

## Paul's Editors

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Interpolations so far identified in the epistles of Paul appear in all manuscripts, and thus belong to the *formation period* of these texts; they were probably added when the letters were edited for wider circulation.<sup>1</sup> The likely editors are those who cosign a letter: Sosthenes (1 Cor), Timothy (2 Cor and Php), Timothy and Silvanus (1 Thess), or go on very sensitive missions: Timothy (1 Cor 4:17, Php 2:19, 1 Thess 3:2) and Titus (2 Cor 8:23, 12:18); along with Paul's probable operations manager, Onesimus. I here consider the possibility that they are also the authors of the Deutero-Paulines.

### Onesimus

Philemon is not a church letter, and properly has no place in the Pauline corpus. It must have been included at someone's urging, and only Onesimus, its beneficiary, is likely to have even have known of it (he was its bearer).<sup>2</sup> As head of an operation which he ran from the front lines, Paul badly needed an office manager. Paul promises to make good any peculation, in order to secure Onesimus's service for himself.

Paul's assistants were ideally placed to find posts in the post-Apostolic period. Onesimus himself became Bishop of Ephesus.<sup>3</sup> Writes Ignatius of Antioch in c114:

**Ign Eph 1:3.** seeing that in God's name I have received your whole multitude in the person of Onesimus, whose love passeth utterance and who is moreover your Bishop – and I pray that ye may love him . . . for blessed is He that granted unto you according to your deserving to have such a Bishop.

Later, Ignatius alludes to several passages in Philemon. The request for Burrhus:

**Ign Eph 2:1.** Now concerning my fellow servant Burrhus, your deacon by the will of God, who is blessed in all things, I beg that he may stay longer, for your honor and for that of the Bishop . . .

echoes Paul's request (Phm 13) that Philemon be allowed to stay with him. And

**Ign Eph 3:1.** I do not command you as if I were someone great, for though I am a prisoner for the Name, I am not yet perfect in Jesus Christ . . . I have taken it upon me to exhort you . . .

puts Ignatius in Paul's position (Phm 8-9), a prisoner at Ephesus.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>I have in mind especially the recent work of William O Walker Jr.

<sup>2</sup>I here largely agree with the point of Knox **Philemon** 82.

<sup>3</sup>It has been objected that there could be any number of people named Onesimus. But Onesimus "Useful" is a slave name. How many slaves have the makings of a Bishop?

<sup>4</sup>I agree with Knox **Philemon** (further parallels at 85-87) that these gracious echoes are decisive for the identity of the Bishop and the slave.

Onesimus was probably at least 25 when he ran away from his master in c55, and some 60 years later, he will have been in his mid-eighties; a not impossible longevity. But if a slave did indeed become a Bishop, what was his path to that dignity?

The authentic letters of Paul are agreed to be seven,<sup>5</sup> symbolizing completeness.<sup>6</sup> But 1 and 2 Cor are to the same church, and even counting Philemon as a church letter (Phm 2b, probably editorial), that makes only six *churches*. It was thus necessary to compose a seventh church letter, to complete the ideal number and introduce the rest. Goodspeed, considering Colossians genuine, thought that this was Ephesians.<sup>7</sup> But Colossians is *not* genuine, and is itself the best candidate. Who wrote it? Its opening (Col 1:3-4) mimics that of Philemon (4-5) and a long passage on slaves (Col 3:22-4:1) implies personal interest.<sup>8</sup> Then Onesimus is the probable author of Colossians, and also of Ephesians, which has the same labored style in Greek.<sup>9</sup> Ephesians is an update of Colossians, though it is also aware of other Pauline writings.<sup>10</sup>

What would have prompted an Ephesians update? Perhaps Onesimus' entry into his responsibilities as Bishop, when he took a wider view, not only of Paul's heritage, but of the issues then facing Christianity.<sup>11</sup> If so, then we have this sequence:

(1) Phm [by Paul, concerning Onesimus] > Col > Eph [both by Onesimus]

### Timothy

That Timothy was among Paul's editors is likely, given his position of trust under Paul. One indication of that trust is Paul's intention to send him on a delicate mission to the Philippians ("I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon," Php 2:19). I have suggested that the clearly private note preserved as Php 4:2-3 was addressed to Timothy as he undertook that errand.<sup>12</sup> It asks Timothy to compose the differences between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. It could not have been sent to the church, only to Timothy privately. Then it was not recovered from any archive at Philippi, and can only have been provided to the editors by its recipient: Timothy.

The gratuitous praise of Timothy in Php 2:20-22 ("For I have no man like-minded, who will care truly for your state, for they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ. But ye know the proof of him, that, as child serveth a father, he served with me in furtherance of the Gospel") may well have been inserted by Timothy himself.

<sup>5</sup>By those whose opinions I consider sound. For a detailed overview, see Collins **Letters**.

<sup>6</sup>The seven baskets taken up at the Feeding of Four Thousand (Mk 8:18-21) symbolize provision for all the nations (Israel alone is symbolized by the twelve baskets at the Feeding of Five Thousand, Mk 6:34-44). Compare the 70 (or 72) nations of the world in Genesis 10.

