes, Paul is mentioned only on the margin, as though it were a footnote and as evidence for which side the pre-Christian Saul-Paul was on, namely, on the side of fanatical, anti-Christian Pharisaism.

One could certainly still go a step further. According to the Jewish historian of religion H.J. Schoeps, it is a fully open question whether the entire stoning story relates an historical event. Schoeps points out the remarkable circumstance that, in spite of great significance as an archetypal martyr, Stephen plays no great role in early Christian literature and that his martyrdom falls entirely into the background next to that of James the brother of the Lord in 66 CE. For these reasons and others, Schoeps can doubt “the historicity of the supposed Hellenistic Deacon Stephen.”<sup>8</sup> He observes that we very probably do not have to do here with a “historical figure, but with a substitute figure introduced by Luke for tendentious reasons, on whom teachings troublesome to the author are unloaded.”<sup>9</sup> For the most part, the material Luke uses for developing his destined death—Stephen is stoned after his speech against the Temple—contains the same motifs as the account of the stoning of *James* the brother of the Lord. In Schoeps’s opinion, the same destiny is imposed on the “substitute man” Stephen as on James the brother of the Lord. “The retouching of the facts allowed Luke... [28] to unload the anti-cultic disposition, which was entirely foreign to him,” and which finds expression in the speech of Stephen, the enemy of the Temple, “on the spokesperson for the Greek contingent within the early community and to place this in the mouth of a peripheral figure in the events.”

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<sup>8</sup> H.J. Schoeps, *Das Judenchristentum*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> H.J. Schoeps, *Urgemeinde*, 13; idem, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, 441ff.; cf. R. Eisenman, *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran* (1983), 76, n. 144.

*Paul on the Way to Damascus*

**A**s a zealot for the law, Paul supposedly also distinguished himself later in the persecution of Christians. He obtained “letters” from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem that legitimated even his persecution of Christian communities in distant Damascus.

- 9:1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest  
 9:2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

It has been noted again that Paul did not have the slightest authority to undertake a persecution of Christians in Damascus, which was an independent city and not subject to the jurisdiction of the Jewish central authority (Sanhedrin).<sup>10</sup> An interesting explanation of this historical riddle, which was discussed at the very beginning of the discovery of the Qumran scrolls, but then dropped and forgotten, has recently been tossed into the discussion again by the American, R. Eisenman. Eisenman presumes that the term “Damascus” is a code name for the group of Jewish sectarians who had gathered together in the Qumran settlement (One thinks of the “Damascus Document”). Accordingly, Paul’s expedition supposedly led him not to the Damascus in Syria, but to that Damascus which is spoken of in the so-called Damascus Document.<sup>11</sup> This explanation would naturally only be plausible under the given presumption and would make sense only if Christians dwelled in Damascus (= Qumran) at the time of Paul, [29] which for Eisenman, who identifies the residents of the Qumran settlement with the early Christians, was in fact the case. To be sure, until today this thesis has been energetically disputed by the majority of scholars—without being in a position, however, to offer a different, better explanation.

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<sup>10</sup> Lublinski, *Das werdende Dogma*, 67: “... He [Paul] had not the slightest authority for this and also not the slightest power, since Damascus is a fully independent city and in no way subject to the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem. The people of Damascus and the Romans would certainly have quickly and decisively put a stop to the activities of such a naïve usurper.” For Lublinski, it is this impossibility, among others, that “throws the entire story overboard.”

<sup>11</sup> R. Eisenman, *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran* (1983), 68-69; *James the Brother of Jesus*, 247f.

*The Conversion*

Just outside Damascus a sudden reversal then took place through the best known episode from the life of Paul: *his conversion*. It is often said that the conversion made a Paul out of the earlier Saul. But this now proverbial turn of speech does not fully correspond with the circumstances reported by Luke. For Luke, the Jew Saul who was converted to Christianity continues to be called Saul for quite a long time. The reader first learns that Saul also had a second name (namely, the Roman name Paul) very incidentally in Acts 13:9, when Saul-Paul has succeeded in converting Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul in Cyprus, to Christianity.

Paul's sudden conversion experience outside Damascus, from which authors and artists in every age have found inspiration again and again—one thinks, for example, of the well-known picture *The Conversion of Paul* (1600) by M. da Caravaggio—is described three times by Luke.

- 9:3 Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him.
- 9:4 And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
- 9:5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting;
- 9:6 but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." [30]
- 9:7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.
- 9:8 Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.
- 9:9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

In spite of the fact that the account of Paul's conversion is repeated three times, which emphasizes the significance Luke obviously attributes to this event, the individual items reported therein are not very productive for the biography of the apostle. We will see below in more detail that Luke's presentation is clearly not to be understood as a rendering of historical events, but as a tendentious rejection of the claim put forward by the writer of the letters to be an *eyewitness* and thereby a legitimate apostle of Jesus Christ. In addition, some of the material from

which the author constructed his conversion story shows remarkable similarity with other well-known conversion stories from ancient literature. This too does not exactly speak for the historicity of the Lukan presentation.

Following other scholars, U. Ranke-Heinemann calls attention to a parallel between Acts 26:14 and a segment from a drama by the Greek poet Euripides. In Acts the voice speaks to Paul-Saul:

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.

What we have in this saying is a citation from the *Bacchae* of Euripides, in which the persecuted God (In this case, Dionysus) speaks to his persecutor (In this case Pentheus, the king of Thebes) as in Acts: “You turn a deaf ear to my words... Instead of kicking against God’s goads as a mortal, you should rather offer sacrifices.”

U. Ranke-Heinemann concludes: “This Dionysius episode has obviously been taken over into the Damascus scenery. An ancient persecution-saying is taken up in a Christian persecution-saying. Even the detail that because of his meter Euripides uses not the singular, but the plural ‘goads’ is taken over by Luke.” Of course, U. Ranke-Heinemann characterizes the “fairy story about the process of Paul’s conversion” as a “harmless fairy story.”<sup>12</sup>

#### *Missionary Journeys*

**I**n contrast to the presentation of Galatians, where the writer explicitly says that he did not immediately confer with “flesh and blood,” but first went to Arabia (Gal 1:17), in Acts we are told that following his conversion Paul went to the Christian church in Damascus, where he is healed of his blindness by Ananias (Acts 9:10ff.). After an unsuccessful attack on the life of the new convert to Christianity, Paul goes to Jerusalem to the apostles there (Acts 9:24-25; cf. 2 Cor 11:32).<sup>13</sup>

Soon afterward comes the first missionary journey (Acts 13:2ff.), which Paul undertakes along with his companion Barnabas, and which leads the two missionaries to the island of

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<sup>12</sup> Ranke-Heinemann, *Nein und Amen*, 200.

<sup>13</sup> “In Damascus, the ethnarch of King Aretas guarded the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me; but I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands.”

Cyprus, where Paul is even able to convert the Roman proconsul there, named Sergius Paulus, to Christianity (Acts 13:12).

After the apostolic council in Jerusalem Paul, to whose work all the rest of Acts is dedicated (Acts 15:36ff.), travels over almost the entire Mediterranean region. The apostle is portrayed by the writer of Acts primarily as a miracle worker and missionary (not as an independent theological thinker), who successfully continues further on the way that—according to Acts—Peter first trod. [32]

On his second missionary journey, which takes the apostle to Macedonia and Achaia, Paul travels for the first time on European soil (Acts 16:9ff.). Paul is imprisoned, but set free again through miraculous circumstances (an earthquake!) and through God's ever-present assistance (Acts 16:26ff.). At the Areopagus in Athens the apostle preaches the message of the resurrection (Acts 17:16-34), which stands at the center of his preaching (The Paul of Acts has never heard anything about justification by faith alone).

#### *Imprisonment*

**A**fter the return to Antioch by way of Ephesus and Caesarea (Acts 18:18-22), an additional missionary journey is attached, which, after a long stay in Ephesus, where he becomes involved in the rebellion of the silversmiths (Acts 19:24-40), takes the apostle again to Macedonia and Greece. This is followed by the last trip to Jerusalem. Evil premonitions torment the apostle (Acts 20:22-23), who soon after his arrival in Jerusalem is arrested, at the instigation of fanatical Jews from the diaspora (Acts 21:27ff), who hinder his work here as they do everywhere else.

After the proceedings before the governor's council in Caesarea and the hearing before the Roman governor, Felix, and his follower, Festus (Acts 23:23-25:12), Paul appeals as a Roman citizen to Caesar, and after a speech before king Agrippa (Acts 25:13-26:32), is brought to Rome. In connection with this journey to Rome, the writer of Acts also tells us many more wonderful things about a shipwreck and escape (Acts 27:14-28:1), poison snake bites that have no effect (Acts 28:3-6), sick people being healed (Acts 28:8-10), etc.

Luke leaves us in the dark only about the end of Paul's life, although there would certainly have been many wonderful stories to tell here. We do learn, however, that immediately after his arrival in Rome, in spite of his chains, Paul has the opportunity

to converse with Jews who were there and to testify “from morning to evening... [33] about Jesus from the law of Moses and the prophets” (Acts 28:23).

Uncertainty exists, however, regarding the further fate of Paul. Was he condemned to martyrdom, as reported in the apocryphal Acts of Paul? Or did the apostle travel from Rome even further to the West, to evangelize there also? The account in Acts breaks off abruptly.

28:30 And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him.

28:31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching them about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered.

The peculiar end of Acts has given rise to many questions for exegetes (similar to the equally peculiar ending of Mark). It is often assumed that the writer of Acts had an apologetic reason for concluding his work in this way. News of the martyrdom of Paul would eventually have exposed the apostle to suspicion of scheming against Rome. Since this could not be Luke’s view, for whom it was most important to demonstrate for his contemporaries how loyal and absolutely harmless Christianity was from a political perspective, he concluded his presentation of the apostle’s activity in the way he did.

*From Acts to the Pauline Writings*

**A**fter working intensively on Acts, I realized that the attempt with its help to get closer to the person of Paul had failed miserably. The biographical information it contained about the apostle seemed to be mostly legendary in character. That was true not only for the activity of Paul as a miracle worker or, for example, his marvelous escape from prison in Philippi (Acts 16:26ff.), but also for information that at first sight appeared to be reliable and [34] which in fact is perceived as historical by many biographies of Paul, e.g., the apostle’s instruction by Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), his activity as a persecutor of Christians (Acts 8:1ff.), and his conversion (Acts 9:4; 22:3-21; 26:9-20).

Against this background, the closer I came, the contours of the figure of the apostle, which to begin with (like the well-known picture of the four apostles by Dürer) had been sharply profiled and stood before my eyes almost as if they were carved in stone, began to drift apart like a smoke-screen. Whoever immersed himself in the world of Acts and took pleasure in its wonderful

stories, the great deeds and adventures of the apostle, his heroism and courage in the face of martyrdom, in order to directly pose the question regarding the historical value of all this—for such a person it would be like someone who received a gift of gold in a beautiful dream and now upon awakening had nothing. It became more and more clear to me that anyone who would base his historical knowledge of the apostle on Acts must tumble into the deep, golden abyss of fairy tales and legends. Historical certainty could never be found here. The question whether anything at all in the presentation of Acts could have historical value could basically not be answered by a historian who was aware of his responsibility. If one did not want to simply dismiss everything as unhistorical (one really could not blame someone who reached such a radical conclusion), all that remains is the simple statement that we have to do here with an apostle, who presumably worked around the middle of the first century, who was an important missionary, and who may have died in Rome.

Besides Acts, of course, there are still more literary witnesses to Paul in the New Testament, which have remained out of view until now: the letters. Since, in contrast to Acts, we have to do here not with testimonies about the apostle, but with testimonies of his own, the situation would seem to be entirely different. The figure of the apostle as well as the history of the early Christian community, that had just dissolved before my eyes into a fog of fanciful and phantom-like figures, must necessarily take on clearer, firmer contours. For the first time in the literature of the New Testament, we had writings which seemed to be a true [35] historical foundation stone and whose historicity and authenticity could not be doubted. For the first time, we had here written documents which reflected the life of the early Christian church first hand, so to speak, not in legendary, transfigured retrospect, and in which one could sense the living breath of a real personality in every line.

It became clear to me what enormous significance the Pauline letters had for the historian of early Christianity. If we had to do here (at least in some cases) with the earliest Christian documents and with authentic letters from the hand of the apostle Paul—and at that time, like other theologians, I took this for granted —

- Then they obviously must reflect the situation in which they were written, which would mean that, from a historical perspective, we find ourselves in the middle of the first century CE, i.e., in

that very time that one later characterized as “earliest Christianity.”

- Then what the letters impart concerning the earliest community in the first half of the second century must also be more or less valid, and Acts, which contains many points of contact with the letters, could also be drawn upon as an additional historical source.
- Then (a decisive point!) what Paul says about Jesus must have been said around the middle of the first century, so that one can with certainty begin with the historical existence of the man from Nazareth before the conversion of Paul. What the apostle communicated about him, to be sure, was little enough, but even here, once one had obtained the necessary certainty, one could fill out Paul’s somewhat pallid picture of Jesus with additional interesting details from the Gospels.

In these ways the rest of the New Testament writings could be more and more firmly connected with the letters. And finally one could arrive at the comforting result that the entire ship of the early Christian church with all its known apostolic crew lay at anchor in the safe harbor of the first century. [36]

I understood not only what it means for theologians to possess the Pauline letters, I also understood what it would mean if—for one reason or another—they were lost, or if their authenticity were called into question, like the rest of the New Testament writings—an idea, to be sure, which still seemed completely impossible to me. Since New Testament scholarship has obviously fastened the entire weight and load of their theories to this single hook, namely, the Pauline writings regarded by them as authentic, all those things whose fate, just a moment ago, they still believed could be connected with the authenticity of the letters would also be dragged into the abyss. The figure of the apostle Paul and our knowledge about him would become questionable. The historical value of the four Gospels and Acts, which derives from one of the Gospel writers, would again become questionable. The history of the man from Nazareth would also become questionable. In short, all our trusted and beloved conceptions of early Christianity would become dubious.

Such a prospect, however, seemed purely hypothetical for me, since I regarded the authenticity of the Pauline letters, or at least a core of these letters, as having been demonstrated. The thought that even with the testimony of the Pauline letters we

have to do not with a direct reflection of events around 50 CE, but with much later documents was an impossible possibility.

Nevertheless, in the course of time this impossible possibility would gradually become a certainty for me. With closer examination, one after the other of the thirteen letters in the New Testament canon under the name of Paul turned out to be “inauthentic,” i.e., not proceeding from the pen of the apostle who lived in the first century. At the end, the number of those letters from the Pauline corpus which withstood critical examination shrunk to a small, hard core, with Galatians and the Corinthian letters at the center — until these also finally had to be given up.

Before I come to the Pastoral Epistles, as well as Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians, with which criticism of the Pauline writings begins, a few general comments regarding literary forgery in early Christianity are necessary.

#### *Original and Forgery in Early Christianity*

Whoever deals with the writings of New Testament very soon encounters—also and especially outside the Pauline epistolary literature—the phenomenon of forgery, or as one says in a somewhat more refined way, pseudepigraphy.

The history of investigation of the New Testament has led to the conclusion, generally accepted today, that of the twenty-seven writings of the New Testament—apart from those that supposedly derive from Paul—not a single one can be traced back to an apostle or a student of an apostle. Although the titles of the four Gospels—*The Gospel According to Matthew; The Gospel According to Mark;* etc.—seem to indicate with regard to the four authors that we have to do with apostles, or students of apostles, and are thus direct or indirect reports by eye witnesses, the majority of exegetes today would reject the possibility, for example, that Matthew the tax-collector wrote the Gospel of Matthew or that the interpreter of Peter named Mark wrote the Gospel named after him.

The view has generally prevailed that the Gospels were first transmitted anonymously until they were attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (presumably shortly before the formation of a “canon” of the New Testament around the end of the second century).<sup>14</sup> The fact that the Gospels all have false attributions is related to the fact that the decisive condition for including a

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<sup>14</sup> The final canonization first took place a century later; see the 39. Easter letter of Athanasius from 367 CE.

Christian writing in the New Testament canon, which henceforth would serve the church as a plumb-line (= canon) for her preaching, was the principle of apostolicity. To be recognized by the Church, a writing must be of apostolic origin, i.e., traceable back to an apostle or to a student of an apostle.

