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 978-0-521-09380-4 - The Pastoral Letters  
 Anthony Tyrrell Hanson  
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# THE PASTORAL LETTERS

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## WHY ARE THE PASTORAL LETTERS DIFFERENT?

They certainly are different from the other Pauline letters, and we cannot hope to understand them unless we begin by asking why they are different. All through the centuries since they were first written they have stood apart from the other letters of Paul. The actual description 'Pastoral Epistles' is only about three hundred and fifty years old. Thomas Aquinas (died 1274) described 1 Timothy as 'a pastoral textbook', and this phrase pin-points one of the features that makes the Pastorals different from the other letters. They contain advice about how to run the Church such as we do not find in exactly the same way in other letters of Paul. Paul does indeed, in 1 Corinthians for example, give plenty of advice on problems which have cropped up in the life of the Church in Corinth. But this is more detailed and more fitted to one local situation than anything we find in the Pastorals. Another feature which makes them different is that they are written apparently for the benefit of individual church leaders, Timothy and Titus. We do, it is true, have one other example of a letter written by Paul to an individual, the letter to Philemon. But we have only to read Philemon over once (it does not run to more than twenty-five verses in all) to see for ourselves how very different it is from any of the Pastoral letters. It is written to deal with one particular historical situation. It contains no *general* advice at all. It does begin with a greeting to the Church in Philemon's house, but after that it is wholly concerned with a personal matter between Paul and Philemon.

So far we have only dealt with the differences in form and

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main contents between the Pastoral letters and the others. And one could quite reasonably say that these differences are accounted for by the fact that we do not happen to have any other letters of Paul written to individual church leaders. But we have still to mention the most important differences of all: these are differences in style, vocabulary, and actual thought. Style is something which it is very difficult to identify; yet a careful, sensitive reading of the Pastoral letters must leave one with the impression that the style is not just that of the other Pauline letters. It is less enthusiastic, less fiery, less emphatic than what we meet in 2 Corinthians or Colossians, for example. There are fewer references to the great central beliefs of Christianity, very few indeed to the Cross. It is true that there are very few such references in Philemon, and not so very many in 2 Thessalonians. But, once again, the matter must be decided by reading the works concerned. Read over Philemon and the two Thessalonian letters, and then ask yourself: is this the same style as the Pastorals?

Vocabulary is something which is best left to the experts, and the experts nowadays tend to hand the problem on to the computer. But we can easily point to a number of key words in the Pastorals which simply do not occur in the other Pauline letters: there is *eusebeia*, for example, translated by the N.E.B. as 'religion'. It is a favourite word in the Pastorals; it carries an overtone of 'piety', 'god-fearingness', almost 'middle-class religion'. Paul never uses it in any of his other letters. Or we could point to the title *Sōtēr*, 'Saviour'. In all his other works Paul only uses it once, in Phil. 3: 20, of Christ. But in the Pastorals it is his favourite epithet both for God and Christ. Again, we could ask why is God called 'Dynast' in 1 Tim. 6: 15 (the N.E.B. rather loosely turns it into a verb: 'God . . . holds sway'). Or why is he called 'King of all worlds' in 1 Tim. 1: 17? These are words which are used for God in Jewish writings of the period between the Old Testament and the New, and also in the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament. But they are never found in Paul's other

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writings. We could look at it the other way round, and ask why Paul never calls Christ ‘the Son’ in the Pastorals, while it is one of his most usual ways of referring to Christ in his other works. These words are not far-fetched ones, only suitable to one particular set of circumstances. They are words which one would expect a man to use whenever he wrote about Christianity. From these few examples, therefore, it can be seen that the vocabulary of the Pastorals needs some explaining.