<sup>7</sup>Goodspeed **Meaning** 5-6.

<sup>8</sup>The Colossians "domestic code," 3:18-4:1, is interruptive (Belz 46-48), yet characteristic. Then Colossians, once written, was open to self-improvement during the editorial process.

<sup>9</sup>Lincoln xlvi, "long sentences, frequent relative constructions, genitive constructions."

<sup>10</sup>Besides the Paulines proper, Ephesians also has contacts with the Pastorals; Ware *passim*.

<sup>11</sup>Beare **Ephesians** 604, "Ephesians . . . is an attempt to formulate a philosophy of religion which is at the same time a philosophy of history, out of Pauline materials"

<sup>12</sup>See Brooks **Philippi** 112.

If so, he was not long content with it. One of the Pastorals, 2 Timothy, contains further praise of Timothy, which is not germane to the ostensible purpose of the letter:

**2 Tim 1:5.** having been reminded of the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and, I am persuaded, in thee also.

This would make Timothy a third generation Christian, a credential superior to that of Paul himself. Paul's speaking of Timothy as his "child in the Lord" (1 Cor 4:17) suggests that Timothy had been converted by Paul: a less grand status. This statement:

**2 Tim 1:6.** For which cause I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee through the laying on of my hands.

implies commissioning (as that of Paul, in Acts 13:3), but not necessarily conversion. Again, the dispraise of colleagues in Timothy's interpolation Php 2:20-22 is given far more elaborate scope in 2 Timothy. Paul is assumed to be speaking:

**2 Tim 4:10.** For Demas forsook me, having loved this present world, and went to Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.

**2 Tim 4:16.** At my first defense no one took my part, but all forsook me.

Note that Demas gets much better treatment in what I have called the Onesimus strand:

**Phm 23.** Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you. [24] And so to Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

**Col 4:14.** Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.

The Luke connection is problematic; it suffices here to notice who mentions it.

All that Demas is accused of in 2 Tim is aspiring to be important to some church. Titus and 1 Tim show two of Paul's lieutenants being put in charge of churches, perhaps reflecting the shift from the old visiting apostle system to local management.

Harrison's case for genuine Paul fragments in the Pastorals deserves to be judged on the longest and most dramatic of them: Paul's farewell from prison in 2 Timothy. But his reconstruction (**Paulines** 117f) has to be reassembled from scattered material (2 Tim 1:16-17, 3:10-11, 4:1-3, 4:5b, 4:6-9, 4:16-19, 4:20b-21a). There is no reason for a conflated letter to be broken into so many pieces. Did Timothy perhaps remember how a fragment of his own letter had been worked into the conflated Philippians?

And is it a forgery? One detail of that supposed letter suggests a motive:

**2 Tim 1:16-17.** The Lord grant mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he was in Rome, he sought me diligently, and found me (the Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord in that day); and in how many things he ministered at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

"Onesiphorus" here is probably a variant for Onesimus. Timothy continues in nominal collegueship to Onesimus, while making *himself* the recipient of Paul's last message. The implication is evident: *it is not Onesimus, but Timothy, who is Paul's true heir*. If so, we may sum up Timothy's deutero-Pauline connection in this way:

(2) Php [by Paul, with an interpolation by Timothy] > 2 Tim [by Timothy]

And we have now isolated a second strand of post-Pauline tradition.

## Titus

Easton suggests,<sup>13</sup> and Murphy-O'Connor confirms,<sup>14</sup> that Titus and 1 Tim are distinct from 2 Tim. For Titus, we must then seek a different author than Timothy, perhaps Titus himself, the beneficiary of that Epistle (it gave him authority in Crete). Can we link any editorial additions in the authentic epistles with anything in Titus?

Consider the interpolated 1 Cor 7:17-24,<sup>15</sup> which interrupts Paul's advice on marriage to suggest that all should remain socially as they are, whether slave or free, a precept justified by, and linked with, the atoning death of Christ. Compare:

**1 Cor 7:20b.** Wast thou called being a bondservant? Care not for it.

**Tit 2:9a.** Servants *to be in subjection* to their own masters . . .

**1 Cor 7:23.** Ye were bought with a price; become not bondservants of men.

**Tit 2:14.** Who gave himself for us . . .

The similarity is obvious. And the first pair (1 Cor 7:20b and Tit 2:9a) might be read as critical of the freed slave Onesimus. So especially might this next phrase:

**Tit 2: 9b.** . . . not gainsaying, [10] not purloining

inasmuch as the real-life Onesimus had gotten into financial trouble with Philemon, which Paul, in asking for Onesimus' freedom, had guaranteed to repay (Phm 19).

Given the strong similarities between Titus and 1 Tim, it is most likely that one author wrote both of them. That Titus should advertise himself as worthy of trust in Crete is reasonable, but why should he write 1 Timothy, which at both its beginning and its end asks Timothy to correct matters in a doctrinally disorderly Ephesus?

