

## Chapter V

### *Questions of Introduction*

**Donald Guthrie**

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#### **I. General Considerations**

In approaching any writing there are various preliminary questions which an exegete must settle before he can decide on the right approach to the interpretation of the text. There are five main considerations, all of which are in some respects dependent on one another. These are (1) Background, (2) Date, (3) Destination, (4) Integrity and (5) Authorship. While the first four are important, this essay will be devoted mainly to the fifth since this in the past has tended to have more influence over interpretation than the rest. Some initial comments must, however, be made on the others since they frequently affect problems of authorship.

#### **L. BACKGROUND**

If an attempt is made to place any writing in its context, attention to background is essential. Hence any information available about first-century life is useful to the exegete. It goes without saying that knowledge of eastern customs and ways of thought is indispensable for a right interpretation of a group of writings whose setting is essentially oriental. This is no less true for the Epistles than for the Gospels. It involves some understanding of Judaism, Hellenism and paganism. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has contributed to the interpretation of the New Testament almost wholly in this area of background. New light has been cast on the relationship between Judaism and Hellenistic thought which has particularly affected the approach to John's Gospel. It can no longer be interpreted as a wholly Hellenistic production. Similarly increasing knowledge of Gnosticism and its precursors has provided a better understanding of some of the New Testament books, particularly Colossians.

Some warning must be issued against a wrong use of background material. The existence of parallels is not in itself proof of common ground. The most notable example of the use of such a wrong method is to be seen in the *religionsgeschichtlich* school, which played down the uniqueness of the New Testament text to such an extent that its true perspective became lost. Care must also be taken to ensure that any background material appealed to

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is contemporary with the writings being examined and not of considerably later date, as has happened, for instance, in certain cases in the use of Mandaic materials.

#### **2. DATE**

In many of the New Testament writings precise dating is impossible simply because insufficient information is available. But in most cases an appropriate dating is possible by

taking into account available background material and historical allusions which contain time-elements. The importance of dating for exegesis may be illustrated by the following example. If the Epistle to the Colossians is dated in the time of fully developed Gnosticism in the second century, the interpreter of its Christology and of its allusions to the heresy will be obliged to take this into account. But its meaning and purpose will be different if, on the contrary, first-century Gnosis is in mind. Moreover, dating has an immediate effect on determination of authorship, for if Colossians is dated in the second century, Pauline authorship is immediately ruled out. But this raises the problem as to which should be established first, to which the most satisfactory solution is a *via media* which sees both as complementary problems, but in which the weighting must be in favour of authorship.

### 3. DESTINATION

This consideration may be treated from two points of view: on the one hand concern about the geographical location of the readers, and on the other hand concern about their character. Although geography has little effect on exegesis, it is not entirely unimportant. The destination of the Pauline letters may be cited as an example. Although in all cases this is specified, there are questions, for instance, about the precise destination of Ephesians. If this letter is regarded as a circular, to what extent would this affect the exegesis? It would seem to be very little affected since the background is so general. But many New Testament books have no clear indication of destination (e.g. the Gospels, and such Epistles as James, 1 John, Hebrews and Jude). In some cases our understanding of obscure statements in the text might well be elucidated if more information were available, but the exegete can work only with the data he has. Although it might help if we knew the specific group to whom Hebrews was sent, it is possible without this knowledge to interpret it in a broadly satisfactory way.

Of more importance is the character of the readers, as far as this can be ascertained. The exegete needs to decide to what extent statements in the text are of purely local or of general significance. The Corinthian Epistles are a case in point. Some of the advice given by Paul regarding women in 1 Corinthians, for instance, may be due to the local background. It would be questionable exegesis in such cases to assume that a general principle is necessarily being given, although it is usually possible to extract some

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general teaching from the specific example. Moreover, the circumstances of the original readers were conditioned by contemporary customs (e.g. the wearing of veils by women) and this must clearly be taken into account in considering the modern relevance of the passage. Another important consideration is the extent to which Gnosis lies behind the texts. The exegete will look for it particularly in those books which are thought to have been sent to destinations where Gnostic influences are known to have been active.