It is the same with the thought of the Pastorals: we want to know, for example, how it is that Paul can write about the Law as he does in 1 Tim. 1: 8–11. In the rest of his writings, and especially in Galatians and Romans, the Law is a power hostile to man, originally provided by God because of man’s sinfulness, but now, by the coming of Christ, made out of date and irrelevant for those who accept God’s offer of friendship. In this passage in 1 Timothy the Law is something much less complicated, it is simply that which condemns evildoers. Why this remarkable change of doctrine? Or again: in all his other writings Paul opposes false teaching by arguing against it, showing how it conflicts with basic Christian beliefs. But in the Pastorals, though he spends much time condemning false teaching, he does not argue. He appeals to an existing body of teaching as a treasure committed to the Church, but he does not argue as to the respective merits of the true and false teaching. On the contrary, he discourages argument. These are two outstanding instances which suggest that, in the sphere of their actual thought-content also, the Pastorals are different from the rest of Paul’s letters.

SOME SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION

Naturally, various attempts have been made to account for these striking differences. Only three solutions are possible, and only one of them can be right. We must look at these three:

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*Some suggested answers*1. *Paul wrote these letters in his old age*

The defenders of this solution point to the obvious fact that, as far as we know, nobody ever doubted Paul's authorship of these letters until the question was raised two hundred years ago. They claim to be written by Paul; they contain many references to details of Paul's life and circumstances; they are addressed to real, historical people about whom we read in Acts and in Paul's undoubtedly genuine letters. They sometimes echo Paul's own language. In so far as there is a change of style and contents in them, say these scholars, this can be explained by a consideration of the circumstances in which they were written. Paul was old and tired, and had lost his earlier fire and energy. He was probably in prison and in very close confinement in Rome. Scholars have pointed out the difficulties involved in letter-writing in ancient times even under the happiest conditions, and have suggested that Paul may have had to rely on the services of a secretary when he wrote the Pastorals. Perhaps the altered style and vocabulary are to be put to the account of the secretary. But the letters, such scholars insist, are Paul's in essence.

The case for full Pauline authorship is not completely convincing. Some people have even claimed that in the second century A.D. it was known that the Pastorals were not by Paul, on the grounds that Marcion did not know of them. Marcion was an unorthodox Christian teacher who lived in Rome about A.D. 140. He mentions the other Pauline letters, but not the Pastorals. But Marcion is not a reliable guide, as he did pick and choose among the New Testament Books recognized by orthodox Christians, and he may have known the Pastorals but rejected them for doctrinal reasons. Again, there is in existence a papyrus manuscript of the Pauline letters dating from about A.D. 250, known as P<sup>46</sup>, which does not contain the Pastorals. (This Gothic P is used by scholars to indicate a papyrus manuscript.) It is one of the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament we possess, so its evidence is important. But

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it is incomplete, and, though it is very doubtful whether there would have been room for all three Pastoral letters in the missing portion, its evidence cannot be called conclusive. As for the suggestion that the style and the thought of Paul grew feebler as he grew older, this is not very flattering to Paul. There may be something in the secretary hypothesis, but how much is Paul and how much secretary? The Pastorals give the impression that the secretary more or less took command. A final objection to this theory lies in the difficulty of fitting the details of Paul's career which we learn from the Pastorals into the outline of his career as we know it from other sources.

2. *The Pastorals are not written by Paul at all, but by some other church leader who lived about fifty years after Paul's death*

This is not as startling a suggestion as it sounds, for we have at least one example in the New Testament of a letter which was written in these circumstances. This is 2 Peter, which is certainly not by Peter, but was written in Peter's name perhaps as late as A.D. 120. This solution explains all the differences from the rest of the Pauline letters: the teaching, style, and vocabulary are different because the writer was different. The champions of this view can point to several links between the Pastorals and Christian writings of the period A.D. 100–20 especially in the matter of vocabulary. The blanket condemnation of false teachers without argument is very like what we find in 2 Peter and in Jude (the latter probably belongs to the end of the first century). The suggestion is that some influential Christian teacher, probably in Asia Minor, wished to write a sort of handbook for local church leaders, and that he decided to issue it in Paul's name, both because as an admirer of Paul he believed he was maintaining Paul's teaching, and because he wished to lend Paul's authority to his work. It was a period when the Church was much harried by false teaching. This practice of issuing a book in the name of some revered figure of the past was an accepted convention at the time and

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would not have carried the suggestion of dishonesty that it would certainly incur today. Compare the way in which the first five Books of the Old Testament are attributed to Moses although it is quite certain that Moses did not write them.