Today hardly any scholar would think of identifying the author of the Gospel of Matthew with Matthew the apostle, [38] who appears in all four apostolic lists in the New Testament and according to early church tradition was regarded as its author. The same is true for Mark and Luke. The Gospel of John as well would not be regarded today by hardly any scholar as the work of John the apostle, although even in the past century “on every page” one heard “the heart beat of the disciple whom Jesus loved.”<sup>15</sup>

The situation is not much different for the other writings of the New Testament, i.e., above all, the letters. Even Catholic theologians do not regard the epistle of James as the work of “James the brother of the Lord” (Gal 1:19), as the letter’s introduction obviously suggests when the author refers to himself as “James, a servant of God and Lord Jesus Christ,” but, as is nicely said in the Catholic *Einleitung* to the New Testament by Wikenhauser-Schmidt,<sup>16</sup> is regarded rather as a “pseudonymous writing,” whereby “the author... [has] made the most sparing use... of the principle of pseudonymity, in that he only [!] claims for himself the name of James the brother of the Lord.” For a long time the epistle of Jude has been seen not as the work of “Judas the brother of the Lord,” but as the work of an “author from the post-apostolic time.”<sup>17</sup> According to today’s view, the first epistle of Peter can in no way derive from the apostle Peter, nor can the second... and so one could continue.

The production of pseudepigraphic writings is in no way met with only in early Christian literature; it was also common elsewhere in antiquity. It was especially common in Jewish apocalyptic literature to disclose revelations and visions under the name of a patriarch or some other authority from the ancient past. Also popular was literature that placed “final words” in the mouth of a famous person, whereby it took on for the reader the status and dignity of a last testament. In Jewish literature, for

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Van Manen, *Romeinen*, 204 (= *Brief an die Römer*, 189f.)

<sup>16</sup> Wikenhauser-Schmid, *Einleitung*, 376.

<sup>17</sup> Wikenhauser-Schmid, 583.

example, there is a writing named *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. As the fore-father Jacob addressed his twelve sons shortly before his death (Gen 49:1-33), so also here, before their own death, Jacob's twelve sons address their descendents, to communicate to them their final wishes and to illuminate them concerning future events that they have already foreseen. [39] Even in the Greek-Hellenistic world, however, pseudepigraphy was certainly an everyday practice. Among others, for example, letters are known to have been forged in the name of Plato.

The most important reason ancient writers provided their productions with false authorial attributions was probably that in this way they could invest them with greater authority. In a very conservative society, like that in antiquity, which had especially high esteem for traditions and values from ancient times, a writing stemming from ancient times and moreover one that had been written by a legendary, mythically-elevated figure, would naturally have great importance.

With regard to Christian literature, the previously mentioned perspective of apostolicity played a great role. It was, above all, the Catholic church that quickly recognized that it was important to possess a solid and reliable foundation in its struggle against other churches (e.g., the Gnostics, Marcionites, and Ebionites). To justify themselves and in order to controvert the legitimacy of the other churches, they developed not only the principle of right belief (confession) and the apostolic succession of bishops, but for this purpose also created their canon of writings, in which only writings that were apostolic (or at least made this claim) found entry. Because the Catholic church could now claim to be the rightful heir of Jesus and the apostles, it was able to drive its opponents from the field, who, even though they made the same claim, were less successful. These then became "heretics." The Catholic church, on the other hand, being the most powerful "sect," held the upper hand and henceforth defined what Christian "orthodoxy" had to mean for all the faithful.

If one recognizes that the idea that something must be truly apostolic in order to be divinely inspired and canonically legitimate is historically conditioned and arose from a struggle for power in the church, it is much easier to comprehend the concept and [40] phenomenon of literary forgery in early Christianity. Historical understanding makes it possible for us to evaluate a writing independent of its apostolicity or non-apostolicity. We recognize that the value of a New Testament writing's contents

does not depend on whether it is authentic or not. A forgery could contain more “original” ideas than a supposed original. The person who has learned to pay attention to content and who regards content, not authorship, as the final and decisive authority to which one feels obligated will be less disturbed by the problem of forgery.

Nevertheless, I am naturally aware that it is not easy for many Christians to live with the fact that we find “forged” writings in the New Testament canon. One is taken aback and asks, How is it possible that a religion with a high moral claim like Christianity can be based on writings that do not derive from those persons in whose name they were written?

According to their individual temperament, origin, and religious background, each person/Christian reacts very differently to the knowledge that most writings in the New Testament are falsifications. Basically, two different reactions are possible. The first could be called churchly-apologetic. Its representatives are all too inclined to play down or make light of the matter of forgery. One should “not really” speak of forgery, since the intention of the pseudepigraphical author (e.g., in the case of the Pastoral Epistles) was “to allow the voice of the apostle to be heard even after his death, to insure his continuing ‘presence’ (cf. Col 2:5 with 1 Cor 5:3)”<sup>18</sup>—so the theologian A. Lindemann of Bethel, with regard to the author of the so-called deutero-Pauline writings. Moreover, the concept of “authenticity” is said to be vague. Since for the Catholic New Testament scholar N. Brox “the ‘authenticity’ of a writing is shown by its Christian content, not by historical traces of the actual author,”<sup>19</sup> even an “inauthentic” writing—depending on the amount of Christian content—can prove to be authentic. [41] Against such attempts to soften or obscure the fact of literary forgery, it continues to be important to always call things by their right names. Thus, U. Ranke-Heinemann states: “It should not be denied that... forgeries were a wide-spread practice in the early church. This does not make them legitimate. It is and remains religious counterfeiting.”<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, one does not need to go as far as that furious critic (K. Deschner) who would like to deal with the entire history of literary falsification in early Christianity under the theme *Criminal*

<sup>18</sup> TRT 1, “Briefe und Briefliteratur,” 195.

<sup>19</sup> Wikenhauser-Schmid, *Einleitung*, 576.

<sup>20</sup> Ranke-Heinemann, *Nein und Amen*, 274.

*History of Christianity.* This throws out the baby with the bath water. Criminalization of early Christian pseudepigraphy is misguided and inappropriate for the actual circumstances, which have nothing to do with the circulation of counterfeit coins or bills. We observed above that the origin of forgeries must be looked at from the historical circumstances of its own time. They were supposed to satisfy the need of many Christians who require binding rules and the authority of an apostolic age. One should also not find objectionable the fact that in addition the attempt was made to pursue church politics in this way, since extensive use was made of these instruments in all Christian camps. Finally, one will have to say that most of the writings included in the New Testament under false names are of such high theological and literary quality that the world of religious literature would be far poorer if the authors of the pseudepigraphic works had abided by our modern rules of play and produced the writings under their own names. For then, we have to fear, if they had not been linked with the lustrous name of an apostle, they would not have been regarded as worth transmitting; they would have remained literary ephemera and would not have survived over the centuries.

From what we have said here about the problem of literary forgery with reference to the Christian faith, one could (correctly) conclude that the question is often given far too much importance. In fact, in general, it is [42] less the simple, faithful Christians, who quickly recognize that the Pauline letters in no way become less valuable by the discovery of their inauthenticity, than the representatives of the church and scholarship, who have a difficult struggle with this problem.

For many scholars it is a question of their own reputation. One can understand that a biblical researcher who throughout his life-long, scholarly occupation with the Pauline letters has proceeded as a matter of course from the integrity of letters generally recognized today as authentic (Rom, Gal, 1 and 2 Cor, 1 Thess, Phil, Phlm), and on this basis has written many brilliant books, would find it difficult to bear if someone could prove to him that all his work until now rested on a fiction. For him what may not be, cannot be.

For the church there is also very much at stake—at least according to its own self-understanding. Because it regards itself, now as before (the reference here is primarily to the Roman Catholic church), as the legitimate heir of Christ and his apostles and until today bases its authority on this claim, the discovery

that all the New Testament writings are forgeries and in no way stem from the time of the apostles makes many things uncertain. If the Church acknowledges that the historian who advocates this view is correct, it must give up its own claim of authority—or (which would certainly be more beneficial) perceive this as a questioning of its own self-understanding and base its authority in the future on spiritual empowerment, not historical.

*The Inauthenticity of the Pastoral Epistles (1, 2 Timothy, Titus)*

By and large, in Protestant as well as Catholic circles today, there is agreement that the so-called Pastoral epistles—i.e., the two letters to Timothy as well as the letter to Titus, called Pastoral epistles because they are directed to the shepherds (pastors) of communities, not the communities themselves—cannot stem from the writer of the other letters, or, as the case may be, from Paul. [43] H. v. Campenhausen, the Protestant theologian, speaks in this regard of “a typical forgery, although of unusual spiritual distinction.”<sup>21</sup> The authenticity of 1 Timothy was doubted already in the nineteenth century. It was first contested by the German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1807); and his judgment was then taken over by J. G. Eichhorn (1812) and extended to the other Pastoral Epistles.

*Differences in Language and Theology*

In general, in evaluating the Pastoral Epistles, one employed and still employs criteria relating to language and style as well as criteria relating to content. The results of word statistics already show that there are great differences between the Pastoral epistles and the other Pauline letters regarded as authentic. The number of words which appear neither in other Pauline writings nor anywhere else in the writings of the New Testament (so-called *hepaxlegomena*) is very high (26% = 175 words), while, on the contrary, of the 884 words in the Pastoral letters (personal names not included) 306 (36%) are not found in the other Pauline letters.<sup>22</sup>

The appearance of a number of concepts that derive in part from the vocabulary of the Hellenistic world... (“piety,” “prudence”/“discretion,” “good conscience,” “epiphany” (instead of “parousia” for Paul), *despótes* = “ruler”... “Saviour,” “trustworthy

<sup>21</sup> Campenhausen, “Polycarp of Smyrna,” 183.

<sup>22</sup> See Wikenhauser-Schmid, *Einleitung*, 523.

word,” “sound teaching” [words], among others), stands in contrast to the absence of a number of central Pauline concepts (“covenant,” “body of Christ,” “righteousness of God,” “revelation,” “freedom,” “cross,” among others), all of which one should not expect in every letter, but whose total absence is remarkable... This language reflects a different kind of theological thinking and a different church situation.”<sup>23</sup> But the stylistic differences are also striking and can be noticed even through the English translation of the Greek original. N. Brox observes: “In contrast to the passionate, sometimes explosive style of Paul, we find no trace of similar energy in the Pastorals. In contrast to the apostle’s numerous insertions, [44] incomplete sentences, and hardly understandable phrases, stands the calm flow of speech in the Pastoral Epistles.”

*Did Paul Have a Secretary?*

The attempt has been made to explain the linguistic-stylistic differences by the hypothesis of a secretary. It is said that Paul did not write the letters himself, but only sketched out a rough draft and gave this to a secretary, who then filled in the details and formulated the wording. For various reasons, this hypothesis is very improbable. Among others, it collapses because of the many differences in theology and content that distinguish the Pastoral Epistles from the presumably authentic Pauline letters, and which Paul would hardly have allowed his secretary to get away with. I give only three examples. While for the writer of the presumably authentic letters faith is understood primarily as an act, in the Pastoral epistles the focus is primarily on content (1 Tim 3:9; 6:10; 2 Tim 4:7), i.e., “orthodoxy with regard to fundamental, uncompromising apostolic teaching that must be accepted and held fast.”<sup>24</sup> While the opposition between *sarx* and *pneuma* (flesh and spirit) is fundamental for the “authentic” Paul, these are nowhere referred to in the Pastoral epistles. Finally, the theology of the law and works occupies a far more important place in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 2:10; 5:10; 5:25; Tit 2:7; 3:8, 14; cf., of course, 2 Tim 1:9; 6:10; 2 Tim 4:7) than in other Pauline letters which (in their original stratum) are clearly antinomian and in which all legalistic elements were introduced later.

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<sup>23</sup> Brox, *Pastoralbriefe*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

*Paul's Mantel*

Finally, another important argument against the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is the impossibility of accommodating them in the framework of Paul's biography. In Wikenhauser-Schmidt's *Einleitung*, the investigation of [45] the "presumed historical situation of the Pastoral Epistles" reaches the conclusion:

All three Past(oral Epistles) thus presuppose that at the end Paul was resident in Asia, or perhaps in the East (so Titus). Of all the situations referred to in the three letters, however, none fits in the life of Paul up to his conveyance to Rome as a prisoner in the fall of 60... If the three letters really derive from Paul, therefore, they must have been written in the time after his two-year imprisonment in Rome (61-63), and it must thereby be presupposed... that he had then been exonerated and set free.<sup>25</sup>

Precisely this assumption, however, is highly improbable and is rightly rejected today by almost all exegetes. The situation of the Pastoral Epistles is thus shown to be an "ostensibly historical" fiction by an author writing in the name of Paul.

In investigating the situation of 2 Timothy, a small detail often plays a very large role, namely, the mantel of Paul, which he supposedly left behind when he departed from Troas. Writing in the name of Paul, the author of 2 Timothy asks his protégé Timothy:

4:13 When you come, bring the mantel that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.

In view of the supposed "obscurity" of these details, many exegetes have spoken of the "simple realism," the "uniqueness of the situation and of the relationship between writer and recipient." J. Jeremias, the great New Testament scholar, even saw this as the "main argument for the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles."<sup>26</sup> However, one can certainly only speak in such a way if one thinks very little about the writer's pseudographic inventiveness and imagination—which many scholars are certainly inclined to do. [46]

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<sup>25</sup> Wikenhauser-Schmid, *Einleitung*, 470.

<sup>26</sup> Cited by Brox, *Pastoralbriefe*, 271.

*A Double Standard*

It is now certainly interesting that many indications that in the opinion of New Testament scholars speak for the inauthenticity of the Pastoral Epistles are also to be found in the presumably authentic Pauline letters—without the same consequences being drawn from this as in the case of the Pastorals! We obviously have to do here with a double standard.

Thus, Walter Schmithals, the Berlin New Testament scholar, for example, represents the view that “the setting forth of identical, enduring ordinances of a legal kind for the most diverse missionary regions” does not correspond “with the diversity of communities in the time of Paul” and thus could not be intended “for fellow workers whom Paul has just seen or will see very soon.”<sup>27</sup>

In this connection, however, it must be remembered that on this point the situation of the supposed authentic letters of Paul does not differ from that presupposed by the Pastorals: here also the apostle produces precisely his most encompassing writings, richly garnished with all kinds of exhortations and universal teachings, just on the eve of his upcoming visit in the churches. Romans is supposed to have arisen in this situation, i.e., shortly before the apostle’s arrival in Rome; and 2 Corinthians likewise, shortly before the apostle’s arrival in Corinth. Here also one might ask whether it would not have been better for the apostle to reserve his shrewd recommendations until he had become familiar with the problems of the community “face to face.”

The expressed self-stylization of the apostle is also often used as an argument against the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles. In 1 Tim 1:16 the writer speaks of the “mercy” that he (Paul) received, “that in me first Jesus Christ might display all patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.” About this, N. Brox writes: “Such absolutizing of one’s own person...is not Pauline.... Nowhere in his authentic letters does Paul ascribe to himself such a key position in the process of salvation. We have before us not statements by the apostle, but statements about the apostle.”<sup>28</sup> —But, is such an “absolutizing of one’s own person” really not Pauline? [47]

Even the Paul of the supposedly authentic letters, who was set apart while still in his mother’s womb and called to his office

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<sup>27</sup> RGG, V, 146.

<sup>28</sup> Brox, *Pastoralbriefe*, 115.

by the grace of God (Gal 1:15f.), does not exactly distinguish himself by excessive humility. In 1 Cor 11:1, for example, he can present himself as an example and proudly appeal to his readers: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (cf. also 3:10; 4:11-16; 9:19-27; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:7). The writer of Philippians can imagine no greater gift for his readers than to suffer what he himself has already suffered: “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine” (1:29-30). Indeed, in the mind of the writer of Philippians, the suffering of the apostle not only possesses normative character, but obviously already has a redemptive significance—like that of Christ: “Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all” (2:17). It is no wonder that even the writer of Philippians can appeal to his readers: “Brethren, become fellow imitators of me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us” (3:17).

