

II. AUTHORSHIP¹

The very great weight of patristic evidence in favour of Petrine authorship and the absence of any dissentient voice raises so strong a presupposition in favour of the correctness of the claims of the epistle to be Peter's own work that it is surprising that this has been questioned. Yet because some scholars either have wholly rejected the genuineness of the opening address or else have proposed various theories to get over the difficulties which are thought to be involved in the traditional view, it will be necessary to examine these difficulties. The main objections will first be given and then the possible answers to these objections from the point of view of Petrine authorship. Finally, certain considerations will be mentioned about the difficulties of alternative theories.

a. The objections to apostolic authorship

(i) *Linguistic and stylistic objections.* That the writer was thoroughly at home in the Greek language is admitted by all. The epistle has a fairly polished style which has been influenced by the Greek of the LXX with which he is intimately acquainted, as is evident not only from his direct citations but also from the many instances where his language is moulded by Old Testament forms. This very fact has proved to some scholars to be a stumbling-block to the acceptance of Petrine authorship. It is suggested that the writer's acquaintance with the LXX is a literary knowledge and not the kind of knowledge that a practising Jew would possess, for he shows no evidence of his religious inheritance such as Paul so clearly shows. The writer's vocabulary is extensive and varied and his command of Greek syntactical usages not inconsiderable. Indeed, his Greek is smoother than that of Paul, who was highly trained in comparison with Peter. And herein lies the main difficulty.

Can such facility in the Greek language be imagined in a Galilean fisherman, whose native tongue was Aramaic and whose educational background would not dispose towards linguistic ability? Many scholars feel the difficulty so keenly that they answer emphatically in the negative. The incidental description of Peter in Acts 4:13 as 'illiterate' (ἀγράμματος) is claimed to add weight to this objection, although it should be noted that the more probable meaning of this word in the context is 'not formally trained'. In fact, in the traditional allusions to Peter he is depicted as needing an interpreter when addressing people whose mother tongue was Greek. The tradition may, of course, be wrong, but it is strong enough to raise doubts about Peter's facility in the Greek tongue.

(ii) *Historical objections.* A major crux in the attack on Petrine authorship is the historical situation presupposed in the epistle. The author is writing to persecuted Christians (*cf.* 1 Pet. 1:6; 2:12, 15; 4:12, 14–16; 5:8–9), and particularly mentions reproach suffered for the name of Christ. It is therefore supposed that Christianity has now become a crime in itself, as distinct from the mere social nuisance which it was considered to be at an earlier time. This cannot, it is claimed, be outbreaks of mob

¹Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Series taken from jacket., 4th rev. ed., The master reference collection Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996, c1990), 762.

violence, but official organized opposition to Christianity. Yet although the Neronian persecutions were directed against Christians in Rome there is no evidence that such persecution spread to the provinces to which this letter is addressed (i.e. Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia). But if the Neronian persecution is ruled out, the epistle must be dated during either the Domitianic or Trajanic persecutions and in either case this would dispose of apostolic authorship, since Peter, according to tradition, was martyred in the time of Nero.

Moreover, parallels between the situation described in Pliny's correspondence with the Emperor Trajan and that suggested by this epistle lead some scholars to conclude that the same occasion is in mind. Some form of this theory is held by many who dispute the unity of the epistle and who draw attention to the different approach towards persecutions after 4:12 (but see the discussion on the Unity, pp. 788 ff.).

Another objection which may be mentioned here is the want of any known connection of Peter with any of the Asian churches among which the epistle was designed to be circulated. Furthermore, these Gentile districts would more naturally come under the supervision of the apostle Paul, in which case it is thought to be strange to find Peter addressing them after Paul's death, since his ministry was concerned with the circumcision.

A different kind of historical objection is that such a term as 'fellow-elder' (5:1) would not have been used by an apostle. Moreover, the author's claim to be an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ could not have been written by Peter, because he was not present during the whole period of the passion. It is further maintained that an apostolic author such as Peter would have reflected in his writing far more reminiscences of his personal contacts with Jesus, and of his knowledge of the sayings of his Master. But this objection cannot be regarded as serious since the presence of such reminiscences in the case of 2 Peter is regarded by some as an objection against apostolic authorship, and there is no sure canon of criticism which can pronounce on the validity of either.

(iii) Doctrinal objections. Opponents of Petrine authorship place much emphasis on the affinities in thought between this epistle and the Pauline letters. It is maintained that the author has borrowed from some of these, particularly Romans and Ephesians. But even apart from literary connections the author's theological background is so much akin to Paul's that he has been regarded as a member of the school of Paul. Yet how could this have happened to Peter? Some scholars feel that this is too much to ask of the elder apostle, who had never had any close connections with Paul, and who had in fact ranged himself against him.

A corollary to the alleged borrowing from Paul's epistles is the supposed want of any originality in this epistle. In other words it is considered that there is nothing characteristically un-Pauline in it. Even the absence of reference to the question of the law has been regarded as a difficulty in a letter written by the leader of Jewish Christianity. In other words, this difference from Paulinism is rather evidence of Pauline influence than the reverse. Such an objection depends for its weight on the assumption that no apostle of Peter's stamp could have lacked originality. Indeed it assumes that all apostles must have been creative. A different objection of an almost opposite kind is the alleged maturity of the author's thought and its kinship with the Old Roman Creed, in particular the doctrine of the descent into Hades.

When all these objections are cumulatively considered, they will appeal to different minds with different force, but the fact that they have seemed to some scholars sufficiently conclusive against Petrine authorship is reason enough for carefully examining their validity. In considering this, it is as well to recognize that those swayed by these objections generally pay no heed to the external evidence, although they have at times been caused no small embarrassment when they have attempted to explain it.

b. An examination of the objections to apostolic authorship

(i) *Linguistic and stylistic objections.* It is a difficult matter to decide whether any man could or could not attain to fluency in a language other than his own, when so little is known about the personal capacities of the man in question. More stress may have been given to Peter's former occupation of fishing than is really justified, for at the most conservative dating of this epistle an interval of more than thirty years separated Peter the writer from Peter the fisherman, and who can measure what facility he might have achieved over so long a period? Even if Aramaic had been his native tongue, he lived in a bilingual area and would not only have used Greek of a colloquial kind before his Christian ministry, but would regularly have used it in his conversations with Hellenistic Jews, even at Jerusalem or Antioch. Moulton and Howard, in fact, suggest that Peter's Greek may have been better than his Aramaic.

The widespread use of the LXX version by a Palestinian Jew is not extraordinary when he is addressing himself to Gentile areas, for the Greek version of the Scriptures was the Bible of the Gentile churches, and Peter could hardly have been unacquainted with it when working within communities of Hellenistic Jews.

But do the words of Papias about Peter's interpreter being Mark really support the contention that Peter's Greek was so poor that he needed the services of an interpreter? Clearly the words are intended to authenticate Mark's gospel, and it is straining the language to suppose that Papias meant to imply Peter's linguistic inability.

We must conclude, therefore, that it cannot be asserted that Peter *could* not have written this epistle on the grounds of language and style. At most we may note its extraordinary character, and at least we may maintain that no conclusive barrier to apostolic authorship exists on this score. Yet in order to meet the difficulty felt by many scholars, an alternative view has been postulated suggesting that an amanuensis, Silas, has either himself been responsible for the stylistic characteristics, or was in fact the author of the epistle, writing under Peter's direction.