**1 Tim 1:3.** As I exhorted thee to tarry at Ephesus when I was going into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine, [4] neither to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questionings . . . [5:20] O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee, turning away from the profane babblings and oppositions of the knowledge which is falsely so called, [21] which some professing have erred concerning the faith.

This might address elements in Colossians (here considered as being by Onesimus) which have been widely noted in the commentaries as potentially Gnostic in character; the key word in this quote is "knowledge falsely so called." To dispute the doctrinal soundness of Onesimus is to challenge his position in Ephesus, where his influence as Paul's resident manager would have been greatest. One common element in the Pastorals seems to be opposition to Onesimus, which is detectable in Timothy (2 Tim), and is perhaps more overt in Titus (Titus and 1 Tim).

If so, then in terms of editorial additions followed by independent deutero-Paulines, we would have:

(3) 1 Cor 7:17-24 [interpolated by Titus] > Titus and 1 Tim [both by Titus]

<sup>13</sup>Easton **Pastoral** 17f

<sup>14</sup>Murphy-O'Connor **2 Timothy** 418.

<sup>15</sup>As evidence for its interpolation, note 1 Cor 7:17b "and so ordain I in all the churches," a claim of universality which suits the likely agenda of the collected letters.

### Silvanus

That Silvanus might have written 2 Thessalonians is a natural thought, since he cosigned the original 1 Thessalonians.<sup>16</sup> 2 Thess is much concerned about doctrine, and doctrine of a recognizably Alpha sort. The phrase “obey” the Gospel (1:8, 3:14) implies a Gospel of commandments, such as the six listed by Jesus in Mk 10:19. The Atonement figures in all three of the Pastorals, but is nowhere visible in 2 Thess.<sup>17</sup> Finally, 2 Thess revives the coming of Christ at the end of the world, as first predicted in Mk 13. In these details, the author of 2 Thess seems close to Mark, with whom Silvanus’ origin in Jerusalem (Ac 15:22f) might in any case associate him.

2 Thess goes beyond any other deutero-Pauline in not only offering to *correct* something in a genuine epistle, but in *questioning the genuineness* of a genuine epistle. Paul in Phm 19 insists that he is writing in his own hand, as though to create a legally sound document, and in Gal 6:11 he comments on the largeness of his handwriting. In 2 Thess, these hints are picked up in this way:

**2 Thess 2:2.** That ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit or by word, or by epistle as from us . . . [3:17] The salutation of me, Paul, with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.

This is an effort to replace earlier teachings with later ones. We then have:

(4) 1 Thess [co-signed by Silvanus] > 2 Thess [written by Silvanus]

### Sosthenes

Sosthenes, the co-sender of 1 Corinthians, appears this way in Acts:

**Ac 18:17a.** And they [the Jews who had accused Paul before Gallio in Corinth] all laid hands on Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgement-seat.

He is then a Corinthian; a local ally of Paul. In co-signing 1 Cor, he probably helped to secure that letter’s acceptance in Corinth, and probably agreed with its reproof of factionalism. We might associate him with the interpolated 1 Cor 13,<sup>18</sup> whose message is that mutual regard is preferable to doctrinal or other squabbles. Then:

(5) 1 Cor [co-signed by Sosthenes] > 1 Cor 13 [interpolated by Sosthenes]

### Apollos

In 1 Cor 1:12 he is the leader of a faction at Corinth. At the end of 1 Cor (16:12), Paul answers a question about when Apollos might come. That this question is asked of Paul implies a degree of practical cooperation; that he cannot answer definitively implies some independence on Apollos’ part. He seems to be a colleague at a distance, and thus is not a strong candidate for Paul’s editorial team.

<sup>16</sup>Since 1909; see the survey in Best **Thessalonians** 50-52.

<sup>17</sup>Its brief appearance in the early 1 Thess 5:10 “who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him” is subject to doubt as an interpolation.

<sup>18</sup>For that passage (more exactly 1 Cor 12:31b–14:1a), see Walker **Interpolations** 147-165.

Apollos in Acts is from Alexandria; an Alpha Christian “mighty in the scriptures” (Ac 18:24) but needing re-instruction before he is theologically sound (Ac 18:26). This matches what can be inferred from Hebrews as to the author of Hebrews.<sup>19</sup> Then:

(6) [An independent role as of 1 Cor] > Hebrews [written by Apollos]

### Conclusion

All told, there is reason to think that the interpolations in Paul’s genuine letters were added on one occasion by his editors; that the editors were those who had been his chief colleagues during his lifetime; that they were neither unanimous about doctrine nor without personal ambition, and that once the editorial task was done, and the letters had been published, they continued to write new epistles which adjusted Paul’s message and kept his name before the public; providing, according to their several lights, for an emergent Christianity which still had to be guided on its way.

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<sup>19</sup>First noted by Luther. Attridge **Hebrews** 4 is reluctant to accept the identification, but surely Onesimus’ combination of traits and talents must have been rare.