2 Peter Reconsidered

The Rev E.M.B. Green, M.A., B.D.

THE TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT LECTURE, 1960

[p.5]

The Second Epistle of Peter was accepted into the Canon in the fourth century with greater hesitation than any other book. That hesitation reappeared at the Reformation when Luther accepted it, Erasmus rejected it, and Calvin was uncertain. The debate has continued, but in the last forty years opinion has hardened against its genuineness, and in many quarters the question is regarded as settled. The aim of this paper is to reconsider the problem, not because the writer has the presumption to dogmatize over a question which has puzzled the ablest heads in the Church for a thousand years, but because the arguments commonly adduced to support the current view of 2 Peter as an undoubted pseudepigraph do not appear to be as securely based as might be expected from the confidence reposed in them. These arguments turn on (i) the external attestation of the book, (ii) the relationship between 2 Peter and Jude, (iii) the contrast between its diction and that of 1 Peter, (iv) the contrast between its doctrine and that of 1 Peter, and (v) various anachronisms and contradictions. Arguments (i) and (iii) alone were used in antiquity; the remainder are of more recent origin. We shall examine these points in turn.

THE EXTERNAL ATTESTATION OF 2 PETER

The external attestation is inconclusive. No book in the Canon is so poorly attested among the Fathers, though, as Westcott[1] shows, 2 Peter has incomparably better support for its inclusion than the best attested of the rejected books. It is not cited by name until Origen, early in the third century. He says, 'Peter has left one acknowledged Epistle, and perhaps a second; for this is contested.'[2] But though recording the existence of doubt in some quarters, he himself accepts it. Six times he quotes 2 Peter by name, and there are other probable allusions. In short, 'Even Peter blows on the twin trumpets of his own Epistles'.[3] It is interesting that he says nothing against the style and diction of 2 Peter, though he was one of the keenest literary critics in the ancient world, as his remarks on the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews make plain.[4]

Eusebius is usually misquoted as rejecting the Epistle. What he in fact says[5] is that it is a disputed work, regarded by the majority in the

[p.6]

Church as authentic; he himself was doubtful,[6] but did not altogether deny its authenticity. His doubts rested on two grounds;[7] first, that it was not, so far as he knew, quoted (*sc.* by name)

---

[1] *The Canon of the New Testament*, passim.
[2] *Comm. in Johann*. 5.3.
[3] *Hom. in Josh*. 7.1: '*duabus epistolarum suarum personat tubis*.'
[4] Eusebius, *H.E*. 6.25.11.
[5] *H.E*. 3.25.3, 4.
[6] *Op. cit*., 6.25.8: 'one and maybe another.'

by any of the 'ancient presbyters', and secondly that writers whom he respected rejected it.[8] Thus, in his most considered statement,[9] he classes 2 Peter with James, Jude, 2 and 3 John as ἀντιλεγομένων, γνωρίμων δ'ὅμῶς τοῖς πολλοῖς. He then goes on to speak of τὰ νόθα, uncanonical books.[10]

Jerome records the doubt, explains it as resting on the divergence of style from 1 Peter,[11] and suggests the hypothesis of two different amanuenses.[12] This suggestion is supported by what we know of the place of dictation in the epistolary method of the ancient world,[13] and by the express references in the Fathers to Peter's use of ἑρμηνευτάι we read not only of Mark fulfilling this role,[14] but also of one Glaucias[15] doing so. And the hypothesis is strengthened by the recent researches of E. G. Selwyn into the extent of Silvanus' influence both on the form and content of 1 Peter (see *The First Epistle of St. Peter,* pp. 9ff.).[16]

The authority of Jerome seems to have been largely influential in securing its acceptance in the Western Church, though the importance of its recognition by Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzus, Athanasius and Augustine must not be underestimated. It is significantly included in the late third-century catalogue contained in the *Codex Claromantanus*,[17] which gives all the Catholic Epistles, also Barnabas, Hermas, Acts of Paul and the Apocalypse of Peter; but all four of these have been added by a later hand. 2 Peter was recognized as canonical by the fourth-century Councils of Hippo, Laodicea, and Carthage,[18] and thereafter its position was unquestioned until the sixteenth century. It seems probable that these Councils had access to evidence which has now been lost. It is certainly significant that 2 Peter was accepted by the very Councils that rejected the letters of Barnabas and Clement of Rome, both of which had long occupied an honoured place in the lectionaries of the Church alongside Scripture. The Fathers of these Councils seem to have exercised exemplary care and discrimination. They took great pains to exclude spurious and sub-apostolic writings,

[p.7]

and clearly regarded 2 Peter as authentic after a thorough examination of its claims.

It was not only in the Alexandrian and Roman canon of the fourth century that 2 Peter was included. We find it contained in the Bohairic and Sahidic versions of the New Testament which are at least 100 years earlier.[19] The Epistle[20] is omitted by the Peshitta and Old Syriac. Aphraates and Ephraem Syrus appear not to have known it, but it is possible that this silence is intentional. If so, it is not difficult to suggest a reason, since Jude is also omitted. Now Jude explicitly, and 2 Peter implicitly, quote the apocryphal *Assumption of Moses.* The Gnostics

---

[7] Op. *cit*., 3.3.1, 4.
[8] οὐκ ἐνδιάθηκον ε ναι παρειλήφαμεν.
[9] *Op. cit.,* 3.25.3, 4.
[10] νόθα is the name he uses for orthodox books rejected from the Canon, as opposed to ἀναπλάσματα αἱρετικῶν ἀνδρὼν. Thus he classes Hermas, Barnabas and 1 Clement as νόθα.
[11] '*Stili curn priore dissonantiarn*,' Script. Eccles. 1.
[12] *Epist*. 120.11.
[13] T. C. Skeat, *The Use of Dictatian in Ancient Book Production*.
[14] Eus. *H.E*. 3.39; 2.15. Tertullian, *adv. Marc*. 4.5.
[15] Clem. Al. *Strom*. 7.106.
[16] Despite W. L. Knox's criticism, *Theology* 1946, p. 343.
[17] Westcott, *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 565.
[18] Lagrange, *Canon*, p. 148.
[19] Jacquier, *Le Nouveau Testament dans l'Eglise chrétienne*, vol. 2, pp. 254ff., though exact dating is precarious.
[20] Together with 2, 3 John, Revelation, as well as Jude.

were notorious for their misuse for sectarian purposes of *haggadah* of this sort, and it is precisely in Syria, where the extravagances of Jewish angelology were most notorious, that one would naturally expect to find the most violent reaction against anything that might be adduced in their support. 2 Peter was, however, included in the Philoxenian version, and was perpetuated in the Syrian church by the Harklean recension in the seventh century AD.

Though not quoted by name before Origen, there appears to be early, though not widespread, evidence of its use. Both Eusebius[21] and Photius[22] say that Clement of Alexandria had it in his Bible, and wrote a commentary on it. The commentary is lost, but there seem to be some allusions to it in his surviving works.[23] And Clement succeeded (*c.* 185 AD) Pantaenus at the Alexandrian School, who can scarcely have been duped by a fraud a few years old, which is what the date assigned to 2 Peter by Harnack and most moderns would necessitate. Firmilian writing to Cyprian alludes to it,[24] which shows the precariousness of Chase's argument[25] from Cyprian's own silence. The Pseudo-Clementines[26] have clear references to 2 Peter, and Irenaeus[27] cites the same adaptation of Psalm xc. 4, as does 2 Peter iii. 8 ἡ γάρ ἡμέρα Κυρίου ὡς χίλια ἔτη, καὶ χίλια ἔτη ὡς ἡμέρα μία. This may be significant in view of their identical and wide divergence from the Lxx. Indeed, Methodius[28] at the end of the third century specifically attributes the

[p.8]

source of the quotation to 2 Peter. And there appears to be a striking reference to 2 Peter i. 15 in Irenaeus' citation of an earlier writer[29] (Papias, perhaps?) to the effect that after the death (ἔξοδον) of Peter and Paul, Mark, the interpreter of Peter, wrote down the gospel message which Peter used to preach. Not only is the content of these two sayings similar; so is the form. ἔξοδος, used absolutely[30] with the meaning 'death', appears to be restricted to Luke ix. 31, 2 Peter i. 15 and this passage in Irenaeus. This would be most naturally explained if Peter's usage reflects an actual *verbum Christi,* which was taken over by Irenaeus.

The absence of 2 Peter from the Muratorian Canon is no more singular than that of 1 Peter, which was universally accepted. There seems to be a highly probable instance of its recognition in Rome a good deal earlier than this, in Aristides' Apology[31] which was presented to Hadrian in 129 AD. Van Unnik thinks it is referred to in the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth*,[32] and it is quite possible that Clement of Rome knew it.[33] Apart from the references

---

[21] *H.E*. 6.14.1.
[22] *Cod*. 109.
[23] Such as τὴν ὑδὸν τῆς ἀληθείας (*Protrep*. 10.106) which is a biblical ἅπαξ in 2 Pet. ii. 2; σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις (*Strom*. 1.19.94; cf. 2 Pet. i. 14) and, most striking of all, ἀγοράζει ἡμᾶς ὁ κύριος τιμίῳ αἵματι (Ed. Proph. 20) which conflates 1 Pet. i. 59 and 2 Pet. ii. 1. Mayor, *The Epistle of Jude and the Second Epistle of Peter*, pp. cxixf. adds other possible allusions.
[24] Cyprian, *Ep*. lxxv.
[25] Hastings *Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. 'Peter, Second Epistle'.
[26] *Recogn*. 5.52.3 reproduces 2 Pet. ii. 19. See also *Ep. Petri* as. Jac. 2.2 and 2.4 with 2 Pet. iii. 16 and i. 54.
[27] *A.H*. 5.23.2.
[28] *De Resurrectione*—a fragment preserved in Pitra *Anal. Sacra*, iii, p. 611.
[29] *Op. cit*., 3.1.1.
[30] Though it is common enough in late Greek with the genitive, e.g. ἔξοδος τοῦ βίου.
[31] *Apol*. 16. ὅ ὅδος τῆς ἀληθείας ἥτις τοῦς ὁδεύοντας αὕτην εἰς τήν αἰώνιον χειραγωγεῖ βασιλειαν. Cf. 2 Pet. i. 11, ii. 2.
[32] The Jung Codex, ed. F. L. Cross, p. 116. He sees traces of 2 Pet. i. 17 and ii. 2.

listed in Mayor,[34] Clement's 'Noah preached repentance'[35] seems to reflect Peter's 'Noah, a preacher of righteousness',[36] since the Old Testament account nowhere says anything of the kind. It is possible, however, that both drew on current *haggadah* at this point,[37] though the coincidence is very striking.

These apparent allusions in the literature of the first four centuries may in some instances be imaginary, but their combined weight is considerable. This is admitted by Mayor, who confesses[38] that if we had nothing but the external evidence to go on in deciding the authenticity of 2 Peter, we should be inclined, like the ancients, to accept it. He himself rejects it on the grounds of its dependence upon Jude and incompatibility with 1 Peter; but the verdict of so distinguished a scholar on the external evidence is interesting.

