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EXEGESIS OF THE PAULINE LETTERS, INCLUDING THE DEUTERO-PAULINE LETTERS

STANLEY E. PORTER

1. INTRODUCTION

For some reason, the notion persists that exegesis of the Pauline letters is easier than that of the Gospels. The thought is that matters of language are more self-evident in the Pauline letters, due to lack of translation from Aramaic (as Jesus' words purportedly are), and matters of background are less complex, due to a lack of issues raised by synoptic comparison. Only a moment of reflection will reveal that this notion is greatly mistaken, or at least no more true of the Pauline letters than of the Gospels.

Two examples will suffice to illustrate the difficulties of Pauline exegesis. The first considers a matter of language. Paul quotes the Old Testament on numerous occasions. It is difficult to calculate the exact numbers, but the direct quotations in his major letters number around 80 instances.¹ In several of these places, he appears to change the wording significantly. Why? What does he mean by these changes? What do they imply about the text he is using? What does his quotation of the Old Testament imply when he writes to predominantly Gentile churches? These are not easy questions to answer, but they have large exegetical significance for understanding Paul's message and his argumentative strategy. It is difficult to understand major sections of such a fundamental letter to the Pauline corpus as Romans without addressing this and related questions. The second example considers a matter of context. Related to the example cited above is the debate over how much about the historical Jesus Paul appeared to know, with the range of opinion running from much to very little. Discussion often involves exegesis of two or three key, though disputed, passages in 1 Corinthians (7:10; 9:14; possibly

¹ On issues related to this, see S.E. Porter, 'The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament: A Brief Comment on Method and Terminology', in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (ed. C.A. Evans and J.A. Sanders; SFEJ, 5; JSNTSup, 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 79-96.

11:23-25).² Scholars have found it difficult to delimit the passages for consideration, to say nothing of determining their significance for understanding Paul's relation to the historical Jesus. All of this is not to say that Paul's letters are not understandable without delving into complex linguistic and contextual exegetical matters. On a superficial level they certainly are. They are, I would contend, as understandable as any other writings of the New Testament—probably no more or no less.

To provide as complete an exegesis of a passage in a Pauline letter as is possible, however, the exegete needs to consider a host of issues regarding authorship, language, culture, religion and theology, literary genre—far too many to discuss here in any detail—that form the necessary interpretative context for analysis of a particular passage. In light of the importance of these various issues, a chapter such as this could approach the Pauline letters in a number of ways. One would be to discuss the individual letters, singling out the particular questions that apply to a given book and showing how they apply to exegesis of particular passages. Much of this information can already be found in numerous introductions to the New Testament (see the Bibliographical Essay above, for description of some of these sources), as well as commentaries that provide exegesis of particular passages, and is not necessary to repeat here. Instead, the topics below constitute a select number of fundamental exegetical issues that form the foundation for exegesis of particular passages in the Pauline letters. This number is not complete, but is designed to sensitize the interpreter to the issues involved in Pauline exegesis. Discussion of issues of this sort is necessary for informed and informative exegesis, even though the exegetical implications of these topics is often ignored when exegesis becomes merely a matter of describing the grammar of a given passage, as if it did not matter whether the passage was found in Paul, the Gospels or another New Testament writer. I assume that the exegete has sufficient linguistic understanding to grasp the basic structure of a passage. Rigorous exegesis, however, demands a larger interpretative context in terms of issues specific to the Pauline letters to become useful.

² For a recent discussion, see F. Neirynck, 'The Sayings of Jesus in 1 Corinthians', in *The Corinthian Correspondence* (ed. R. Bieringer; BETL, 125; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Pecters, 1996), pp. 141-76.

2. PAUL'S JEWISH AND HELLENISTIC BACKGROUNDS

An important first step in exegesis of the Pauline letters is to place them in their proper larger context, that is, with regard to their cultural, religious and theological background. Therefore, a fundamental set of assumptions in much discussion of the Pauline letters attaches to whether Paul reflects a Jewish or a Hellenistic background.³ Although it is rarely stated as baldly as that, discussion in the secondary literature often reflects such a dichotomy, attempting to classify various elements of Paul's thought on the basis of whether the Jewish or Greek elements predominate.

Those who wish to argue for the importance of Paul's Jewish background begin from several programmatic statements that Paul makes regarding his Jewish background, including Phil. 3:5-6. Also brought into the equation is the tradition found in Acts that Paul, although born in Tarsus in Silicia, was educated in Jerusalem under the Rabbi Gamaliel I. This would harmonize with his becoming a Pharisee and then becoming a persecutor of the Church because of its acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. Those who wish to argue for the importance of Paul's Hellenistic background often begin with a distinction between Palestinian and Diaspora Judaism. Paul's being born outside of the Land and travelling extensively in the Mediterranean world, using the Greek language and the Greek letter-form as his major means of communication with the churches that he founded, all play into the hands of these scholars.

To a large extent, however, each of these characterizations is in need of correction. The simple opposition between Jewish and Hellenistic backgrounds is unsupportable in light of recent research. Much of this research has been promoted by Martin Hengel, but he is only one of the latest of a number of scholars who have seen the first-century world in broader terms.⁴ The first-century Mediterranean

³ This issue is discussed in some detail in L.M. McDonald and S.E. Porter, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature* (Peabody: Hendrickson, forthcoming), chap. 9.

⁴ See M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (trans. J. Bowden; 2 vols.; London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974); *idem*, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989); *idem*, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1980), etc. He follows in the tradition of such scholars as E.J. Bickerman (e.g. *The Jews in the Greek Age* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988]) and V.

world was essentially Greco-Roman in nature, even at its fringes, such as the Roman near east, where Greco-Roman customs, law and language prevailed. In other words, as an aftermath of the conquests of Alexander the Great (late 4th century BCE), and the subsequent unification of the Greek states and other territories under Roman rule from the time of Augustus (late 1st century BCE), from Arabia in the east to Spain in the west, and as far north as Britain and south as the north of Africa, the world was in many respects one. This is not to say that there were not regional differences in culture, religion and even local languages, since there were. These were determined by such matters as cultural and ethnic background, language, history of conquest and politics. The framework in which these regional differences were allowed to continue, however, was Greco-Roman, that is, Greek culture as mediated through Roman rule. Several of the most noticeable elements of this were, for example, the fact that Greek was the *lingua franca* of this empire. Regional languages continued in a few places (e.g. Phrygian in northern Asia Minor, Aramaic in Palestine and Syria, and Nabatean in Arabia, etc.), and eventually Latin became a second *lingua franca* from the second century on, but the major language that held this empire together was Greek, even in Palestine. An additional Greco-Roman element of life throughout the Roman east was the establishment of many cities built on Greek and Roman plans, such as Caesarea Maritima, or other immense building projects of Herod the Great in Palestine.⁵

The Roman world was also highly religious and very syncretistic. Roman religion was apparently originally based upon the Greek pantheon, but had readily embraced a large number of regional cults as well.⁶ With the perception of the overwhelming largeness of the contemporary world, privatistic religion also increased, with the result that mystery cults spread throughout the empire, such as Mithraism,

Tcherikover (*Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959]).

⁵ See F.W. Walbank, *The Hellenistic World* (London: Fontana, 1981); W. Tarn and T.G. Griffith, *Hellenistic Civilisation* (London: Edward Arnold, 3rd edn, 1952); and M. Cary, *A History of Rome down to the Reign of Constantine* (London: Macmillan, 2nd edn, 1954), for details of what is summarized above.

⁶ See J. Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), for an excellent discussion that places Judaism within the context of Roman religion; cf. J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

which was largely spread by the Roman army. Judaism was one of these cults, with its own meeting places (synagogues) and writings (the Old Testament, usually in its Greek form, the Septuagint). Many people were apparently attracted to some of the tenets of Judaism (called God-fearers),⁷ but most of them without formal allegiance. Judaism probably did not have formal recognition, but, because Jews tended to be exclusive and to live in concentrated ghettos in certain places, such as Rome, they received certain religious considerations and some resultant privileges. These were perhaps not much different from considerations given to other religious cults. One potentially troublesome area was worship of the emperor, but this practice did not develop more formally until late in the first century and into the second century CE (Pliny, *Ep.* 10:96).⁸ Most Greco-Roman life did not exclude Jews from functioning in various ways in the empire. Sometimes they lived in large enough numbers to attract undue attention, or were thought to cause disruptions, which brought punishment (e.g. the expulsion from Rome in 49 or 41 CE—the date is uncertain). Of course, Judaism maintained a number of distinctive beliefs, especially regarding the coming of a messiah. Even in many of its beliefs, however, there are more than a few traces of influence from the larger Greco-Roman world. However, it was merely one religious-ethnic people group—albeit a significant one—within the larger Greco-Roman world.

What difference does this perspective make in exegeting the Pauline letters? The most important consideration is that interpretation of Paul's writings must occur within this conceptual framework. Paul is sometimes viewed as unique because he combined being an ethnic Jew with being a citizen of the Greco-Roman world. To the contrary, although his literary and theological contribution was undeniably unique, Paul was in many ways a typical member of the Greco-Roman world—a large number of, if not most, people had a similar bi-unitary background and set of allegiances. It is not known how many Jews were Roman citizens,⁹ but in this regard Paul was almost assuredly not

⁷ For recent discussion of this controversial topic, see I. Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting. V. Diaspora Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Exeter: Paternoster, 1996), esp. pp. 1-126.

⁸ See L.J. Kreitzer, *Striking New Images: Roman Imperial Coinage and the New Testament World* (JSNTSup, 134; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 69-98, for a recent discussion of the emperor cult.

⁹ Even though statements that Paul was a Roman citizen are only found in

unique (note that Paul's father also was a citizen; Acts 25:28). Paul both had a specific ethnic heritage, and was a 'citizen' of the larger Greco-Roman world. This world was truly cosmopolitan, as, for the first time, people were able to travel relatively extensively and communicate over broad expanses of territory previously for the most part out of reach. Paul was not unreasonable in hoping that he could travel to Spain (see Rom. 15:24, 28), and his many travels around the eastern side of the Mediterranean bear witness to the extensive travel and shipping lines available. Many of these were based upon the importance of supplying food for the empire, especially grain shipments from Egypt and Africa.¹⁰ When Paul wrote his letters in Greek to various groups of Christians throughout the Roman empire, he wrote them with the reasonable expectation that these letters could and would be understood by those to whom they were transmitted.

An example that well illustrates the interconnectedness of the Greco-Roman world, of which Judaism was a part, is the suggestion that Paul uses forms of rabbinic argumentation at certain places in his letters. For example, at Rom. 5:8-9 he states that, if God was able to reconcile humanity when humanity was an enemy of God, how much more will he be able to save humanity in the end. This seems to reflect the Rabbinic form of argumentation of the lesser to the greater (*t. Sanh.* 7:11). In other words, God's being able to accomplish the harder task of overcoming human animosity implies that he can perform the easier task of saving those who have been reconciled. This indeed resembles what has come to be known as rabbinic argumentation, and Paul may have learned this form of argumentation during the time of his study with Gamaliel in Jerusalem. However, one must examine the larger question of the origins of rabbinic exegesis. David Daube, the Jewish legal historian, has convincingly argued that 'the Rabbinic methods of interpretation derive from Hellenistic rhetoric. Hellenistic rhetoric is at the bottom both of the fundamental ideas, presuppositions, from which the Rabbis proceeded

Acts (16:38; 22:25), they are probably accurate. See B. Rapske, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, III. *Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Exeter: Paternoster, 1994), pp. 72-90; A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 144-93 and *idem*, *The Roman Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1973), p. 273, who provides much documentation on this issue.

¹⁰ See G. Rickman, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), esp. pp. 231-35.

and of the major details of application, the manner in which these ideas were translated into practice.'¹¹ Rhetoric was very important in the ancient world, and led to a set of more or less formalized principles by which those who were engaged in public discussion and disputation crafted their statements. Rhetoric was of great importance from the fourth century BCE on, and led to a number of important formulations of its principles by such writers roughly contemporary with Paul as Cicero and Quintilian, among others.¹² Within this world, it is not surprising to find that Jewish forms of exegesis may well have been influenced in their development by Greco-Roman rhetoric. Thus, it is unwise to draw a bifurcation between Jewish and Greco-Roman influence upon Paul. Rather, what is often seen here as a Jewish feature should be seen within the larger sphere of Hellenistic influence.