We are left in no doubt that Peter employed Silas as his scribe or secretary, for he tells us so in 5:12. But did this amount to co-authorship, and if it did not, what degree of latitude did Peter allow Silas in expressing his thoughts? It is well known that ancient secretaries were at times allowed considerable freedom in writing down their master's ideas. Indeed, in certain cases the secretary would be given only the barest outline of the contents and would then produce the letter in conformity with the outline. The master would, of course, check over the finished product and it would be assumed that the contents were authenticated by him. Although the language would be that of the amanuensis the fundamental ideas would be those of the master.

In the case of 1 Peter, Silas would well fill the bill, for if he is to be identified with the Silas of Acts he was well acquainted with Paul and was, in fact, associated with him in the address of both the Thessalonian letters. Some have suggested co-authorship with Paul in the production of these letters, and if this is a valid deduction it is not improbable

that a similar combination with Peter resulted in the production of 1 Peter. Selwyn has strongly argued for this probability on the grounds of close connection of thought and language between 1 Peter, the Thessalonian epistles and the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15, of which Silas was one of the bearers. But similarities of thought are capable of various explanations and the employment of expressions in common use by different authors may be as reasonable an explanation as common authorship (or co-authorship). Nevertheless, where a name is known to have been associated with different groups of writings similarity may be not insignificant. The Silas (Silvanus) hypothesis cannot, therefore be ruled out, and forms a reasonable alternative for those whose main objection to Petrine authorship is linguistic.

Certain criticisms of this amanuensis hypothesis should not go unnoticed. It is strongly rejected by F. W. Beare, who calls it 'a device of desperation'. To him the teaching of the epistle, with its lack of stress on the work of the Spirit, is proof enough against the theory of early authorship. But one's estimate of any hypothesis is partly conditioned by presuppositions, and those for whom the other difficulties loom large will not be disposed to dispense with the linguistic problem on such a basis as an amanuensis theory. Another problem is the absence of any salutation from Silas, which would be strange indeed if he were the secretary or part-composer (*cf.* Rom. 16:22 where Tertius the scribe sends his own greetings). This suggests that Silas played a far less important part than the amanuensis hypothesis implies. Not only so, but 5:12 would stand as a rather obnoxious piece of self-commendation, unless in fact Peter himself added this conclusion. It is further difficult to imagine that the direct appeal of 5:1 ff. could have been the indirect work of a secretary. The personal authority is so real that it would be necessary to maintain that for this part of the letter the apostle had dictated. It is also significant that the statement in 5:12 which mentions Silas may indicate either the bearer or the secretary and some doubt exists therefore about the method of composition.

Another criticism is based on the fact that Silas was a Jerusalem Christian and would not, therefore, be equipped with Greek as our author clearly was. But there were certainly some Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem, and there is no basis for excluding Silas from their number. Indeed, he may have been chosen for this reason as a delegate to convey the letter of James to Greek-speaking churches of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:33 ff.).

To sum up, the amanuensis theory has nothing to disprove it, but neither has it evidence enough to be conclusive about its correctness. If Peter had the help of Silas it would seem improbable, by reason of the whole tone of the letter, that the author allowed too much freedom to his secretary. At least the finished article was given out very definitely as Peter's personal message, invested with his own special authority.

(ii) *Historical objections.* The question of the identification of the persecution reflected in this epistle is crucial to this problem of authorship, as has already been pointed out. But a prior problem is scantiness of adequate data about early persecutions. Much of the weight of objection from an historical point of view has been based on the assumption of general provincial persecution directed against Christians in the reign of Domitian. But this assumption has met with recent suspicion, for there are very few data in support. It is known that Flavius Clemens and Domitilla his wife were persecuted in Rome with one or two others, but there is no more than a strong presumption that this limited persecution was on account of their Christian profession and no evidence at all for

any widespread persecution affecting the provinces named. This makes it impossible to relate our epistle with any certainty to this period.

But assuming some official persecution was either active or imminent in these provinces of Asia Minor, is it still possible that the situation under Trajan may be reflected? The parallels are not as striking as has often been claimed. The name 'Christian' may by that time, and in fact for some time previously, have acquired a technical connotation, but that does not immediately identify 1 Peter 4:14 (being insulted because of the name of Christ) with this situation, for all Christian suffering from the commencement of the church was regarded as 'in the name'. Indeed it was prepared for by our Lord himself. But it should further be remembered that Pliny was requesting an imperial judgment which involved a clarification of the whole position of Christians. Neither Pliny's enquiries nor Trajan's reply suggest that procedure against Christians was a new departure. Moreover, there is no suggestion that the kind of problem confronting Pliny was worldwide, and yet 1 Peter 5:9 shows that the kind of suffering that the Christians were called upon to endure was liable to befall Christians anywhere. Moreover, there is a further difference between Pliny and 1 Peter, for in the former a state of affairs is reflected which is a continuation of a past policy, whereas in the latter a fiery trial seems to be regarded as a new experience (1 Pet. 4:12). To sum up, there is little to commend this identification and it cannot be said to be demanded by the evidence.

But does the Neronian persecution fare any better? It is true that no evidence exists that provincial districts were affected, although Tertullian makes a statement about an *institutum Neronianum* making Christians outlaws, but no trace of this edict remains. Yet Christians were certainly made scapegoats in Rome, and the savage nature of Nero's treatment of them must have been widely known throughout the provinces, where great apprehension must have arisen among the Christians. Peter may well have imagined an extension of the attack and wished to warn the Asian Christians of what was in store for them. There is nothing in the references to persecution in this epistle which rules out this hypothesis.

One other question remains. Are the references to suffering in the epistle sufficiently clear to show that official persecution was in mind? In the first part of the epistle the sufferings are of a general kind (1:6-7; 3:13-17), but in the latter part a fiercer opposition seems to be envisaged (4:12 ff.). Yet there is much to be said for the view that the kind of sufferings are not martyrdoms but reproaches due to the fact that Christians were considered odious in the eyes of their neighbours. The *apologia* (3:15) which they must be prepared to give when necessary is equally well explained by the need for a general Christian testimony as by the need for legal defence. In fact there is little distinctive about the 'persecutions' in 1 Peter which would not apply to the opposition that Christians had to endure from the inception of the church. What Peter is concerned about is to prevent Christians from suffering wrongdoing, but he implies that all other kinds of suffering were designed by God for their welfare. Suffering as a Christian is contrasted with suffering as a murderer, thief, evildoer or busybody (4:15-16), and although the parallelism would appear to demand legal penalties in both cases, yet all that need be implied is some action on the part of magistrates, as for instance happened in the case of Paul's troubles with Silas at Philippi. The fiery trial (πύρωσις) of 4:12 may indicate some form of persecution by incendiarism, in which case the Neronian persecutions would

furnish a striking parallel, or it may be used metaphorically of any trial which has the refining effect of fire.

Although it may be impossible to reach any indisputable conclusion, it may be maintained with confidence that nothing in these references to persecution excludes the possibility that the self-claims of the epistle to be Petrine are genuine.

The problem of Peter writing to districts under Paul's supervision is not a serious one, for if Paul were now dead (as is most generally supposed) there would be no question of a clash of territories. It would not be unnatural, in fact, for the surviving senior apostle to send a message of encouragement to Gentile churches if the apostle to the Gentiles was no longer alive. But it is certainly not established that this epistle was, in fact, directed to Pauline churches. Of the provinces mentioned, Paul worked, as far as we know, only in Galatia and Asia, and even in the northern districts of these he had in all probability not worked. No doubt these areas had been evangelized by converts of Paul, but had probably not known him personally. This may account for the absence of any reference to him, although there is no particular reason why such a reference should have been included in any case. If the tradition of Peter's residence in Rome is correct, too much emphasis must not be laid upon the present enlargement of Peter's commission as a minister to the circumcision.