#### **4. INTEGRITY**

Where a writing is claimed to be composed of several originally disconnected fragments, its integrity may then be at stake and the exegesis affected. As an example 2 Corinthians may be cited. If the exegete comes to the text believing, for instance, that it consists of four separate fragments, he will not attempt to trace any unifying thread of thought or any structure. Indeed in this case it is usually as exegetes that scholars claim to discover different emphases in the separate parts. But those who approach the book as a unity will be more inclined to absorb the apparent differences within an overall understanding of the epistle. Thus differences in interpretation are bound to result.

### **II. Authorship**

In varying degrees, all authors impress their personal characteristics on their respective texts. Adequate interpretation of what is written cannot be divorced from considerations of authorship. The more that is known about the author, the greater the possibility that his words will be correctly understood. In the field of New Testament exegesis this at once poses problems, since for many of the books no certain data are available about the writers. It raises the question whether exegesis of anonymous books needs to proceed on different lines from exegesis of books where the author is well known.

Another problem which arises as a direct result of the application of criticism to New Testament writings is the evaluation of the effects of theories of pseudonymity on the exegesis of a text. We need to discuss, for instance, whether interpretation is affected by the exegete's adoption of a pseudonymous theory of authorship for any of Paul's epistles. Before this question can be answered, many factors must be examined, including the first century approach to pseudonymity and the validity of literary devices.

#### **1. THE VALIDITY OF AUTHOR-CRITICISM**

A cursory glance at the history of criticism is sufficient to demonstrate the importance of authorship in critical enquiry. The pre-critical period, with its emphasis on the divine origin of scripture, was not greatly interested in questions of human authorship. The historical background was considered

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to be irrelevant in view of the dogmatic approach to the text. As soon as a critical approach was adopted it became of first importance to consider who wrote the words which were the subject of exegetical examination. The earliest serious critical examination which resulted in the rejection of the traditional authorship of a New Testament writing was Schleiermacher's examination of 1 Timothy.<sup>1</sup> Since he came to the conclusion that Paul was not the author of this Epistle, he was obliged to interpret it as a pseudonymous letter. His example was soon followed by Eichhorn<sup>2</sup> who applied the same methods to all three Pastoral Epistles. This

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<sup>1</sup> *Über den sogenannten ersten Brief des Paulus an den Timotheus* (Berlin 1807).

<sup>2</sup> *Historische-Kritische Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Leipzig 1812), 111.315.

movement away from traditional ascriptions and from the claims made in the texts themselves soon spread still further with Baur<sup>3</sup> and his school. It is noticeable that challenges to traditional ascriptions of authorship went hand in hand with rejection of authority. In other words, the earlier critics never supposed a category in which authorship could be challenged and authority maintained. Baur considered only four Pauline Epistles to be genuine, which at once implied that the rest were of lesser calibre. His view of authorship strongly affected his exegesis of the Epistles, although it should be noted that his assessment of authorship was governed by his prior reconstruction of the history.

Since Baur's time the history of criticism has shown a constant interest in problems of authorship. Holtzmann<sup>4</sup> followed in the tradition which considered that historical background was of utmost importance to the exegete. In the twentieth century, reaction against the possibility of reconstructing the historical background, typified in the work of Bultmann<sup>5</sup> and his associates, has lessened detailed attention to authorship, but has certainly not eliminated it. There are many assumptions made without discussion on the basis of earlier views which have survived in the course of the development of criticism. Hence many modern exegetes approach the text from the point of view of non-authenticity, with the result that interpretations resting on acceptance of authenticity are not even discussed.