A similar situation is found in the use of the Old Testament by Paul. This is an issue that must be discussed on two levels. The first level concerns why Paul even uses the Old Testament, especially when writing to predominantly Gentile churches, and the second is how to account for his exegetical techniques when he cites the Old Testament. For example, the book of Romans has more direct quotations of the Old Testament than any other of Paul's books—around 55 instances. Paul was probably writing to a church of mixed Jewish and Gentile background, though probably with more Gentiles than Jews (see below).¹³ This makes it difficult to understand why Paul relies so heavily upon the Old Testament to structure his argument. At Rom. 1:17, he quotes Hab. 2:4 as the 'thematic' statement that governs his entire conception of the book. When he undertakes to justify the faithfulness of God, in light of the situation with Israel (Romans 9-11), he creates a veritable pastiche of Old Testament quotations (see the *UBSGNT*⁴ list). As a further example, it is even less readily understandable why Paul uses the Old Testament at probably at least three places in Philippians (1:19; 2:9-11; 4:18), a

¹¹ D. Daube, 'Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric', *HUCA* 22 (1949), pp. 239-64 (240).

¹² A recent survey of the history of rhetoric is to be found in G.A. Kennedy, 'Historical Survey of Rhetoric', in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 B.C.-A.D. 400)* (ed. S.E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 3-42.

¹³ See discussion of this and related issues in K.P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2nd edn, 1991), *passim*.

letter addressed to a church with probably very little Jewish membership. Certainly the city of Philippi itself did not have much of a Jewish population.

Several observations of exegetical significance can be made concerning Paul's use of the Old Testament. The first is with regard to Paul himself and the second is with regard to how Paul uses the Old Testament. The first factor to keep in mind is that Paul's argument (see below on the letter form) should be assessed at least in the first instance in terms of how he wishes it to be constructed, rather than how it would have come across to his listeners. We know from others of Paul's letters (e.g. the Corinthian correspondence—see below) that Paul was not always conceptually understood by his audience, so much so that he was required to write other letters to rectify situations that earlier correspondence may have even aggravated. Paul's worldview, including his theological perspective, was oriented toward seeing the Scriptures fulfilled in the coming of Christ. This framework provides the basis for his thought and his argumentation. As a result, he often structures his argument around the Old Testament. This is especially, but by no means always, true when he is dealing with the Jewish people, as Romans 9–11 illustrates. The key is to appreciate why and in what way Paul invokes the Old Testament in his thought. In some instances, his readers may have been familiar with the Jewish Scriptures and could have informed those who were not so informed of added significance. His invoking of sacred texts, even if they were not familiar to his audience, would probably have been seen as providing a form of rhetorical proof to his argument. This technique of argumentation was well-known in the ancient world (e.g. quotation of Homer by later Greek writers), and the words of authorities were often seen as carrying special weight in support of an argument.

How was it that Paul used these texts in support of his argument? There has been much recent discussion of Paul's exegetical technique, but the majority of this discussion has been inclined to argue that Paul's exegetical technique is dependent upon some form of Jewish exegesis.¹⁴ Christopher Stanley has argued that Paul's technique is similar to that of other Jewish exegetes of his time, as opposed to those of the Greco-Roman world. Stanley's analysis is revealing, however. He divides up the categories for comparison into two. He

¹⁴ See C.D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* (SNTSMS, 74; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. pp. 8–28.

then explores citation techniques in Greco-Roman literature and in early Judaism. He divides those of early Judaism into two major categories, with writers such as Philo of Alexandria in one category and the Qumran texts in another. Stanley's conclusion is that Paul's exegesis of the Old Testament falls most comfortably into that of the Jewish interpreters such as Philo. In light of the comments above, one can readily see that there are problems with such a categorization, however. The first is the neat bifurcation between Greco-Roman and early Jewish interpreters, since the writers of early Judaism, especially Philo, were very much a part of the Greco-Roman world; the second is the failure to take seriously the fact that Paul writes in Greek, and has that in common with Philo, as opposed to those interpreting the Old Testament in Semitic languages such as those at Qumran; and the third is the lack of recognition of Greek influence upon some, if not most, of the Jewish interpreters of the time, including Philo.¹⁵ Philo's so-called allegorical method of interpretation of the Old Testament, which amounts to an expanded paraphrase of especially the Torah, is fully consonant with Greek-based citation and interpretation of important literary texts (especially Homer), typical of the Alexandrian literary tradition.¹⁶ In other words, as argued above, what one might characterize as Jewish exegesis of the Old Testament is, instead, exegesis within the larger context of the Greco-Roman interpretative tradition of venerated texts, a tradition that he has in common with a host of other ancient writers of the Hellenistic world. The kinds of changes to the text that Paul makes—such as expansion, contraction, grammatical alteration, etc.—are much like that of both other Jewish interpreters as well as many Greco-Roman writers. Comparison of Paul's practice with that of other writers helps the exegete of the New Testament to realize that the kinds of changes that Paul makes are consistent with the broad textual interpretative tradition of the ancient world, in which venerated texts were invoked for a variety of important reasons. Sometimes these texts provided the philosophical foundation for a particular position, other times they offered argumentative support for such a position, and other times they only illustrated the terms in which the discussion or thought-processes took

¹⁵ Again, see Daube, 'Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation', *passim*, on the Greco-Roman origins of rabbinic exegetical technique.

¹⁶ R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), esp. pp. 44–54 on Philo.

place for a particular writer. Paul displays all of these tendencies in his use of the Old Testament, an element of his own exegesis that has not been fully explored in recent scholarship.

Thus, the matter of Paul's background has important exegetical implications. His use of the Old Testament, traditionally seen as an area that reveals his Jewish background, provides confirmatory evidence for analysis of Paul within the larger Greco-Roman world of which he was an active participant.

3. PAUL'S OPPONENTS

A second issue relevant for exegesis of a number, if not virtually all, of Paul's letters is the issue of the opposition that he faced in a given Christian community and that elicited his epistolary response. There are a few letters in which Paul does not apparently face opponents in a strict sense, such as the book of Romans, Philemon, and possibly Philippians. Even for letters such as Romans or Philemon, however, the letter reveals that Paul is facing a potentially divisive and/or contentious situation. Analysis of the points of contention, often in terms of specific opposition, is an important part of Pauline exegesis, and the nature of Paul's opponents is a matter of recurring yet unresolved debate. Not only does virtually every New Testament introduction discuss this topic, but there have been a number of important studies of the subject.¹⁷ One of the most exegetically difficult situations to analyze is the one that Paul confronted at Corinth. The situation is difficult because, despite the relative abundance of evidence available, there is much that is simply not expressed or known, and exegesis of the letters requires extensive historical and theological reconstruction to provide an appropriate interpretative framework. As a result, there are varying reconstructions that must be weighed, some of them with more and others with less plausibility. In this section, exploration of the

¹⁷ See, for example, J.J. Gunther, *St Paul's Opponents and their Background: A Study of Apocalyptic and Jewish Sectarian Teaching* (NovTSup, 35; Leiden: Brill, 1973); E.F. Ellis, 'Paul and his Opponents: Trends in the Research', in *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity: New Testament Essays* (WUNT, 18; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1978; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 80-115; and the important methodological statements found in J.L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* (JSNTSup, 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), esp. pp. 75-112.

opponents at Corinth will provide an opportunity to evidence the exegetical significance of this important category of investigation.

The first stage in analysis, however, must be the establishment of the proper historical and temporal context. This includes the gathering of significant data that must be explained by any exegetical hypothesis. In other words, what is the relationship between the composition of 1 and 2 Corinthians, and the issues that seem to have warranted their being written? There is much disagreement on this. I will offer one plausible historical scenario, but also try to indicate in recounting it where there are major points of dispute (minor points of dispute will not be included here, even though there are plenty that could be). It must be noted that my reconstruction admits evidence where appropriate from the book of Acts, an admission that many scholars would dispute and wish to exclude from their exegesis.

Paul appears to have planted a church in Corinth on what has come to be characterized as his second missionary journey (probably c. 50-52 CE) (cf. Acts 18:1-18), staying in Corinth for a year and a half. During this time, probably around 50-51 CE, he appeared before the Roman proconsul Gallio, who dismissed charges brought by the Jews against him, and may have, through his verdict, helped to guarantee Paul's safety in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:6; 2 Cor. 1:19). The dating of Gallio's term as proconsul, on the basis of the so-called Gallio inscription, is one of most secure dates of New Testament chronology.¹⁸ Leaving Corinth, Paul returned to Antioch by way of Ephesus, Caesarea and Jerusalem, thus ending his second missionary journey. During the earlier part of his third missionary journey (probably 53-55 CE), probably during an extended stay at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-41), Paul sent his first letter to the Corinthian church. Some scholars think that 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 is part of this now lost letter, although recent scholarship has tended away from this position.¹⁹ Paul apparently then received information about problems in the church

¹⁸ On matters of New Testament chronology, see the summary and bibliography in S.E. Porter, 'New Testament Chronology', in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. D.N. Freedman; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). The Gallio inscription is conveniently discussed in G. Ogg, *The Chronology of the Life of Paul* (London: Epworth, 1968), pp. 104-10, along with other relevant inscriptions.

¹⁹ See M.E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994-), I, pp. 25-36, for discussion of this hypothesis.

(1 Cor. 1:11), as well as a letter from the church asking for advice on certain issues (see 1 Cor. 5:1; 7:1). Paul responded with what we call 1 Corinthians. Timothy was then sent on a special mission to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10), where he discovered that there was a crisis, apparently including attacks on Paul's authority (2 Cor. 2:5-11; 7:8-12). Timothy was unable to deal with this crisis, and returned to Ephesus to tell Paul. Upon hearing of these difficulties, Paul apparently visited Corinth briefly, but he was rebuffed. This visit is apparently referred to by Paul as the 'painful visit' (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1, 2), not recorded in Acts. After his visit, Paul sent a powerful letter in response, probably carried by Titus, to deal with this crisis involving his apostleship. This letter is probably that referred to as the 'tearful/severe' letter (2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8-12). Many scholars have maintained that 2 Corinthians 10-13 is a part of this letter, a hypothesis often based on, among other arguments, the use of the verb tenses in the two sections. For example, there are some pairs of verbs where the so-called present tense is found in 2 Corinthians 10-13 and a so-called past tense is found in 2 Corinthians 1-9. The implication in some scholars' minds is that the events described in the past tense occurred before those in the present tense (see 2 Cor. 10:6 and 2 Cor. 2:9, 2 Cor. 13:2 and 2 Cor. 1:23, and 2 Cor. 13:10 and 2 Cor. 2:3). Unfortunately for this part of the theory, the verb tenses in Greek, according to the latest discussion of Greek verb structure, do not refer primarily to time, and will not sustain such an argument.²⁰ Nevertheless, differences in tone between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13 may still indicate that the two portions were at least written at different times. Many scholars, if not most, however, would now claim that this third letter to the Corinthians is now lost. After writing this letter to the Corinthians, Paul departed Ephesus and went toward Macedonia (1 Cor. 16:5-9; cf. Acts 20:1-2). Delayed along the way by a visit to Troas, he waited for Titus, but could not find him (2 Cor. 2:12-13). Going on to Macedonia, he met Titus there, who informed him that the worst of the crisis in Corinth was over (2 Cor. 7:6-16), in response to which Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, his fourth and final Corinthian letter, carried by Titus and two other 'brothers in Christ'. Many scholars think that chs. 10-13 may have been sent separately from the rest of the letter, probably later if they were separate, but

²⁰ See S.E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (SBG, 1; New York: Lang, 1989), esp. pp. 75-108, and the Chapter on the Greek Language of the New Testament.

being sent earlier may help to account for their stronger tone. Paul then traveled on to Corinth (cf. Acts 20:3), from which, within a year, he probably wrote the letter to the Romans, apparently without any difficulties. This indicates the likelihood that the Corinthian crisis was finally resolved in Paul's favor.

