

EARLY CHRISTIANITY'S LETTERS

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Not every text described as a letter is really a letter. We may start with the following definition: a real letter is the written communication of his thought by one person to another, sometimes to more than just one other person. For example a young person, when staying abroad could regularly send letters to his/their parents that are supposed to be sent on to his/their brothers and sisters, if they live on their own, and perhaps to some good friends as well. The simplest form of a letter, however, remains the expression by writing of a person's own thought which is sent from A to B. It has been said that four conditions have to be met to allow for a written text to be designated as a letter: the name of the sender and that of the addressee must be known; opening and signature have to secure its completeness; there mustn't be any doubt about its being genuine.¹ The sender need not have written it by his/their own hand, he may have dictated to a secretary or a stenographer; someone else may have copied it from a draft; a third person may even have composed it following the sender's instructions. The letter remains a letter, if only the sender by signing it or by any other mark of authenticity takes it on his own account.² I can agree to these conditions for a genuine letter. Nevertheless, what I see as the essential condition is that it be the communication of a person's thought by this person to another person.

Not every letter is such a real letter. There is no need for a thorough-going acquaintance with literature to be aware of this. Aren't there in our own Dutch literature novels in the shape of letters? I am thinking of Wolff and Deken, of Bosboom-Tous-saint's psychological novel of emancipation *Majoor Frans*, which consists of "letters." Moreover, there are Busken Huet's *Brieven*

* *Oudchristelijke Brieven Godsdienstwetenschappelijke Studien* (1951), 3-31. Translated by Frans-Joris Fabri and Dr. Michael Conley, 2001.

¹ So Otto Roller, *Das Formular der paulinischen Briefe. Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom antiken Briefe* (Stuttgart, 1933), p. 30.

² Roller, p. 3.

over den Bijbel. Widely read among the "letters" of foreign literature are Erdmann's *Psychologische Briefe* (1852), addressed to a highly esteemed friend (to ask who this friend possibly could have been would be a foolish thing to do) and Justus von Liebig's *Chemische Briefe* (3rd ed. 1851). Not one of all these letters had ever been sent to particular persons by public or private means of transport. Their dressing-up for literary ends is obvious and so nobody thereby suspects forgery.

So we have to distinguish between real and pseudo-letters. This is true not only in our times but just as well in antiquity. Discoveries of papyri in Egypt have brought to light many letters which had been written for specific occasions.³ Classical examples of such occasional letters were written by Cicero: private letters showing profound intimacy, letters communicating information, diplomatic letters, business letters, letters of consolation, of recommendation. In such real letters the author logically brings in his own character and at the same time he tries to go deep into the mind and way of feeling of the addressee. A correspondence of that kind always gives us a less or more clear picture of both the author and his readers. In his letters to Atticus, Cicero pictures himself like he is. On the other hand his letters *ad familiares* were drafted for a greater number of readers, and because of that they show traces of rhetoric. The *letter of Art* as a special type of literature is derived from the occasional real letter. The great Attic rhetorician Isocrates (436-338 BCE) used the letter form for fiction to give his readers more vivid impressions. In Rome the poet Horace (65-8 BCE) pictures in his *Letters* scenes of human life in a satirical way or teaches his readers how to understand poetry. In the fictitious letters of literature the authors aim at beauty of form. Typical examples are the collected letters of Pliny (62-114), which a scholar denies to be real letters. In them there is but seldom any connexion between the subject of the letter and its addressee, whose name is only mentioned to give honour: "the addressee in fact is the community of the educated public."⁴

At the end of the first century CE letter writing had already become a special type of literature in the Roman world. Thus in schools of rhetoric, letters using names of persons of history were

³ Cf. St. Witkowski, *Epistulae privatae graecae* (Leipzig, 1906).

⁴ Martin Schanz, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, 2. Teil, 4. ed., revised by Carl Hosius, p. 847.

being written about particular events to improve one's style. From there they found their way into literature. Letters were edited in the fields of law, medicine and didactics. The letter genre was used by the Stoics in the first place to spread moral values (Panaetius and Poseidonius). Especially Seneca's letters are to be seen as edifying reading material for the public in general.⁵ Though on the surface they are addressed to the procurator of Sicily Lucilius (62 CE), they nevertheless clearly show traces of not belonging to a real exchange of letters, but on the contrary of being destined from the very beginning to the broad public. This is already made clear by the inner contradiction that the then 66-year old Seneca introduces his friend as "a young man" (Ep. 26,7) of whom he says to expect great things (2,1), but who still badly needs his advice and teachings, whereas elsewhere he says the difference in age is but small (35,2). Because of this, some scholars have assumed that the collection consists of both real and fictional letters. But there is no reason whatever [6] for doing so: the entire collection is meant to be read by the broad public. By writing to Lucilius, Seneca gives his teachings the character of a private exchange of ideas though it is really just a pseudonym.⁶ In confidential letters one would expect to find allusions to contemporary persons, but there aren't any. What the letters aimed at was to recommend philosophical studies as the most important and most suitable occupation for a human being. Gradually Seneca lets go the letter mode; often he confines himself to just a remark (e.g., "you want to know") and his text more and more switches into dialogue form to refute other people's ideas.⁷ Peters' diagnosis has since been confirmed by A. Bourgery⁸: these letters have never been sent. He points out that already Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) had considered them to be the fruit of Seneca's everyday meditations. There aren't any individual traits in the portrait of Lucilius. Though totally incapable of taking any initiative himself, he is utterly willing to let his friend give him a moral education. He represents the ideal

⁵ Cf. Hermann Peter, *Der Brief in der römischen Literatur. Literaturgeschichtliche Untersuchungen und Zusammenfassungen* (Tome XX of the "Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der kgl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften," No. III, Leipzig, 1901, pp. 216ff., 204ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 233ff.