That Peter would not describe himself as a fellow-elder and would not have claimed to be a witness of Christ's sufferings (5:1) is by no means as self-evident as has been supposed. Quite apart from the fact that the term 'elder' seems to have been used as late as the time of Papias as a description of apostles, and therefore could not have been regarded in the primitive church as an inferior title, the context almost demands such a description for the exhortation of the elders to have its fullest effect. It could be seen as an expression of modesty on the writer's part. It is even more an evidence of his sympathy with his readers. That Peter has not witnessed all of Christ's sufferings would certainly not prevent him from calling himself a witness, and Streeter's objection on this score must be rejected as unworthy of further consideration.

(iii) *Doctrinal objections.* There has been such widespread assumption that Peter's epistle is but an echo of Paulinism that it is refreshing to find an increasing tendency to mark the individual contribution of Peter in the field of New Testament theology. There is both an absence of such Pauline doctrines as justification, law, the new Adam, and the flesh, and the presence of highly characteristic methods in Peter's own presentation, such as his copious use of Old Testament citations and moral codes, his church-consciousness, historic consciousness and Christ-consciousness. Peter's teaching cannot be systematized into a theological school of thought, but there is enough distinctiveness about it to differentiate it from Paul's approach. The most notable contribution is the doctrine of Christ's descent into Hades, which in its focus upon the resurrection of Christ stands in direct relationship to Peter's emphasis on the resurrection in the early Acts speeches. As an eyewitness of the risen Christ Peter would never forget the profound impression which that stupendous event made upon his mind, and the doctrine of the descent, however obscure it is to modern minds, would surely be more natural as a part of primitive reflection upon the significance of the resurrection than as a later development, or as a peculiar fancy of a pseudonymous author.

At the same time, no serious student of Paul and Peter would deny that there is much common ground between them, which cannot wholly be explained by their common

Christian background. Some Pauline influence on Peter's mind is generally supposed to be required by the content of the epistle, but this would be damaging to Petrine authorship only if two presuppositions can be established. First, it must be shown that the New Testament presentation of Peter makes it psychologically inconceivable that he was susceptible to outside influence, particularly from so powerful a personality as Paul. But the data available do not depict Peter as a man of fertile ideas, but as a man of action. Paul's successful resistance to Peter's weak compromise at Antioch is sufficient indication of the direction in which mental influences were likely to flow. Indeed, traces of other New Testament literature such as James and Hebrews are further evidence of the receptive character of this author's mind, and such receptivity is not incompatible with the sympathetic character of Peter. Secondly, it must be shown that Peter and Paul represent divergent tendencies which are unlikely to have permitted close liaison between them. But this is a view of history which is a legacy from the Tubingen school of criticism, with no basis in the New Testament. That both made their own contribution to Christian thought and that Paul's was the greater must be acknowledged, but there is such singular lack of any real divergence between their writings that it is fortuitous either to charge Peter with lack of originality or to regard the epistle as an attempted reconciliation between opposing parties. The plain facts are that both represent vital aspects of early Christianity.

c. Alternative theories

Before a full appraisal of the problem of authorship can be made, it is essential to examine the probabilities of the alternative views of authorship and these will now be listed and their difficulties noted.

(i) *A pseudonymous letter.* This is the most obvious alternative to Petrine authorship and the earliest critics of the traditional view automatically assumed it. Although the notion of the Tubingen school that the letter was a later celebration of the union between rival Pauline and Petrine parties, thus accounting for the Pauline elements under a Petrine pseudonym, has now been completely abandoned, the idea of an intentional pseudonymous letter has been retained, harnessed to other less questionable motives. H. von Soden suggested that Silas issued the letter in the name of Peter who was renowned as a martyr (1 Pet. 5:1 is understood in this sense), in order to encourage Christians who were suffering in the Domitianic persecutions. But this theory may at once be dismissed, for the sudden appearance of a letter from one so long dead would raise immediate suspicions. Moreover, it would be unintelligible why Silas did not then publish the epistle in his own name. A. Jülicher proposed as author an unknown Roman teacher, whose knowledge of Paul eminently fitted him for the task, but who chose Peter's name to invest his work with the authority of the apostle who had suffered beside Paul in Rome, but this is little more conceivable.

It has been supposed that the main difficulties in this older conception of pseudonymity may be removed by the assumption that the pseudonym is not an intentional device to deceive, but merely an acknowledged literary practice. Thus F. W. Beare argues that the readers would well recognize the pseudonym as a harmless device. They would even accept it as evidence that the author was more concerned about his message than about his own authority. Such a notion of pseudonymity as an accepted literary device has commended itself to many modern scholars because it appears to remove any moral stigma from the older hypothesis of wholehearted pseudonymity. For

this reason the description of such a process as 'forgery' is ruled out as unfair and misleading. But to maintain this type of hypothesis at all it is clearly necessary to draw a definite distinction between ancient and modern literary practice, a distinction which in itself is open to criticism.

Basic to this suggestion is the assumption that the author had no intention to deceive. He may be represented, in fact, as a man who, through motives of modesty, uses the convention of pseudonymity to encourage much-harassed Christians in his own time. It would be further necessary to assume that the readers would readily recognize the device and presumably be prepared to overlook any incongruities such as those mentioned above. The readers would in that case even applaud the author's selfless industry. But the crux of the theory is whether pseudonymity of this type was ever an accepted literary convention. Appeal to the mass of early Christian pseudepigrapha can only mislead unless there is careful differentiation of literary types. F. Torm has demonstrated that early Christian epistolary pseudepigrapha were so rare that this cannot possibly be regarded as a conventional form, and, if it was not, the main basis of this type of theory collapses.

Thus when F. W. Beare declares that there 'can be no possible doubt that Peter is a pseudonym', the grounds of his confidence may be challenged. In any case, his own attempt to explain the use of the pseudonym is most unsatisfactory, for he considers it to be a kind of dramatic re-creation of the personality of the pseudonym, comparable with the monologues of Browning. But are we to suppose that an author, under the stresses of an impending and serious persecution, composed a letter with such attention to a purely literary technique? The idea is surely incredible. It will not do to dismiss the whole problem, as Beare does, by merely stating that the question of authorship was unimportant and that it was the teaching that mattered, for it is obvious that the teaching had to be authenticated by an authorized teacher. Clearly, to maintain a theory of literary pseudonymity as distinct from deceptive pseudonymity, it is necessary to provide more adequate parallels and more suitable motives than Beare has been able to do. The difficulty here is the general difficulty of all hypotheses of early Christian epistolary pseudonymity.

F. Torm in his penetrating examination of pseudonymous methods and motives maintains that it is impossible to make out an intelligible case for the use of pseudonymity in 1 Peter. The fact that the author's purpose is encouragement means that personal relations between readers and writer would play a much more important part than apostolic authority. Why did not the author, if not Peter, publish his encouragements in his own name? There seems to be no satisfactory answer to this question. The epistle deals with no heresy which might have required apostolic authority to refute it. Moreover, the mention of Silas and Mark cannot be regarded as part of the pseudepigraphical machinery, for a pseudo-Peter would surely avoid associating so closely with Peter those who, according to Acts and the Pauline epistles, were associates of Paul. Nor would a pseudo-Peter make Peter echo the influence of Paul.