This basic chronology, along with some observations about surrounding events, already includes a surprisingly large number of exegetical judgments. These include, among others, estimations of the number of letters, the events precipitating their being sent, some motivations on both Paul's and the Corinthians' parts, and the forms of the letters and their contents. One could conclude differently on several of these matters, and it would have consequences for exegesis. However, this historical-chronological fact-finding stage is merely the first, leading to a necessary further step in the exegetical task. This step involves gathering exegetical data from the letters themselves regarding the kind of opposition Paul encountered, and then constructing a plausible explanation regarding these data in terms of identifying the opponents. In some instances, it is better to separate this into two tasks, although it is difficult to think of individual data outside of a conceptual framework. One must grapple at this point with the importance of an exegetical spiral. That is, from the situation and data at hand one creates a reconstruction of the Corinthian situation. This reconstruction is then used to re-interpret the data in the text. Out of the interplay of the data and one's further analysis, one hopes to gain insight into the Pauline letter situation and the content of the letter. What is to be avoided is simply reading pre-conceived ideas into the data, and finding 'confirmation' of one's hypotheses in them.

This stage of exegesis is best handled in terms of the individual letters, but must then be brought together in light of the multiple Corinthian-letter situation. The second stage can begin with the simple question—what could have been so cataclysmic to elicit these events as just recounted, including multiple letters and multiple trips back and forth between Ephesus and other places, and Corinth? There has been much scholarly debate regarding the conflict at Corinth that brought forth this series of correspondence. By recounting the several major proposals regarding the opponents at Corinth, one can begin to see how one's exegetical decisions in just one area have significant effects upon interpretation. The situation is compounded by the fact that there are (at least) two Corinthian letters to be analyzed. I begin with 1 Corinthians, before discussing 2 Corinthians.

The traditional view regarding the issue at Corinth has been that, initially, it was about unity and disunity within the church. Indications in the letters are that Paul was informed that the church was divided into a variety of factions, with controversial issues or practices going on that warranted a series of comments from him. Since Paul's first letter (1 Cor. 5:9), he had apparently received further communication from the Corinthian church, including specific information regarding their various quarrels and divisions (1:10-17). At 5:1, then, Paul turns from the brief body of his letter regarding the larger issue of church unity to a lengthy parenthetic section dealing with specific issues that are dividing the Corinthian church. He treats them serially, sometimes indicating a change in topics by use of the phrase *περὶ δέ*, 'now concerning' (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).²¹

The following four issues appear to have been causing division at Corinth: (1) sexual behavior (5:1-13; 6:12-20; 7:1, 28); (2) controversy between those who were scrupulous in not eating food that may have been offered to idols, and those who held no scruple regarding eating this meat in places where it was known to be served (8:10; 10:27-28), possibly resulting in behavior that led to Corinthian Christians getting involved in court cases with each other (6:1-11), along with social divisions creeping into celebration of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34); (3) practices of worship, including a number of women having been particularly vocal during services, as well as undue emphasis being put on the charismatic gifts, such as speaking in divine or heavenly languages (chs. 12, 14); and (4) the resurrection (ch. 15), whether the Corinthian church held that the resurrection of Christ had not occurred, or whether they were disputing that there would be a resurrection of believers, especially if some members believed that they had already entered the eschaton.

A major problem with this position is that one must wonder whether there was some sort of larger outside influence that had penetrated the Corinthian church to cause such strife over these issues. If not, the matter of disunity may not indicate what can rationally be called Pauline 'opposition' apart from the kinds of internal squabbles one might expect in a growing and developing organization, such as the Church was in the first century. As a result, some have argued that

²¹ See M.M. Mitchell, 'Concerning ΠΕΡΙ ΔΕ in 1 Corinthians', *NovT* 31 (1989), pp. 229-56. Paul also uses conditional clauses (1 Cor. 7:17; 13:1; 15:12), a knowledge formula (10:1), a strong adversative (15:35), and an emphatic cataphoric pronoun (11:17; 15:50).

there was a wide variety of divisive groups in Corinth, none of which was pre-eminent (although many may have thought of themselves as such), and maybe none of which was attempting to wrest control of the church from Paul. For example, the evidence may support the idea that there were some libertines, who had misunderstood the concept of Christian freedom as an excuse for excessive indulgence (5:1-13, 6:12-20). Others may have been ascetics, who viewed such practices as marriage to be sinful (7:1-28). Still others may have been ecstasies, who were allowing spiritual experience to lead to disorderly behavior in the church (ch. 14). Some of these may have had a realized eschatology, thinking that they had already attained the eschaton, which condition justified their behavior. Each of these groups may have been associated with a particular individual or recognizable group in Corinth, or there may also have been people siding with various individuals, including the Paul group, the Apollos group, the Cephas group, and the Christ group (1:12).²²

A second hypothesis has tended to dominate much recent exegesis of 1 Corinthians, and that is that there were Jewish-Christian gnostics in the church.²³ These gnostics, so the hypothesis goes, disparaged the earthly and the fleshly realms, and elevated the spiritual realm with its esoteric knowledge (see 1:18-2:16, 3:18-23 for references to 'knowledge'). Their set of beliefs that freed them from the constraints of this world may well have resulted in overindulgence (see 5:1-6:20; 11:17-34). These Jewish-Christian gnostics were concerned to mediate the otherworldly realm to this world, but it raised some direct questions regarding their Christology, responded to most directly in what Paul says in ch. 15 regarding Christ and the resurrection. If Christ was God, the question might be asked, how could he also be a man? This bifurcation in thought and formulation would have tended toward a position in which Christ's humanness would have been merely an appearance of being human.

But is the gnostic hypothesis that exegetically convincing? Several factors should be considered. One is that it does not appear to address the range of issues mentioned in the letter, only focusing on certain sections. Furthermore, most recent research has come to acknowledge the fact that there is a significant difference between 'proto-gnostic

²² See C.K. Barrett, 'Christianity at Corinth', in his *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), pp. 3-6.

²³ See, for example, W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (trans. J.F. Stealy; Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).

tendencies' and full-blown Gnosticism. As Gnosticism emerged in the second and third centuries with its myth of the heavenly redeemer, full of all sorts of emanations and manifestations, it probably reflected the influence of Christian thought, rather than the other way around. As a result, the most that can probably be argued is that some proto-gnostic tendencies, perhaps common to Judaism and wider Hellenistic thought, were to be found at Corinth. For example, heavenly knowledge took an exalted place over the earthly, but without the gnostic Christology or worldview that later developed.²⁴ Much of what is often cited as gnostic may reveal other influences, such as Jewish wisdom thought, rather than full-blown Gnosticism.²⁵ Thus the gnostic hypothesis, though not without some appeal, fails to be convincingly well established as the best explanation of the situation at Corinth.

As a result, a somewhat related and more specific view has been proposed that the major problems at Corinth stemmed from the outworkings of an over-realized eschatology.²⁶ In the mind of the Corinthians, according to this hypothesis, a mystical or magical element seemed to attach to the various practices in which those in the church were engaged, including baptism and the Lord's Supper. Those practicing them apparently thought quite highly of their spiritual status, depreciating earthly things and status. Thinking of themselves as already having entered the eschaton, they lived accordingly. This kind of thinking may well have derived from wisdom speculation or some other form of Hellenistic thought. Rather than positing that Hellenistic Judaism was responsible for these influences, the emphasis should probably be on Hellenistic thought in general. The general exaltation of esoteric knowledge was emphasized, perhaps in conjunction with the Platonic thought promoted by Hellenistic philosophy.²⁷ As noted above, it is precarious to try to create a divide

²⁴ See R. McL. Wilson, 'Gnosis at Corinth', in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C.K. Barrett* (ed. M.D. Hooker and S.G. Wilson; London: SPCK, 1985), pp. 102-14.

²⁵ See B.A. Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology* (SBLDS, 12; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1973).

²⁶ See A.C. Thiselton, 'Realized Eschatology at Corinth', *NTS* 24 (1977-78), pp. 510-26, for the standard discussion of this issue.

²⁷ See G.W. Bowersock (ed.), *Approaches to the Second Sophistic* (University Park, PA: American Philological Association, 1974); cf. D. Litfin, *St Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (SNTSMS, 79; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 109-34.

between Hellenistic Judaism and the encompassing phenomenon of Hellenism.

These previous characterizations of the opponents tend to emphasize divisive struggles within the Corinthian church, often fomented by outside agitation. However, it has recently been argued that the major problem at Corinth was one between the church and Paul, its founder, over his authority and the nature of the gospel.²⁸ In 1 Cor. 9:1-14, for example, Paul rigorously defends himself, rejecting the church's judgment of him. 1 Corinthians is also Paul's response to their letter to him, in which they had taken exception to several of Paul's positions in his previous letter (1 Cor. 5:9). Paul responds by re-asserting his authority (3:5-9; 4:1-5), and correcting the Corinthians as a whole church, using the second person (1:10-12; 3:4-5; 11:18-19). The problem in the church does not seem to stem from outside opposition having infiltrated the group (so the term 'opponents' may be the wrong one), but seems to stem from anti-Pauline sentiment started by a few who had eventually infected the whole congregation. These people thought of themselves as being wise. Paul's preaching was 'milk' compared to their mature teaching (2:8; 3:1), and his behavior was seen to be weak or vacillating with respect to such issues as food offered to idols (8:1-11:1). When Paul emphasized how he was writing on spiritual things (14:37), it was to respond to people who thought of themselves as being 'spiritual', but who did not consider Paul as such, since they had fantastic experiences to back their claims (chs. 12-14) and he did not. Their spiritual endowment was related to their knowledge and wisdom (chs. 1-4, 8-10). They went even further, however, contending that they were already experiencing the Spirit in full measure, probably including some eschatologically exuberant women who thought they had entered the new age (chs. 7, 11), contrary to the weak Paul, who had not.

This exegetical position provides a unified depiction of the problem, and rightly focuses it upon the apostle Paul and his defense of his apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1-14). Several factors must be considered further, however. One is whether the issue of Paul's personal apostleship is really at the heart of the letter, especially in terms of the variety of issues raised in chs. 5-11. These problems seem rather to reflect issues of practice and behavior rather than personal

²⁸ See G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 6.

confrontation. Evidence of outside factors, such as mention of the Apollos and Cephas parties (1:12), points to some form of outside agitation. This solution, while perhaps right in recognizing that personal opposition to Paul as an apostle might constitute a partial explanation of the situation, is probably not a sufficient analysis of the data.

The predominant scholarly position regarding 1 Corinthians posits that Paul is responding to behavior in the Corinthian church that originates with influences from the surrounding Hellenistic world, even if the specific nature of that outside influence cannot be adequately and fully described. But how does that help us to understand the possible opponents in 2 Corinthians? The historical reconstruction offered above would seem to imply continuity regarding the situations of the two letters. Nevertheless, the data do not necessarily indicate this, and it is difficult to pin down those who seem to stand behind 2 Corinthians. Part of the problem might be alleviated if one separates 2 Corinthians 1–9 from 10–13, inferring that chs. 10–13, with a harsher tone, were sent before chs. 1–9, but arguments for separating the two, especially in light of their unity in the text-critical tradition (i.e. no extant text of 2 Corinthians separates the two), are not entirely convincing.²⁹ If the occasion that prompted the first two letters to the Corinthians was the possible fragmentation of the church, in 2 Corinthians it appears that much of the disunity has been overcome. Consequently, the opponents that elicited 2 Corinthians have often been separately characterized in terms of the specific nature of their attack. As noted above, Paul's fourth letter to the Corinthians (no matter how much of it is found in our 2 Corinthians) apparently dealt sufficiently with the problem, reinforcing the view that these opponents represent a minority position that was finally rejected by the church at Corinth.

The nature of the attack against Paul reflected in 2 Corinthians seems to have consisted of a number of wide-ranging accusations brought by outsiders. He was accused of being unstable, as evidenced by a change of plans and vacillation (1:15–18), being unclear as to what he meant (1:13–14), being ineffective (10:10), being a tyrant (10:8), abandoning the Corinthians (2:1; 13:2), his gospel not being clear (4:3), and his speech being pitiful (10:11; 11:6; this last point

²⁹ Besides Thrall (*Second Corinthians*, pp. 5–20), who surveys opinion, for bibliography see L.L. Welborn, "The Identification of 2 Corinthians 10–13 with the "Letter of Tears", *NovT* 37 (1995), pp. 138–53.

probably indicates that he was not trained in rhetoric as some of them may have been). Paul was also apparently denigrated for a number of reasons concerning his claim to being a representative of Christ, or an apostle. These include the fact that he had no formal letters of recommendation, as perhaps did other itinerant preachers and teachers (3:1; 4:2); his claims regarding belonging to Christ were apparently seen as unsupported, perhaps because he had not actually seen Christ (10:7); he arrived in Corinth without a clear mandate (10:13–14); and he was said to be inferior to the 'super apostles' (11:5; 12:11), a position that Paul himself may well have indirectly re-enforced by being seen as having distanced himself from the Corinthians by refusing to be supported by the congregation (11:7–9). All of this may well have indicated to some that Paul was not even to be considered an apostle (12:12, 14), and that Christ was not speaking through him (13:3). Paul may also have been accused of having a deleterious effect upon the congregation, because his behavior seemed to be offensive, including praising himself (3:1, 5; 4:5; 5:11–15; 6:3–5; 10:2, 8; 11:16–18; 12:1, 11). He may have been accused of working duplicitously for gain (7:1; 12:17–18) even by using the collection (8:20–21), being a coward (1:23; 8:2; 10:1, 10; 11:32–33), and harming the Christian community by abandoning the Corinthians (2:1; 13:2) and exploiting the situation for his own benefit (7:2; 12:16).