Here also, the self-assurance of the apostle at times reaches such a degree that one must either diagnose all the symptoms of pronounced megalomania—or in considering such statements, to be consistent, we must arrive at the same conclusion as for the Pastoral Epistles, which are generally regarded as inauthentic, namely, that we have to do here not with “statements by the apostle, but (with) statements about the apostle.” The hardly tolerable self-stylization thus betrays the later, pseudepigraphic author of the letter, who, filled with admiration, looks back on the transfigured picture of the hero of faith from the past.

In addition, it should also be pointed out that the situation in the supposedly authentic Pauline letters is often just as contradictory and confusing as in the Pastoral Epistles. [48] According to W. Schmithals, “the writer of the P(astorals) is not interested in sketching an authentic historical situation for the letter, nor even in a position to do so.”<sup>29</sup> What should we say then about the writer of Philippians, who one time portrays the apostle as a prisoner (1:7, 13, 14) and then again as a free man (2:25; 4:10)? Or about the writer of 2 Corinthians, regarding whose situation exegetes can obtain any clarity at all only if they occupy themselves with complicated hypotheses of segmentation; i.e., they believe they can reduce the difficulty of conceiving a unified

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<sup>29</sup> RGG<sup>3</sup>V, 147.

situation by declaring the letter to be a composition from several small letters, or “postcards,” written at entirely different times in entirely different situations, which were then supposedly joined together by a redactor? Peculiar here is only that the redactor obviously did not regard it necessary to inform the reader in a redactional note about this procedure, by which he arbitrarily atomized (why actually?) the precious memory of the apostle.

Finally, it must still be said that the reference to a later development in teaching found in the Pastoral Epistles as an argument against the authenticity of the letter is also a double-edged sword, since one can advance this argument with equal justification against the supposedly authentic letters of Paul. Here also we encounter a series of conceptions which cannot be otherwise documented anywhere in the presupposed time of origin. The Christ-hymn in Philippians (Phil 2:6ff.), for example, contains strong echoes of the conception of the descent of the heavenly Sophia,<sup>30</sup> which is first evident only in the second century and fully developed first by the Gnostic Valentinus (for Valentinus, see below, *Marcionism and Gnosis*).

Also the other echoes of Gnostic conceptions, and indeed not only those that can be presupposed already in the first century, but those that derive from the more developed Gnosis of the second century—for example, the cursing of the earthly Jesus, 1 Cor 12:3, first documented at this time, belongs here—show that not only the Pastorals but also the other Pauline letters share the religious atmosphere of the second century, not the first. [49]

*Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians: Inauthentic*

**O**n the basis of contradictions in content and theology, the letter to the Ephesians, the letter to the Colossians, and the second letter to the Thessalonians are also regarded as inauthentic by most scholars today.

In the same way as the Pastoral Epistles, in reading Ephesians and Colossians linguistic and stylistic differences first catch the eye. While Colossians contains thirty-four words that appear nowhere else in the New Testament, and fifteen that appear elsewhere only in Ephesians, the letter to the Ephesians itself contains some thirty-nine hapaxlegomena and ninety words that do not appear in the Pauline letters designated as authentic.

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<sup>30</sup> Bauer, *Christus und die Caesaren*, 373ff.

Many sentences in Ephesians and Colossians strike one as excessively verbose. “One misses the liveliness characteristic of Paul.”<sup>31</sup> In its place, we encounter long complicated sentences, in which the writer prefers to connect “abstract ideas to one another with genitive constructions”<sup>32</sup> and string these together until it is entirely incomprehensible (e.g., Col 1:9-12):

- 1:9 Therefore, we too, from the day we heard of it, asking that you be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
- 1:10 to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God,
- 1:11 being empowered with all power, according to the might of his glory, for all endurance and patience with joy,
- 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Although, from a literary perspective, the results of the whole stylistic process might provide little edification, for many readers it produces the impression of great theological significance: what is obscure must also be profound. Whether this is true cannot be investigated here. [50] The stylistic peculiarities of Colossians and Ephesians, which some would also explain by appeal to liturgical influences, decisively diverge from the presumably authentic letters of Paul, and indeed to such an extent that even the Catholic *Einleitung* by Wikenhauser-Schmidt calls it an “evasion” if one speaks here of Paul’s “late style” or appeals once more to the secretary-hypothesis in order to save their Pauline origin.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Letters from No-man’s Land*

**A**part from linguistic-stylistic peculiarities, a large number of inner contradictions and factual problems can also be cited against the authenticity of the letters. Especially characteristic of Ephesians is the letter’s “lack of situation.”<sup>34</sup> Its occasion is nowhere clearly visible. It seems to have been “written in a historical no-man’s land.” This certainly does not indicate the

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<sup>31</sup> Wikenhauser-Schmid, *Einleitung*, 470.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

<sup>34</sup> See Fischer, *Tendenz und Absicht*, 14; Schmithals, *NT und Gnosis*, 81.

presence of an actual letter, which generally is written in a definite historical situation for a definite historical reason. We have the impression here that we have to do rather with an *edifying tract* in the form of a letter,<sup>35</sup> i.e., a theological writing that only later was given a historical cloak and that only later was placed under the great name of the apostle. The “letter” may also be a reworked sermon, or baptismal liturgy; in any case, this view was held by both E. Käsemann, the Tübingen New Testament scholar, and G.A. van den Bergh van Eysinga, the Dutch representative of radical criticism.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, the writer of the letter hardly seems to have a *personal relationship* with the Christians addressed here, which is strange, since Paul is supposed to have resided in Ephesus for a long time. According to Eph 6:21, the readers should know everything about Paul; but according to 1:15; 3:2, they know about each other only through hearsay. The readers are addressed once as Gentile Christians (1:13; 2:1d., 11f., 13, 19; 3:1), then as former Jews (1:11f.), and then again very generally as Christians (1:15-23; 3:12; 4:17). [51] Here also one wonders whether the writer had any knowledge at all of the concrete circumstances in the local community, or whether from the very beginning he did not imagine the recipients of the letter to be the *entire* church.

Ephesians contains signs of familiarity with other Pauline letters, e.g., Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians. Here also one can distinguish teaching material (chs. 1-3) from exhortatory material (chs. 4-6). Eph 3:3 is related to Gal 1:12-16 and is something like the earliest commentary on Galatians. The writing originally may have been intended to be attached to the earliest collection of Pauline writings. As in the other Pauline writings, the picture of Paul is *idealized*: Paul suffers and is imprisoned “on your behalf, the Gentiles” (3:1); his theological and christological concepts show that a long development has taken place. The community was not founded only a short time ago, but has obviously existed for a very long time.

#### *Contradictions*

**J**ust as in Ephesians, so also in Colossians one can observe a series of small contradictions. The author writes one time in the singular (1:23b-4:18) and then again in the plural (1:1-12,

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<sup>35</sup> Van Manen, *Handleiding*, 47.

<sup>36</sup> Van den Bergh van Eysinga, *Inleiding*, 101f.

23a), as if he himself were not really certain which possibility he should choose. The case is similar for the question concerning his imprisonment. One time he finds himself in prison (4:10, 18); but then it is said that he toils and strives for the community (1:29; 2:1). It is entirely unclear how both should be reconciled with one another. The writer himself probably did take the situation in which he placed his hero very seriously.

Also when reading, the writer seems one time to portray Gentile Christians (1:21, 27; 2:11), and another time Jews (2:13, 14). With regard to content, the writing contains allusions to the Old Testament (Ps 110:1) as do the other Pauline letters. In particular, Ephesians seems to have been known to the writer of Colossians—probably, as for Marcion, with a different name, namely, the letter to the Laodiceans (2:1; 4:13-16)—and heavily used by him.

If one adds some further observations, e.g., the fact that Paul already appears as a “dogmatic authority,” who is known by all Christians, and that he has already completed what Christ suffered for the community, and if one adds as well that the Christian community seems to have already existed for some time and that the gospel has already been preached in all the world (1:6, 23), then the tradition, according to which Paul wrote this letter around the year 63 in Rome, can hardly be correct. With Colossians, we have to do rather, as with Ephesians, with an edifying-dogmatic tract in the form of a letter, intended to be read (4:16) at the gathering of the community (for worship).

#### *Did Paul Copy from Himself?*

Just as Ephesians seems to connect with a series of passages in Colossians, so also 2 Thessalonians agrees in many places with some passages from 1 Thessalonians, partly in verbatim echoes.<sup>37</sup> Apart from 2:2-9, 11-12, there are only nine verses in 2 Thessalonians without parallels in 1 Thessalonians!<sup>38</sup> From the

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<sup>37</sup> See the nice overview by Schelkle, *Paulus*, 125.

1 Thess 1:1	= 2 Thess 1:1f
1 Thess 1:2f.	= 2 Thess 1:3
1 Thess 2:12	= 2 Thess 1:5
1 Thess 2:13	= 2 Thess 2:13
1 Thess 3:11-13	= 2 Thess 2:16f.
1 Thess 5:14	= 2 Thess 3:6
1 Thess 5:23	= 2 Thess 3:16
1 Thess 5:28	= 2 Thess 3:18

<sup>38</sup> Van den Bergh van Eysinga, *Inleiding*, 111f.

indisputable existing literary dependence of the second letter on 1 Thessalonians, it has been concluded that the second letter originated with use of the first. Because one could not assume that in the writing of 2 Thessalonians Paul had copied himself, there must have been a later hand at work in the origin of the second letter. The letter is thus pseudonymous.

In view of these very reasonable considerations, all attempts to nevertheless save the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians—1 Thess is directed to the leader of the community, 2 Thess to the entire community; 2 Thess was originally addressed to the community in Phillipi; 2 Thess is a literary composite—are not very convincing. [53]

The occasion for 2 Thessalonians cannot be easily deduced from the tendency of the letter, which in terms of content clearly presents a correction of what is said in 1 Thessalonians. The writer of the letter obviously fears that the remarks in 1 Thessalonians about the immediacy of the impending parousia of the Lord could have negative consequences for the ethical conduct of the community. He attempts to prevent this, among other ways, by reference to the good old apostolic tradition (2:15) and stimulation of orderly conduct (3:6-12)—and by delaying for a while the “coming of the Lord” (which obviously made readers of the first letter very uncomfortable), and embellishing it with a rich replenishment of apocalyptic events.

#### *Paul as a Schoolmaster?*

**T**he view held by the majority of theologians today that not all of the thirteen letters ascribed to Paul in the New Testament actually derive from the apostle naturally raises the question concerning the real author, or authors, of these writings. Who in early Christian times would have had an interest in writing and distributing letters in the name of the apostle? One most often assumes here that the deutero-Pauline writings and the Pastoral Epistles were the product of a *Pauline school*. In the course of his activity as a teacher (possibly during his time in Ephesus), Paul is supposed to have gathered students and fellow workers around himself, who constituted a “school,” after the model of ancient schools of philosophy. After the death of the apostle, the pseudographical writings were produced in the circle of students and fellow workers, who intended to give new voice to the theological inheritance of their master in different times and different circumstances.

Of course, in the same way as the assumption of a Johannine school, the darling, pampered child of present day theologians, the entire theory has a decisive catch to it. In the same way as the assumption of a Johannine school, it represents a *fiction, a pure* [54] *hypothesis*, for which not the slightest basis can be found in the New Testament.

As a rule, arguments in favor of this assumption offer only vague references to the contemporary teaching activity and schools of wandering pagan teachers, who suggest this hypothesis, as well as the fact that Paul often mentions fellow workers in his letters (Rom 16:3, 9, 21; 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25; 1 Thess 3:2; Philm 1:1, 24). That is obviously too little to prove beyond all question the existence of a Pauline school, especially because, as we will see later, from the perspective of church history, the fellow workers of Paul mentioned in his letters are just as intangible as their master himself, or, as the case may be, his churches. In any case, the early church historians, Hegesippus and Eusebius, know nothing at all about a “Pauline school” or about any students of Paul who would have played a special role therein—and they would have really had to have known!

If all that still remains then is only the reference to the existence of forged letters, which is employed to demonstrate what in reality must be independently demonstrated, we find ourselves in a circular argument. First, the existence of a school is hypothesized in order to explain the pseudepigraphic writings as the product of a Pauline school; then on the basis of the pseudepigraphic writings as the product of a Pauline school, one concludes, razor sharp, that a Pauline school existed. That is not very convincing! Basically, what applies to the Johannine school also applies here. Already in the last century, F. Overbeck, a critical theologian and friend of Nietzsche, remarked that we have to do here with a “scholarly invention” that is “groundless,” the “splendid example of a fantasy,” since one “not only knows nothing about its founding but also nothing about who belonged to it.”<sup>39</sup>

The question about the real origin and the real writer of the Pauline pseudepigrapha is thus not satisfactorily resolved with the hypothesis of a Pauline school. We will have to return to this question later. [55]

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<sup>39</sup> Overbeck, *Das Johannes-Evangelium. Studies zur Kritik seiner Erforschung* (1911), 98, 104, 206.

*Whoever says A must also say B*

**F**or every reader who has followed me thus far a question must intrude that also arose for me very early, as I occupied myself with the Pauline letters and the problem of their authenticity: How far can criticism of the Pauline writings go? Is there a definite point, a border, at which it is said, Thus far and no farther! Or on the contrary, if it has been shown that a portion of the letters are inauthentic, must not the rest be investigated, even if to begin with they inspire in us the appearance of authenticity and genuineness?

Many people perhaps believe that the existence of inauthentic letters necessarily has the simultaneous presence of authentic letters as a presupposition, that the former belongs to the latter almost like a shadow and thus necessarily presupposes it. They think that if there had not been an apostle Paul who left behind authentic letters, no later person would have come up with the idea of writing letters under the name of Paul. This assumption, however, is not persuasive. One can easily imagine that not only the writer(s) of the Pastoral Epistles, the deutero-Pauline letters, and 2 Thessalonians, but also the writer(s) of the rest of the Pauline letters, possessed from tradition only the report of the life and work of the apostle, and that the whole fiction of an apostle who wrote letters (who, as we will see, the writer of Acts knew nothing about at all, of even wanted to know about) was their own invention. To illustrate this with an example from our own time (to be sure, regarded as inappropriate by some people): even the forged diaries of Hitler “discovered” by Gert Heidemann/Konrad Kujau had no connection with a really existing, authentic diary of Hitler; rather the fiction of a Hitler who wrote diaries entered the world at the same time as the forgeries.

Against an investigation of the authenticity of all the letters, the objection could be made that there are hardly any witnesses from early Christian times that seem to exhibit such a personal, individual character as, for example, the Pauline letters to the communities in Corinth or Galatia. [56] One would have to concede that precisely these letters at least have the immediate appearance in their favor. The sharply imprinted profile of a living, historical personality seems to be disclosed in them. In view of their passionate, combative character, with their multiplicity of personal allusions, they awake in the reader, at first glance, the character of something impossible to be mistaken about, something that cannot be invented, something “authentic,”

which makes it seem impossible to raise at all the question of genuineness.

Nevertheless, apart from the fact that from time immemorial it has been part of the task of scholarship to place in doubt and critically interrogate even what appears to be obvious, the observation that letters transmitted in the New Testament under the name of the apostle are distinguished by the "living stamp" of his spirit will not be really satisfactory as long one is not able to establish where and how he became acquainted with this spirit. The fact that the writer of Galatians was obviously a person with a passionate temperament and a sharply defined personality cannot be proof that we actually have to do here with Paul. Otherwise, for example, one would also have to regard the scribblings in the letters of the young Werther as authentic documents. It all comes down to the question whether the writer who transmitted letters under the name of Paul can be shown, by means of the historical circumstances in which he appeared and which are reflected in his letters, to be that person whom he claims to be. The letters transmitted under the name of Paul, therefore, can only be regarded as really authentic if it has been shown that they fit seamlessly and unbroken into the time and historical circumstances presupposed by their writer.