⁸ In *Revue de Philologie de Littérature et d'Histoire anciennes* (XXXV. Paris 1911), pp. 40-55; Cf. p.31, note 1.

pupil, but he is in fact of no real importance; he is a dummy that “asks” and “would like to,” “wants to know” and “says” — everything just like an author makes a fictional interrogator do. It may well be that Seneca got the idea of expressing his thoughts in the form of letters from the famous example of Epicurus’ letters, as he so much likes to quote from them.

Seneca had a great impact on later authors, e.g., Fathers of the Church like Cyprian, Lactantius, Ambrose, and Hieronymus. Generally speaking, their letters were conceived and written for public use, even though they are directed to particular communities, circles, or private persons. Their intentions are education and edification, admonition and consolation for the greatest possible number of readers.⁹

Just as much can be said about the early Christian letters. In those times pseudonymous writing was quite common. Works by Adam, Enoch, the Twelve Patriarchs, Moses, and Ezra are just a few examples out of the many. This usage cannot be concealed for any NT scholar. Yet, as soon as the canonical apostolic Epistles are at stake, they seem to forget it. Theology today is not much interested in the problems of criticism that were particularly prevalent in the last century. Those that prefer results of a more positive kind now speak with disdain about critics, as though these people would like nothing better than to declare spurious as many ancient texts as possible. Too much confidence, however, in traditions of the Church without the necessary amount of criticism leads to absurd ideas about earliest Christianity. The Dane Frederik Torm¹⁰ found pseudonymous many Greek, profane Roman, and religious Jewish texts, but he denied that this type of Christian literature also existed and was seen as such by contemporaries in the Christian Church of the first centuries. So in the end it was possible for him to ascribe the fourth Gospel to John, the Epistle of James to James, the Pastoral Letters to Paul. According to the historian of Greek literature Ulrich von Willamowitz-Moellendorf, the latter have nothing whatsoever to do with Paul, he names them *Falsate* (forgeries), as opposed to the other Pauline Epistles which he evaluated in the traditional way. But he neither considered the

⁹ Peter, pp. 239ff.

¹⁰ *Die Psychologie der Pseudonymität im Hinblick auf die Literatur des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh, 1932).

genuine letters to be private letters nor just literature, but rather something in between, an unimitable but again and again imitated form that reminds one of Epicurus' usage of the letter mode to display his doctrines.

"Forgery" sounds nasty, as we have to discriminate between the work of a forger and that of an author who makes use of "the literary form of fiction." When in the period of Hellenism in Alexandria and Pergamum great libraries were being founded the administrators tried to complete their stock of books as much as possible for good money. Then it surely happened that seeking profit, booksellers added the name of a famous author, e.g., Isocrates or Galen, to obscure texts. So works of anonymous or unknown authors that had not done well in bookshops, found their way to buyers. There even were special tricks to give recently composed manuscripts the appearance of old ones, e.g., by putting them in a granary into heaps of fresh wheat! Lucian (*adv. indoctum* 1) mockingly talks about the credulity of the public that doesn't see through that kind of practice. Even more in use was this kind of fraud at the time of the Roman Emperors. With Theodoe Birt¹¹ we should speak here of literary stealing.

We can't accuse the early Christian pseudepigraphers of such a criminal act. We have to emphasize this as there is a lot of equivocation here. The opponents of radical criticism very often seem to say that it classifies the NT authors among the ignoble tamperers mentioned above. Showing a certain amount of annoyance, mainstream critique both of 'believers' and 'liberals' rejects the ignoble idea that Paul's Epistles to the Romans, the Corinthians, and the Galatians could possibly have been composed by *forgers*. As if the Dutch School of Radical Criticism had ever said so! But with the killing epithet *forger* a negative atmosphere is being aroused against any kind of this "dangerous" radical critique. It frightens orderly people that don't want to have anything to do with forgery of texts, with hairsplitting or quibbling. That denigrating term, however, is used less to prove Paul's Epistles genuine than to articulate antipathetic feelings against independent criticism. In the meantime, sluggish striving for comfort believes to have overcome the danger of criticism by using such terms. By the way, spuriousness in literature by no means necessarily implies a lack of quality.

¹¹ *Kritik und Hermeneutik*, p. 12.

“A letter given to public use—we would say: edited—was read, considered genuine and recommended if its contents could be sealed off as addressed to all believers.” VAN MANEN¹² found this thesis confirmed in Peter’s Second Epistle, the author of which pretends to be the same as the one of 1 Peter and to be writing to the same readers; cf. 2 Pet. 3:1: “This is now my second letter to you.” The author of the first letter, however, had addressed “God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1). Our author addresses “those who have received a faith as precious as ours,” which is a much wider, geographically not a confined group of people. The same author of the second letter mentions “our dear brother Paul, who also wrote you” (3:15), in a way as if Paul had addressed *all of his letters* (3:16) to the readers of 2 Peter. Ignatius (Eph. 12:2) just so considers *all* of Paul’s letters as addressed to the Ephesians and Polycarp (Phil. 3:2) as to the Philippians! And indeed, they are right! For they were intended from the beginning to be read by as many groups of people as possible. In his *Thesaurus*, SUICERUS (1624-1684) points at the use of *epistolè* in the sense of mandate in ecclesiastical literature. ADOLF DEISSMANN has written a clarifying text about the epistle.¹³ He sets the epistle in contrast to the genuine letter. The latter is not a work of literature, not more than a contract of renting, a testament or a diary. You could call it a conversation put to paper, that pertains to nobody but the sender and the receiver; it’s an object of intimacy, an open-minded meeting of two persons that are separated by minor or greater distance of place. The epistle, on the contrary, is intended for the public; everybody could and should read it, and the more people do read it, the more its aims will be achieved. Logically DEISSMANN does not see the bulk of the pseudonymous epistles of ancient times as products of fraud but as of a widespread and in itself innocent custom.

By the way, DEISSMANN was not very consistent in using his own letter-or-epistle distinction. For example he designates James’s letter an epistle because it is addressed to the twelve tribes in the diaspora; such a letter, he says, could never have

¹² *Paulus III* (Leiden, 1986), p. 315.