The attempt has been made to show the dependence of 2 Peter on

[p.9]

some late-first- or early-second-century authors. At the close of the last century, when the possibility of a common oral tradition was scouted, and similarities between documents had to be explained in terms of literary dependence, Abbott,[39] and to a lesser extent Farrar,[40] proclaimed the dependence of 2 Peter on Josephus, who published at the very end of the first century. This view is not upheld today by any responsible critic. Mayor, who rejects Petrine authorship, and Bigg[41] who accepts it, are both unimpressed by the argument. True, there is a marked similarity in some of the ideas and expressions of the two authors, but that is hardly surprising in two Jews trained in the same Scriptures and familiar with later Jewish writings such as Philo. All three have in common a very considerable vocabulary, including such words as ἐλευθερία, ἀμαθής, ἀρετή, ἰσότιμος , ταρταροῦν, ἐυσέβεια, ὁ προφητικός λόγος, δεσπότης, μύθοις ἐξακολουθεῖν, ἡ μεγαλειότης τοῦ θεοῦ. Among its other rare words, 2 Peter shares some, like τεφροῦν and φωσφόρος, with Philo, and others, like βόρβορος and ἐπόπτης, with Josephus. These similarities, as well as the marked resemblances in language between 2 Peter and the Carian Decree (see p. 23), are regarded by both Chase[42] and Mayor[43] as 'due in the main to the diffusion of commonplaces in rhetorical study, set prefatory phrases and the like, which were employed by those who learned Greek in later life'— as Peter might well have done.

However, with the *Apocalypse of Peter* the case is different. Between it and 2 Peter there is a universally agreed literary relationship; indeed it is close enough for Sanday[44] to have urged

---

[33] *Clem*. 9 τῇ μεγαλοπρεπεῖ δόξη αὐτων recalls the ἅπαξ of 2 Pet. i. 17. Ibid. πόρρω γενέσθω ἀφ᾽ ἡμῶν ἡ γράφη αὕτη ὅπου λέγει Ταλαίπωρόι εἰσιν οἱ λεγουντες... ταῦτα ἠκούσαμεν καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν, ἰδού, γεγηράκαμεν καὶ οὐδ ν ἡμῖν τουτῶν συμβέβηκε. Cf. 2 Pet. iii. 4.
[34] J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of Jude and the Second Epistle of Peter*, p. cxiii.
[35] *Clem*. 7.6.
[36] 2 Pet. ii. 5.
[37] The existence of such haggadah is assumed by Spitta from Jos. *Ant*. 1.3.1. where Noah 'persuaded them to turn their thoughts to better things', and *Sib. Or*. 1.128 where he 'heralded repentance'. *Clem*. 1.7 is, however, linguistically much closer to 2 Pet. ii. 5.
[38] *Op. cit*., p. cxxiv.
[39] *Expositor*, 1882.
[40] *Expositor*, 1888.
[41] *I.C.C*., The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude.
[42] *H.D.B*., s.v. 'Peter, Second Epistle'.
[43] *Op. cit*., p. cxxx.
[44] *Inspiration*, p. 347.

that they came from the same pen. M. R. James[45] gives many resemblances of diction and thought which are too marked to be accidental. The *Apocalypse,* written early enough to precede the letter of the Church at Vienne[46] (*c*. 179 AD) and to find acceptance in the Muratorian Canon, is largely indebted to our Epistle. That this is the explanation of their relationship, and not *vice versa* as Harnack maintained, is not seriously questioned today,[47]

[p.10]

and so the *Apocalypse of Peter* becomes yet another early witness to the regard in which 2 Peter was held in those circles which were aware of its existence.

2 Peter is short. Its subject matter is of limited interest, so vaguely is the false teaching depicted. It does not lend itself to quotation; indeed it is rarely quoted from the pulpit or in theological writings today. Furthermore its circulation was very limited in the early days, as is clear not only from the widespread ignorance of it in the West and places in the East during the first four centuries, but also from the appalling state of the text. Indeed, Vansittart[48] maintains that for a time it existed in a single copy only. This may help to explain one of the two grounds for the hesitation towards 2 Peter felt in antiquity, namely its poor attestation among the early presbyters (though as we have seen, that attestation is both considerable and primitive). Their other great difficulty was the contrast between 1 and 2 Peter in style and vocabulary, and to this we shall shortly turn. However something must first be said about the relationship of 2 Peter and Jude.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 2 PETER AND JUDE

That there is a dependence either of 2 Peter on Jude or of Jude on 2 Peter, or of both on some lost document, is certain. For of the twenty-five verses in Jude no less than nineteen appear, in whole or in part, in 2 Peter. Furthermore, the identical ideas, words and phrases, and even the order of events leave us in no doubt that the relationship between them is a literary one. Which way the dependence lies has been widely and inconclusively discussed. Mayor, Abbott, M. R. James and Chase incline to the priority of Jude; Spitta, Zahn, Plummer and Bigg to that of 2 Peter. I do not propose to argue the point here. The authenticity of 2 Peter is a problem which has to be considered independently of its priority to or dependence on Jude, though the two propositions have frequently been confused. The literary question is, in fact, not unlike the Synoptic problem of the relation of Matthew to Luke in their sayings-material. Either Matthew used Luke, or Luke used Matthew, or both drew from a common source. If 'Q' be not regarded as an unnecessary postulate in the Synoptic problem, why should not a lost common source be possible here? The possibility has been explored in an able monograph by E. I. Robson,[49] in which he supposes both Peter and Jude to have used one of the several

---

[45] *Lectures on the Revelation of Peter*, p. 52.
[46] See Bigg, *op. cit*., p. 207.
[47] A. E. Simms (*Expositor*, 1898, pp. 460-71) has critically examined their relationship, and demonstrated the priority of 2 Peter. He shows their radical difference in style, tone and morale: and the Virgilian views of hell, pictorial development of biblical statements, mythological elements, bizarre descriptions and use of late Greek words like τηγανιζόμενος which characterize the Apocalypse, brand it as the later work. Their differing external testimony, too, supports the conclusion that the author of the Apocalypse sought Petrine authority for his work by a parade of 'coincidences' with 2 Peter. See further Bigg, *op. cit*., p. 207, Mayor, *op. cit*., p. cxxxiii, Chaine, *Les Épîtres Catholiques in Etudes Bibliques*, 1939, pp. 3, 4, all of whom are agreed on the priority of 2 Peter.
[48] *Journ. Philol*., iii, pp. 357ff.
[49] *Studies in 2 Peter*, 1915,

tracts which were circulating in apostolic circles. The existence of one such tract containing the sayings of Jesus, and of another containing Mark xiii, has long been suspected. If we are to follow the suggestion of Carrington[50] and Selwyn[51] there may well have been a catechetical tract and a

[p.11]

persecution tract. Rendel Harris,[52] supported to some extent by Dodd,[53] suspect the existence of a list of *testimonia,* and W. L. Knox's *Testimonies,*[54] 1916. theory of gospel origins requires several such fly-sheets. May there not have been another which decried false teaching?

Of course, it may well be that Peter did draw from Jude, the date of whose Epistle is quite uncertain. This is by no means fatal to the theory of Petrine authorship. It seems reasonably clear that 1 Peter is indebted to James. If Peter was in the habit of drawing from other sources in this way, he would not be the first great man, or the last, to draw material from a lesser figure. Milton and Handel both borrowed from their inferiors. And it is clear that Paul did not disdain incorporating into his writings hymns, credal formulae, primitive catechesis, and even heathen poetry. In view of this, it is refreshing to find Joseph Chaine, in his commentary in the *Etudes Bibliques,* combining belief in the priority of Jude with belief in the authenticity of 2 Peter. The relationship, therefore, of 2 Peter to Jude does not immediately concern us; that of 2 Peter to 1 Peter, however, is of considerable importance.[55]

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN 1 AND 2 PETER: DICTION

As we have seen, this was one of the only two arguments used in antiquity against the authenticity of 2 Peter. And indeed the divergence of style is great. The vocabulary of 1 Peter is dignified; that of 2 Peter is grandiose. Ambitious, somewhat pedantic words like οιζηδόν and ταρταροῦν are plentiful. Many of the favourite words and expressions of 1 Peter, such as συνέιδησις, ὑπακόη, νήφειν, ἐλπίς, ἁγιασμος, are absent in the second letter. The connecting particles of 1 Peter have largely disappeared, and 2 Peter has a curious tendency to fall into iambic rhythm (ii. 1, 3, 4), which seems to have been a characteristic of some elements in Hellenistic Judaism.[56]

Significant though these differences may be, however, the resemblances are no less striking.[57] There are Hebraisms in both letters; for example φθορᾷ φθαρήσονται, καταρᾶς τέκνα, and τοὺς ὀπίσω σαρκὸς πορενομένους in 2 Peter.[58] The habit of verbal repetition[59] is a marked

---

[50] *The Primitive Christian Catechism*, 1940.
[51] *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 1946.
[52] *Testimonies*, 1916.
[53] *According to the Scriptures*, 1952, pp. 28ff., though his view has been challenged in M. *Hooker's Jesus and the Servant*, 1959, pp. 21ff., in favour of Harris' position.
[54] *Sources of the Synoptic Gospels* II (Ed. H. Chadwick), 1957.
[55] As against F. W. Beare, I assume the Petrine authorship of, Peter, together with the Fathers and most British commentators. For the latest survey of the evidence, see A. F. Walls' Introduction to A. M. Stibbs' *The First Epistle of Peter*, 1957.
[56] Bigg, *op. cit*., p. 227, quoting Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*.
[57] For a list of the most striking similarities, see B. Weiss, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 266.
[58] For further examples, see Chaine, *op. cit*., p. 18.
[59] Bigg, *op. cit*., p. 226, gives a long list which could be considerably extended.

[p.12]

feature of both works, and this is the very element which would remain constant through the employment of different amanuenses for the two letters.

For those who set much store by linguistic statistics the following figures will be of interest. Of the 543 words in 1 Peter, 63 are New Testament *hapax legomena*; of the 399 words used in 2 Peter there are 57 *hapax legomena.* Indeed, peculiar, striking words are a feature of both Epistles. Of the words which appear in no other Greek writer except later ecclesiastical authors, there are nine in 1 Peter and five in 2 Peter. Twenty-seven words in 1 Peter, 24 in 2 Peter are not found in any classical author. 1 Peter has 33 words in common with the LXX, 2 Peter has 24. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find even an opponent of Petrine authorship like J. B. Mayor confessing that 'there is not that chasm between 1 and 2 Peter which some would try to make out. In the use of the article, for instance, they resemble each other more than any other book of the N.T.'[60] In other words, Bernhard Weiss' judgment that 'the Second Epistle of Peter is allied to no New Testament writing more closely than to his First'[61] is justified on a purely linguistic analysis. Indeed we can go further. A. E. Simms, in a fascinating article in the *Expositor* for 1898, has shown that 1 and 2 Peter are as close on the score of words used as 1 Timothy and Titus, where not even Harrison[62] is inclined to doubt unity of authorship. 1 Timothy has 537 words, Titus 399; they have 161 in common. 1 Peter has 543, 1 Peter 399; they have 153 in common. And yet the conclusion of a common authorship is most commonly resisted on linguistic grounds!