For other reasons as well, an examination of the question of the authenticity of the Pauline letters is certainly not superfluous. As we observed above, the history of the investigation of the New Testament writings has led to the generally recognized conclusion that of the all-together twenty-seven writings in the New Testament—apart from those that supposedly derive from Paul—not a single one can be traced back to an apostle, or a student of an apostle— [57] and this is the case even though all the writings of the New Testament claim direct or indirect apostolic authorship, which then constitutes the presupposition for their inclusion in the canon! One probably does not at all need an especially critical mind to permit the question with what grounds present day scholarship still justifies the very self-confidently expounded judgment that the Pauline letters, or at least some of them, which critics today still regard as "genuine," are authentic writings of the apostle from the middle of the first century. To put this question another way, with what justification do the modern critics decree the apostle Paul to be the exception—indeed the only exception!—to the principle they themselves established, namely, that the writings contained in our canon, without

exception, do not stem from the writers named in them, but rather from pseudonymous authors?

In any case, these few preliminary considerations already make clear that the question concerning the authenticity of those letters which scholars until now, for whatever reasons, have excluded from the discussion of authenticity could prove to be thoroughly rewarding. This is obvious from our previous observations. Whoever says A must also say B. If in the opinion of scholars some of the Pauline writings are clearly inauthentic, what is the situation then with the rest?

*E. Evanson: the Uncomfortable Englishman*

Everyone who occupies himself with the history of research in a particular area of interest soon ascertains that most of the questions which stirred him and which at first seemed new and exciting had at sometime already been asked. This is also true for the question about the authenticity of all the Pauline letters. This question was also once asked and investigated, and indeed at the very beginning of historical-critical occupation with the Pauline letters.

The first person who dared to challenge the authenticity of one of the letters held to be sacrosanct by today's research [57] was the Englishman, Edward Evanson (1731-1805). Evanson, who had served as pastor in Longdon (Gloucestershire) since 1770, was in every way an independently minded theologian. As a convinced Unitarian, he rejected the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as well as the idea of incarnation. Like all Unitarians, in the confession of a trinitarian God Evanson saw an infringement of the fundamental idea of monotheism. Because as an ordained pastor, however, he was obligated to read the Apostle's Creed every Sunday, or the (especially trinitarian oriented) Nicene Creed, he either made arbitrary modifications or read so fast that no one could understand him. This was the reason then that the congregation complained about him to his superiors and criticized, above all, the "underplaying" of the Nicene creed. Evanson replied that he read the Nicene creed, which "exceeded the limits of his conceptual power," only as an obedient servant of the law.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, he declared himself prepared to read it more slowly in the future. With regard to his abbreviation of the liturgy, this was a serious matter of conscience. And in any case,

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<sup>40</sup> See Van den Bergh van Eysinga: "Edward Evanson," in *NTT* (1913), p. 153.

within a few months Parliament would make a statement concerning reform of the liturgy. Until then, his accusers should be patient, “certainly not a long time to bear with a weaker brother’s qualms of conscience for men who are so strong in their own true faith.”<sup>41</sup>

Evanson nevertheless remained stubborn and made further changes in the worship service immediately on the following Sunday, in which he left out what were for him offensive liturgical phrases (“both God and man,” as well as “Father, Son and Holy Ghost”). Afterward he explained in writing that he was not appointed by the Lord-Chancellor to preach “incoherent nonsense of dumb superstition,” but “the true and proper word of God.”<sup>42</sup> So on 4 November, 1773, a complaint against him was presented. On account of an error in process, however, this was rejected, and Evanson was exonerated by a higher authority. Evanson died on 25 September, 1805, in Colford, after working for still some years on reform and renewal of the worship service. [59]

Evanson contested the authenticity of Romans, above all because of contradictions with Acts, whose witness he regarded as historically correct. While Romans presupposes the existence of a Christian church whose faith is known in all the world, Acts has nothing to report about a Christian community in Rome when Paul arrived. Moreover, Evanson asked, how a congregation could already exist in Rome if at the time the vision called Paul to Macedonia the gospel had not yet been preached in Europe. While it is presupposed in Romans that the Jews in Rome are already familiar with the gospel, in Acts Paul would like to make the gospel known to Jews in Rome (Acts 28:17-29). Above all, for Evanson Romans 11 shows very clearly that the writer of the letter cannot be Paul, but someone writes *after the destruction of Jerusalem* presupposed by the parable of the olive tree.

*From Baur to Bauer*

**T**he Tübingen theologian F.C. Baur (1792-1860) was one of the most important New Testament scholars of the past century and the first in Germany to submit the New Testament to a comprehensive historical critique.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Idem, 154.

Not only the Pastoral Epistles, regarding whose authenticity F. Schleiermacher had already allowed doubts to be expressed,<sup>43</sup> but also both Thessalonian epistles, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, and even Philippians—i.e., letters “whose authenticity,” according to an early New Testament scholar, “could have never been contested with any appearance of justification”<sup>44</sup>—fell victim to the unmerciful criticism of the man from Tübingen. Baur left only four pillars standing: Romans, the two Corinthian epistles, and Galatians. Obviously troubled by the fact that he had already stuck his neck out, [60] Baur now made every effort to insure that “not even the smallest suspicion of inauthenticity” could ever be raised against these letters, because they “bear the character of Pauline originality so indisputably that one cannot even imagine with what justification any critical doubt could ever be maintained.”<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, Baur’s view that there was only a basic collection of four authentic “major epistles” was revised by most of his friends and critics. For them, the reduction to only four letters seemed all too arbitrary. For most German critics, Baur had gone *too far*, and they strived in the time that followed to show that, alongside the “major epistles,” at least three additional epistles, which had been rejected by Baur as inauthentic, should be regarded as authentically Pauline: 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon.<sup>46</sup>

Of course, there was still another radical critic in Germany, for whom Baur *had not gone far enough*. Instead of stopping when he was only half-way home, Baur should have done what seemed only consistent to do, namely, recognize the inauthenticity of *all* the epistles. Such was the criticism advanced by Bruno Bauer (1808-1882). While Ferdinand Baur should be numbered among the most important New Testament critics of the nineteenth century, Bruno Bauer certainly belongs among the most original. Bauer was the *Enfant terrible* among theologians of that time. Like Baur, Bauer was a student of the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel.

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<sup>43</sup> F. Schleiermacher, *Über den sogenannten 1. Brief des Paulus an die Thm* (1807); J.G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, III 1 (1812). With regard to F.C. Baur’s contribution to the question of the authenticity for the Pastorals: *Die sogenannten Past. des Apostels* (1835).

<sup>44</sup> A. Hahn, *Das Evangelium Marcions* (1823), 50; cited by van Manen, *Romeinen*, 31 Römer, 3.

<sup>45</sup> F.C. Baur, *Paulus* (21866), vol. I, 276.

<sup>46</sup> Z. B. Holsten and A. Hilgenfeld, who regarded 1 Thess, Phil, and Phlm as authentic.

As a youth he had been a personal friend of K. Marx and F. Engels. Later, having identified in the meantime with the political right wing, he turned against them.

As a teacher of theology, Bauer presented a severe provocation for his contemporaries. In view of the theses that the theology professor from Berlin presented in his books and at the rostrum, that should hardly be surprising. The normally upright and decent man, whom contemporaries portray as a likable and unassuming person, seems to have evolved here from a Dr. Jekyll to a Mr. Hyde. In a letter from 6 December 1841, he writes to his friend Ruge about his occupation as teacher and theologian: “At the university I lecture before a large audience. I do not recognize myself when I declare my blasphemies at the rostrum—they are so enormous that the students’ hair stands on end, these children, whom no one should provoke—and think about how piously I work at home on the defense of holy scripture and revelation. In any case, it is a very evil demon who lays hold of me every time that I ascend the rostrum, and I am so weak that I submit to him unconditionally.”<sup>47</sup>

The “demon” to whom Bauer submitted had whispered to him that all the Pauline letters were inauthentic and that an historical person named Jesus very probably never existed. If he had existed, Bauer argued, this Christ would then be conceived “as a real historical appearance .... before which human beings must shudder, a figure who can only impart fear and horror.”<sup>48</sup> Bauer’s reference here was primarily to the Christ portrayed in the Gospel of John, which he perceived as an unhistorical construction.

The provocation that Bauer represented for his scholarly colleagues was so great that in 1842 he was removed from office. However, Bauer was not thereby released from his demon — he continued to write as a vegetable merchant and anchorite of Rixdorf Bücher, in which he developed his view of early Christianity without Jesus and Paul—but at least Bauer’s theses could no longer damage the minds of his students.

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<sup>47</sup> We have to do here, to be sure, with a piece of self-characterization. But the passage nevertheless discloses something about Bauer’s psyche, which at this time seemed in some sense to be “ridden by the devil.” In my opinion, the category of the “demonic,” that Barnikol quite often employs as a scientific evaluation of the Bauer phenomenon, is not very helpful.

<sup>48</sup> Bauer, *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*, Vol. 3 (1842), 314.

Bauer was convinced not only that the Paul in Acts represents an imaginary historical figure, but also that the representation of the apostle in the letters “sprung from the same ground of deliberate reflection.”<sup>49</sup> Although Bauer impressively displayed the inconsistency and half-heartedness of other theologians, who, like Baur, [62] had more or less retreated to four major epistles, he was not able to plausibly carry out his own initiative.

Bauer offered no reasonable and systematic analysis of the literary character of the Pauline letters, but saw his task rather to “scold” the author like a schoolmaster, often in petty ways, and to finally convict him again and again of self-contradiction.<sup>50</sup> Even the forward with which Bauer introduces the investigation of the origin of Galatians, which has as its goal the “exposure of the compiler,”<sup>51</sup> does not suggest anything good. From the very beginning, Bauer takes for granted the fictional character of Galatians. He is filled with unfathomable mistrust, which leads him to raise suspicion with every word and again and again to triumphantly tear the mask from the face of the “compiler,” with whom, in addition, he seems to stand in a tense human relationship. As criteria for evaluation, Bauer usually calls attention to presumed or actual stylistic deficiencies, which he unmercifully exposes and rectifies.

Even though the entire process is often more arbitrary than systematic, here and there insights and perceptions appear that witness again and again to the brilliant, critical mind of the writer, and which constitute the real significance of this work. In a certain sense, the reader is drawn into a dramatic “unveiling struggle” in which one finally does not know what he should admire more: the cleverness of the “insidious hierarch,”<sup>52</sup> or the acuteness of the critic who exposes him step by step.

Bauer finally comes to the following conclusion: none of the letters circulated under the name of Paul, including the so-called major letters, stem from the pen of the apostle; on the contrary, they are written by various authors, and all are the product of Christian self-consciousness in the second century.

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<sup>49</sup> Bauer, *Kritik*, Vol. 1, V.

<sup>50</sup> So already Steck, *Galaterbrief*, 6f.

<sup>51</sup> Bauer, *Kritik*, I, VI: “If the compiler is unveiled, we will determine, first of all, the relationship between Romans and the Corinthian letters and their origin.”

<sup>52</sup> Bauer, *Kritik*, III, 8.

The primary arguments for the spuriousness of the Pauline epistles are the influence of Gnosticism,<sup>53</sup> most evident in the Corinthian letters, which for Bauer belonged to the second century, as well as the dependence of the writer of the letters [63] on the Gospel of Luke (which was traditionally regarded as supposedly later) and Acts, which Bauer attempted to demonstrate for individual letters.

According to Bauer, 1 Thessalonians presupposes Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, and Galatians; Philippians presupposes 2 Corinthians, the first and second sections of Romans, as well as 1 Thessalonians; and the writers of Ephesians and Colossians are supposed to have made use of 1 Corinthians and Galatians. The four major letters originated in the following order: Romans; 1 Corinthians; 2 Corinthians, Galatians.<sup>54</sup> Their writers were strongly opposed to the views of Acts, which they presuppose and to some extent deal with polemically.

In his book *Christus und die Caesaren* (*Christ and the Caesars*), Bauer explains that “progress in the redaction of Acts as well as the production of the Pauline epistolary literature was carried out in the decades from the final years of Hadrian’s reign to the first half of Marcus Aurelius’s, and each circle had the other in view in its work. At the highpoint of this conflict, *Galatians* sketched a portrait of the apostle that was directed point for point against an edition of Acts very much like the one we have today.”<sup>55</sup>

According to Bauer, the name of Paul could be connected with such epistolary literature because “the figure of this champion of a universal community and of freedom from the law through faith already existed.”<sup>56</sup> For Bauer, this figure was obviously not historical, but legendary—as the name already indicates, and whose symbolism (Paul = the small one) Bauer dealt with at length (see below: *The Doppelgänger: Paul and Simon*).

Bauer, who as we already noted also rejected the historical existence of Jesus, was dismissed by other scholars [64] as a “fantasizer.” Until today, no real debate with him has taken place.

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<sup>53</sup>See also the chapter in *Christus und die Caesaren*: “Der Gnosticismus in den paulinischen Briefen,” 371ff.

<sup>54</sup> Bauer, *Kritik*, III, 118ff.

<sup>55</sup> Bauer, *Christus und die Caesaren*, 327.

<sup>56</sup> Bauer, *Kritik* Vol. 3, 118ff.

*The Radical Dutchmen*

*Dutch radical criticism* refers to a movement arising in the nineteenth century within New Testament scholarship in the Netherlands, some of whose representatives rejected the historical existence of Jesus. They were usually conceived of as a group: the Dutch Radical School. The representatives of this school include, among others, *Allard Pierson* (1831-1896), the well-known theologian and historian of art and literature, after whom the Allard Pierson Museum on Oude Turfmarkt in Amsterdam is named; his friend *Samuel Adrianus Naber* (1828-1913), a philologist; *Abraham Dirk Loman* (1823-1897), professor of theology in Amsterdam; *Willem Christiaan van Manen* (1842-1905), a scholar from Leiden; and the philosopher *G.J.P.J. Bolland* (1854-1922), also from Leiden. The last offshoot and representative of radical criticism in this century was the theologian, *Gustaaf Adolf van den Bergh van Eysinga* (1874-1957).

The designation “radical” was obviously ascribed to this movement with a certain amount of sarcasm, since in the eyes of many people they intended to destroy not only the wild branches of the Christian tradition but also its roots (*radix*, from which the word *radical* is derived, meaning “root”). The Dutch critics referred to in such a way, however, gladly used this concept for themselves and gave it a positive meaning.

With regard to time, the history of Dutch radical criticism can be very precisely defined. The beginning of Dutch radical criticism is usually perceived in the publication of Pierson’s *Sermon on the Mount* in 1878, a work in which doubt was already expressed with regard to the authenticity of the so-called major letters as well as the historical existence of Jesus. The history of Dutch radical criticism closed with the death of Van den Bergh van Eysinga — or at least since then is no longer represented in universities. [65] Only a small academic circle of “Van-der-Berghians” survives today, but this plays hardly any role in present day Dutch theology.

*Loman* was certainly one of the most outstanding personalities among the Dutch radical critics. His lecture *Über das älteste Christentum (On Earliest Christianity)*, given on December 13, 1881, in the house of the Free Church of Amsterdam (today an avant-garde center in Weteringschans 6-8 in Amsterdam), ignited a storm of indignation in the audience. In his lecture, Loman claimed that Christianity in its origin was nothing else than a Jewish-Messianic movement and that the figure of Jesus

had never existed, but represented a symbolization and personification of thoughts that could only make full headway in the second century. A gnostic messianic community later appeared alongside the Jewish-Christian messianic community. In the period between 70 and 135 CE the two groups opposed one another with bitter animosity. Only in the middle of the second century did they achieve a reconciliation, in which the gnostic community had Paul as its representative and the Jewish-Christian community had Peter. The result of this process of reconciliation was the formation of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Loman, the letters of Paul are all inauthentic and represent the product of the newly-believing, gnostic-messianic community.

Later radical critics regarded Loman's lecture as a kind of manifesto, in which the rough elements of the new paradigm—the radical-critical theory regarding early Christian history, Loman's hypothesis—were set forth. The significance still attributed to Loman's lecture in radical-critical circles at a later time is shown by the fact that in the house of the *Vrije Gemeente* Van den Bergh van Eysinga and his students celebrated December 13th as a special memorial.<sup>57</sup>

In general, the agreement of representatives of the radical school was confined to the two basic theses: the denial of authenticity for all the Pauline letters and/or the historical existence of Jesus. So both theses were not always held simultaneously. Van den Bergh van Eysinga [66] remarks: "There are radicals who accept the historicity of Jesus while rejecting the epistles," although, to be sure, "the opposite case, that one rejects the historicity of Jesus but nevertheless maintains the authenticity of the Pauline letters... cannot be documented."<sup>58</sup> The historical existence of Jesus was questioned by only a few radical critics, and even Loman, who originally questioned it, later withdrew this thesis. On the other hand, the thesis that all the Pauline letters are inauthentic was held by all radical Dutch critics.