¹³ In his *Bijbelstudien* (1895), pp. 157–252; compare his article “Epistolary Literature” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* II, 1323–1329.

been delivered. But he does not accept the identical counter-evidence for 1 and 2 Corinthians and for Galatians.

At the end of the former century, VAN MANEN argued in his university course on Early Christian Literature, that Paul's letter to the Romans was neither a letter, nor by Paul, nor to the Romans. The astonishment of the juvenile students of theology, who had never ever heard of such heretical opinions in their religious education, no matter of what kind it had been: evangelical, ethical-orthodox, reformed or even modern, is understandable. Van Manen's strict argumentative method could not but make a deep impression on them, and so the students in the end either came to hating their teacher as an apostle of disbelief, or they came to honouring him as a champion of free science-based thinking. The latter ones learned to see how sincere were Van Manen's motives which forced him to do purely rational work, at first sight totally in the negative. Seemingly negative, but not in fact! The reproach addressed to Dutch Radical Criticism of just teaching how it had not happened, but leaving people at a loss about how then it had happened, has always been unfair. Can critique after having cleared away convictions that cannot be held any longer, reasonably be demanded to immediately produce undoubtable new ones? Should internal dates show that not a single one of Paul's Epistles be genuine in the usual meaning of that term, we would nevertheless have been freed from a deep-rooted scientific error, which then would be a positive result not to be underestimated. Where in science does constructing begin and dismantling finish? Outsiders seem to be rasher in deciding on such a point than the insider, who knows that he is already constructing while still dismantling. If Paul's epistles are not documents of the middle of first century CE, but to be dated approximately one hundred years later, and if they are to be regarded as an attempt by the Church to cut the ground from under the dangerous Gnostics' feet, even then we would have a positive result that is much better able to explain the century of silence about these letters than what is usually supposed to explain it: that those not quite "unambitious" letters of the famous Apostle of the Gentiles hadn't found any attention among the Christian public.

Van Manen's predecessors were ALARD PIERSON and A.D. LOMAN. Exposed to the firing of criticism for half a century, quite a few letters of the collection that tradition has handed over

under Paul's name had been declared spurious, and this by scholars of a much less "frantic" natural disposition.¹⁴ In 1835 the Tübingen scholar F. C. BAUR had postulated genuine without a trace of doubt Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. Then, labeling them the principal letters, he set them as a standard of authenticity for the other ones. As late as 1855 he repeated that against those four there never had arisen any sign of suspicion and added that they showed the character of Pauline originality in such an uncontradictable way that critical doubt would never be able to rightly affect them.¹⁵ The great Baur could write thusly only because he neglected the work of the greater critic BRUNO BAUER (*Kritik der paulinischen Briefe* [1850—1852]). VAN MANEN¹⁶ never accepted that arbitrary way of sifting by the Tübingen man. In his opinion those principal letters themselves first had to be investigated in respect of their genuineness. ALBERT SCHWEITZER's well-known statement that there had never been anything published about Loman, Steck or Van Manen that was to the slightest degree up to the importance of their works, makes one think twice. That statement further says that these men had carried on the work of the Tübingen School of Criticism and had kept asking questions where the other theologians had given up doing so.¹⁷ One of these other theologians was the widely influential HARNACK who, writing about the genuineness of the Ignatian letters, remarked with a sneer, "There are still some that deny the authenticity of these letters, but then there are still even those that reject the authenticity of every single one of Paul's Epistles."¹⁸ *Du haut de sa grandeur* this Harnack never even tried to refute radical criticism's thesis with arguments. Since the time Schweitzer made that remark forty years ago, mainstream science has neither fought off the attacks of criticism nor positively given proof that Paul's Epistles are genuine. Though it readily declares the authenticity "to have been investigated scrupulously time and again" during the nineteenth century with the result that the

¹⁴ For Edward Evanson's critique cf. my article in *Nieuw Theologisch Tijdschrift* (1913), pp. 149ff.

¹⁵ F. C. Baur, *Paulus* (2nd ed., Leipzig, 1866), p. 275.

¹⁶ *Paulus II* (Leiden 1891), pp. 9f.; compare "Tijdspiegel" (1891), p. 428f.

¹⁷ *Paul and His Interpreters. A Critical History* (New York: MacMillan, 1956), pp. 135, 138.

¹⁸ *Die Briefsammlung des Apostels Paulus und der anderen vorkonstantinischen christlichen Briefsammlungen. Sechs Vorlesungen aus der altkirchlichen Literaturgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1926), p. 77, footnote.

dispute almost completely came to a standstill and now the by far greater part of the collection has to be considered genuine, namely the principal Epistles, and Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. KNOPF, confirming that statement in his well-known *Introduction*,¹⁹ nevertheless has to concede that there are vast parts within the Epistles that in respect of content and style are far away from the characteristics of a letter: admonitions, lay-sermons, lectures, prophecies, essays, poems, controversy dialogues. All these modes are immediately seen as not originated out of the exigencies of the day but taken from traditions existing already long before. According to Knopf, we have here a special problem in literature that but seldom has been analyzed: how do genuine letters, though written on special occasions, with a particular aim, and addressed to particular, narrowly confined groups of people (note: in every place! c. 1:2), nevertheless exceed by far the accidental and letter-like characteristics concerning both style and contents in such a degree as to eventually be transformed into the higher modes of literature? I for one would prefer to speak here of essays in the guise of letters.

According to WENDLAND, Paul's relation to his readers is not easy to understand. Paul produces something in between a letter and an epistle, which, alone by its typically liturgical presentation, is already on a higher level than that of a private letter. Paul does not speak as a private person but as a spiritual adviser and head of the community. That's why in the introduction of his letters he emphasizes his being an apostle.²⁰ This authoritarian character of the Pauline letter is certainly a matter to be taken into account.