There is much truth in this suggestion; indeed, as we have seen, it meets most of the difficulties. But it does not fully explain all the evidence. There are, for example, many personal details about Paul's life to be found in the Pastorals, especially in 2 Timothy 4. Rigorous upholders of the theory we are now discussing must maintain that these details are all invented by the author. This seems unlikely. It is true that by the middle of the second century plenty of fantastic legends about Paul had grown up, but only a few scholars would date the Pastorals as late as that. As we shall see, it is extremely difficult to date them after A.D. 110, and they are probably earlier. This hardly leaves time for so much apparently useless legend to have grown up. Most scholars who reject suggestion 1, therefore, are inclined to accept some form of suggestion 3.

3. *The Pastorals are a later writing, but they contain genuine fragments of Paul's letters*

This account of the Pastorals begins from suggestion 2, but explains most of the personal details by saying that they are genuine fragments of Pauline letters which came into the possession of the author of the Pastorals; he incorporated them into his three letters. This is the view adopted in this commentary, and is that of most modern English commentators.

It brings its own problems, however. In the first place, there is no agreement as to which fragments are by Paul. Some scholars accept a great deal as Pauline, some very little. This is a question of individual choice, and the particular selection adopted in this commentary will be clearly indicated in the text. It has been objected against this theory that Paul is hardly likely to have written brief notes to his friends; did Timothy and Titus receive postcards from their leader? This

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objection can be met by grouping all the allegedly Pauline material into two fragments, as has been done here. There is some evidence that small fragments of several different letters from Paul to the Church in Corinth are preserved in the work known to us as 2 Corinthians; for example, many scholars believe that 2 Cor. 6: 14 — 7: 1 represents a fragment of the first letter that Paul ever wrote to Corinth, and that it was at first preserved by the Corinthian Church inside the original manuscript of 2 Corinthians, and only later incorporated into the text of the letter. Another objection to this third theory is based on the difficulty, already mentioned on p. 5, of fitting such alleged details of Paul's career as we find in 2 Timothy 4 into his known life-history. But this difficulty can be met by following the very ancient hypothesis that Paul was released from prison after the two years mentioned in Acts 28: 30, and that he had a further missionary term of several years before being re-arrested and subsequently put to death.

THE DATING OF THE PASTORALS

Assuming, then, that the Pastorals were for the most part written after Paul's day, we have next to try to decide as accurately as we can when they were written. In this sort of question, the best way to proceed is to fix two dates within which the Pastorals must have been written, and then to see whether it is possible to decide on one particular year or years within that period. We begin therefore by suggesting the year A.D. 135. This is probably the year in which Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, wrote a letter to the Church in Philippi, and it seems quite clear that he quotes 1 Tim. 6: 7 and 10 in this letter. He first says: 'The beginning of all difficulties is love of money', which sounds very like 'The love of money is the root of all evil things' (1 Tim. 6: 10); then he adds an almost verbatim quotation of 1 Tim. 6: 7: 'We brought nothing into the world, but we are not able to take anything with us either.' Polycarp, therefore, must have

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known 1 Timothy. As for a limit in the other direction, the author seems to refer to Acts 13: 50; and 14: 5, 19. These passages in Acts describe the dangers and persecutions encountered by Paul in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, and to these 2 Tim. 3: 11 refers. The date of the publication of Acts is uncertain, but most scholars are inclined to put it at about A.D. 90. Thus we seem to have a period of roughly forty years in which to place the composition of the Pastorals, A.D. 95–135.