In order to illustrate this latter point some examples will be cited. In his approach to the Gospels as books which mainly contain the theological creations of the early church, Bultmann<sup>6</sup> does not discuss authorship. In the strictest sense the writers take on the role of compilers or editors of the units of tradition and not the role of authors. Exegesis loses sight of the personal contribution of the writer. It is this impersonal side of Bultmann's method of interpretation which has caused the development of redaction criticism,<sup>7</sup> with its restoration of the importance of the individual. Many redaction critics, however, consider that the author is two stages removed from the original events, the first stage being the development of units of tradition and the second the shaping of these units into a theological whole.<sup>8</sup> None of these approaches looks at the Gospels in the same light as those which give weight to traditional views of authorship. For instance, if Matthew, an apostle, was the author of the Gospel attributed to his name, the exegete will clearly approach the Gospel from a different point of view.<sup>9</sup> There will be more inclination to treat his record as historically correct than if some unknown compiler, with his own specific theological viewpoint, had written it.<sup>10</sup> A

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<sup>3</sup> *Die sogenannten Pastoralbriefe* (Stuttgart 1835).

<sup>4</sup> *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Freiburg 1885).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. for instance, Bultmann's approach to history in his *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (E.T., Oxford 1958<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>6</sup> Emphasis on units of tradition has made emphasis on authorship irrelevant.

<sup>7</sup> In writings of scholars like Marxsen, Conzelmann and Bornkamm. See the article on redaction criticism, ch. XI.

<sup>8</sup> Clearly authorship becomes important in discussions of the theological moulding, but even here the theology is more important than the personal characteristics of the author.

<sup>9</sup> A comparison between the approach of G. Bornkamm and R. V. G. Tasker in his *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London, 1961) illustrates this point.

<sup>10</sup> An unknown compiler could, of course, produce an authentic work, but anonymity makes it more difficult to establish authenticity (cf. Hebrews).

similar difference is seen in approaches to the book of Acts, for clearly an exegete who regards the book as written by a reliable historian will have a different assessment of its statements from one who regards the book as an essentially theological composition.<sup>11</sup> This latter point illustrates a problem that could arise among those who share a common theory of authorship. Acceptance of Lucan authorship does not necessarily imply acceptance of his work as history rather than theology, which shows that more is needed than the identification of the author.<sup>12</sup> For many New Testament books information regarding the character of the author is nevertheless restricted to deductions from the contents of the books themselves, or else scattered material in traditions which may or may not be correct. The exegete could wish that as much information existed about all the New Testament authors as exists for the apostle Paul, but in most cases the data are scanty.

In considering the validity of author-criticism some attention must be given to the implications of tradition on the subject. Are there evidences from patristic sources that early Christians attached much importance to questions of authorship? The answer to this question falls into two sections—a consideration of any comments on the significance of authorship in approaching exegesis and a consideration of statements of authorship without comment. The latter evidence is much more prevalent than the former. There are certain comments which suggest the importance of authorship, as when Tertullian<sup>13</sup> asserts that the four gospels come either from apostles or from their pupils, an assertion which clearly shows that authorship weighed heavily with him in his approach to the books. Indeed, this statement shows the important connection between authorship and apostolicity in his mind. Irenaeus<sup>14</sup> makes a similar statement about the authors of the gospels, Mark being described as "the disciple and interpreter of Peter", Luke as "the follower of Paul" and John as "the disciple of the Lord". These statements suffice to show the significance attaching to authorship, but the question remains whether early and uncritical comments of this nature have any relevance for the modern exegete. Many scholars rule them out as guesses. Yet the strong persistence of belief in apostolic authorship demands explanation. The early patristic writers may, of course, be treated as too naive to deserve serious consideration, or their opinions may be regarded as valid data for an approach to the text. The most reasonable approach is to subject their comments to serious examination and where justifiable to regard their evidence as reliable data which must be given weight in resolving the historical background. Where there are no sound reasons for suspecting the validity of patristic comments on authorship, to ignore such evidence would not be in harmony with sound critical principles.<sup>15</sup>

The close connection between traditional comments on authorship and apostolicity has been mentioned above, but this raises the most important problem of all—that of apostolicity itself. What importance did apostolic origin have for authoritative Christian literature? Could any

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<sup>11</sup> An exegete like E. Haenchen continually refers to "Luke" but does not mean Paul's companion, whereas F. F. Bruce fully accepts the Lucan authorship and interprets the book accordingly. See E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford 1971), and F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London 1952).