Well yes, some say, but 1 Thess. 5:27 shows that those letters were supposed to be read out to the congregation. The quote is as follows, "I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers." But the letter addresses the *Church* (1:1). Who then are those "you" in 5:27? The *heads* of the Church, is the answer! But in no place are the heads especially addressed. That "charge before the Lord" is ceremonious and ponderous in a private piece of writing, but not so if we have to do with a kind of Sacred Scripture which, divinely

¹⁹ *Einführung in das Neue Testament*, (Giessen, 41934, p. 37.

²⁰ P. Wendland, *Die hellenistisch-römische Kultur; Anhang: Die urchristlichen Literaturformen*, (Tübingen, 2, 3 1912), p. 344.

authorized, demands to be read out in front of the congregation. What about this reading forth when the letter has been addressed to the Churches of Galatia? Such a letter is undeliverable. The pretext that it had to circulate does not help. Even the modern system of having periodicals circulated needs a list with the subscribers' names and the sequence of delivery. Nothing of the kind is to be found in this letter.

A peculiar light on this letter-writing is shed by Col. 4:15f., where the Church of Colosse is asked to see to it that the letter be read in the Church of Laodicea as well, just as the letter to the Laodicean Church at Colosse. So these letters have to be read to local churches to keep them obedient by means of the words of a person of accepted authority. They are clearly conceived for publication. Wendland²¹ even compares them with "Erlasse hellenistischer Könige und Beamten" (*Decrees of Hellenistic Kings and Government Officials*), as these, too, often were in letter-form. This is indeed quite a different procedure from the personal communication of thought by an important person! If furthermore JOHANNES WEISS²² tells us that what we have here in front of us is not the expression of transitory feelings, but words deeply pondered about that certainly had not been written down within a few hours' time but had taken their author several days or even weeks—well then, all this hints more at a book than at a letter.

The size of Paul's letter to the Romans, some 27 to 30 sheets of papyrus, says the expert ROLLER,²³ exceeds by far the normal size of a letter, indeed almost that of a book. 1 Corinthians should even be called a tome. Private correspondence of greater length is not to be found in Greek. Already in antiquity the extraordinary size of Plato's and Thucydides' letters of suspected authenticity brought about the remark that they were not letters, but books with just some greeting formula as introduction. The canonical Epistles to the Romans and 1 Corinthians being even more voluminous, we can safely conjecture that they belong to the literary type of the "open letter."

The Pauline letters differ from the usual type of Greek letters in antiquity in that they adorn the name of the sender with attributes and, by doing that, on an average expand the

²¹ Ibid., p. 346, note 3.

²² *Gegenwartsbibel II*, 3rd ed., pp. 223ff.

²³ Ibid., p. 39.

length of the introduction sixfold. In this respect the Pauline letters seem very odd to ROLLER.²⁴ In the classical letter, as is well-known, the addressee's name is put in the dative, followed by "be saluted"; so the formula is "A to B, greetings!" This formula is found as well in Acts 23:25; 15:23; James 1:1—interestingly, just in texts supposed to be written in Jerusalem. In the Pauline letter, however, the actual appellation stands grammatically separated from the greetings, and this not only by the attributes that are added to the sender's name but additionally by hints about the contents of the letter and the protest against disregard of the author. Another deviation from the normal letter-type consists in the formula "Paul and all the brothers that are *with me*" (Gal. 1:1). A Greek author would write, "Paul and all the brothers that are *with him*."²⁵ It's not the custom in private correspondence to mention more than one author, but again it agrees with the kind of letters that are produced by public bodies as townships or corporations or other groups. They sometimes mention at the letter's head one or more representing officials or managers. We then speak of decrees or edicts similar to those pastoral or Lenten-letters that bishops address to all believers in their diocese or the Pope even to believers all over the world.²⁶

Instead of with the short and concise, "Paul to the Corinthians, greetings!" 1 Cor. begins with the words, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." There is a taste here of the Christian sermon imbibed in the devotional rhetoric of the East.²⁷ The secular greeting has been replaced by a religious one, in which grace and peace are prayed for and the source is mentioned out of which they flow. By emphatically mentioning his holy function, the author seems to engage in polemics against those that accuse him of having usurped apostolic dignity (cf. Rom. 1:1, "set apart for the gospel of God"). This seems to imply confrontation with

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 57, 349.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 59; 436ff.; 349.

²⁷ A.D. Loman, *Nalatenschap* (Groningen, 1899), p. 26.

non-authorized apostles. SICKENBERGER,²⁸ a Roman Catholic commentator, rightly says that, by using these words, Paul intends to give his epistle the appearance of an official document. This scholar furthermore rightly recognizes that Sosthenes' cooperation cannot be seen as something merely external, for example copying the letter, but indeed as co-authoring.²⁹ It is remarkable, though, that after that opening Sosthenes immediately vanishes and Paul keeps writing exclusively in the singular. The purpose of mentioning a co-author seems to be to give the letter a Catholic character. So as well in 2 Cor. 1:1 (Timothy), and especially in Gal. 1:2 "all the brothers with me," that most likely wants to show that Paul, too, has his supporters. Which we can gladly believe; but that all those brethren had cooperated in writing the letter — no, that we can't believe. Furthermore the character of a real letter does not allow that it be addressed to "all those *everywhere* who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2); or, not that wide, but for a letter still much too wide, "together with all the saints throughout Achaia" (2 Cor. 1:1), or "To the Churches in Galatia" (Gal. 1:1). LIETZMANN refers to inscriptions in synagogues that read, "peace to this place and to all places in Israel." But this reference is of no importance, as it is not comparable: what is convenient on top of a temple or a church is not automatically convenient in the heading of a letter. Where "Paul" writes, "This is the rule I lay down in all the Churches." (1 Cor. 7:17), Church authority is speaking.

What way was there for the Romans to understand the Pauline Epistle, which was addressed to them? They have to have been Paulinists already before Paul had ever seen Rome. At the time this letter was written, the dogmatic concept of "grace" was already fully developed and with it the objections raised against it by legalist-minded people. Faith, justice, love, justification through faith, works of the law, being baptized into Christ and crucified together with Christ, revelation, spirit, etc.—up to that time no Greek would have been able to hear in these words the implications intended by Paul, and as a result they could not but be unintelligible to them and to the Jews just as well.