Can we be any more precise than this? It seems reasonable to suggest that we can. About the year A.D. 112, Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia wrote a letter to the Emperor Trajan asking his advice about the correct treatment of Christians. That letter has survived and we shall be referring to it in the course of the commentary. But for our purpose here it is sufficient to notice that Pliny gives us evidence that Christians were being persecuted in one part of Asia Minor about the year A.D. 112. Pliny himself did not begin the persecution of his own accord; it was rather forced on him by the activities of informers, who accused certain persons of being Christians. Pliny had to decide what to do with them. Trajan's reply has also survived: he says that Pliny must punish with death any who admit to being Christians and refuse to recant. Incidentally Pliny refers to certain individuals amongst those accused who said they had been Christians as long as twenty years ago, but had ceased to be so now. This suggests that in Bithynia at least there was persecution of Christians, coming, perhaps, at the end of a period of peace. Now in the Pastorals there is no hint whatever of persecution. If we assume, as all scholars do, that the Pastorals were intended for the Church in Asia Minor, probably in Ephesus, then it looks as if one must put the date of their composition decidedly before 112. Of course Ephesus was not in Pliny's province, but it is hard to believe that a persecution such as we read of in Pliny's letters could be taking place in Bithynia without producing any effect on the Church in the region of Ephesus. Incidentally, we may add here the



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evidence of the Revelation of John. When Revelation was written, there can be no doubt that persecution had been taking place, and was still going on, in Asia Minor. Most scholars agree with Irenaeus (died about A.D. 200) that Revelation was written in the year 96. We must therefore put the Pastorals some time later than this, to allow the expectation of persecution to die down. Thus we may reasonably suggest a date round about the year 105 for the Pastorals.

Of course we could try to fit them into a period ten years after the time of Pliny, say about A.D. 125. This would put them in the first years of the Emperor Hadrian's reign, and this seems to have been a time of comparative peace for Christians. But during this period Christians were still under the threat of the same repressive action as Pliny had taken, and it is hard to believe that this state of affairs would not be more clearly reflected in the Pastorals. Besides, the date of A.D. 135 for Polycarp's letter is not absolutely certain. Some scholars would put it as early as 117. This would of course virtually compel us to adopt a date for the Pastorals of about 105.

There are three other small books in the New Testament which seem to have been written in much the same circumstances as the Pastorals, very different though they are in style and contents. These are the letters of John. Many scholars would assign these letters to the years 100-5. It seems likely that they were written to the Church in Asia Minor. They show no sign of recent, present, or imminent persecution; and, like the Pastorals, their author is greatly concerned to oppose false teachers. It is even possible that they have one more feature in common with the Pastorals: the author of the letters of John (who calls himself the 'elder' or 'presbyter') is disturbed by the behaviour of a certain leader in one of the local Churches. This man, Diotrephes, is described by John as 'their would-be leader' (see 3 John 9). Diotrephes seems to be claiming a right to rule the local Church and to excommunicate by his own authority those who do not acknowledge him. It has been suggested that what we have here is the

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emergence in Diotrephes' local Church of the office of bishop as it became known all over the Church later on in the second century. Now, as we shall be seeing later, the Pastorals probably witness indirectly to the fact that the office of bishop has recently been established in the churches to which they are addressed. We may add to this that in the letters of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, which were written about A.D. 110, the rule of bishops is established in Syria and Asia Minor, though not, it seems, in Philippi or Rome. But the emphatic way in which Ignatius defends the position of the bishop suggests that this new institution was still under fire. Incidentally, Ignatius' career is evidence of persecution in Syria, for he wrote his seven letters while being conveyed as a condemned criminal to Rome, where he was to suffer as a martyr. Another point of contact with the time of Ignatius is the reference to Jewish teachings in the Church which occur so often in the Pastorals. Ignatius also was troubled by people who wanted to bring the Church round again to Judaism. All this evidence, indirect and inconclusive as it is when examined piece by piece, does seem to build up a fair case for dating the Pastorals at about A.D. 105.

## THE DATING OF THE PAULINE MATERIAL

If we acknowledge any Pauline fragments in the Pastorals, we should try to fit them into Paul's life-history. It is first necessary to state clearly which verses are to be treated in this commentary as genuinely from Paul's pen. They are as follows:

- (a) 2 Tim. 1: 15-18;
- (b) 2 Tim. 4: 9-21, omitting verse 18;
- (c) Titus 3: 12-14.

Of these three, (a) tells us about Paul's experiences of his trial in Rome; 1: 18 seems to imply that Timothy was in, or near, Ephesus at the time that Paul wrote. (b) continues the same theme, giving interesting information about the location of