Some scholars have attempted to avoid the difficulties of an individual pseudonymous author by positing a school of Peter, on the assumption that less questions would be raised in that case. But the school idea needs some supporting evidence to carry conviction.

(ii) *An anonymous letter later attributed to Peter.* Conscious of the unsatisfactory character of theories of intentional pseudepigraphy which had been proposed, and yet persuaded that the epistle possessed non-Petrine characteristics, Harnack proposed a compromise. The opening and closing sentences (1:1 ff. and 5:12 ff.) were, in his view, appended later, thus freeing the main body of the letter from any attachment to Peter's name and enabling him to propose that a Roman teacher familiar with Paul's letters felt free to address areas through which Paul had travelled in his mission work. A similar idea was maintained by B. H. Streeter, who nevertheless divided the main material into (1) a bishop's homily to newly baptized converts (1:3–4:11) and (2) a bishop's pastoral letter, addressed to neighbouring churches. Neither Harnack nor Streeter could produce manuscript evidence in support of the spuriousness of the beginning and ending, which entirely depends on subjective considerations. Streeter's suggestion that Aristion was the bishop and author of the main part does nothing to enhance his theory. A. C. McGiffert's opinion that the attachment of Peter's name was no more than a scribal guess is no more probable.

Theories of anonymous circulation are generally proposed only as an offset to the difficulties of pseudonymous authorship. But the problem is merely moved a stage farther to pseudonymous attribution. That an epistle circulated without the author's name presents no difficulty in view of the Epistle to the Hebrews, but that it should later undergo scribal additions of the type conjectured raises serious problems.

In the absence of positive manuscript evidence any theories of interpolation are highly suspicious, for two reasons. (1) It is difficult to conceive how an epistle originally circulating as anonymous could ever acquire an apostolic name, a specific address and concluding greetings without raising the least suspicion among any churches in the area purporting to be addressed. (2) Resort to interpolation theories is so thoroughly subjective that it is altogether too facile a means of removing difficulties. In the nature of the case theories which deal with the text as it stands are more credible than those which depend on speculative scribal additions for which no evidence exists.

Both the variety and dubious character of those alternative views are in themselves favourable to apostolic authorship, since disputants must not only produce good reasons for rejecting the traditional position, but must themselves produce an alternative explanation of all the facts which is more satisfactory than the rejected hypothesis. When so careful a critic as E. F. Scott fairly acknowledged that the attribution of the epistle to Peter must have been due to a misunderstanding no longer discoverable, this gives the measure of perplexity experienced by advocates of non-Petrine authorship. Several more recent scholars have proposed reasons for the use of a pseudonym, such as a means of mediation between Pauline and Jerusalem tradition, or the desire to witness to catholicity by claiming the support of Paul's co-workers, or the intent to preserve the traditions of a Petrine school.

d. Conclusion of the discussion on authorship

The result of this survey of various theories leaves us in no doubt that the traditional view which accepts the claims of the epistle to be apostolic is more reasonable than any alternative hypothesis. We may see here a true reflection of the apostle's experience of Jesus Christ and his lasting contribution to the doctrine of the Christian church. If there is not the depth of the mind of Paul, there is a warm affection which is unmistakable and a deep sympathy with those whom he seeks to help.

Indirect support for this view of the epistle may be found in various echoes of Jesus' teaching, some faint traces of events in which Peter played a part which are recorded in the gospels (as *e.g.* the possible allusion in 5:5 to the girding incident in Jn. 13:4 f., and the reference to shepherding the flock in 1 Pet. 5:2 ff. which brings to mind Jn. 21:15–17). There are also parallels with the Acts speeches attributed to Peter which are not without significance.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE²

For convenience, the author of 1 Peter will be referred to throughout the commentary as “Peter.” This practice does not imply that the issue of authorship is by any means settled, yet the question of whether Peter was actually the author cannot be avoided. The author unmistakably introduces himself as “Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1). The only personal references after this initial self-introduction are the first person verbs, “I appeal to you” (with παρακαλῶ) in 2:11 and 5:1a (the latter elaborated by a self-designation as “fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a sharer as well in the glory about to be revealed,” 5:1b), and a final self-reference in 5:12–13: “I have written you these few lines through Silvanus, (whom I consider a faithful brother), to make an appeal [παρακαλῶν] and to bring testimony that this is true grace from God” (v 12; he adds in v 13 a greeting from “Mark, my son”).

With these exceptions, the author consistently keeps his personality out of the letter. He is content to let his arguments stand on their own merit, without taking advantage of his supposed identity as the apostle Peter.

PETER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

“Peter” is of course prominent among the disciples of Jesus in all the Gospels, and where he comes into the story it is often with a touch of irony. There is first the irony of his name: he is originally “Simon, son of John,” but when his brother Andrew introduces him to Jesus, Jesus tells him that “you shall be called Cephas (which interpreted means Peter)” (John 1:42). Both the nickname “Cephas” in Aramaic (cf. 1 Cor 1:12; 9:5, 15:5; Gal 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14) and “Peter” (i.e., Πέτρος) in Greek compare a person to a “rock.” The wordplay is more evident in the classic passage in Matt 16:18, where Jesus tells Simon, “You are Peter [Πέτρος], and on this rock [πέτρα] I will build my congregation [ἐκκλησία].” In view of the importance attached in another saying of Jesus to “building on the rock” (Matt 7:24–27//Luke 6:47–49), the importance of this pronouncement can scarcely be overlooked. Yet the pronouncement can be read either seriously, as if to say, “You are indeed a strong foundation,” or ironically, as if to say, “Some rock you are!” The section as a whole favors the ironic reading. In a few short verses immediately following Simon’s acknowledgment of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v 16), Matthew employs a loosely chiasmic structure to lift “Peter” up to a height of insight,

²J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary : 1 Peter* (, Word Biblical Commentary Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), lv.

only to bring him down to a depth of ignorance (the parallel in Mark 8:31–33 presents only the down side of this pattern):

- a. There is an emphasis on revelation: “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (v 17).
- b. Simon is given a name: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my congregation” (v 18a).
- c. There is a promise of victory over death: “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (vv 18b–19).
- d. The disciples are told to maintain secrecy about Jesus being the Christ (v 20).
- d’. Jesus does explain to the disciples “that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed” (v 21).
- c’. There is a promise of victory over death: “and rise the third day” (v 21). Peter is unable to accept these predictions about what will happen to Jesus (v 22).
- b’. Peter is given a name: “Get back in line, Satan! You are a scandal to me” (v 23a).
- a’. Peter is no longer the recipient of revelation: “for your concern is not with the things of God, but with human things” (v 23b).

The fact that the channels of revelation have dried up for Peter is dramatized by his proposal at the transfiguration scene that shortly follows: “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish I will make three tabernacles, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah” (Matt 17:4; Mark 9:6 and Luke 9:33 add explicit comments to the effect that Peter did not know what he was saying). Beyond this, Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus is attested in all four Gospels. The all-too-human Peter of the Passion narrative is one with the other disciples and one with the reader of the Gospels as well, even though the reader may enjoy the irony and smile at Peter’s facile confidence.