<sup>12</sup> Lucan authorship may be said to corroborate other evidences of authenticity since Luke must have had access to much first-hand material.

<sup>13</sup> *C. Marcion* iv.2.

<sup>14</sup> *Adv. Haer.* iii. 1.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. it is not sound criticism when all the statements of a particular author are discounted because on some issue he expresses a naive opinion.

writing be regarded as authoritative that was not known to have come from an apostolic source? While the evidence on this theme is not conclusive, there

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are many indications that apostolic authorship was generally regarded as a guarantee of the authority of the writing. The preponderance of apocryphal books purporting to come from apostolic sources suggests the importance of supposed apostolic origin among those producing this kind of literature.<sup>16</sup>

There needs to be a right appreciation of the relationship between apostolic authorship, apostolic content and authority. Apostolicity is more to be identified with apostolic content than with authorship. If the New Testament is based on what was generally recognized as apostolic doctrine, problems arise when critical enquiry pronounces against apostolic authorship. In that case either the book in question must be placed on a different level from the rest, or else the early Christian basis for canonicity must be revised. The latter course is the one generally followed, in which case even books of pseudonymous origin can be placed alongside authentic apostolic books.<sup>17</sup> Yet the problem of authority is not so easily settled in this way, especially where writings claim some specified author, a claim which is then believed to be inaccurate. It cannot be disputed that more authority rests with literature which is known to be apostolic than with writings whose origin is confidently declared to be non-apostolic. The Pastoral Epistles are a good example of this difference. Those who dispute their genuine Pauline origin generally regard them as second-century productions which can practically be disregarded in the reconstruction of the development of thought in the apostolic age.<sup>18</sup> They are certainly not in that case given the same weight exegetically as if they are treated as the actual words of the apostle. Even those theories which propose that the content of these Epistles is Pauline but not by Paul cannot escape the dilemma over the authority of the writings, for secondary writings in the Pauline tradition have less validity than primary apostolic documents. This discussion leads naturally into a consideration of the relationship between apostolicity, anonymity and pseudonymity.

## 2. APOSTOLICITY, ANONYMITY AND PSEUDONYMITY

Whenever a theory is proposed which denies the genuineness of the ascription to a particular author, the problem of pseudonymity arises. Whenever traditional ascriptions to books which give no claim to specific authorship are rejected, the problem is one of anonymity. In both cases apostolicity is ruled out unless the term is comprehensive enough to include works in the apostolic tradition which were not written by apostles. The questions raised are not purely academic. What grounds are there for the view that if pseudonymity was an accepted literary convention, pseudonymous works attributed to apostles would carry the same authority as genuine writings? The main problem here is to discover to what extent it can be demonstrated that pseudonymity was a literary convention for writings of the type found in the New

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. W. Schneemelcher and R.M. Wilson; London 1963, 1965).

<sup>17</sup> Those who regard pseudonymity as an acceptable literary device claim that this places books of such origin in the same category as books which advertise their true authorship.

<sup>18</sup> Consider, for instance, the dating of F. D. Gealy in his exegesis of these epistles in *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York 1955), Vol. II, pp. 351ff. in which a post-Marcion period places them in a secondary category.

Testament. Even if this could be established it would still be difficult to prove that such works were received on the same footing as genuine works.

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Our first consideration must be the problem of anonymity. There are some instances, notably the epistle to the Hebrews, where specific authorship appears to have been attributed to an originally anonymous letter. In this case it cannot be supposed that the letter loses any authority by being declared anonymous. Those patristic writers who questioned the Pauline ascription did not dispute its canonicity, although the hesitation over it in the West may have been due to its unknown origin.<sup>19</sup> It is significant that Origen,<sup>20</sup> while disputing the Pauline authorship, nevertheless recognized the apostolic content.