Furthermore, there are some interesting parallels in the second letter to the use of language in the first. Thus the ἰσότιμος of i. I and the τίμια of i. 4 recall the significant use of τίμιος in 1 Peter i. 7, 19. The salutation of i. 2, unparalleled elsewhere in the New Testament, corresponds exactly with that of the First Epistle. This would be very natural in the same author, but it is, perhaps, surprising that an imitator should copy this slavishly—and nothing else. In i. 3 ἀρετή, a rare New Testament word, recalls its similar application to God Himself in 1 Peter ii. 9. Both uses are probably derived from the LXX of Isaiah xliii. 21. ἐπόμται in i. 16 corresponds to the ἐπόμτέυοντες of 1 Peter ii. 12, while the verb ἀγαπάζειν (2 Pet. ii. 1) reminds them of the price paid for their redemption in 1 Peter i. 18.[63] The ἀσελγεία of ii. 7 occurred also in 1 Peter iv. 3, and the κατάρας τέκνα of ii. 14 contrasts with the τέκνα ὑπακοῆς of 1 Peter i. 14, as does the ἀκαταπαύστους of ii. 14 with the πέπαυται ἁμαρτίας of 1 Peter iv. 1. In iii. 3, ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτων

[p.13]

τῶν ἡμερῶν recalls ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων in 1 Peter i. 20, and in iii. 14 the exhortation to be found ἄσπιλοι καὶ ἀμώμητοι suggests Peter's characteristic *imitatio Christi,* Christ being the ἀμνοῦ ἀμώμου καὶ ἀσπίλου of 1 Peter i. 19. These are only random examples of the extreme similarity in turn of phrase and allusion which exists between the two Epistles. They may, of course, be the subtle touches of the *falsarius,* but his apparent clumsiness and lack of

[60] *Op. cit*., p. civ.
[61] *Op. cit*., p. 165.
[62] P. N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles*, 1921, passim.
[63] ἐλυτρώθητε... τῷ τιμίῳ αἵματι... χρίστου.

concern for verisimilitude displayed elsewhere in the Epistle hardly predispose us to expect such artistry.[64]

In addition to the linguistic affinities between 1 and 2 Peter, there seem to be as good parallels between 2 Peter and the supposedly Petrine speeches in Acts as Selwyn adduces for the First Epistle.[65] λαγχάνειν (i. 1) for instance, is only used in this sense in Acts i. 17, in the course of Peter's address to the eleven. The uncommon New Testament word εὐσέβεια; used four times in 2 Peter, occurs in Peter's speech in Acts iii. 12, while the μισθὸν ἀδικίας (ii. 15) is found on his lips in Acts i. 18. Five times in the Epistle the Lord Jesus is called σωτήρ; it is as such that Peter proclaimed Him before the Sanhedrin (Acts v. 31). In Acts iii. 19-21 Peter seems to teach that the longed for new order ἀποκατάστάσις πάντων) to be inaugurated by the parousia is dependent to some extent upon the repentance of men.[66] This furnishes a remarkable parallel of thought with 2 Peter iii. 9, 12, 15, where the delay in the parousia is attributed to God's long-suffering in waiting for men to repent;[67] it is to be the goal of the Christian's hope and endeavour *(i.e.* by bringing others to repentance).[68] The similarity is most evident in the Greek.

It may, of course, be fanciful, but is there a possible reference to his old trade of fisherman in his repeated use of δελεάζω (ii. 14, 18), elsewhere found only once in the New Testament, or to his denial in ii. 1 where he speaks of the false teachers as τὸν δεσπότην ἀρνούμενοι? That word 'deny' must have been full of solemn memories to Peter. It is perhaps significant that twice in a speech in Acts (iii. 13, 14)

[p.14]

he is represented as using it against the unbelieving Jews. And what are we to make of Συμεὼν Πέτρος (i. 1)? The combination of the two names appears to be a primitive trait, found only in Matthew xvi. 16, Luke v. 8, and John *passim.* Even more significant is the original Hebrew form of the word Συμεὼν, preserved elsewhere in the New Testament only in Acts xv. 14 where it is used by James of Peter. This form of the name is either a genuine Hebraism used by Peter himself, or else a brilliant archaism without parallel in the writings of the second century, including the whole corpus of pseudo-Petrine literature.[69]

Such considerations are necessarily inconclusive, and incapable of irrefutable demonstration. Each critic must assess the importance of these apparent allusions and coincidences for himself. But let us at least try to place ourselves in the writer's place, and ask ourselves how an apostle might be expected to have written, and how a *falsarius* would probably have

---

[64] G. H. Boobyer, in the *T. W. Manson Memorial Volume*, 1958, has discovered far more elaborate affinities, which he prefers to regard as deliberate borrowings from 1 Peter by the author of 2 Peter. It has yet to be shown that the second century produced minds capable of producing such brilliant pseudepigrapha as Ephesians, the Pastorals and 2 Peter, so different in tone, in thought, and in quality from the undoubted works of the second century. How these brilliant falsarii managed to retain their anonymity, in a generally undistinguished age, is a mystery.

[65] *Op. cit*., pp. 33ff.

[66] μετανοήσατε... ὅπως ἂν ἔλθωσι καιροὶ ἀναψύξευς ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ Κυρίου, καὶ ἀποστέιλη... χριστὸν.

[67] μακροθυμεῖ εἰς ὑμας, μὴ βουλόμενος τινας ἀπολέσθαι, ἀλλὰ πάντας εἰς μετάνοιαν χωρῆσαι.

[68] προσδοκῶντας καὶ σπεύδοντας τὴν παρουσίαν... καὶ τὴν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν μακροθυμίαν σωτηρίαν ἡγεῖσθε

[69] The Graecized form Σίμων is, of course, found in *The Gospel according to the Hebrews, The Gospel of Peter, The Clementine Homilies,* etc.; but never in the second century does the primitive Συμεὼν appear.

expressed himself. To quote a satirical passage from Dr. Bigg, 'If a writer declares his identity in the address only of an epistle, as in 1 Peter, the address is treated as a forged addition. If he hints in an unmistakable way who he is, as in the case of the Gospel of John, his words are regarded as so suspicious, and even indecent, that he must be a forger. But if he does both, as in the case of 2 Peter, the case against him is treated as irrefutable'.[70] Certainly this is an unsatisfactory way in which to treat literary problems, especially in view of the evidence we have considered; linguistic analysis, affinities with 1 Peter, and, perhaps, with the 'Petrine' speeches in Acts, by no means tell against Peter's authorship of the second letter, though the differences in style and vocabulary from 1 Peter suggest that a different scribe was employed.

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN I AND 2 PETER: DOCTRINE

Many, including J. B. Mayor and R. Bultmann, are prepared to grant that the variance of diction between the two Epistles is not fatal to unity of authorship, but maintain that the doctrine of 2 Peter is irreconcilable with that of x Peter, and is typical of the subapostolic age. Most modern critics regard this as the heart of the case against the letter, though it is interesting to recall that the ancients never held this against 2 Peter. The objection on this ground is, therefore, quite new.

It has been, however, very forcefully argued, particularly by Bultmann[71] and Käsemann.[72] Bultmann finds too great an emphasis on

[p.15]

human effort, and too little on the Holy Spirit. He regards the thought of 2 Peter as inferior to that displayed in the first letter. He regards the absence of any fresh allusions to gospel history as suspicious, which is an interesting contrast to the usual critical procedure, where fancied allusions to or developments of gospel themes are regarded as being the marks of the *falsarius* seeking to commend himself. Bultmann further asserts that while there is no emphasis on γνῶσις in 1 Peter (he forgets 1 Pet. iii. 7), the cross, the resurrection, ascension, doctrine of the Church as the true Israel, baptism and prayer (all common themes in 1 Peter) find no place in the second Epistle. Käsemann would urge that (i) the Christology of 2 Peter is degenerate; Christ is a cult-deity rather than a redeemer; (ii) the eschatology is only Christian in that Christ is judge; otherwise it is related to man, not to God; it is individualistic not corporate, and speaks of the deliverance of the just and the damnation of the unjust; (iii) the ethics are unsatisfactory; the major evil seems not to be self-affirmation but imprisonment in the world of sense. The ideal held out seems not to be membership of the heavenly kingdom but apotheosis. In fact, he thinks, despite its emphasis on εὐσέβεια, 2 Peter is dualistic. He sees in the reference to the transfiguration an illustration, and indeed a confirmation, of the author's hope for apotheosis. In the references to Old Testament prophecy (i. 19-21) he detects the Catholic reaction to Montanism in its insistence on testing the living voice of prophecy not merely by the Scriptures, but by the Scriptures as interpreted by the Church—for even the false teachers could find Scriptures to support them if they relied on 'private interpretation'.

Further, he senses a second-century milieu for i. 9; 'cleansing from his old sins' is supposed to reflect their attitude to post-baptismal sin, in striking contrast to the newness of salvation that

---

[70] *Op. cit.,* p. 232.
[71] *Introduction to the New Testament, in Loc.*
[72] *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche,* 1952.

we find in Paul's writings. In considering chapter iii, Käsemann thinks that the author loses the entire tension of the New Testament eschatological hope by explaining the delay in the parousia as due to the relativity of time. Thus the urgency and finality of God's judgment are lost.

In seeking to assess these varied arguments, it will be convenient to group them under four subjects; the doctrine of God, of salvation, of the last things, and of Christian behaviour. The question of γνῶσις and of the transfiguration will be considered later.

God is depicted in this Epistle, as uniformly in the Bible, in His character of holy love. The universe began (iii. 5) and will end (iii. 12) with the one, everlasting God (iii. 8). He is holy and will punish sin (ii. 4ff.), but, as the Old Testament scriptures promised with increasing clarity (i. 19-21), He has taken the initiative in Salvation, and chooses, calls (i. 10) and takes men into His family (i. 1-4). He demands of them a holy life (iii. 14), but undertakes to deliver them from tempta-

[p.16]

tion (ii. 9). The reverential periphrases for God (θεία, δύναμις, θεία φύσις, μεγαλοπρεπής, δόξα, etc.) which he affects are as similar in content as they are different in form from the language used in 1 Peter, and may well have been conditioned by the situation confronting him as he wrote. Lack of awe and reverence for God was at the heart of the antinomian attitude he was attacking. This may well account for his predicating ἅγιος of the prophets (iii. 2) whose authority they flouted; of the ἐντολή whose injunctions they spurned (ii. 21), and of the ἀναστροφή (iii. 11) enjoined on the faithful, since their way of life was the reverse of holy.

The Christology of 2 Peter, which Käsemann calls degenerate, is certainly a very exalted one. It is in relation to Him alone that God is called Father[73] (i. 17). He is the δεσπότης of His followers (ii. 1) whose ἐντολή they must obey (ii. 21). Far from being a mere cult-deity, He is shown in this Epistle as the very essence of Christianity;[74] it is through the knowledge of Him that men enter the way of salvation (ii. 20), and it is a deepened knowledge of Him that produces the fruit of Christian character (i. 8) and brings the grace of God into men's lives (i. 2). It is to Him that the concluding doxology is addressed (iii. 18). Though associated repeatedly with God (i. 1, iii. 10, 12), He is in some sense subordinate to the Father (i. 17) from whom He received honour and glory. Is not this the same Jesus that we know from the Gospels and Epistles? True, the resurrection and ascension are not directly mentioned, but they are presupposed in the living Christ with whom this letter confronts us, and in the title κύριος, uniformly applied to Him by the early Christians in recognition of His ascension (i Cor. xvi. 22; Acts ii. 36; Phil. ii. 9-11). If the emphasis is different from that of 1 Peter, it is because the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the letter is different. The 'mockers' scoffed at His parousia, broke His commandments, and by their behaviour effectively denied both His lordship and His saving power (iii. 2, 3). But it is not possible to drive a wedge between the Christology of the two Epistles without attenuating the language of 1 Peter about Christ as the subject of the

---

[73] See H. F. D. Sparks' essay 'The Doctrine of Divine Fatherhood in the Gospels' in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lighifoot,* pp. 241ff. for the evidence that this and not the 'general Fatherhood of God' was the teaching of Jesus.

