

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

28 HISTORIC SETTING OF THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

whole of the fact we pretend to explain. There are those, again, who, in order to give history all its due, shut up Jesus of Nazareth into a past growing continually more remote, and while they admit His posthumous influence do not distinguish Him otherwise from all who have lived and died upon the earth. This does not ignore the *datum* so completely as a pure idealism, but it does ignore a vast proportion of what it has to explain. And there are those who, in order to do justice to all the phenomena with which we have to deal, lay equal emphasis on the historical Jesus and on His exaltation into eternal life, and His perpetual presence with us through His Spirit in the very character which His history reveals. In the former cases, there is no Christianity at all; all that has ever been known to history under that name—the whole *datum* in the case—disappears. In the last, Christianity subsists on the same historical basis on which it has always rested, and the place of Christ in it is not doubtful. Still, as at the beginning, He fills all things. Unto Him be glory for ever.

JAMES DENNEY.

*THE HISTORIC SETTING OF THE PASTORAL EPISTLES.*¹

In certain respects these Epistles are second in value and interest to none in the New Testament. They are not, indeed, equal in quickening religious power to the earlier Pauline letters. But in historical suggestiveness, in the light they cast upon the problems which emerge after the first or evangelistic stage of the Gospel's progress gives place

¹ The substance of a lecture given at the Oxford Summer School of Theology on July 25, 1912, an origin which may perhaps be allowed to excuse the personal note which appears in certain passages.

to that of consolidation and secondary developments, they are perhaps as instructive as any.

They are essentially the missionary's *vade mecum* in all ages and in all lands, and are probably never so fully understood or appreciated as on the foreign mission field. A year spent on such a field of practical problems will give more insight into their strength and wisdom than a life-time spent amid the academic associations of a professorial chair. It is the fresh approach from the side of experience, by men who are in "touch with the realities" of human nature in all its variety, as well as at home in the historical background of society in the early Roman Empire, that has renovated the study of them and taken it out of the old ruts of criticism in which it has moved for the most part in modern times.

But while we owe much to the general influence of the comparative study of religion, whether learnt on the mission field or by historical research, for help to get beyond doctrinaire attitudes of mind, one must name with special gratitude the work of two English scholars of exceptionally large human outlook and culture. When one approaches these Epistles fresh from the few pages on them in Hort's *Lectures on Judaistic Christianity* and in *The Christian Ecclesia*, and from Sir W. M. Ramsay's recent *Historical Commentary on the Epistles to Timothy* in the *EXPOSITOR*,¹ one feels the subject has been lifted to a new level of reality² and that much criticism between Baur and Jülicher is simply out of date and irrelevant. For "most of the negative rea-

¹ Series VII., vols. viii.-ix., and Series VIII. 1.

² "Regarded in the proper perspective, they are historically perhaps the most illuminative of all the Pauline Epistles; and this is the best and the one sufficient proof that they are authentic compositions. . . . No work whose composer makes his first object to assume the personality of another, can attain such historical significance; it cannot express the infinite variety of real life unless it is written naturally and for its own sake" (*EXPOSITOR*, VII. viii. p. 1).

soning in regard to these Epistles is composed of statements and judgments from the wrong point of view."¹ In the recovery of the true point of view a vital element has been the newer conception of Paul himself and so of Paulinism. Paul the doctrinaire theologian, or at least the prophet of a one-sided Gospel repeated with fanatical uniformity of emphasis under all conditions, has largely given place to Paul *the missionary*, full indeed of inspired insight on the basis of a unique experience, but full also of practical instinct, the offspring of sympathy with living men of other types of training.² When the Pastorals are viewed anew in the light of this idea, half their difficulties disappear.

The fact is, that the time has come for a frank reconsideration of the Pastoral Epistles in a really historical spirit, one which strives only to reach the best *constructive* theory of all our present data, including those of common sense and religious analogy. There has been too much inconclusive polemic, too much piling up of objections to other men's theories, and too little thoroughness and responsibility in the way the critic's own theory is put forward. But this is not a truly critical attitude to a phenomenon so significant of something at least as are these documents, which come to us with good early external evidence in the name of the Apostle Paul. It is certainly not an attitude which can satisfy the historian. He must feel able to place them in a context in which they become truly natural and relevant in whole and in part, or he must leave them alone for the time, confessing his inability to frame any satisfactory theory at all.

Now I venture to say with some confidence that no theory has yet been framed of them on the basis of fictitious composition, as relative to a situation other than that claimed by

¹ Ibid. VIII. i. 263.