In his response, Paul had to find a suitable tone in the letter and make his perspective clear. For example, he says that his opponents were a paid minority (2:6; 10:2), implying that they readily accepted financial compensation (2:17; 11:20; something he believed that he was entitled to, even if he did not use it; 1 Cor. 9:3–11), and had gained entrance into the church by letters of recommendation and self-commendation (3:1; 10:12, 18). They apparently boasted of their own excellence (5:12; 11:12, 18), emphasized ecstatic experience (that Paul counters with his own) (5:13; 12:1–6), and overtly claimed both the apostolic office (11:5, 13; 12:11) and superiority to Moses (3:4–11), although without making known their own Jewish heritage (11:22). Paul claims that these people were in fact preaching another gospel (11:4), had encroached on others' missionary territory (10:15–16), were immoral (12:21; 13:2), were boastful (10:12–13), and were led by a particular person (2:5; 7:12; 11:4). As a result, he calls them Satan's servants (11:13–15). By contrast, Paul regarded himself as an apostle (1:1), and the proof of this lay in the Corinthians themselves

(3:2-3), among whom he had done mighty things (12:12), reflecting his appointment from God (3:5, 6; 4:7).

These two full paragraphs provide a summary of at least some of the data gleaned from 2 Corinthians regarding its situation. Can these false preachers be more definitively characterized, and then correlated with the situation of 1 Corinthians?³⁰ There has been much speculation, often focusing upon 2 Corinthians 11. Some have characterized his opponents as Judaizers such as were involved in the Galatian situation, on the basis of their emphasis upon their Jewish heritage (3:4-7; 11:22).³¹ However, Paul's response in 2 Corinthians is not nearly as strong as that in Galatians. Some have thought that the opponents were 'gnostics'.³² One sees their willingness to emphasize ecstatic experience, but this position would require a fuller development of Gnosticism than is likely for the first century (see above). A third proposal is that these were Hellenistic Jews who were making claims regarding their miraculous powers.³³ This theory of 'divine men' (θεῖος ἀνὴρ) lacks evidence for its existence before Christianity had taken firm root, with the best parallels coming from the third century and later (see Apollonius of Tyana).

It is even possible that these false preachers were followers of Apollos, and reflected the Hellenistic Judaism of Alexandria. Consequently, they may well have been educated and articulate spokesmen who were formidable opponents for Paul. The merit for this suggestion, especially in light of 1 Corinthians (e.g. 1:12, 18-31; 2:1-5), is mitigated by the quite different ways in which Paul seems to handle the two situations. He is more conciliatory in 1 Corinthians, but more confrontative in 2 Corinthians. There is no hard evidence that the situation had escalated, and it is difficult to form a hard line of connection between the two. Perhaps this implies that the problems

³⁰ See Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents*, esp. pp. 13-73 for summary of the positions noted below, and pp. 187-91 for his own conclusions.

³¹ C.K. Barrett, 'Paul's Opponents in 2 Corinthians', in *Essays on Paul*, pp. 60-86; *idem*, 'ΨΕΥΔΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΙ (2 Cor. 11:13)', in *Essays on Paul*, pp. 87-107; Gunther, *St Paul's Opponents*, pp. 1-94.

³² R. Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (trans. R.A. Harrisville; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), *passim*; Schmithals, *Gnosis in Corinth*, *passim*.

³³ D. Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), *passim*; contra C. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism: A Critique of the Use of this Category in New Testament Christology* (SBLDS, 40; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).

reflected in 2 Corinthians were attributable to a minority of people who were personally attacking Paul, perhaps a new group of outsiders questioning Paul's apostolic authority in a potentially persuasive way. Arguably the most likely explanation is that this group of false preachers originated in Palestine, quite possibly as emissaries (whether legitimate or otherwise) of the Jerusalem leaders or 'super apostles' (see 11:5, 13, 23; 12:11),³⁴ or as itinerant preachers who claimed to have been with Jesus. The Jerusalem leaders were not necessarily directly opposing Paul at Corinth, but one must not dismiss the degree of suspicion that apparently existed between the Jerusalem and Antiochian missionary efforts (see Acts 15:1-5; 21:20-21). Paul suggests that the Corinthians have been too quick to accept the false preachers' claims to have the authority and endorsement of the 'super apostles'. As a result, he asserts his equal standing and authority with any other apostles, including those in Jerusalem—anyone who says otherwise is a false apostle (2 Cor. 11:5, 12-15).

The exegetical importance of establishing the possible opposition to Paul in a letter is clearly of importance, but the issues cannot always be clearly resolved, as the above discussion illustrates. For example, the two (to my mind) most likely scenarios regarding 1 and 2 Corinthians (the traditional view regarding disunity and that of outsiders from Jerusalem) seems to be consistent with readings of the individual letters involved, but is in tension with the reconstructed scenario above. The solution that posits a gnostic influence behind the problems of both letters resolves the problem of contradiction, but is far from being the most obvious understanding of the data in the individual letters, especially in light of problems with the concept of Gnosticism itself. Nevertheless, as I hope that this example illustrates, discussion of the opponents of Paul in a given letter certainly has exegetical significance, and must be approached in a systematic way. This significance can be seen in the area of interpretation of the individual letters, but extends more broadly to include understanding the larger life and ministry of the apostle.

³⁴ Cf. R.P. Martin, 'The Opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians: An Old Issue Revisited', in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis* (ed. G.F. Hawthorne with O. Betz; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 279-87.

4. THE OCCASION AND PURPOSE OF THE PAULINE LETTERS

A further factor to consider in exegesis of the Pauline letters is the issue of the occasion and purpose of the letters. Interpreters of the Pauline letters often fail to make an important distinction between the occasion of a letter or the situation that elicited it, and the purpose that might have been served by the writing of the letter.³⁵ The discussion above regarding the opponents at Corinth is to a large extent a discussion of the occasion of those letters. The purpose of a letter reflects the perspective of the author in relation to the occasion. It is entirely possible that a given occasion could result in writings with varying purposes, depending upon the given author and his motivations. Some idea of the purpose of a literary work, such as a Pauline letter, would seem to be necessary to serve as a means of arbitrating between various possible interpretations of passages in any book.

There is perhaps no more widely disputed Pauline letter regarding its purpose than the book of Romans. The circumstances that elicited the letter to the Romans seem to be encapsulated in a number of important passages that occur at the beginning and the end of the letter. These passages require sustained analysis, in light of how they relate to the rest of the letter and the re-constructed historical circumstances, in order to establish the purpose of the letter. Paul states in Rom. 1:13-15 that he had planned to come to Rome, and that he was eager to preach the gospel to those in Rome, but that he had been prevented from doing so. In Rom. 15:22, he clarifies why he had been prevented—he had been preaching in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. He had now preached from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum (Rom. 15:19) and had no place further to preach in the east (15:23), so he set his sights on Spain (15:24, 28). He intended to visit the church in Rome in the course of his westward movement (15:23, 28-29), but first had to go to Jerusalem to deliver the collection that he had gathered from the churches in Macedonia and Greece (15:26). This was the occasion or situation in the apostle's life when the letter was written, but what was the purpose of the letter?³⁶ In other words,

³⁵ This is an important distinction used in McDonald and Porter, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature*, chap. 10. This section is based on treatment of Romans in that chapter, where a fuller discussion may be found.

³⁶ A summary of various positions is found in A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); L.A. Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation* (JSNTSup, 55;

just because his situation or circumstances were as depicted does not mean that he had to write a letter to Rome. Much less, it does not dictate that he had to write a letter like the one now in our New Testament. Whereas it may be agreed that the occasion of Paul's proposed visit to Rome was part of the westward expansion of his preaching ministry, the purpose or motivation for his writing the letter to the Romans is far from agreed, and has elicited an incredible amount of debate.

The element of contingency in the Pauline letters has become important in recent scholarly discussion. In other words, Paul as a writer is addressing in each letter a unique set of circumstances that warrants a response to that particular situation.³⁷ So much is true of any communication; however, that does not help to decide the purpose of a given letter. Determining a letter's purpose requires examination of the content of the letter in the light of its situation. As a result, there have been a number of proposals worth considering regarding the book of Romans, several of them mutually contradictory, or at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Melanchthon's judgment that Romans is a compendium of the Christian religion summarizes the traditional view of the purpose of Romans—that is, the letter is as close to a systematic theology as is found in Paul's writings. Paul is writing to a church that he has not visited, but that figures in his future travel plans, as a means of setting out the major tenets of what he believes constitutes Christian belief. He does so in a highly systematic and organized way, using the letter form. This position tends to minimize the contingent elements of Paul's presentation, including the relevance of specific contextual issues (e.g. Romans 14–15), and emphasizes the major doctrines that constitute the Pauline gospel (e.g. justification by faith, human sinfulness, the role of Adam and Christ, sanctification, reconciliation, the relations of Jews and Gentiles, the role of the state, etc.). This position was virtually unchallenged until the work of F.C. Baur in the early nineteenth century, and still has significant supporters.³⁸

Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); R. Morgan, *Romans* (NTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 60-77.

³⁷ J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 23-36; 'Paul's Theology: Consistent or Inconsistent?', *NTS* 34 (1988), pp. 364-77.

³⁸ See F.C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, his Epistles and his Doctrine* (2 vols.; London: Williams & Norgate, 2nd edn, 1876),

Two major objections to this position are that it minimizes the context and circumstances surrounding the writing of the letter, to the point that this book could apparently have been written to virtually any Christian community anywhere at any time; and that many of what some scholars would consider major Christian doctrines are lacking in Romans, making it at best an incomplete, and hence flawed, compendium. The doctrines often cited as lacking are eschatology, Christology, the doctrine of the Church, the Lord's Supper/Eucharist and marriage. There are responses to these objections, but it is sufficient here to note that they provide substantial reasons against accepting this proposal.

A purpose for the letter has been proposed that addresses one of the major objections to the first position above regarding the contingency of the letter. T.W. Manson claimed that the book of Romans was sent originally to the churches both at Rome (chs. 1–15:23 or 33) and at Ephesus (chs. 1–16). Thus, it reflects the ideas that were deepest in Paul's thought. It is not a full-orbed compendium of all major Christian doctrine, but rather a manifesto of Paul's deepest convictions.³⁹ Paul, unable to visit Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem and then Rome, sent this letter to both, in a larger form for the Ephesians. This would account for inclusion of the names in ch. 16 that seem to be associated with Ephesus, and the fact that, in some later manuscripts, the Roman destination is missing. Thus, the letter is expanded in its scope from being a letter addressed to a single church to a type of circular letter.

Unfortunately for this position, there is not a strong case to be made for the book of Romans circulating in a form that only included chs. 1–15, since this would make for a somewhat abrupt close and an unnatural ending. This raises the further question of why Paul would convey his deepest convictions to the church at Rome, a city he had never visited. It is understandable that a revised form would be sent to the church at Ephesus, but why not Corinth or Antioch, churches that he knew, rather than Rome? It is perhaps more understandable that Paul would send a compendium of Christian belief to a church that he anticipated visiting, rather than an exposition of his deepest beliefs.

I, pp. 331–65; D.J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), esp. pp. 22–24; N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), p. 234.

³⁹ T.W. Manson, 'St Paul's Letter to the Romans—and Others', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 3–15.