[74] This emphasis on Christ at the centre of Christianity, which begins and develops in the knowledge of Him, seems to have been a constant element in the various streams of early Christianity. See Jn. xvii. 3; Phil. iii. 8, 10; Acts viii. 5, 35.

gospel, the Saviour, the chief Shepherd, the Lord, and the One to whom the doxology could be addressed.[75]

It is indeed surprising that the Holy Spirit should only once be mentioned, and then only in connection with the inspiration of Scripture (i. 21)—in itself, incidentally, an interesting link with

[p.17]

1 Peter i. 11, 12. The clue, however, is probably to be found in pastoral requirements. The antinomian did not need to be reminded of the power of the Holy Spirit to sanctify him; he needed rather to be awakened to the need for holiness and the part human effort plays in it. So the writer concentrates on exhortation, and scathing denunciation of sin. The problem Paul faced in writing to the Galatians was precisely the opposite. Here were professed Christians so given over to self-effort that they needed to be reminded that holiness of character could be implanted only by the Spirit of God; hence the emphasis on His work throughout that Epistle. In both cases the subject matter is occasioned by the needs of the recipients. It is too often forgotten that these early Christian Epistles are missionary letters written to meet what was often a very urgent need, and not theological treatises penned with meticulous care in the quiet of the study.

As for the soteriology of the Epistle, it is perfectly true that the cross is not central, as it is in the first Epistle, but it is present none the less. It is implicit in the title σωτήρ so frequently applied to Jesus. It is referred to in the 'purging of sins' (i. 9). It is vividly recalled in the phrase τὸν ἀγοράσαντα δεσπότην ἀρνούμενοι. (ii. 1), for it was, of course, through His death on the cross that Christ ransomed us, and thus earned the sovereign right of δεσπότης to our obedience. It is in 1 Peter i. 18 that we are told that our ransom was achieved at no less a cost than the 'precious blood of Christ', and in that passage as here, the doctrine of His sacrifice is made the plea for man's obedience.[76] In 1 Peter the cross is explicitly invoked as the ground of the Christian's hope (ii. 24, iii. 18) and the example for his life (ii. 21, iii. 12, 13). In 2 Peter, where his recipients needed neither assurance nor comfort, the cross is implicit, but it remains as the basis for his denunciation of antinomianism; to go on in sin is to forget the cleansing once received,[77] and to deny the Lord who bought them.

Closely allied to soteriology is eschatology, which occupies a prominent place in this Epistle as a sanction on the lawlessness of the false teachers, and an encouragement to holy living for the others. It is hard to understand the view that the eschatology of the letter is individualistic not corporate when iii. 9 speaks of the Lord's will that

[p.18]

---

[75] See Selwyn, *op. cit.,* pp. 247ff.

[76] Similar language is found in 1 Cor. vi. 20, vii. 23: ἠγοράσθητε τιμῆς. The whole concept goes back to Mk. x. 45.

[77] There is no warrant for Käsemann's assumption that this phrase in i. 9 refers to post-baptismal sin and reflects a second-century viewpoint. The initial cleansing of Christians through repentance—faith—baptism, and their status henceforth as clean despite their sins (1 Cor. vii. 11; *cf.* Jn. xv. 3, xiii. 10), justified despite their failures (Rom. v. 1, viii. 1; Acts xiii. 39) is a characteristic paradox of New Testament teaching. Paul's application of this truth is the exhortation to the faithful to become what they are. Peter's application of the same truth is the warning to backsliders not to forget what they are.

all should come to repentance, and iii. 13 looks for 'new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness'. It is even harder to understand what complaint can be found with the concept of the deliverance of the just and the damnation of the unjust at the parousia. This solemn teaching about the final judgment is an ineluctible strand in all biblical eschatology. (*Cf.* Mt. xxv. 31ff., xxiv. 37-40; 2 Thes.. i. 7-10; Jn. iii. 36; etc.)

A more serious objection is that 2 Peter loses the entire tension of the New Testament eschatological hope by making God outside time (iii. 8). But this is no device for explaining away the delay in the parousia. It is an elementary recognition of the eternity of God; He is not limited by time, which is a category of His creation. On the contrary, 2 Peter's eschatology appears, upon close examination, to bear the marks of primitive teaching, according to which we are living in the last days, which were inaugurated by the incarnation, passion and resurrection of Jesus, and will be consummated at the parousia. The tension between realized and unrealized eschatology is the very nerve of the New Testament concept of ἐλπίς. And it is just this tension between the 'now' and the 'then', between the 'have' and the 'have not', which is so live and real in 2 Peter. Christians are already 'partakers of the divine nature' (i. 4), yet they have still to enter upon 'the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour' (i. 11). They have escaped 'the corruption that is in the world' (i. 4; *cf.* ii. 18), yet for this very reason (αὐτό τοῦτο, i. 5) they are to 'add to their faith virtue' (i. 5ff.), and become what, in Christ, they already are; so that they may be 'neither barren nor unfruitful' at the parousia (i. 8). 'Elect' already, they must nevertheless 'make their calling and election sure' (i. 10). What is this if not the typical New Testament tension between the church and the world, between the present and the future, the ideal and the phenomenal, faith and works, in fact between the Christian *simul justus et peccator*?

Not only is the primitive. eschatological tension alive in 2 Peter, but the parousia hope is adduced, as in the writings of Paul and John, for practical and not speculative reasons. It always carries the corollary of godly living, the theological 'therefore'. The three ethical inferences regularly drawn by the New Testament writers from their confident expectation of Christ's return, namely holiness, watchfulness, and Christian service, are all here, The day of the Lord will be sudden (iii. 10, 11); therefore watch[78] (iii. 12). The day of the Lord can be hastened (iii. 12, where the AV 'hasting unto' is a quite unjustified translation of σπεύδοντας) by Christian missionary activity, just as

[p.19]

Peter said it could be in Acts iii. 19-21: 'Repent ye therefore, ... that so (ὅπως ἄν) there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send the Christ' (RV).[79] And the day of the Lord is the supreme sanction for holy living: 'wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found... without spot, and blameless' (iii. 14). As 1 John put it: 'Little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.... Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself' (1 Jn. ii. 28, iii. 3). This corresponds exactly to the parousia hope in 2 Peter. The return of Christ is certain, though we do not know when it will be. It has these practical implications, which we have been considering, and in the meantime

[78] The influence of this κλέπτης metaphor of our Lord's (Mt. xxiv. 42-44) had great influence in the early Church, and balanced the tendency towards expecting an immediate return of Christ (1 Thes. v. 2; Rev. iii. 3, xvi. 15).

[79] This remarkable coincidence of thought furnishes an argument of considerable weight in favour of the genuineness of the Epistle. The idea doubtless derives from the *verbum Christi* in Mk. xiii. 10.

we live ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν (iii. 3),[80] in between the first and second advents of Jesus Christ, In all these three points the second-century church lost contact with the apostolic message.

Not only is the teaching about the parousia hope primitive, so also is the language in which it is described. This is in striking contrast to the second-century practice, as is apparent from a comparison of 2 Peter iii. 7ff. and its reserve about the accompaniments of the second coming, with the fulsome curiosity arid macabre and gruesome detail of the Apocalypse of Peter. What is even more suggestive of a first-century origin for 2 Peter is the quotation and application of Psalm xc. 4 in iii. 8. This verse became in the second century the proof text of Chiliasm, which was almost regarded as a sign of Christian orthodoxy from the time of the writing of Revelation to Irenaeus' day, and even later.[81] It would have been all but impossible for a second-century writer to use this verse without commenting on it at all, either in favour of or against the Chiliast hope. 2 Clement, Methodius, Justin and Barnabas are full of it. But 2 Peter gives the quotation no Chiliast turn at all.[82] Indeed he connects it not with the duration of the millennium but with time of the parousia, and this seems to be a strong argument for the great antiquity of the Epistle.

We have now to consider the objections to the authenticity of the Epistle based upon its ethics. Bultmann admits that it goes far beyond legalistic moralism; the ethical imperative is securely founded in the indicative, as in the Pauline Epistles. In both writers relationship to Christ is the essential prerequisite to Christian behaviour. We have

[p.20]

already considered his objection that there is too much emphasis on σπουδή and not enough on the work of the Holy Spirit. It is most probably conditioned by the specific needs of those to whom the letter was written, and was designed to bring home to men tainted with antinomianism the responsibility of Christian warfare, and the challenge to Christian holiness. His further objection, that there is too great an emphasis on future salvation to the neglect of the present possession, is a direct contradiction of Käsemann's complaint that 2 Peter speaks of the saved condition of the citizen of heaven. Both critics have grasped one element in the truth; salvation *is* future—but it is proleptically enjoyed in the present. Both have failed to come to terms with an eschatology that is at once realized and future. There is little more substance in Kãsemann's typically German contention that there is nothing in the Epistle about justification by faith. πίστις is used, he thinks, not of an act of trust, but of the saved condition of the citizen of heaven, given to the apostles and others in the fairness of God;[83] thus it is almost the mere intellectual assent to a doctrinal formula. But this is a quite gratuitous assumption. πίστις is declared in 2 Peter i. 1 to be the fundamental element in Christian experience; it is the gift of God (i. 1, 4; *cf.* Eph. ii. 8) not only to the first generation disciple but to others (i. 1; *cf.* Jn. xvii. 20). If it is not to be 'barren nor unfruitful' (i. 8) it must show itself as the root of fruits of character (i. 5, 7). As Boobyer has pointed out, the treatment of faith in 2 Peter is closely linked with that in 1 Peter i. 5, 7, and it is thoroughly intelligible

[80] *Cf.* 1 Pet. i. 20; Heb. i. 2, etc.
[81] See Justin, *Trypho* 80-82.
[82] It is more accurate to regard 2 Peter's reference as an inference from Ps. xc. 4 rather than a quotation of it. The psalm contrasts the eternity of God with the brevity of human life. 2 Peter contrasts the eternity of God with the impatience of human speculations. God is *patiens quia aeternus.*
[83] ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ θεοῦ (i. 1 reflects a non-Pauline use of δικαιοσύνῃ, he claims. But why should Peter be bound by the linguistic usage of Paul?

that the same author should go on to deal with the moral virtues that genuine faith produces, in contrast to the antinomianism of the heretics. Faith without works is, according to James, dead (Jas. ii. 20); according to 2 Peter it is blind (i. 9). Boohyer concludes,[84] '2 Peter was dealing with dangerous opponents whose misuse of Paul's doctrine of faith and works made it imperative for him to emphasise that faith unsupported by good works is of no avail.'[85]

But Käsemann's greatest difficulty over the ethics of 2 Peter lies in its dualism, a gnostic characteristic. The major evil appears to the writer to be not self-affirmation, but imprisonment in the world of sense. The Christian ideal appears to be apotheosis, not membership of the heavenly kingdom. These are acute observations, and contain much of value. There *is* a dualism here, as there is in the teachings of Jesus (in, for instance, the parables of the drag-net, wheat and tares,

[p.21]

sheep and goats, and *e.g.* Mt. xxiii. 33; Mk. ix. 43-48), in the writings of Paul (*e.g.* 2 Cor. iv. 4) and constantly in the writings of John (*e.g.* 1 Jn. ii. 15). But in each case it is an ethical and not a metaphysical dualism. Exactly the same is true of 2 Peter. Nowhere is there a hint of the gnostic metaphysical dualism, however strongly the ethical dualism is portrayed. A good deal of misunderstanding has arisen over 2 Peter's use of 'the world'. Nowhere does he suggest that he means 'the natural world', 'the world of sense'. His usage is consistent; it is identical with that of John, and signifies society alienated from God. True, that state of alienation produces the fruit of corruption, of lust run riot (i. 4, ii. 20), but it is the state of separation from God itself with which he is primarily concerned, and it is this state which is left behind when a man comes to a knowledge of the Saviour (i. 3, 'through the knowledge of him', ii. 20). The behaviour of the antinomians is proof that despite their claim to 'know him', they have not escaped the corruptions of the world; that despite their vaunted 'liberty' they are still in that bondage to sin which characterizes the world (*cf.* Jn. viii. 34). In short, 2 Peter could well have written 1 John v. 19: 'We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the arms of the wicked one'(ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ). The world and the church are essentially incompatible, and the mistake of the heretics was their attempt to combine them.