The case of Hebrews has led some to suppose that the key to an understanding of pseudonymity is to be found in anonymity. K. Aland,<sup>21</sup> for instance, maintains that since the real author was believed to be the Holy Spirit, anonymity was natural. The human author was but the vehicle through whom the Spirit spoke. Under this theory ascriptions of authorship are seen as a retrograde step, a movement to put too much stress on the human agent. In this case anonymity and pseudonymity would be regarded as normal, whereas clear claims to authorship would be seen as abnormal. Indeed, Aland goes as far as to maintain that the anonymous authors not only believed themselves to be under the Spirit, they actually were.<sup>22</sup> If this thesis is correct, it would almost make author-criticism irrelevant for exegesis, since whatever the method of production the text can be regarded as the message of the Spirit. Yet such a theory needs careful examination to establish its validity.

The first point to notice is that the Pauline Epistles, which may reasonably be regarded as among the earliest group of writings in the New Testament, are not anonymous and that Paul was certainly conscious of being under the inspiration of the Spirit.<sup>23</sup> Aland attempts to escape from the difficulty by maintaining a distinction between letters and epistles.<sup>24</sup> By excluding the former and concentrating on the latter, he dispenses with an examination of the writings of Paul which would prove an embarrassment for his theory. The Christian message was, in fact, communicated powerfully by the personality of this man. If this factor is not given full weight, any exegesis of the text must be strongly affected.

The second serious weakness in Aland's position lies in his conception of the activity of the Spirit. The New Testament shows the Spirit to be the Spirit of truth, which at once rules out all methods of deception. If the Spirit used pseudonymous methods the only acceptable hypothesis would be that the method was so universally acknowledged that no-one would have questioned its validity as a justifiable means of Christian communication. But this is too

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<sup>19</sup> The earliest evidence comes from Tertullian (*De Pudicitia*) who placed Hebrews below the apostolic epistles. His acceptance of Barnabas as author clearly influenced him in his decision.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Eusebius, H.E. vi.25.

<sup>21</sup> JTS ns. 12, (1961), pp. 39-49, reprinted in SPCK *Theological Collections* 4 (London 1965), 1-13.

<sup>22</sup> Aland considers that in those days the Christian writers were regarded as pens moved by the Spirit.

<sup>23</sup> Those times when Paul draws attention to his own opinion (as for instance in I Cor.7:12) suggest that he is generally conscious of speaking from God. His whole emphasis on the work of the Spirit supports this view.

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit., pp. 3, 4.

big an assumption to accept without evidence. It calls for some statement regarding the prevalence of an attitude towards pseudonymous writings in the first century world.

Pseudonymity was certainly prevalent among both Jews and Greeks during this period. But the widespread use of assumed names does not prove that it was necessarily acceptable. In respect of the Jewish apocalypses, for instance, although these were invariably ascribed to venerable names, there

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is no evidence that this pseudepigraphic form was ever officially accepted. Indeed, these works were not included at any stage in the Hebrew canon.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand they enjoyed considerable popularity and it is difficult to believe that many, if any, of the original readers supposed that the pseudonyms were real. When ante-diluvian patriarchs are purported to write apocalypses, it is evident enough that the motive could not have been to deceive. But there is no suggestion that the apocalypses were ever regarded as authoritative by official Judaism. Moreover these Jewish works bear no relation in form to the New Testament epistles and even in respect of the Apocalypse of John the parallels are slight.<sup>26</sup> There are similarly no close parallels in Greek literature to the supposed New Testament epistolary pseudepigrapha, which forms a major obstacle to the view that this kind of literature was an accepted convention. In fact epistolary pseudepigraphy is the most difficult form to produce, with the result that the makers of pseudepigrapha avoided the form.<sup>27</sup> Such works as 3 Corinthians and the Epistle to the Laodiceans are so obviously not genuine that they must be regarded as conspicuous failures as effective pseudonymous works. Since, therefore, no real parallels can be found to the epistolary form, those who advance hypotheses which posit epistolary pseudepigrapha cannot claim that this was an established convention and this must clearly affect their approach to exegesis. If, for instance, Ephesians is considered to be non-Pauline, the interpretation of the meaning of the Epistle must differ from an understanding of it as a Pauline Epistle.<sup>28</sup> It is not simply that an adequate explanation is necessary for the pseudonym, but the words themselves lose in weight of authority when they are reduced to the utterance of an anonymous man who has had to take cover under the pseudonym. The suggestion that this is a sign of his modesty is unconvincing.<sup>29</sup> The church in Asia took a very different view of the presbyter who "for love of Paul" composed *The Acts of Paul*.<sup>30</sup> There would of course be less difficulty if the writer had been in close touch with Paul and was reproducing faithfully the apostle's ideas in his own way, but even in this case a pseudonymous letter could not bear the same weight as one personally written by the apostle.