My first "encounter" with so-called Dutch radical criticism took place when, as a theological student, I was curiously browsing the pages of a newly acquired Introduction to the New Testament and in a section dealing with the Pauline epistles

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<sup>57</sup> See Van den Bergh van Eysinga, "*Loman na zestig jaren*" (1942), 3ff.; "*Radikale critiek in het gedrang?*" (1954), 4ff.

<sup>58</sup> Van den Bergh van Eysinga, *Radikale Kritik*. 171.

stumbled upon the existence of something called “radical criticism,” whose representatives had the audacity to deny the Pauline authenticity of the four major epistles and to explain them as “the fallout of anti-nomistic currents from the period around 140 CE.”<sup>59</sup>

I was skeptical, since the designation “radical criticism” itself could not portend anything good. In the same way as the English Bishop J.A.T. Robinson obviously did, at that time I imagined a radical to be “like a wild thrashing critic,”<sup>60</sup> half man and half wild animal. Moreover, I already knew about Bruno Bauer, who likewise had contested the authenticity of all the Pauline letters, and indeed with what I then regarded as very questionable methods and results. In the same way as the denial of authenticity for the Pauline letters, which seemed to be related with this, such attempts seemed to me to be determined by very transparent prejudices, lacking any scholarly seriousness. In any case, I could agree in the depths of my heart with the author of my Introduction to the New Testament, the famous New Testament scholar W.G. Kümmel, when he pays no further attention to such fantastic theories in what follows and only remarks in half a sentence that their representatives began with “untenable literary presuppositions and an atrocious historical construction.” [67]

At that time, what I had read about these foolhardy scholars (all of them held teaching positions) was still sufficient to convince me that additional information would hardly be required for my further theological education and would probably also be unrewarding. Even though a knowledge of Dutch radical criticism in fact turned out to be unnecessary for completing my theological exam, however, it was certainly evident that such knowledge was absolutely indispensable for a more intense, scholarly engagement with the Pauline letters.

In reading the Pauline letters I later encountered more and more questions that, when I was a student, I had either never thought about at all or had regarded as having been already answered long ago. A series of these questions was already

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<sup>59</sup> In P. Fein and J. Behm, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (1950), p. 124, it reads: “Dutch theologians such as Pierson, Naber, Loman, Van Manen, Van den Bergh van Eysinga, and Steck in Switzerland, also reject the four major letters of the apostle and explain as the fallout of anti-nomistic currents from the time around 140 CE, but in doing so begin with untenable literary presuppositions and an atrocious historical construction.” Cf. W.G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1975), 250f.

<sup>60</sup> J.A.T. Robinson, *Wann entstand das neue Testament?* (1986), 16.

discussed above. Since the common answers did not satisfy me, even when they were advanced with reference to the often-entreated “critical consensus,” and since the remarkable certainty suddenly radiated by theology teachers when one asks them about the historical bases of the Christian faith deeply disturbed me, I began more and more to seek refuge with persons who with regard to the church and theological history were outsiders and “skewed-thinkers,” whom during the course of my studies I had heard something about in standard textbooks and introductions only in footnotes, parenthetical comments, and marginal remarks.

With regard to the radical theologians, I nevertheless knew at least that they obviously had undertaken a general assault on the traditional picture of early Christian history as it has been taught in universities, largely without change, from Baur until today. I did not know in detail for what reason and with what arguments this had been carried out and with what arguments it had been repelled by traditional theology.

The question about what kind of arguments these were—on the basis of my previous engagement with the Pauline letters, I thought I could surmise some—had to be put off for a long time because of my lack of knowledge of the Dutch language. In time, of course, this problem began to engage me in such a way, the curiosity became so unbearable, [68] that I could no longer resist the temptation. I went to the library and procured for myself all the literature available in Germany about and by the Dutch critics, purchased a Dutch-German dictionary, and began to read.

With the first, still somewhat stumbling reading of some classic radical-critical writings in the original Dutch, I already suspected that the key might lie here for the many questions and problems which had caused me so much trouble in my occupation with the history of early Christianity and especially with the Pauline letters.

I was more interested in the arguments with which Dutch theologians and philologists had contested the authenticity of all the letters than with the answers they had given for many difficult questions in Pauline research. Even if a single argument, considered for itself, would not always have decisive significance, in connection with many other arguments it nevertheless builds what one characterizes as “cumulative evidence.” This is what one calls a scientific theory that is constructed from many different individual arguments, where each, considered for itself, need not be completely convincing.

In what follows, I obviously cannot not repeat all the arguments with which the authenticity of all the Pauline writings has been contested. (Whoever is interested in this should see my book *Paulusbriefe ohne Paulus?*.) In a series of brief points, however, I can note some questions and problems which could give a moment's pause even for those who until now have never doubted the authenticity of all the Pauline writings.

- “Paul, slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...”  
“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...” “Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God...” “Paul, a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus...”

Does someone write here about himself or about *someone else*? Do we have to do here with a statement about one's self or with a statement *about* the (revered) apostle (of a legendary past)?

Consider this: The greetings employed by Greeks and Romans were *very unpretentious*. Even the great Cicero could simply write: “Cicero greets Atticus” (*Cicero Attico salutem dicit*)

- Gal 1:1: “Paul... to *the churches* in Galatia.”  
1 Cor 1:1: “Paul, to the church of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, *together with all those who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.*  
The poor letter carrier!
- Gal 1:11: “*I want you to know*, brethren, that the gospel preached by me was not of men.”  
Had Paul left the Galatians ignorant of this central point of his teaching until now?
- Gal 1:17: “Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.”  
Gal 2:6: “And from those who were reputed to be something—what they once *were* makes no difference to me.”  
Why *were*? “*Are*” the apostles then no longer present when the author of Galatians writes his letter? Have they already died?

Does the author of Galatians by this time look back on the apostolic age as closed?

- In Galatians 6:11 Paul calls attention to the large letters of his handwriting: “See with what large letters I am writing with my [own] hand.”

Why? Obviously because he wants to provide his readers with an indication of the authenticity of the letter. Question: But why must the apostle already protect his letters from falsification? [70] Were forged letters already in circulation *in his lifetime*? Hardly!

If already in his own lifetime Paul represented such an authority that it was worthwhile to produce false letters in his name, why then do we hear nothing about the great apostle and his letters for another 100 years?

The writer’s reference to his handwriting in 2 Thessalonians 3:17 —“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write”—is regarded by most exegetes as a sign of the letters inauthenticity. Why is the corresponding reference in Galatians not so regarded?

- 1 Cor 3:1f: “But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual persons, but *as fleshly persons, as babes in Christ*. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even now you are not ready for it, for you are still fleshly.”

1 Cor 2:6: “Yet among the *perfect ones* we impart wisdom.”

Is the writer of 1 Corinthians himself really clear about *to whom* he is speaking?

- Rom 1:1f: “Paul... set apart for the gospel of God... namely, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh...”

2 Cor 5:16: “Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.”

Can the writer of Rom 1:1-2, who places so much value on the family tree of Jesus and his descent from David, be the same person who wrote 2 Cor 5:16?

- Is it conceivable that on the *very eve* of his sojourn in Rome he wrote one of the longest letters in ancient

literature to the church there? Why does he write a letter at all that goes beyond a brief announcement of his coming? Would he not be able in a short time to provide a much better and more lively testimony through his personal presence with the Roman community? [71]

- How could Paul be *understood* by those to whom he writes in Galatia? Can one imagine that the simple, war-like mountain people of the countryside, or the certainly not much better educated inhabitants of the province, would be able, even in the least way, to follow the theological ideas in the letter directed to them? From this perspective, does not Galatians represent, as the radical Dutch critic said, something like “Hegel lecturing to aborigines”?<sup>61</sup>
- After Paul received his revelation, he goes *into the desert* (to Arabia, Gal 1:17)—and not to the Jerusalem church! Does that make psychological sense? Transfer that for a moment to a follower of Socrates in southern Italy, who has come upon one or another of Plato’s dialogues and now feels called to become a disciple of Socrates:

He took pleasure in the fateful death of the philosopher, for he was a sophist with body and soul. But he became aware of something different. To think like Socrates, to feel, to teach, to live like Socrates, to fully identify with him, that—so he had understood, grasped by intuition—is the one thing necessary. Would he now hurry to Athens? Plato was still alive. Alkibiades was still alive. From them and from so many others he will attempt to learn what Socrates thought, felt, taught—what spirit spoke from his environs.

No. He goes to Egypt, remains there for three years, and then writes and speaks about Socrates during his entire life and comes to be regarded by a credulous world as the most credible witness to the Greek philosopher, as the most reliable interpreter of his life and work.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Loman, *Nalatenschap*, 74; cf. Detering, *Paulusbrieve ohne Paulus?*, 297; Van den Bergh van Eysinga, *Radical Views about the New Testament*, 81.

<sup>62</sup> Pierson, *Bergrede*, 103.

- Why does *the Jew* Paul forbid men to cover their heads during the worship service (1 Cor 11:4)—when such a practice is common in Jewish worship? Why does *the Jew* Paul speak of the Greeks and *Barbarians* (Rom 1:14) [71] if according to Greek understanding of the concept the latter term can only refer to himself? Why must the Jew Paul first *become* a Jew (1 Cor 9:20)?
- Why does Paul undergo a battle with beasts in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32) even though as supposedly a Roman citizen he could not be sentenced *ad bestias* at all? Even if he was not a citizen of Rome, how could he have survived such a thing?
- Why does the author who presumably wrote 1 Thessalonians between 50 and 60 look back upon the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE? 1 Thess 2:16: “God’s judgment has come upon them [the Jews] at last!” (cf. also the “severity of God” in Rom 11:17-22).
- In the next section, I would like to deal with one of the most important questions:  
 Why are the letters of the great Christian apostle, who claims godly authority for his office, and whose literary and theological level was hardly reached again in early Christian literature, first attested only in the first half of the second century?  
 Why is the Catholic Justin in the middle of the second century silent with regard to the Pauline writings? Why do we first encounter a canon of letters with Marcion the heretic?

#### *Seeking Traces*

**T**he Pauline letters are regarded as the most important documents of early Christian history in the first century, and Paul is its most important witness. It is expected of a reliable historical witness that his own historical identity can be credibly demonstrated. Tertullian, the church father, was not at all satisfied with the fact that the author of the Pauline letters represents himself in his letters as an apostle from early times (In this Tertullian was more critical than many New Testament critics today).<sup>63</sup> [73] Such

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<sup>63</sup> Tertullian, *AM* 5.1.

a claim is not sufficient by itself to produce certainty on this point. What is the situation then with the other witnesses for the apostle and his letters?

With regard to the person of the apostle, in the search for non-Christian sources for Paul one finds oneself in a similar dilemma as in the attempt to document the historicity of Jesus with non-Christian source material: the ancient sources are silent.

The dilemma is even greater since the silence stands in flagrant contrast to the overwhelming significance that the apostle is supposed to have had according to the writer of Acts and the early Christian tradition. Should we not expect that the sensational, public appearance of the apostle, his preaching and his missionary work, must also have had at least a distant reflection outside the churches founded by him?

Even if we do not regard by far everything that Acts tells us about the work of Paul as historical—even if one ignores his appearance before king Agrippa (Acts 25:13) or the high council in Jerusalem (Acts 22:30ff.), his marvelous release from imprisonment in Philippi (Acts 16:24ff), the uprising he caused in Ephesus (Acts 19:23ff), and the excitement he stirred up in Athens (Acts 17:18ff)—when all these elements, largely banished to the realm of legendary stories by present day scholars, are set aside, there nevertheless remains the bright reflection of an extraordinary personality who could hardly have remained unknown to a Greek or Roman writer or historian of that time. Even if we limit ourselves to only the major letters of Paul, a person and events remain which the ancient world could not have ignored and which must also have attracted attention beyond the narrow circle of Christian churches. Where indeed do we encounter such a man, who like Paul in Ephesus was thrown to the wild beasts in the arena (1 Cor 15:23), who received “five times the forty stripes minus one” (2 Cor 11:24), who was ship-wrecked three times, adrift in the sea for a night and a day (2 Cor 11:25)—and survived all this!—who traveled from Jerusalem as far round as Illyricum [74] in order to preach the gospel and evangelize (Rom 15:122ff.), who was able to escape from Damascus in a dramatic way (2 Cor 11:32-33)...? The puzzling answer is “Nowhere”! Neither in Graeco-Roman nor in Jewish literature do we find a trace of all this.

The figure of the apostle of the people, who is elevated in Acts to transcendent, almost divine status (Acts 14:11), obviously attracted so little notice among the Greeks and Romans that they

do not mention him with one word. In this regard, there was a number of ancient writers who could have been and must have been interested in the figure of the apostle: for example, Josephus, the Jewish-Roman historian, who is already met in connection with the question concerning the historical Jesus, who in his work *The Jewish War* relates the history and pre-history of the Jewish wars up to the fall of Masada in 73 CE and in his *Jewish Antiquities*, which appeared around 94 CE, described the history of Jews from the creation of the world until 66 CE. As already in the case of Jesus, so also with regard to Paul, Josephus, who otherwise displays the history of the Jewish people in great detail, and even somewhat garrulously, remains remarkably silent. Josephus, the friend of Romans, knows nothing about Paul, the Roman citizen, and also nothing about Saul, the zealot for “the traditions of the fathers” (Gal 1:14). The Saul known to Josephus is a relative of king Agrippa<sup>64</sup> and shares only the name in common with the Saul of the New Testament.

Josephus’ silence might seem strange, but it is nevertheless honest. The regretful lack of historical reports about the apostle Paul would have been easy to remedy through some insertions and interpolations. That Christians, for their part, did not succumb to this temptation might have something to do with the fact that it was easier to tolerate the absence of any kind of historical reports about the apostle than the disturbing silence that surrounded the person of Jesus by Josephus.

In addition to Josephus, one could think of a number of other ancient writers who could have referred to the apostle in one way or another: [75] Plutarch (c. 45-120 CE), who was open to all religious movements of his time, Pausanias (c. 115 CE), Aulus Gellius (2 century), Lucian (120-180 CE), to name only a few. They were all familiar with the theaters of the apostle’s activity and one or the other must have heard something about it—but they are all silent.

If what follows from all this is that the figure of the apostle to the nations, who was portrayed in such radiant and gleaming colors by Christians, was fully unknown to the “nations” of the first and second centuries, a look at the Jewish sources from the first and second centuries shows that here as well nothing seems to have been known either in a positive sense about the Jew who surpassed all his contemporaries in his zeal for the religion of the

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<sup>64</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 20.9.4.

fathers or in a negative sense about the despiser of the law and apostate.

However, not only the person, but also his work, namely, the letters written under the name of the apostle, are all obviously entirely unknown into the middle of the second century. As the majority of present day scholars recognize, the historical course of the Pauline letters in the first and second centuries is one of the most obscure and puzzling chapters of New Testament research.

The elevated claim with which Paul appears in his letters in his capacity as an apostle called by God (Gal 1:1f) stands in curious contrast with the fact that the apostle seems to have been completely forgotten in the theological discussion from directly following his death until the time of Marcion. Not only were the churches supposedly founded by Paul further developed on a different, Catholic foundation, particularly strange is that the letters, to which the apostle is indebted until today for the largest part of his fame, seem to have been forgotten for almost an entire century, until we encounter them in the middle of the second century in the hands of a heretic, of all places, the heresiarch Marcion, who was excommunicated by the Catholic church in 144 CE.