It is unjust to charge 2 Peter with making apotheosis the Christian aim, rather than the enjoyment of the heavenly kingdom. That corporate goal of Christian aspiration is spoken of in i. 11 and iii. 13. 'Apotheosis'—a non-Petrine word—(if we must use the word: never is it used in this Epistle), is regarded by our author not as the goal but as the starting-point of Christian experience. He uses it to describe that union with Christ which John calls 'birth from above' (Jn. iii. 3), or 'becoming a son of God' (Jn. i. 12). Peter uses the same imagery of the new birth (1 Pet. i. 23), as does James (i. 18). Paul speaks of the new creation rather than the new birth; it takes place when a man leaves the world for the church (2 Cor. v. 17) and thus becomes adopted into God's family (Rom. viii. 15). The Christian's body is the home of Christ (Eph. iii. 17; Rom. viii. 9, 10), or the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. vi. 19). Being made 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. i. 4) is but a similar expression for this indispensable entry into a right relationship with God. A possible explanation for the

---

[84] *Op*. c*it,* p.41.

[85] It seems that they claimed Pauline support for their divorce of faith and works (iii. 16). This calumny has always been cast on Paul's doctrine of justification, and he was as keen to refute the charge as he was to maintain the doctrine (Rom. iii. 8, vi. 1ff.).

particular turn of phrase may be sought in the claims of the false teachers. A similar thing has happened in 1 John.[86]

[p.22]

It would appear that these discrepancies in doctrine between 1 and 2 Peter are more fancied than real. And, in any case, the argument is a precarious one. To expect, with Bultmann, a slavish repetition of the main themes of 1 Peter is quite unreasonable in view of the totally different situations to which the two letters were addressed. 1 Peter envisages Christians facing persecution, 2 Peter Christians infected with false teaching of a gnostic flavour. The key-note of 1 Peter is, therefore, hope; of 2 Peter, knowledge. 1 Peter directs the thoughts of the recipients to the great events of the life of Christ, for their emulation and comfort; 2 Peter dwells on the great hope of the return of Christ, for their warning and challenge. The difference in tone may, perhaps, be reflected in the use of different words for the return of Christ, a prominent theme in both letters. In 1 Peter ἀποκάλυψις is used; the removal of the veil that hides from their sight the Lord who is spiritually with them all the time. In 2 Peter παρουσία is used; the sudden appearance of the absent king among the disobedient servants. The one word breathes encouragement for the afflicted; the other, warning for the scoffers.[87] 1 Peter has much to say about the atonement and the church; it urges patience, humility, loyalty. 2 Peter is very different. Holiness of life is the dominant need; the past judgment of God in the Old Testament days and the coming judgment of God at the return of Christ support the strong challenge of the letter, where the gentle pleas of 1 Peter would have been out of place. The writer's mind is full of the dangers of false teaching.[88] The full knowledge of Jesus Christ is the best safeguard against these dangers, and it is this, accordingly, which is stressed, in contrast to the hope which pervades 1 Peter. Both letters are, in fact, largely determined as regards their subject matter by the pastoral needs which evoked them, and herein lies the difference in doctrinal emphasis between them.

Nevertheless despite the very different *Sitz-im-Leben* of the two letters, we have seen that a remarkable degree of similarity subsists between them. In both the second coming is a major theme; in both the Old Testament is inspired by the Holy Ghost, and prophecy is *a* divine foretelling of the gospel events (2 Pet. i. 16-21; 1 Pet. i. 10-12). In both we find the doctrine of election (2 Pet. i. 10; 1 Pet. i. 2) and the new birth (2 Pet. i. 4; 1 Pet. i. 23) with the need for holiness (2 Pet. i. 5ff.; 1 Pet. ii. 11ff.). In both the μακροθυμία of God is related to His judgment, in 1 Peter (iii. 20) by water, and in 2 Peter (iii. 20) by fire. Both draw attention to the warnings of the deluge (2 Pet. iii. 6; 1 Pet. iii. 20), to Noah (2 Pet. ii. 5; 1 Pet. iii. 20) and the fewness of the saved (2 Pet. ii. 5; 1 Pet. iii. 20). Both Epistles regard the history and privileges of God's ancient people as typical of the Christian

[p.23]

dispensation (2 Pet. ii. 1, 5, 6, 7, 15; 1 Pet. ii. 9). Both recognize the solidarity between the old and the new Israel (2 Pet. iii. 2; 1 Pet. i. 12, ii. 9). The sinful angels of 2 Peter ii. 4 in pits (or chains) of darkness remind us of the spirits in prison of 1 Peter iii. 19. These latter had Jesus as their preacher, κήρυξ Noah was a preacher of righteousness, κήρυξ δικαιοσύνης, to the

---

[86] See C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (Moffatt New Testament Commentary), p. xix, where John appears to take over, fill with new meaning, and fling back at the false teachers catch phrases such as 'heavenly seed', 'abide in God', 'be born of God', etc.

[87] See Mt. xxiv. 42.45 for the germ of this contrast.

[88] Hence the emphasis on ἀρετή and εὐσέβεια.

men of his day. And if the author of 2 Peter does not dwell on those facts of the earthly life of Jesus referred to in the first Epistle, as an imitator might well have done, he does draw attention to another, the transfiguration. If he does not often quote verbally from the Old Testament, he directs his readers' attention to the 'word of prophecy' and his thoughts are full of Old Testament examples, such as Noah, Lot, Sodom, Balaam. It would seem, in fact, that the ancients were not unreasonable in their failure to discern any fatal difference in doctrine between the first and second Epistles of Peter.

VARIOUS ANACHRONISMS AND ALLIED PROBLEMS

There remain several objections to the authenticity of 2 Peter which are often considered decisive: the Hellenistic colour of the letter, the reference to the destruction of the world by fire, the nature of the false teaching, the account of the transfiguration, and the 'slipping of the mask' in various places, notably in iii. 4 and iii. 16.

The Hellenistic cast of the letter, and in particular the reference to a Christian as being a 'partaker of the divine nature', occasions today less surprise than once it did. The Decree of Stratonicea in Caria[89] to the honour of Zeus and Hecate, which is dated AD 22, has many parallels to the language of 2 Peter,[90] among them τὰς τῆς θείας δυνάμεως ἀρετάς (*cf.* 2 Pet. i. 3). Philo, writing at much the same time, speaks of men as λογίκης κοινώνοι φυσέως.[91] Stobaeus uses the phrase ἐντὸς εἰναι της φυσέως τῆς θέιας,[92] and Josephus θέιας μετεσχηκέναι φύσεως.[93] From this it is apparent that such language is early; it was current coin in the middle of the first century AD, especially in thoughtful circles, and could well have been used by Peter. There is no reason to believe that he necessarily understood a great deal about the philosophical overtones and associations of the terms, any more than present day pulpit references to atomic power or the quantum theory require us to suppose that the preacher has extensive acquaintance with

[p.24]

physical science. It is merely the language of the day.[94] And if Paul used the philosophical concepts of the heavenly man and the *pleroma;* if he took over, disinfected, and threw back at the heretics such words as μεμύημαι, πρωτότοκος, καρποφορεῖν καὶ αὐξάνειν and the γινώσκω root, it is difficult to see why Peter could not have done the same with such words as ἐπίγινωις, ἐποπταί, εὐσέβεια, θέια δύναμις and θέια φύσις. That this may have been his method is rendered all the more probable in view of his adaptation of a Stoic προκοπή in i. 5-7. Our writer is doing no more than John,[95] with his heavenly seed, his birth from above, his

---

[89] Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East,* p. 360. For the text see *C.I.G.* II. 2715.

[90] Notably τῆς τῶν κυρίου αἰωνίου ἄρχης (2 Pet. i. 11), πᾶσαν σπουδὴν εἰσφέρεσθαι (2 Pet. i. 5), εὐσέβειαν (2 Pet. i. 3).

[91] *De Somn.* 1.28. He also says οὐκ ἂν ἐπετόλμησε τοσοῦτον ἀναδράμειν ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς ὡς ἀντιλάβεσθαι θεοῦ φυσέως, ἐι μὴ αὐτός ὁ θεός ἀνέσπασεν αὐτὸν προς ἑαυτον. For further examples, see Mayor, *op. cit.,* p. li.

[92] *Ecl*., p. 222.

[93] *Contra Apionem* 1.5.

[94] Such language is common in Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus and others of the Fathers. It is using the language of Athens to commend the message of Jerusalem. For New Testament parallels *cf.* 1 Jn. i..5; Heb. vi. 4.

[95] The most recent work on the Fourth Gospel has reacted against the tendency to seek parallels for such language in the *Hermetica* of the second century: the writings of Qumran provide far closer parallels, and a far more satisfactory cultural background against which to understand the Johannine message.

logos-Christology, and abiding in God. He is putting the traditional Christian doctrine into contemporary Greek dress, without in any way committing himself to the associations those words carried with them in certain circles. He adapts the terms, and charges them with new meaning. What is very significant in i. 3, 4 is the challenge he makes to Stoic and Platonic suppositions. With a brilliant *para prosdokian* he grants that we are partakers of the divine nature, but not by φύσις or by νόμος as their rival schools maintained, but by χάρις, by the precious gospel promises offered to us by God. Furthermore the aorist of ἀποφυγόντες (i. 4) reminds us that we are not moving in the realms of Platonism but of Christianity. We are made partakers of the divine nature not *in* escaping the natural world of time and sense, hut *after* escaping the world in the sense of mankind in rebellion against God.