² Prof. Percy Gardner's recent study of *The Religious Experience of St. Paul* may be cited as a fruit of this larger and more humanly flexible view of Paul, even while one dissents from some of its special positions.

their ascription to Paul, which can bear without reduction to absurdity even half the amount of criticism which the traditional theory of authorship commonly undergoes preliminary to its dismissal. It is usually felt hardly worth another scholar's pains seriously to examine his neighbour's negative theory in detail, to see how far it proves a working hypothesis. There is not the breath of life and reality in any one of them : rather they are lay figures.

Take what may be called a moderate or average theory of this order, e.g., that the Pastorals were written somewhere midway between the death of St. Paul and the period of Ignatius—a *terminus ad quem* seemingly imposed by the external evidence and the absence of the monarchical episcopate which is central to the Ignatian epistles. But what of the absence of all polemic against either a Cerinthian or any other type of Docetic Christology, such as is presupposed by the Johannine Epistles? And yet it is usually held that the Pastorals belong to much the same region and period as these, as well as those of Ignatius. Instead of Docetism, a reaction of the Hellenic mind upon the Gospel, what we have in evidence is chiefly a kind of trifling and scrupulous Legalism (comparable to that which meets us in Colossians), due to a recrudescence of Judaism, the influence of which generally preceded that of Hellenism—though of course the two operated in various degrees from the very first.

This is only a specimen of the criticism to which such a theory is open. But it would be premature to continue it further, until there is more consensus in favour of any given theory of the sort. It is more fruitful to examine the growing verisimilitude of the Pauline authorship proper, due to growing realisation of the actual conditions of life in and around the churches of Ephesus and Crete in the early sixties A.D.

What, then, are the objections of those who deny the

32 HISTORIC SETTING OF THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

claim which these Epistles make for themselves? They "presuppose, if genuine, Paul's release from the Roman imprisonment, and he was not released. The diction and style are un-Pauline; and in what the Epistles say about false teaching and ecclesiastical organisation we find ourselves in a sub-Pauline atmosphere."¹ The first of these objections, that generally esteemed the most serious, will be fully dealt with in the sequel. The second, that which Dr. Hort thought alone formidable, while yet he did not regard it as fatal, is seriously compromised by the giving up of a like objection to the authenticity of the "Imprisonment Epistles," in whole or in part. As to the third, so far as the "false teaching and ecclesiastical organisation" themselves are concerned, the difficulties are mainly due to doubtful exegesis and are largely set aside by analogies afforded by the generally acknowledged epistles to the Colossians and Philipians.

The "false teaching," as Hort shows sufficiently in his *Judaistic Christianity*, is for the most part associated with a certain type of Judaism² of which we have varied and early evidence in the first century, and is parallel to the Colossian errors. Since Hort wrote, moreover, our realisation of what is now called "pre-Christian Gnosis," in Jewish as well as other circles, has grown very rapidly.³ It is admitted that "no one system of 2nd century gnosticism is before the writer's mind," and that one cannot "detect anything except incipient phases of syncretistic gnosticism behind the polemical allusions" (*Encyc. Brit.*, xxvi. 1031 f.). The old objections to the "false teaching" of the Pastorals as

¹ This is Archdeacon Allen's summary, in reviewing Dr. Moffatt's *Introduction to the New Testament*, in the *Expository Times* for 1911.

² See also Wohlenberg's commentary (1906) in Zahn's series on the New Testament.

³ E.g., through the writings of M. Friedländer and others; see Rev. G. H. Box's Survey in *The Review of Theology and Philosophy*, vi., esp. pp. 67 f., 74 f.

implying second century *gnosis*, are in fact simply out of date, and should cease to rank in the discussion of authenticity.

Similarly the "ecclesiastical organisation" argument might well be relegated to oblivion ; for, as Sir W. M. Ramsay has recently said,¹ "the organisation in the Pastoral Epistles is not apparently advanced one step beyond that of the Church in Philippi in A.D. 61," so far as they can be compared. But while there is really nothing sub-Pauline in the above phenomena, there is more *prima facie* force in the objections derived from the way in which they are treated, and more generally from the difference in religious method and emphasis in the exposition of the Christian life and its motives found in these Epistles as compared with those confessedly Pauline. This is a living issue ; and setting aside the exaggeration with which it seems often to be stated, its consideration is useful as tending to add to the discrimination and balance of our appreciation of Paul as a man and as a missionary.

On the whole, then, the considerations which still seem entitled to reckon seriously reduce themselves to these three :

(i.) Is their style and diction consistent with Pauline authorship ?

(ii.) Is their religion Pauline, or not ?

(iii.) Can situations be found for them within the known life of the Apostle ?

We shall deal with these in the above order, which is that of the degree in which they seem to challenge any finding in the affirmative sense. But before discussing them separately, it is needful to place ourselves at the right standpoint, so far as we have already won our way to it as the result of general advance in the historic spirit, with its concrete realism, and in its sense of the manifoldness of actual human life.