Let's have a look at the Pastorals that are said to be written to Timothy and Titus by Paul. One would think that the very personal relation presupposed here between them and Paul, as

²⁸ In *Tillmann's Heilige Schrift des N.T. VI* (Bonn, 1932).

²⁹ Cf. 1 Cor. 16:21. Lietzmann is wrong in his commentary (3rd edition), p. 4.

we see them in the mentioning of a forgotten coat and of book-scrolls Paul had left behind (2 Tim. 4:13), would lead moderate critics to designate the Pastorals authentic. This the more so as completeness of thought and theological formulas immediately remind us of the “genuine” Pauline letters and as vividly pictured events of Paul’s life give an impression of authenticity. But all this could not prevent doubt; more, the Pastorals’ genuineness was even rejected. Did not already SCHLEIERMACHER call the situations of 1 Timothy’s fiction and the historical authenticity “floating in the air”? WEISS says that the artificiality of this piece of fiction is found out just by taking it in your hands, which, according to him, cannot be said about the characters in the *genuine* letters.³⁰ Furthermore, the remark has been made that there was no need for pastoral enlightening with Timothy and Titus, as Paul had taken leave of them but shortly before (1 Tim. 1:3; Tit. 1:5) and was looking forward to seeing them again very soon (Tit 3:12; 1 Tim. 4:9,25; 3:14). But does this not apply just as well — I must ask — for the book-length Epistle to the Romans, since there too Paul is looking forward to seeing them soon?

If a private element is needed to give proof for a written document to be a *letter*, Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians has to be designated a pseudo-apostolic text. But then, this is a conclusion scholars nowadays gladly try to do away with. WEISS³¹ especially regarded 2 Cor. as a genuine private letter about tangible facts. But at the same time he saw it as a compilation and as a mix of two different letters, which had been written under different circumstances and in different states of mood. How can such a product be called a normal letter? This problem especially emerges, when a bit further on in Weiss’ book one reads that the two Epistles to the Corinthians are a redactional composition out of at least four Pauline letters. And me thinking that letters were *written*, not *compiled*! A letter, I think, is that genre of literature which is least of all suitable for compilation.³² Not far away from the standpoint of the radical critics are those that, together with Weiss, admit that we don’t have Paul’s letters in their *original* form, but only like they have been altered by redactors.

³⁰ “Gegenwartsbibel II,” 3rd ed., pp. 534ff.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 264ff.

³² Heinrici, “Der literarische Character der neutestamentlichen Schriften.”

The Epistle to the Galatians clearly shows how the private details one expects in a letter are opposed to the contents of this text. This supposedly occasional letter was sent by the apostle when circumstances forced him to address the Galatians who, shortly after he had won them over to his faith, had apostasized. The letter opens with Paul stating that he had received his apostleship directly from God and Christ without any human mediation. How was it possible for this community—according to the letter itself well acquainted with Pauline theorems—to forget in so short a time Paul’s unique authority which demanded unconditional obedience?³³ That should have been impossible, but nevertheless it had happened, for they had allowed “some people” to persuade them of law-abiding thought and practice. “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal 1:8). So possibly Paul himself as well, or even an authority from heaven that he seems to be considered equal with. How strange all this is, especially when followed up by, “As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” (1:9f.). Indeed an astonishing repetition in other words of the preceding verse. And even more astonishing the reference to a former menace of condemnation while condemning.³⁴ VALENTIN WEBER’s attempt of saving his apostle makes it all even worse than it already was. Paul, this scholar says, in verse eight included himself in a possible condemnation. After that, passion forced him to stop writing or dictating for a while and he thought the matter over and discussed it with the brothers. In their opinion his statement was excessively harsh. But Paul then confirms that he for one will stick to what he has written, and that’s why he now uses first person singular.

Doesn’t this harmonizing blow up the second condemnation to monstrous size? The first one could perhaps be explained by those time and again upcoming fits of temper by the apostle, from which our bona fide “vindicator” of Paul’s honour must have suffered. But the second condemnation—after a recreation break and a deliberation with the brothers, who disagreed with his acting that harshly—such an attitude would show him to be pig-

³³ Cf. Dr. A. Pierson, “De Bergrede en andere synoptische Fragmenten” (Amsterdam, 1878), pp. 100f.

³⁴ Bruno Bauer, “Kritik der paulinischen Briefe” (Berlin, 1852), p. 11.

headed and spiteful to a degree but seldom found anywhere else. If one though, as myself, considers the epistle spurious, the rhetoric affectation becomes understandable and we can answer the question: where and when did Paul say such a thing before? Obviously in 2 Cor. 11:4. There, after giving word to his fear their minds may by some bad influence be led astray from their sincere and pure devotion to Christ, he continues, "For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough." Thus here, too, a warning against someone preaching another gospel, while in another place (16:22) he seems to have the power of condemning deserters. It is the sentence of eternal condemnation by the hierarch who is hiding his face behind the mask of Paul. PIERSON's remark is still valid, which says that a claim of being sent by heaven loses quite a bit of its strength, if one at the same time denies this heaven the right to give new revelations, even if they were opposed to former ones.³⁵

One of the best arguments of the radical thesis is the fact, confirmed again and again, that later letters of the Pauline collection presuppose the reading of an earlier one. So for example the Galatians are supposed to have read Paul's occasional letters to the Romans and to the Corinthians. I have already given a few examples and will now add some striking ones. Gal. 4:19 reads "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." LIETZMANN may call this a cry out of the deepest part of the soul and OEPKE may consider it "almost drastic," but I for one agree with our LOMAN, who called it a monstrous metaphor: to be in pains of childbirth about children that had been born already, and this said by a man! Everything becomes clear if we think of 1 Cor. 4:14f.: "in Christ Jesus I became your father through the Gospel." So here he was the father of the community, who gave them spiritual life. Now in Galatians he is presented as the mother, obviously an imitation, but not one that comes off well. But the quote is of even greater importance. In it namely is included that up to that time the Galatians had not belonged to those in whom "Christ is formed in." In other words they now had to be won over to Pauline Christianity for the first time. How else, if once Christ

³⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

had been formed in them, could they have deserted? They then would, like Paul himself, have been crucified with Christ, and would no longer have lived themselves but Christ in them (Gal. 2:20).