A further proposal regarding the purpose of Romans recognizes that Paul was facing an unknown future on his contemplated journey to Jerusalem. He was carrying the collection from the churches in Greece and Macedonia, not knowing how it would be received in Jerusalem, so Bornkamm argued that Paul wrote his last will and testament to the Roman Christians.⁴⁰ The record in Acts 21:17–26 indicates that Paul had good reason to wonder about his Jerusalem reception (Rom. 15:31) (it seems very likely that this account in Acts is reliable, since it creates a very plausible course of events in which the Jerusalem church is implicated in Paul's arrest). Paul took this occasion to write to the Christians at Rome to provide a permanent record of his message, as a forecast of the preaching and missionary ministry he wished to continue. A balance is maintained in the letter that reflects one of his persistent battles, and perhaps one of the issues to be faced in Jerusalem—legalism and antinomianism. Although he had been accused of being an antinomian, he was anxious to show that he, as well as the Christian faith, was neither antinomian nor legalistic.

Why did Paul choose to write this kind of a letter to Rome, a church he had never visited? Bornkamm insists that this letter is not a last will and testament with Paul not anticipating being able to carry on his ministry. In what sense then is it a *last* will and testament? Furthermore, if it were to be his last, Paul could have been expected to pour out his theological heart to his friends, such as one of the churches that could have been expected to maintain the Pauline mission. There is the further difficulty that the unsettled state that Bornkamm posits does not appear in the letter. There is reference to uncertainty regarding the church at Jerusalem (Rom. 15:31), but this is mitigated by Paul's conviction that he is determined to make his way to Rome on his way to Spain after having visited Jerusalem (Rom. 15:24). Romans has none of the gloom found in letters such as 2 Corinthians 10–13 or especially 2 Tim. 4:6–7 (which Bornkamm considers deutero-Pauline), where Paul seems genuinely exhausted and concerned regarding the future.

The distinguishing mark of all of the genuine Pauline letters, it has been maintained, is mention of the collection (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8:1–9:15).⁴¹ The collection is important in Paul's thinking,

⁴⁰ G. Bornkamm, 'The Letter to the Romans as Paul's Last Will and Testament', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 16–28.

⁴¹ M. Kiley, *Colossians and Pseudepigraphy* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), p. 46.

even though this framework seems to be predicated upon a previous presumption of which are the authentic letters. Consequently, it has been posited that Romans, though addressed to the Roman churches, is in fact a letter that is 'addressed to Jerusalem'.⁴² In other words, it was written as if it were being overheard by the church at Jerusalem, so that they would accept both Paul's ministry and his collection, and he could overcome their possible objections regarding what he had been teaching. What he is writing in the letter may even constitute a dress rehearsal for the kind of speech or apology that he would deliver to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

Despite the validity of Paul's concern regarding his reception in Jerusalem, Romans is probably not best seen as an apology to Jerusalem. This letter can be only an indirect way of offering an apology to them, since it is sent in the completely opposite direction, that is, to Rome. The reference to Jerusalem in Rom. 15:31 is insufficient to suggest that Paul is concerned that his letter might reach Jerusalem. Furthermore, there is material in the letter that would hardly appeal to Jews, especially an audience that Paul was trying to please (see Romans 4, 11). The collection might offer a suitable occasion for writing the letter, but it hardly provides a sufficient purpose to write such a lengthy and involved one, especially since references to the collection in Romans are minimal.

A more realistic option, in conjunction with the hypothesis above, is that Paul wrote this letter as a letter of self-introduction, possibly verging on an apologetic letter.⁴³ Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome so that they would welcome him and help him on his way to Spain (Rom. 1:11-15; 15:24, 28). Rapport was needed with that church, so that they would receive him and his gospel, with the idea that he may well have been in need of financial support (his mention of the collection and his work on behalf of the church in Jerusalem would have prepared them for this). In keeping with this theory, Paul uses many of the techniques of a teacher or an apologist. For example, he uses the dialogue form typical of diatribe, in which he writes both sides of the dialogue in order to raise issues, explain ideas, raise

⁴² J. Jervell, 'The Letter to Jerusalem', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 53-64.

⁴³ F.F. Bruce, 'The Romans Debate—Continued', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 175-93; A.J.M. Wedderburn, 'Purpose and Occasion of Romans Again', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 195-202; P. Stuhlmacher, 'The Purpose of Romans', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 231-42. On the apologetic or protreptic letter, see D.F. Aune, 'Romans as a *Logos Protreptikos*', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 278-96.

objections and respond to them—all as a way of leading his audience through his argument. Just as Corinth, Ephesus and Antioch had provided platforms for his work in the eastern Mediterranean, Paul envisioned Rome as his platform for moving westward.

Paul seems, nevertheless, to be engaging in an awful lot of very heavy theology simply to introduce himself to the Roman church. Paul would appear to be running a serious risk of jeopardizing his plans if he were to touch on some disputed issue or pronounce on a sensitive issue such as Jewish and Gentile relations. This approach is not one used elsewhere by Paul; he does not lay out his gospel for others to examine and approve. The church at Rome was unique in Paul's experience, since he had at least had important contacts with the church at Colossae, another church that he may not have visited. Nevertheless, it is hard to accept that Paul was so unknown to the church at Rome, thus hardly warranting such an extended introduction. In the letter itself, his plans seem to center more on Spain, and less on Rome, a city which seems to be only incidental to his plans.

One scholar has gone so far as to argue that Paul wrote Romans as an instrument to re-found the church so that it would have an apostolic grounding to which it could point for authority.⁴⁴ According to this position, Paul viewed some churches as full and complete, and others he did not. Paul says in Rom. 15:20 that he does not build upon another's foundation, but this can be reconciled with Rom. 1:15 and his eagerness to preach in Rome if it is seen that the church does not in fact have the kind of foundation that he sees as necessary for an apostolic church.

This solution to the purpose of Romans is perhaps indicative of the variety of approaches offered, many of them perhaps borne out of frustration that there is no more definitive solution. Nevertheless, it is difficult to quantify what exactly the Roman church would have lacked by not having an apostolic foundation. Paul in fact says in the letter that they are full of knowledge, capable, and proclaimers of the faith (Rom. 1:6-16; 15:14-23). In Rom. 1:6, Paul favorably describes the Romans as being 'among' the Gentiles who have become obedient to the faith, making it unlikely that he is distinguishing them in any meaningful way. Even if Paul is forcefully asserting his apostolic

⁴⁴ G. Klein, 'Paul's Purpose in Writing the Epistle to the Romans', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 29-43.

authority in the letter (something he does not appear to be emphasizing; see Rom. 1:12), that would not necessarily mean that he is founding or re-founding the church there. The evidence of such a re-founding is lacking, here and elsewhere in the New Testament.

Several scholars have more realistically proposed that the purpose of Romans is tied up with Gentile and Jewish relations. There are two forms of this position. The first sees a divide in early Christianity between Petrine or Jewish and Pauline or Hellenistic elements.⁴⁵ According to this position, the letter was the earliest support for the great Gentile church in Rome, opposing the Jewish Christians there. Paul wanted to be able to deliver the picture of a unified Gentile Christianity when he presented his collection in Jerusalem. This letter has nothing to do with Rome per se, but with Rome as a church of Gentiles to which Paul can point as a noteworthy success in support of his position as representative of Hellenistic Christianity.

It is true that there was conflict in the early Church between parties that have been called 'Jewish' and 'Hellenistic' (whether these are the most appropriate labels requires further examination), but this position still fails to explain the purpose of Paul's writing Romans. There are too many specific references in the letter for it to be unconcerned with the church at Rome (see e.g. 1:8-15; 13:1-7 and chs. 14-15). There are also too many references to the Jews, including lengthy discussion in chs. 9-11, for a letter that is merely designed to present a unified picture of Gentile Christianity. There is no other letter that does this. If the dispute in the early Church is primarily an ethnic-cultural one, why is the issue not addressed in that way? Much of the language is too comprehensive, including description of Jews and Gentiles, to provide an argument for this being a picture concerned only to promote the Hellenistic side of Jewish and Gentile Christian relations.

The second form of the Jew and Gentile proposal argues that there were divergent communities that are being addressed, possibly the weak (Jewish) and the strong (Gentile), or various groups involved in the question of status. This theory takes seriously the conditional and

⁴⁵ This view is held in various ways by R. Jewett, 'Following the Argument of Romans', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 265-77; W.S. Campbell, 'Romans III as a Key to the Structure and Thought of Romans', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 251-64, chap. 3 in his *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context* (Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity, 69; Frankfurt: Lang, 1992), pp. 25-42; K.P. Donfried, 'False Presuppositions in the Study of Romans', in *Romans Debate*, pp. 102-24; M. Goulder, *A Tale of Two Missions* (London: SCM Press, 1994).

contingent nature of the Pauline writings, as well as the specific references within the book, especially those in the parenetic section. Paul perhaps offers something encouraging to each side in the dispute. The Jews, for example, are allowed to retain pride in Abraham, while the Gentiles can see themselves as grafted onto the tree that Israel once occupied alone.

This theory does not seem to offer much regarding the purpose of Romans until chs. 14-15, where the discussion of the weak and the strong is introduced, thus leaving the bulk of the letter unexplained. However, it is not clear that the 'weak' and the 'strong' are being addressed in ethnic terms. What it means to be 'in Christ' is being addressed, but not enough is known of the composition of the church to make firm equations with particular groups.

As this brief survey of exegetical options has shown, there is no consensus regarding the purpose of Paul's writing the letter to the Romans. This has several important exegetical consequences. First, in interpreting the letter, every exegete must have some idea of the purpose that generated the letter. This is necessary to offer some form of control over exegetical decisions taken in the course of study of individual passages in the letter. For example, one must have some purpose in mind that is able to understand both the discussion of the weak and strong in chs. 14-15, the theological ideas regarding the Jews in ch. 9 and the statements regarding Gentiles in chs. 2-8. Without such an overall conception, the result will be fragmentary exegesis that may have no correlation with its larger context. Various proposals for individual passages may be put forward, but no larger sense of the whole book will be maintained. Secondly, one's conception of purpose must be open to being shaped by exegesis of individual passages. This is a description of the exegetical spiral, in which the part (i.e. individual passages) influences the whole (i.e. one's conception of the purpose of Romans), and vice versa. Thus one's sense of purpose is informed by the text. Each of the proposals above attempts to reflect such a weighing of alternative viewpoints in light of exegesis of particular passages. Nevertheless, larger exegetical decisions must be made, often with inadequate evidence to hand, which have consequences for subsequent understanding.

5. PSEUDONYMY AND EXEGESIS OF THE PAULINE LETTER CORPUS

This discussion of exegesis has so far treated the entire Pauline letter corpus, with little specific attention to issues of authorship.

Nevertheless, this is probably a far more important issue in exegesis than many scholars realize, since it has a variety of implications. These can be readily observed by tracing the response to F.C. Baur and his followers when, in the early nineteenth century, they proposed that the authentic Pauline letters were only four, not the entire thirteen in the New Testament. Today Pauline scholars have tended to settle for a middle ground, most of them recognizing the authenticity of at least seven letters: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. This means that there are various levels of dispute over the remaining letters: 2 Thessalonians, Colossians and Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles. Some scholars would maintain that one or more of these is also authentically written by Paul, while others would dispute that any of them could be. The question here is what difference pseudonymity makes for exegesis of the Pauline letters.⁴⁶

In light of numerous recent episodes in which purportedly authentic documents have proven to be forgeries, we tend to think of the issue of pseudonymity as, for the most part, a modern issue, or at least one on which the ancients had a different perspective. However, pseudonymity was a problem throughout the ancient world—it is certainly not merely a problem of the biblical and related literature (e.g. apocalyptic literature such as *1 Enoch*). These pseudonymous writings included letters.⁴⁷

Before exploring the implications for exegesis of the New Testament, it is worth noting how pseudepigraphal literature was handled in the ancient world, as well as in the early Church. Ancient writers, both Christian and secular, were apparently aware that some of the writings with which they were dealing were pseudonymous. For example, among non-biblical writers, Suetonius describes a letter of Horace as spurious, Galen took only thirteen out of the sixty or eighty Hippocratic texts as genuine, and was concerned that his own corpus of works was being infiltrated by those he did not write, Philostratus disputes a work by Dionysius, and Livy reports that, when discovered, pseudonymous books attributed to Numa were burned. One of the most complex situations in the ancient world was the corpus of

⁴⁶ Some of the following arguments were originally developed with regard to issues of canon, rather than exegesis, in S.E. Porter, 'Pauline Authorship and the Pastoral Epistles: Implications for Canon', *BBR* 5 (1995), pp. 105-23.

⁴⁷ See L.R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles* (HUT, 22; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1986), esp. pp. 9-42.