Then the reference to the ἐκπύρωσις of the world is held to tell against the authenticity of the letter. The origin of the idea is certainly Persian. We find it also in Plato's *Timaeus*.[96] The Stoics held it, but they taught that after the destruction by fire, the world would return to its previous state. The Christian view, on the other hand, as prevalent in second-century writers,[97] was similar in so far as it taught the ἐκπύρωσις but widely different in almost every other respect. Unlike the Stoics, they taught that a new heaven and a new earth would replace the old, a cosmos wholly different in quality. The Stoics, in fact, taught a νέος κόσμος, the Christians a καινός κόσμος. As Chaine has put it in his examination of the subject in the *Revue Biblique*,[98] 'La conception

[p.25]

scientifique de la fin du monde est la même, mais la pensée profonde est toute differente. D'un coté on est en presence d'une philosophic pantheistique, et de l'autre des prodromes du jugement divin.' What was the origin of this second-century Christian belief in the destruction of the world by fire is not clear. It was viewed with suspicion by Irenaeus[99] and Origen[100] because of its similarity to the Stoic doctrine and its popularity among heretical circles like the Valentinians. They themselves held to the main stream of Old Testament teaching where the function of fire is to refine rather than to destroy. It is certain that the destruction of the world by fire was not an article of faith among Jews of the first century, for Philo argues strongly against it. It is not to be found in the Old Testament, nor elsewhere in the New. It is difficult to see how such a doctrine, which was regarded with suspicion because of its use in pagan[101] and heretical circles, came nevertheless to be widely held, unless it was supported by some apostolic document. I follow Bigg in thinking it possible that the distinctively Christian belief in the destruction of the 'world by fire may have arisen ultimately from this Epistle.[102]

---

[96] *Timaeus* 22 d.
[97] Celsus says Christians generally believed in a world conflagration (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.21, 79). See Justin, *Apology* 2.7.
[98] Joseph Chaine, *R.B*., 1937.
[99] *Adv. Haer.* 1.7.1.
[100] *Contra Celsum* 4.11, 79.
[101] It is, of course, true that this ἐκπύρωσις is taught in the Sibylline Oracles (4.172-177) and in the prophecies of Hystaspes. The latter appear to date from the mid-second century (see Clem. *Strom.* 6.5.43) and are Christian writings. The dating of the Sibylline Oracles is difficult, but the Fourth Oracle appears to date from near the end of the first century, and has been influenced by both Jewish and Christian interpolations. The idea of a cosmic conflagration also appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls (*cf.* 1*QH* 3.29-36, 6.25ff.) and shows strong signs of Zoroastrian influence.
[102] *Op. cit.,* p. 215.

We must glance briefly at the nature of the false teaching which is attacked throughout the Epistle. It is quite unnecessary to attempt to distinguish between the scoffers and the libertines; indeed iii. 3 makes it clear that the same class of people are meant. They were false teachers, whose antinomianism of life made it impossible for them to believe in the judgment implicit in the second advent. It is equally unnecessary to come down to the second century to find similar examples of libertinage, disbelief in the parousia, emphasis on γνῶσις and sectarianism. Indeed, there seem good reasons why the heresy here envisaged is not late. For one thing, the gnosticism of the second century, based as it was on a thorough-going dualism, led to the twin but opposite extremes of lasciviousness and asceticism. If the body was evil, it was, of course, immaterial to the salvation of the eternal soul, whether one indulged it or sought to mortify it. But no hint of such an attitude to the body appears in 2 Peter, where we have lasciviousness without accompanying asceticism. We seem to be moving in the early days when the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith was twisted to mean 'let us sin, that grace may abound'. It is interesting that the false

[p.26]

teachers are expressly charged with misrepresenting Paul (iii. 16)—no new charge in the early Church (see Rom. iii. 8, vi. 1, 2). In this connection it is worth remarking that there is no suggestion in our Epistle of attributing the creation of the world to some Demiurge, and this would have been difficult to avoid in the third chapter if the writer had indeed been attacking gnostic dualists.

Furthermore, gnosticism in the second century seems to have been fairly clearly defined in certain specific schools, such as the Carpocratians, Severians, Archontics and Valentinians. These schools each had their own characteristics. Were 2 Peter of late date, we might reasonably have expected a reference to the distinctive tenets of the heretics he is attacking. As it is, we find nothing of the sort; not even the suggestion of 'genealogies' and the Old Testament as being the work of the Demiurge, which were common stock among gnostics of various sorts. Instead, so vague are the references to the false teaching in this letter, that it is hard to form any clear picture of the tenets of those he is attacking. This state of affairs would have been hard to envisage in the second century.

It is not difficult to find parallels for the false teaching quite early in the apostolic age. Something of the sort was to be found at Corinth in the fifties. There, as here, a movement had gained foothold which advocated an advanced sexual programme based on promises of liberty (2 Pet. ii. 19; 1 Cor. vi. 12, 13). The Lord who had bought His servants was, in practice, denied (2 Pet. ii. 1; 1 Cor. vi. 18-20). The same movement, laying emphasis on the emancipating effects of γνῶσις, justified participation in heathen cultus (2 Pet. ii. 10; 1 Cor. viii), abused the ἀγαπάι (2 Pet. ii. 13; 1 Cor. xi. 21), fostered separatist tendencies (2 Pet. ii. 1; 1 Cor. xi. 18ff.), and, most significant of all, encouraged disbelief in the future element in the kingdom of God, the parousia and the resurrection of the body (2 Pet. iii. 4; 1 Cor. xv. 12); and this, of course, led naturally to licence (2 Pet. iii. 3; 1 Cor. xv. 32). A similar sort of heresy is found in the Asian churches, advocated by the Nicolaitans (Rev. ii, iii). While much about these sectaries is obscure, it is at least plain that sexual immorality, participation in idolatrous feasts, γνῶσις and separatism were their main characteristics, coupled with political co-operation with Rome. The occurrence of the name of Balaam in Revelation ii. 14, 2 Peter ii. 15, Jude 11 strongly suggests some such connection. In short, there is no antinomian movement known to us from the second century which more closely tallies with that of 2 Peter than the Nicolaitans of Revelation and the libertines of Corinth.

The transfiguration story, alluded to in i. 16-18, has been castigated as an example of the author attempting to commend himself as the apostle. But why should an imitator choose this, of all the incidents

[p.27]

in Jesus' life? If, however, Peter is the author, and the *Sitz-im-Leben* is at all similar to that of, Corinthians, the answer is not difficult. He could not appeal to the resurrection of Jesus as the earnest of the parousia, because it was in principle empirically unverifiable. So he grounds the parousia hope in the transfiguration, an experience in the life of the incarnate Lord for which he could vouch because he was there. And this was a foretaste of the second coming. The connection between δύναμις and the second coming to which he draws attention in i. 16 is preserved in Matthew xxiv. 30. It would seem that here, as in the first Epistle, Peter appeals to personal experience (1 Pet. v. 1) and the testimony of Scripture.(1 Pet. i. 10-12) as the twin grounds upon which he bases the reliability of his message.[103] As ever in the primitive church, the solidarity between apostle and prophet, just as between old church and new (ii. 1; *cf*. 1 Pet. ii. 9), is stressed; and this is an emphasis that quickly disintegrated in the second century under the twin stresses of Marcionism and Montanism.

The transfiguration account here appears to be independent of the synoptic versions, and could quite well be primitive. Peter omits ἀκόυετε αὐτοῦ (possibly a gloss in the synoptics from the LXX of Dt. xviii. 15) and also what Some critics have regarded as the 'mythical element' in the synoptic account, namely the allusions to Moses and Elias—they would actually have been very appropriate in this context which so Stresses the solidarity of the old covenant and the new. The order of words is different from the Gospel record; the emphatic ἐγώ is unparalleled in the synoptics, and the εἰς ὃν ἐυδόκησα finds only a partial parallel in Matthew, and none at all in Luke and Mark. The twice repeated φωνὴ ἐνεχθεῖσα suggests that it probably found a place in the original oral tradition of the incident, but has not survived in the Gospels. Thus the Petrine story appears to be independent, and not inferior to the Gospel accounts. ἅγιον ὄρος is unlikely to reflect second-century usage, as has been alleged. Indeed, there is no tradition whatsoever in the second century of the location of the 'holy hill' of the transfiguration. If it were a mark of the *falsarius* one might have expected it to be more specifically indicated, for had not the hill of the sermon or of the ascension as good a title to the adjective ἅγιος? In point of fact, the attribute 'holy' is often predicated in the Bible of places where God has revealed Himself. Hence it is applied to Zion (Ps. ii. 6, iii. 4, etc.) and Sinai (Ex. xv. 13). It springs, I feel, not from a second-century veneration of a spot which we have no evidence that they did venerate, but from an eyewitness musing retrospectively upon the place where Jesus manifested His glory.

[p.28]

At this point a word must be said about i. 14. It would appear to be a clear reference to our Lord's prophecy in John xxi. 18 and xiii. 36, and perfectly natural in Peter, whom of course it directly concerned. However, commentators by no means always understand it as such. Boobyer, for example, sees the strength of the evidence pointing to the connection with John

[103] He regards Scripture as even more sure than personal experience: this is how we should construe βεβαιότερον (i. 19). Had he meant that Scripture is confirmed by their experience on the mount of transfiguration, he would have written βεβαιωθέντα.

xxi, but rejects it, because he knows of no link between John's Gospel and 2 Peter, and doubts the possibility of such a link since John does not record the transfiguration. If, however, Peter wrote 2 Peter, the difficulty vanishes, and the origin of the allusion is to be found in a *verbum Christi* rather than in the highly artificial literary history (largely in the Apocrypha) which Boobyer postulates.[104] Other commentators see in this allusion a *vaticinium ex eventu,* proof positive of the hand of a *falsarius.* How, it is asked, could Peter know that his death was imminent? The saying in the fourth Gospel says nothing about the timing of his death, except that it would be when he was old. But as he grew older, he would, of course, have realized that it grew nearer, and could quite well have anticipated it as 'soon'. But it is by no means certain that ταχινή means 'soon'. Zahn[105] has given sound reasons for believing that it means 'sudden' in this context, as it unquestionably does in ii. i. Now, if the Johannine tradition is even approximately true, Peter is promised a violent death when he grows old. It seems to be to the suddenness of his departure that he here alludes, and it is this that makes him seriously consider the preservation of his κήρυγμα (i. 15). Indeed, there is reason to think that in this reserved allusion we have the fountain-head of the Peter—Mark relationship so widely attested in the second century, especially as Irenaeus,[106] in discussing it, preserves the same rare absolute use of ἔξοδος to mean death that we have in this passage. This consideration, combined with the probable date of Mark's Gospel in the mid-sixties, renders it plausible that here we have the origin both of the tradition concerning Peter's literary relationship with Mark, and also of the whole prolific family of pseudo-Petrine literature. The apostle had promised something more. There were not lacking those determined to supply it.

There remain various passages where scholars think, they can detect the 'slipping of the mask' by the *falsarius.* These we must consider in turn. Sometimes the advent of the false teachers is spoken of as future (ii. 1, iii. 3), sometimes as already present (ii. 11f., 17f., 20, iii. 5). Is

[p.29]

this an example of the writer finding prophecy too difficult an art to sustain, and lapsing into the present tense as he thinks of his own day? Such could be the explanation, but it need not necessarily be. A similar phenomenon is noticeable in 2 Timothy where false teaching and living is spoken of in the present tense in i. 15, ii. 18, 25, and iii. 5 (which refers to false teachers as present which were regarded as future at the beginning of the sentence, iii. 1!), and in the future tense in ii. 16, 17, iii. 2ff., 13, iv. 3, 4.[107]

Again, the reference to the day dawning, and the day star arising in your hearts (i. 19) might suggest that the writer is spiritualizing away the parousia, and reducing it from the cosmic to the personal level.[108] In view of his consistent treatment of the second coming throughout the

---

[104] Boobyer, *Manson Memorial Volume,* p. 50, recalls Moses' anticipation of his death (Dt. xxix-xxxiii) and his injunction to hold fast to his teaching. This incident received much attention: it was alluded to in *Assumption of Moses* i. 10ff., *Testament of Levi* i.15, *2 Baruch* 78. 2-7, etc., and the tradition was known to Josephus, from whom he thinks both the author of John and 2 Peter derived their material.

[105] *Introduction to the New Testament, in loc.*

[106] *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1.