This view of the historical course of the Pauline letters in the first and second centuries is by no means an individual opinion, [76] but is a generally accepted understanding in recent research today.<sup>65</sup> I would call attention, for example, to the New Testament scholar Ernst Käsemann, who in his essay “Paul and Early Catholicism” provides a brief sketch of the effects and after-effects the apostle had on the Christian church of his time. Even for Käsemann, the finding is by and large negative: in the churches founded by Paul the memory of the apostle disappeared in a very short time. For Käsemann, the Pauline churches are “after a single generation already entangled in Hellenistic enthusiasm” without being able to preserve the inheritance of the apostle. Even the Apocalypse of John “gives no indication that Asia Minor was indebted to the apostle.” To be sure, apart from the insignificant witness of Ignatius, Käsemann knows a “great exception”—i.e., Marcion—which also makes clear “in what circles the theologian Paul continued to be esteemed.” In view of these very meager results, Käsemann’s formulation at the beginning of his article is

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<sup>65</sup> With the exception of A. Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum*. For a criticism of Lindemann, see Detering, *Paulusbriefe ohne Paulus?*, 437ff.

entirely confirmed: “Historical research has perhaps its final and deepest value in the fact that it disillusioned. How true this is even and especially of Paul has scarcely received sufficient recognition until now.”<sup>66</sup> To be sure!

### *Two Pauls*

A problem that has occupied Pauline research for a long time is the fact that the picture of Paul in Acts differs essentially from that which we meet in the letters presumed to be authentic. In comparing Gal 1:17 with the relevant passage in Acts, for example, we observe a significant divergence. While according to the presentation in Gal 1:11-2:10, after his conversion Paul spent three years in Arabia, Acts knows nothing to report about this. In the presentation of Acts it is as if after his conversion Paul remained in Damascus for some time and preached Christ in the synagogues there (Acts 9:10-22), until he was finally driven out by Jews there and came to Jerusalem.

While in Galatians Paul’s second visit in Jerusalem is occasioned by a “revelation” (Gal 1:12), in Acts he is commissioned to go to Jerusalem by the churches in Antioch.

While the fifteenth chapter of Acts (vv. 23-29) contains the so-called “apostolic decree,” that prescribes that Gentiles abstain from “blood and what is strangled and unchastity” (Acts 15:20)—a requirement that was continuously followed by Catholic Christians of the second and third centuries and which had no efficacy except in Gnostic and Marcionite communities (see Justin, *Dial.*, 35), the writer of Galatians knows nothing about this decree in the passage where he relates the meeting in Jerusalem.

The differences between the letters regarded as authentic and Acts, however, do not relate only to individual historical data, but are fundamental in character. Acts gives us an entirely different picture of Paul than the letters.

The following two characteristics are commonly raised up as the essential features of the Lukan picture of Paul:<sup>67</sup>

1. Luke sketches the picture of the apostle in such a way that he appears as a *typical representative of Judaism*, as a Jew who is faithful to the law.

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<sup>66</sup> Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, 236-251: 239, 238.

<sup>67</sup> See G. Klein, who in his investigation of the origin of the Christian apostle concept, *Die zwölf Apostel*, deals in detail with the picture of Paul in Luke; also Schmithals, *Apostelamt*, 269ff.

In Acts, for example, Paul *not only approves of circumcision, but even practices it himself!* (Acts 16:3: the circumcision of Timothy).

This passage can be compared with Acts 21:21, where Luke mentions the concern of some Jewish-Christian zealots for the law who have heard a rumor about Paul that he teaches Jews to forsake Moses by telling them that they should not circumcise their children or observe Jewish customs. To provide the Jewish-Christian zealots for the law with a public demonstration of his faithfulness to the law, Paul is supposed to become a Nazarite for a while and pay the expenses of four men who would become Nazarites—which he promptly does (Acts 21:18ff; In ancient Israel a Nazarite—from the Hebrew *nazir* = to separate oneself, consecrate oneself—was a man who was set apart by a vow for special service to God and who distinguished himself from his religious brethren by an ascetic way of life. For example, a Nazarite had to abstain from wine for a specified time; for reasons of purity he could not touch a dead body; and he could not “let a razor travel over his head,” that is, he must let his hair grow long like the Old Testament hero Samson. One could regard him as a Jewish “monk for a time”—often for a lifetime.)

**In contrast to this**, Paul of the letters (in the non-interpolated passages of the *corpus paulinum*) explicitly and vehemently rejects the law and circumcision. Paul’s criticism of the law reaches its peak in Philippians where, in the course of a furious polemic, circumcision is characterized as nothing less than *castration* (Phil 3:2).

2. A further characteristic of the Lukan picture of Paul is the subordination of the apostle to the Jerusalem representatives of the church.

a) Luke emphasizes that, in contrast to the other apostles, Paul had not been an eyewitness to Christ. In all three presentations of Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-31; 22:3-21; 26:9-20), it is important for Luke that Paul fell down on his face. This and the blinding of Paul have the same significance every time: afterward, Paul can no longer see! Consequently, he did not experience an appearance of the exalted Christ like the rest of the apostles, since all he saw was the great heavenly light.

According to the presentation of Luke, therefore, “Paul is dependent on *hearing*... That Paul first identifies the exalted Christ in dialogue emphasizes that he had not *seen* him. And that

he converses with the Lord *in heaven* shows that Jesus did not come to earth.”<sup>68</sup>

The tendency that Luke pursues with this presentation of the conversion of Paul can be understood against the background of his picture of Paul and his concept of an apostle. According to Luke’s understanding, only one who has *seen* Jesus Christ is an apostle. Against this background, the writer of Acts endeavors to fundamentally distinguish Paul’s conversion and calling from the calling of the twelve. [79]

In this regard, the fact that Luke reports the calling of Paul *three times* shows how important this distinction between Paul and the twelve apostles was for him. In contrast to the twelve, Paul had never seen Jesus! The resurrected Christ had never left heaven at all, but had merely *called to him* from heaven and, in other respects, referred him to the church, which had long been built on the foundation of the twelve.

The New Testament scholar W. Schmithals can say: “The greatness of Paul for Luke consists precisely in his devoted dependence on the twelve apostles.”

**In contrast to this**, the writer of the letters presents the matter in an entirely different way. In Gal 1:1f and 1 Cor 9:1ff Paul explicitly emphasizes that he is entirely equal to those who were apostles before him. He has “seen Jesus our Lord” (1 Cor 9:1). He claims for himself and his gospel the same direct relationship with the resurrected Jesus as the apostles.

b) The words that Jesus directs to the apostle in Acts 9:6, that he should go into the city in order to hear there what more he should do, make it entirely clear that the conversion of Paul is exclusively centered on *establishing contact with the Jerusalem church* and its representatives. The New Testament scholar G. Klein observes:

The direct contact with the heavenly world exhausts itself therefore in the goal of bringing Paul to the threshold of the meeting with Ananias and remains this side of any material instruction. This—and so also the conveyance of the disoriented Paul into the orientation of faith—remains the exclusive prerogative of the representative of the church.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Schmithals, *Apostelamt*, 151.

<sup>69</sup> Klein, *Die zwölf Apostel*, 146f.

In contrast to the presentation of Galatians, conversion and calling are therefore not identical with one another for Paul. In Acts, conversion only plays the role of a road sign by which Paul is directed to the representatives of the Jerusalem community: it is here that he first receives the decisive instruction and authorization for his further work.

c) Closely related with this is the further circumstance noted by Klein, namely, that the difference [80] between the presentation of Acts and that of Galatians “that first meets the eye” concerns “the absence of the figure of Ananias.”<sup>70</sup>

While Acts reports that directly following his conversion Paul turned to Ananias (Acts 9:10ff.), the representative of the church, in Galatians Paul denies “as sharply as possible that there was any kind of incident that might suggest the possibility to conceive his apostleship as being ‘from men,’ indeed, even as only ‘through men.’ Thereby it is expressed with complete clarity that not only a direct but also any kind of mediated human role in his conversion is excluded. The contrast with the Lukan scheme, for which the idea of mediation is constitutive, is total.”<sup>71</sup>

Klein remarks that the “highly polemical inclination” of the prescript of Galatians, which is primarily concerned with the rejection of opposing constructions, wants to address this issue in every conceivable expression, and in the formulation of positive circumstances is entirely dependent on the preceding negation.”<sup>72</sup>

d) The subordinate position attributed to Paul in relation to the other apostles is exemplified above all by the conduct of the apostles during the so-called apostolic council.

While the Paul of Galatians, for example, “in order to completely maintain his independence, so that the fact that he sets his gospel before the leaders in Jerusalem would not make him appear to be subordinate and dependent, declares that he went to Jerusalem as the consequence of a revelation (Gal 2:1),”<sup>73</sup> according to the Lukan presentation he follows a resolution of the church in Antioch (Acts 15:2f.). While according to the statements in Galatians the Jerusalem pillars imposed nothing on Paul,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 160f. The interpolated passage Gal 1:18-24 is excluded from this framework; see the chapter “Entry visit with the Pope – an interpolated trip to Rome.”

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 161, n. 771, with reference to the commentaries by Lietzmann, Schleier, and Oepke.

<sup>73</sup> B. Bauer, *Kritik*, Vol. 1, 17.

according to the presentation of Acts the apostolic decrees are imposed on Paul and his churches.

**All this** (b-d) contradicts the picture mediated to us by Galatians. Here the apostle is represented as fully *sovereign*. He is an apostle “not from men nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:1). It was a *revelation* that caused him to go to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles there (Gal 2:2). He comes without having been sent by his own church or summoned by those in Jerusalem. [81]

Since, as we have seen, the differences between Acts and the presumably authentic letters of Paul are in many cases irreconcilably great and fundamental in character, they require a decision by the historian: one must give preference to either the presentation of Acts or that of Paul as more historically adequate.

It is very obvious that for the great majority of scholars the decision would be in favor of the Paul of the letters, and the presentation of Luke in Acts, as a rule, is characterized, more or less emphatically (sometimes even polemically), as a tendentious falsification. The English theologian A.J. Matill, who can be named here as representative of many others, declares that “in Acts and in the letters there are *two Pauls*, the historical Paul of the authentic letters and the legendary Paul of Acts.”<sup>74</sup>

One must ask whether the decision by Matill and the majority of present day scholars in favor of the Pauline letters, which seems so obvious and beyond question, is not somewhat rash. There is indeed a *third* possibility, usually left out of consideration, that can lead us beyond the narrow alternative that either the Pauline letters or Acts must be correct. How would it be if from a historical perspective *neither* Luke *nor* the author of the Pauline letters was “correct”? If the Paul of Acts as well as the Paul of the letters, as Bruno Bauer expressed it, “sprung up from the same ground of deliberate reflection”?

As we have seen, by closer observation it becomes clear that Acts and Galatians are “in conversation” with one another, that “in their work” the authors of both writings have each other “clearly in view.”<sup>75</sup> It follows from this, whatever one may think in particular about the relationship of mutual dependence, that both writings, whose respective statements, in spite of, or perhaps precisely because of their differences, [82] fit together like two

<sup>74</sup> In C. H. Talbert, *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, 88, 98.

<sup>75</sup> B. Bauer, *Christus und die Caesaren*, 372.

pieces of a puzzle, must have originated at approximately *the same time*. It is unthinkable that one piece of the puzzle (Galatians) is many decades older than the other and that the (implicit) polemic of Acts was conserved over many decades in order to appear again in a time in which the debate about the apostleship of Paul (after his death) had long since become insignificant. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine that the writer of Galatians did not know Acts, or one of its predecessors, which, last but not least, is indicated by the “highly polemical tendency” that present day scholars called attention to.

Even apart from this, the likewise fictional character of the picture of Paul we encounter in the letters is clear. The many improbabilities and inanities with which Acts burdens us from a historical perspective, and which cause many scholars to consider Acts as a historical source regarding the apostle Paul either not at all or only to a very limited extent, are also met in the Pauline letters! We would see this even more clearly, or course, if we first freed ourselves from the prejudice that in the letters we have to do with first-hand sources, and if we had the same critical distance with regard to the letters as we do with regard to Acts. Instead of this, the automatically presupposed and, in general, hardly further considered axiom of authenticity leads us either to not even notice the many discrepancies and problems in the letters regarded as authentic or to plaster over *those we do notice* with all kinds of possible and impossible explanations. Our *prior decision* that in the letters we have to do in every case with documents having great historical authenticity is so unshakable that, as improbable as they might be individually, all these explanations are legitimate. If we once began to doubt the possibility of such explanations (As a rule, hardly anyone believes the explanations as such except for the one from whom they originated), in the same breath we would have to ask the decisive, fundamental question about the authenticity of all the letters—and no one wants to do that.

[83] Our prior-decision has the effect that we have forgotten how to be amazed at things that we should really wonder about: for example, that the writer of the letters claims he went to Jerusalem *because of a revelation* (Gal 2:2), as the Dutchman Pierson already noticed, smells suspiciously of apologetic (the writer obviously counters the accusation that his apostle, if anything, is no sovereign apostle, but as Acts claims, had been *sent*) and gives rise to the suspicion that for the writer of this

passage the historical possibility (or impossibility) of a “revelation” that would cause him to go to Jerusalem at the appropriate time for the apostolic council had escaped his sight. Or for example the writer’s incidental remarks that he had fought with wild animals in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32), that after many other hardships (“five times I received from the Jews forty [lashes] minus one; three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned”) he was “adrift on the deep sea for a day and a night” (2 Cor 11:24f.: literally *on the bottom of the sea!*); that he was received by the churches in Galatia “as an angel of God... as Christ Jesus” (Gal 4:14): Why? And how did the Galatians know Christ Jesus, whom the apostle had yet to preach to them for the first time?); and so forth. If we would read these passages and others in a different context, we would recognize without a moment’s hesitation that we have before us either overblown exaggerations of someone’s runaway imagination or—what is more probable—literary fiction. In addition to what has been said, we now come to a further important point, which we have not considered at all until now.

*Why does Luke Remain Silent About the Letters of Paul?*

**T**he list of *Christian* writers who must have known the Pauline writings but whose work nevertheless betrays nothing of the sort [84] is considerable. Surprisingly, the writer of Acts also belongs to this group. Even Luke knows nothing about the literary activity of the apostle! For Luke the activity of Paul (and Peter) is limited to that of a missionary and worker of miracles. He seems to know nothing about any correspondence of Paul with his churches; in any case, he says nothing about this.

How should one explain this peculiar situation that the first and only New Testament author who concerns himself with the life history of Paul does not waste one word regarding the apostle’s letters to his churches, which seemed so important to Christians a few decades later that they found them worthy of inclusion in the New Testament canon. Can one imagine that a present day writer would write a biography of Schubert without mentioning his musical works? What is hidden behind Luke’s remarkable silence?

According to the generally accepted conception, Luke writes after the death of Paul, and thus looks back on the life and work of the apostle. If he does not mention the letters of the apostle, the reason for this must be sought in following three explanations:

1. Luke *knew* the Pauline writings, but for certain reasons would not, or could not mention them;
2. Luke *did not know* the Pauline writings, even though they already existed;
3. Luke did not know the Pauline writings because in his time no literature at all in the name of Paul yet existed.

It is self-evident that today Luke's remarkable silence with regard to the letters of Paul must be explained either with 1) alone, or perhaps with 2), since 3) would presuppose the inauthenticity of all the Pauline letters, which is an impossible possibility for research that continues to hold fast to the axiom of authenticity for all the Pauline writings, and that until now has not once considered this as even a temporary working hypothesis.

To be sure, the reasons given for the fact that Luke did not know the Pauline writings, although they already existed, strike one as entirely artificial. The assumption that in the course of his search for details about the life of the apostle Luke heard nothing about the letters that were supposedly so highly revered and highly valued in the churches is extremely improbable.

More probable, on the other hand, is G. Klein's assumption that by "suppressing the Pauline writings" Luke wanted to "neutralize the theology of Paul that was regarded as sinister by orthodox thinking."<sup>76</sup> In other words, Klein's thesis means that Luke knowingly ignored the Pauline letters because in many ways these were disturbing for the church of his time.

This thesis, that proceeds from the correct observation that in their language and theology the Pauline letters come remarkably close to the Gnosticism perceived as heretical and for this reason must have seemed "sinister" to the orthodox church of the second century (I return to this below = *Marcionism and Gnosis*), must nevertheless collapse in the form represented by Klein because in the Pauline writings—in their present canonical form—alongside much that is Gnostic there are also some anti-Gnostic ideas, which are not only well in accord with the thinking of the orthodox church but also could be made excellent use of against the Gnostics.

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<sup>76</sup> Klein, *Die zwölf Apostel*, 215; cf. Lindemann, *Paulus*, 164.