Lysias's speeches. Although over 420 were ascribed to him, many ancients knew that many were not genuine, and they formulated various lists indicating this and attempting to determine those that were genuine. For example, one list includes as many speeches as possible, but indicates questions regarding authenticity for a third of them.⁴⁸

A very similar situation apparently held in Christian circles. The general, if not invariable, pattern was that, if a work was known to be pseudonymous, it was excluded from any group of authoritative writings. For example, Tertullian in the early third century tells of the author of '3 Corinthians' (mid second century) being removed from the office of presbyter (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17).⁴⁹ Bishop Salonus rejected Salvian's pamphlet written to the church in Timothy's name.⁵⁰ The best known example is the instance where Bishop Serapion in c. 200 reportedly rejected the *Gospel of Peter*. According to Eusebius (*H.E.* 6.12.1-6), Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, wrote to the church at Rhossus in Cilicia, after he had discovered the *Gospel of Peter* being read. He is reported as saying, 'we receive both Peter and the other Apostles as Christ; but as experienced men we reject the writings falsely inscribed with their names, since we know that we did not receive such from our fathers' (LCL). Although the process that led to the Gospel's rejection is complex, involving doctrinal and ecclesiastical issues, it was, in any case, rejected, despite initial tolerance because of its seeming innocuousness.

⁴⁸ See Kiley, *Colossians as Pseudepigraphy*, p. 18 and nn. 9, 10, 11, 12, cf. pp. 17-23, for reference to and citation of primary sources for the above; B.M. Metzger, 'Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha', *JBL* 91 (1972), p. 6 and *passim*, who discusses many instances of exposed pseudepigrapha; and K.J. Dover, *Lysias and the Corpus Lysiacum* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

⁴⁹ See D.A. Carson, D.J. Moo and L. Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 368-69, who also cite the example of the Epistle to the Laodiceans, which was clearly rejected by the early Church, along with a letter to the Alexandrians, according to the Muratorian fragment (see G.M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* [OTM; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992], pp. 196-200).

⁵⁰ Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument*, pp. 20-22; E.E. Ellis, 'Pseudonymity and Canonicity of New Testament Documents', in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin* (ed. M.J. Wilkins and T. Page; JSNTSup, 87; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), p. 218.

The several means and reasons by which pseudepigrapha were exposed and excluded are admittedly diverse. But as Donelson observes, on the basis of a thorough study of pseudepigraphical writings in the ancient world, both Christian and secular, 'No one ever seems to have accepted a document as religiously and philosophically prescriptive which was *known to be forged*. I do not know a single example.'⁵¹ He includes both Christian and non-Christian documents in this assessment. Therefore, in assessing the implications for exegesis, the interpreter must recognize that the recognition and establishment of pseudonymy for a given Pauline letter puts the letter concerned into a different category of analysis, one separate from the authentic writings of the author.

The question remains, however, what are the specific implications for exegesis? One approach, which has become widely accepted, is to treat the introduction of pseudepigrapha in the Pauline corpus as a phenomenon in harmony with the history of formation of other parts of the scriptural corpus. For example, one scholar has suggested that, within the Old Testament, there is a tradition of pseudonymous literature, in which traditions were supplemented, interpreted and expanded in the names of earlier authors.⁵² According to this analysis, there are three major traditions, the prophetic tradition, the wisdom tradition and the apocalyptic tradition. The wisdom tradition in the Old Testament is essentially confined to anonymous literature and the apocalyptic tradition is confined to Daniel, for whom there is no tradition of his being an illustrious hero. Thus the only tradition with direct relevance to the New Testament writings is the prophetic tradition. According to this view, in the prophetic tradition, in particular Isaiah, the tradition was developed by anonymous writers whose writings were attached to the earlier authentic Isaiah. Hence Second Isaiah is not by the historical figure of Isaiah, attested in First Isaiah itself and elsewhere in the Old Testament, but can still only be understood in terms of First Isaiah. The implications of this view of pseudonymity for exegesis would seem to be minimal, with the pseudonymous Pauline letters to be exegeted as part of the larger Pauline corpus, of which the undisputed authentic letters (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians, along with Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon) stand at the center.

⁵¹ Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument*, p. 11 (italics mine).

⁵² See D. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon* (WUNT, 39; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1986), pp. 17-43, esp. pp. 26-42 on growth of the Isaiah tradition.

This interpretative framework must be considered further before this pattern can be applied to the Pauline letters, however. It at first appears to present a situation parallel to that in the Pauline letters—there is a pattern of attributing writings to a recognized figure, quite possibly and even probably after the person was dead, and this practice was known to the audience. But this is only a superficial similarity. The type of literature is different. Isaiah is anonymous literature, which purports to contain the words of Isaiah, and is better compared with, for example, the Gospels, which purport to contain the words of Jesus. The Pauline letters are directly attributed to a known author, and appear to be his words, not merely to contain them. The process of literary production is quite different, as well. In the Isaianic writings, the tradition is expanded and compiled over a relatively long period of time, and the document itself grows. In the Pauline letters, the argument would be that the tradition grows, but by adding new documents to the corpus, not merely by expanding others. This would imply that the corpus had already been gathered together—something not sufficiently well known to use as evidence in this discussion—and that the theology of the added letters posed no problem when placed side by side with the authoritative and undisputed Pauline letters. If such a process truly occurred, inclusion must have been early, since attestation of many if not most of the now-disputed Pauline letters in the Church Fathers ranges from as early as *1 Clement* in the late first century to the third quarter of the second century.

Others treat pseudonymy as if it made no difference to exegesis. In his commentary on Ephesians, Lincoln argues that pseudonymy does not detract from the validity or authority of the particular pseudonymous document as part of the New Testament canon. He argues that to worry about such a thing is committing what he calls the 'authorial fallacy', which he defines as setting more store by who wrote a document than by what it says.⁵³ This argument requires further scrutiny, since the question of authorship does have serious implications, especially for exegesis. First of all, each of the Pauline letters in the New Testament is ascribed to a particular author, one who is well-known in the New Testament and reasonably well-connected to a series of historical events. These letters are not anonymous, without any line of definite authorial connection. The convention of pseudepigraphal writing seems to demand ascription to

⁵³ A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC, 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), p. lxxiii.

an important and illustrious figure, of whom a certain number of facts are known. These facts are missing for the pseudepigraph of the disputed Pauline letters, however. Secondly, even if one may have some sense of how to read a letter but not know who the particular author is, for Ephesians—as well as any other disputed Pauline letter—authorship does make a difference for exegesis that addresses the range of questions necessary for understanding a text. Authorship is important for determining whether the situation being addressed is one in the 50s or the 180s, whether one is reading a letter confronting problems at the beginning of the Christian movement or one responding to developed problems of Church order, whether the theology reflects an author formulating and developing profound concepts for the first time or merely repeating what have become accepted dogmas, etc. A clear case in point is Hebrews. Since so little is known of such issues as authorship, date of composition, addressees, and situation, the range of proposals is very wide, and the certainty of conclusions highly elusive. Thirdly, the evaluation of whether any disputed Pauline letter is pseudonymous is often done in terms of evaluating it with reference to the authentic Pauline letters. If Lincoln really believes that authorship makes no difference, then perhaps even asking the question of authorship at all is unnecessary or committing the ‘authorial fallacy’, for these as well as any other books of the New Testament. Thus, one of the most important links to a particular historical, and hence theological, situation is decisively broken, and exegesis must be altered accordingly.

Therefore, it appears that establishing whether a document is pseudonymous or authentic does indeed make a significant difference to exegesis, and some of these factors have important further implications as well. For example, in attempting to establish which letters are pseudonymous, it is not so simple to establish this for any of the Pauline letters merely by appealing to other New Testament letters that are disputed or even highly doubted, such as the Pastoral Epistles, Ephesians or possibly 2 Thessalonians and Colossians, or, outside the Pauline corpus, 2 Peter. Such an appeal introduces a circularity to the argumentation, which can only be solved by discovery of some sort of firm criteria that can adjudicate the issues. There are apparently no known explicit statements from the first several centuries of the Church to the effect that someone knew that any of the Pauline letters were pseudonymous, so this line of enquiry does not resolve the issue. Nor is it sufficient to cite a number of non-

canonical Jewish or especially Christian documents as examples of pseudonymous literature, as if this proves its existence in the New Testament.⁵⁴ The fact that these documents are non-canonical is apparent confirmation of the fact that documents that were found to be pseudonymous did not make it into the canon, even if this process of ‘discovery’ took some time.⁵⁵ One is clearly left with internal arguments, but matters such as style, language and theology are highly contentious and ultimately inconclusive, as the history of discussion of these issues well illustrates.

One last issue to raise with regard to exegesis of pseudonymous literature is that of deception. This has been a particularly sensitive issue in the discussion. The matter of deception has more implications than simply casting a shadow of doubt over the process by which a given book was accepted as authoritative. There are also two major results for exegesis.

The first is with regard to the integrity of what can be believed by the author who writes under the name of another. A common argument in defense of pseudepigraphal writings is the so-called ‘noble lie’, that is, that it is in the best interests of the readers that they not know or are deceived regarding authorship by someone other than the purported author. As Donelson says, the noble lie is still a lie, and all of the attendant moral implications attend to it.⁵⁶ Kiley rightly claims that this gives valuable insight into pseudepigraphers’ motives.⁵⁷ As Davies admits in her discussion of the Pastoral Epistles, the letters make a claim to a high moral standard but she believes that they are pseudonymous and are thus in some sense fraudulent. She admits that there is no simple explanation.⁵⁸ As Donelson states, ‘We are forced to admit that in Christian circles pseudonymity was considered a dishonorable device and, if discovered, the document

⁵⁴ As does Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. lxx-lxxi.

⁵⁵ Works to be mentioned here would include the Jewish works *4 Ezra* and *1, 2 Enoch*, and the Christian works *Didache*, *2 Clement*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which (6:16) accuses certain books of being forgeries, while itself being pseudepigraphal. Admittedly, some of these documents remained on the edges of various corpora of authoritative writings for some time.

⁵⁶ Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument*, pp. 18-22. The noble lie refers to Plato’s acceptance of a lie that is useful for the one to whom the lie is told (see *Rep.* 2.376c-382b, 3.389b, 414cc).

⁵⁷ Kiley, *Colossians*, p. 21.

⁵⁸ M. Davies, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 113-17.

was rejected and the author, if known, was excoriated'.⁵⁹ There were, nevertheless, all sorts of encouragements for skillful pseudepigraphal writing in the ancient world, including pietistic motives prompting those in the Church to speak for an earlier figure,⁶⁰ and self-serving motives, such as the money paid by libraries for manuscripts by particular authors.⁶¹

The second result of pseudonymy for exegesis concerns the circumstances surrounding the production and then acceptance of the pseudepigraph. This can be conveniently explored in terms of the circumstances surrounding the production of the Pastoral Epistles, in particular with reference to their personal features and the original audience or receivers of the letters. Whereas many scholars have struggled with the difficulties surrounding the situation of these letters if they are authentic, the same questions must arise regarding pseudonymous authorship. As Meade has recognized, if they are pseudonymous, there is a 'double pseudonymity' of both *author* and *audience*.⁶² What sort of a situation was at play when these letters were received into the Church? It is undecided, even by those who take the Pastoral Epistles as pseudonymous, when the letters were written and/or regarded as authoritative, with dates ranging from an early date of 80–90 to the last half of the second century. The original audience would almost assuredly have known that Paul was dead. Were the letters introduced as new letters from Paul, or at the least inspired by the situation such that Paul would have said these things had he been there? Many have argued that these pseudonymous writings are transparent fictions, and no one would have thought them actually to have been written by Paul. This proposal encounters the problem of why they were acknowledged in the first instance in light of the apparently universal response by the early Church to known pseudepigrapha, which, as we have demonstrated, were rejected *carte blanche*. In any case, any information regarding original context and audience that the original recipients would have known has been lost, as the letters are represented in the New Testament as being a part of the Pauline corpus.

⁵⁹ Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument*, p. 16.

⁶⁰ It is questionable whether this motive can be equated with an innocent motive. See Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument*, p. 10.

⁶¹ See M.L. Stirewalt, Jr, *Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography* (SBLRBS, 27; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), pp. 31–42.

⁶² Meade, *Pseudonymity in the New Testament*, p. 127.