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<sup>25</sup> At the meeting of elders at Jamnia they were not considered canonical and at no stage subsequent to this.

<sup>26</sup> A parallel exists in the title, but in form and content John's apocalypse differs in a marked way from the Jewish apocalypses. His is not pseudonymous, does not contain a survey of past history and moves on a higher plane (i.e. is more spiritual).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. my article on epistolary pseudepigraphy in my *New Testament Introduction* (London 1970), pp. 671ff. For a general discussion of canonical pseudepigrapha, cf. B. M. Metzger, *JBL*, 91 (1972), pp. 3-24.

<sup>28</sup> A comparison between C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford 1951), and F. Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (London 1963), will demonstrate this.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Mitton, *op. cit.* 30.

<sup>30</sup> According to Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 17.

### 3. METHODS OF DETERMINING AUTHORSHIP

One of the problems for the New Testament exegete is the fact that methodology in relation to the examination of authorship has been piecemeal, each exponent determining his own principles of criticism. What weighs heavily with one seems slight or even irrelevant to another. In these circumstances there is only one satisfactory course of action and that is for the exegete to delineate the methods he has adopted in reaching his conclusions. Clearly the scope of this article is too restricted to give anything more than a brief indication of the lines along which a constructive methodology might proceed.

(1) Where more than one writing is attributed to the same author, it is possible and desirable to compare the language and thought to verify

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whether the same author could have written both works. But great care must be taken in implementing this method. Literary parallels are notoriously difficult to decide either as a proof of borrowing or of dissimilar authorship. It is not a sound principle of criticism to maintain that a man who wrote a document A could not have written document B if the only grounds for this conclusion are a varied use of the same terms or the use of different terms to express the same idea. In fact the only justification for such a conclusion is when document A plainly contradicts document B, although even here care must be taken to ensure that the contradiction is real and not merely apparent.

(2) Arising out of this is the deduction from use of sources as to the character of the author. Arguments, for instance, based on the assumption of what an apostolic author would or would not use are invalid because of the lack of any supporting evidence. One might hold that an apostle would not use or quote a non-apostolic source and another might see no reason to exclude such a possibility. In the long run the decision one way or the other is quite arbitrary and cannot form a valid basis for criticism.

(3) An approach to authorship on the basis of stylistic data would seem to present a more objective basis, but again difficulties arise because of the indefinable qualities of a man's style. Before style can be used as a reliable test of authorship it is necessary to determine what its characteristics are. Do these, for instance, reside in the peculiar or most striking words which an author uses, or do they reveal themselves in the unconscious patterns with which he employs common words? Are sentence structures a sure guide to distinctive style? Do authors have any kind of norm from which they rarely deviate? Obviously if the last question could be answered in the affirmative this would provide an objective test which could be relied on to lead to an effective conclusion. Certain linguistic statisticians have made this assertion, but their methods need careful assessment. Is it demonstrable that every author has a statistical norm in such matters as word-frequencies or sentence lengths from which they do not deviate beyond what might be expected from standard deviations? To be able to maintain this position with any confidence it would be necessary for extensive examination to be made among a