The denial of Peter in Matthew and Mark is predicted in the context of Jesus’ announcement that “You will all will be scandalized, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered, but after I am raised up I will lead you into Galilee’” (Mark 14:27–28//Matt 26:31–32). When Peter declares that even if all are “scandalized,” he himself will not be, Jesus predicts his threefold denial. Not even Peter’s professed willingness to die rather than deny Jesus blunts the force of this prophecy (Mark 14:29–31//Matt 26:33–35). In Matthew, the verb “scandalize” echoes Jesus’ rebuke to Peter (“You are a scandal to me”) in 16:23 and stands as an ironic shadow over this “rock” among Jesus’ disciples (cf. Matt 18:6–9//Mark 9:42//Luke 17:1–2). In Matthew too, Peter is never reinstated. The denial is the last we hear of him. Mark, however, subtly implies Peter’s reinstatement in the word of the young man at Jesus’ tomb to the women: “Go tell his disciples and *Peter* that he leads them into Galilee” (16:7, italics added). Just as Peter was singled out in the prediction of scattering, so he is singled out in the announcement of resurrection and promise of restoration. The verb “lead” (προάγειν), both in Mark 14:28//Matt 26:32 and Mark 16:7//Matt 28:7, is probably chosen to emphasize the role of Jesus—specifically the risen Jesus—as shepherd, and of the disciples as his flock.

The reinstatement of the erring Peter is more explicit in Luke and John. In Luke it is built into the very prediction of Peter’s denial, which stands in a different context from that of Mark and Matthew. The effect is to reduce the irony and to make of Peter a more

serious, even heroic, figure: “Simon, Simon! Look, Satan has asked for you in order to sift you like wheat! But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not give out; and you, when you have turned around, must strengthen your brothers!” (Luke 22:31). Only after this, and after Peter’s reply (“Lord, with you I am ready to go to prison and to death”) does Jesus predict the threefold denial (22:32–33). Thus the reader knows from the start that everything will turn out all right as far as Peter is concerned. After Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples returning from Emmaus are told, “The Lord is really risen and has appeared to Simon” (24:34; cf. Mark 16:7, although the appearance in Luke is in Jerusalem and not Galilee). This is the last mention of Peter in Luke’s Gospel. He does not fulfill there the role of strengthening his brothers, yet by taking up the reins of leadership in the first part of the Book of Acts, he brings Jesus’ prayer for him to realization.

In John’s Gospel the reinstatement of Peter is even more explicit, although the note of irony returns. Corresponding to his threefold denial is a threefold affirmation of his love for Jesus (John 21:15–17). That the denial scene in John 18 is still in view in chap. 21 is signaled by parallel references to a “charcoal fire” in 18:18 and 21:9. Jesus’ first question to Peter (“Simon of John, do you love me more than these?”) mocks the rash statement attributed to Peter not in this Gospel but in the Synoptic tradition (cf. Mark 14:29//Matt 26:33). The ambiguity of the use of two different words for “love” in the exchange between Jesus and Peter (i.e., ἀγαπᾶν, “choose” or “prefer,” and φιλεῖν, “be a friend”) has given rise to an enormous discussion, and admits of no definitive solution (see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36 [Waco, TX: Word, 1987] 394). Peter’s “grief” at Jesus’ persistent questioning, however, suggests that the reinstatement of Peter in John’s Gospel, although real, is not unqualified or free of irony. John 21:15–17 is closely linked to vv 18–23 (with the characteristically Johannine “Truly, truly, I say to you,” v 18a, as a transition). This concluding section is divided into two parts, the first dealing with Peter’s future (vv 18–19), and the second comparing his future with that of the beloved disciple (vv 20–23). Both are heavy with irony.

THE DEATH OF PETER

The saying in John 21:18 is customarily taken as a prediction of Peter’s martyrdom, largely because of a parenthetical comment by the narrator in v 19a: “This he said signifying by what death he [Peter] will glorify God.” The comment is important as part of the data on the basis of which scholars have concluded that Peter suffered martyrdom for his faith in Christ, presumably in the sixties at the time of Nero’s persecution of the Christians in Rome. This is of importance in relation to the authorship of 1 Peter, because in most discussions the authorship of the epistle has been inextricably linked to the question of date. The death of Peter under Nero is customarily taken as a fixed point of reference: if Peter wrote it, it must be earlier than, say, A.D. 64–65; if it is not, then the Apostle Peter cannot be the author. But is the tradition of Peter’s martyrdom in the sixties certain enough to justify such clear-cut alternatives? On what historical evidence does the tradition rest?

The witness of John 21:18–23 is more ambiguous than is commonly assumed (again see Beasley-Murray, 394). In itself, v 18 does not speak clearly of martyrdom but has the appearance of a traditional proverb or riddle about youth and old age: “When you were young, you used to get yourself ready and go wherever you wanted; when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will get you ready and take you where

you do not want to go.” The picture fits an aged man in a nursing home as well as it does a gallant warrior for Christ suffering martyrdom. It is the narrator’s comment in v 19a that tilts the image in the latter direction, possibly on the basis of the expression, “you will stretch out your hands.” This expression, not strictly necessary to the proverblike pronouncement in which it stands, became in early Christianity a recurring picture of crucifixion (cf., e.g., *Barn.* 12.4; *Did.* 16.6; Justin, *Dial.* 90.5, 91.3; Justin, *Apol.* 1.35; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.17.4, Dem. 46, 79). Yet in themselves, even these words could be taken as simply a part of the proverb, an old man’s gesture of helplessness or resignation. Nor should it be overlooked that even the narrator’s comment does not speak expressly of martyrdom, only of death. Two other comments of this kind in John’s Gospel do speak of a martyrdom, the crucifixion of Jesus himself (cf. 12:33; 18:32). In 21:18 the characteristic Johannine word for crucifixion, ὑψοῦν (“lift up,” or “exalt, 12:32, 34; cf. 3:14; 8:28) is conspicuous by its absence. The accent in 21:18 is clearly on the differences between Peter’s death and that of Jesus, not on the similarities. The most striking difference is that Jesus dies willingly, even on his own initiative (John 10:15, 18; cf. 19:30) while Peter dies against his will. Even though Peter had earlier said, “I will lay down my life for you” (13:37b, using the same expression Jesus used in 10:15, 18), Jesus had questioned his resolve, and in connection with that questioning had predicted Peter’s threefold denial (13:38). The description of Peter’s old age and death in 21:18 does nothing to change the doubts that Jesus harbored in the earlier scene. Jesus’ word to Peter in this verse is a prediction of Peter’s old age, and (if we can trust the narrator) of his death. It may or may not be a prediction of his martyrdom, but in any case it hardly qualifies as an unambiguous prophecy of a glorious or heroic martyrdom (is an unwilling martyr still a martyr?). The phrase “glorify God” in v 19 is surely appropriate to the death of any true believer, as is Jesus earlier promise to Peter that “You will follow me later” (13:36b; cf. 12:26; 14:3; 17:24). If the comment does refer to Peter’s martyrdom, it makes no statement as to when that martyrdom would take place, except that it would be when Peter was old. Indeed, if we press the grammar of v 19, it is not even absolutely certain that Peter is already dead at the time of the narrator’s comment. The statement is that Jesus was “signifying by what death [Peter] will [not would] glorify God.” Although it is fair to assume that futurity from the standpoint of Jesus the speaker is not necessarily equivalent to futurity from the narrator’s standpoint, it is at least worth noting that the grammatical construction in 12:33 and 18:32 is different: Jesus signified “by what death he was going to die” (with the imperfect ἤμελλεν as a helping verb). It is probably true that Peter was dead at the time the narrator inserted the comment, yet the possibility cannot be excluded that he was simply old and helpless, awaiting the end.