[107] It is possible that the combination of present and future is intended to stress the correspondence between prophecy and event. In both cases where the future is used it is in immediate juxtaposition to references to the prophets (i. 19-ii. 3, 4) and the Old Testament era. Just as the prophets foretold there would be, false teachers are at work amongst the church.

[108] In line with the Oxyrhynchus papyri explanation of the kingdom (Lk. xvii. 21) being ἐντὸς ὑμῶν in the sense of being in your hearts.

rest of the letter, however, it is somewhat unlikely that he is introducing a contradictory conception of it here, and attempting to meet halfway those who were trying to demythologize the parousia. The author displays no desire whatever to conciliate the false teachers, and speaks in the most realist terms about the personal return of Christ. Much more probable is the suggestion[109] that ἡμέρα is nothing more than the development of the simile begun ὡς λύχνῳ, and has no relationship to the second coming whatsoever. The meaning of the phrase would then be 'Stick close to the prophetic word, as to a light in a murky place, until daylight dawn in your hearts, and true understanding dawns upon you'. This would be a most appropriate injunction to such very partially-enlightened Christians as the recipients of this letter had shown themselves to be, and would be in line with the ideas of 2 Corinthians iv. 4 and Ephesians i. 18.

But the arguments of this type most frequently used against the Petrine authorship of the Epistle are based upon the third chapter, where, it is urged, we are presented with two most glaring anachronisms in the reference to the fathers as having fallen asleep, and to Paul's letters as Scripture.

In iii. 4 the scoffers claim that 'since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation'. These

[p.30]

'fathers' are assumed to be Christian 'fathers', the first generation of Christians, which has passed on. Even if this assumption were correct, it would not necessitate a late date. As early as the first of the New Testament writings, the state of those who died before the parousia was a burning topic. Peter's words may be an echo of 1 Thessalonians iv. 17 or 1 Corinthians xv. 6, 52, where this problem is faced. But, quite apart from the fact that there is no instance in the New Testament where οἱ πατέρες is applied to Christian leaders of the first generation, the context here makes it abundantly plain that the 'fathers' are the Old Testament 'fathers', as in Hebrews i. 1, Romans ix. 5, Acts iii. 13. For all things are said by the scoffers to continue as they were from the beginning of the creation (not of the new dispensation), and the following two verses make the allusion to Genesis indisputable. There is, therefore, no slipping of the mask here, but a perfectly natural reference to the world which has been undisturbed since the days of the patriarchs, and is as yet unchanged by the parousia.

We turn, finally, to the difficulties of iii. 15, 16, which are held in most quarters to tell decisively against the authenticity of 2 Peter. There is no real difficulty in supposing Peter to have read the majority of Paul's letters within a few months of their being written; indeed it is quite probable, in view of their common friend in Silvanus, their common spheres of operations, such as Corinth and Asia Minor, and the ease of communication afforded by the Roman roads. Nor are we surprised to find Peter referring to Paul as 'our beloved brother' unless we are unduly influenced by the Tübingen dichotomy between them.[110] It is certainly

---

[109] Made by the Rev. H. de Waal in the unpublished Proceedings of Professor Moule's Cambridge New Testament Seminar, 1958. The absence of the definite article before ἡμέρα supports this explanation, and the personal orientation of the verses—ταὶς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε, ἔχομεν, etc., suggest that it is *their condition* (of ignorance and susceptibility to false teaching) and not a *universal situation* (*i.e.* the parousia) that he is concerned with.

[110] For a valuable exposure of the extent to which New Testament scholarship is still unconsciously influenced by the historical reconstruction of the Tübingen School, while the literary hypotheses upon which it was based are universally abandoned, see Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind,* chapter 3.

hard to think of a second-century writer penning such a description. Views about Paul were very definite in the second century; and a *falsarius* would either have thought of him as 'that holy apostle St. Paul', or else as 'that false apostle, Paul'. The real difficulty is to imagine Peter classing Paul's letters with τὰς λοιπὰς γραφάς. At least it is a difficulty to those who do not take seriously the apostolic claim to a unique authority; to those who think that the apostles threw off their ideas in casual letters, which they had no idea that the recipients would treasure and value' equally with the Old Testament scriptures. But Paul's own claims are very different. He insists that his message is not the word of men but the word of God (1 Thes. ii. 13). So far from regarding his letters as mere *obiter dicta,* he directs the Colossians both to read it *in church* and then forward it to Laodicea (Col. iv. 16). To the Thessalonians he says that rejection of his teaching is to involve excommunication (2 Thes. iii. 14; *cf.* 1 Tim. vi. 3, 5). In 1 Corinthians

[p.31]

ii. 16 he claims the very mind of Christ, and insists that not merely his doctrine but the words in which it is couched are inspired by the Holy Spirit (ii. 13). In 1 Corinthians vii, where he is customarily represented as distinguishing between the importance of his teaching and that of Jesus, he exclaims 'And thus I ordain (διατάσσομαι) in all the churches' (1 Cor. vii. 17). He is the ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, the plenipotentiary representative of Jesus. His authority, therefore, is as his Lord's. That is why he can say 'If any of you think himself to be spiritual, let him recognize that what I write to you is the commandment of the Lord. But if any man recognize this not, *he is not recognized*[111] (*sc.* by God)' (1 Cor. xiv. 37-39). No wonder that this claim was too strong meat for the majority of the second-century scribes; the words of Paul are the words of the Lord.[112]

This is how the apostles viewed[113] their authority, and as we shall see,[114] this is how the early subapostolic church viewed it, too. How, then, can we assert categorically that Peter could not have put Paul's letters alongside the other scriptures? The transition was doubtless eased by the Jewish recognition of further inspired books under the title αἱ γραφάι. during the last few centuries BC after the formal 'canon' of Torah and Prophets had been accepted as complete. For the writer of 2 Peter, the term ἡ γραφή denotes writings of men in touch with God, ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι (i. 21). He consistently correlates apostles and prophets—both are led by the Holy Spirit. In chapter i the apostolic testimony to the divine voice, and the divine voice through the Old Testament scriptures, are regarded in the same light. In chapter ii. 1ff. the false teachers are accused of wresting the Old Testament; in chapter iii of wresting Paul. This equation of the Old Testament prophet with the New Testament apostle as the very mouthpiece (*cf.* 1 Pet. iv. 11) of the Lord, is precisely what we find in the first Epistle. The prophets (1 Pet. i. 11, 12) were inspired by the Spirit of Christ; their writings, though possessed of an immediate relevance, had a *sensus plenior,* which was only realized in Christ.

---

[111] εἰ δέ τις ἀγνοεῖται.

[112] This is increasingly widely recognized; it is brought out in F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*; the article ἀπόστολος in Kittel's *Wörterbuch*; N. Geldenhuys, *Supreme Authority;* and O. Cullman's essay on 'The Tradition' in *The Early Church.*

[113] This claim is made not only by Peter and Paul, but also by John. See 1 Jn. i. 1-5; 2 Jn. 10 (whose adherence to apostolic doctrine is made the condition of fellowship), and Revelation *pnssim,* especially xxi. 14, where the walls of the heavenly city have twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles. It is on the basis of this authoritative position that John can proceed to write xxii. 18, 19, the passage that claims finality for the apostolic message enshrined in his book. The claim of the apostles rests upon such *verba Christi* as Mt. x. 40; Jn. xx. 21.

[114] See p. 32, n. 2.

And, says Peter, 'it was for us that they ministered the things that are now reported to you by them that have preached the gospel to you with the

[p.32]

Holy Ghost sent down from heaven'. How can one deny the equal applicability of the term γραφή to prophetic and apostolic writers when the ultimate authorship of God's Spirit is claimed for both? Peter, certainly, was not disposed to do so. There is nothing in the doctrine of scripture to be found in the second letter which could not have been written by the author of the first.

THE PROBLEM OF PSEUDEPIGRAPHY

In conclusion, some consideration must be given to the modern view that pseudepigraphy was regarded in the early Church as a thoroughly legitimate literary device, and carried no moral stigma. Indeed, according to Harrison,[115] a *falsarius* of this type 'was not conscious of misrepresenting the apostle in any way; he was not consciously deceiving anybody; it is not, indeed, necessary to suppose that he did deceive anybody'. Such letters 'went out for what they were, and the warm appreciation with which the best minds in the church received them would not be tinged with any misunderstanding as to the way in which they had been written'. If this assessment were wholly true, and if nobody was taken in by the device, it is hard to see why it was adopted at all. It may, perhaps, hold good in the case of apocalyptic literature. Books like *The Assumption of Moses, The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and *The Book of Enoch* flourished in the intertestamental period, and were held in considerable regard. Jude, for example, quotes *Enoch* in verse 9 and possibly in verse 16, though it is difficult to be certain whether he accepted it himself, or whether his use of it is an *ad hominem* argument against sectaries who were familar with and favoured it. Whether or not such apocalyptic writings were regarded as the actual work of those whose names they bear; whether they were thought to embody the secret tradition of these traditional teachers; or whether the practice was recognized as a literary fiction, is not clear. In any case, the situation is quite different when the names of the apostles are used by almost contemporary authors who were writing not apocalyptic but epistles. Whatever canons of poetry may have tolerated pseudepigraphic apocalyptic writings, using the names of mythical or long-dead national heroes, cannot necessarily be assumed to apply to prose works using the names of very recent letter-writers who were recognized by the subapostolic church as possessing a unique authority.[116]

---

[115] P. N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles,* p. 12.

[116] The extent of this recognition of the uniqueness of the apostolic witness is frequently minimized, but it is clearly presupposed by the early gnostic appeal to esoteric apostolic tradition, and it is explicitly stated in the catholic writers. Clement of Rome (*c.* 42) writes 'Christ is from God, and the apostles from Christ', and he is careful to distinguish between the apostles Peter and Paul, and Apollos, 'a man approved in their sight' (*c.* 47). Ignatius draws the same distinction between his position and that of the apostles—and Ignatius was not one to underrate the episcopal office—'I do not command you, like Peter and Paul; they were apostles', he wrote to the *Romans* (*c.* 4). Or again, to the *Trallians* (c.3) 'I should not order you, as though I were an apostle'. Polycarp writes (*c.* 6), 'Let us so serve Jesus with all reverence and fear as He Himself gave commandment and the apostles who preached the gospel to us, and the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord'. This distinction between the apostolic age and his own, of which he is so aware, is underlined by his copious quotations from the great majority of the books of the New Testament, as, indeed, Clement had done before him. Both apply the formula 'It says' or 'The Scripture says' to New Testament as well as Old Testament writings (see Clement *c.* 36, a running commentary on Heb. i; *c.* 30 where 1 Pet. v. 5 or *c.* 34 where 1 Cor. ii. 9 is quoted as Scripture; and *c.* 23 where we find an almost certain conflation of Jas. i. 8 with 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4. Polycarp (*c.* 12) cites the whole of Eph. iv. 26 as Scripture, though only half of the verse is found in the Old Testament—Ps. iv.

[p.33]

And such evidence as we have suggests strongly that this toleration was not afforded, and that the early Church was strict in rejecting pseudepigrapha.