¹ EXPOSITOR, VII. viii. p. 17.

“ Richer in historical points of view ”: that, as Harnack observed a quarter of a century ago, expresses our gain as compared with the age of the Tübingen school and its opponents ; and it involves a radical revision of its findings, with results mostly favourable to the authenticity of early Christian writings, and in any case always more in keeping with common sense and religious experience. In particular, the Pauline Epistles have one after another emerged from the cloud of obscurity and suspicion into the daylight of historic verisimilitude. How ? Mainly by the working out of the links of analogy shown to bind a suspected epistle to the nucleus of undoubted ones. But closely connected with this process, partly as effect, partly as growing co-factor, has gone the action of a new idea of Paul himself, and consequently of Paulinism, which reacts powerfully upon our sense of probability when we have to consider the epistles still in debate. The contrast between the notion of Paul which determined both older criticism and defence, and that which guides the new, may be put broadly as follows : To the one, Paul was ever the *theologian* ; to the other, he is ever the *missionary*. The theologian of the older writers was far less than the missionary as now conceived. He was less human, less flexible, less considerate of the needs of actual men and women, that “ by all means ” he “ might save some ” ; and far more the doctrinaire prophet, bent on putting things in terms of his own categories, even though he might find by experience that these often did not appeal to the average man in the same inspiring way as to himself, or that they were apt to be misunderstood and lead to practical abuse in certain cases. In a word, Paul the theologian was a human abstraction, with much that is the moral glory of manhood left out of account. Paul the missionary is a real man with a full-orbed humanity, determined in practical matters—which were nine-renths of his daily vocation—

mainly by the practical considerations of a sympathetic love, and "through constant watching" of human capacities and needs made "wise" as a pastor of souls.

The contrast in practice, in the behaviour natural to each of these two types under given conditions, is immense; and it largely explains what was meant in saying above that it is full time that a serious attempt were made to reconsider the Pastoral Epistles in the light of our present outlook. For that outlook is quite different from that which gave birth to the negative estimate of their connexion with Paul that has become a dogma in certain critical circles, a dogma from which the life has largely gone out. Sir W. M. Ramsay has shown us in his *Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* how much more human reality there was in the Paul of Acts and the Epistles than had hitherto been realised. He did so because he was able to see the data through the eyes, as it were, of a Græco-Roman citizen of the Empire, moving amid the varied conditions which met a traveller in the days of Claudius and Nero. Not until we have added the insight into the same records which the experience of the foreign missionary in a highly civilised society like that of India or China is able to contribute, directly or indirectly, to the study in question, shall we begin fully to recover the experience lying behind the written words of the Pauline Epistles, and so be able to judge with something like objectivity, because with adequate knowledge, whether Paul the Missionary could or could not have so written, under certain conditions, to those whose personal welfare was his absorbing aim.

In the true Missionary there is a large emotional and sympathetic element, an element which enters indeed into every good as well as great personality, certainly into such an one as Paul; witness the ties of affection between him and his readers to which all his Epistles testify. Of this side of the Apostle the older criticism largely made abstraction. Is it

surprising that it reached negative results as regards the probability of his authorship in cases touching which critics are now generally agreed on positive ones? But it may well be doubted whether the process of applying a more human and humane conception of Paul to the problems connected with the Pauline Epistles has yet been carried out to the full; ¹ and whether it is not able to solve some of the difficulties hitherto felt as regards the Pastorals. We need to remember how the letter to Philemon helped to guide scholars to the right, namely, the positive conclusion as to Colossians; for there is a Philemon element, an element of true human emotion and personality present in these Epistles, which can neither be ignored nor yet dissected out from the remaining matter.

VERNON BARTLET.

*THE RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF
THE TRINITY AS PRESENTED IN THE NEW
TESTAMENT.*

(1) IF we could with certainty assign the very words of the Great Commission in Matthew xxviii. 18-20 to the Risen Lord Himself, we might claim that He Himself put the doctrine of the Trinity in the forefront of the confession of Him in baptism. But this view is widely challenged to-day. "Perhaps," says Bruce, "it is not to be taken as an exact report of what Jesus said to His disciples at a certain time and place. In it the real and the ideal seem to be blended; what Jesus said there and then with what the Church of the Apostolic age had gradually come to regard as the will of

¹ Among those whose work is largely influenced by the more flexible and human "missionary" view of Paul, I may instance not only scholars like Lightfoot, Ramsay, and Prof. P. Gardner, but also the younger German School represented by Weinel and Von Dobschütz. The question remains, however, whether the latter group have allowed their new standards sufficiently to modify the "critical" tradition as to the Pastorals.