In Galatians 1 and 2 Paul proclaims a great many surprising things to the Galatians that make us ask the question: But didn't they already know all this? Had they then never ever heard anything about that Pauline Gospel? Here indeed we find much ado about nothing. And again it is a preceding letter that throws light: in 1 Cor. 15:1 the identical, "I want to remind you" fits nicely, as it is about the important disclosure of the Lord's last Revelations.³⁶

When reading in Gal. 4:13-15 about Paul's meeting these uncivilized people of the mountains for the first time—he not knowing their language nor they being able to understand him — we ask: How could these people accept his pneumatic Gospel? And how could they accept him as they would Christ Jesus, as an angel of the Lord? Should then Paul himself have suggested that idea to them? By the way, what did they know about Christ Jesus? Hasn't he protested against such a glorification of his person? He then witnesses about them, that they, if possible (only *if necessary* would make sense) would have torn out their eyes and given them to him. Such a thing could perhaps be said about a small group of intimate friends, but not about all the Churches in Galatia. Here the rhetorical and the fictional characters of the pseudo-letter show clearly and LOMAN³⁷ rightly points at the missing features of real life, as the letter tells us nothing factual about the customs and way of thinking of the Galatians in mid-first century. The sentimental way in which the love relation between Paul and the Galatians is described is unbearable, if that fondling is not for one of the communities but for all of them together. That's rhetorical exaggeration, acceptable in an open letter or an essay, but not in a genuine letter.

According to 2 Thess. 3:17, a greeting with his own hand is the mark, the sign of authenticity of each of the Epistles (cf. Col. 4:18 as well). So it becomes clear why the author, pretending to be Paul, writes to the Galatians, "See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand" (Gal. 6:11). Paul then also wrote some letters not with his own hand, as 1 Cor. 16:21 tells us: "this

³⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 71

greeting in my own hand.” This text was imitated by Gal. 6:11. There is no understandable motive for saying that here. The writer imitates Paul’s supposed custom of giving his letter a mark of authenticity. In both spots the greeting in his own hand is followed by harsh words.³⁸ Here fiction becomes obvious: if the readers knew Paul’s handwriting, the recourse to his own writing was not needed, if they didn’t, utterly nonsensical. If the letter was delivered by well-known people, why the affirmation that it really had been written by Paul? And how possibly would such a letter, estimated to be of greatest importance and undeliverable by a third party, be entrusted to somebody unknown? So LOMAN rightly asked.³⁹

The letter of Early Christianity uses a special vocabulary and belongs to the literary genre of rhetoric. One of the peculiarities of the Pauline collection is that praise and blame are alternately bestowed on the readers. The Romans’ faith is said to be known all over the world (Rom. 1:8); but just the same kind of praise is poured out in the letters addressed to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:14) and the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:8). Whenever there is a reproach to the readers, there was a word of praise just before. The hardly flattering contents of Rom. 1:18 – 2:1 seems strange just after the faith of the Romans and its being praised all over the world have been mentioned. But the reproach is again followed by words of praise, as if it were a plaster on an open sore. In Rom. 6:12-16 we have first an extensive and forceful warning against sin, but in v.17 this is followed by the honouring attestation—which in a genuine letter would have made the admonition obsolete—“But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching (*typos tēs didachēs*) to which you were entrusted.” Nevertheless, it still has to be said, “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.” (Rom. 8:8); but immediately follow the reassuring words, “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit,” while again immediately following the human “nature in the flesh” has to be faced, as it does not seem to disappear entirely, not even by a radical conversion, “if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Rom. 8:9). So this

³⁸ R. Steck, *Der Galaterbrief nach seiner Echtheit untersucht* (Berlin, 1888), p. 142.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27ff.

chapter keeps alternating praise and blame. The author sticks to the conviction of the Romans being full of goodness and higher knowledge (15:14), but they nevertheless must still be taught hard lessons by their pastor who has to treat them with firmness.

The same applies to the Corinthians. They evoke feelings of gratitude in Paul, as they have been enriched in Christ Jesus in every way, in all their speaking and in all their knowledge (1 Cor. 1:5). Nevertheless, they are reprimanded as “not spiritual but worldly” and they need teaching because of their lack of knowledge (3:1–3; 10:1; 12:1; 15:51). Indeed, just a few verses after they were praised Paul has to appeal to them: there may be no divisions among them and they may be perfectly united in mind and thought (1:10). And we learn that there are quarrels among them (1:11 ff.). In the community of these beloved children of the Apostle jealousy and quarreling occur (3:3), even sexual immorality (5:1), idolatry and drunkenness (5:11). These people take pride against one another (4:6). They cheat and do wrong, and they do this to their brothers (6:8). They need to be warned against all sorts of evil sins, mentioned by their names (6:9–10). Nevertheless, they have been washed (by baptism), they have been sanctified, they have been justified (6:11). But all this does not make warnings against sexual immorality (6:13, 18; 10:8) and idolatry (10:7, 14) superfluous. They are praised for remembering Paul in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as he passed them on to them (11:2). But there are divisions among them and the Lord’s Supper is not held in a Christian way (11:18f., 20). So the final conclusion reads, “Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!” (11:22). They have taken their stand on the Gospel (15:1), but nevertheless some of them say that there is no resurrection of the dead (15:12). The faith of these is useless (15:14). Those spiritual Corinthians are warned not to be misled but to come back to their senses and stop sinning; Paul says all this to their shame and adds, “There are some who are ignorant of God” (15:33f.).