*The Silence of the Apocalypse*

What is true for Acts also holds for the last book in the New Testament canon, *The Revelation to John*, which according to prevailing opinion was perhaps written in the time between 81 and 96 CE. One should also be able to presuppose a knowledge of Paul and the Pauline letters for the author of the Apocalypse, since the seven letters contained in the writing are addressed to churches that belong in the region of Paul's missionary work: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Here also we are disappointed. The author of the Apocalypse, who according to traditional opinion writes only a few decades after Paul,<sup>77</sup> [86] seems to have heard nothing about Paul or his letters. At the same time, he had all kinds of reasons to talk about him. Above all, the apocalyptic writer, who was filled with passion for Christian martyrdom, could not have ignored Paul's own martyrdom in Rome.

Moreover, how should the serious differences between the Christianity presupposed by the Pauline letters and that which the apocalyptic writer addressed be understood? In comparison with the former, must not the latter seem to come from another world? While the writer of the Apocalypse still conceives Christianity as entirely a national-Jewish affair, the writer of the Pauline letters presupposes a Christianity that has emancipated itself from Judaism and the law long ago.

In addition, as Käsemann observes, the writer of the Apocalypse of John gives no indication "that Asia Minor is indebted to

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<sup>77</sup> With regard to the dating of the Apocalypse, I would refer to the discussion of W. Hadorn, *Die Offenbarung*, 1928; cf. also Weiss-Heitmüller, 278, with regard to Rev 11:1-2: "But not only the forecourt should be spared but also those 'who pray therein' ... Who are these? ... They must be those who not only come there now and then, but are constantly there. Now for a long time, during the Roman war, the Temple (apart from the forecourt of the Gentiles) was the primary residence of the Zealots. They used it primarily as a fortress, but like their predecessors ... at the same time they clung to the holiness of the house of God and regarded themselves as invulnerable there ... This faith in the invulnerability of the Temple and the remnant sheltered therein is shared by our author, and with this his time is determined. He knows that the rest of the city is lost, but hopes that the assault of the enemies will be broken on the ramparts of the Temple. That means he had already experienced the Romans' entrance into the city (since May, 70), but not yet their burning of the Temple (August, 70), i.e., he wrote in the summer of 70 CE." Cf. also Helgel, *Die Zeloten*, 249; Wellhausen, *Analyse der Offenbarung Johannis*, 15; Bousset, *Die Offenbarung*, 32f.; as well as Couchoud, "L'Apocalypse," in *Christianisme*, 1939, Introduction: "It (Rev) is the oldest Christian writing."

the apostle.” In light of the astonishingly negative historical findings, that is even saying a bit too much. The radical critic Loman did not leave it be with simple astonishment, but bravely drew the consequences: it seemed to him that defending the authenticity of the major epistles was something more difficult than opening all the seals and locks of the Apocalypse.<sup>78</sup>

Not only important New Testament writings wrap themselves in silence with regard to the apostle Paul and his letters (Paul is mentioned for the first time in the New Testament in 2 Peter 3:15, which according to the prevailing view today is supposed to have originated in the middle of the second century),<sup>79</sup> outside the New Testament as well in the period between 50 and 150 CE we encounter hardly any church writer who can definitively witness to the existence of letters stemming from the apostle Paul.

#### *Justin and Aristides*

**J**ustin, the “philosopher and martyr,” who lived in Rome (ca. 165 CE) and descended from Flavia Neapolis (today Nablus) in Palestine, is one of the most important church writers of the second century. According to his own statement, he had first been a teacher of Platonic philosophy before he was converted to Christianity.

Justin also seems to not yet have heard of Paul. In any case, his writings do not indicate that he knew an additional apostle alongside the twelve. Likewise, Justin seems not to have known letters that had been written under the name of Paul.

Of course, there is something that makes the whole affair somewhat more complicated, but also more puzzling, than the New Testament witnesses considered until now. It is the often noted fact that, in spite of his obvious ignorance of Paul, Justin’s writings occasionally, in some places, sound “Pauline,” i.e., their language and theology have a certain Pauline coloring. For example, in his *First Apology* (19) Justin attempts to derive the possibility of resurrection from the image of a man and human seed: just as in a wondrous way the man comes forth from human seed, so also the human body will be resurrected and take on immortality. That could directly connect with 1 Cor 15:38, where the author of the Pauline letters employs a corresponding image: “But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each seed its own body.”

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<sup>78</sup> See Detering, *Paulusbrieve ohne Paulus?*, 264.

<sup>79</sup> Vielhauer, *Urchristliche Literatur*, 599.

This echo of Pauline theology and language, that can also be observed elsewhere<sup>80</sup> and can hardly be accidental, is strange. If Justin knew the Pauline letters, why does he fail to mention him as a missionary and founder of churches, as a great Christian theologian, or as a martyr and hero of the faith? How can we explain the strange fact that Justin speaks in Pauline phrases without mentioning Paul or his letters?

Since we often encounter this phenomenon in our search for traces of the apostle in second century writings, the question will be pursued in somewhat more detail in what follows. It can finally be explained, however, only when we interrogate our last and decisive witness, Marcion, the “rediscoverer” of the [88] Pauline letters who was excommunicated from the Catholic church.

If we hold fast to the traditional understanding, namely, the view that all the (major) Pauline letters are authentic, the following possible explanations emerge:

1) One can deny that the passages that sound like Paul should be traced back to the Pauline writings and or that Justin knew of any Pauline tradition;

2) One can assume that Justin did indeed know Paul, but deliberately ignored him because he was the primary witness for Marcion, the heretic whom Justin fought;

3) One can presume that Justin refrained from mentioning Paul out of respect for his Jewish dialogue partner;

4) One can disregard what is found in the text and make Justin an ardent follower of Paul.

The first possibility, for example, is taken up by W. Schmithals, the Berlin New Testament scholar. Schmithals declares: “That the Oriental Justin must have devoted himself in Rome to the Pauline tradition is an unreasonable demand. Did Rudolf Bultmann in Marburg devote himself to the literature of Hans Bruns, or Billy Graham in Berlin to the writings of Ernst Fuchs? Hardly!”<sup>81</sup>

The anachronistic comparison Schmithals makes between Justin, Bultmann and Billy Graham is hardly sufficient to provide a satisfactory explanation for those passages that contain echoes of Pauline writings. Apart from the fact that one cannot compare the situation on the theological “book market” in those days with

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Dial* 13 and Rom 4:9-11, Gal 3:9; *Dial* 111 and 1 Cor 5:7; *Dial* 14 and 1 Cor 5:8; *Dial* 42 and 1 Cor 12:12; *Dial* 47 and Rom 2:4.

<sup>81</sup> *The Office of the Apostle*, 250, n. 91.

that of today, one should also consider that writings that are about to be elevated to the rank of canonical dignity are not easily ignored.

That Justin does not mention Paul because he deliberately ignores him is forcefully maintained in our time by G. Klein.<sup>82</sup> Klein rightly refers to it as a “very strange affair”:

An orthodox writer, who is nevertheless a witness for how things were in Rome around 150, leaves behind in his work not one trace of that apostle to the Gentiles who decades earlier had enjoyed the highest respect in this very same church, as 1 Clement indicates, and Ignatius as well indirectly. Did he know nothing about him, and none of his writings? That would have been fully impossible at this time and in this place. [89] The only possible conclusion is that he wanted to ignore him.

Klein provides the same kind of explanation here as in the case of Luke, who in his view was “embarrassed” by Paul and in this way attempted to limit the popularity of his writings. With regard to this explanation, therefore, the same thing must be said as there.

That the third possible explanation is correct is highly questionable,<sup>83</sup> since one can find many starting points in the Pauline letters for conversation with a Jewish dialogue partner. And the fourth explanation is even less probable, since the fact that Justin nowhere mentions Paul by name seems to be completely ignored.

Two possible explanations for solving Justin’s enigma still remain. But both of these explanations, of course, would presuppose what is obviously unthinkable for most theologians, namely, that the (major) Pauline letters do not derive from the apostle and are therefore inauthentic.<sup>84</sup>

Explanation 5: In view of the fact that Justin does not explicitly mention the Pauline letters, one could surmise that they did not yet exist, or

Explanation 6: that they were not yet circulating as letters of Paul. To begin with, there could have been only general theological tracts, which—having originated in heretical (Marcionite) circles—were already by and large identical with the later Pauline letters, but did not yet sail under the flag of the apostle. This

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<sup>82</sup> *Die zwölf Apostel* (1961), 200.

<sup>83</sup> It would be represented, for example, by Goodspeed and Grant.

<sup>84</sup> The Dutch radical critic Loman already made this fundamental argument in an investigation in 1882, to be sure, without finding great response.

would explain the fact that Justin's language now and then exhibits Pauline echoes, but that at the same time he nowhere speaks of the apostle. He does not do this because he obviously did not know him, either as an apostle or as the writer of the literature he sometimes used and in which various questions about Christian life were addressed. This literature could later have been brought into the form of letters and attributed to the apostle. This presumption offers a possible explanation for why Justin nowhere mentions Paul, even though he makes use of Pauline phrases. That theological writings that had originally not at all been conceived as letters could circulate as theological treatises for a long time [90] before they were reworked into "apostolic letters" is indeed a phenomenon known elsewhere. In the view of many scholars, for example, the letter of James could have been such a treatise, which through the introductory address and greeting with the name of James, the "brother of the Lord" and apostle, became a letter from early, apostolic times. And Hebrews as well, as one can see at a glance, has hardly anything to do with a real "letter," but is basically nothing else than a theological "essay," which was first transformed into our "letter" to the Hebrews through the addition of some epistolary formalities.

The name alone divulges that it can hardly be a real letter: for example, who would perceive a letter *to the Germans* as an authentic letter—with postmark and stamp? In any case, the possibility can not be excluded that the Pauline letters also originally circulated in the Christian bookstores of the ancient world only as "interesting literary publications," as the Swiss radical critic R. Steck expressed it. The Pauline letters as well contain many passages that give a strong impression of theological-dogmatic or ethical treatises. It would be entirely possible that individual "building blocks" of this kind were later furnished with an epistolary frame and published as testimony from apostolic times.

But even if Justin already possessed the Pauline writings as letters—not in their present canonical form, but in an earlier version, there could have been a serious reason why he would have remained silent about it. Justin could have been aware that the Pauline letters represented forgeries (by Christian heretics). Because of their theological content, he did not want to deny them respect; but he obviously also could not recognize them as documents from apostolic times, just as little as he could

recognize Paul as an apostle, whom he either did not know at all, or knew only as the patron saint of the heretics. [91]

This conjecture, which leads us into the middle of the entire question concerning the authenticity of the Pauline writings and which will engage us later in connection with the interrogation of our chief witness, Marcion, cannot be pursued further here. At this point, it is sufficient to observe that Justin knows nothing about the existence of an apostle Paul nor anything about letters written under his name, which in the middle of the second century for a representative of the Roman church, to which Paul had once written the letter to the Romans, must seem very strange.

It is also strange then that the Christian philosopher Aristides, who at about the same time was writing in Athens, in his writing addressed to the Caesar Hadrian, in which he defends Christianity against accusations by the pagan world, speaks not a single word about the supposed founder of the first Christian churches in Greece, even though—here we encounter a phenomenon similar to Justin—he sometimes uses Pauline formulations. As with Justin, the Christianity of Aristides had already largely separated from Judaism—but any reference to the person who with his theology supposedly created the presupposition for this is missing. As with Justin, the preaching of the gospel is exclusively the work of the Twelve (whether he silently includes Paul among them or does not know him at all is unclear).

*1 Clement and Ignatius:*

*Two Will-o'-the-wisps of New Testament Criticism*

**I**n our investigation of witnesses to the Pauline letters in the literature of the first and second centuries we have until now (along with some writings less important for our work) left two writers out of consideration: the writer of *1 Clement* and the martyr-bishop Ignatius of Antioch. Both writers are perceived by most scholars today as the earliest witnesses to the (major) Pauline letters.

According to widespread opinion today, in *1 Clement* we have a writing from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth, that supposedly originated in 81-96 or 96-98 [92] and whose author was a certain Clement of Rome, who presumably was “a leading person in the Roman church, one of their bishops or presbyters.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Vielhauer, *Urchristliche Literatur*, 540.

In this writing, whose purpose is seen to be the restoration of peace and order in the quarreling Corinthian community, Paul is spoken of several times—5:5-7, where the persecution and suffering of the apostle is alluded to; Paul is characterized as a “herald in the East and the West,” who “received the true fame for his faith,” and is portrayed to the Corinthians as “the greatest example of patience”; then 47:1, where the community is reminded of the “letter of the blessed Paul,” in which the quarrelsome Corinthians were once already admonished to unity, and indeed by highest apostolic authority. If it is already clear from the second passage that the writer of *1 Clement* knew 1 Corinthians, on the basis of other passages it also cannot be denied that he knew some of the other Pauline letters.

The martyr-bishop Ignatius of Antioch, who around 110 was supposedly brought from his home in Antioch to Rome in order to suffer martyrdom there, is a remarkable figure. In his seven letters that he writes on the way to different churches in Asia Minor and to the church in Rome, he also shows that he knows the apostle Paul and his letters. In his letter to the Ephesians (12.2) he refers to the Ephesians as “common-initiates with Paul,” who mentions the church in Ephesus “in all of his letters.” Peculiar here is only that the “common initiation” of the supposed founder of their community has been so quickly forgotten that later they could make the disciple John, who had supposedly already been executed in Jerusalem in 44 CE, the founder of the church.<sup>86</sup>

In his letter to the Romans (4.3), Ignatius mentions “Peter and Paul” in one breath, and in other passages also it is clear that the author of the Ignatian letters knew not only Paul but also his letters, which he sometimes cites or alludes to.

Even if knowledge of the apostle Paul and some of the letters written in his name can not be disputed for either the writer of *1 Clement* or Ignatius, [93] it is nevertheless very doubtful that the two apostolic fathers fulfill another essential presupposition for their reputation as witnesses for the authenticity of the Pauline epistles. What is the situation with regard to the authenticity of *their* “letters” and the question of their dating? — If one can believe the majority of today’s theologians, the authenticity of the letters and their origin around the turn of the first to the second century is beyond doubt.

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<sup>86</sup> J. Haller, *Papstgeschichte*, Vol. 1, 347.

To be sure, thoroughgoing skepticism is appropriate when scholars appeal to the “critical consensus” or “generally recognized results.” Apart from the fact that until now in this scholarly field the majority decision has seldom led to reliable results, it has also often been seen in the past that opinions having been supported for a long while by a broad “critical consensus” at some point end up in the scholarly waste basket as entirely out of date.

The case with regard to *1 Clement* and the Ignatian letters is somewhat different because the authenticity of these “letters” was very contested for a long time in the past! In his *Papstgeschichte (History of Bishops)*, J. Haller rightly calls attention to the fact that for a long time these letters were “regarded as unauthentic... Today one regards them as authentic, but how long can one do that? The price of such documents tends to rise and fall with the scholarly market...”<sup>87</sup>

In fact, to confirm this one must only glance briefly at the fluctuating *history of research* for these letters. Surprisingly, the theologians of our grandfathers’ and great-grandfathers’ generations often show themselves to be far more critical than their descendents today. Not only *1 Clement*, which because of its enormous length, that for a real letter was highly unusual, stirred up doubt among old-time scholars, the Ignatian letters also took on the smell of forgery very early. Until the seventeenth century, the Ignatian letters were known only in the so-called “longer recension,” which contained not only seven letters like the collection today, but six additional letters. The Catholic character of these letters (among which was a letter from Ignatius to Mary!) was so obvious that it required no great scholarly effort to recognize that [94] they represented pseudepigraphic products from a later time. The Protestants of the Reformation were among the first to suspect that the letters of the martyr-bishop, who carried out energetic propaganda for the office of the monarchical bishop on his way from Syria to Rome, were forgeries. They were joined later by most of the theologians of the Tübingen School — although in the meantime the situation had changed somewhat (in favor of the authenticity of the letters) and since the seventeenth century there had existed not only the thirteen letters of the longer recension but also the seven letters of the “middle recension,” whose Catholic elements were not so striking to the eye.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

In any case, towards the end of the last century there was a “conservative” turn, introduced by the investigations of the German scholar Th. Zahn<sup>88</sup> and the Englishman J.B. Lightfoot,<sup>89</sup> both of whom, with a great display of erudition, attempted to demonstrate the authenticity of the seven letters of the middle recension, without providing satisfactory answers, to be sure, for the decisive questions raised previously by those who contested their authenticity. After their judgment received in 1878 the blessing of A. Harnack, who at that time was the greatest German authority in the area of early Christian history, the authenticity of the seven Ignatian letters was established in Germany as a generally recognized scholarly result. After Harnack’s harsh dictum—“Whoever regards the Ignatian letters as inauthentic has not studied them intensely enough”—only a few still had the courage to again place the question of authenticity on the day’s agenda.