In the mid-first century we find Paul inveighing against the practice in the Thessalonian correspondence (2 Thes. ii. 2, iii. 17). By no stretch of the imagination could he be regarded as condoning what Harrison claims were 'the very different standards of literary proprietorship which prevailed in those days'.[117]

Then in the second century the author of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*[118] was deposed from his office as presbyter for this very fault. He was, Tertullian tells us,[119] convicted of passing off his work under Paul's name,[120] and thus 'augmenting Paul's fame from his own store'. He protested that he had done this in all good faith, and that he had acted from the highest of motives 'from love of Paul'. But he was, none the less, unfrocked. Certainly it is true that Tertullian is concerned to discourage the practice of women conferring baptism, for which the heretics sought authority in this spurious work; and to this extent it could be argued that its author was condemned, not for pseudepigraphy, but for the doctrine of the book. But while it would have suited Tertullian's argument at this point to have been able to say that the author of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* was deposed on account

[p.34]

of heretical teaching,[121] it is important to notice that he cannot do so. He offers no hint that the book was heretical in doctrine, but merely rejects it as an authority on a matter of discipline because it was a spurious book. Indeed, the very points which the heretics in Tertullian's time argued were in their favour—Thecla's self-baptism and work as a teacher—were justified by Basil and others of the Fathers and were allowed to remain in the book, which enjoyed an astonishing circulation and exerted a widespread influence for many centuries. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Tertullian represents the author as punished, not for any heterodoxy contained in the book, but for fraud, for attempting to pass it off as apostolic.[122] For *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* is not heretical. True, it has Encratite tendencies, but these were widespread in the second century, and certainly would not have offended Tertullian! Indeed, as M. R. James has observed,[123] the author takes great pains to have his work regarded as a continuation of the canonical Acts; he fills in some of the gaps in the later life of Paul, and he aims at verisimilitude by using personnel derived from the Pauline Epistles, such as Demas,

---

4). The author of the *Epistle of Barnabas,* similarly, deprecates his own position, and in combining a verse of Genesis with one from Romans, appears to accord Paul the status of Scripture (xiii. 7). This is surprising only to those who do not take seriously the New Testament doctrine of the unique function of the apostles (see pp. 30ff.). In short, as Jülicher put it, 'The saying of Serapion, *c.* 200 AD, "We accept the apostles like the Lord Himself" could have been written 100 years earlier.' It is this atmosphere of reverence towards the apostles in the second century that makes it hard to suppose that writings falsely attributed to them were received with equanimity.

[117] *Op. cit.,* p. 12.

[118] More properly known as the *Acta Pauli.* See A. Souter, *J. T.S.* xxv, p. 292.

[119] *De Baptismo* 17.

[120] *Paulo perperam adscripta.*

[121] This view was held by Lipsius (*Acta Apocrypha,* p. xcv) and Mayor (*op. cit.,* p. cxxv), but it is quite unwarranted by the text of Tertullian.

[122] See Gwynn's magisterial study 'Thecla' in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography,* vol. 4, 1887.

[123] *J.T.S.* VI, p. 244.

Hermogenes, Titus. This is precisely the sort of procedure which, we are told, was adopted by the author of 2 Peter. We are assured that it was regarded with acquiescence by the Christians of the day, who had not attained to our standards in matters of plagiarism and false attribution. We are encouraged to believe that, providing the content was orthodox and the motive for false ascription a noble one, such as *pietas* towards a revered teacher, the work was cheerfully accepted in orthodox circles. Surely this incident recorded by Tertullian shows us that such was not the case. The author of these *Acts,* like the author of 2 Peter, was orthodox; he, like the author of 2 Peter, made strenuous efforts after verisimilitude. He was, furthermore, inflamed with the noblest *pietas,* love of Paul, and it was with the best of intentions that he wrote. Yet he was deposed—for forgery. We have here an invaluable insight into the attitude towards pseudepigraphy adopted in at least some influential orthodox[124] circles towards the end of the second century.

Origen's remarks about the Epistle to the Hebrews have sometimes been adduced to support the thesis that, in the judgment of the late-second-century church, a pupil's work may be regarded as his master's. But Origen's words do not warrant such a conclusion. He says, 'The diction is that of someone who recorded from memory the Apostle's

[p.35]

teaching, and, as it were, illustrated with a brief commentary the sayings of his master. If then, any church hold this Epistle to be Paul's, we cannot find fault with it for so doing; for it was not without good reason that men of old time have handed it down as Paul's.'[125] It is certain that Hebrews became accepted at Rome in the fourth century on the ground of its supposed Pauline authorship; *i.e.* it was authorship, and not merely content, that fixed it firmly in the canon at that time. But Rome had recognized and used it in the very early days, as is clear from I Clement and Hermas, who make no mention of its authorship. This omission may have been accidental; it may have been because the content of *Hebrews* was so manifestly in line with the apostolic message, as Origen suggested;[126] or it may have been because it was known to have come from the Pauline circle, and to have been written by an 'apostolic man'. In any case, no valid argument concerning *pseudonymous* writings can be based upon the *anonymous* Epistle to the Hebrews.

The remaining insight we have into the way in which the subapostolic Church regarded pseudepigraphy is afforded by the story about Serapion.[127] He was 8ishop of Antioch about A1 i8o and wrote a book entitled *Concerning the so-called Gospel according to Peter*.[128] It appears that this *Gospel of Peter* was being read in the small Christian community at Rhosse.[129] When he first came among them, he supposed that they were all orthodox, and, as he had not read the *Gospel* put forward by them in the name of Peter, he said, 'If this is the only thing that seems to be a ground of bickering[130] among you, let it be read'. Having later discovered that its popularity was due to its docetic Christology,[131] he carefully read the book and then forbade its use. He says, 'For our part, brethren, we receive both Peter and the other

---

[124] Tertullian had not become a Montanist when he wrote the *De Baptismo.*
[125] Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.25.
[126] 'It will be obvious that the ideas of the Epistle are admirable, and not inferior to any of the books acknowledged to be apostolic'. Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.25.
[127] Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.12.
[128] Περὶ τοῦ λεγομένου κατὰ Πέτρον εὐαγγελίου.
[129] Plutarch calls it Orossus.
[130] μικποψυχίαν παρέχειν.
[131] Though the extent of its docetism seems to have been slight. See *J.T.S.* vol. II, p. 1.

apostles as Christ,[132] but the writings which falsely bear their names (φευδεπίγραφα) we reject, as men of experience (ἐυπέιροι), knowing that such were not handed down to us'. We should not be too ready to blame his earlier tacit permission for the *Gospel* to be read, since it does not appear to have supplanted, but merely supplemented the 'canonical' writings. But in Serapion's subsequent action several points are noteworthy. In the first place, the book proved on examination to be a pseudepigraph, and *because it was such,* he rejected it. Because he accepted the writings of the apostles as the words of Christ, he had no

[p.36]

hesitation in banning this book when it was shown not to derive from the apostolic circle. Even the refutation of it which he wrote was entitled not *Concerning the Gospel of Peter,* but *Concerning the so-called Gospel according to Peter.*

Secondly, he claimed to have had considerable experience of literature of this sort; he was *empeiros,* that is to say, his critical faculties were by no means so dull as those of second-century theologians are commonly supposed to have been. Thirdly, he was careful to enquire into the history of the *Gospel.* He took pains to examine the traditions adduced in support of the authenticity of this document which claimed apostolic origin; and in this instance he found them wanting. He was not to be imposed on by a fraud of recent date.

These factors, combined with the suspicions aroused by its popularity in docetic circles, led him to ban the book. As in the case of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla,* we notice the great care exercised by second-century scholars to preserve the apostolic deposit both from pollution (by heretical writings) and from accretion (by pseudonymous writings).

It was in an atmosphere such as this that we are asked to assume 2 Peter originated. It is generally thought to have been published in the second quarter of the second century, and yet it was apparently accepted by Clement of Alexandria, Aristides, and Origen. In view of the attitude towards pseudepigraphy adopted by leaders in the early Church,[133] it seems unlikely, to say the least, that men of this calibre would have accepted the Epistle if they thought it was a forgery. It is difficult to avoid the word 'forgery' if 2 Peter is not genuine. J. D. Deniston, a specialist in this type of literature, wrote in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*:[134] 'Forgeries differ from other pseudepigrapha in two respects. With a true forgery the attribution must be made by the author himself; and there must be the intention to deceive.'

The author of 2 Peter claims not merely the name Peter, but Συμέων; he uses words like δεχεάξω and ἀρνοῦμαι. which suggest, and incidents like the transfiguration and the relationship with Paul which compel us to believe, that he intended himself to be regarded as Peter. The letter is either a genuine one or an impudent forgery. This is the issue which was thrashed out in the Councils of the fourth century. They may, of course, have been wrong as to its genuineness; in which case they would have been the first to demand its excision from the canon as

---

[132] Note the typical second-century conviction that the apostles and their writings share the unique revelatory significance of Christ Himself.

[133] Jerome (*De Vir.* III. 21) and Eusebius (*H.E.* 4.7) mention Agrippa Castor, an early second-century apologist, who 'composed a most satisfactory refutation of Basilides' in which he noticed his commentaries on the Gospels, and exposed the claims of certain suppositious prophets (ἀνύπαρκτοι), whom he had used to support his doctrines. Here is further evidence of careful criticism early in the second century. It would not have been easy to pass off forgeries claiming to be authoritative, even at that early date.

[134] *s.v.* 'Forgeries, Literary'. *O.C.D.,* p. 367.

νόθον, spurious. But their judgment has yet to be shown to be in error.

There were, of course, plenty of forgeries circu1ating in the second century. But these normally had well-defined characteristics. They attempted to claim apostolic authority for heretical teaching, or to embody the secret tradition of the apostle concerned, or else to provide a romance, a sort of religious novel, or, perhaps, to answer some of the questions posed by a third generation's insatiable curiosity. Thus *The Gospel of Peter* is written in the interests of a docetic Christology. *The Apocalypse of Peter* professes to add to our knowledge about the future life and draws its imagery from Virgil and Homer. Others of these pseudepigrapha seem, like the *Periodoi Petrou* (if we may judge from the scanty remains), to have been pure romance. But into which of these categories shall we place 2 Peter?[135] It exhibits no proven anachronisms in language or doctrine; it has no heterodox axe to grind; it tells us nothing we did not already know about Peter; it is not, like the *pseudo-Clementines,* a polemic, nor, like the *Praedicatio Petri,* a fairy tale. It bears no resemblance to any of the undoubted Petrine forgeries of the second century;[136] it makes no mention of burning second-century problems like chiliasm, gnosticism, developed theosophical systems, or church leadership. As a pseudepigraph it has no satisfactory *raison d'être.* The case against the Epistle does not, in fact, appear by any means compelling. It cannot be shown conclusively that Peter was the author; but it has yet to be shown convincingly that he was not.

This lecture was delivered in Cambridge on July 8th, 1960, at a meeting convened by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research. It was published by The Tyndale Press in 1961 and subsequently reprinted 1968.

Prepared for the web by Robert I Bradshaw in March 2005. Reproduced by permission of the author.

http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/

---

[135] Bigg's comments are worth reproducing (*op. cit.,* p. 233): 'The pseudonymous writers of the early church, from the nature of things, were never either intelligent or critical. They did not attempt to qualify themselves for their task by an accurate study of the past; indeed, it would not have been possible for them to do so. There is hardly an instance of a really good pseudo-antique except the *Platonic Letters,* the work of an otiose scholar, who had thoroughly studied his exemplar, and could reproduce his style and circumstances to a nicety. But what was difficult for an Athenian professor with a library at his command, was quite beyond the capabilities of an uneducated Christian. Such a man does not comprehend even the simplest rules of the forger's art. We may apply to him the words of Persius "Digitum exsere, peccas".'

[136] Indeed it may well account for them. See p. 28.