In the second Epistle to the Corinthians we see just the same pattern. Those Church members stand firm by faith (2 Cor. 1:24). In their mortal flesh the life of Jesus is at work (4:12). Nevertheless they still have to be reconciled to God (5:20) and must take care not to receive God’s grace in vain (6:1). They must not yoke together with unbelievers (6:14ff.). They still must purify themselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit (7:1). In the meantime Paul does not condemn them; on the

contrary, he has much to boast about them (7:3f.; 9:1ff.). They are innocent (7:11); and as all of them are obedient he has nothing to worry about (7:15). Don't they excel in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in their love (8:7)? But the sincerity of their love apparently has still to be tested (8:8), as they will have to show the proof of it (8:24). Alas, their obedience is not yet complete and they are still looking at the surface of things (10:6f.). Therefore Paul is afraid their minds may somehow be led astray from their "sincere and pure devotion to Christ" and desert to the preacher of a Jesus other than the Jesus he preached (11:3f.). He fears that when he comes there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder (12:20). There are those who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged (12:21). So he will not spare them (13:2).

We find the same contradictory ideas about the communities in the Epistle to the Galatians. Before their very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified (Gal. 3:1) by Paul who called them by the grace of Christ (1:6). They received the Spirit by believing his pneumatic Gospel (Gal. 3:2). Therefore they are all honoured with the title "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (3:26; 4:6f.). And this although after their recent conversion they have so quickly deserted Paul's Gospel and have turned to a different one, being foolish to such a degree that they allowed themselves to be bewitched. So, after beginning with the Spirit, they are now trying to attain their goal by human effort (3:3), as they are turning back to the weak and miserable principles to be enslaved by them all over again (4:9). No wonder that the Apostle fears that somehow he has wasted his efforts on them (4:11). But how can the man, in such a bitter mood because of their desertion, write the words: "You have done me no wrong" (4:12)? And this although he has now become their 'enemy' by telling them the truth (4:16). Only when he is with them they are zealous (4:18). Because of that he is perplexed about them (4:20). If they let themselves be circumcised—come to think of it: all those Churches in Galatia *en bloc*!—Christ will be of no value to them at all (5:2). They don't keep obeying the truth any longer (5:7). After all this complaining one does not understand how Paul can be confident in the Lord that they will take no other view but his (5:10). This does badly agree to the presupposition that they keep on biting and devouring each other (5:15), and gratify the desires

of the sinful nature (5:16). The list of sinful acts is long and of a kind so serious, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (5:19-21, 25). Yet they are called “spiritual” people who should restore gently their brothers caught in sin (6:1f.), though they need the advice not to take pride in themselves, (6:4) nor to sow to please their sinful nature (6:8). All this explains the harsh words just before the prayer for grace at the end of this “letter”: “Finally, let no one cause me trouble” (6:17)!

All this shows that we have to see these “letters” as treatises, as books to be read in Christian congregations. Texts that already existed before were used to produce them. What has been explained in extenso to the Romans—and is understandable in context there—is repeated to the Galatians in a kind of shorthand-style. Even LIETZMANN, a non-radical commentator, has to admit this fact, though he does not see what follows from it. To Gal. 3:15-1 he makes the quite laconic remark, “One has to know Paul to be capable of understanding him,” and to explain what he means by this statement he quotes Rom. 4:13. Even more grossly to Gal. 3:13 the same scholar makes the annotation: “There the audience is supposed to be acquainted with the complete structure of the ideas developed in 2 Cor. 5:21; without that this text is not understandable.” Poor Galatians, who in their time had to do without both LIETZMANN’s *Handbuch* and an Epistle that was in the hands of the Corinthians. Regularly the authors of these Epistles take over ideas and literal phrases out of other Epistles, in the same way as they quote from O.T. texts without mentioning their sources, just like nowadays some preachers do time and again with quotes from O.T. or N.T..

It would take us too far to specify the inconsistencies about the supposed addressees that occur in other Epistles as well. But there is one characteristic example in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians that I can’t omit. This community gives Paul good reasons to be grateful to God because of their work produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their endurance inspired by hope (1 Thess. 1:3). The members of the congregation are elected (1:4) and imitators of the Apostle, and in spite of severe suffering, they welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so they became a model followed by many believers (1:6-7). They are Paul’s hope and joy, the crown in which he will glory. They are indeed his glory and joy (2:19f.). Nevertheless, they must be admonished to an ethical way of life

(4:1ff.); Paul has to instruct them how to live in order to please God, but not so without adding immediately, “as in fact you are living” (4:1), they only should do this more and more (4:2). They namely should avoid sexual immorality (4:3) and should not wrong their brothers or take advantage of them (4:6). About brotherly love, however, Paul need not write a single word, for they themselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, they do love all the brothers. Yet they should do so more and more (4:9-11). They still need to be urged to live so that their daily life may win the respect of outsiders (4:12). These sons of the light (5:5) must encourage one another and build each other up, just as “in fact you are doing” (5:11). For there are still idle ones, who need to be warned (5:14), the timid and those that pay back wrong for wrong (5:15). The examples given may suffice. As the addressees don’t in the least give reason for this exaggerated amount of admonition, we here recognize the style of the official episcopal letter which is addressed to the Church, thought of as a totally perfect body, which nevertheless has never been free of stains and wrinkles. The hierarch, diplomatic letter-writer, with the burden of having to care for all of the communities (2 Cor. 11:28), writes to the *entire* church.

In a remarkable way we find this confirmed by the so called fragmentum Muratori, the most ancient list of canonical texts we possess.⁴⁰ All of the Pauline letters are seen there as written for the entire Catholic Church and the number of the seven letters of Revelation 2-3 is put in relation to Paul’s correspondence with seven local Churches. “Seven” means fulness, perfection, completeness, and therefore it stands for the entire Church.