As in the case of the Ignatian letters, so also for *1 Clement* a quick look at the history of research suffices to relativize the opinion expressed with great self-confidence by many theologians today that we have to do here with an authentic writing from the close of the first century. The leading scholars of the Tübingen School did not perceive this writing as an authentic letter. Here also it was again the German scholar Harnack who authoritatively supported the authenticity of the writings still disputed at that time and thereby determined the course of future research until today. After Harnack, at least in Germany there were few researchers who dared contest *1 Clement*. [95] In view of the numerous questions and problems that *1 Clement* and the Ignatian letters had earlier posed for scholars—and which were not really solved by Zahn, Lightfoot, or Harnack—this is more than curious and perhaps only understandable against the background of these scholars’ great authority. What may also have played a role for some theologians was the view that the letters were quite important not only for dating the Pauline letters but also for dating some other New Testament writings (e.g., the Gospel of Matthew) and that calling their authenticity into question could produce further consequences, which made it seem advisable not to ask this question to begin with.

Whatever the case may be, whoever picks up *1 Clement*, for example, and reads it without prejudice will encounter so much

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<sup>88</sup> Th. Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 1873.

<sup>89</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1, 1890.

nonsense and so many contradictions that they will not be able to suppress the question. In spite of the introductory address to “the church of God that sojourns in Corinth,” and in spite of the obligatory mentioning of some names as well as other epistolary formalities, do we have to do here with a *real letter*?

Can a document consisting of some 32-35 papyrus pages be accepted without further ado as a writing that was sent from Rome to Corinth with the intention of actual correspondence? Apart from the fact that the size of an average letter in antiquity, as one can determine from collections of ancient papyrus letters we possess,<sup>90</sup> was not substantially different from our letters today and consisted of one to two pages (rather less than more, since writing was such an arduous affair in antiquity),<sup>91</sup> the situation in which the author intervenes with the pen, the party conflict in Corinth, required great haste! If he wanted to accomplish something with his writing, he could hardly sit there and spend weeks or months drafting a writing whose size surpasses that of many ancient books, especially since in view of conditions of conveyance in the ancient world he would have had to reckon with considerable delay in delivery. With the passing of one or two months, [96] the situation which the writer presupposes in his writing could be entirely different, and his writing hopelessly out of date.

If the party conflict in Corinth and the replacement of the presbyters with younger members of the church was in fact the real incentive for the letter from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth, it is furthermore completely impossible to understand why the writer only comes to speak of this in chapter 44 (!) and in the first two-thirds of the writing exhausts the patience of the Corinthians with discussions of the resurrection, the omniscience and omnipresence of God, and such things, which although edifying, have no importance for the matter at hand.

In addition, there is the consideration that the entire controversy addressed by the writer of *1 Clement* remains strangely unclear and vague and that the information about it is very contradictory, as even supporters of its authenticity today must concede:

He [Clement] emphasizes that the uproar can be traced to “a few rash and self-willed persons” (1.1; in 47.6 it is only “one or

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<sup>90</sup> A look at Deissmann’s *Licht vom Osten* is also well worthwhile.

<sup>91</sup> See K.H. Schelkle, *Paulus*, 6.

two persons”), but then accuses the entire congregation (46.9 = “your uproar”). As motives he identifies jealousy; envy and contentiousness; lack of love, humility and discernment. But he does not identify the actual background of the Corinthian conflict (!), just as little as he identifies the actual motives for the—certainly uninvited—intervention by Rome in the inner affairs of the Corinthian church (!). Without doubt, these are closely related, but there is nothing else to learn about either. The opponents in *1 Clement* left behind no witnesses; nor can their views be reconstructed from the writing, since it does not debate their arguments, but simply condemns them morally. With regard to the circumstances in Corinth as well as Rome’s motives, if one is not willing to give up, one is dependent on hypotheses.”<sup>92</sup>

If one begins with the presumption that we have to do here with a real letter, all the peculiarities cited here should give one cause for thought!

Finally, the conflict as such lacks any inner probability: how can the Corinthian church, founded so long ago, [97] rise up against their presbyters on account of only a few ringleaders? The “attempt at mediation” that the writer undertakes (from Rome!), in which he one-sidedly condemns the “troublemakers” in Corinth, as if they acted from base motives, is also entirely unrealistic and shows the fictional character of the whole thing. Already in the last century, G. Volkmar raised the consideration that the letter could hardly be intended for the *entire* community in Corinth, as the address would have us believe, but only for that part of the community to which the displaced presbyters and their followers belonged.<sup>93</sup>

The tensions and obscurities revealed here are due to the contradiction between the situation presupposed in the writing and the author’s real intention. The real intention of the author, of course, is not the resolution of an actual conflict in a diplomatic way, but something quite different: his writing, which is directed not to *one* church, and also not to the church in Corinth, but to *all* the churches in the Catholic universe, is intended not to mediate, but to instruct and—here a typical Catholic tendency of

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<sup>92</sup> Ph. Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur*, 536.

<sup>93</sup> G. Volkmar, “Über Clemens von Rom und die nächste Folgezeit mit besonderer Beziehung auf den Philipper- und Barnabasbriefe sowie auf das Buch Judit,” in *ThJb(T)* 15, 1856, 287-369; with regard to Volkmar, see Wildemann, *Evangelium als Lehrpoesie*, 1983.

the letter becomes visible—to warn against uprisings and disorder in the churches! The writings leads us into a time, most probably the middle of the second century, in which the distinction between priests and laity (40.5: there are much different rules for laity than for ecclesiastical officer-holders) already announces the Roman clericalism. Over against all inclinations to opposition, the authority of the church is enjoined in an impressive example.

For this purpose the writer employs the motif of party conflict already known to him from 1 Corinthians and uses this as a pretense, cloaked in the form of a letter, for an edifying, exhortative discourse on the theme “Peace and Harmony in the Church.” For the writer of *1 Clement*, the church in Corinth is an exemplary church, in which he would like to see his ideal church realized, in essential agreement with that of the self-aggrandizing official Roman church: consider the harmonious picture of the church he sketches, in which the young submit in humble subordination to the old, [98] the laity to the priests, the wife to the husband (chs. 1-2)—the Roman Catholic ideal of the church in its purist form!

Once one has recognized the writer’s real intention, it will no longer seem strange if there are other peculiarities as well that would look odd in a real letter. Who would expect, for example, in a real letter, which moreover is written by the church in Rome to the church in Corinth, to find the exhortation (34.7), “Let us therefore come together *in the same place* with harmony of conscience and earnestly call upon the Lord as from one mouth, that we may share in his great and glorious promises”? In view of the geographical distance between Rome and Corinth, one can only wonder how the writer imagined the *common* visit of a holy place. In this passage it becomes clear: for a moment the writer has forgotten the situation presupposed by the letter and falls from the role of writer of letters into the role of a preacher, which he also gladly takes over in other passages as well: see the passages with strong liturgical characteristics (20.1-12; 38.1-4 and the concluding prayer, 64), which make one think of a sermon rather than a letter.

In other places, the author succeeds very well in imagining himself in the role of a letter writer: for example, in the introduction to the letter, where it reads:

On account of the sudden and repeated misfortunes and calamities that have befallen us, we have been somewhat delayed in turning to the questions disputed among you,

beloved, and especially the abominable and unholy sedition, so inappropriate for the elect of God.

In these lines, many people have wanted to see a reference to an actual situation of persecution (under Nero or Domitian). As the Dutch theologian Van den Bergh van Eysinga already recognized, however, what we have here is only a conventional apology, which the author of *1 Clement* readily employs to give his writing the appearance of an authentic letter.<sup>94</sup> According to the operative Roman law, persecutions did not usually arrive overnight. [99]

In the same way as *1 Clement*, the seven so-called letters of Ignatius also are all pseudonymous works.

The situation presupposed in the letters must already raise suspicion. The bishop of Antioch has become a victim of persecution of Christians in his own city, and the punishment is not to be carried *here*, as would usually be the case, but, accompanied by a small body of Roman soldiers, he has been sent on a journey through half of the Mediterranean world, from Syria to Rome, to be thrown to wild animals in the arena there!

Although Ignatius is a prisoner, he nevertheless has the remarkable opportunity during his trip through the city of Smyrna in Asia Minor to make contact with the local bishops of the churches in Ephesus, Magnesia, and Tralles, and to hand over to them a letter to each of their churches. In a similar way, the churches in Philadelphia and Smyrna, as well as Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, receive letters from Troas. Since in spite of his sentence Ignatius is obviously still uncertain whether he will be put to death in Rome, he also writes a letter to the church in Rome, in which, delirious in the face of death and craving martyrdom, the bishop entreats them not to prevent his martyrdom by intervening with the authorities.

I beseech you, do not be an untimely kindness to me. Let me be food for the beasts, through which I can attain to God! I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb and leave no trace of my body, so that when I fall asleep I will not be burdensome to anyone... I long for the beasts that are prepared for me, and I pray that they will be quick with me. I will even entice them to devour me quickly... Fire and cross and struggles with wild

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<sup>94</sup> Van den Bergh van Eysinga, *Oudste christelijke Geschriften*, 172; cf. Detering, *Paulusbrieve ohne Paulus?*, 156.

beasts, cutting and tearing asunder, rackings of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil, let these come over me that I may attain to Jesus Christ!  
(*IgnRom*, 4-5) [100]

This has been perceived as the product of a pathological longing for martyrdom.<sup>95</sup> But the matter is likely to be much simpler. In the case of this citation as for the Ignatian writings in their entirety, we have to do not with real letters, but with something entirely composed at a writing table. Their author is not the martyr-bishop Ignatius, but someone later, perhaps a pseudonymous writer around the middle of the second century, who puts himself in the role of the legendary martyr-bishop and was able thereby to give free flight to his fantasy since at that time he hardly needed to fear that the hysterical, overblown death in the arena he conjured up would ever become a reality. The empty and hollow pathos of the declamation, the entire surrealistic scenario that we meet in the Ignatian letters, including the artificial background situation, obviously modeled on the journey of Paul as a prisoner, all this shows that we have to do with the product of a typical “writing table author.”

Given the artificiality of the basic situation, a series of remarkable contradictions and improbabilities we observe becomes understandable. Ignatius writes that he has been condemned (*IgnEph* 12.1f; *IgnRom* 3.1), but in another passage is nevertheless still uncertain whether (and how) he will die. He is in chains, but nevertheless able to visit the churches of Asia Minor and write letters! A passage in the letter to the Romans throws light on how grandly the author handles the geographical and historical details. In *IgnRom* 5.1 Ignatius writes to the Romans from Smyrna that “from Syria to Rome, by land and by sea” he has been fighting wild beasts (meaning his Roman guards), which is a peculiar remark if one considers that the bishop’s journey by sea is still before him.

Like the writer of *1 Clement*, the author of the seven Ignatian letters also drops out of his role as bishop and martyr again and again. In *IgnEph* 5.3, for example, he seems to have entirely forgotten that he writes as a bishop, and exhorts the church like someone who has never been invested with the office of bishop: “Let us then be careful not to oppose the bishop” (cf. *IgnEph* 11.1;

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<sup>95</sup> U. Ranke-Heinemann, *Nein und Amen*, 252: “So speaks this unfortunate saint shortly before he was thrown to the wild animals. It may be that the impending horror deranges a person...”

15.2; 17.2; *IgnMagn* 10.1). It is also strange that Ignatius, who is still uncertain whether he will experience the martyr's death in Rome, [101] can self-consciously anticipate the result of martyrdom and characterize himself in the introduction to the letter as *Theophoros* ("God-bearer") and *Christophoros* ("Bearer of Christ") (*IgnEph* 9.2), which according to practice at that time characterized the martyr only *after the death*.<sup>96</sup> Here also it is evident that the letters stem from a later writer, who already looks back on the martyrdom of the legendary bishop.

The historical existence of a bishop in Antioch named Ignatius need not necessarily be doubted. As the theologian D. Völter showed, there existed a tradition according to which Ignatius was martyred in winter 115-116 *in Antioch* by order of the Caesar Trajan.<sup>97</sup> Presumably, this tradition was known to the author of the letters. He enlarged on this in his own way by adding the journey to Rome, and then used it as background for his literary production, in which he let the last weeks and days of the heroic, death-disdaining martyr come alive once again.

That the seven Ignatian letters are not authentic letters is shown by the fact that in general they are stylistically very carefully constructed, which one would hardly expect for letters having originated under the arduous conditions of an imprisonment journey. In addition to this, in the only letter addressed not to a church, but to a person, bishop Polycarp, the absence of any personal relationship with the addressee is particularly remarkable:

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to Polycarp, who is bishop of the church of the Smyrnaeans, or rather has God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as bishop over him, abundant greeting. Welcoming your godly mind, which is grounded as if on an unmovable rock, I glory exceedingly that it was granted to me to see your blameless face, for which I remain glad in God. I exhort you in the grace with which you are endued to quicken your course and to exhort all men so that they might be saved. Live up to your office with all diligence, both fleshly and spiritual...<sup>98</sup>

Nothing could be more general and non-committal! It must be clear to every reader that in the letter to Polycarp we have to do

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<sup>96</sup> F.J. Dögler, "Christophoros als Ehrentitel für Märtyrer und Heilige im christlichen Altertum," *AuC* 4 (1933), 73-90.

<sup>97</sup> See Detering, *Paulusbrieve ohne Paulus?*, 162f.

<sup>98</sup> *IgnPoly* 1.

[102] not with an actual correspondence, but with literature, an *artificial letter*. Whoever regards the letter to Polycarp as inauthentic, which the theologian Hilgenfeld could already characterize as a “counterpart to the Pastorals,”<sup>99</sup> cannot maintain the authenticity of the rest of the Ignatian letters.

Finally, it should be noted that the number seven is also remarkable for an assembled collection of letters. In view of the importance that the number seven had in antiquity (as the symbol of fulfillment), it seems to have symbolic significance. If one assumes that we have to do here with authentic letters, it must be asked how and by whom their collection was brought about. The real situation is much more simple: the letters were conceived as a collection from the very beginning, as parts of a whole, in which one “letter” presupposes the other.

Thus, in *IgnEph* 20.1, for example, Ignatius declares that plans to write “a second small book”<sup>100</sup> (Significantly, the writer he does not speak of a “letter”), in which he will discuss “the plan of salvation with reference to the new man Jesus Christ, his faith, his love, his suffering and resurrection.” This second book is then the letter to the Magnesians. That the letter to the Magnesians presupposes the letter to the Ephesians is shown by *IgnMagn* 1.2, where the desire is expressed that the churches might experience a three-fold unity, “a union of the flesh with the spirit of Jesus Christ... a union of faith and love... a union of Jesus with the Father”; for what we have here is a recapitulation of the most important ideas from the letter to the Ephesians!

In view of the almost total absence of a substantial debate about reservations regarding the authenticity of the seven Ignatian letters and *1 Clement* that have been put forward in the past, it can hardly be maintained that the judgment expressed with such self-assurance by modern research that we have to do here with authentic letters inspires much confidence. In my opinion, it is time for present-day theologians to free themselves from the spell of Harnack and other authorities of the past in order to submit the “letters” to a renewed critical examination—even with the risk that the two old lighthouses, which illuminated New Testament criticism for many years, so as to shelter a large part of New Testament literature in the safe harbor of the first century, will turn out to be will-o'-the-wisps.

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<sup>99</sup> Hilgenfeld, *Die ignat. Briefe und ihr neuester Kritiker*, 1848.

<sup>100</sup> βιβλίδιον