wide variety of known authors.<sup>31</sup> Until this has been done evidence of this kind must be received with the greatest reserve. Even if a tendency towards a statistical norm for authors could be established, it would still be difficult, if not impossible, to apply the test where the extant literature does not provide adequate samples, which is certainly the case with many of the New Testament Epistles. The older emphasis on the number of hapaxes used in each writing as a means of comparing authors<sup>32</sup> is equally difficult unless a thorough demonstration can be made of the extent to which any author may be reasonably expected to enlarge his vocabulary. If no certain method of comparing style can be established, it must remain an inconclusive tool in the hand of the exegete for determining authorship.

(4) Another matter of some importance is doctrine. If in two accounts claiming the same author one brings into prominence a range of doctrines

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which are absent from the other, can this legitimately be regarded as evidence that they could not have come from the same author? The problem resolves itself into a discussion of the extent to which an author may be expected to reflect his characteristic ideas in all that he writes. The problem obviously cannot be resolved without reference to the purposes of each writing. What may be expected for one purpose may not obtain for another. It is not self-evident, for example, that Paul will write in the same way to a Christian church which he has never visited as to a close associate. It would be natural to suppose that the former would contain a fuller exposition of his ideas than the latter. Nevertheless the question must be faced whether a creative thinker like Paul could ever write in a non-creative way. In the end a decision on this can only be subjective. No-one is in fact entitled to say that a book must be non-authentic because some characteristic doctrine is lacking, for this would mean tying down the personal freedom of the author within too narrow limits. It may as reasonably be deduced that authors do not necessarily reflect their characteristic doctrines in all their writings.

(5) Because every author writes in a historical situation, an examination of the historical background of the writing together with an examination of historical data known about the supposed author is a valid methodology in order to decide whether one excludes the other. If, for instance, historical background suggests a second century date whereas the author ascription denotes a first century date, only two explanations are possible. Either the ascription is incorrect or else the historical background must be re-examined. The latter course may, in fact, be the more reasonable, especially where there is room for difference of opinion in the identification of the historical allusions. A case in point is the Colossian letter, where the supposed second century background of Gnosticism reflected in the heresy is being fast abandoned as a ground for non-Pauline authorship because of the undoubted existence of pre-Gnosticism in the first century. Additional knowledge of Gnosticism has led to a re-appraisal of the place of this type of evidence in disputing the Pauline origin of this epistle.<sup>33</sup> The same might be said about the various allusions to persecutions in the New Testament. It is impossible in these cases to be certain to which period of church history these indecisive

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<sup>31</sup> A.Q. Morton, who has advocated this view, has based his conclusions on a restricted amount of evidence and cannot claim to have established a general principle (cf. *Paul the Man and the Myth* (London, 1966), by A. Q. Morton and J. McLeman).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. P. N. Harrison's approach in *The Problem of the Pastorals* (Oxford 1921).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. R. M. Wilson's treatment in his *Gnosis and the New Testament* (Oxford 1968).

references belong and it is certainly precarious to argue from what might have been to what is. This could be illustrated from I Peter where the references to persecutions might refer to Trajan's time, but cannot be proved to do so.<sup>34</sup>

(6) The preceding considerations might suggest that no positive approach to authorship is possible, but this would not give the full picture. In cases where the New Testament text does not give an author's identity, there are no means of arriving at a conclusion without relying on external evidence (as, for instance, in the case of Luke-Acts). For the remainder the self-claims of the books themselves must be given adequate weight. It would seem to be a fair principle of criticism to allow the claims to stand until they are dislodged by being shown to be untenable. This means that such claims should be given the benefit of the doubt where challenges to them fall short of

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positive proof. In these cases also due weight must be given to external tradition.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. the different approaches of F. W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford 1958), and C. E. B. Cranfield, *The First Epistle of Peter* (London 1950).