With regard to exegesis, there are a number of further implications regarding Pauline pseudepigrapha. First, they cannot be used in any way in the establishment of a Pauline chronology, since the lack of grounding in a specific historical and authorial context removes this point of stability. Secondly, in light of theological development and possible pseudepigraphal authorship, the disputed or pseudonymous Pauline Epistles must be handled delicately in establishing Pauline theology. 'Pauline theology' is here a slippery term, but one that must be defined at least in part. For some, it may mean a theology of all of the letters attributed to Paul, whether genuine or not. The exegetical significance of the disputed letters would constitute evidence for the diversity and development of early Pauline theology so defined. For those concerned with trying to establish a Pauline theology based on what Paul may have actually thought and written, pseudonymous letters cannot be used to create a Pauline theology in this sense. They are instead part of a record of how some people responded to Paul, how others developed his thought, how some people applied his ideas to later situations, or even how some people wished Paul could have spoken—they can never be more than only one interpretation among many others. The fact that they were included in the group of Pauline letters has enhanced their apparent authority, and may mean that they represent the most influential or powerful followers of Paul, but it does not raise their level of authenticity.

As discussed above, a factor not as fully appreciated as it might be is the difference that the issue of authorship ultimately makes for exegesis. Even for the authentic letters there are problems of interpretation with regard to such issues as occasion and purpose. Without attributable authorship, there is even less information available. The letters must be interpreted in light of the double pseudonymy of author and audience, and thus cannot constitute evidence for the life and teachings of Paul. In other words, questions of authorship have serious exegetical implications.

6. RHETORICAL CRITICISM AND THE PAULINE LETTER FORM

Paul was a letter writer in an age of letter writing.⁶³ The joining

⁶³ On the Pauline letter form, see McDonald and Porter, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature*, chap. 9; and on the issue of Pauline rhetoric, see S.F. Porter, 'Paul of Tarsus and His Letters', in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period*, pp. 533–85.

together of the world surrounding the Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period, regularized under the Roman empire, brought a sense of unity to the region, and also created the functional need for communication between people who were sometimes removed by great distances from each other. This includes the need to communicate between the apostle and the small Christian assemblies he had founded, or with which he wished to communicate. As a result, the letter became very important, not only for general communication, but as an important form of communication in the early Church. The exegetical implications of this form of communication must always be considered when analyzing the Pauline writings, since letters are the only literary genre that Paul used.

Thousands upon thousands of letters from the Greco-Roman period have been found as a part of a vast quantity of papyrus documents from the ancient world. The vast majority of these papyrus documents were found in Egypt, although others of significance have been found east of the Mediterranean. The kinds of documents found include wills, land surveys, reports, receipts for various financial transactions, contracts (especially regarding agriculture and related services), personal letters, and a variety of judicial, legal and official documents and letters, as well as numerous literary and theological works.⁶⁴ Twenty-one of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament have been identified as letters of various sorts, and all of Paul's writings are letters. The same pattern was continued by the Apostolic Fathers, of whom twelve of the fifteen texts of the Apostolic Fathers by the nine authors included are letters.

Adolf Deissmann, one of the first to appreciate the importance of the papyrus letters for study of the New Testament, observed that the Egyptian letters tend to be short, with the average being somewhere around 275 words. Paul's letters, however, are much longer. Only Philemon, at 335 words, approximates the length of the average

⁶⁴ Collections of these letters useful for New Testament study are to be found in, for example, A.S. Hunt and C.C. Edgar, *Select Papyri* (vols. 1-2; LCL; London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932, 1934); G.H.R. Horsley and S. Llewelyn, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (7 vols. to date; New South Wales: Macquarie University, 1981-); J.L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (FFNT; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); for background information, see E.G. Turner, *Greek Papyri: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1980), and R.S. Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (AAW; London: Routledge, 1995).

Egyptian letter (and even it is longer by a few words). However, there are a number of letters attributed to literary figures, such as Plato, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Cicero and Seneca. As a result of observing these various kinds of letters, Deissmann distinguished the 'true letters' of the papyri from 'literary letters' or 'epistles', concluding that Paul's letters were true letters (except for the Pastoral Epistles), since they were addressed to a specific situation and specific people, and reflected Paul's genuine and unaffected thoughts and ideas, and were written in the language of the people of the day, rather than some artificial literary style.⁶⁵ Most studies of the letters of the New Testament are responses to Deissmann's analysis.

The general consensus among scholars today is that a variety of factors must be considered, rather than simply length and supposed genuineness. Better than seeing a disjunction between letter and epistle is the idea that there is a continuum, which depends on at least the following factors: language, whether the letters have a formal or informal style; content, whether their subject matter is one of business, personal recommendation, praise or blame, or instruction; and audience, including whether they are public or private. Some of the other factors to consider in analyzing Paul's letters are that these, unlike most true letters, are not private in the conventional sense, but neither are they for any and all who might be interested in reading them. They are for groups of followers of Christ, or churches, hence the frequent use of the second person plural form of address. Barring Philemon, Paul's letters are significantly longer than the average papyrus letter, and they have some unique features of organization, discussed below. The body of the Pauline letter is recognizably that of the ancient personal letter, although the topics discussed are not usually personal commendations, but rather instructions in the Christian faith. With this essential framework regarding the letter in place, more specific exegetical issues regarding Paul's letters can be examined.

In recent exegesis of the Pauline letters, classical rhetorical criticism

⁶⁵ See especially A. Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (trans. A. Grieve; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901; 2nd edn, 1909), pp. 1-59. For an important critique of Deissmann's hypothesis, as well as a discussion of recent research in Greek epistolography, see S.K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (LEC; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), pp. 17-26, and the Chapter on the Genres of the New Testament in this volume.

has been frequently drawn upon.⁶⁶ Before proposing a method of exegeting the letters on the basis of epistolary theory, I wish to subject the concept of rhetorical criticism as an exegetical method of the Pauline letters to critical scrutiny.⁶⁷ Some scholars seem to suggest, even if implicitly, that the application of the categories from classical rhetoric to ancient letters was something with which the ancients themselves would have been familiar, that they would have recognized, and that Paul would have intended to use. These kinds of suppositions seem to be particularly useful to those who wish to find a firm basis for their exegesis by appealing to the ancients themselves. When such support is sought among the ancients, however, it is conspicuously missing. After his thorough study of ancient epistolary theory, Abraham Malherbe states, 'Epistolary theory in antiquity belonged to the domain of the rhetoricians, but it was not originally part of their theoretical systems. It is absent from the earliest extant rhetorical handbooks, and it only gradually made its way into the genre.' He states further, 'It is thus clear that letter writing was of interest to rhetoricians, but it appears only gradually to have attached itself to their rhetorical systems'.⁶⁸ These conclusions certainly offer little theoretical justification for the kind of rhetorical analysis that is found in many commentators on the rhetoric of the Pauline letters. A survey of the primary sources confirms Malherbe's conclusions. It is not until Julius Victor (fourth century CE), in an appendix to his *Ars rhetorica* (27), that letter writing is discussed in a rhetorical handbook, although confined to comments on style. Thus, although categories of ancient rhetoric may have been 'in the air' of the Greco-Roman world, their use in the writing or analysis of letters cannot be substantiated. Only matters of style, and some forms of argumentation, appear to have been discussed in any significant or extended way, though not systematically, with letters virtually always mentioned in contrast to oratory.

⁶⁶ One of the major proponents is G.A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

⁶⁷ See S.E. Porter, 'The Theoretical Justification for Application of Rhetorical Categories to Pauline Epistolary Literature', in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (ed. S.E. Porter and T.H. Olbricht; JSNTSup, 90; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 100-122.

⁶⁸ A.J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (SBL/SBS, 19; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 2, 3.

The above conclusion does not preclude exegeting the Pauline letters in terms of the categories of ancient rhetoric, however, as long as it is kept in mind that these categories, especially those regarding the arrangement of the parts of the speech, probably did not consciously influence the writing of the letters and almost assuredly did not figure significantly in their earliest interpretation. Rhetorical analyses are one form of exegesis to which these texts can be subjected, but they are not the only ones, and should not necessarily enjoy a privileged status among interpretative methods. This is not to say, however, that there is no relationship between ancient rhetorical and epistolary theory—some functional correspondence between them may be established.⁶⁹ These functional correspondences are related to the various uses to which the various literary forms were put, and how these uses correlate with their literary structures.

The major importance of the study of the ancient Greek letter form for exegesis is seen in relation to the structure of the letter. Scholars are divided over whether Paul's letters fall into three, four or five parts.⁷⁰ The question revolves around whether two of the parts are seen, on functional grounds, to be separate and distinct units within the letter, or whether these are subsumed in the other parts of the letter. Without wishing to distance Paul's letters from those of the Hellenistic world, especially in light of how Paul enhanced the letter form, it is appropriate to expand the traditional form-based three-part structure, and talk in terms of five formal parts to the Pauline letter: opening, thanksgiving, body, parenthesis and closing. This is not, however, to say that each of the Pauline letters has all five of these elements. Nevertheless, when one of these sections is missing, it is worth asking whether there is a reason for this departure from his standard form.

Since presentation of content is based on the defined structure of the genre, the Pauline letter form provides one of the best guides to exegesis of the Pauline letters. Comments on each of the five

⁶⁹ See J.T. Reed, 'Using Ancient Rhetorical Categories to Interpret Paul's Letters: A Question of Genre', in *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, pp. 297-314.

⁷⁰ The three-part letter is defended by J.L. White, 'Ancient Greek Letters', in *Greco-Roman Literature*, pp. 85-105, esp. p. 97; the four-part letter by J.A.D. Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings* (JSNTSup, 101; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), p. 11; and the five-part letter by W.G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (GBS; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), pp. 27-43. I tend to follow Doty below.

epistolary parts will provide examples of exegetical significance. This is where an expanded concept of rhetoric might well illustrate functional overlap between rhetoric and epistolary theory.

A. Opening

The usual (though certainly not unvaried) opening of a letter in the Hellenistic world from the third century BCE to the third century CE included three elements: the sender, the recipient and a greeting, often formalized as 'A to B, greetings (χαίρειν)', although the form 'to B from A, greetings' was also found. The formal features of the epistolary opening, such as the greeting, perform certain functions in the letter. These include establishing and maintaining contact between the sender and recipients, and clarifying their respective statuses and relationships.

Paul, while including all three formal elements in his standard opening, introduces several modifications. For example, Paul often includes others as co-authors or co-senders of his letters. Only Romans, Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles do not include a co-sender, usually Timothy. There are several possible exegetical implications for Paul's including another person or persons in the opening. Perhaps these people should be seen as co-senders. By mentioning them, such as his longstanding companion Timothy (and Silas), Paul shows that his gospel is not his alone; what he is saying comes from a Christian community to another Christian community. Timothy is also seen to be as a letter-carrier in Acts, as well as in the Pauline letters, so the specification at the beginning of the letter probably helped to establish the authority of the letter-carrier, possibly responsible for reading (and interpreting?) the letter to the audience. Romans and Ephesians do not have co-senders, perhaps because these letters were being sent under different circumstances than the other Pauline letters, the first to a church Paul had never visited, located outside his immediate sphere of influence (Paul may not have been to Colossae either, but it was within his sphere of influence), and the second perhaps to no specific church but to a number of churches in Asia (if Paul wrote the letter at all). The Pastorals also include no co-sender, but if they are authentic and if they are sent to Timothy and Titus, two of Paul's close associates, they would have no need of a co-sender as defined above.

Paul also often expands the specification of the sender or recipient of a letter, including information of potential exegetical and even theological significance. For example, in Rom. 1:1-6 Paul designates

himself as set apart for the gospel of God, which leads to a lengthy expansion on the nature of this gospel and its relation to Jesus Christ. In 1 Cor. 1:2, Paul expands upon the designation of the recipients, defining the church of God in Corinth in terms of those who are sanctified and called to be holy. Whereas designation of the title or position of the sender or recipient in a letter was known in the ancient world, Paul's kind of expansion is virtually unknown before his writings.

Paul has also apparently modified the word of greeting. All of Paul's letters include the words 'grace' (χάρις) and 'peace' (εἰρήνη), with the word 'mercy' (ἐλεημοσύνη) added in 1 and 2 Timothy, rather than the verb 'greet' (χαίρειν) found in Hellenistic letters. The word for 'grace' is cognate with the word 'greet', so it is easy to see that Paul is apparently playing upon the standard convention for greeting, probably in a sense theologizing the letter opening in a distinctly Christian way. The suggestion that Paul includes 'peace' as a translation of the Hebrew word *shalom*, and that this reflects his integration of Greek and Jewish elements into his letter, is probably to be dismissed as over-theologizing the opening.