The irony of John 21:15–19 is placed in its larger Johannine context in vv 20–23, where Peter’s future is compared with that of the beloved disciple. This is the last of several passages where these two individuals are seen in relation to each other. At the supper before the last Passover the “disciple whom Jesus loved” is seated closest to Jesus, so that Peter has to lean over and ask him what Jesus has just said (13:24). When Mary Magdalene tells the two that she has found the tomb of Jesus empty, the beloved disciple outruns Peter to the tomb but allows Peter to look into the tomb first; the account tells what Peter saw but nothing of his reaction (20:3–7; according to some manuscripts of Luke 24:12 Peter was “amazed”); then the beloved disciple, on looking into the tomb, “saw and believed” (John 20:8). In chap. 21, when Jesus appears to the disciples fishing

at the Lake of Tiberias, it is the beloved disciple who has to tell Peter, “It is the Lord” (21:7). At Jesus’ crucifixion the beloved disciple is present, along with the women (19:25–27). Peter, with all the others, is conspicuous by his absence (cf. 16:32; 18:8). In chap. 18, at the time of Peter’s triple denial of Jesus, an unnamed disciple (possibly the beloved disciple) is present (18:15–16) as a contrast to Peter, and as a potential witness to Peter’s shame. It is therefore no surprise when Peter is gently rebuked for his curiosity about the beloved disciple’s fate in 21:20–23: “If I decide that he remains until I come, what is that to you? As for you, follow me!” (v 21; cf. v 23). Whether both men were dead at the time this passage was written, whether Peter was dead and the beloved disciple alive, or whether both men were alive cannot be determined from the language. Although the first two possibilities are more likely than the third, none of the three can be absolutely ruled out.

If the witness of John’s Gospel to Peter’s martyrdom, much less his glorious martyrdom in the Neronian persecution, is far from clear, the same is true of 2 Peter, where the statement, made in Peter’s name, that “I know that I must soon be divested of my body, as our Lord Jesus also informed me” (2 Pet 1:14) carries no real hint of martyrdom (the adjective *ταχινή*, as Bauckham [199] rightly notes, means “soon,” not “sudden,” as if to suggest the violent death of a martyr). This is especially significant if, as most scholars believe, 2 Peter was written after Peter’s death. The death to which 2 Peter refers appears to be a natural death, however much he may have regarded it as a way of glorifying God. If the revelation from Jesus to which the text refers is the saying now found in John 21:18 (cf. Bauckham, 200–201), then 2 Peter supports an interpretation of that passage along the lines here suggested. Nor does 1 Peter itself support the notion that the Apostle Peter died as a martyr. The self-designation *μάρτυς* in 1 Pet 5:1 should be understood as “witness,” in the sense of one who proclaims the saving message of the suffering Christ, not as “martyr” (see *Comment* on 5:1).

The earliest “martyr” text for the Apostle Peter is *1 Clem* 5.4, and even this text leaves ample room for doubt that the author is referring to martyrdom in the usual sense of that word. Clement is warning against envy and jealousy, and making the point that not only the righteous of the old covenant (chap. 4) but “the good apostles,” Peter and Paul, were done in by enemies who practiced these vices (5.1–7). Peter, he writes, “because of unrighteous envy endured not one or two, but many hardships, and having thus borne witness (*οὐτω μαρτυρήσας*) went to the place of glory that he deserved” (5.4: cf. the summary of Paul’s life in 5.5–7, culminating in the same participle, *μαρτυρήσας*: “having borne witness before the rulers, he departed the world and was taken up to the holy place,” v 7). Although Peter’s “witness” or “testimony” is linked to the hardships he faced during his lifetime, nothing that is said even here precludes a natural death, whether in his case or in that of Paul.

It is only in somewhat later sources that Peter’s violent martyrdom is indicated, with increasing confidence and specificity: e.g., the Rainer fragment of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, where the risen Jesus tells Peter, “Go into the city which rules over the west ... and drink the cup which I have promised thee [cf. Mark 10:39] at the hands of him who (is) in Hades, that his destruction ... may begin and thou mayest be worthy of the promise” (Hennecke-Schneemelcher, 2:679); also the full martyr account in *Acts of Peter* 30–41 (Hennecke-Schneemelcher, 2:314–22), in which Peter, fleeing Rome, meets the risen Jesus coming to Rome to be crucified again (*Acts Pet* 35); Peter returns to the city and is

finally crucified upside down (38–39; for this detail, cf. Origen in Eusebius, HE 3.1.2–3; also the notice in Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 15, apparently based on John 21:18, that “Another fastened Peter with a belt when Peter was bound to the cross”). Eusebius claims that at the time of Nero, “Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified, and the title of ‘Peter and Paul,’ which is still given to the cemeteries, confirms the story” (HE 2.25.5), citing a Roman writer named Caius for the location of the remains of the two apostles on the Vatican hill and the Ostian Way respectively (2.25.6–7), and Dionysius of Corinth for the martyrdom of the two at the same time (2.25.8).

Alongside such traditions of Peter’s martyrdom must be placed certain other accounts in which Peter lived long enough in Rome to ordain Clement as his successor. This is seen in Roman tradition (e.g., Tertullian, *PraescrHaer* 32) and in Jewish Christianity in the *Epistle of Clement to James*, prefaced to the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, chap. 2: “Since, as I have been taught by my Lord and Teacher Jesus Christ, who sent me, the days of my death have drawn near, I lay hands on this Clement as your bishop” (Peter mentions his death here in much the same way as in 2 Pet 1:14, while the reference to his martyrdom in chap. 1 is as ambiguous as the earlier reference in *1 Clement*). All such traditions are of course suspect as efforts to strengthen Peter’s connection with Rome and the authority of the Roman church (this is even more true of the tradition of the fourth-century *Catalogus Liberianus* to the effect that Peter remained in Rome for twenty-five years; see, e.g., O. Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr*, trans. F. V. Filson [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953], 113). Yet they are not necessarily *more* suspect than the texts that make of Peter a glorious martyr in the time of Nero. One does not have to take seriously all the later traditions about apostolic succession in the Roman church to allow that Peter may have lived in Rome for a long time. William M. Ramsay (*The Church in the Roman Empire* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893], 283) concluded, on the one hand, that “The tradition that he lived for a long time in Rome is ... strong,” and, on the other, that “he cannot have been in Rome long before the Neronian persecution ... therefore a long residence there is impossible unless he lived to a much later date.” Consequently, Ramsay argued simultaneously for Petrine authorship of 1 Peter and for a date around A.D. 80 (cf. 284–95).

Although it is doubtful that one can be as specific as Ramsay was about date, the fact remains that the time and circumstances of Peter’s death remain unknown. His death cannot be used as a firm point of reference to decide either way the question of the authorship of 1 Peter. While Petrine authorship is obviously compatible with a date in the early sixties, it does not require it. The work of William Ramsay almost a century ago still stands as a valid warning against linking the question of the authorship of 1 Peter too closely to the question of its date.