We should further focus on the fact that in his letters Paul regularly switches from humiliating to elevating himself, which is something that fits well in the mouth of a Prince of the Church. The second Epistle to the Corinthians may give proof. The Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (1:1), who suffers together with the sufferings of Christ (1:5) and whose conscience testifies that he has conducted himself in the world in the holiness and sincerity that are from God (1:12), so that the community can boast of him (1:14), could nevertheless possibly be outwitted by Satan (2:11). But God always leads him in triumphal procession in Christ and through him spreads every-

⁴⁰ “Kleine Texte,” edited by Lietzmann (nr. 1, 2nd ed., Bonn, 1908), p. 7.

where the fragrance of the knowledge of him (2:14-17). This is no boasting, for his competence comes from God (3:5). If he renounces secret and shameful ways and does not use deception, nor distorts the word of God, but, by setting forth the truth plainly he commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God (4:2), he does not preach himself, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and himself as the Corinthians' servant for Jesus' sake (4:5). And everything he does and says is from God (4:7; 5:18). Though he says not to recommend himself to the readers (3:1; 5:12), he is doing just that time and again (6:4ff.) by summing up what he achieved during his mission (6:5-10; 11:22,33; 12:10) and by displaying his virtues widely (6:2; 10:3-6). He is taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men (8:21). Even if he boasted still more about his authority, he would not be ashamed of it (10:8). He does not think he is in the least inferior to the other Apostles, and he does have knowledge (11:5f.). On behalf of the Corinthians he lowered himself (11:7). But he has to confess: "I am nothing" (12:11).

Does not here a diplomat—Prince of the Church alternate self-glorification with pious humility and in so doing remind us of the later "servant of the servants of God"? This is not the language of a real person, but of the official ecclesiastical authority.

TORM⁴¹ opined that in Tertullian's time writing in the name of an Apostle was by no means considered unobjectionable. In his work on Baptism (chap. 17) the Acts of Paul seem to have been found out by contemporaneans as a forgery. Against the scholarly consensus, that not critical but dogmatic objections decided on such a verdict, TORM opposes his impression that these Acts were not heretical. So he presents himself as a less severe censor than the *Decretum Gelasianum* of the fifth century which classified them among the writings of heretics and schismatics repudiated by the Church. What did Tertullian object against these Acts? In them a female, Thecla, is told to baptize and teach! A text containing such impiety could not possibly be of Paul's hand. The presbyter who confessed to have produced the text, and because of that was dismissed, declared to have acted out of love for Paul. So argued somebody else as well. About 440 the man had published a text in four volumes against the meanness of the times with an appeal to the Church to give up her riches and wealth. The opening was in the apostolic style: "Timothy, the

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 26f.

least of God's servants, to the Catholic Church all over the earth, grace and peace to you of God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and of the Holy Spirit." Hints as to the real author were missing. When bishop Salonius got hold of the work he soon had an idea about the author's identity. Out of fear that the text mistakenly could be accepted as written by the apostle Timothy he sent a protesting letter to the presbyter of Marseille, asking why that pseudonymous letter had been published. The presbyter's answer to the bishop⁴² read: the text will not be regarded as an apostolic apocryphe considering that it does not present itself as written by the apostle Timothy. In other words: this designation had not been used to take in the public. The author — so the presbyter continues — has left out his own name for a number of reasons, the most important being God's command never to strive for vain worldly glory. Just like we give alms in secrecy, we do with the fruit of our labouring. May your left hand ignore what your right hand is doing. It's to God's honour that the author acted as he did; to God human work is the more agreeable the less public appreciation is sought for. The author is humble, effaces himself and hasn't any dishonest intentions. He doesn't want to diminish the impact of his precious text by the obscurity of his own personality. Nowadays the public is trivial to the point to give more weight to the name of the author than to the contents of a text. Out of respect and humility the author has used Timothy's name. So he followed the example of St. Luke the Evangelist, who pretended to write for Theophilus but indeed did so for God's love. The book has been written "to God's honour," or rather: it's God's honour itself that has brought it to light, for He, who caused it to be written, is justly said to be its author.

With HAEFNER⁴³ one could see here a *transition* from pseudigraphy to pseudonymity in the modern sense of the word, if the two in this context were not one and *the same* thing. For in both cases the name of a person of great reputation is falsely attributed. The fact alone, that the Canon of Sacred Scripture had been fixed before, must provoke a bishop's protesting, when in the fifth century an author, hiding himself under a biblical name, wrote the opening lines of his book in apostolic style. Bishop Salonius may have felt, too, that a minor member of the hierarchy

⁴² Salvianus's ninth letter in the "Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Lat," Vol. III.

⁴³ Alfred Haefner in *Anglican Theological Review*, 1934, pp. 8ff.

should not be allowed to imitate the fashion of an apostolic author by addressing the entire Church with a pauline opening.

All the above then is proof enough that the biblical letters were seen as written for all of Christianity and that it was not pride but, quite the contrary, Christian humility that, to secure their contents, stood behind the attribution to them of apostolic pseudonyms.

Tertullian, too, (*Adv. Marcionem* 5.17) is king's evidence for this. Marcion had known the Epistle to the Ephesians as the Epistle to the Laodiceans. To this his opponent says, "Marcion did his best to give this title to the text, as if he were a zealous investigator in this field as well. But we aren't interested in the least in titles (here synonym for *addresses*), for the Apostle, when writing to *some* people, has written to *all*." Thus here is admitted that every single letter was addressed to all of Christianity and not to one or the other peculiar circle. Tertullian so had not come across all the particular, the local, the personal, the special relation between author and readers, which modern criticism fences with.

In my opinion everybody, who wants to work in the field of Paulinism, will earnestly have to take into account the above developed.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Only while correcting the proofs did I come to see an essay by **Dr. A.D. Leeman** in "Mnemosyne," quarta series, vol. quartum, fasc. II, Leiden, 1951, p.175-181, titled "The epistolary form of Sen. Ep. 102." Leeman's conclusion confirms **Bourgery's** impression mentioned above (p. 6 and footnote 8).



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