B. Thanksgiving

Many Greco-Roman letters then include a health wish, in which a prayer or word of thanks was offered for the well-being of the addressee. This was often addressed to one of the Egyptian gods, such as Serapis. Paul also uses a formula in which a verb of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστῶ) is addressed to God, with a reason for his thanks.⁷¹ Paul has again adapted the Hellenistic letter form to his epistolary and theological purposes. Galatians, however, lacks a thanksgiving, creating a jarring transition from the opening to the body of the letter, in which Paul expresses his astonishment that the Galatians have so quickly deserted their calling. 1 Thessalonians, on the other hand, is full of thanksgiving by Paul for the Thessalonian Christians, with words of thanksgiving spread throughout the letter.

One must, however, be cautious in exegeting the thanksgiving portion of the letter, in light of the theory of many scholars that Paul

⁷¹ On the relation of the Pauline thanksgiving to other thanksgivings, see J.T. Reed, 'Are Paul's Thanksgivings "Epistolary"?', *JSNT* 61 (1996), pp. 87-99; cf. G.P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayer: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of Paul* (SNTSMS, 24; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), who analyzes prayers in the thanksgiving, as well as the other parts of the letter.

utilizes the thanksgiving section to forecast the topics that are to be discussed in the letter. For example, most if not all of the ideas introduced in the thanksgiving of 1 Thessalonians (1:2-10) are developed in various ways in the rest of the letter: their work (1 Thess. 2:1-16), being imitators (3:6-10), being models (4:1-12), and the return of Christ (5:1-11). To the contrary, however, only two of the many themes discussed in 1 Corinthians are introduced in its thanksgiving, spiritual gifts and eschatology (1 Cor. 1:7).⁷² A more accurate assessment of the relationship between the thanksgiving and the content of a letter is to say that the thanksgiving provides a general orientation to the relationship between Paul and the particular church, a relationship which is then developed in various ways in the rest of the letter.

C. Body

The Hellenistic letter body has been the least studied part of the Hellenistic letter form. The same is true of the body of the Pauline letter, with much more attention being devoted to exegeting individual theological ideas in isolation rather than appreciating the unfolding of Paul's argument. For Paul, the body of the letter tends to deal with one or both of two subjects: Christian doctrine and, like Hellenistic letters of friendship, Paul's personal situation. Letters such as Romans, Galatians and 1 Corinthians tend to be concerned in their bodies to outline and develop important Pauline theological concepts. Paul's personal situation, especially in relation to a particular church, is discussed in Philippians, as well as in 1 and 2 Corinthians. In the Pauline letter corpus, the epistolary body typically follows the friendship letter convention, in which various issues regarding the personal relationship of those involved are broached (these may include theological issues). In that sense, Christian teaching and issues of belief fall within the scope of the personal letter form, although Paul has clearly developed and applied this form in an extended way.

Like other Hellenistic letters, the body of the Pauline letter is usually divided into three parts: the body opening, the body middle or body proper, and the body closing. These formal locations in the body of the letter serve various functions in introducing and concluding the matter at hand. Like other letter writers, Paul relies upon a number of formulas to mark the beginnings and endings of various portions of

⁷² See J. Bailey and L.D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1992), p. 24.

the body and to draw attention to the significance of various ideas that he introduces. For exegetical purposes, these formulas can serve as important markers to indicate logical shifts in the argument and in terms of the conclusion and introduction of new ideas.

The following introductory formulas are worth noting: the verb 'beseech' (παρακαλῶ) in a transitional request or appeal formula (e.g. 1 Cor. 4:16; 16:15; Phlm. 8, 10), often, though not always, as a transition from the thanksgiving to the body of the letter (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:10); disclosure formulas, such as 'I want you to know' or 'I don't want you to be ignorant', indicating that the sender believes the recipients should know what he is about to tell them, often used near the beginning of the body of the letter (see e.g. Rom. 1:13; 2 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:1; Phil. 1:12; Gal. 1:11); expressions of astonishment (e.g. Gal. 1:6), indicating that Paul completely objects to what it is that the recipients are doing or saying (usually in relation to what is being disclosed); and compliance formulas, in which he restates something that places an obligation of action upon his readers (e.g. Gal. 1:9, 13-14).

Body closing formulas are designed to bring the argument of the body together and close this portion of the letter. The following closing formulas are worth noting: confidence formulas, in which Paul expresses confidence that his recipients will have understood what he has said and will act appropriately upon it (e.g. Rom. 15:14; 2 Cor. 7:4, 16; 9:1-2; Gal. 5:10; 2 Thess. 3:4; Phlm. 21); and an eschatological conclusion, in which Paul places what he has been saying in the larger framework of the imminent return of Christ (e.g. Rom. 8:31-39; 11:25-26; 1 Cor. 4:6-13; Gal. 6:7-10; Phil. 2:14-18; 1 Thess. 2:13-16). Belief in the imminent return of Christ was used by Paul as a serious motivation for proper Christian action and belief. Paul also occasionally uses a travelogue near the close of the body portion of his letter (e.g. 1 Thess. 2:17-3:13), characterized as the 'apostolic parousia' or apostolic presence.⁷³ Paul indicates his reason

⁷³ See R.W. Funk, 'The Apostolic Parousia: Form and Significance', in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (ed. W.R. Farmer, C.F.D. Moule and R.R. Niebuhr; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 249-68. Funk tries to identify a formal category, but the apostolic presence is better seen as a functional convention. See also M.M. Mitchell, 'New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus', *JBL* 111 (1992), pp. 641-62, who questions some of Funk's conclusions.

for writing or his intention to send an emissary or even pay a personal visit to his recipients. In effect, the letter is a temporary substitute for the apostle's (or his designated representative's) presence. The travelogue outlining the apostle's plans usually occurs near the end of the body or even the parenesis (Rom. 15:14-33; Phlm. 21-22; 1 Cor. 4:14-21; 1 Thess. 2:17-3:13; 2 Cor. 12:14-13:13; Gal. 4:12-20; Phil. 2:19-24), but it is not necessarily only found at the close (see Rom. 1:10; 1 Cor. 4:21; Phil. 2:24).

D. Parenesis

The parenesis section of the Pauline letter is concerned with proper Christian behavior. The parenesis often specifies what is proper Christian behavior, and expresses this using various traditional forms of moral instruction. These include moral maxims, vice and virtue lists, and household codes (German *Haustafeln*) that specify mutual submission between members of the household (e.g. Eph. 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1). In creating his parenesis, Paul draws upon a variety of sources, including the Old Testament, contemporary Jewish thinking, Greco-Roman thought and Hellenistic moral traditions. Paul's best known parenetic sections are those in Rom. 12:1-15:13, Gal. 5:13-6:10, and 1 Thess. 4:1-5:22.

E. Closing

The typical Hellenistic letter closing expressed a health wish, often in terms of a closing imperative, a word of farewell, and the word 'good-bye' (ἔρρωσο or ἔρρωσθε). Paul, however, includes a number of different elements in his closings, showing significant differences from the typical Hellenistic letter closing. The Pauline letter closing might consist of any number of the following elements: greetings, to the recipients or conveyed from those who are with him to the recipients (Rom. 16:3-23, with the longest list; 1 Cor. 16:19-21; 2 Cor. 13:12-13; Phil. 4:21-22; 1 Thess. 5:26; Phlm. 23-25); doxology at the end of his letter (one is included earlier at Gal. 1:5), often containing exalted language of praise and glory to God (e.g. Rom. 16:25-27; Phil. 4:20; 1 Thess. 5:23); benediction, which takes several different forms, depending upon whether it is a grace or a peace benediction (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 12:14; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:22; 1 Thess. 5:28; Phlm. 25); and occasionally greeting of each other with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 3:12; 1 Thess. 5:26).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ On these and other features of the Pauline closing, see H. Gamble, Jr, *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans: A Study in Textual and Literary*

As in the epistolary opening, some of the ideas and themes presented in the letter are also summarized in the closing, but the function of the closing is not best described as a summary of the contents of the letter. The closing of the letter is simply a way of concluding the correspondence, often not by adding to or even recapitulating what has already been said, but by providing suitable words of closing. Paul has again theologized the closing in a Christian way, in order to leave his recipients with a closing that offers praise and glory to God (Rom. 16:25-27) and grace or peace to the recipients (2 Cor. 13:14).

Thus the structure of the Pauline letter provides exegetical guidance as to what one might expect when one confronts the letter form. The letter form can set legitimate parameters for the kinds of exegetical conclusions that can be drawn from the various sections of the letter. A poignant example can be found in the book of 1 Corinthians. Because of statements that are made, especially in chs. 12 and 14 regarding women in worship and spiritual gifts, in particular the gift of tongues, this book has been invoked in much recent theological discussion. A factor that is often overlooked in this discussion, however, and one relevant to matters of exegesis as discussed above, is where these chapters appear in the book itself. The body of 1 Corinthians extends from 1:10-4:21, and is concerned with Church unity. Perhaps the most plausible explanation of the occasion for the letter was a conflict over unity that elicited this letter addressed to that issue. In his argument, developed in the body of the letter, Paul first discusses the problem of disunity (1:10-17). He then turns to a discussion of the gospel (1:18-2:5), which consists of the message of Christ crucified, a concept that is foolishness to most (1:18-25), including the Corinthians, who were called to faith when they were unwise (1:26-31). Paul's message is based upon the power of the Spirit (2:1-5). The Spirit is the source of God's wisdom (2:6-16). Turning specifically to the question of divisiveness in the Church (3:1-23), Paul sees disunity as a sign of spiritual immaturity (3:1-4), and he discusses how the work of various people contributes to God's larger purpose of building the Church (3:5-17), leading to his call for unity among the Corinthians (3:18-23). Paul concludes the body of the letter with a justification of himself as Christ's faithful servant (4:1-

Criticism (SD, 42; Grand Rapids: Ferdmans, 1977), pp. 56-83; Weima, *Neglected Endings, passim*.

23). After elucidating these general concepts, though illustrated through specific statements regarding Paul and his situation as an apostle, Paul turns to the parenetic section of the letter (5:1–16:12). The parenetic section is much larger than the body of the letter; however, this does not mean that the relative functions of the sections involved are to be viewed differently. In this section, Paul responds to particular problems of the Corinthian church. Many, if not most, of them seem to have threatened their church unity in some way, and in that sense they are specific instantiations of the more general truths discussed in the body of the letter. However, the nature of parenesis is exhortative, that is, to describe how Christians are to behave in light of their Christian faith. Therefore, parenesis is not focused upon doctrine except as doctrine is worked out in behavior. Hence Paul has words regarding questions of morality (5:1–6:20), marriage (7:1–40), food sacrificed to idols (8:1–11:1), worship (11:2–34), spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40), and the resurrection (15:1–58), closing with words on the collection. Any didactic material in the parenesis must be taken in light of the particular situation that is being addressed regarding the Corinthian church. This can be clearly seen in the passage in 5:1–13, where a case of incest in the church is being addressed. The particular steps to be taken are addressed to that particular case. The same kind of exegetical framework should also be employed when examining the more controversial passages in chs. 12 and 14, seeing the problems discussed there in the first instance as examples of behavior that threatened the larger concept of unity in the church at Corinth.

7. CONCLUSION

The importance of Pauline exegesis cannot be minimized. The ability to linguistically analyze a given passage of one of the Pauline letters is of course not to be minimized. However, exegesis involves much more than being able to parse word-forms and string together syntactical units, or find lexical glosses in a dictionary. Exegesis requires knowledge and application of the issues specific to exegesis of a given author. For Paul, this requires the placement of this intriguing figure of the ancient world into his appropriate historical, cultural, religious and theological contexts, weighing all of the various aspects of the world in which he lived. This also requires consideration of the implications whether Paul actually wrote any of the given letters being exegeted. Once this has been established, consideration must be given to the specific issues being faced, often in

terms of Paul's opponents. Once the occasion of the letter is reconstructed, one can attempt to assess the specific purpose of Paul's writing the given letter. This determination of purpose, in conjunction with analysis of any given passage in terms of how it fits within the format of the Pauline letter form, provides a useful set of parameters for determining the exegetical significance of a passage. In this sense, one can speak of exegesis of the Pauline letters.

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