PETER AND 1 PETER

What picture of the Apostle Peter emerges from 1 Peter? The most noticeable feature is that the irony characterizing much of the portrayal of Peter in the Gospel tradition has largely disappeared (just as it has in Luke-Acts, 2 Peter, and most later traditions). Instead of applying to Peter, ironically or otherwise, the designation “rock” or “stone,” the author of 1 Peter applies it with utmost seriousness to Jesus himself (2:4–8). Jesus is “the living Stone” (v 4), the “choice and precious cornerstone in Zion” (v 6), and for unbelievers a “stone of stumbling and a rock to trip over” (v 8). This use of the word “rock” (πέτρα) in parallelism with “stone” (λίθος) in v 8 is the one possible touch of

irony remaining in 1 Peter. The phrase, “a rock to trip over” (πέτρα σκανδάλου), taken from Isa 8:14 LXX, echoes in a curious way Jesus’ scathing rebuke to “Peter” (Πέτρος) in Matt 16:23 (“You are a scandal [σκάνδαλον] to me”), as well as the prediction about Peter and all the disciples that they would be “scandalized” because of him (Mark 14:27//Matt 26:31). For the most part, 1 Peter foregoes irony and assigns the designation of “stone” to the one to whom it ultimately belongs.

The same is true of the notion of Jesus as shepherd, as emphasized both in Mark 14:27–28//Matt 26:31–32 and in John 21:15–17. It is likely that the former of these texts, which (in Mark at least, v 28) contains in itself the basis for overcoming the irony with which Peter and the other disciples are depicted, governs the argument of 1 Pet 2:24–25. Christ is described in 2:24 as the one who “carried our sins in his body to the cross,” and the one by whose “wounding you have been healed.” Then, abruptly in v 25, he is “the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” The missing link in the chain of Christ’s deeds is his resurrection from the deads The image of Christ as Shepherd implies in 1 Peter his resurrection, just as in Mark 14:28 it is as the Risen One that he assumes the role of Shepherd to his scattered sheep (see Comment on 2:25; cf. also Heb 13:20). For the notion that the sheep have “turned” (ἐπεστράφητε) to their Shepherd, cf. Peter’s own “turning” (ἐπιστρέψας) in Luke 22:32. The exchange between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15–17 finds its parallel in 1 Pet 5:1–4, where Peter tells the elders to “Shepherd the flock of God that is in your care” (v 2) so that “when the chief Shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (v 4). Although he establishes common ground with the elders as “fellow elder,” as “witness to the sufferings of Christ,” and as “sharer in the glory about to be revealed” (v 1), he makes nothing of his own role as shepherd. Although there are undeniable allusions in 1 Peter to the role assigned to the Apostle Peter in the Gospel tradition, these allusions are low keyed, subtle, and without the irony so evident in the crucial Gospel texts. The tendency to remove the irony is the same tendency visible in Luke-Acts and is understandable either on the assumption that the author of 1 Peter is Peter himself or that it is someone who took Peter’s ministry rather seriously. Whichever may be the case, the author of 1 Peter has attempted to put Christ rather than the apostle at the center, while at the same time taking the apostle seriously as Christ’s servant and authoritative messenger.

IS PETER THE AUTHOR?

As in the case of most NT books other than the letters of Paul, the discussion of the authorship of 1 Peter is a futile discussion if its purpose is anything approaching absolute certainty. This is especially the case with regard to arguments from style because there is no acknowledged Petrine corpus with which 1 Peter can be compared. The only other NT letter attributed to Peter is generally viewed as less likely than this one to have been written by him. No one knows what the Apostle Peter’s literary style must have looked like. It has been frequently suggested that the elegant Greek of 1 Peter does not appear to be the work of a Galilean fisherman whose native tongue was Aramaic and who, with John, was regarded by the religious authorities in Jerusalem as an “unschooled” and “simple” man (Acts 4:13). But if, as appears likely, 1 Peter was a semi-official communication from the Christian community at Rome (similar in this respect to *1 Clement*), addressed as a diaspora letter to a wide circle of congregations on the far frontiers of the Roman Empire, then it need not be assumed that Peter composed it personally. The elegant Greek style could well be the work of a professional to whom

Peter made known his ideas and whose finished work Peter approved (the testimony of Papias, after all, is that Peter, for a different purpose, made use of Mark as his “interpreter”: Eusebius, HE 3.39.15). The theory of a professional scribe, or amanuensis, has customarily been linked with the reference to Silvanus in 5:12, but the phrase “through Silvanus” more likely identifies the bearer of the letter (see Comment on 5:12). The assumption that Peter had professional help in the composition of this letter by no means requires that the name of his amanuensis be known. If this is the case, then stylistic considerations, of little value in any instance, are worthless.

Perhaps the most formidable objection to Petrine authorship of 1 Peter has been the impression that in certain respects this letter represents a stage in the development of Christian thought at least a few decades later than Peter’s death. For example, as we have seen, the issue of faith in contrast to the works of the law so prominent in the letters of Paul is not an issue. The perspective of 1 Peter is in some respects more like that of Matthew or of Luke-Acts than of the Apostle Paul. Criticisms of the authenticity of 1 Peter are not always consistent because at the same time there have always been some who doubted Petrine authorship because this letter was seen as the work of a Paulinist—i.e., a “deutero-Paulinist,” comparable to the supposed author(s) of Colossians, Ephesians, or the Pastorals. The difficulty with this approach is that, lacking a clear standard for what primitive “Petrine” material would look like, Paul is arbitrarily made the standard for the first generation of Christian theology, as if Paul were somehow normative or typical of Christian thought in those early decades. Paul’s difficult struggles with a variety of opponents suggest just the opposite.

Certain characteristics of 1 Peter do, however, point to a date later than that normally assigned to Peter’s death:

- a. The reference to “Babylon” in 5:13 suggests that by the time 1 Peter was written the Roman armies had already destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish temple (this would give special poignancy also to 4:17). “Babylon” as a designation for Rome is not attested before A.D. 70, but becomes frequent in both Christian and Jewish sources soon after 70.
- b. In 5:13, too, the phrase “the [congregation] in Babylon” seems to presuppose a single Roman community of Christians, in contrast to both Romans and Hebrews (which give the impression rather of house churches or scattered communities) but in agreement with *1 Clement* near the end of the first century (see, e.g., *1 Clem* 1.1, “the church of God which sojourns in Rome”). Beyond this, if 1 Peter knows and makes use of Paul’s letter to the Romans or the Epistle to the Hebrews or both (a view which is plausible but not quite certain: see above, Sources and Literary Affinities), then a date in the last quarter of the first century is likely.
- c. The compliant attitude urged toward the Roman emperor and his magistrates in 1 Pet 2:13–17 (cf. Paul in Rom 13:1–7) is hard to visualize either during the reign of Domitian (contrast the portrayal of the Roman Empire as a beast from the sea in the Book of Revelation) or at the time of the Neronian persecution. Although Peter writes of a “fiery ordeal” (4:12) and of the present as a “time for the judgment to begin from the house of God” (4:17), the actual abuse of Christians with which he seems most concerned is verbal abuse (e.g., 2:12, 15, 23, 3:9, 16; 4:4, 14b). Because there is little evidence of outright persecution, a time between Nero and Domitian is indicated. The apocalyptic language of 1:1–6, 8; 4:7, and 4:12–19 is undeniable, but it is unlikely that this language is occasioned primarily either by events in Rome, where the letter was written, or in the

provinces of Asia Minor to which it was directed. A more likely explanation is that events elsewhere—specifically the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies in A.D. 70—contributed decisively to its apocalyptic tone (see Comment on 4:17). This evidence confirms a date between 70 and 80.

- d. Arguments for a later date have often appealed to a letter from the younger Pliny, writing to the emperor Trajan about A.D. 110 from Bithynia, an Asian province to which 1 Peter was directed (*Epistles* 10.96). Pliny asks for advice from the emperor about procedures to be followed in dealing with Christians:

I have never been present at an examination of Christians. Consequently, I do not know the nature or extent of the punishments usually meted out to them, nor the grounds for starting an investigation and how far it should be pressed. Nor am I at all sure ... whether a pardon ought to be granted to anyone retracting his beliefs, or if he has once professed Christianity, he shall gain nothing by renouncing it; and whether it is the mere name of Christian which is punishable, even if innocent of crime, or rather the crimes associated with the name.

Uncertain as to the grounds for punishment, Pliny describes for the emperor the procedure he has been following:

For the moment this is the line I have taken with all persons brought before me on the charge of being Christians. I have asked them in person if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for punishment; for, whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakeable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished. There have been others similarly fanatical who are Roman citizens. I have entered them on the list of persons to be sent to Rome for trial (*The Letters of the Younger Pliny* [Baltimore: Penguin, 1963], 293–94).

Pliny goes on to speak of an “anonymous pamphlet ... which contains the name of a number of accused persons”:

Among these I considered that I should dismiss any who denied that they were or ever had been Christians when they repeated after me a formula of invocation to the gods and had made offerings of wine and incense to your statue (which I had ordered to be brought into court for this purpose along with the images of the gods), and furthermore had reviled the name of Christ [lit. “cursed Christ,” *maledicerent Christo*]: none of which things, I understand, any genuine Christian can be induced to do (*ibid.*, 294).

He affords as well a glimpse into the history of the Christian movement in his province: Others, whose names were given to me by the informer, first admitted the charge and then denied it; they said that they had ceased to be Christians two or more years previously, and some of them even twenty years ago. They all did reverence to your statue and the images of the gods in the same way as the others, and reviled the name of Christ (*Christo maledixerunt*). They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this; they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honour of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it. After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and reassemble later to take food of an ordinary, harmless kind; but they had in fact given up this practice since my edict, issued on your instructions, which banned all political societies. This made me decide it was all the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from two slave-women, whom they call deaconesses. I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths (*ibid.*).

Pliny’s language makes it clear that the situation he describes has gone on for at least two decades. As for the situation in his own time (i.e., in A.D. 110):

a great many individuals of every age and class, both men and women, are being brought to trial, and this is likely to continue. It is not only the towns, but villages and rural districts too which are infected through contact with this wretched cult. I think though that it is still possible for it to be checked and directed to better ends, for there is no doubt that people have begun to throng the temples which had been almost entirely deserted for a long time [*diu intermissa*]; the sacred rites which had been allowed to lapse are being performed again, and flesh of sacrificial victims is on sale everywhere, though up till recently scarcely anyone could be found to buy it. It is easy to infer from this that a great many people could be reformed if they were given opportunity to repent (*ibid.*, 294–95).

Trajan's answer to Pliny (*Epistles* 10.97) is of equal interest:

You have followed the right course of procedure, my dear Pliny, in your examination of the cases of persons charged with being Christians, for it is impossible to lay down a general rule to a fixed formula. These people must not be hunted out; if they are brought before you and the charge against them is proved, they must be punished, but in the case of anyone who denies that he is a Christian, and makes it clear that he is not by offering prayers to our gods, he is to be pardoned as a result of his repentance however suspect his past conduct may be. But pamphlets circulating anonymously must play no part in any accusation. They create the worst sort of precedent and are quite out of keeping with the spirit of our age (*ibid.*, 295).

Despite the emperor's concern for fairness, the answer to Pliny's inquiry is that the mere confession of the Christian name, if there are legitimate accusers to call attention to it, and if the confessor persists in his commitment, is sufficient grounds for punitive action. This is supported by Justin Martyr's perception a generation later. Justin writes to the emperor Antoninus Pius in his *First Apology* that "those among yourselves who are accused you do not punish before they are convicted; but in our case you receive the name as proof against us" (Justin, *Apol.* 1.4.4). His hope is that "the deeds of all those who are accused to you be judged, in order that each one who is convicted may be punished as an evil-doer, and not as a Christian [cf. 1 Pet 4:15–16]; and if it is clear that any one is blameless, that he may be acquitted, since by the mere fact of his being a Christian he does no wrong" (Justin, *Apol.* 1.7.4).

Similarities to the situation presupposed in 1 Peter are readily apparent in these second-century sources: the emphasis on slander or accusation (cf. 1 Pet 2:12; 3:16; 4:4), even to the point of "anonymous pamphlets" (which the emperor repudiates as evidence); the distinction between punishing Christians for specific crimes and punishing them simply for being Christians (cf. Pet 4:15); and the requirement that suspected Christians dissociate themselves from the movement by "cursing Christ" (contrast 1 Pet 4:16). The implication of Pliny's correspondence is that the situation he describes has gone on in Bithynia for quite some time. It is not a question of a particular "persecution" in the history of the church, but of an on-going precarious situation for those identified as Christians in the provinces to which 1 Peter was written. The range of Pliny's questions demonstrate that there was as yet no fixed imperial policy toward Christians, and Trajan confirms explicitly that this is the case. Even as Justin Martyr's *Apology* reflects a situation that has developed further than the situation described in Pliny, so 1 Peter reflects a situation that has not developed as far. Emperor worship, e.g., to which Pliny alludes twice (with references to "your statue") plays no role whatever in 1 Peter: it is hardly imaginable that 1 Pet 2:13–17 could have been written in such a confrontational setting. The importance of Pliny's testimony is not that it pinpoints the date of 1 Peter, but that it reflects a situation that must have gone on for some time and that presupposes

the existence of flourishing Christian communities in Bithynia and Pontus during the last decades of the first century.

None of these considerations with regard to the date of 1 Peter is conclusive by itself, but together they point to a date later than the Neronian persecution. If the evidence for the time and circumstances of Peter's death is inconclusive, then even a date this late does not necessarily rule out Petrine authorship. Clearly it does not prove Petrine authorship either, and this is why the discussion of authorship yields little certainty. Positively it can be said that the interpretation of the Christian message in 1 Peter is well within the parameters set by the Gospels and the letters of Paul, yet without being simply derivative from Paul. If the letter does not directly cite words of Jesus which Peter might be assumed to have remembered, it does play upon some of them in subtle ways which show an awareness of the Peter story in the Gospel tradition, and it does so without making extravagant claims for "Peter" as a giant in the Roman (much less the universal) church. There is a restraint in 1 Peter that distinguishes it from the apocryphal literature and to some degree even from 2 Peter. Those who argue that a genuine letter of Peter would have reflected more on the sayings and life of Jesus should remember that one of the arguments against the genuineness of 2 Peter has always been that this letter laid too obvious claim to apostolic authority by doing precisely this (cf., e.g., 2 Pet 1:14, 16). By contrast, the restraint of 1 Peter enhances its credibility as a genuine communication from an aged "Apostle of Jesus Christ" to a Christian "diaspora" in Asia Minor, on behalf of the church at Rome (or "Babylon") not long after the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies. 1 Peter does not have the characteristics of a pseudonymous writing in the usual sense of the word; if Peter is not its author, the letter should probably be regarded as a product of the Roman church not long after his death, bringing his authority to bear posthumously on issues about which the authors believed they knew Peter's mind and perspective. The burden of proof still rests with those who choose the latter alternative; the traditional view that the living Peter was personally responsible for the letter as it stands has not been, and probably in the nature of the case cannot be, decisively shaken.